

HAMPSHIRE CHURCH BELLS.

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MUCH speculative interest has been aroused in the minds of many campanologists by the mystery which still shrouds the personality of two bell-founders whose initials "R. B." and "I. H." appear inscribed on many Hampshire bells. The queries arise, Who were they, and where were their foundries located?

The writer of the all too brief notes on Hampshire church bells in the "Victoria County History" alludes to "R. B."—(1) "An unknown founder"; (2) "a founder R. B."; and (3) "having the founder's initials R. B." There are some twenty-three bells in the county cast by this founder in the interval 1595-1622, seven of the series being in the Isle of Wight.

The simple epigraph "God be our guyd" is inscribed on eight of the bells; "Geve God the glory" on three; "In God is my hope" on a like number; "Geve thanks to God" appears on two; whilst "Love God" and "I live in hope" are inscribed on single bells. The remaining five have the initials with the date of casting only. Another "R. B.," but not a church bell, is located in the westernmost of the six embrasures on the south side of the ancient Bargate at Southampton. The bell is referred to by the Rev. Silvester Davies in his history of that town as "one of three or four bells at different stations which answered one another in ringing the watches or sounding alarms. The present bell bears the inscription "In God is my hope R. B.," with the date "1605."

Mr. H. B. Walters, "Church Bells of England" (1912), writes, on p. 220:—"The post-Reformation foundries in Sussex and Hants are of little importance. Many bells in Hants, between 1571 and 1624, bear the initials of an unknown

'R. B.,' and others, between 1616 and 1652, those of 'I. H.' " He adds :—" Both men were probably resident at Winchester or Southampton." From the dates an inference may be drawn that two distinct series of bells have been cast by founders whose identity has been hidden under the "R. B." initials ; indeed, such would almost seem to have been the case. Dr. Amherst D. Tyssen, "Church Bells of Sussex" (ed. 1915), writes :—" The early Elizabethan bells are still involved in mystery . . . nor do we know what name is indicated by the initials 'R. B.' which occur on five bells in Sussex, dated 1571 and 1572. Mr. Cocks ('Bucks,' p. 195) and Mr. North ('Rutland,' p. 48) give an account of a bell-founder named Richard Benetly or Bentley, who was living at this time ; but his work is very different from the 'R. B.' bells of Sussex. I have notes of nine bells in the south of Hampshire, and six more in the Isle of Wight, ranging from 1598 to 1614, bearing the initials of 'R. B.,' but these have fuller inscriptions than our Sussex 'R. B.' bells, besides being somewhat later."

Mr. North, "Church Bells of Northamptonshire" (1878), also alludes to Richard Benetlye :—" At Passenham hangs a bell—the fourth—inscribed :—' +A+TRVSTY+FRENDE+IS+ HARDE+TO+FYNDE+1585.' The initial cross is also placed as a stop between each word. The founder of this bell I trace by the same initial cross and form of letter—which is a large semi-Gothic-Roman one—being found upon the third bell at Seaton, co. Rutland, which is inscribed ;—' RYECHARDE BENETLYE BELLFOVNDDER.' It is worthy of notice," Mr. North adds, "how these bells help to explain each other ; the one gives the founder's name, the other his date. The location of his foundry has still to be learned."

Mr. H. B. Walters, "Church Bells of England" (1912), in the chapter on "Post-Reformation Foundries," refers to one at Colchester, and names Richard Bowler, the originator of the foundry, as casting bells there between 1587 and 1604—a man of some artistic taste who used ornamental Gothic letters and decorative borders. His bells, however, are found

only in Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridge. No bells cast by him are found in Hants. "It will be noticed that the inscriptions on his bells differ from those of 'R. B.'"

In a paper read before the Hampshire Field Club in the autumn of 1892, and revised by the author in 1901, the Rev. G. E. Jeans, Vicar of Shorwell, refers to two "R. B." bells in the tower of St. Peter's Church there, and, in a parenthesis, says:—" 'R. B.' is Robert Bond, a bell-founder at Winchester." The learned vicar, in replying to a query of mine in November, 1918, writes:—"I think indications strongly point to the Bonds having a foundry at Winchester. In North's 'Church Bells of Lincolnshire' (p. 141) you will find that the priest's small bell at Binbrook St. Mary and the one bell at Croxby have 'R.W.B.' North says he does not know this founder. The 'w,' I suppose, is for Winchester." Between the "R" and the "B," and above the "w," is a bell.

Further references to the Bond family are found in Mr. Percy G. Stone's "Architectural Antiquities in the Isle of Wight." In commenting on a bell at Newchurch, cast by Anthony Bond in 1626, he adds in a footnote:—"The family of Bond were bell-founders in the first half of the seventeenth century, and bells made by them exist in many of the churches both on the Hampshire mainland and in the Isle of Wight."

Referring to the second (now the tenor) bell at Chale Church, Mr. Stone writes:—"A seventeenth-century bell from the Bonds' foundry has round it the lettering:— 'ANTHONY.BOND.MADE.ME.1628.W.B.R.T.' " In alluding to a bell located at Brading, Mr. Stone states:—"The initials 'A. W.' appear on bells with 'R. B.,' as in the church of St. John Baptist, Winchester. The Salisbury foundry," he adds, "generally produced short religious mottoes such as 'Prais the Lord,' found on the Brading bell." Lukis, "Bell Inscriptions," p. 76, gives the inscription on the Winchester bell—the fourth bell—"GOD IS MY HOPE R.B. 1606," and, following after the date "A.W : I.W." (These initials after the date may refer to the churchwardens.)

Dr. Amherst D. Tyssen likewise alludes to the Brading bell and the initials "A. W." on it in his "Sussex Church Bells":—"The initials 'A. W.' on eight bells in Sussex stand for Anthony Wakefield, a bell-founder at Chichester, who was casting bells in 1594-1605. His Sussex bells have the epigraph 'PRAIS THE LORD' with the date inscribed on three, and 'PRAIS GOD' on four of the series. Anthony Wakefield may be credited with the fourth bell at Brading, in the Isle of Wight, which bears 'PRAIS THE LORD 1594,' and the initials 'A. W.' with many other initials." "In the latter part of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries, much of the work in Hants and Sussex was done by itinerant founders. In South Hants and Dorset we find bells by Anthony Bond" (1615-36). In Hampshire the Anthony Bond bells are few in number. One of 1623 date is at North Stoneham; and four (of the peal of five) at St. Lawrence, Winchester, were cast by him in 1621. Two of his bells located in the Isle of Wight have already been commented on. The epigraphs on his bells are in striking contrast to the short devotional inscriptions on the "R. B." bells.

Canon Raven, "The Bells of England" (1906), writes:—"Anthony Bond recast the great tenor at Wimborne Minster, Dorset, in 1629, placing on it his monogram . . . PER AB ANNO DOMINI 1629, and after the churchwardens' names a shield bearing a chevron and three mullets"—a founder's mark not discovered on any other bells cast by him.

In reply to a query, Mr. A. Heneage Cocks wrote in May, 1918:—"I can add nothing further concerning the identity or locality of 'R. B.' I have again mentioned him in both my papers on local bell-foundries in the 'Victoria History of Bucks and Berks.' . . . Mr. Walters is the best chance, but I have looked up his 'Essex Bells,' and 'R. B.' is not mentioned there. As to the foundries, Salisbury and Winchester are likely guesses, but, so far as I know, are merely guesses. I am rather a believer in geographical distribution for spotting early bells, and even as late as 'R. B.' If you take the centre of the sixteen bells you know of in the county, and find it is

near either of those cities, though it will not prove the point, it will certainly carry weight ; or it may point to some smaller place where there was a foundry."

On another occasion Mr. Cocks remarked :—" I did a good deal of hunting into the Winchester archives in pursuit of bell-foundries, but quite unsuccessfully. . . . I am not aware that anyone has done Salisbury."

In regard to the possibility of the foundry being located at Salisbury, Lukis, in his " Wiltshire Bell Inscriptions," pp. 99-130, mentions no inscribed bell of the 729 in that county as being cast by either " R. B." or Anthony Bond.

Dr. Amherst D. Tyssen wrote to me recently concerning the former :—" I see no grounds for connecting ' R. B.' with Anthony Bond. The latter was an itinerant bell-founder from London, and the fact of the Chale bell having, according to oral tradition, been cast locally, strengthens the supposition."

" Having regard to the wide geographical distribution of bells marked with the ' R. B.' initials," my friend Mr. W. J. Parkinson Smith remarks that " to have cast bells so far distant, and in so many counties, one naturally conjectures that the foundry must have been widely known."

In conclusion, no documentary evidence has so far been cited to support the conjecture of family relationship or of business associations existing between " R. B." and Anthony Bond, beyond the continuity in dates, the " R. B." bells covering the period from 1595 to 1614, and those cast by Anthony Bond from 1615 to 1629.

Respecting the other unidentified bell-founder, " I. H.," whose initials are found on some seventeen bells in Hampshire, the writer of the notes on Hampshire church bells in the " Victoria County History " alludes to the bells as inscribed with " the founder's initials I. H.," or " by an uncertain founder I. H., whose bells are common in the district," and " by the unidentified founder I. H. (possibly John Higden)." These bells range over the period 1610-52. One of the earliest of the bells cast by him is the tenor, dated 1610, at

Hinton Ampner, Hants ; and possibly his latest, of 1652, is located at Bursledon in the same county.

Mr. Walters, in his "Bells of England" (1912), referring to this unknown founder, conjectures the initials may be those of John Higden, foreman to Joseph Carter, a successful bell-founder at Reading from 1578 to 1606. In his will, bearing date 1609, Carter refers to John Higden as "his servant," leaving him a small legacy.

It is probable that Higden set up a foundry in Hampshire, possibly at Winchester or Southampton. By some means or other he obtained possession (or at least had the use) of many ancient letters and stamps used by Carter. His inscriptions are generally in black letter, but other lettering is used. At Martyr Worthy the second bell, of date 1632, has the legend "In God is my hope" in small black letters ; while the tenor bell, of 1631, has the same epigraph in Gothic capitals. Higden was fond of reproducing medieval stamps such as the Wokingham "R. L." shield, as, for instance, on the fifth bell at Owslebury, of date 1622. Thirteen of Higden's bells bear the epigraph "In God is my hope" ; on two "God be our guyd" is inscribed ; while two of 1615 and 1651 have merely the initials and date of casting.

In the April issue of "Notes and Queries" Mr. H. B. Walters writes expressing his regret that on the subject of the bell-founders "R. B." and "I. H." he is unable at present to throw any further light on their identity, and continues, "Besides the bells in Hants by these founders, I have notes of one in Dorset and six in Wilts by 'R. B.,' and three in the latter county by 'I. H.' I am strongly in support of Mr. A. H. Cocks's opinion that geographical distribution is an important factor in determining the locality in which a group of bells were made. If we apply the test in the present case, we obtain the following results :—

"(1) 'R. B.'s' bells between 1595 and 1624 are nearly all to be found in South Hants and South Wilts, and out of the total of 29, 17 are in South Hants or the Isle of Wight. Against this we have three in North Hants, two in North Wilts, and one in Dorset.

" (2) Out of 23 known bells by 'I. H.,' there are 16 in South Hants, three in South Wilts, and two in West Sussex, as against two in North Hants.

" This clearly points to Winchester or Southampton as the locality of the foundry. I have excluded the 'R. B.' bells in Sussex, as apparently they are by another (local) founder. It is possible that Anthony Bond had some connection with 'R. B.,' but we have no direct evidence beyond the circumstance that his bells are found in the same localities.

" The most promising chance of identifying these founders, or at all events of ascertaining where they worked, would be by the investigation of churchwardens' accounts. If it could be ascertained which of the parishes now or recently possessing bells by 'R. B.' or 'I. H.' have old accounts of the period remaining, a search would probably result in unearthing the name of the place whence the founder came, even if the bells were cast on the spot, and probably also the founder's name, though that is not always given."

ADDENDA.

For the following interesting note, relating to the inscriptions on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th bells at St. Lawrence's Church, Winchester, I am indebted to the Rev. W. E. Colchester.

Writing on September 2nd, 1919, Mr. Colchester says:—

" With regard to 'R. B.,' I think that the St. Lawrence bells—of which church I am Rector—are rather conclusive. The inscriptions are quite easy to read:—

" 2nd bell—' W. COLSON L.V. R.B. A. + B. 1621.

+ QUÆRITE DOMINUM ESAY 55.'

" 3rd bell—' W. COLSON L.V. A + B + TS 1621.

+ DESUPER OMNIA.'

" 4th bell—' LANCELOT VIBART. W. COLSON. R.B. + ANTHONY BOND MADE ME 1621.'

" 5th bell—' LANCELOT VIBART AND W. COLSON, CHURCHWARDENS. R.B. ANTHONY BOND MADE ME. ME RESONARE JUBET PIETAS MORS ATQUE VOLUPTAS. T.S. 1621.'

"It seems to me that Anthony must have learnt his work from 'R. B.,' and was probably his son. There is no sign of there ever being a foundry at Winchester, beyond one bell, that at St. James's, Hunton, by I. Earley, of Winchester, 1651.

"(The 'Essay 55,' on the second bell, was incomprehensible till a friend made the suggestion, which cleared up the mystery—'Seek the Lord while He may be found' comes from Isaiah lv.)"