

THE BELLS OF BRISTOL CATHEDRAL

By RANALD W. M. CLOUSTON

THE article in 'The Ringing World' of May 13th, 1960 (page 321), left a number of unanswered questions on these bells. A recent visit, with tuning forks, enabled the pitches of the four existing bells to be determined: these and the other data on them may be summarised thus:

Treble: diameter 28½", approx. weight 5 cwt., date c.1500, note 0.36 semitones flat of F.

Second: 31½", 6 cwt., c.1500, 0.05 semitones flat of E flat.

Third: 35½", 8½ cwt., c.1300, 0.15 semitones flat of B.

Tenor: 49½", 20 cwt., 1670, 0.45 semitones flat of E.

(2)	(3)	(4) 57"	↑ N
37"	40½"	E 53"	
		D 46½"	
37"	38½"	C 47½"	
(1)	A	B 44"	

As shown on the above plan the bell frame was clearly designed to house nine bells, and it seems that the west side by the two trebles, denoted by (1) and (2), may be rather later than the rest. The pit marked D above is 46½" wide, but the hatchway is immediately below it and the frame lower horizontal members have been cut to give a clearance of 53". The east end of this pit has also been cut by the lower horizontal members to allow the tenor to be got out into the space to the east of the frame before being hoisted into position in the pit marked (4).

All except possibly pit B shows signs of having bells hung in them at one time: in the case of pit B some decay has taken place and new pieces of timber have been fitted such that a brief inspection did not disclose sufficient evidence.

It will be noted from the pitches shown above that the interval between the treble and tenor is over 13 semitones, i.e. well over an octave. The evidence of the nine bell frame and the fact that at the Reformation the church had 10 bells with an alleged total weight of 10,006 lb., approximately 90 cwt., suggests that there was a ring of nine with a small sanctus bell hung elsewhere in the fabric.

We can say with some certainty that the existing treble was cast for the tower as the initials and arms of Abbot John Nulande appear on the bell. This then suggests that the other two pre-Reformation bells were also initially cast for this tower and that the Commissioners in 1553 did not do any exchanging of bells, but purely removed five of the ten.

ACCURACY OF 1553 WEIGHT

The total weight of the 10 bells of 10,006 lb. appears twice in the records of the Commissioners and some of the weights of other bells in the county are noted to have been assessed by Thomas Dutton, Surveyor of Gloucestershire. How his assessment was made is not clear. It is highly improbable that the bells were physically weighed and it is also unlikely that the monastic records would be of much help in the case of say the present third bell, cast circa 1300. This bell of 35½" diameter is very thick in the sound bow, 3", for this diameter, and any assessment of weight based on known weights of other bells of that diameter would be in error. This leads to the thought that the total weight of 10,006 lb. could be quite a bit out.

The existing tenor, dated 1670, is clearly a recast of the 'one great belle for the clocke' which the Commissioners allowed to be retained. This bell hangs in the widest pit of 57" and on the evidence of the widening of the pit D, immediately over the hatchway, it would seem that the old tenor was somewhat larger than the present one. There is bound to be some loss of metal in recasting and it may well be that Roger Purdue II designed a smaller bell to allow for this loss and reduce the cost of recasting. It is to be suspected

that the old tenor was some half a semitone flatter than the present one and was on octave below the present second bell.

Another factor is the cracked bell sold in 1802, which weighed 11 cwt. 17 lb. This would have had a diameter of about 39" and a note perhaps three semitones flatter than the present third.

PRE-REFORMATION RECONSTRUCTION

The evidence therefore seems to point to a pre-Reformation set of 10 bells with the following particulars:

Sanctus: say 1 cwt.

Treble: present treble, 5 cwt., pit 1, note F—36.

Second: present second, 6 cwt., pit 2, E flat—05.

Third: 7 cwt., pit A, 2D flat.

Fourth: present third, 8½ cwt., pit 3, B—15.

Fifth: 9 cwt., pit B, 2B flat.

Sixth: bell sold 1802, 11½ cwt., pit D, 2A flat.

Seventh: 12 cwt., pit C, 2G.

Eighth: 15½ cwt., pit E, 2F.

Tenor: present tenor before recasting, 22 cwt., pit 4, 2E flat—05.

Total weight 97½ cwt.

The existing bells show that the musical scale did not conform to present day standards, the interval between the present second and third being two full tones instead of three semitones. The ring of nine would in some respects be similar to that at Basingstoke, where the interval between the two trebles is a full tone. The total weight of 97½ cwt. shown above is rather in excess of the 10,006 lb. of metal said to be in the tower at the Reformation, but the margin is not great.

One thing can certainly be said: that this ring of nine was an extremely early one and was complete when other churches generally had five bells or less. However in the same county the monastery at Winchcombe, at the Reformation, had eight bells weighing 6,322 lb., and Christ Church, Bristol, signed for eight bells on May 23rd, 1553, received from the Commissioners. See Ellacombe's 'The Church Bells of Gloucestershire,' Appendix C. It is not clear whether these latter bells were already in the tower or whether some had been obtained from elsewhere, even perhaps the Cathedral, then the Abbey of St. Augustine.

50 Years Ago

'R.W.' November 29th, 1912.—

The first 'name' peal of Cinques at Cripplegate

Some months ago, when two Johns met, the conversation turned upon the John peals, rung some few years ago, and one reminded the other that while the Williams and the Thomases had rung peals of Cinques, this was a performance to which the Johns had not turned their hand. 'Hadh't we better see about it?' asked the one, 'I don't know,' replied the other. 'I think we had better go the whole hog and make it Cinques while we are about it. And that is how the peal last Saturday came to be attempted....'

(The Johns taking part were: Truss, Goldsmith, Matthews, Cheesman (conductor), Carter, Thomas, Armstrong, Sharman, Hesse, Oxborough, Golding, Neal.)

5,280 PLAIN BOB MAJOR

By GEOFFREY DAVIES

5/4 M H 23456

—• 43652

— 63254

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Nine times repeated with single for hob M* in 5th and 10th parts. Contains 18 combination course ends.

Rung as 5,056 at Stone, Staffs, April 25th, 1962.

SEASONAL GREETINGS

Our issue of December 15th and December 22nd will contain Christmas and New Year messages. Price 4s. for 36 words. Please send copy as soon as possible.

SALISBURY DIOCESAN GUILD West Dorset Branch

The A.G.M. of the West Dorset Branch was held at Beaminster on November 24th, when about 55 members and visitors attended. Standard and Surprise Major methods were rung during the afternoon and evening.

The service was conducted by Canon C. Carew Cox, president of the Guild. The lesson was read and the address given by the Rev. G. V. Syer. The organist and St. Mary's choir were in attendance, and a course of Grandsire Triples was rung on handbells after the lesson.

Mr. C. W. Powell, the vice-chairman, presided at the business meeting. New members elected were Mrs. C. Savage and Miss J. Knight, both of Askerswell. The honorary secretary's report showed that membership stood at 140. Two quarter peals were rung for Canon Cox's 80th birthday, and six quarter peals and one peal for the 80th anniversary of the Guild. Ten members had rung their first quarter, and there were two new conductors. One quarter was by an all resident ladies band.

Thorncombe bells were in the hands of Messrs. Taylor and were due to be finished in the spring of 1963, when they would be a ring of eight. The accounts showed a balance in hand of £73 12s. It was decided to send a further £3 3s for the Ernest Morris Memorial.

The election of officers resulted in the following: Chairman, Mr. C. W. H. Powell; vice-chairman, Rev. G. V. Syer; honorary secretary and treasurer, Mr. J. T. Barratt; Ringing Master, Mr. H. D. W. Bishop; Deputy Masters, Mr. G. S. Morris and Mr. H. G. Keeley; Canon Cox and Mr. F. Knight, committee members.

Mr. Powell proposed a comprehensive vote of thanks to the churchwardens, organist, choir and to the Beaminster ringers for the excellent tea. He also thanked Messrs. E. Bailey, T. Gunning and A. Winters for their long and loyal service, all three having served in Beaminster for over 50 years each. Mr. E. Bailey, as churchwarden, suitably replied giving a warm welcome to all visitors.

Canon Cox said he would like to thank all who had been so kind as to ring for his birthday, and for the response to his appeal for ringing to mark the 80th anniversary of the Guild. Nineteen quarters and nine peals had so far been rung.

Subject to permission, the meeting programme is: Bradpole, February 23rd; Thorncombe, April 20th; Corscombe, June 22nd; Chardstock, September 21st; Lyme Regis, November 30th.

Under A.O.B., Mr. Pannell asked that more attention should be paid to the sending of numbers for tea. Nineteen notified to this meeting! J. T. B.

OBITUARY

MR. HOWARD BEARDSMORE

Abergavenny has lost a very promising young ringer by the passing of Howard Beardsmore, at the age of 22. He had been ill for only a few days, was operated on for perforated appendix and peritonitis, was recovering, then complications took place and he died on November 14th.

For two years Howard studied at Aberystwyth University, and was employed as assistant librarian at the local public library.

He started ringing here about six months ago and was showing great promise. He took a deep interest in his church, was present for service ringing and on practice nights. Always pleasant and of excellent company, we miss him very much.

The funeral took place on November 19th, two ringers acted as bearers—Mr. N. Ward and Mr. G. Lewis—together with four young friends of Howard.

After the interment a quarter peal of Doubles in four methods was rung on St. Mary's bells, with the bells half-muffled, by the following: B. Thomas 1, G. Lewis 2, Rev. I. J. Richards 3, P. Saunders 4, G. Ward (cond.) 5, R. Horsington 6, N. Ward 7, M. O. Roberts 8 (7, 6, 8 covering).

Howard was the youngest of a family of six. Our deepest sympathy is extended to his parents, brothers and sisters in their sad loss. G. W.