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The Tower —AND— Bells of Evesham

1833—1910,

BY

E. A. B. BARNARD,

Author of "Old Times Recalled," &c.

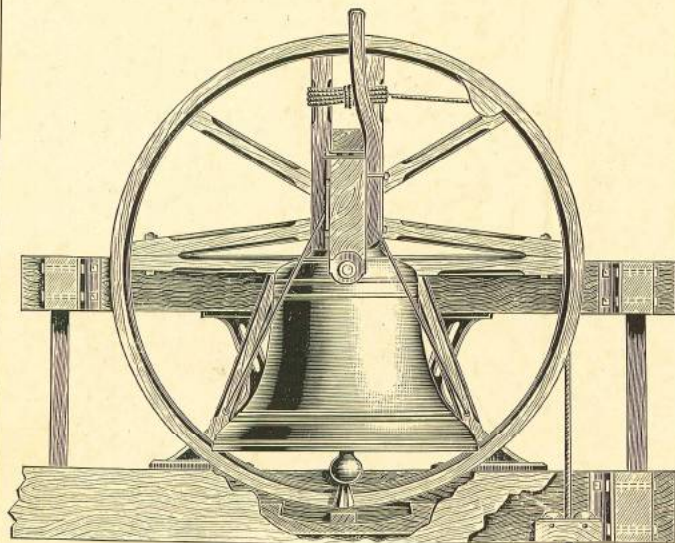
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
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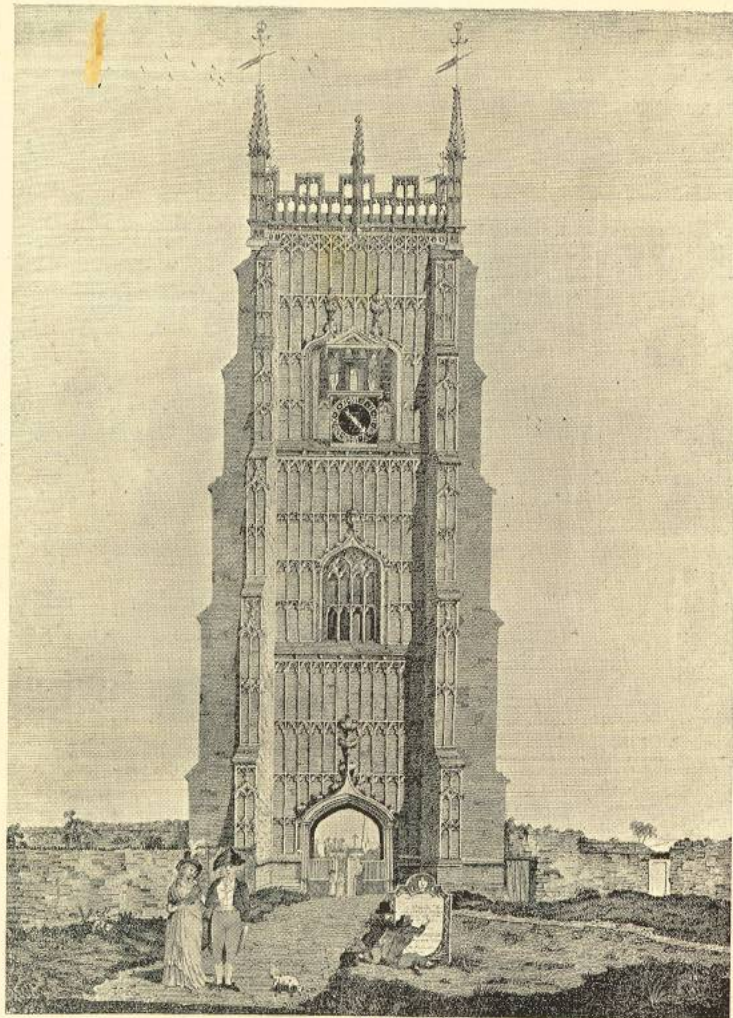
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*The sacred minster bell
It peals o'er hill and dell,
May Jesus Christ be praised:
O hark to what it sings,
As joyously it rings,
May Jesus Christ be praised.*

Translated by E. CASWALL,
from Psalm 3 in Genevan Psalter, 1551



EVESHAM BELL TOWER IN 1794.
(Reproduced from Tindal's History of Evesham.)

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Tower and Bells of Evesham have been indissolubly connected with the history and fortunes of our town for so many years that any particular event concerning them cannot but be of interest to all those who know them. Therefore, it is with the intention of commemorating the re-hanging of these bells, and the addition of two bells to the peal of eight, that I enter upon the pleasant task of compiling this little book which, I trust, may be acceptable to all lovers of Evesham.

Naturally, the first thought that occurs to the mind in connection with the subject of the Evesham Bells is the fact that the earliest instructions for making bells, which are known to us, are found in a treatise written by Walter of Odyngton, a monk of Evesham Abbey, somewhere about the year 1240. The manuscript of this treatise, which is probably a copy of it made after a lapse of two centuries, is to be found in Archbishop Parker's collection in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and owes its preservation to the pains taken by

the Archbishop to save such records from destruction at the Dissolution of the Monasteries. The work is divided into six chapters, that on bells containing only eleven lines of text of a technical nature and not necessary to consider here.

The mention of Walter of Odyngton brings another monk of Evesham to mind, none other than that famous "Monk of Evesham," to whom, in the year 1196, came the Revelation concerning the places of Purgatory and Paradise. In this Revelation the monk is describing his journey into Paradise, and how he sees afar off a glorious gateway and great steps up which the holy souls are ascending joyfully and without halting. Then over all this scene there steals the sound, he says, of "a marvellous peal of bells, ringing with solemn sweetness, as though all the bells in the world, or whatever has sound, had been rung together at one time. In this peal and ringing broke out a marvellous sweetness, and a various mingling of melody. I do not know whether the beauty of the melody or the sweetness of the sound was more wonderful."

So may we hope that our ten bells of Evesham may for many years to come sound over the Vale in beauteous melody, and thus remind us somewhat of that celestial peal heard by the ecstatic Monk of Evesham.

June, 1910.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOWER OF EVESHAM.

IN the year 1207 the Abbey Church of Evesham received great injury by the fall of its high Central Tower which had been completed probably by Abbot Reginald (1122-1149), and forthwith motives of prudence dictated the erection of a detached Bell Tower, and the final restoration of the Central Tower was not completed until a century later. This detached Bell Tower was commenced by Adam Sortes, a monk of Evesham and afterwards Prior of Penwortham, a cell of the Abbey. In 1261 it was struck by lightning, the upper portion being injured, but the damage done then was soon restored. Onward from this period until the early decades of the Sixteenth Century the history of the Bell Tower and its site became much confused with that of the Central Tower of the Abbey, and this confusion, made by the historians of that period, has become worse confounded by modern writers.

However, the subject of present consideration is that of the Bell Tower which is so familiar to us to-day, and which was commenced, probably in 1533, by Abbot Lichfield upon the site of the Bell Tower which had been first erected by Sortes. Lichfield had been Senior Prior at Evesham, and was elected the fifty-fifth and last Abbot of Evesham on December 28, 1514. He at once commenced to make liberal benefactions, not only to his monastery, but also to the town, in which, amongst other good deeds he built a Grammar School. Within the conventual area he adorned the Choir of the Abbey Church; erected the wonderful chantries in the Church of All Saints and St. Laurence, and finally caused the building of the Tower, the accomplishment of which was never entirely fulfilled, for it is evident that it was intended to carry a groined ceiling over the archway. The crash of the Dissolution came and Lichfield was hurried from his Monastery in 1539, and died at Offenham in 1546. He left behind him the memory of a great and saintly man, and a name which is still familiar to everyone who knows Evesham. His body was brought to be buried in his own chantry in All Saints Church, beneath the very shadow of his own Tower, and there was set over his resting-place a slab of marble bearing a brass effigy and inscription upon it, the whole being thus described by the old Worcestershire historian, Habington: "At the entrance into this chapel lieth, humbled on the ground, the resemblance of an Abbot truly great, leaving the dignity of his high place, and wise, when foreseeing the



[Traced from Dineley's History from Marble, by Mr. A. W. Ward].

INCISED MARBLE SLAB COVERING
THE GRAVE OF
ABBOT CLEMENT LICHFIELD AS IT
APPEARED IN 1684.

storms which overthrew this with other religious houses, he struck sail to avoid shipwreck. His resemblance is vested for the Altar in prayer; on his right hand is: Deus in nomine tuo saluum me fac; and on the left: Et in virtute tua judica me; and below, on the one side: Quia in inferno nulla est redemptio; and on the other: Miserere mei sacerdotis in cujus tempore nova turris Eveshamiæ erecta est.* When Dineley visited Evesham about 1684 he found only the slab of marble remaining, all traces of the brass inscriptions having disappeared. This slab he depicted in his "History from Marble," and an

* "Save me, O God, for thy name's sake; and avenge me in thy strength; for in hell there is no redemption. Have pity upon me the priest in whose time the new tower of Evesham was built." In the year 1659 the Tower was still so called, for at a Vestry Meeting held at that time it was agreed "that William Lane shall keepe the leadwork of the New Tower in sufficient repaire during the terme of his natural life, the Churchwardens paying him yearly one shilling."



(Photo by T. E. Doeg.)
 STAINED GLASS REPRESENTATION OF
 ABBOT CLEMENT LICHFIELD,
 IN ALL SAINTS CHURCH, EVESHAM.

accurate tracing of it, made by Mr. A. W. Ward, is reproduced on p. 9. When the historian May published his History in 1845, the slab still remained to mark the Abbot's resting-place, but even that had been disturbed early in the Nineteenth Century when the grave was allowed to be opened by two local antiquarians. Later on every vestige of the slab disappeared, but one is happy to record that the Chantry was restored to its original uses in 1895; and that in one panel of

the stained glass placed in the windows there, to the memory of the Rev. F. W. Holland, Vicar of Evesham from 1871-1882, there is a representation of the Abbot holding a model of the Tower in his left hand. The accompanying photograph of the panel has been taken, after considerable trouble, by Mr. T. E. Doeg, and with the kind permission of the Vicar of Evesham (the Rev. J. M. Walker) who has recently placed a tablet of hammered brass upon the wall above the Abbot's grave, bearing upon it the Abbey arms; the memorial inscription which I have detailed above; and the date of Abbot Lichfield's burial, October 9, 1546.

The Abbey of Evesham was suppressed in 1539, but by this time Lichfield had almost completed his Tower, and we see it to-day exactly as he left it, now nearly four hundred years ago, the last and perhaps the noblest ornament of the Abbey. Various reasons have been adduced to account for the Tower remaining untouched during the general destruction which went on around it, and the most likely one is that the townspeople found sufficient money to satisfy the rapacity of the Commissioners and others, and that they were thus enabled to preserve intact a monument in the erection of which probably many of them had had a share.

The Tower is thus described by May: "The fabric is square, strengthened from base to parapet by graduated buttresses with panelled fronts. Its east and west faces exactly correspond; each being divided into three compartments. The first includes a spacious archway, under an ogee canopy

with crochets and an elaborate finial; in the second is a window of considerable size, canopied in the same manner, and filled with tracery of very graceful form; and the upper story includes a pair of narrower windows, beneath a double ogee with crochets and concluding finials. Both these fronts are entirely covered, save where arches occur, with panelled mullions under foliated transoms; and the whole is surmounted by an embattled parapet, delicately pierced, and crowned with tapering pinnacles appropriately wrought." The situation of the Tower so nearly adjoined the Abbey Church that the northern transept abutting almost against it, would conceal its lower stones on the south: a reason for the absence of much ornament on that side, as also for the departure from uniformity observable in the window of its upper part.

Above the east arch of the gateway is an escutcheon, rarely observed, and carved in the stone, upon which is inscribed the monogram "C.L.," with the inscription: "Qui gloriatur in Domino gloriatur." This inscription was not known to the members of the British Archæological Society when they commenced their visit to Evesham in August, 1875, and it seems that the Bell Tower was assigned, by a very learned authority, to the Fifteenth Century. However, after the Society had been here some days the above-recorded evidence was adduced, together with the record of the inscription which had existed upon Abbot Lichfield's grave, and of course, all doubts as to the date of the Tower were at once laid aside.

The Tower is built of blocks of oolite, a stone which can be most delicately carved, and which the monks probably obtained from the old quarries near Buckland, in the Cotswold district. It is 110 feet in height, and 28 feet square at its base. It has been depicted in many architectural and topographical works during the last two-and-a-half centuries, one of the earliest being the view given by Dineley about the year 1684, in which it represented as standing alone, as it does in these days, and not flanked by the walls which seem to have been built on either side of it in the Eighteenth Century, in order to enclose the Churchyard. The view in Grose's *Antiquities* also gives the Tower without the flanking walls. Dingley depicts a flag-staff with a weather-vane surmounting it, placed in the centre of the roof, and from it is flying a flag bearing an anchor, doubtless the badge of Clement Lichfield, on a white ground. From the Parish documents it appears that this flag-staff became a source of trouble in the year 1717, for it was then agreed at a Vestry Meeting "that the Piece of Timber in the middle of the roof of the Tower which bears the Vane be taken down by reason of its great prejudice to the Roofs of the said Tower, and four Vanes erected, one upon each Corner pinnacle, and that the Lead which encompasses the said Piece of Timber be applied towards defraying the expenses of the four vanes." It is very likely that the existing four crown-surmounted vanes are identical with those ordered to be placed on the corner-pinnacles in 1717.

14 **The Tower and Bells of Evesham.**

Prior to this period, that is to say, on May 15, 1674, the condition of the Tower was discussed by the Corporation of Evesham, for the first and only time in the history of either. Dr. Jephcott was Vicar as this time, and held so many incumbencies as to almost create a record in pluralism. One of the results of his constant absence from Evesham was that the Tower fell into great neglect, was "presented," and the Council passed this resolution:—"Itt is ordered that in pursuance of a presentment of the Grand Jury att ye last Generall Sessions holden for this Borough, setting forth that ye pinnacles and battlements on ye west side of ye greate tower have been long in decay and ought to be repayred. Itt is now ordered that ye repayers thereof be referred to ye care of Mr. John Ballard, Mr. Thomas Yarnold, Mr. Jarrett Smith, Mr. Thomas Harris, and Mr. William Harris for ye parish of All Saints; and to Mr. Thomas Milner, Mr. Thomas Harewell, Mr. Nicholas Field, and Mr. Thomas Embury for ye parish of St. Lawrence; and that they cause the sayd decays to be viewed by some other able workmen for that purpose, and that they or the greater part of them report the charge thereof to this Chamber, and that a levy bee made for ye repayre of ye said Tower accordingly, and that all speedy course bee taken herein.' However, the Borough records contain no further reference to the matter, and the Parish records are completely silent concerning it.

Towards the end of the Eighteenth Century



Photo by]

THE TOWER QUARTER-BOYS.

[T. E. Doeg.

the Rev. William Tindal compiled his *History and Antiquities of Evesham*, and facing page 40 of his book there is a fine drawing of the Tower made by C. W. Osborne, a gentleman then resident in Evesham. This drawing, which is here reproduced as the frontispiece of this book, was made in 1794, and is particularly interesting as it shows the two Quarter-Boys standing on what was a wooden ledge over the clock, and above them is a canopy. These two Quarter-Boys, or "Jacks" as they were also called, are depicted as ready to strike with their iron halberds, the quarters on two small bells placed between them. Beneath the bells is a small figure of which I am unable to obtain any description. The Quarter-Boys were worked by a mechanical contrivance inside the Bell Chamber, and remained in position until about fifty years ago when they were taken down, cleaned, and transferred to Abbey Manor, where they still remain in excellent condition after all the many suns and storms they must have weathered for generations. By the kind permission of Mrs. E. C. Rudge, these figures have been specially photographed for reproduction here, and this is the first occasion upon which they have appeared in full detail in any publication concerning Evesham.

How many years they were in position it is impossible to say, but it is quite likely that they were placed there when the Tower was first built. The armour they wear is of the period of Edward IV. The figures are of oak—for many years ob-

scured by successive coats of whitewash—and each is about 3 feet 6 inches in height. Noake, writing in his *Rambles in Worcestershire* in the year 1848, says concerning them:—"The clock is guarded on the right and left by two sanguinary-looking characters carved in wood or stone, whose purposed occupation was to strike the hour on two small bells, but who, for lack of the sum of £5 more, required, as I am told by the constructor, now remain motionless and with uplifted hammers, appear 'willing to wound, but yet afraid to strike.'" This seems to infer that the figures had been placed in position somewhat recently to the year 1848, but I have good evidence that they had been certainly associated with the Tower for a very long period of time, for on October 30, 1754, there was a Parish Meeting at which it was unanimously agreed "that the Jackes belonging to the Tower shall be repaired, painted, and put up again, and that both parishes pay an equal share of the Expense thereof, and also the canopy to be repaired and new painted at the like joint expense." It will be noted that this resolution contains the words "put up again."

Referring again to the Tindal engraving, it will be observed that the Tower gateway was closed with gates at that time, and these were not removed till 1876. They were a constant source of expense to the Vicar and Churchwardens, for they were continually broken down by the youth of Evesham, and their padlocks damaged. Finally, they disappeared, together with the gates which then existed

under the Reginald Gateway. Another source of trouble to the parochial authorities were the large windows in the Eastern and Western side of the Tower, which had been broken by stones thrown at them since at least the year 1625, and probably from the earliest days of the Tower. The clock faces too constantly suffered in this way. Sometimes the windows remained practically void of glass for years, but in the last decades some improvement certainly took place, and a few years since the erection of wire lattice guards over the glass of both windows has rendered them practically secure from injury. There is no doubt but that the fabric of the Tower also received considerable damage at various times from this practice of stone-throwing, to which the delicate finials and lower panels bear witness.

The historian Rudge records in 1820 that "thirty-five years ago, a person undertook to fly from the top of the tower to the ground: he accordingly descended upon his breast along a rope (which had been secured to one of the pinnacles and was extended to a stile near the Gothic Arch, in the Cross Churchyard) and fortunately accomplished his rash attempt."



CHAPTER II.

THE BELLS OF EVESHAM.

AMID all the havoc wrought in Evesham at the period of the Dissolution, the Bell Tower as we have already seen, was allowed to remain untouched, and thus to form the stately and enduring monument of all those great conventual buildings which formerly had dwarfed it into comparative insignificance, but which were now levelled with the dust.

Although Abbot Lichfield had not been able to entirely complete the Tower, yet—according to Leland* who wrote just after the Dissolution—he had placed "a great bell in it and a goodly clock," and this "great bell" was doubtless the one described in the Dineley Manuscript (already referred to) as forming one of a peal of six," at his time existing in the Tower. Dineley says that it bore a black-letter inscription thus: "Eternis annis resonet campana Joannis," and it

* Itinerary, Vol. IV., p. 72.

20 The Tower and Bells of Evesham.

was thus certainly a pre-Reformation bell. In addition to this bell, which was the tenor, Dineley notes another as bearing the date "A.D., 1631," and this must have been the bell the modernised inscription upon which I gave in my "Parish Papers" (October, 1904), as follows:—

I sound the sound that doleful is
To them that live amiss;
But sweet my sound is unto them
As live in joy and bliss.

Edward Cugley, Mayor; Richard Cresheld, Recorder;
Russel Andrews, Chamberlain;

John Samon, John Balam, both Ministers;*
Anthony Lea, William Nicklis, and Richard Grove,
John Clements, Churchwardens.
1631.

I sweetly tolling men do call
To taste of food that feeds the soul.

In 1631, therefore, there were two bells in the Tower, and no more. I have noted that Dineley mentions "a peal of six" as existing in 1684, and it seems that the four additional bells to constitute this peal, were placed in the Tower after the Restoration of King Charles II. in 1660. Browne Willis says, in his "Mitred Abbeys," that "there was a peal composed of the bells of the two parish churches, which at the Restoration were taken from their respective places by the young people of the town, and melted down into a new peal for the Tower." There is certain evidence that some bells were hung in the Tower very soon after the Restoration, and that the work was undertaken by the Parishes at large.

* The Parishes of All Saints and St. Laurence were not united under the same vicar until 1662.

The Tower and Bells of Evesham. 21

At a Special Vestry Meeting in August, 1664, it was agreed "that ye Ring of Bells that are speedily to be hanged in the Great Tower in ye Church-yard of ye Parishes aforesaid, shall be repaired for ever thereafter by equal charge of the whole Towne, and not by distinct parish payments," and on February 16, 1665 there is a further resolution that "the overplus of the metall of ye Ring of Bells that was lately cast and hanged in ye Tower shall be sold by ye present churchwardens of both parishes for a defraying ye charges of casting and hanging ye said bells." These bells may have been cast in Evesham.*

In 1665, therefore, there existed a peal of six bells in the Tower, and there is no evidence that this peal was increased in number until 1741, although Cox, in his "Worcestershire," written in 1720, says "the Bells in the Tower are Eight" which he also says "were taken out of the Churches." Cox, however, is by no means a reliable authority, and probably he was mistaken in the number of the bells existing in the Tower at his time. That same year of 1665 the Vestry agreed "that Anthony Munslow shall keepe the Bells in ye Tower with sufficient Roopes and shall abate Twenty Shillings of the pay that formerly he received of the two Parishes for the Ringeinge of greate Bell Mornings and Nightes, and keepinge th Clocke, he stille performinge the same worke and doinge as formerly expressed and making the

* Six of the eight bells comprising the present Badsey peal were cast in 1706 by Michael Bushell and William Clark, of Evesham.

same abatement." With reference to this "Ringeinge of the greate Bell Mornings and Nightes," it is of interest to refer to May's "History of Evesham" (p. 320), where he says:—"Another custom (at Evesham) somewhat peculiar and observed beyond memory till within the last two or three years (circa 1845), was that of rising the tenor bell, which hangs in the Bell Tower, at four o'clock on the mornings of Monday, Thursday and Saturday throughout the year. Why these mornings should be preferred, and why the early hour, especially in winter, it is difficult to say. . . . Like the Curfew Bell still rung there, the morning toll may have originated in an earlier usage." The historian goes on to say that legend ascribes the observance to the gratitude of a stranger who had lost his way in the darkness, and was directed to safety by the pealing of the bells of Evesham. This is an old legend which has seen much service not only in England but in other countries too, but the reason for the early ringing of the Evesham tenor bell for so many years on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, is certainly difficult to find. The Curfew Bell was regularly tolled at eight in the evening until a few years ago when it lapsed into a spasmodic observance, probably owing to the state of the tenor bell, but with the present restoration it is pleasant to think that the old custom will be regularly maintained. In the historian May's time, Curfew tolled at seven o'clock on Saturdays and throughout the twelve

days after Christmas; otherwise it was tolled nightly at eight.

It has already been shown that Abbot Lichfield placed "a goodly clocke" in the Tower, and this is substantiated by Dineley, who says that "its dial, besides the hours of the day, showeth the age of the moon," and later on, in 1731, the Evesham Churchwardens paid one shilling "for mending ye Moon Dial at the Tower."

There is no evidence as to when Lichfield's clock was removed from the Tower, but the parochial records show that a new clock and a set of chimes* were put up in the Tower by Mr. Edward Rudge, in 1745, after a futile effort had been made by the two Parishes in 1743. This clock does not appear to have remained very long in position, for the historian Rudge records in the year 1820 that "on the dial within the works of the present clock, is the following inscription:

Jno. Drury,	}	Churchwardens.
Jno. White,		
Thos. Masters,		
Chas. Welsborne,		

Wm. Worton, Birmingham, Fecit. 1775."

In 1824, according to a contemporary drawing made by C. W. Osborne, the clock-face on the Eastern front of the Tower bore the date 1809, and this may have been the "modern clock with double front," referred to by the historian May in

* On April 10, 1828, John Warner, Watchmaker, estimated to supply "a new Barrell and setting three new tunes on the Barrell," for the Bell Tower for a sum of £20.

1845, when he made a vigorous appeal for the removal of the Quarter-Boys and their canopy, "that piece of carved absurdity which veils the chaste tracery of the upper windows." The present clock was placed in the Tower in 1876.

To return to the main subject of this chapter: in 1741 the bells were again taken in hand by the Parishes, but curiously enough, and also unfortunately, there is no evidence whatever amongst the Church documentary possessions here as to what was done at that time. The only evidence we have is afforded by the bells themselves. We know* that the tenor bell of 1631 was retained—with its original inscription—in the peal, and that seven bells were placed with it, bearing the following inscriptions:—

- Treble.—Peace And Good Neighbourhood A.R. 1741.
- No. II.—Prosperity To Our Benefactors. A.R. 1741.
- „ III.—Prosperity To The Church Of England. A.R. 1741.
- „ IV.—Glory Be To God On High. A.R. 1741.
- „ V.—Praise God In His Holiness. A.R. 1741.
- „ VI.—When You Us Ring, We'll Sweetly Sing. A.R. 1741.
- „ VII.—Hark to the Musick Of Our Sound. A.R. 1741.

The initials "A.R." on these seven bells were those of Abel Rudhall, of Gloucester, bellfounder. This firm had been founded in 1684 by Abraham Rudhall, who was in turn succeeded by his son, Abraham, in 1718. The latter died in 1735, and

was succeeded by the above-mentioned Abel Rudhall. Abel died in 1760, and was followed by Thomas, who was succeeded by Charles and John Rudhall in 1783, but in 1785 the partnership was dissolved, and Charles retired. John continued to cast bells, but the foundry belonged to his niece, Charlotte, who, in 1829, let the premises to Thomas Mears.

The peal of bells placed in the Tower in 1741 remained untouched till the year 1820. At the commencement of that year the Churchwardens arranged with a townsman, one John Jarrett, for the repair of the woodwork around the Tower Bells, and he "by want of skill caused the breaking of the tenor bell." It is thus that the accident is described in the Churchwardens' Accounts of 1821, but an Evesham worthy in a note made at that time, says: "The Eighth bell was broken by one, Jarrett, a blundering carpenter, and looked upon as an Electioneering job. . . . The bell was re-cast in the same year with the same poetical inscriptions, but the Churchwardens, being in hostility with the Corporation on Election Matters, the names of the Civic Governors were omitted, and the State severed from the Church." Be this as it may, the breaking of the bell was a serious cost to the Churchwardens, and, of a sum of £80 due to Jarrett for his work at the Tower, they then refused to pay him more than £55 13s. 4d. Of course there was nothing for it but to have a new bell, and it was at this juncture that the above-

* History of Evesham, Rudge, 1820, p. 57.

mentioned Thomas Mears, of the Bellfoundry, Whitechapel, London, was to become associated with our Evesham bells.*

Mears attended a Vestry Meeting late in the year 1820 and presented his estimate "for the supply of a new tenor bell weighing 31cwt. 0qr. 21lb." The estimate was accepted at a sum of £218 6s. 3d., and a further £20 was charged for taking down the old bell and hanging the new one. Against this there had to be placed a sum of £149 9s. 3d., being the amount allowed by Mears for the old bell, weighing 29cwt. 0qr. 13lb., and so Jarrett's unfortunate accident cost the parish £88 17s. The new tenor was placed in position about June 26, 1821, when the old bell was taken down, broken into pieces, and despatched to Mears "in two or three strong casks," a pathetic ending to a service of well-nigh two hundred years! Evidently, the parishioners were not altogether pleased with the new bell, and a few months later Churchwarden Thomas, of All Saints, wrote to Mears complaining that the bell was not loud enough, and received from him a reply saying, "I believe that in a little time the bell will be louder and become familiar to you, and I have not the smallest doubt that it will give you satisfaction." Mears was correct, and

* It is interesting to record the fact that the firm of Mears and Stainbank Ltd., of Whitechapel, London, forwarded an estimate for the present restoration of the bells.

that same bell, of course, still hangs in the Tower, and bears these names:—

"Rev. Henry Portmore Cooper, Minister;
W. L. Phelps, E. Rudge, J. Thomas, and
W. Battersby, Churchwardens, 1821.
J. Mears of London,
Fecit."

This new bell, with those seven cast in 1741, now constituted the peal; they remained undisturbed until 1875, when they were re-hung and pealed again under new conditions on Christmas Day, 1875. This work and other much-needed restoration at the Tower had been undertaken at the instance of the late Rev. F. W. Holland, who was instrumental in raising a sum of £570 for the purpose.

Twenty years later, in 1895, an expert examined the Belfry, and reported that "the framework, though practically a new one, is not strong enough to bear the weight of the bells, about eight tons in all." From that time matters at the Tower went from bad to worse, and in June, 1903, another expert bell-ringer, wrote to the "Evesham Journal" that "the Tenors, or the two heaviest bells, have almost dropped to the floor, and are become absolutely useless for ringing, and the others will soon share the same fate. The bells require to be re-hung in a cast iron frame by a competent firm, with all the latest improvements, and if there is a memorial for anything wanted it should be two additional trebles, and then Evesham would have the finest peal of ten in the county." I do not know the name of

the writer of these lines, but if he still is in our midst he must be happy that his wishes have been so entirely fulfilled within a space of seven years.

After 1903 it became increasingly, and almost alarmingly, evident that matters could not be much longer delayed, and the restoration was finally taken in hand by a Committee styled The Evesham Tower Bells Improvements Committee, and consisted of the Vicar of Evesham (the Rev. J. M. Walker), the late Mr. E. C. Rudge, Messrs. J. Averill, C. F. Cox, Thomas Cox, T. A. Cox, Isaac Morris, R. Spires, and J. T. Williams, with Messrs. T. F. Lowe and E. A. B. Barnard as Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary respectively. This Committee met for the first time on September 30, 1909, and later on accepted the tender of Messrs. Barwell and Co., Ltd., Birmingham, to re-hang the bells in a steel frame upon a new floor, and to accomplish other work which it is not necessary to here detail, at a cost of £304 15s. This work has been in the entire charge of Mr. W. H. Godden and has been carried out under the superintendence of Messrs. Barwell's foreman, Mr. J. E. Grove, who is Ringing-Master of St. Martin's Guild for the Diocese of Worcester, and a campanologist of great experience.

At the same time the Committee accepted the tender of Messrs. J. B. Joyce & Co., of Whitchurch, Salop, to completely overhaul the Clock and Chimes at a cost of £70; and to this a sum of £20 has since been added for the supply of an additional barrel

of seven tunes. The old tunes, familiar to so many people since the year 1876, are:—

Sunday.—Bedford ("Through all the changing scenes of life.")

Monday.—"My lodging is on the cold ground."

Tuesday.—"The blue bells of Scotland."

Wednesday.—"Drink to me only with thine eyes."

Thursday.—"There's nae luck about the house."

Friday.—"Barbara Allen."

Saturday.—"Home, sweet home."

The new tunes are:—

Sunday.—Nicaea ("Holy, Holy, Holy!")

Monday.—"The minstrel boy."

Tuesday.—"Ye banks and braes."

Wednesday.—"Bonnie Dundee."

Thursday.—"The banks of Allan Water."

Friday.—"The wearing of the green."

Saturday.—"The bailiff's daughter of Islington."

Amongst other improvements, the Committee also undertook the restoration of the ninety-eight much-worn steps in the Tower, and the screening off of the Bell Chamber from the steps, thereby preventing access to the bells except to those concerned with the care of them.

A lightning conductor is also to be fixed upon the Tower for, I believe, the first time in its history, although we have seen that the Bell Tower of Abbot Adam was destroyed by that agency in 1261.

Finally, at a Committee Meeting held on April 21, 1910, it was announced that offers to augment the peal to ten bells had been received, and these

30 **The Tower and Bells of Evesham.**

the Committee unanimously accepted, the donors expressing their desire to defray the entire cost of their respective gifts. The treble bell was given by Mr. J. Bracher, Mrs. E. B. Whalley, and Mr. E. A. B. Barnard, and bears this inscription:--

"WE PRAISE THEE O GOD
IN MEMORY OF ELLEN ETTWELL
OBIIT SEP. 26, 1907."

The second bell was given by Mrs. Espley and Miss Espley, and bears this inscription:--

"MAY JESUS CHRIST BE PRAISED
IN MEMORY OF ALFRED ESLEY
OBIIT MAR. 17, 1908.

THIS BELL IS GIVEN BY HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER."

The casting and hanging of these two additional treble bells was also entrusted to Messrs. Barwell, and the total cost of the whole restoration and additions was estimated at being about £600, towards which the sum of £232 was raised as the result of an Old English Fair in June, 1909, mainly organised by Mrs. J. M. Walker and Mrs. C. F. Cox; and also the sum of £100, being a portion of the proceeds of a Swiss Fete at Abbey Manor, organised by the late Mr. E. C. Rudge and Mrs. Rudge, in July, 1909. Evesham now possesses the fourth peal of ten bells in the county, a peal which eminent authorities class as being one of the best in the Kingdom, the tenor bell being considered a particularly fine bell. The other three peals of ten bells in Worcestershire are at Bromsgrove, Dudley St. Thomas, and All Saints, Worcester.

The Tower and Bells of Evesham. 31

The two new bells, which are not included in the chimes, have been successfully cast and placed in the Tower. The Lord Bishop of Worcester visited Evesham on June 25 for the purpose of dedicating them, when the whole peal of ten bells was heard for the first time, a Long Peal of 5,151 Stedman Caters being rung by experienced Birmingham ringers in 3 hours 39 minutes.

The original inscriptions upon the eight old bells, of course, remain, as detailed on pp. 20 and 24. The first peal upon them after re-hanging was rung on Sunday morning, May 1, being the 1201st Anniversary of the dedication of the first Christian Church in Evesham. The ringers were as follows, the date given after each name signifying the year in which the individual member commenced to ring in the Bell Tower:—William Robbins (1858), James Robbins (1859), T. H. Robbins (1879), Harry Hampton (1882), Frank Jinks (1886), H. J. Martin (1900), Edwin Robbins (1900), C. Williams (1902), and H. Middleton, who, with T. Haines to assist him, rang the tenor bell. The only recorded occasion upon which a "Long Peal" was rung on the eight bells was about twenty years ago, when the Ancient Society of College Youths visited the Tower and rung a peal of 5,040 Stedman Triples in three hours and twenty minutes.



CHAPTER III.

SOME RECORDED HISTORICAL OCCASIONS
UPON WHICH THE TOWER BELLS HAVE
BEEN PEALED.

IN the preceding pages it has been shewn that ever since the year 1665 there has been a peal of bells in Evesham Tower, and in the period of time which has elapsed since then one can imagine how many hundreds of times the bells have taken their part in the observance of national, local, and family events. The following few recorded instances I have compiled from the documentary evidences in the Churches of All Saints and St. Laurence:—

- 1726 January 13.—“Return of ye Kyng (George I.) from Germany.”
1736 January 16.—“When ye Kyng George ye First came home.”
1737.—“At ye Queen’s (Caroline, wife of George II.) bearring” (funeral).
1743 July 3.—“Ye Ringers for Dettengen Victory.”
“When ye Kyng (George II.) returned from abroad.”



Photo by]

EVESHAM BELL TOWER IN 1910.

[Frith & Co.

34 The Tower and Bells of Evesham.

- 1755.—“When ye Kyng (George II.) came home.”
 “When Johnson defeated ye French and
 Indians on ye Oio.”
- 1756.—December 22.—“Ye Kyng of Porwsa’s
 (Prussia) Accession Day.”
- 1760 November 11.—“For ye Bells at ye Kyng’s
 (George II.) Burial.”
- 1813.—“Victory at Vittoria.”
- 1815 June 24.—“For news of the Victory of
 Waterloo.”
- 1821.—“Death of Queen Caroline” (wife of George
 IV.)
- 1827.—“Death of Frederick, Duke of York, 2nd
 son of George III.”
- 1830.—“Death of George IV.”
- 1837 June 26.—“The Queen’s (Victoria) Proclama-
 tion.”
- July 8.—“The King’s (William IV.) Funeral
 Peal.”
- November 16.—“The Day the Church (St.
 Laurence) was Opened.”
- 1838 June 28.—“Queen Victoria’s Coronation.”
- 1840 February 10.—“The Queen’s Wedding.”
- 1842 January 25.—“Baptism of the Prince of Wales
 (His late Majesty, King
 Edward VII.)

Proclamation Day, Coronation Day, the reigning
 King’s Birthday, and the reigning Queen’s Birth-
 day have, of course, always been observed, and
 amongst the peals which have fallen into desuetude

The Tower and Bells of Evesham. 35

may be noted the regular observance until,
 at least, 1845, of:—

Jan. 30.—“King Charles’s Martyrdom.”

May 29.—“Restoration Day.”

Nov. 5.—“Gunpowder Plot.”

The bells were always pealed at both the Election
 and the Oath-taking of a new Mayor, and they
 played a very prominent part in the pro-
 ceedings of an old-time Parliamentary Election.
 To give one instance alone, and that a late one,
 evidence was elicited at the hearing of the Eves-
 ham Election Petition of 1838 that the bells rang
 during the canvass and poll for a period of twenty-
 one days, the ringers averaging five hours’ ring-
 ing daily, for which they received £40 amongst
 them, “in addition to having a good dinner every
 day.”



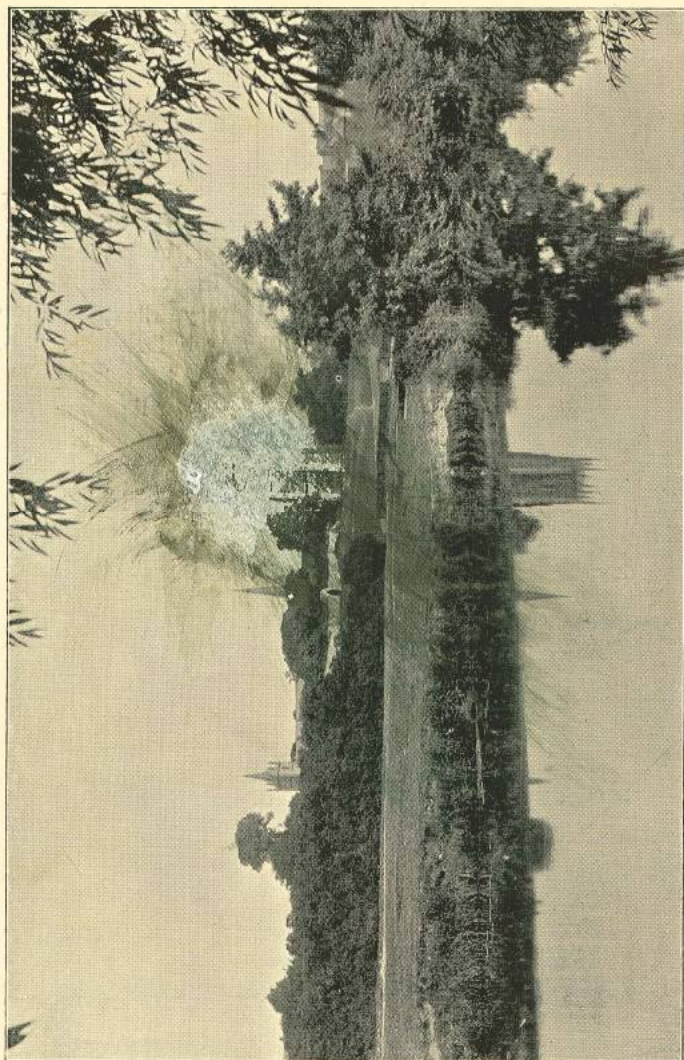


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EVESHAM BELL TOWER & SPIRES.

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(37)

CHAPTER IV.

THE INSCRIPTIONS IN THE TOWER.

THE following interesting version of the well-known doggerel lines which are to be found in many belfries up and down the country, is painted upon the South wall of the Bellringers' Chamber in the Tower. This inscription is undated, but its existence has been known for many years, and it probably dates from the middle of the Eighteenth Century. It reads thus:—

“Gentlemen Ringers far and near,
That are disposed to Ring here,
Observe these Rules and note them well
The man that overturns his Bell,
Unto the Sexton sixpence pay,
Before he passes hence away,
And he that rings with Spur or Hat
Must pay likewise fourpence for that.
Ropes cost money; Oyl is dear,
Therefore make pay or come not here.

This Evesham version is peculiar from the fact that, so far as I am aware, it is the only one which refers to ropes and oil as expensive items, whilst

any allusion to the liability of ringers to "Swear and Curse" is omitted.

There are also some more lines inscribed upon the wall in proximity to the tenor rope, as follows:—

Of as this Bell with solemn toll,
Speaks the departure of a soul,
Let each one ask himself: "Am I
Prepared—should I be called to die?"

Besides these two rhymes there are painted upon various parts of the walls of the Chamber the names of ringers who have assisted in pealing the bells since the year 1726. In chronological order the list reads:—

John Gardner	...	...	1726
Thomas Robbins	...	...	1737
Robert Yemans, senr., Sexton	...	...	1754
Thomas Robbins, Sexton	...	...	1761
John Gardner, junr.	...	...	1765
Benjamin Holtham	...	...	1768
Charles Groves	...	...	1770
David Yemans	...	...	1772
Thomas Robbins, Sexton	...	...	1774
Joseph Holtham	...	...	1776
Rd. Righton	...	...	1776
Thomas Arkless	...	...	1782
Thomas Huband	...	...	1803
John Pearson, Sexton	...	...	1806
Thomas Wincott	...	...	1808
John Parker	...	...	1808
Rd. Evans	...	...	1808
Charles Baylis	...	...	1812
Robert Brunsdon	...	...	1812

James Robbins, Sexton	...	...	1816
William Arkless	...	...	1824
Charles Grove	...	...	1826
William Robbins	...	...	1828
Edward Bearcroft	...	...	1828
Thomas Jinks	...	...	1833
John Haines	...	...	1833
William Robbins, Sexton	...	...	1833
Thomas Robbins	...	...	1833
William Bedenham	...	...	1838
James Langston	...	...	1839
Thomas Robbins, Sexton	...	...	1840
Eli Beasley, Sexton	...	...	1840
W. J. Robbins	...	...	1858
James Robbins	...	...	1859
Thomas Jinks	...	...	1861
George Beasley	...	...	1861
George Farley	...	...	1871
Henry Scrivens	...	...	1871
James Robbins, Sexton	...	...	1872
William Haines	...	...	1875
James Robbins	...	...	1875
Joseph Haines	...	...	1876
Thomas H. Robbins	...	...	1879
John Rock	...	...	1882
Arthur Robbins	...	...	1882
Hy. Hampton	...	...	1882
Charles Brotherton	...	...	1886
Frank Jinks	...	...	1886
Henry Phipps	...	...	1891
John Collins	...	...	1891
Henry J. Martin	...	...	1900

Upon reference to page 30 it will be seen that, commencing with the year 1858, six of the above-named ringers took part in the first peal of the recently-restored bells, which was rung on May 1, 1910. The long and close associations of the Robbins family with the Churches and Tower of Evesham, as Sextons and Bell-ringers, must almost constitute a record, and it is interesting to note that at this present moment Mr. James Robbins is Sexton of All Saints Church, whilst Mr. T. Robbins acts in the same capacity at St. Laurence Church.



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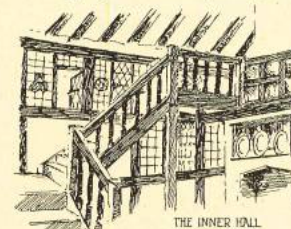


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