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OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS

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HOLY CROSS, COWBRIDGE, GLAMORGAN

THE SMALL, ancient Borough of Cowbridge lies in the shallow valley of the River Thaw (or Ddawan, in Welsh) at the point where the river is crossed by the Roman military road, the Via Julia Maritima, from Caerleon to Carmarthen. This road is the basis of much of the modern A48; on Stalling Down, the hill to the east of Cowbridge, the Roman road still runs straight up and over, while the modern road curves away on an easier gradient. Whether there was a Roman settlement at Cowbridge is a matter of dispute. The town as we know it was first fortified (against the wild Welsh!) by the first Norman lord of the district, Robert de St. Quentin, in 1091. Parts of the fortifications still survive; in particular, the South Gate and the south wall, which separate the old and new buildings of the Grammar School. On a hill close by are the ruins of St. Quentin's Castle, a building commenced by Lord Gilbert de Clare and left for ever unfinished after the latter's death at Bannockburn in 1314.

The name "Cowbridge" first appears as "Cubrigg" in the late 13th century; this is something of a mystery since the town had been known in Welsh, and still is, by the name of Pontfaen, which means "Stone Bridge." Cowbridge had its charter as a borough at least as early as 1323. In the Middle Ages there were two boroughs in Glamorgan, the other being Kenfig; Cardiff was virtually non-existent. Today, Cardiff is Wales' capital city; Kenfig is literally buried under the sand; and Cowbridge is still Cowbridge!

Cowbridge had its own code of laws (or by-laws as we would call them) and the version of these now extant, written down from 1610 onwards on a parchment roll 30 feet long, shows that there were (besides the burgesses and a lesser rank of citizen known as chencers), a mayor, aldermen, "bayliffs," and sundry other officials such as the Ale Tasters, Searchers of Leather, and Overseer of the Shambles. I hasten to add that the last-named was **not** the designation of the tower captain! Among the laws is one to this effect: "That noe maner of pson shall play at dice cards bowles nor other unlawfull games within the said towne . . . AND ALSO that there be noe tenyse playing within the high streate."



NOTHING DEFINITE

Nothing definite seems to be known about the Parish Church of the Holy Cross before the year 1473, when the Lady Anne Nevill, Lady of the Manor of all Glamorgan and consort of Richard Duke of Gloucester (who became the "Crookback" King Richard III), built part of the church at the same time as she built the towers of Llanblethian and of St. John's, Cardiff. The living of Cowbridge was endowed by Richard III in 1484. The church today is a spacious edifice well earning its nickname "Cathedral of the Vale of Glamorgan." Prominent among the memorials therein are those which commemorate past headmasters of the Grammar School founded 1608, and also the School's Fallen in the two World Wars. The unusually massive central tower is thought by some to have been intended to have a spire. The whole church has recently undergone extensive restoration towards which money is being raised in the district.

It is interesting to observe that in the days of the 18th century Establishment the affairs of the borough, and of its parish church, were regarded as one. Two-and-a-half centuries ago, or a little over, the existing four bells in the tower were in a bad way, being "broke, crack'd, and very much out of Repair, as also the walls of the s'd steeple, Timber and Frames being decayed, and other necessary work incident thereto." Cowbridge's solution was simple. It was written into the Roll of Laws that with effect from the beginning of January, 1722, "the whole profits accruing from all the Toll in general, the profits or Toll of the Weigh-house, the rents of the Town Shop, Church House and Council Tutt" (the last-named is a piece of land, now a small park with swings) were to be mortgaged over the ensuing nine years to pay the sum of £246 for "new casting the s'd Bells and for adding Four New Bells more . . . so as to have a ring peal or sett of eight Bells."

(Continued overleaf)



HOLY CROSS, COWBRIDGE—contd.

It is natural enough, then, that some of the bells have the Cowbridge Borough Seal impressed as part of their inscriptions, and that those named as "Benefactors" are mostly the borough officials. There were however two other gentlemen and two ladies who earned the designation, so one concludes that the princely sum of £246 alluded to does not represent quite all the cost of the new bells. The Rev. Daniel Durel, M.A., (whose name is wrongly spelt on the 2nd bell) was headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School 1721-1763.

Cast by E. and W. Evans of Chepstow in 1722, and tuned and rehung in a steel frame by John Taylor and Co., Bell Founders, Loughborough, in 1935, these bells are now the only complete original Evans octave surviving. Details of the bells are:—

- Treble. (2' 4") 4-3-11 in E. EVAN EVANS. Wm. EVANS. BELLFOUNDERS. 1722.
2. (2' 5") 5-0-15 in D sharp. BENEFACTOR. RICHARD GREGORY—RECTOR. BENEFACTOR. DANI. DURELL. SCHOOLEMASTER. 1722.
3. (2' 7") 5-3-4 in C sharp. BENES MRS. MAGt. MATHEWS. MRS. HESTER WILKINS. E.E. W.E. 1722.
4. (2' 9") 6-2-12 in B. Wm. DAVIS. JOHN STYDER ALDn. BENES. E.E. W.E. 1722.
5. (2' 11½") 7-2-5 in A. RICH. BATES. THO. BATES. ALDERMEN. E.E. W.E. 1722.
6. (3' 2") 9-0-17 in G sharp. THO. WILKINS. IEN. WILLIAMS. GENT. ALDERn. BENEFACTS. E.E. W.E. 1722.
7. (3' 5½") 11-2-10 in F sharp. EDWd. CARINE ROG. WILKINS. ESQR. BAYLIFFS. BENEFACTS. E.E. W.E. 1722.
- 8 (Tenor). (3' 10") 15-3-13 in E. BENEFACTORS. FRANCIS GWYN ESQR. MAYOR. EDW. STRADLING ESQR. DEP. MAYOR. E.E. W.E. 1722.

STALWART BAND

There is a photograph in the ringing chamber of the stalwart who rang to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 (for some reason the church was being wrongly known as St. Mary's at that time, and the caption contains this name; the background is clearly recognisable as the exterior of Cowbridge tower). But peal ringing, as far as is known, was never done here prior to the 1935 rehanging. For the following details of peals I am indebted to Mr. David Llewellyn, hon. peal recorder to the Llandaff and Monmouth Diocesan Association of Church Bell Ringers:—

The first peal recorded at Cowbridge was in 1935, which is very surprising considering that the bells were cast as far back as 1722. The band taking part were local ringers with the exception of Mr. J. W. Jones, who rang in just about everything at this time. It is worthy to note that this was one of the four times only that Mr. Seymour Barker rang a peal outside St. John's, Cardiff, in a total of 100 peals. Peal No. 1, Saturday, December 7, 1935, in 3 hours and 10 minutes: Grandsire Triples, composed by Rev. Bankes James, conducted by Charles H. Perry; Benjamin J. Toby treble, John W. Jones 2, George Popnell 3, Frank Rowsell 4, Charles H. Perry 5, Alfred W. Wright 6, D. Rees James 7, Seymour R. Barker tenor. A birthday peal for Mr. J. W. Jones (hon. secretary of The Llandaff and Monmouth D.A., aged 70).

The second peal, also of Grandsire Triples (Holt's Original), on March 19, 1938, conducted by Ernest Stitch, was note-



Memorial window to fallen Old Boys of Cowbridge Grammar School in World War I. Bottom left: Arms of School; bottom right: Arms of Jesus College, Oxford, which owned the school from 1685-1918.

worthy in that Robert E. ("Ted") Coles rang the first of his many peals in this tower. Ted, alas, has passed on, but two other senior members of the Association who stood in this peal are still with us—Mr. Alfred Hannington (his first of Triples inside), and Mr. Trevor M. Roderick.

In a repeat performance of the same peal with the same conductor in 1948, the famous Mr. A. J. Pitman rang the 2nd. In 1962 the then 15-year-old Nicholas Simon called a peal of Plain Bob Major; and on September 2 in the same year Robert E. Coles called Grandsire Triples for the first time; this was to be his last peal at Cowbridge.

There have been 33 peals on the bells to date, the most recent at the time of this writing being a commemoration peal of Grandsire Triples by a band in which local service ringers and the Grammar School Society were well represented, rung in 2 hours and 54 minutes on Saturday, October 14, 1972, for the 250th anniversary year of the bells. The peal was called by Ellis N. Thomas of the Grammar School Society (and one-time hon. secretary of the Cambridge University Guild); and Cowbridge Sunday service ringers who stood were Geoffrey Morgan, tower captain and grandson of the late Mr. Harold Blick (a respected ringer here for over 50 years); A. W. Thomas, tower secretary and member of a family closely associated with this tower; and W. J. Lewis Groom, who is also an hon. member of the School Society.

Sunday ringing at Cowbridge is at 10.30 and 5.30, and practice night is Tuesday. All visitors to the district are always welcome to share in the ringing of these fine and historic bells which have for so many years been proclaiming the Church's message. IOLO DAVIES.

THE RINGING WORLD

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25 YEARS AGO

Taken from The Ringing World for May 14, 1948

When Frank E. Pervin retired from the mastership of the Coventry Diocesan Guild Arthur H. Beamish was elected to succeed him. As Dorothy Beamish was re-elected as general secretary it created a rather unique situation in which a husband and wife occupied two official positions in the Guild.

A. Patrick Cannon claims distinction in his 100 peals as conductor, inasmuch as they have been rung in 97 towers in 21 counties. "I pass by this way once!"—Belfry Gossip.

George W. Pipe rang a peal of Bristol Surprise Major at the age of 13. It was conducted by Sylvia R. E. Pipe.

100th peals were rung by Mrs. T. J. Lock and William A. Stote.

40 YEARS AGO

May 12, 1933.

To celebrate the "coming-of-age" of W. A. (Billy) Hughes, of the Whitechapel Foundry, a quarter peal of Grandsire Triples was rung at St. Lawrence Jewry. Father and grandfather both took part.

By ringing the second to a peal of Cambridge Maximus, Rupert Richardson "completed the circle" at Surfleet.

An article by Gabriel Lindoff showed how Grandsire Doubles could be called in 368 different 240's, equalling 88,320 changes without a repetition of calling.

Miss Evelyn Steele took part in the first peal of Surprise on the bells of Badby, Northamptonshire.