

FARINGDON CHURCH BELLS.

An interesting article on Church Bells in the December number of the Parish Magazine suggests to us that a few particulars of the Faringdon Church bells may be of interest. But, perhaps, think of the years these bells have been used to summon the people to assemble for Divine Worship in the grand old Church; to send out their joyous sounds as the great festivals of the Church come round year after year, and also in celebration of national and local events. When ringing the old year out and the new year in, the ringers were celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of the bells hung in the Church tower in the year 1708.

We cannot account for any peal of bells previous to 1708. In that year six bells, cast by William and Robert Corr, of Aldbourne, were hung in the Church tower. The tenor bell cracked and was re-cast by R. Wells, of Aldbourne, in 1779. Number five also cracked, and was re-cast by James Wells, of Aldbourne, in 1803. In 1874 the six bells were taken down; number four being cracked was re-cast by Mears and Stainbank, of London, who also supplied two new bells, making a peal of eight. New framework was made and the bells re-hung by Frederick White, bell-hanger of Appleton, and when completed the Appleton ringers gave a peal containing 5,040 changes, in three hours, composed and conducted by Mr F. White. This was on the 10th November, 1874.

The "Ting-tang" or little bell, as it was usually called, is probably the oldest bell in the Church, and was doubtless originally the Sanctus Bell, which was sounded at the consecration of the Holy Communion. For a great number of years afterwards it was used just before the commencement of service, as at Wantage, Shrivenham, Highworth, and very many other Churches. What are called the eight o'clock bells, rung on Sunday mornings were no doubt originally rung for early Mass, and the practice has been all along continued, and in our time the early service has in very many Churches been revived. Another old custom is the Passing Bell. In former days it was customary for the bell to be tolled immediately after the death of a member of the Church, when a messenger was sent to the Vicar or Rector of the parish asking for the passing-bell to be rung. This custom is still continued in some parishes, but for very many years in Faringdon the custom has been to sound each bell three times for a man and twice for a woman, and lastly to toll the tenor bell, the morning after a death takes place.

The following is the description of the present bells, with their weights, and the inscriptions on them:

No. 1—4½ cwt. Mears and Stainbank, Founders, London, 1874.

No. 2—4½ cwt. Mears and Stainbank, Founders, London, 1874.

No. 3—5½ cwt. William and Robert Corr, Founders, Aldbourne. William Buns and John Ling, Churchwardens, 1708.

No. 4—6½ cwt. God bless the Queen, 1708.

No. 5—8 cwt. 1708.

No. 6—9¼ cwt. Mears and Stainbank, Founders, London, 1874.

No. 7—12 cwt. James Wells, Founder, Aldbourne. Thomas Cotgrove and Edward Wilson, Churchwardens, 1803.

No. 8—17 cwt. R. Wells, Aldbourne, fecit. J. Cock and Henery Newman, Churchwardens, 1779.

The Chimes were probably set going when the six bells were hung in 1708, and the same works have been in use ever since. When the two additional bells were added in 1874, the tune set to the words "Angels ever bright and fair," was selected in place of the old tune, and a new chime-barrel made and fixed by Mr F. White, of Appleton.

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A few extracts from an article on Church Bells and Belfries, by Nathaniel Asche, in the December number of the *Faringdon Parish Magazine* :—

... Though bells of various kinds are known to have been used from the remotest times past, their history may be almost said to date from the time of their adoption as a means of summoning the early Christian congregations, the earliest method of announcing the hour of public worship was by a handbell rung at the porch. Then came a number of bells struck by a hammer. . . . Two examples remain of the old bells of early Christendom, the most celebrated being the little bell of St. Patrick, measuring six inches in height, and square in shape. As the use of bells spread amongst sacred buildings, so the craft of the bell-founder gained many patrons and Royal gifts to Abbeys and Churches frequently took the form of a bell or bells. Winchester Cathedral was presented with two bells by Canute. In the reign of Edward I some finely-toned bells were cast by Richard de Wimbis for Westminster Abbey. . . . As bells became general, in consequence of the ringing of the curfew in all towns and villages, the bell-founders were busy going from place to place to cast bells on the spot to save the difficulty of transport. . . . The two largest bells in the world are those of Moscow and Pekin, but for quality of tone there is nothing to equal our largest bell, "Great Paul," which weighs about seventeen tons, and is the first bell of its size to be rung by swinging, large bells previously being struck with a hammer. Next to Great Paul comes Big Ben of Westminster, weighing fourteen tons, and then Great Peter of York, ten tons; Great Tom of Oxford, seven tons; and Great Tom of Lincoln, five tons. As regards peals of bells, England takes foremost place, that of St. Paul's Cathedral, consisting of twelve bells, being acknowledged to be the finest in tone and the heaviest peal in the world.

The great advance in bell-founding may be said to have reached perfection in the Flemish foundries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during which time the famous carillons of Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, and other Belgian towns were cast.

At Antwerp, in the beautiful tower, hangs Great Carolus, weighing 16,000 pounds, to whom Charles V stood godfather with ninety-eight companions from the big bass, which takes sixteen men to move, to the tiny treble not larger than a table bell. For three hundred years or more these bells have gone on ringing every quarter of an hour. Bruges, too, is famous for its forty beautiful bells. It is impossible to conceive what enchantment there is in listening to such fine carillons as those of Antwerp and Bruges, and once having heard them their echoes will never quite die away from the memory.