

II.

THE BELLS OF ST GILES, EDINBURGH, WITH A NOTICE OF THE MISSING BELLS OF THE CHAPEL OF HOLYROOD HOUSE. BY GEORGE HUNTER MAC THOMAS THOMS, SHERIFF OF CAITHNESS, ORKNEY, AND SHETLAND, F.S.A. SCOT.

I borrow, for a notice of the Bells of St Giles which I had prepared, the following more technical one by Mr J. S. Archer, which I have just discovered in the *Bell News and Ringer's Record* of 14th April 1883, and to which I have made some additions and corrections :—

The tower of St Giles contains thirty-five bells in all. Of these the belfry contains twelve. A frame beneath the beautiful open crown on the roof supports the remaining twenty-three.

Of these twelve bells in the belfry eight are of steel. These latter are hung from fixed stocks, and are without clappers. They are in the key of E. The external hammers, striking on the soundbows, are moved by a revolving barrel, studded with teeth, and turned by hand. The metal part of the mechanism appears to be sound, and only slightly worn ; the barrel itself is, however, much warped and decayed. The arrangement is modern, and the bells have no inscriptions, except the maker's name and date of manufacture. The inscription is Naylor Vickers and Co., E. Reepe's Patent Cast Steel, Sheffield, two with date 1858, three with 1860, one with 1863, and one with 1864. These are the bells with the greatest height and diameter, ranging from a height of 3 feet 7 inches, and a diameter of 4 feet 2 inches to a height of 1 foot 10 inches, and a diameter of 2 feet 5 inches.

On the other four bells, which have wheels and heavy top counterpoises, but no stays, are the following inscriptions in Roman capitals :—

No. 1.—“Archibald M'Aulay, Esq., Lord Provost ; Thomas Fenton, Alexander Simpson, James Watson, James Flint, Bailies ; and Patrick Lindsay, Dean of Guild ; James Donaldson, Treasurer ; David Mitchell, Conveener ; Robertus Maxwell me fecit Edinburgi in company (*sic*) Anno 1728.”

[This bell has both wheel and rope.]

The above inscription surrounds the shoulder of the bell, the date being immediately below.

No 2.—“Sir Patrick Johnston, Lord Provost Edr., 1706 ; Archibald Rule, William Neilson, George Lauson, George Land, Bailies ; Sir Samuel M'Lellan, Dean of Guild ; William Jafray, Thesaurer” (*sic*).

[This bell has no rope or clapper.]

The above inscription, like the previous one, surrounds the shoulder of the bell. On the waist are emblazoned the city arms.

No. 3.—THE GREAT BELL OF ST GILES'S.—This bell is rung for the Sunday services, and on it the hours are struck by the mechanism of the clock. It was fractured and recast in 1836. The original inscription, according to Dr Laing, was as follows :—

“Honorabiles viri burgenses villæ de Edinburch (*sic*) in Scotia, campanam fieri fecerunt. Anno Dmi. MCCCCLV. [1460]. Johs et Wilhelmus Hoerhen me fecerunt, Ipsamque campanam Gyelis vocari voluerunt. Defunctos plango, vivos voco, fulmina frango.”

Beneath the above inscriptions the bell is said to have borne the arms of Guelderland (it was cast in Flanders), figures of the Virgin, and other devices. The inscription now on the bell is—“C. & G. Mears Founders London, 1836.”

No. 4.—THE VESPER OR AVE BELL.—This has no clapper. Round the shoulder of this small, but finely-shaped bell, is the following inscription in Gothic capitals, beautifully cut :—

+OMNIBUS CARDEI: MEMENTO: MAL: ANNO: D: M: III: LXIII+

XIII

The approximate height, weight, diameter at mouth, and notes of the last four bells are as follows :—

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|--------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------|------------------|
| 1.—Height | 2 ft. 3 in. | —diam. | 2 ft. 9 in. | —app. weight, | 7 cwt. 3 qrs. | —note | D _b . |
| 2. ” | 2 ft. 2 in. | ” | 3 ft. 3 in. | ” | 11 cwt. 3 qrs. | —note | B _b . |
| 3. ” | 3 ft. 3 in. | ” | 4 ft. 6 in. | ” | 30 cwt. | —note | E _b . |
| 4. ” | 1 ft. 1½ in. | ” | 1 ft. 5 in. | ” | 1 cwt. 1 qr. | —note | B. (?) |

In addition to the above are the twenty-three bells forming a chime or carillon. These, as before mentioned, hang in the open-air immediately under the crown, and are arranged in three rows one under the other, the smaller bells at the top, and the five largest bells under a penthouse below. Six only out of the entire set are inscribed or dated.

On the 12th is the date, “1698.”

On the 15th, the same date, almost defaced.

On the 17th: “Johannes Meikle nos fecit Edinburgi 1699.”

On the 19th: “Gorg Lawson, Thesaurer, 1699. Sir Gorg Home of Kello Provost.”

On the 22nd: “Johannes Meikle hasce omnes campanas musicas fecit 1698 Edinburgi.”

On the 23rd (tenor): “William Menzies, Archibald Rule, Georg Mitchell,

James Nairne, Baillies. Samuel M'Clland, Treasurer, 1698. Patrick Halyburton, D. of Gild. Alexander Thomson, Conveener; John Meikle me fecit Edinburgi." Below this there is also—

Sir
Archibald Mure
of Thorntoun
Lord Provost.

These twenty-three bells range in height from 1 foot 9 inches to $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches and in diameter from $24\frac{1}{2}$ inches to $6\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Mr Archer gives the diameter of the carillon tenor at the mouth as 2 feet, approximate weight, 3 cwt. 2 quarters. The notes are exceedingly impure, the tenor, as far as can be made out, speaks B \flat . As a mere matter of curiosity, it may be added that the treble of this carillon is $6\frac{3}{8}$ inches diameter at the mouth, and weighs probably about 15 lbs. These bells are intended to be played by hand; the chiming mechanism being controlled by levers arranged in keyboard fashion, the naturals in a row at equal distances, and the sharps above at corresponding intervals. The lowermost C \sharp and D \sharp are dummies. The connection between the levers and striking apparatus is entirely out of order, and much decayed. Until about five years ago, they were played by a Miss M'Leod, who succeeded her father as performer. Between them they covered a space of nearly eighty years as carilloneurs at St Giles's. The barrel carillon, with eight bells, was introduced not long ago during Provost Lawson's term of office, for the purpose of calling worshippers to church. It was only a short time in use, the mechanism proving very defective. It was wholly disused about twelve years ago. Nothing can now be ascertained concerning the tunes pricked on the barrel. Some of the beams on which the bells hang are supposed to have been taken from a vessel of the Spanish Armada.

The ancient ringing-chamber is immediately over the groining of the tower crossing. In the middle of the floor is a grating fitted into the central ring of the vault, through which the church beneath used to be visible. In the roughly-boarded ceiling are the holes through which the bell-ropes passed; owing to the decay of the woodwork, it is impossible to say how many ropes were originally provided for. Three or four of the holes only are perfectly marked, and it is likely that there were two or three others not now distinguishable. The chamber is now nearly dark, owing to the alteration in the pitch of the roofs in the church, 1829-33, by which all direct light from the outside was cut off. The restoration of the church has now been completed through the munificence of Dr Chambers, and Mr Archer suggests that a fitting conclusion to the work would be to clear out the whole of the existing bells, substituting for them a light peal of eight, fitted for ringing in the orthodox manner.

Dr Chambers, in his interesting introduction to the first volume of the *St Giles' Lectures*, notices the bells at present in the tower or crown of St Giles'. He mentions, besides those above noticed, the St Mary Bell, which, sad to say, was sold with certain church furnishings in 1561 (see Dr Wilson's *Memorials of Edinburgh*), for £220 Scots. Among these other articles there appear to have been three small gold bells, and a blue bell, which I suppose to have been altar bells. The obliteration of the original inscription on the Great Bell of St Giles, which dated from 1460, and which was rung to assemble the citizens after the battle of Flodden, lends interest to the following passage in the *Weekly Magazine or Edinburgh Amusement*, vol. xxvi. p. 350, under date 1774—“Sometime ago, the great bell of St Giles' Church having suffered damage, it was found necessary to take it down, and put up one of the Abbey Church bells in its place.”

The important point in this quotation consists in this, that the Great Bell of St Giles' was taken down, and one of the Abbey Church bells substituted in its place.

A correspondent, who called my attention to the matter, added—“Perhaps this is the key to the possession of a relic of another sister church. It may be that the Town Council Records about 1774 may throw some light on this antiquarian matter. No reference is made in Dr Chambers' notice to this additional bell.”

I accordingly got our obliging Town Clerk and fellow-member to search his records, with the result that he sent me the following memorandum as to a contract to recast a bell in 1610, and extracts of entries of subsequent dates:—

“A contract (*Charter House Book*, vol. i. p. 746) was entered into between the Dean of Guild of Edinburgh and Charles Hogg, potter, and Thomas Weir and James Sibbald, peuterers in Edinburgh, bearing that the bell in the steeple being riven, spoilt, and abused by certain unskilful persons, ringers thereof, the Magistrates had ordained the Dean of Guild, to whom the care of the Kirks by virtue of his office properly pertained, to take down the said bell, and cause melt and renew the same sufficiently, and to agree with the said persons thereupon; and therefore the said three persons acknowledged to have received the said bell of good and sufficient bell metal, weighing 94 stone troy weight, and obliged them to make a sufficient mould and to melt the said bell,

and of the metal thereof to form, make, and cast a new bell in the said mould of the same thickness, wideness, height, fineness, and proportion in all respects as the said old bell then was at the receipt thereof, within the castle of Edinburgh, date of melting and casting thereof and number of the weight thereupon, and a good and sufficient well sounding bell, of as good and sufficient bell metal, at the sight and to the contentment of the Magistrates and Council for the time, and to deliver at the over Trone, where the old bell was weighed and delivered to them, before 1st August next, and to be of the weight foresaid at least: For which causes the Dean of Guild obliged himself to pay the said three persons 3s. 6d. Scots for each pound of the new bell of the weight foresaid, and 12s. Scots for each pound of augmentation; and if said bell turned out a bad one, the said persons obliged themselves to deliver a good one brought home from Flanders or London of the same description before 1st November next. The contract is dated 20th April 1610, and on the back thereof is a discharge for the price of the new bell £698, 16s., the weight being 139 stone 6 pounds, dated 26th October 1610."

Then occurs the following note:—

"N.B.—This bell being found defective and taken down, in order to be sent to Flanders or London to be melted over again, the before named three persons gave bond to hold the town of Edinburgh *indemnis*, dated 7th April 1619."¹

29th December 1697.—The Council recommend a committee "to call for Deacon Meikle, founder, and propose to him ane project the good toun hes for setting up ane cheme of musicall bells within this city for decoreing thereof, and report their opinion."

¹ Dr Wilson, in his *Memorials of Edinburgh*, states that two of the St Giles' bells were recast in 1621 at Campvere, in Zealand. The larger of these bells was afterwards cracked and recast in London in 1846, according to Dr Wilson. This, it is thought should be 1836, that being the date on the present great bell.

In *Traditions of Edinburgh*, published in Edinburgh in 1848 by William Rutherford, it is stated that in 1621, *three* bells were recast (not two, as stated by Dr Wilson), which cost £120, 5s., besides the metal of the old bells, which was sent to Campvere to be recast. According to Rutherford

The largest bell weighed	2150 lbs.
„ second	768 lbs.
„ third	620 lbs.
	Dutch weight.

12th January 1698.—The Council, upon receiving that report, “doe grant warrand to Deacon Meikle, founder, to cast two small musicall bells of different notes about the weight of the small dead bell, and recommend to James Hamiltoun, chyurgeon and Trades Counciler, to give orders thereanent, and see the samen done with all conveniencie upon the good toun's expences.”

26th January 1698.—The said James Hamiltoun having produced three small musical bells of different notes made by Deacon Meikle, the Council do therefore recommend to the former committee “to setle and agree with Deacon Meikle for ane cheme of musicall bells, and bring in ane contract to be past betwixt the good toun and him thereanent.”

18th February 1698.—That committee reported that they “did unanimously agree to certain articles specified in the minute, whereby Deacon Meikle was to make a cheme or sett of bells for the good toun, fifteen in number, and of different notes according to a scheme, and the good toun was to pay him twenty-two shillings Scots for each pound weight of the bells, and, because the Deacon would be at a considerable charge thereanent, to advance him ane thousand pounds Scots; which report being considered by the Council they approved thereof, and appointed the treasurer to make payment accordingly.”

The Scheme according to which Deacon Meikle is to make the Musical Bells for the High Church Steeple of the good town of Edinburgh.

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|---|--|
| 15. C sol fa or smallest bell, half a note above B fa bi mi #, weight 6 lb. | |
| 14. B fa bi mi # | } a full note distant each. |
| 13. A la mi re | |
| 12. G sol re ut b | |
| 11. F fa ut | half a note distant from E la mi. |
| 10. E la mi | } a full note distant from one another. |
| 9. D la sol re | |
| 8. C sol fa ut | half a note above B fa bi mi # |
| 7. B fa bi mi # | } a full note distant each. |
| 6. A la mi re | |
| 5. G sol re ut | |
| 4. F fa ut): | half a note above E la mi. |
| 3. E la mi | } a full note distant each, or the biggest bell. |
| 2. D la sol re | |
| 1. C sol fa ut | |

(Signed) ARD. MURE, *Provost.*

(Signed) JOHN MEIKLE.

13th September 1698.—The Council, upon report of the Committee appointed “to consider the care and pains taken by Francis Toward, musician, in fitting, tuning, and playing upon the cheme of musicall bells, Doe therefore establish a salarie upon him of fyve hundred merks yeirly, for which he was to play upon the said cheme of bells every day of the week except the Sabbath day, half ane hour before and half ane hour after twelve o'clock, and any other time the Magistrates should think fitt to appoint, and to take prentices for instructing them in the art of playing upon the said cheme.”

20th July 1774.—“The Lord Provost acquainted the Council that he had applied to the Court of Exchequer for one of the bells in the Chappell of the Abbey of Holyrood House to supply the place of the hour bell in the steeple of St Giles's, which was lately found to be crackt, and the tone thereof greatly spoilt, and which their Lordships had been pleased to grant, upon bond being given for the penal sum of three hundred pounds sterling, to restore the same if called for, which being considered by the Council, they agree to grant the said bond accordingly.”

27th July 1774.—The bond was read and signed in Council.

The Council records bear that this small bell, originally in Holyrood, had this inscription—

SOLI DEO GLORIA JAN BURGERHUYS ME FECIT, 1608.

There is no bell to be found now in St Giles' tower with this date and inscription. The question arises, Where is it?

The entries in the Town Council records continue—

24th August 1774.—The Council appointed two joint players on the music bells of the city, with the ordinary salary, and obliged them to teach one or two schollars as the Council shall think fit to play on the said bells, and that without fee or reward.

The Magistrates and Council of Edinburgh (of date 28th September 1774), authorised and allowed the bell of the Old Abbey Church, which the gentlemen of the Episcopal Chapels in Edinburgh had obtained from the Barons of Exchequer for the new Chapel there, to be rung on Sundays, provided the same be done at the same hours with the bells belonging to the city.

Upon getting these excerpts, I applied to the Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, who is also a Fellow, to assist me in the search for the missing bell, and he has kindly supplied me with the following excerpts from the Minute Book of the Barons of Exchequer:—

Wednesday, 17th February 1773.

ABBAY CHAPEL BELLS LENT FOR USE OF EPISCOPAL CHAPEL, COWGATE.

Read a memorial from Mr John M'Kenzie for himself and the Committee appointed for superintending the building of the chapel in the Cowgate for public worship, after the usage of the Church of England, praying the barons to allow them the use of the two bells which were taken down from the steeple of the chapel at Holyrood House, where they are now rusting and exposed to the open air. The Barons are pleased to allow the petitioners the use of the best bell on their giving bond in the penalty of £150 to return the said bell when required by the Barons.

Monday, 18th July 1774.

ABBAY CHAPEL LARGE BELL PRAYED BY MAGISTRATES OF EDINBURGH.

Read a memorial from the Lord Provost, Magistrates, and Town Council of Edinburgh, praying the barons to allow them the use of the large bell which hung in the Royal Chappell at Holyrood House, ordered Mr Hunter Mason to attend the Barons to-morrow at twelve o'clock.

Wednesday, 20th July 1774.

CHAPEL ROYAL LARGE BELL GIVEN TO MAGISTRATES OF EDINBURGH.

Mr Hunter Mason, attending in obedience to the order of the 18th of this month, the Barons allow the Magistrates and Town Council of Edinburgh the use of the largest bell which belonged to the Chappell Royal at Holyrood House, upon their giving bond in the penaltie of £300 to return the same whole, and in good condition, when called for by the Barons.

We have already seen that on 27th July 1774, a bond for one, and as it seems the largest of the Holyrood House Chapel bells, was signed by the Magistrates. Was it got by the magistrates, is one question? where is it now, is another?

The best bell was granted to the Episcopalians in 1773 by the

Barons, and that they got that bell would seem to be proved by the Council Minute of 28th September 1774, in which permission is granted to ring it on Sundays. Rumour has it that this bell is still rung on Sundays from the south-east minaret of St Paul's Church, in York Place.

It would be interesting to know if this be the case, and my object in reading this paper will be served, if the history of that bell be cleared up as well as some traces discovered of the other and larger bell which belonged to the Chapel Royal at Holyrood House.¹

I exhibit rubbings of the inscriptions of the bells in the steeple of St Giles, the most curious being that on the vesper or Ave Maria bell, which is given in *facsimile* on p. 95.

¹ The author's object has been so far gained that Mr G. Godfrey Cunninghame, F.S.A. Scot., has communicated, as one interesting fact among many others, which he has discovered, that the largest bell of Holyrood House Chapel was obtained by the Magistrates, placed in St Giles', and thereafter transferred to the Tron Kirk. It was there when the steeple of that kirk was burned on 16th November 1824; it was then and there destroyed. The other bell was, and is in the south-east minaret of St Paul's Church, York Place. Mr Cunninghame promises to give the Society the benefit of a number of other discoveries at an early date.