

Addendum to F C Eeles and R W M Clouston, 'The church and other bells of Wigtonshire', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland*, 107 (1975-6), 272

R W M Clouston*

Whithorn Town Steeple Bell

This bell, $19\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter, inscribed:

PETER · VANDER · GHEIN · HEEFT · MY · GHEGOTEN · INT · IAER · /17 (Shield) 08

has prompted further research, as it has been pointed out that there are a number of difficulties in accepting the statement that the founder was Peter van den Ghein in the year 1708.

The Peter van den Ghein alive and working in 1708 was Peter V. One recent reference (Lehr 1971, 239ff) notes him as the son of Andreas van den Ghein of St Truiden; business was poor, and so around 1700 Peter V moved to Tienen, but even there bell founding work was hard to find. Only once was he involved in casting bells and this was in 1709 when the town of Tienen bought for their own use the last de Haze carillon with the intention of setting it up in the town hall. They needed four bass bells with deeper notes to extend the range and gave the job of casting them to Peter V then resident in the town. By 1723 they decided to sell the carillon to Brussels and it was then found that one of the Peter V bells was cracked, another was damaged and would not last long, and the other two had the same note. Peter V was already dead by 1723. The work on the Nijmegen carillon in 1738 was carried out by Peter VI and Matthias van den Ghein. So it must be considered extremely unlikely that Peter V would have been able to cast such a fine bell as that in the Whithorn Town Steeple.

The shield bearing a bell of unusual shape and the initials R A was to be found on the second bell at Thornton-le-Moors, Cheshire, before recasting in 1909. A rubbing of the inscription on this bell is preserved in the Turner Collection in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries of London, and the figures of the date 1708 and the shield are virtually identical. Between the words are heart shaped stops as on the Whithorn bell, but in this case the correct way up. Whitehead (1888, 249) illustrates a shield with the same bell but with slightly differently designed

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letters R A appearing on bells at Dalston and Kirkbampton in Cumbria dated 1704 and 1705. At Skelton, with the date 1717, there is additionally the word Wiggan which confirms that the founder was Ralph Ashton of Wigan. His bells are comparatively rare, the full list being:

Llanfernien, Clwyd, 1703; Dalston, Cumbria, 1704; Kirkbampton, Cumbria, 1705; Overton School, Lancs, 1707; Thornton-le-Moors, Cheshire, 1708, recast 1909; Whithorn, Dumfries & Galloway, 1708; Melmerby, Lancs, two bells, 1715; Ormskirk, Lancs, 1716; Lowick, Lancs, 1716, recast 1901; Grayrigg, Cumbria, 1716; Skelton, Cumbria, 1717; Pennington, Lancs, 1719, recast 1926; Ruthin, Clwyd, 1719; Hope, Clwyd, 1720, recast 1919; Bruera, Cheshire, 1721; Llanycil, Gwynedd, 1722.

While it seems fairly certain that the present bell is a recast made by Ralph Ashton of an earlier van den Ghein bell, the evidence of the lettering used is not helpful to determine which Peter van den Ghein cast the original bell. The spelling of the surname with an i and not a y suggests Mechlin and Peter I, II or III, but none is thought to have used two sizes of letter in the same word.

Best thanks to Mr André Lehr for his help on this problem, and to Mr Mark Ockelton for pointing it out.

REFERENCES

- Lehr, A 1971 *Van Paardebel Tot Speelklok*.
 Whitehead, H 1888 'Church Bells in Cumberland Ward, no II', *Trans Cumberland Westmorland Antiq Archaeol Soc*, 9 (1888), 240-68.