

Summary of Bells history - chronological overview - draft Dec 2016

The project has provided amazing insight into an aspect of Richmond history completely new to me, and incredibly it has shown that the history of the bells reflects the history of the town generally over 600 years.

The story of bells in Richmond may go back to the Norman start not only of the secular churches and chapels - St Mary's, Trinity, St James, St Edmund, St Anthony, St Nicholas - and possibly even including the three chapels in the Castle - but also the local monastic foundations - St Martin's, St Agatha's at Easby and Greyfriars.

The bell history of St Mary's would certainly take on new impetus c.1400 with the building of the handsome tower which has stood almost unaltered to the present day. Ralph Nevill, 1st Earl of Westmorland, was granted the prestigious Honour of Richmond in 1399, and proved a generous benefactor. His coat of arms - a saltire cross - can be seen on the north parapet of the tower. An integral part of the tower structure is the ribbed vault formed with a central circular opening to allow bells to be raised and lowered through it. Ralph Nevill died in 1425 and was buried in Staindrop Church, of which he was also a benefactor, and his effigy is there, flanked by those of his two wives. His seat, Raby Castle, lies within Staindrop parish.

Richmond as a chartered medieval borough was a very important town - only Scarborough had a similar status in the North Riding. The town, and thus its associated religious institutions, grew further in importance later in the medieval period. There are still a number of surviving medieval bells in the Richmond area - the three Seliok bells now in St Mary's, Trinity Chapel and Kirkby Hill Church, plus evidence of other bells from the chantry chapels of St James and St Nicholas Hospital, demonstrate a considerable investment in bells in the area.

The evidence for the bells of St James Chapel and St Nicholas Hospital Chapel suggests relatively small bells proportionate to the scale of those buildings, and thus the links are convincing. However, the long-established, if unsubstantiated, tradition that the Seliok bell in St Mary's came from Easby Abbey, opens up an intriguing debate as to whether any larger ancient bells in the area came from any of the local religious houses at the Dissolution of the monasteries.

Accessible evidence for the disposal of assets of the dissolved religious houses is patchy, but does provide some documentary material about their bells. St Agatha's in 1536 had 5 bells assessed at £16 13s 4d and Greyfriars in 1538-9 had 3 bells providing 2000 pounds of metal. To give some context to this figure, as the Seliok bell in St Mary's weighs 780lb, it would seem that the three in Greyfriars Tower averaged a similar size.

The Pilgrimage of Grace, a rebellion against the closure of the monasteries which occurred in the north of England in 1536, demonstrated that in this area there was then still strong support for what the religious houses provided, particular worship and prayer, but also social services. The rebellion was unsuccessful and the Dissolution was implemented, with its ensuing economic recession which took generations to overcome. The medieval chantries and hospitals were closed down soon afterwards.

The religious changes of the 16th century were erratic. Richmond was one of the few places in the north which saw a Protestant martyr burnt at the stake in the reign of Queen Mary I, and then one of its former chantry priests became a Catholic martyr during the

reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Her reign of had to address not only Catholic-backed threats to overthrow her, but also major problems such as poverty, road maintenance and changes to working practises. Nevertheless the late-16th century saw two major events in Richmond which were to have enormous implications for the town's future history.

The first was the re-foundation of the medieval grammar school in 1567, which involved some assets formerly belonging to the Chapel of St James, which is why the pupils at the present Richmond comprehensive school have St James as the badge on their uniforms. The second was the granting to the town of a new charter in 1577, which gave Richmond two members of Parliament [leading eventually to its becoming a 'pocket borough'], and established a corporation under an Alderman, with a Recorder [presiding over one of many important courts based in the town] and the two Serjeants-at-Mace with which we are still familiar today. The first Alderman under this charter, the equivalent of the Mayor so named in later charters, was James Cotterel, a Dublin-born lawyer working at the courts of the Archdeacon of Richmond, based in Trinity Chapel. Cotterel later moved to the Council of the North based in York, and when he died in 1595 he was buried in York Minster, where there is a memorial brass which shows a portrait of him. In his will he bequeathed to Richmond the town's oldest piece of civic plate, the Cotterel Salt, and endowed an annual sermon to be given by the rector.

The early Stuarts kept the country Protestant, but times were still unsettled, with the English Civil Wars occurring in the middle of the 17th century. It took some time after the 1660 Restoration for things to settle down. Records relating to our church bells reflect how their use had come to include secular events. From shortly after the Restoration, the Borough of Richmond was paying for the ringing of the bells to mark significant anniversaries. The Chamberlains Accounts record the payment of 2s 2d to Duke [presumably Marmaduke] Stapleton for ringing the bells to celebrate the public holiday of King Charles II's return - Royal Oak Day, 29 May, and again on Gunpowder Plot Day - 5 Nov, in 1663. [NYCRO DC/RMB 6/2/1]

A contract [NYCRO DC/RMB] between the Borough of Richmond and Thomas Wood, a Thirsk bellfounder, in 1665 provides some information about this period. It was intended to acquire two new bells, to add to three which already existed in the 'steeple', at a cost of £29, and using the metal from a bell in the Borough's possession. All five bells were to be re-hung, and maintained by Wood. It is not clear whether this contract was carried out, but it is interesting that the borough was the client, and also that they had a 'spare' bell. This contract pre-dates by three years the important work on change-ringing by Rev Fabian Stedman published as *Tintinnalogia* in 1668.

The Borough's Chamberlains again paid sums varying from 2s to 2s 2d for in 1680, this time to Robert Apedall, for ringing on St George's Day, the King's Birth Day and 'Gunpodder Treson Day'. Apedall was in 1683 paid 7s for ringing at the time of the Rector preaching the James Cotterell sermon 'and other work for the bell'. In 1685 4s 8d was paid for ringing on 14 October and 5 November. The ringers were paid the larger sum of 11s in 1688 for the 'Day of Thanksgiving'. The disbursements in 1689 were also varied - 2s 6d for ringing on 11 April to mark the crowning of King William III and Queen Mary II, and 2s for ringing on 29 July when news arrived that Princess [later Queen] Anne of Denmark had been delivered of a son. In 1692, 2s was paid for ringing on Coronation Day and the same of 24 May 'when we got victory over the French fleet', and 2s 2d for a day ringing on 2 September 'when King William came out of Flanders' [NYCRO DC/RMB 6/2/4].

In 1697 St Mary's acquired four bells made by the distinguished bell founder Samuel Smith of York. This must represent a major expenditure. It was towards the end of the incumbency of Richard Godsalve, rector of Richmond from 1664 and vicar of Great Smeaton from 1668. He died 6 March 1699/1700.

A sixth bell was given to St Mary's in 1739 by Sir Conyers D'Arcy. He was one of Richmond's two M.P.s for many years. The other seat was held for many generations by members of the Yorke family who had a mansion on The Green around which they developed impressive landscape gardens so famous that people came from far and wide to visit them and they became one of the many visitor attractions of Georgian Richmond. The Yorkes also had a private gallery in the church, and a burial vault there.

Sir Conyers D'Arcy [1685-1758] was the younger brother of Robert D'Arcy, 3rd Earl of Holderness whose seat was Hornby Castle near Catterick. After a short spell in the Life Guards, he entered Parliament and sat for various seats between 1707 and his death. He was M.P. for Richmond 1722-47, later sitting for York. He bought the Aske estate in 1727 and made many improvements to the house and grounds. M.P.s in those days spent about half the year - roughly September to February - in London, and the rest of the time on their estates.

Sir Conyers was a loyal courtier, first in the household of Queen Anne, then George I, who made him Master of his Household and a Knight of the Bath, and lastly George II. He received a Crown grant of land in the Privy Garden of Whitehall in order to build a public office as well as a private house for the lavish entertaining for which he was renowned. He also held various local public offices which were hereditary to the D'Arcy family, including serving as Lord Lieutenant of the North Riding during the minority of his nephew, and was High Steward of Richmond Castle, Chief Bailiff of the Liberty of Richmond and Constable of Middleham Castle. The inscription on his bell describes him as "Knight of the Bath, Member of Parliament for Richmond, Lieutenant of the North Riding of Yorkshire, Comptroller of his Majesty's Household, and one of his Privy Council." The bell also bears the D'Arcy coat of arms - *Azure, a semeè of cross crosslets, and three cinquefoils, argent* - and the Latin inscription *Tria juncta in uno* [Three united in one].

Sir Conyers was party to an event in 1727 which was to change the course of Richmond history. When a general election was called in that year on the death of George I, four candidates stood for the two seats. The sitting members, John Yorke and Sir Conyers D'Arcy were defeated by Charles Bathurst and Sir Marmaduke Wyvill, but 823 votes were cast, far in excess of the people eligible to vote. The result was challenged, and a House of Commons upheld the complaint, quashed Bathurst's and Wyvill's election and reinstated Yorke and D'Arcy. Furthermore they defined for the first time just who was eligible to vote - the owners of those ancient burgages which had a right of pasture in Whitcliffe Pasture. These 273 properties became known as Burgage Houses. This led to Richmond becoming a 'Pocket Borough', for anyone owning more than half of them would have the election in their 'pocket'. This was not achieved until after Sir Lawrence Dundas came to Aske in 1760, but the Dundas family and their nominees held the two seats unopposed well into the 19th century. The owners of burgage rights still own the former Richmond Racecourse.

Sir Conyers D'Arcy was involved with Richmond at a key stage in its development as it became a leading provincial social centre, a fashionable town to which well-to-do people were attracted to come and live or to attend social activities, and to admire its attractive scenery and townscape. His new bell of 1739 reflects this rising status of early-Georgian

Richmond. Sir Lawrence Dundas supported further improvements to the town, but seemingly not to the church, although his descendant, Lawrence, 1st Marquess of Zetland, gave a new bell in 1905.

The accounts of St Mary's churchwardens [NYCRO PR/RM 3/1] provide information on how much was spent on ringing the bells from 1736. The ringers were paid a salary of £4 a year, plus extras for ringing on special occasions. Christmas Day only warranted 1s 6d, but national celebrations such as Royal Oak Day on 29 May, 11 and 30 October and 5 November cost 6s. A visit by the Bishop earned the ringers 1s for ale. Minor maintenance costs included oil, pulleys and a stay, and 3s for help in mending the bells.

In 1737 the old team of ringers was replaced by a new team, the old team's half-year salary was £1 10s, the new received 4s per quarter per man. Work was done on several of the bells, four men gave assistance in raising the 5th bell and were paid 1s, a new wheel for the 4th bell and work on the other bells cost £2 15s plus £2 8s for ironwork, and the rings were paid 8s for their assistance in raising the bells. Ringing the bell for the Cotterel sermon cost 4s. In addition to the usual special ringing on 29 May, 11 and 30 October and 5 November, plus Christmas Day [£1 8s], two extra ringing days ordered by the Rector cost 12s.

Candles had to be bought, especially for ringing on a dark Christmas morning [1s 2½d] and the Duke of Cumberland's birthday was an additional day rung costing 1s. Oil, bell ropes, leather for 3 bells and a plank of wood were maintenance costs.

The arrival of Sir Conyers D'Arcy's new bell in 1739 resulted in carriage charges from York, and the ringers' salary going up to £4 4s per quarter. Alterations also had to be made to the frame to accommodate an extra bell, and a delegation went to York to see new methods of hanging. A one-off event occurred in 1740 when the ringers were paid 7s 6d 'for rejoyceing when Carthagena was taken'. Different churchwardens provide us with differing details in the accounts. In 1741 the ringers were paid 17s 6d 'for ringing whilst the Bishop held his Visitation here', and we learn that someone was paid 6d for tolling the bell for a funeral. Several amounts were paid for repairs to and replacing of the bell tongues. The town's loyalty to the anti-Jacobite cause appears in the accounts in 1745, not only were the bells rung for the Duke of Cumberland's birthday, but also 'when he was expected at Richmond', and again in 1750 for ringing 'eight days and a half and when the King landed £ 3 3s'.

Another influential person who left his mark on the town was the Rector of Richmond 1739-87, Rev Francis Blackburne. A charismatic preacher, he brought back into church use Trinity Chapel, the tower of which had become the property of the Corporation, containing the town clock and two bells used for civic purposes.

Further details on issues with the bellringers are given in the records of the church's vestry meetings [NYCRO PR/RM 2/1]. "At a meeting in the Vestry on the 17th of June 1800 pursuant to notice it was agreed that the salary of the ringers shall be increased, namely, each ringer to receive 2 guineas a year for the ordinary duty of the church and 2s. 6d. a day for each public ringing day namely King's Birthday, half a day for the 4th November, whole day the 5th (November) and the King's Coronation Day unless any public ringing should be ordered by the Mayor, Rector and Churchwardens upon some particular occasion subject nevertheless to such restitutions as shall after wards be made by the Mayor and Rector." And again from 6 December 1820 - "It was resolved by the inhabitants present that (the late ringers having been discharged from their office for irregularity in their duty

as it is said) It is the request of this meeting that the churchwardens do reinstate them on their promise of future good behaviour."

One of the four Samuel Smith bells of 1697 became cracked, and was replaced in 1892 by one cast by bell founder John Warner and Sons, when a new frame was made, and major repairs were carried out on the tower. Until this point, entry to the belfry staircase was an outside door in the churchyard, the old doorway was blocked up [its outline can just be detected] and a new belfry door made inside the church. Next to this is a small bell put up by the bellringers in 1919 as a memorial to two of their number who fell in the First World War, Reginald Brand and John Watkin. As well as the bell given by the Marquess of Zetland in 1905, another was bought by public subscription, making a total of eight. They were all re-hung in 1923.

The Richmond community's support for the bells in St Mary's has continued with the raising of money for the present scheme.....

CJH

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