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The Gloucestershire Bell-Foundries

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THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE BELL-FOUNDRIES.

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HAVING previously enjoyed the privilege of contributing to these *Transactions* (vols. xviii and xx) some results of my investigations of Gloucestershire Church Bells, I now venture to supplement those two papers with some notes on the history of the local bell-foundries, embodying the results of some recent researches in that direction.

The bell-foundries of Bristol and Gloucester were in mediæval times two of the most important in the kingdom, and the history of one extends from the thirteenth to the end of the seventeenth century, that of the other from the thirteenth almost without a break down to the nineteenth. The great majority of the bells in Gloucestershire towers are from one or the other of these two foundries, and therefore I trust that no excuse is needed for bringing before the notice of this Society such new facts relating to them as I have been able to collect. At the same time, I do not wish, more than may be necessary, to cover again the ground of my two previous papers and of the labours of my revered predecessor, Canon Ellacombe. The present paper deals with the foundry at Gloucester, and I hope to follow it with one on that of Bristol, the history of which is more complicated.

I. THE GLOUCESTER FOUNDRY.

Records of Gloucester bell-founders go back, as at Bristol, well into the thirteenth century. About the year 1270 we have a grant from Hugh the bell-founder (*campanarius*), burgess of Gloucester, to the Prior and Brethren of St. Bartholomew's Hospital of a moiety of his land in Mynde-

lone.¹ This is a death-bed bequest on condition of their celebrating an anniversary for him after his decease. That *campanarius* here denotes a bell-founder, and not, as in some contemporary records, a ringer of bells, is clear from the following entry, which also exhibits this family in the light of benefactors to the Hospital.

1303-04. "Release from Cecily le Cornwall and Christiana the bell-founder (la Belyutare) daughter of Hugh the bell-founder to the Prior and Brethren of the same to their right in two tenements."²

Lady bell-founders are not unknown in mediæval and later history,³ but we have no evidence that any existing bells came from this personage, still less from her father's foundry. The earliest existing bells which can be traced to the Gloucester foundry are a small group in this and the neighbouring counties, which I have discussed in a previous paper.⁴ I have there given reasons for assigning them to one Sandre, of Gloucester, of whom the only record is a bell-founder's seal found in the Thames many years ago bearing his name. The date which has usually been assigned to it is 1300-20.

A probable son of Sandre was John of Gloucester, who cast the bells of Ely Cathedral in 1354.⁵ His name also occurs in the Gloucester Records in the year 1346, in which "John le Belyeter" appears as a witness to a release from Cecily of Allensmore to William Ragoun of certain rights.⁶

¹ Stevenson, *Calendar of Gloucester Records*, p. 251.

² *Ibid.*, p. 299.

³ The best-known instance is Joanna Hille, afterwards Sturdy, of London (1440-61).

⁴ *Trans. B. and G. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xviii. p. 229. They bear the initial cross, Ellacombe, 52. To the list of Sandre's bells must be added one at Credenhill, Hereford, now recast. I am inclined to think that the bell at Besford, Worcestershire, being of earlier character than the others, may be as early as the time of Christiana or even Hugh.

⁵ Raven, *Ch. Bells of Camb.*, p. 5 ff.

⁶ Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

I have associated him with a group of bells cognate to those assigned to Sandre, but much more numerous.¹ It is probable that the bell at Charlton Abbots must be also assigned to him. The cross and lettering differ slightly from those, *e.g.*, at Brookthorpe and Winston, but are of much the same character. Whether the initials "I.S." at the end of the inscription are those of the donor or refer to John himself must remain uncertain. It is worth noting here that the lettering on this group of bells appears on some half-dozen bells in Shropshire with a perfectly plain Greek cross.² As this is not found elsewhere, it seems likely that the letter-stamps passed from John of Gloucester to a later founder at Shrewsbury.

For the next hundred years or so all records of Gloucester bell-founding are lacking, but it is not unlikely that some of the local mediæval bells as yet unassigned to any founder may fill in the interval. Such exist at Randwick (cross Ellacombe 70), and at Oxenhall and Side (cross 57).

We pass on then to the period 1450-1500, in which an important founder appears on the scene in the person of Robert Hendley, whose name occurs on a bell at St. Nicholas, Gloucester. This man I have already discussed, but it may not be out of place to record such additional information about his work as has come to my knowledge in recent years. His bells have proved to cover a much more extensive territory than was formerly realised, and he found his way up the Severn, past Highley in Salop, right into Montgomeryshire, where there is one at Llanfair Caer Einion. In Herefordshire there are examples at Aston Ingham,³ Bridestow, Letton, Pipe-cum-Lyde, Stoke Edith, and Yarpole; in Brecknock at Merthyr Cynog and Llanfihangel-

¹ *Trans. B. and G. Arch. Soc., loc. cit.* A complete list is given in my *Ch. Bells of Warwickshire*, p. 5. The initial cross is Ellacombe 105.

² See *Shropshire Arch. Soc. Trans.*, 4th ser. vol. i. (1911), p. 36.

³ On this bell are the initials I.S.

Tallylyn; in Monmouthshire at Llanvihangel, near Chepstow; and in Wiltshire at Easton Grey and South Marston. At Compton Abdale (bell recast) and Horton in Gloucestershire; Crudwell in Wiltshire (recast); and at Priston in Somerset, he uses instead of his ordinary initial cross one which we know as the property of Robert Norton of Exeter (Ellacombe 62). Two more bells in Warwickshire, one in Worcestershire, and about twenty in Gloucestershire make up the full list.

William Henshaw (1500-20)¹ and Richard Atkyns (1529),² who presumably succeeded Hendley, still remain mere names, but there are two bells which I think may be assigned to one or the other, preferably to Atkyns, whose date (1529) suits better. These are the sanctus at St. Nicholas, Gloucester, and the large bell at St. Andrew's, Worcester. Both have the same cross and lettering, and both bear internal evidence for dating. The Gloucester bell was given by John and Alice Putte, or Pytte, and the former may be identical with John Pytte, whose will is in existence, dated 1558. I should be grateful to any local investigator who could elucidate this further. The evidence from the Worcester bell is to this effect. The name of the donor is given as Wyllei or Wylley, and this naturally suggests John Willey, who was rector of the church 1436-50. But other evidence shows that the bell was given some sixty years later by a Mr. Wheley,³ and that it must be dated about 1500-10 at the earliest. If the evidence adduced for the St. Nicholas bell holds good, it must be brought even later, as John Pytte can hardly have made his gift earlier than 1520.

There is a record of yet another mediæval founder at Gloucester in the person of Thomas Loveday, "burgess and

¹ Henshaw was five times Mayor of Gloucester between 1500 and 1520. His foundry is believed to have given its name to Bell Lane in that city, but that may come from the neighbouring hotel.

² Atkyns's will is given in the supplement to Ellacombe's *Gloucs.*, p. 118.

³ See *Assoc. Archit. Soc. Reports*, vol. xxv. p. 569.

blaksmyth," and mayor in 1546 and 1555.¹ In Abbot Parker's Register² there is a copy of an agreement between the abbot and Thomas Loveday, bell-founder, dated 1527, in which the latter "hath covenanted and bargayned with the Abbott to repayre a chyme going uppon eight bells, and upon two ympnes, that is to say, *Christe Redemptor Omnium* and *Chorus novae Hierusalem*, well tuynable and wokemanly, by the Fest of All Saynts next ensuinge, for which the seid Abbott promysseth to pay the seid Thomas Loveday four marcs sterlinge at the fynishment of his seid repayre."

Previous writers have for the most part assumed a break in the history of the foundry from this time down to Rudhall's appearance in 1684, but this was certainly not the case; but there is, it is true, an interval of some fifty years, which brings us down to the post-Reformation period and the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Between the years 1587 and 1608 we find seven bells bearing the initials "I.B.," but the founder's name has not as yet come to light. The list is—

- 1587. Edwin Ralph, Herefordshire, 2nd.
Kempsey, Worcestershire, sanctus.
- 1590. Corse, Gloucestershire, old 3rd.
Huntley, Gloucestershire, 2nd.
Neen Sollars, Salop, 2nd.
- 1600. Hanley Castle, Worcestershire, sanctus.
- 1608. Gloucester, St. Nicholas, Gloucestershire, sanctus.

He was probably not a very flourishing founder, and his bells are all small ones; but they are of some interest, and for the most part elaborately decorated.³ There is, I think, no doubt that he was a Gloucester man.

Slightly overlapping in date with I.B. is Henry Farmer, also undoubtedly a Gloucester man, whose name is only

¹ Bazeley, *Records of Glouc. Cath.*, vol. i. p. 129.

² *Ibid.*, p. 300.

³ The best example is Neen Sollars (see *Shropshire Arch. Soc. Trans.*, 3rd ser. vol. ii. p. 218, plate 4).

found at Throckmorton, Worcestershire. But there are over twenty bells inscribed with the same lettering and fleur-de-lys stop, which cover the period 1600-22, and range over North Gloucestershire and South Worcestershire, with two in Warwickshire. The complete list is as follows :—

- 1600. Church Lench, Worcestershire, 5th.
- 1602. Queenhill, Worcestershire, 3rd.
- 1603. Broadway, Worcestershire, 3rd.
Teddington, Worcestershire, 2nd.
- 1604. Defford, Worcestershire, 2nd.
- 1605. Warwick Castle, Warwickshire, gateway bell.
- 1606. Stow-on-Wold, Gloucestershire, old 3rd.
- 1607. Huntley, Gloucestershire, 4th.¹
- 1609. Broadway, Worcestershire, 4th.
Teddington, Worcestershire, 1st.
- 1616. Alveston, Warwickshire, 2nd.
- 1618. Elmstone Hardwick, Gloucestershire, 3rd.
Dated 29 January.
- 1619. Leigh, Gloucestershire, 2nd and 5th. Dated
27 May.
Elmley Castle, Worcestershire, 2nd. Dated
16 March.
- 1620. Elmley Castle, Worcestershire, 6th. Dated
7 April.
Stow-on-Wold, Gloucestershire, 3rd and 6th.
Dated 16 October.
- 1622. Throckmorton, Worcestershire, 1-4. Dated
6 August.

Apart from the evidence of the bells, we know nothing of Henry Farmer, and his name does not appear in the list of Gloucester wills.

His successor was a man named John Palmer, whose name also occurs once only, at Sandhurst in 1621, but the initials

¹ The actual date is 1670, but the lettering is undoubtedly Farmer's and I think 1607 must be intended.

I.P. occur on numerous bells between that year and 1676. The period being such a long one, it is very likely that there were two of the name, and as a break of nine years occurs between 1638 and 1647 the elder John may have died or retired in the interval; but with certain exceptions, to be noted presently, the bells are of the same character throughout the period.

The 4th bell at Sandhurst is inscribed in the lettering used by Henry Farmer, a circumstance which seems to imply that John Palmer started in partnership with that founder, and succeeded entirely to his business on his death or retirement in 1622 or 1623.

Next we have a group of six bells, all more or less in the neighbourhood of Gloucester, which are inscribed in a new alphabet of plain, thick, square letters. These Palmer seems only to have used for about eight years. The list is—

1623. Staunton, 6th.	}	1626. Leigh, 4th.
1626. Hartpury, 1st and 4th.		1628. Hartpury, 5th.
		1630. Witcomb, old 2nd.

The initials I.P. occur on the bells at Staunton and Witcomb,¹ and at Hartpury the bells are dated with the day of the month, like those of Farmer.

Of somewhat similar character are four bells which on other grounds might more naturally be assigned to the Bristol foundry, the 11th and former 12th at St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol (1622), and two of 1639 in Pembrokeshire—Manorbier, 3rd, and St. Florence, 3rd.² It is further worth noting that the two latter are dated April 8th, a feature already noted as common on Farmer's bells and also found on some of Palmer's. The lettering seems more to resemble in character the flat sprawling type used by the Purdues, though smaller and narrower in form. Possibly researches at St. Mary Redcliffe

¹ These initials also occur on the 2nd at Penrhos, Monmouthshire, dated 1623; but I do not know in what type of lettering.

² See A. D. Tyssen in the *Tenby Observer*, January 3rd, 1907.

might reveal the name and residence of the founder among the parish archives.¹

To return to John Palmer, between 1626 and 1638 we find thirteen more bells, all but three of which bear the initials I.P. ; they are inscribed in a new style of lettering, of a somewhat fancy type, and smaller than either of the sets previously mentioned. The list is as follows :—

- 1626. Llanvapley, Monmouthshire, two bells.
- 1630. Charlton Kings, Gloucestershire, 4th and old 5th
- 1631. Tibberton, Gloucestershire, 2nd. X stop.
- 1633. Woolaston, Gloucestershire, 4th. No initials ;
X stop.
- 1634. Hewelsfield, Gloucestershire, 2nd. No initials.
Badgworth, Gloucestershire, 4th. X stop.
- 1635. Badgworth, Gloucestershire, 2nd. X stop.
Alveston, Gloucestershire, 3rd. X stop.
Corse, Gloucestershire, old 2nd. X stop.
Longney, Gloucestershire, 7th. X stop.
Ross, Herefordshire, old sanctus.
- 1638. Newent, Gloucestershire, 3rd. No initials.
Dated 13 July.

There is nothing particularly remarkable about these bells, except that on some of them, as at Tibberton and Woolaston, there is a X-shaped stop between the words. At Corse and elsewhere we find Palmer's favourite inscription—

“ SOLI DEO DETVR GLORIA.”

The break in the succession of these bells between 1638 and 1647 is probably in some measure due to the disturbed state of the country and of trade during the Civil War ; but it precedes that period sufficiently to justify the conjecture

¹ I am informed by Mr. Cuthbert Atchley that the parish records were mostly destroyed by Chatterton, and that they contain no record of the bells put up in 1622 ; it therefore seems probable that we shall have to remain in ignorance about T.S.

that the subsequent bells are the work of a second John Palmer, who, at first unsuccessful, eventually embarked on a fairly prosperous career. As Dr. Tyssen has pointed out,¹ the Rudhalls did such an enormous amount of recasting in Gloucestershire in the eighteenth century that it is not fair to judge of the amount of work done by earlier founders from their existing remains. The second group comprises eighteen bells, distributed as follows :—

- 1647. Charlton Kings, Gloucestershire, old 3rd. X stop.
- 1649. Hasfield, Gloucestershire, 2nd.
- : Newent, Gloucestershire, old 4th.
- : Woolhope, Herefordshire, 3rd. Initials I.P.
- : Dated 19 March.
- 1650. Berrow, Worcestershire, 1st. Initials I.P.
- Sevenhampton, Gloucestershire, 1st.
- 1651. Standish, Gloucestershire, 4th.
- 1654. Abenhall, Gloucestershire, 2nd. Dated 6 Jan.
- 1655. Rockfield, Monmouthshire, 1st. Initials.
- 1658. Bridestow, Herefordshire, recast.
- 1660. Newland, Gloucestershire, 2nd. Initials. Dated
5 July.
- 1662. Woolhope, Herefordshire, 5th. Initials. Dated
10 July.
- 1665. Llandefalle, Brecknockshire, 1-4. X stop.
- Rockfield, Monmouthshire, 2nd.
- 1669. Rockfield, Monmouthshire, 3rd. Initials.
- 1670. Llandilo Graban, Radnorshire, old 3rd. Initials.
- Llanigon, Brecknockshire, 1st. Initials.
- 1672. Goodrich, Herefordshire, 4th. Initials.
- Penrhos, Monmouthshire, old 3rd. Initials.
- 1674. Newent, Gloucestershire, 2nd. Dated 19 Sept.
- 1676. Pauntley, Gloucestershire, 3rd. Initials.

The following two bells may also possibly be John Palmer's

¹ *Tenby Observer, loc. cit.*

work, though the Somerset one is more likely to be by John Pennington, of Exeter :—

1657. Brimpsfield, Gloucestershire, old 2nd.

1673. Bath, St. John's Hospital, Somerset, bell.

There is little to be said about the ornamentation of Palmer's bells, which are singularly plain in that respect. Beyond an occasional X-shaped stop between the words, the only other attempt at decoration is the impression of the pseudo-Jewish shekel mentioned in Ellacombe's book under Sevenhampton, which also occurs at Bridestow and Woolhope in Herefordshire. Nor do the inscriptions call for much comment, beyond the peculiar method of dating already noted, and the pious admonition on the bells at Hasfield and Sevenhampton, from the English version of Ephes. v. 1 :—

“ BE YE FOLLOWERS OF GOD AS DEARE CHILDREN.”

After the date of his latest bell (1676) there is a break of eight years, until Abraham Rudhall appears on the scene at Oddington in 1684. I pass over the record of this great founder and his successors, about whom I have nothing new to add, and come to the period when John Rudhall, the last of the line, was forced to sell his declining business to Thomas Mears, of London, in 1830. It has hardly been noticed by previous writers that Mears kept open the foundry at Gloucester for several years after this date, and cast bells there for his clients in the Western Midlands, using Rudhall's lettering and stamps.¹ The bell at Cainscross is inscribed as by “ Mears, Gloucester and London, 1831,” and two at Tewkesbury bear “ T. Mears, Gloucester, 1837.” Others similarly inscribed, and dated between 1836 and 1841, occur in Shropshire, Worcestershire, and other counties. In the last-named year the foundry which had been in existence for some 550 years was finally closed.

¹ Cf. *Vict. County Hist. of Glouc.*, vol. ii. p. 205.