

NOTES ABOUT DUMB BELLS.

By R. S. FERGUSON, F.S.A., Chancellor of Carlisle.

Since the publication in the *Journal* for March, 1895,¹ of a short paper by the present writer, entitled, "On a Dumb Bell at Knole," I have been endeavouring, by the circulation of copies of that paper, by letters to my archæological friends and to experts in campanology, and by the insertion of a paragraph in *Notes and Queries* of June the 29th, 1895, to gain some further information on the subject of dumb bells.

The present of a copy of the paper brought a speedy reply from Mr. Albert Hartshorne, F.S.A., saying that he had seen contrivances similar to that at Knole, or the wrecks of them, in church towers, where they are usually dismissed, as windlasses for raising bells into the towers, instead of being recognised as practice dumb bells. He further wrote, "In the tower of Bradbourne Church there is a complete and ancient example of a dumb bell," and kindly sent sketches and particulars, which will presently be utilised for the supplying a description of the contrivance.

But on the other hand Dr. Raven, F.S.A., writes me as follows :—

With regard to windlasses, I think Mr. Hartshorne must be wrong. Of the hundreds of towers which I have climbed in all parts of England, I never saw anything which could be suspected of *mute-tintinnalogy*. The best windlass I know is at Mildenhall coeval with the mediæval lawsuit recorded in the year-book of 1469, and explained in my *Church Bells of Suffolk*, pp. 46-52.² It is placed close by the great opening in the frame through which the bells were lifted, and there can be no doubt of its intent.

One fails to see the object of a permanent windlass in a church tower ; church bells once hoisted into position are not likely to be lowered again for some half century or so ; while both the hoisting up and the lowering down

¹ *Archæological Journal*, vol. lii, p. 45. ² *i.e.*, the lawsuit, not the windlass.

can be much better accomplished by a tackle suspended for the occasion from the great beam of the tower roof, or otherwise (a thing any builder's labourer could do¹), and by a crab placed at the bottom. It is, however, impossible to suggest that the Mildenhall contrivance, coeval with a mediæval peal in existence in 1469, can be a dumb bell, for the practice of change-ringing did not exist in England until the beginning of the 17th century.²

Bradbourne church, of which Mr. Hartshorne is one of the churchwardens, is in Derbyshire. Its tower contains a peal of five bells, recently augmented to six. The



dumb bell, of which an illustration is given from a pen-and-ink sketch by Mr. Hartshorne, stands in a corner of the chamber in the tower immediately below the bell chamber; it is not in such a position as that it could, if a windlass, be conveniently used for raising the bells. It is of very massive construction, and consists of two stout oak parallel beams, framed and notched into the beams of the floors above and below, and making an

angle of about 80 degrees with the floor on which they stand. They are 3 feet 10 inches apart, and carry a horizontal oak roller. This roller has two holes at right angles to each other through each end; and one end, which we will call A, has in addition a third hole through it.

¹ How it was done at Bradbourne is quite apparent: the great beam of the tower roof, which is very ponderous and old, dating from about 1450, has a hole bored horizontally through it, which hole Mr. Hartshorne says must have been bored before the beam was placed *in situ*. When the bells were to be

raised, a crow-bar would be passed through this hole, round the ends of this a looped chain would be passed, and from this chain the block and tackle would be hung.

- Fabian Stedman, *Tintinnalogia*, 1688, cited in Raven's *Church Bells of Cambridgeshire*, pp. 76, 77.

This is exactly the arrangement of the roller of the Knole dumb bell: the two through holes at either end being to carry the weighted arms, of which the Bradbourne example is now deprived, while the rope was passed through the third hole at the end A, and secured by a knot; it was then coiled round the roller towards the other or B end. The Bradbourne roller shows marks, particularly towards the B end, of much wear by the rope, thus proving that the machine has at one time been much used. This could not have been the case had it been a windlass for raising the bells. But there is no sign of it having been a windlass; there is no sign of any handle with which to raise a weight such as a bell; no means of doing so, except by putting spokes into the through holes in the roller; and there is no sign of ratchet and pall to prevent a bell from overpowering the men, who were endeavouring to raise it, taking charge of the machine, and running down to the ground with frightful velocity to the destruction of the bell.

It will be noticed from the illustration that the main timbers of the Bradbourne dumb bell are old beams re-used. Mr. Hartshorne, who has carefully examined them, has come to the conclusion that they came from a bell-frame in Bradbourne church tower, which frame was taken down in the reign of Charles II. (1660–1685), and replaced by one which has in its turn been taken down in the present year, 1895, by men from the famous Loughborough Bell Foundry, when the bells, with the addition of a sixth, were re-hung.¹ This gives us the reign of Charles II. as the date of the Bradbourne dumb bell, a very likely period for the parishioners of Bradbourne to be keen about the new and fashionable exercise of change-ringing, the very period (1667, &c.) when the Cambridge printer, Fabian Stedman, was reducing the art of change-ringing to a system, printing his changes on slips of paper, and teaching them to his ringers at S. Benedict's, Cambridge.²

¹ Messrs. Taylor, of Loughborough, have pointed out that the frame taken out in 1895 was originally for four bells only, but had been altered in 1736 to hold five.—*Bradbourne with Ballidon*

Parish Magazine, Christmas Number, 1895.

² See Raven's *Church Bells of Cambridgeshire, ut ante.*

It remains to be mentioned that the foreman of the Loughborough men at once recognised the Bradbourne contrivance as a dumb bell for teaching young ringers to ring, and referred Mr. Hartshorne to one at Cirencester.

There was some difficulty at first in getting information about the Cirencester example; it had, apparently, been forgotten, as the two following letters from the Vicar of Cirencester (the Venerable Archdeacon Hayward) show:—

July 12th, 1895.

A wheel without a bell attached to it was put up years ago in what we call the Town Hall, adjoining the church, but I never heard of its being used, and certainly it has had no rope to it during the time of my incumbency, and no young ringer has been taught on it.

October 19th, 1895.

My dear Sir,

Absence from home has precluded my personal examination of our dumb bell till now. As I expected, Taylor's man is under a misapprehension. There is neither sliding bar nor block, and no one can tell me when it was last used.

Through the kindness of Messrs. Taylor of Loughborough, I got into communication with Mr. Ernest P. Harmer, of Tetbury, a member of the Gloucester and Bristol Diocesan Association of Change Ringers, who furnished the following account of the dumb bell at Cirencester:—

The "dumb bell" in the upper portion of the Town Hall at Cirencester is a contrivance made some twenty-five years ago by Mr. William Hinton, the then leader of the ringers (and who about that time re-hung the bells in the tower), for the purpose of instructing a newly formed band of ringers in the art. It consists of a wheel and rope, and you can "get it up" (or could, until it was damaged) just the same as a bell, in place of which there is a weight of wood. I say "until it was damaged," for I do not think it can now be "raised" owing to something having gone wrong. If you write to Mr. F. Gardner, Dyer Street, Cirencester, he, being on the spot, could give you full particulars, and perhaps a sketch.

Thank you for your interesting pamphlet.

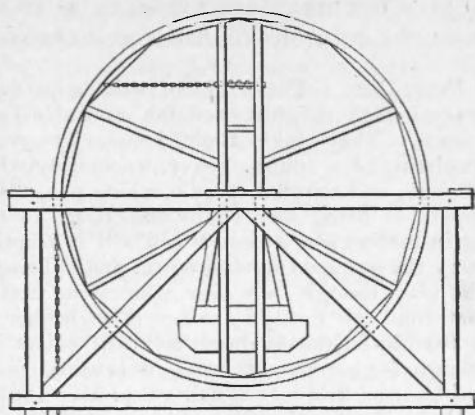
Yours respectfully,
E. P. HARMER.

A letter to Mr. Gardner produced the following interesting information:—

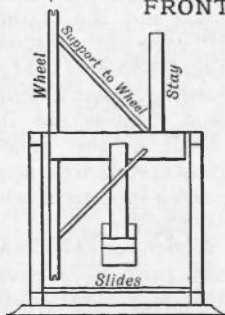
The "bell" to which you refer was made by the late Mr. William Hinton. It was erected about twenty years ago for the purpose of

instructing a newly formed band of ringers how to handle a bell, and thus prevent damage to the tower bells. The "bell" is not in the turret as you have been informed, but is in the building which connects the Town Hall to the church. There is a raised platform

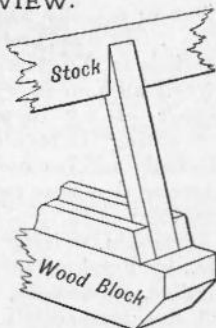
against the back wall of the hall, and from this platform a door opens into a small chamber behind, in which hangs the rope of the "bell"; the bell itself is on the floor of the chamber above; this is reached by means of a spiral stone staircase (in the turret). The frame of this bell is made of 4-inch by 3-inch quartering and is 6 or 7 feet long by 3 or 4 feet wide. It is constructed in a very similar manner to an ordinary bell frame, but very much "lighter." The rough sketch I am sending you will, I think, give you some idea. The stone fixed between the two pieces of wood next to the block is to increase the weight. The Town Hall is situate in the market place and, practically speaking, forms part of the building of the Parish Church. The hall is on the upper floor over the south porch.



FRONT VIEW.



END VIEW.



We have thus two instances of actual dumb bells, that is, of dumb bells used for the purpose of teaching beginners the art of change-ringing; the first dating from the seventeenth century, the second of the nineteenth century. Others there must have been of various dates, and probably had attention been called thereto some time, say forty years ago, several would have yet been in existence, or on record. It might be well, even now, to overhaul the supposed windlasses in view of the fresh light we now have.

I have been unable, as yet, to find in existence any other instance of a dumb bell like that at Knole, a machine

unconnected with bell-ringing at all, but a sort of baby jumper on a large scale, suitable for elderly men, like Addison, Franklin, and University dons.¹ I now proceed to give documentary evidence as to this statement, culled from the columns of *Notes and Queries*.

DUMB BELL.—The origin of this name for the pair of well-known heavy leaden weights used for muscular exercises, is probably little known. They take their name, by analogy, from a machine consisting of a rough, heavy, wooden fly-wheel with a rope passing through, and round a spindle, which projects from one side, the whole apparatus being secured by stanchions to the ceiling of a room, and set in motion like a church bell, till it acquired sufficient impetus to carry the gymnast up and down, and to bring the muscles of the arms into play, though in a less wholesome and more dangerous manner than that now in use by means of its leaden successors. A specimen of the old-fashioned dumb bell still exists in New College, Oxford, though long removed from its original position. (SIGMA. *Notes and Queries*, 2nd series, vol. xii, p. 45. 1861.)

DUMB BELL.—It seems strange that this name should have been given to a thing which has not the slightest resemblance to a bell. . . . It was probably such an apparatus as that described by Addison in No. 115 of the *Spectator* (1711). He says:—"I exercise myself an hour every morning upon a dumb bell that is placed in a corner of my room, and pleases me the more because it does everything I require of it in the most profound silence. My landlady and her daughters are so well acquainted with my hours of exercise that they never come into my room to disturb me while I am ringing."

Franklin, writing to a friend in 1787 (*Life of Benjamin Franklin*, &c., by Bigelow, 1881, vol. iii, p. 370), speaks of his using a machine similar, apparently, to that mentioned in the *Spectator*. He says:—"I live temperately, drink no wine, and use daily the exercise of the dumb bell." Observe, not dumb bells. By the beginning of the present century the dumb bells, as we now know them, had come into use. In *The Miseries of Human Life*, 1807, p. 38, Mr. Sensitive enumerates among exercises: "To keep yourself alive . . . rolling the gravel walks . . . cutting wood . . . working the dumb bells, or some such irrational exertions."

That the use of what we now call a dumb bell should have superseded the cumbersome machine above described is natural enough; but it is curious that a name quite applicable to the machine should have been transferred to an implement utterly unlike it, merely because both were used with the same object of aiding bodily exercise. (J. DIXON. *Notes and Queries*, 7th series, vol. vi, p. 282. 1888.)

I regret to say that all efforts to get particulars of the

¹ Lord Sackville recollects that when a boy he used to fasten a stick to the end of the rope of the Knole Dumb

Bell, and swing up and down on it. *Journal*, vol. lii, p. 46.

dumb bell at New College have failed, as the following letter from the Rev. W. A. Spooner will show :—

I have been having a careful search made in College for the dumb bell. I am afraid all traces of it have disappeared. One or two of the servants remember something of the kind kept in a lumber-room under the Hall, but at the time a passage was made under the Hall this lumber-room was cleared out, and then I fear the dumb bell was broken up; at any rate, no one has seen it since. I am sorry so interesting a relic should have perished.

APPENDIX.

The enquiry about the New College dumb bell brought to light a dumb bell apparatus, which is described in a letter of Mr. E. J. Day, of the Senior Bursar's office, at New College, who kindly interested himself in the search there :

There is in the tower a dumb bell apparatus, used while change-ringing practice is going on. The bell clappers are tied so that the bells themselves are silent, but they ring small bells fixed in the belfry. This apparatus was fixed some few years ago by the University Society of Change-Ringers, but certainly not so far back as 1860.

I have to thank my old friends Mr. Hartshorne and Dr. Raven, the Archdeacon of Cirencester, Mr. Harmer, Mr. Gardner, Rev. W. A. Spooner, Mr. E. J. Day, and Mr. Haverfield, for their kind assistance.