

## III.

“THE PRAYER BELL,” COMMONLY CALLED “THE MINISTER’S BELL,” IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF ELGIN. BY ARCHIBALD HAMILTON DUNBAR, F.S.A. Scot.

In *Sketches of Moray*, edited by William Rhind, Esq. (Edinburgh, 1839), at page 44, is the following note about this bell :—

“It would appear that the ‘Prayer Bell,’ commonly called the minister’s bell, has come scatheless through this trying time. The inscription around it, “Thomas de Dunbar, me Fecit, 1402,” tells that it is an ancient—the only—relic (save and except the Ronald bell of Birnie) of the former dispensation. This venerable piece of metal was given to the town of Elgin by the Earl of Murray four hundred and thirty-five years ago. It has, with equal fidelity, lifted its sonorous voice in behalf of Papists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians ; and has rejoiced at the success of Royalists and Roundheads, Whigs and Tories, as well as sounded forth the requiem of eighteen sovereigns during that period.”

In *Annals of the Parish and Burgh of Elgin*, by Robert Young, F.S.A. Scot. (Elgin, 1879), at page 443, there is a quotation from Rhind’s *Sketches*, p. 44 :—

“The little bell, called ‘the Minister’s Bell,’ bears the following inscription upon it—‘Thomas de Dunbar, me fecit, 1402.’” And Mr Robert Young adds, “It therefore was the gift of the Earl of Moray, and is a venerable relic of Roman Catholic times.”

On reading the above in 1880, it seemed to me improbable that the Earl should have numbered bell-making among his accomplishments ; and probable, that if he had given the bell to St Giles’ Church in Elgin, his coat of arms would appear on the bell. Accordingly, having determined to investigate the matter, I went, on my return to the North in autumn 1881, to the Established Church in Elgin, which has occupied the site of St Giles’ Church since 1828, and, “having taken off my coat,” after some climbing through an accumulation of nearly fifty-three


years' rubbish and dust,<sup>1</sup> I managed to get up to the bell, and to take rubbings of the inscription. My exertions revealed a very different story.

Thomas de Dunbar, who was Earl of Moray in 1402, had nothing whatever to do with the matter.

Mr William Rhind, or "a writer in the *Forres Gazette*," made a very bad guess at the inscription, and ante-dated it one hundred years. Unfortunately, Mr Robert Young has copied these errors.

"The little bell" is 18½ inches high and 22⅝ inches across the mouth. The large bell, which is said to have been re-cast in 1782, is 23 inches high and 31½ inches across the mouth.

The inscription taken from the rubbings of the little bell is:—

**dn̄s, alexāḁ, burkar, me, fieri**  
**fecit Anno domini milēs quingentesimō sedā**  
**A B**  


*dominus alexander barkar me fieri fecit Anno domini milesimo quingentesimo secundo.*

Sir (priest) Alexander Barkar caused me to be made in the year of our LORD one thousand five hundred and two.

Beneath the inscription are the letters A B, the initials of the donor ; below them is a cock *contourné*, not on a shield.

Barkar may be said to be unknown as a surname in the North of Scotland ; it does not appear in the *Registrum Episcopatus Moraviensis*, nor in any accessible local register or deed, and nothing seems to be known in the North about 'dominus alexander barkar,' who ordered the bell to be made in 1502.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is right to mention that on returning to the kirk ten years later, to measure the size of the bells, the belfry was beautifully clean.

<sup>2</sup> Alisaundre le Barker, provost of the burgh of Hadingtone, swore fealty to Edward I., King of England, at Berwick-on-Tweed, on the 28th of August 1296.—(*Calendar of*

In the *Registrum Magni Sigilli* there are confirmations of three charters granted by Alexander Barkar, vicar of Petynane, chaplain to the King. The first, in favour of the parish church of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Haddington, is dated 12th November 1477 (confirmed 18th November 1477, lib. viii. No. 64). The 2nd, in favour of the parish church of St Giles, Edinburgh, is dated 30th May 1486 (confirmed 2nd June 1486, lib. x. No. 150). The 3rd, also in favour of the parish church of St Giles, Edinburgh, is dated 30th May 1486 (confirmed 1st May 1501, lib. xii. No. 374).

Pedinane or Pettynane, in Lanark, belonged to Elizabeth de Moravia de Pedinane in 1426 (*Registrum Magni Sigilli*, lib. ii. 62).