

THE CHURCH BELLS OF BUNBURY

By J. W. Clarke.

In the noble tower of Bunbury church is a fine ring of eight bells. Some of them are comparatively modern having been in the tower for fifty years or so, but two have done duty for nearly two hundred years, another for well over three hundred, and there is one which was ringing here in pre-Reformation days. Although it is still true to say that the bells play an important part in village life, this was much more marked in times past when the parish was very definitely a self contained unit. In those days no celebration was complete no event of national or local importance properly honoured unless it was accompanied by the ringing of the bells. The wardens' books are freely sprinkled with entries such as the following taken from the early eighteenth century.

paid ye Ringers for ye fifth of November	00 07 00
pd ye Ringers for Christmas Day & New Years Day	00 03 00
for Ringing on ye Queens Birth Day	00 02 06
pd the Ringers for Ringing on the 29th day of May	00 02 00
Spent on the Ringers, when the King came in	00 02 06

Each warden kept his own accounts and the payments were shared between them so that these items must be doubled to arrive at the final figure. The celebrations on November 5th were obviously on a grand scale.

The Day-bell rang out from the tower each morning at four o'clock and, as was the custom in almost every parish, the curfew was rung at eight in the evening.

1722	pd Rich. Pinnington for Ringing Day Bell and Curfor	0 10 00
1731	paid Richard Penington for Ringing ye 4 & 8 a.clock Bell	0 10 00
	pd Richard Pinnington for Candles to ring by	0 00 06

The Day-bell was the Ave Bell of mediaeval times and in some country parishes it was used until well into the present century, its value as a rising bell no doubt being the reason for its continuance. The custom of ringing the curfew was followed at Bunbury until the war put an end to all ringing in 1939 and it is interesting to learn that this ancient practice is shortly to be revived.

Besides giving a clear indication of the very considerable use made of the bells, the wardens' accounts also show that no expense was spared to keep them in good order. To understand the significance of many of these repair items it is necessary for something to be said concerning the method of hanging and ringing. The bell is secured by its cannons (ear-shaped hooks) to a heavy piece of elm known as the headstock, at either end of which are pivots which rest in brass beds fitted into the supporting timber framework. A large wheel, grooved round its circumference, is attached firmly to the headstock and from this the rope is suspended over pulleys or rollers to the ringing chamber below.

In ringing the bell is made to swing until it is inverted, and thereafter it is revolved clockwise and anticlockwise, the clapper making one blow for each revolution. A simple device known as the stay and slider, invented nearly three hundred years ago, prevents the bell from being overthrown, (making a second revolution in the same direction). The stay also makes it possible to rest the bell in the inverted position when it is said to be "at the set". Although the traditional principles are still followed, modern methods have naturally substituted metal for wood, cannons have been discarded so that the bell can be more securely fixed to the stock,

and ball bearings have given precision hanging. It will thus be seen that the revolving metal sets up forces which act upon the frame and bearings and between the bell and its headstock, while ropes and pulleys are subjected to much wear. All through the accounts then, expenses for the maintenance of the bells are frequently met with. Some examples might well be quoted.

1709 pd. Richard pinnington for carrying ye Bell Clapper to he 00 00 03
peiced

The ball of the clapper was welded to the shaft and breaks at this point were common.

1709 ffor nuts and Iorn worke for ye Bells 00 01 00
1714 Spent on William Large for fastning ye 5 Bell 00 00 06

Iron straps hooked into the cannons fastened the bell to its headstock. They frequently worked loose.

1713 pd. for turning ye 4th Bell and mending the third Bell 01 06 00

The striking point of the clapper gradually made an indent in the soundbow of the bell, and when this became too deep for safety the bell was turned (usually through 90°) so that the clapper made its blow in a new place. It should be added that the bell had been in, use for a century before this operation became necessary.

1713 pd William Large for mending ye 5th. Bell Gudjoyn 00 00 08

The gudgeons were the iron pins of about 1.25inches in diameter which by a process then known as "steeling" were given a hardened surface. They were driven into the headstock on either side and rested on the brass blocks in the frame and thus bore the entire weight of the bell. If neglected they might allow the bell to fall as at Shotwick in 1728 when the "great bell" fell, or at Wallasey in 1687 when a bell crashed through the floors to the ground.

1718 pd to Miles Gearrat for a new Bell whele and other work done 00 10 00
amongst the Bels
pd to Danniol Jackson for tow Iron steas (stays) and 5 pins for 00 04 06
a new Belwhele and one Cramp for the Bige Bel frame

Being made of timber and of light construction wheels were often under repair. The stays referred to were metal rods fixed from wheel to headstock, a device which helped to prevent warp in the latter. The cramp suggests that the frame was being pulled apart at a joint by the movement of the bell.

This list could be very much extended. Repairs to brass bearing blocks, pulleys, wheels, clappers, bawdricks (the leather bush inserted where the clapper joined the staple cast in the crown of the bell) and hosts of minor repairs unspecified follow each other through the pages of the accounts. Ropes were constantly being spliced, or renewed at a cost of three shillings and sixpence and the very necessary

pd for oyle for ye bells 00 00 06

was naturally a frequent expense.

The bells themselves are of considerable interest and it is fortunate that sufficient evidence is available to compile their history in some detail.

THE TENOR BELL

The word "tenor" is by tradition used to describe the largest in any ring of bells. At Bunbury it is also the oldest and is inscribed



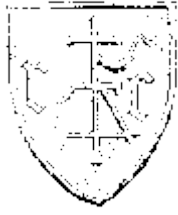
sancti bonifaci

on the shoulder in black-letter smalls and bears the stamps or foundry marks of two different founders. It is undated but there is in the tower at Handley a bell very similar in design and style of lettering, and there is strong reason to believe that both bells were made by the same craftsman. Certainly both are from the same foundry but more than that, each carries on its crown an arrow freely drawn in the mould a sort of mark which may be compared with the well-known mason's mark in stonework. At Handley the complete arrow can be seen; at Bunbury it is partly covered by the headstock which is bolted direct to the crown of the bell, the cannons having been at some time removed. It is perhaps worthy of mention that as far as can be ascertained, the use of such craftsman's mark on a bell is here recorded for the first time. Handley tower was built in 1512 and the bell would be installed either immediately or very shortly afterwards. A similar date can therefore be assigned to the Bunbury Tenor bell. The church thus possesses one of the few pre-Reformation bells found in the county.

It was cast at the Nottingham foundry of Robert Mellour (1510-1525) and, like Handley, bears the typical Nottingham mark, a shield with a saltire cross. The second foundry stamp is one of those used by Robert Crowch a London founder of the mid-fifteenth century whose stamps seem to have been acquired by the Mellour family at the turn of the century. Although shorn of its cannons the bell still remains as a fine example of mediaeval craftsmanship.



Nottingham Foundry mark



Mark of Robert Crowch



Craftsman's Mark

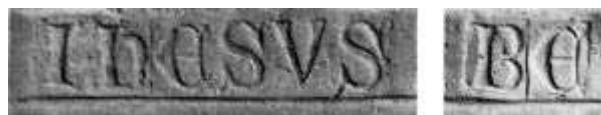
Diameter at the lip 42 inches. Height 34 inches. Weight 14 cwt. 3 qrs. 11 lb, Note F.

The bell has been twice turned and the present striking place of the clapper is about six inches from a former place, so that there are now six clapper marks on the complete circumference.



THE SEVENTH BELL

This bell like the tenor is undated, but here again the style of the inscription makes it possible to give a date within narrow limits and to suggest the name of the founder. The surviving wardens' accounts do not begin until 1655 so that no information is available from that source. The inscription reads





IOESUS BE OVR SPADE

and is in Lombardic capitals 1.25inches in height with the words widely spaced round the shoulder. It is preceded by a decorative cross after the style of that used by the London mediaeval founder John Walgrave and thus provides another instance of the stamps of one founder being handed down to those who followed him.

At Waverton there is a bell with an identical inscription and cross, and on which the same type of lettering has been used. Here however, the founder added his initials G. L. - George Lee of Congleton. Again there is a connection with Nottingham. For over two centuries after about 1550, the great foundry there was in the hands of the Oldfield family and in the early years of the seventeenth century a branch foundry was opened at Congleton. Lee was the first foreman or manager and worked until about 1630, the bell at Waverton being dated 1615. His bell at Bunbury must be earlier, as the sixth bell here, which is evidently from a different foundry, was added in that year and the seventh might therefore be dated 1610-12. This is the bell previously noted as having been "turned" in 1713 and the cannons have since been removed, the crown being drilled and bolted direct to the headstock. The casting is obviously the work of a good craftsman.



Initial Cross by George Lee

Diameter 39.5inches. Weight 10.5cwt. (approx.) Note G.

It is perhaps of some interest to add that the foundry at Congleton was the only one ever worked in Cheshire. It was situated in the old chantry chapel on the bridge, a building which had become disused after the suppression of the chantry at the Reformation. The foundry ran for well over a hundred years and will be referred to later.

THE SIXTH BELL

First cast in 1615, this bell was recast in 1893 by Mears & Stainbank of London, a fact recorded on the waist. The original inscription and date have been reproduced in the recasting, and although not in facsimile some attempt seems to have been made to copy the style of the lettering and figures. The inscription

CANTATE DOMNI CANTICVM NOVIM 1615

is in one inch Roman capitals and placed on the shoulder. The original foundry stamp -if any existed- is not reproduced but pointers to the name of the founder are not entirely absent. The wording of the inscription was a favourite of William Clibury of Wellington in Shropshire (1605-42) and his Latin was notoriously weak. His lettering however, was excellent. He used Roman capitals with floreated backgrounds and his bells were ornamented with taste and skill. The

lettering in the recasting, although without backgrounds certainly suggests that it was copied from a Clibury original.

Diameter 36.5inches. Weight 8 cwt. 2 qr. 6 lb. Note A.

Clibury had in the same year cast bells for Handley (with the same inscription) and Stoak in Wirral. Investigation of the bells of Cheshire is by no means complete, but a number of his bells have already been located and many exist in Shropshire. He also did considerable business in North Wales, a fact which no doubt led to his opening a branch foundry at Holt, Denbighshire, about 1620.

THE FIFTH BELL

The present bell is a recasting by Thomas Mears in 1817 and no clue remains as to the original founder and date. All that can be said with certainty is that it was made between 1615 and 1655, and that Clibury is a likely founder. The bell is inscribed on the shoulder

T MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1817

the remainder of the space being filled with simple ornament. Some details relative to the recasting are given in the account book.

Dr. to Thomas Mears, London.

1817 June 5

To a new 3rd Bell in a Peal of six wt. 6 cwt. 3 qrs. 2 lb. 56 17 00
at 18d p lb

To Clapper fitted to Do 00 03 06

July 11

To Cash pd. Wharfage and Freight of Old Bell 01 12 04

59 12 10

After an allowance had been made for the, metal of the old bell at thirteen pence per pound, the wardens had a balance of £20 15 0 to pay and two more items had to be met.

Paid Freightage and Cartage for the New Bell 02 08 06

Paid for Assistance at taking the Old Bell down and putting the 01 18 06

New one up

The new bell was heavier than the old by thirty-four pounds.

Diameter 33.5inches. Weight 6 cwt. 3 qr. 2 lb. Note B.

Some reason might be given here for the recasting of bells. They were usually recast because of being cracked, a condition often brought about by the pernicious practice of "clocking" resorted to by lazy sextons. To avoid the physical effort necessary to make the bell strike by swinging it, the rope was drawn from the wheel and tied to the clapper so that a slight pull caused the bell to sound. It was unfortunately only too easy to allow the clapper to remain against the soundbow after the blow, and the natural vibrations of the metal were thus interrupted. A crack frequently resulted. There may be some sympathy with a sexton who did not feel particularly energetic at four o'clock in the morning, but it is certainly true that hundreds of bells have been destroyed in this manner, many of, them tenors when being tolled at funerals

THE FOURTH BELL

Twice has this bell been recast and there is no trace of the original founder. Like the fifth it must have been first hung in the tower between 1615 and 1655, and here again Clibury is a likely founder. What is certain is that the three editions of this bell have all been by different makers.

In 1703 the following item appears in the accounts

Pd to Gabrill Smith for mending ye bell wheels 00 01 06

Smith was the last of the Congleton bellfounders, and appears to have taken over the business shortly after 1700 by which time the Oldfields had no interest in it. The above reference is the earliest yet found concerning him and rather suggests that he was then travelling about canvassing for work. It is unusual to find a founder repairing wheels; rather it was a job for the village carpenter. However, Smith must have made some impression at Bunbury, for when the fourth bell later became cracked the wardens sent for him.

1707 Spent att comeing to meet Gabriel Smith abt the Bell 00 01 06

Nothing seems to have come of it immediately, and a second meeting was held before the matter was settled.

1708 Spent when wee bargined with Gabrill Smyth for Casting the bell 00 02 00
Paid for the writings about the bell 00 03 00

The last item refers to the written agreement between them, by which the wardens were to take the bell down and deliver it to the foundry, while Smith was to recast it to the satisfaction of the wardens and return it to the church. The work then proceeded.

Spent in takeing downe the bell 00 02 00
Spent in geting the Bell Loaded 00 01 02
for leading the bell to Congleton 00 15 00
for my owne charges & horse 00 05 00
Spent in geting the bell unloaded & geting it into the Church 00 01 02
Spent of the men that holp up with ye bell and ringers 00 02 00

It only remained to test the result. Following the usual custom the wardens, together with a goodly number of the parishioners stood near the church whilst the bells were rung. They listened carefully and critically to the tone of the new bell and made sure that it was 'tuneable' with the others.

Spent when wee came to prove ye bell 00 01 00

The work was apparently considered satisfactory and Smith was duly paid, the wardens meetinghim at Nantwich.

paid gabrill Smyth for Casting ye bell 04 15 00
spent ay Namptwich when wee paid him 00 01 06

Doubling these amounts as before it will be seen that the total cost of the recasting was thirteen pounds, a remarkably low figure. There was always some loss in weight when a bell was broken up and recast and extra metal was also added to allow for tuning, an operation which was carried out by chipping away the metal on the inside with hammer and chisel. This noisy business sometimes occupied several days, to the great discomfort of those living near the church. There is evidence to show that Gabriel Smith was a poor business man and judging by the two bells cast by him which remain at Tattenhall, a poor craftsman as well. He did not last long for the foundry closed down about 1710 and Tattenhall bells were among the last to be cast in the old chapel building at Congleton.

For some reason Smith's bell was again recast in 1758. It may have been cracked or perhaps it had never been as good as its fellows. When first cast it had been the smallest in the ring; the addition of another bell in 1715 made it now the second, in which place its tonal faults may have been more obvious. At any rate its condition was the subject of a parish meeting held in 1757.

Spent at a Meeting Concerning the Second Bell	00 02 00
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The meeting decided to consult Mr. Rudhall who had provided a fine new bell in 1715, and who by this time held complete monopoly not only in his own county of Gloucester, but also in Hereford, Worcester, Salop, Cheshire and Lancashire. The name of Rudhall is among the most famous in English bellfounding. Beginning in 1684, several generations of the family ran the business with singular success until 1830, and are reckoned to have cast some 5000 bells. The member of the family here concerned was Abel (1736-1760) and he duly arrived at Bunbury.

Pd for Meat & Drink for Mr. Rudhall & Horse When he came to take Notes of ye Bells	00 05 00
Spent at the same time	00 03 00

He probably rode across country from Eastham in Wirral where he was busy on the installation of a new ring of six at that time. The second item no doubt refers to the usual agreement drawn up between wardens and founder.

The work of recasting was carried out in 1758 and is briefly recorded in the accounts.

Spent taking down ye old and putting up the new Bell	00 06 00
Paid Carriage of the Bells to & from Salop	02 00 00
Paid Porterage	00 02 00

The Rudhalls excelled in the business of transport by water, using to the full the facilities provided by the Severn. Bells for Cheshire were taken by boat to Shrewsbury and from there transported by road to their destination. As was invariably the case, the wardens were responsible for the delivery of the old bell to Salop and the collection of the new.

Having been hoisted to the tower, the bell would be fitted with headstock and wheel and lowered gently into its brass bearings in the frame. Then came the customary test before the founder's bill was settled.

Paid Mr. Rudhall as p Bill	22 09 00
Paid Mr. Bennett	10 08 10

Mr. Bennett evidently did the hanging and other incidentals connected with the work, although the amount suggests that other work in connection with the Church was included.

The bell is inscribed with one of the popular couplets associated with the Rudhalls.

WHEN YOU ME RING, I'LL SWEETLY SING. A (bell) R 1758.

It is in 1 inch Roman capitals and a piece of spacing ornament has also been added.

Diameter 32.5inches. Weight 6¼. cwt. (approx) Note C.

NOTE ON BELLS 4 AND 5
There is no direct evidence as to which of these two bells was recast by Gabriel Smith, but the quality of his work was such, that recasting might be desirable in a comparatively short time. The cost of Smith's work also suggests that the bell was a small one.

THE THIRD BELL



Lettering, Foundry Mark, Ornament and Date

By 1715 there was plainly a desire in the parish to improve the ring of bells by the addition of a sixth bell. This is hardly surprising as rings of six were rapidly becoming fashionable, helped by a growing appreciation of the possibilities of the art of change-ringing and also by the forceful business methods by that famous bellfounder of Gloucester, Abraham Rudhall. On May 16th. "at a vestry Meeting at passing the aforesaid Accounts held here this day it is agreed by the parishioners at the sd meeting that a ley of 5d y lb. be granted to the new Churchwardens Mr. Thomas Brescie & Thomas Alcock for the buying a treble Bell"

The Bunbury wardens were frequently in Chester on business matters connected with their office and they had no doubt heard a good deal about the grand new rings of six bells which Rudhall had installed at the churches of St. Peter (1709) and St. John (1710). They wrote to Gloucester and in due course came the reply.

pd for a Letter from Mr. Rudhall

00 00 02

The new bell was ordered and the wardens agreed to collect it in Manchester when ready and convey it to the tower. This procedure was evidently adopted to save carriage costs, Rudhall having a contract to install bells in that neighbourhood so that the Bunbury bell would merely be added to the load. Six bells cast by him for Middleton St. Leonard bear the date 1714 and are most likely those involved here.

Spent when I fetched ye Bell from Manchester	00 06 00
pd for Carrage of the Bell	00 08 00
Spent for help to unlode the Bell	00 04 00
Spent when we paid Mr. Landers for timber to hange the Bell	00 01 00
pd for the Clapper Nales Screwes baldring (baldrick) and fitting itt	01 03 09

pd Thomas Cheswis for Ironworke for the Dore and Bell	00 09 05
pd Mr. Landers for timber for hanging ye Bell	00 17 06
ffor hanging the Bell	02 00 00

When the work was completed Mr. Rudhall came to Bunbury to inspect it and to hear the bells rung. It was necessary of course to make sure that the new bell was correctly in tune with 'the others, and no payment was made until all were agreed about it.

pd Mr. Rudhall for the Bell	21 18 03
Spent when we paid Mr. Rudhall	00 01 09
Spent on Mr. Rudhall and ye Ringers	00 03 00

It was evidently a convivial occasion!

The items above must in most cases be doubled so that the bell cost the wardens over fifty pounds. Perhaps they considered it well worth while when they saw their names boldly lettered in the inscription.

MR. THO: BRESCIE MR. THO: ALLCOCK CH: WARDENS A (bell) R 1715.

Diameter 30.5inches. 5.75cwt. (approx.). Note D.

Before passing on to the remaining two bells which are of the late 19th. century, a pause might well be made to glance back at what had happened in the belfry during the 18th. and 19th. centuries. Rudhall had added a new bell in 1715 and recast the then second bell in 1758 while the wardens' accounts give full details of the making of a new frame in 1746. The third bell was recast by Mears in 1817 and after that no work of major importance was carried out in the tower until the end of the century by which time conditions in the belfry were extremely bad. The frame was delapidated and, what was even worse, the great beams which spanned the tower from north to south were much decayed. On these beams rested the whole weight of the bells. All the bearings were much worn and the fourth bell was cracked.

Quite obviously a complete restoration could no longer be delayed and in 1893 the parish embarked on an extensive scheme, the work being carried by Mears & Stainbank. The bells were lowered to the ground and taken to the foundry where the fourth was recast and the tone of the bells much improved by the tuning machine, an instrument which, working on the principle of the lathe pares off metal at points on the inside of the bell. In the tower the old oak frame and supporting beams were removed and all made new together with the floor, and the bells were hung again with new fittings complete.

There was a desire at this time to increase the number of bells to eight but the cost made this project impossible for the moment. Very wisely however, the frame was built to house the extra bells in readiness for the time when they might be installed. The work done cost the parish over £297.

The opportunity to complete the octave came quickly enough. Mr. James Jones of the Oaklands presented the bells to the parish before he left to take up residence in Gloucestershire and they were cast at the Whitechapel foundry in December 1894. Early in the following year they were placed in the tower and a cherished ambition of both parishioners and ringers was realised. The dates of the casting of the largest and the smallest bells are thus separated by nearly 400 years. Details of the new bells are as follows:

THE SECOND BELL.

MEARS & STAINBANK, WHITECHAPEL FOUNDRY, LONDON. (on the shoulder)

THIS BELL IS GIVEN TO THE GLORY OF GOD

TO THE CHURCH AND PARISH OF BUNBURY

BY JAMES JONES

IN THE 58TH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF QUEEN VICTORIA

A.D. 1895. (on the waist)

Diameter 28.5 inches. Weight 5 cwt. 2 qr. 13 lb. Note E.

THE TREBLE BELL

The smallest bell in the ring is always known as the treble. The inscription is the same as that on the second.

Diameter 27 inches. Weight 4 cwt. 3 qr. 20 lb. Note F.

One further improvement has to be recorded. In 1926 the bells were fitted with new gudgeons and rehung in ball bearings in the modern style. Again the work was done by the Whitechapel foundry and the advantage gained by a device which ensures that the gudgeons are always in perfect alignment will be appreciated.

The Whitechapel foundry, with which the bells have been so much associated has been in continuous existence since 1570 when it was established by Robert Mot. The business was at the height of its prosperity between 1810 and 1843 during which time it was in the hands of Thomas Mears the younger whose name appears on the recast fifth bell and who enjoyed a monopoly which extended practically all over England. Today Mears & Stainbank are among the leading founders in the world.

This brings the history of Bunbury bells to a close. In it a number of bellfounders past and present, have been met with and the records of many long-forgotten churchwardens brought to light. The interest of these past custodians of the bells has been very apparent and the village may well be proud of its bells and especially of the great treasure it possesses in the pre-Reformation tenor.

J. W. Clarke.

(We wish to acknowledge the great help given by H. W. Marks whose photographs illustrate this paper. Editor).

APPENDIX.

RINGERS AND RINGING CUSTOMS

Having written at some length on the church bells of Bunbury, it would seem fitting to add something concerning the ringers and the ringing customs which have prevailed through the long years of the history of these bells. Ever since the Reformation the people of this country

seem to have had a peculiar fascination for bells. If tradition is to be believed, the good queen Elizabeth herself took great delight in the sound of bells and gave much encouragement to bellringing, believing it to be a health-giving exercise. Even today longevity among ringers is proverbial.

In pre-Reformation times Bunbury church was for several centuries of Collegiate status and the earliest ringers would therefore be the priests. Their manner of ringing however, must not be compared with that commonly used today, for it was merely the sounding of a bell or bells by means of a rope attached to a hammer or to a lever secured to the headstock. The ropes would hang down to the ground level for easy access and quite obviously no skill was required to ring. There is no definite information as to how many bells the church possessed at this time, but it is almost certain that there were at least three in the tower with probably a small bell hanging in a bell-cote on the eastern gable of the nave. The latter was known as the Sanctus and used during Mass. It is unlikely that any musical relationship existed between these bells: rather, each was used for a specific purpose. The Ave bell sounded early in the morning, the Angelus in the evening, the canonical hours might be marked by ringing, while each church adopted customs in addition which were peculiar to itself.

After the Reformation bells were no longer needed for their original purpose although some customs were retained because of their value in indicating the time of day. Thus at Bunbury the Ave bell-renamed the Day bell-was rung at four each morning. The possibility of using all the bells to give warning of a service was soon realised as also was the desirability of having them in tune with each other. The tenor or great "bell", being the most valuable, was therefore retained while the others were recast to be "tuneable", and it has been shown in the previous pages how the present ring of eight has been gradually built up from this starting point. The driving force behind this development was the birth and growth of the art of change-ringing, an art which also called for new methods of hanging so that the ringer might have control over the swinging bell. Beginning in the early 17th century, change-ringing spread slowly over the country and became firmly established with tremendous mathematical possibilities before it. The ringer was now a craftsman, a specialist who took delight in his mastery over the revolving metal at the rope's end.

At Bunbury one of the first duties which the wardens carried out on assuming office was the election of that band of specialists, the ringers.

Spent when we hired the Ringers

00 02 06

What sort of competition existed is not apparent but financially the appointment was attractive enough. There was a collective salary of thirteen shillings a year with many extra payments for ringing on special occasions which included the royal birthdays, the anniversaries of accessions and coronations, Restoration Day, at Christmas and New Year (probably at midnight), on Easter Monday when a parish feast was held, and on 5 November when the village celebrated on a grand scale.

It is a matter for speculation as to how far the ringers of the late 17th and early 18th century were advanced in the art of change-ringing but it is pretty certain that the desire to extend the scope of the art was the main reason for an extra bell being installed in 1715. With five bells 120 changes are possible; the additional bell raised this number to 720. When the new treble bell was installed the salary of the ringers, now six, was raised to fifteen shillings but payments for special occasions remained much as before.

It is rarely that the names of village ringers of two centuries ago can be recorded, but here at Bunbury a list of the ringers of 1732 has been fortunately preserved. When John Fenna and

James Done, Churchwardens, held the customary meeting to elect this company of men they entered a minute in the account book:

"We . . . have hired the following Ringers for this present year and will allow 'em the usual wages. William Large, Senr., John Large, Robert Burton, William Large, Jun., Ralph Walker & Richard Spencer."

Each man came to the table and signed his name in the book the last named with some difficulty. William Large was a carpenter and his name occurs frequently in the accounts for he did many repairs about the church and in the belfry. In 1746 he made the lych-gates. The others no doubt followed various occupations in the village then very much a self-contained unit. But ringing was not only practised by the ordinary folk. At St. John's, Chester, the ringers were men of high social standing and some of their names are recorded on one of the two bells which they presented to the church in 1733; they include Sir Robert Grosvenor and Sir Charles Bunbury.

No account of the ringers of those days would be complete without something being written about that faithful servant of the church, Richard Permington. He was not a ringer in the same sense as the others but each morning he plodded his way to the tower to ring the day-bell and in the evening he tolled the curfew at eight. He was the sexton and he seems to have held office for the greater part of half a century at a salary of less than two pounds a year. His duties in and about the church were legion, a fact which is clearly apparent from the accounts. He tended the clock and oiled the bells; he saw to it that there were candles in the church and belfry, bringing them from the shop of Mr. McTurk the chandler; he kept the churchyard clean and tidy and clipped the trees; he acted as labourer for tradesmen working about the church and occasionally did "a bit of business" not specified for the wardens. On Sundays he was a very important figure during the service. As the long sermon proceeded and the sand in the hour glass trickled slowly down he walked the church with measured tread peeping into pews and, with a tap from his staff awakened those who wilted into sleep. He kept a sharp lookout for dogs and whipped them from the building.

1731 pd Richd penington for whipping Dogs and cobing those that sleep 00 05 00

The simple extract calls up so completely the atmosphere of Sunday in the mid-eighteenth century.

A glimpse of ringing at Bunbury in the late 19th century comes from Mr. Windsor who was a ringer long before the two smaller bells were added in 1895.; The day-bell by this time had gone but curfew still rang solemnly at eight and another custom of considerable interest was the ringing of the treble bell at one o'clock on Sundays. The bell was probably associated with Sunday dinner in those days, but its original use was probably that of a "Sermon bell" being sounded to announce that a service with sermon would take place later in the afternoon. Many parishes observed such a custom at this time. On Christmas Eve the ringers did the rounds of the village with handbells and lantern in traditional style, ringing changes and seasonable tunes to the delight of all who listened. Reaching the church shortly before midnight they waited for the clock to strike and then rang the bells to herald Christmas Day, often remaining in the ringing chamber for the rest of the night in readiness for more ringing before the first service at six o'clock. On New Year's Eve there was ringing at eight and ten o'clock to speed the departing year, while at midnight a merry welcome sounded from the tower in greeting to the New Year. One further custom needs to be mentioned. The practice of tolling and ringing on the death of a parishioner was carried out at almost every church during the last century, frequently with much complication. Here it was the custom to toll the tenor bell for an hour each day between the time of death and the funeral, a rather morbid usage which has no doubt been lost without regret. Mr. Windsor recalled vividly the muffled ringing which took

place following the death of King Edward VII when the eight bells were rung in this way each evening for a week. Samson Mossford, Clerk, noted the event in pencil on the wooden clock case of the ringing chamber. In muffling a leather pad is fastened to the clapper so that its blow is thereby softened.