

The following is an extract from the History of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club. Vol.47 part 3, 1998 p235.

THE BELLS OF BERWICKSHIRE

R. W. M. Clouston, Pippin Cottage, Hartest, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP29 4ET

ABSTRACT

The bells range in date from the Ednam handbell now in the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh of 600-900 AD, to the **lost former Ayton bell of c. 1500**, and the Swinton bell actually dated 1499 in Arabic figures, the oldest in Scotland using this method of dating and probably from Malines, through to modern times. Dutch bells are to be found at Earlston, Duns Castle, and Hutton, with Edinburgh cast bells at Whitsome, Westruther, and probably the Cockburnspath handbell; with later bells by John Meikle of Edinburgh at Langton, Fogo, Channelkirk, Greenlaw and probably Foulden. His successor, Robert Maxwell, also cast bells for Polwarth (2), Coldstream, formerly at Duns Castle, Gordon, and up to 1726 at Greenlaw.

INTRODUCTION

This is the twelfth county survey of bells in Scotland to be published; most have appeared in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Whenever possible repetition of information is avoided. These earlier surveys were based on county boundaries applying in Scotland before 1965, and this has been continued with the present survey of Berwickshire.

DISCUSSION The Reverend James Fleming Leishman gave his presidential address to the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club on 12th October 1911 on the subject of the Campanology of the Eastern Borders and this noted the more important bells of which he was aware. The earliest bell is the Celtic handbell now in the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh, called the Ednam handbell and said to have been found at Hume Castle. Straight sided and fabricated from a single iron plate with riveted joints and dipped in bronze, made in the period 600-900 AD. **At the time of Revd James Leishman's talk the pre-Reformation bell at Ayton shown to the Club in June 1868 had already disappeared, but fortunately a rubbing is to be found in the Ellacombe Collection in the British Library, and in Vol. XXII page 272 Rev. I. F. Leishman reproduces it as Plate X and comments upon it. Almost entirely in black letters and reading from right to left:**

X campana : sancte : cuthberte : tommas : bal : rno

Probably cast about 1500 and quite small, the length of the rubbing would suggest a mouth diameter of about 13½ inches (343 mm). The Swinton bell is of this period and is actually dated with Arabic figures 1499. The earliest bell in Scotland to be so dated; the next one known is a lost handbell from Dyke, Moray, dated 1552, of French origin, followed by the Turriff, Aberdeenshire, bell dated 1556 (Eeles and Clouston 1957, 109). The letters M and A in MARIA appear on the 1518 disused Comrie bell (Clouston 1992, 469) in a very similar design but 10% smaller.

[The remainder of the discussion section has been omitted from this extract, but a copy of the Berwickshire Naturalists Club History, from which it is taken, can be borrowed from the History Society library]

AYTON Parish Church (visited 4/10/91).

The tower with spire contains a single bell, 22½ inches (562 mm) diameter, inscribed:

MEARS & STAINBANK, FOUNDERS LONDON.

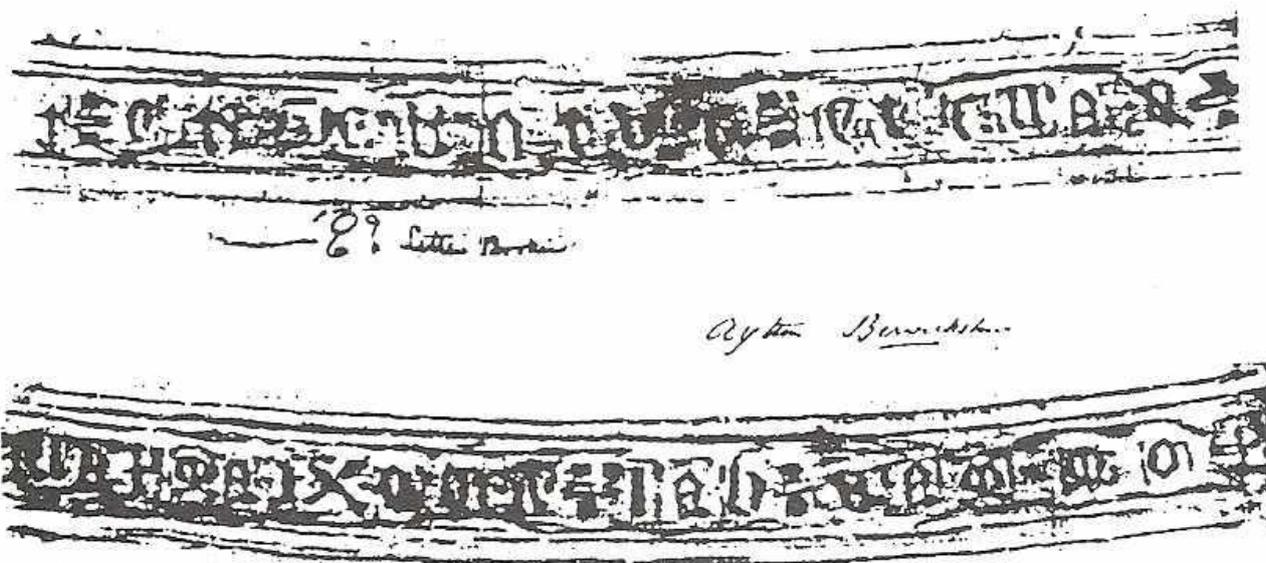
(Waist) PRESENTED BY CHRISTIAN, WIFE OF
WILLIAM MITCHELL INNES, ESQ.
OF AYTON, AND WHITEHALL,
AND DAUGHTER OF
THOMAS SHAIRP ESQ.
OF HOUSTON WEST-LOTHIAN.
A.D. 1865.

From the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, and hung for full circle ringing with contemporary fittings in a soft wood frame. A peg stay on the elm headstock engages with a pendulum type slider in the side frame. Weight about 2½ cwt (127 kg), quite good tone, note A flat + .40 semitones.

The earlier bell was shown to the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club in 1868, and was noted as 'bearing an inscription in ancient letters', vide Proceedings of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club, Vol. XXI, p. 222. By 1911 the bell had disappeared. (Illus 2)

Rev. J.J. Raven, 1892, 11, noted a rubbing he had seen, apparently relating to this bell. Research by the present writer discovered this rubbing in the Ellacombe Collection in the British Library in London under Add Ms 33203 under reference A II 42, this is shown as Illus. 2. The inscription reads from right to left, and starts at the St Andrew's cross and appears to be X campana : sancte : cuthberte : tommas : bal : rno. The length of the rubbing would suggest a mouth diameter of about 13 1/2 inches (343 mm) and the date would be about 1500. The cross and the unusual two dot stop with two parallel lines between are not known to appear elsewhere. The lettering is almost entirely in black letters with the exception of the vertical bar at the end of the penultimate word, which might be intended to be an L, and the Ms which look Lombardic. One C faces left and two in the opposite direction.

There is a disused bell of this period dedicated to St Cuthbert at Monkton and Prestwick, vide Clouston 1947b, 240, but the stop and lettering are different, and the founder appears to have had the initials i h. The Ayton bell clearly has an inscription in two parts, the first three words give 'The bell of St Cuthbert' and the next three would seem to relate to the founder or a donor. Thomas is quite clear, and the next two words could be the surname like BAL- RNO or Balarno. He could well have come over from the Continent.



Illus. 2. *Inscription on former Ayton Church bell.*

By permission of The British Library, MS ADD 33203 Ellacombe Collection.

[end of extract]

Technical Details

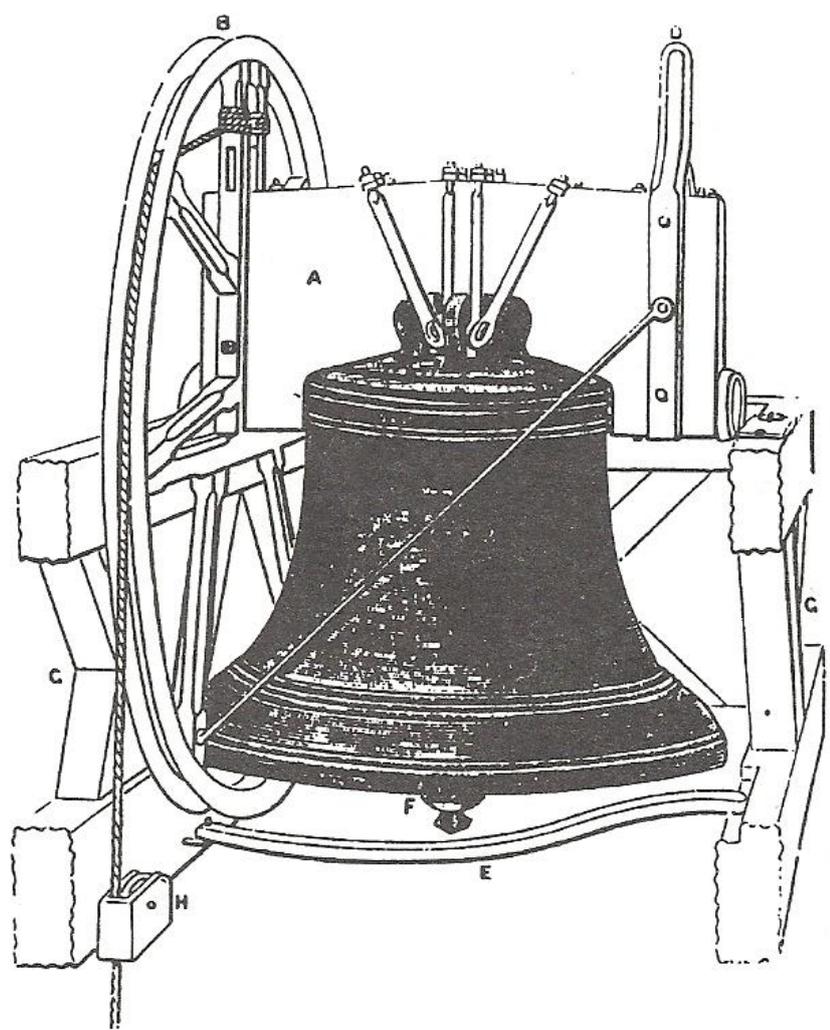
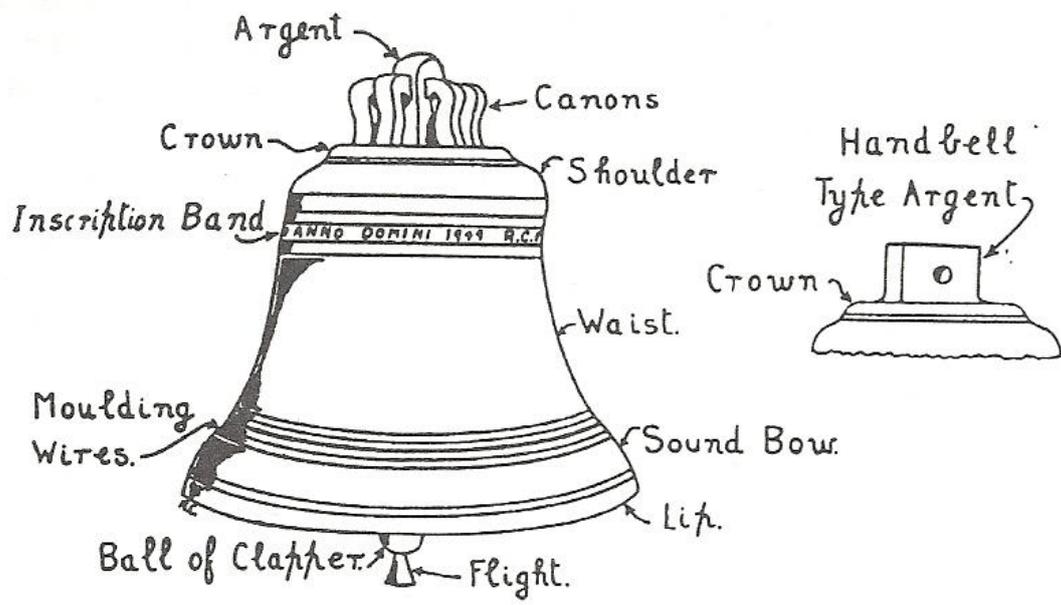
The following technical details were noted by R.W.M. Clouston when he inspected the bell on 4th October 1991. They are not part of the Berwickshire Naturalists' History record but are included here for completeness. The diagram which follows is taken from the Berwickshire Naturalists' History record.

Soft wood frame; Full wheel in quite good order, pendulum slider. Horizontal peg stay in iron on top of headstock. Plain bearings with iron covers, let into top of frame, no cast iron boxes. Pigeons gaining access to bell chamber through spire openings.

Bell

Diameter	22 $\frac{1}{8}$ ins
Approx weight	2 cwt 2 qrs 1 lb
Note	Ab + .40
Semitones	C 1700: 800,443 Hz
Tone	Quite good
Cracked?	No
Any cracks visible	No
Unworn soundbow thickness	1 $\frac{13}{16}$ ins
Worn soundbow	1 $\frac{13}{16}$ & 1 $\frac{13}{16}$ ins
Thickness where ellacombe/ Clock hammer strikes	- ins
Clapper correct length	Yes
Clapper roll	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins
Original Crown Staple?	Yes, cast-in
Any tuning marks?	
Argent retained	Yes
Number of canons	Six
Bell loose in headstock?	No
Type of straps	U bolt + 4 pairs screwed
Headstock condition	ECM. Quite good
Turned?	Never
State of gudgeon pins and type	Recessed hooped and single screw bolted
Lip to shoulder at tangent	15 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins
Shoulder circumference	38 $\frac{1}{4}$ ins
Quality of casting	Quite good
Moulding wires	2, 2-2, 3-2
Founder	Mears & Stainbank, Whitechapel, London
Date	1865

Clapper: 1865 metal leather lined U. Two bolt top with wood centre. Ball worn.



Illus 1. Named parts of a bell, with frame and fittings: A, headstock; B, wheel; D, stay; E, slider; F clapper; G, frame; H, pulley.

AYTON Clock Tower (visited 4/10/91).

On the roof is a disused bell, 24 inches (610 mm) diameter, weight about 3 cwt (152 kg), inscribed:

JOHN C. WILSON & CO, FOUNDERS, GLASGOW 1880.

From the Gorbals Foundry, and cast with argent and eight canons. Hung dead in a timber frame and formerly used as the hour bell for the clock but the hammer has been removed. The clock of about the same date is by H & R Millar of Edinburgh, and has going and hour strike trains.