

Essay for the Friends No. 15

Collectors of Ringing Books

Introduction

In *Essay for the Friends No. 9* (2002) I took the opportunity to write about my own collection of books, and make remarks directed at collectors of such material. But, of course, collecting books and other material on church bells and ringing is not a new phenomenon, although there are probably many more collectors of books now than there were in the distant past. What collectors of the present must envy is the opportunities that collectors of a hundred and more years ago must have had of collecting the very early texts. Also, collectors then, as today, bought books that had just been published, which are now very collectable in their own right. Similarly, books published today round out and keep up to date such a collection, and will be considered very collectable in a hundred years time. In this essay some of the early collections that are represented in the Central Council Library are discussed, as are the collectors themselves.

The Collectors

It is inevitable that the name of the Rev. H.T. Ellacombe (1790 – 1885) is the first to be mentioned. In his time he was considered the leading authority on bells, and he was a collector of anything to do with bells and change ringing. His material on change ringing, much of which was published as an appendix to his *Church Bells of Devon* (1872), and also as a book in its own right, entitled *Bells of the Church*. He also made an effort to collect text books on change ringing, using his connection as editor of the page on bells and ringing that was published in the

general church paper *Church Bells*. In the issue of 6 January 1872 appeared a paragraph which stated that 'The Editor is authorised to offer a good price for a perfect copy of either of the following early books on Change-Ringing....' The 'early books' were the two issues of *Tintinnalogia*. It is known that he was successful in obtaining a copy of the first issue (1668) but not with the second issue (1671) as the only known copy of the latter is in the Bodleian Library.

Ellacombe's collection was dispersed the year after his death, and I have so far been unable to access a copy of the catalogue: only then will we find out the true extent of his collection. However, as Ellacombe seems to have generally placed a bookplate or some other identifying mark in the front of his books, when come across they can be easily identified, and there are two from his collection in the Central Council Library. One is a copy of J. Powell Powell's treatise on Stedman Triples (1828), and another is a copy of Tyssen's ground-breaking *Church Bells of Sussex* (1864). Over his long life Ellacombe had several versions of his bookplate, starting with one with the earlier spelling 'Ellicombe', and each version went through at least one reworking. Ellacombe's copy of Tyssen's *Church Bells of Sussex* has merely a crudely printed label, rather than a bookplate, preserved when the book was rebound in modern times. It also bears the fine bookplate of A.H. Cocks, with a MS note that the book had been bought at the sale of Ellacombe's books in 1886. Those interested in the different versions of Ellacombe's bookplate can find details in my article on Ellacombe that appeared in *The Bookplate Journal* Vol. 1 Number 2 (N.S.), September 2003. There are so many versions that this is a collecting field in itself!

The nucleus of the Central Council Library was a number of books from the library of Sir Arthur Heywood first President of

the Council. He died in 1916, and bequeathed his ringing books to the Cambridge University Guild. It was decided that the books that the Guild did not want could form the basis of a library for the Central Council and so the surplus was donated to the Central Council in 1920 to form the nucleus of a library.

However, there are a number of collectors whose books are better represented in the Central Council Library, and during the course of the preparation of this paper the most interesting person that has been researched is the Rev. William Meredith Morris. The son of a farmer, he was born at Pontfaen, Pembrokeshire in about 1868. This is in the northern, Welsh, part of the county, and he was bilingual in English and Welsh. What he did when he reached mature years I have not found out, but it is likely to have been something musical. In 1891 he married Mary Phillips, from Jeffreston, in the non-Welsh speaking part of Pembrokeshire. Whatever his earlier career, he had a call to the church, and was ordained deacon in 1895 and priest in 1896. He served as curate for Treherbert, at the top of the Rhondda, from 1895 to 1899, and then at Llangynwyd, Glamorgan from 1899 to 1908. However, at the time of the 1901 census he was living at Abergwynfi, some miles from Llangynwyd. In 1908 he became vicar of Clydach Vale, a side valley of the Rhondda, north-west of Tonypany, where he was incumbent until his death in March 1921. This was reported in *The Times* of 3 March 1921:

'Vicar and Violin Maker. The death took place yesterday of the Rev. W. Meredith Morris, vicar of St. Thomas, Clydach Vale, one of the most popular figures in the Rhondda. He had achieved fame as a maker and player of the violin, the construction of which he had made a life study, travelling extensively on the Continent. In a little workshop adjoining the vicarage he made with his own hands many fine instruments, and he wrote several works on the violin.'

Among those books on the violin was one entitled *British Violin Makers Classical and Modern*, first published in 1904 and an enlarged edition of 1920. This is still in print, and is one of the authorities quoted in *Groves' Musical Dictionary*. Another production was a 32-page booklet on wandering fiddlers.

All this is much removed from bells and ringing, and so far nothing has come to light to suggest that Morris was ever a ringer, but it may have been his connection with Llangynwyd which stimulated his interest in bells and caused him to collect books on bells. In 1893 the church at Llangynwyd was drastically restored, and the six bells in the tower were rehung in a new frame by John Warner and Sons. It is likely that this encouraged the ringing of the bells, although nothing in the way of change ringing was reported in *Bell News*. When Morris became curate a few years later his interest may well have been stimulated by this. Whatever the reason, he began to collect books on bells, although most of these were in foreign languages, no doubt collected on his extensive travels on the Continent. It must be wondered how Morris could afford his travels, as he did not come from a moneyed background, and his stipend at Clydach Vale was only £200 p.a. While there must have been books on other musical subjects in Morris's collection, it is those on bells that concern us here. These came to the attention of H.B. Walters, probably through his known acquaintanceship with Arthur Wright, the author of the *Church Bells of Monmouthshire*, and Walters passed on the information to Edwin H. Lewis, who bought them as a collection, I am unable to say if Lewis bought all of the books on bells that Morris had collected.

This brings us to the subject of Edwin H. Lewis, a notable figure in the ringing establishment. Born in 1881, he studied Mechanical Sciences at Cambridge, where he graduated in 1903.

He had learned to ring in 1900, and so it is not surprising that he joined the Cambridge University Guild in 1901, which he represented on the Central Council from 1908 until 1936. He was President of the Council from 1930 until 1957, and during his Presidency he became an honorary member, followed, in 1951, by being made a life member. He died in 1963. Although he was a good change ringer and interested in the theory of change ringing (he published an article on spliced extents of minor in 1912) his main legacy – apart from his books! – was his work on the forces of bells on towers, and the advice he gave on bell restoration in his capacity as a member of the Towers and Belfries Committee. A summary of his experiments and theoretical work on the stresses of ringing bells was published in Sir Arthur Heywood's 1914 book *Bell Towers and Bell Hanging. An Appeal to Architects*. This work is as valid today as it was then and the Central Council Library is privileged to hold Lewis's MS for this work.

As implied above, Edwin Lewis was a keen collector of books, and bought a considerable number of books from the collection of the Rev. W.M. Morris, mostly in foreign languages, including some very early books. These books stayed in his collection until 1955, when Lewis donated 58 books in foreign languages to the Central Council library; the bulk of these, if not all, were from Morris's collection, and many of these can easily be recognized from the fact that they had been rebound by Morris in a dark red cloth, now faded to a dull brown. At the same time Lewis gave two other books, the most important being a copy of Owen's *Church Bells of Huntingdonshire*, and a list of the donation appeared in *The Ringing World* on 23 March 1956. In 1960 (the year inferred from the librarian's report given at the 1961 Central Council meeting) Edwin Lewis gave other books to the library, among which were a copy of Stedman's *Campanalogia* (1677), the 1702, 1733 and 1766

(Monk's) editions of *Campanalogia Improved*, and a copy of the 1788 *Clavis Campanalogia*. Three of these – *Campanalogia* (1677) and the 1702 and 1766 editions of *Campanalogia Improved* - he had obtained from Morris's library. The copy of *Campanalogia* bears Morris's name, the date July 5 1910, and the comment:

'After a diligent search extending over many years I have at last succeeded in finding a copy of the rare first edition.'

The copy of the 1702 edition of *Campanalogia Improved* was dated at Clydach Vale Vicarage in 1908, and the copy of Monk's edition was dated September 28th 1909.

But the rarest book given to the Central Council Library by E.H. Lewis was one of a donation of four items made at the Central Council meeting at Cardiff in 1962. This was a copy of *Tintinnalogia* (1668) and was received on behalf of the Central Council by Fred Sharpe, who remarked that there was a copy of the 1671 edition in the Bodleian Library, and that they would like to get their hands on this one! Morris had dated this one on January 11th. 1911, adding the comment:

'Paid Schultze, of Edinburgh, five guineas for this charming copy of a very rare book.'

Rare indeed, as at that time there were only three known copies, a fourth having only been discovered in recent years.

So far there is little evidence of 'County' books being in the Rev. W.M. Morris's collection, but there was another collection that came into the Central Council Library at about the same time as Morris's books in foreign languages, this time containing many 'County' books. This donation was made by Mrs. Joan Padmore, grand-daughter of Thomas North. Whether this was North's working collection is not sure – he didn't seem to mark his books – and it included such books as Deedes and Walters' *Church Bells of Essex* (1909), published more than twenty years

after North's death. But there were items which were North's own, and these included four MS notebooks, two on Lincolnshire bells and one each on the bells of Leicestershire and Huntingdonshire. Although both of the Lincolnshire notebooks were credited to North, I have demonstrated that one was actually written by the Rev. J.T. Fowler. (See *The Ringing World* 29 June 2001, p.650 for a full analysis.) Other personal items are proof copies of certain of North's books on church bells, those of Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, and Northamptonshire. Some of these are interleaved with blank paper, there are MS corrections, and there are later MS additions and newspaper cuttings. This donation was also acknowledged in *The Ringing World* of 23 March 1956, on the same page as the list of books in foreign languages donated by E.H. Lewis.

Conclusion

At present, when books are received from the same source, they will be listed sequentially in the numbering system, so they can be easily identified. Thus the books received from Jean Sanderson's extensive collection and listed in last year's Newsletter all have consecutive numbers. However, this system only dates from the 1960s, when the stock was numbered for the first time, and items from earlier collections are not consecutively numbered, making them difficult to identify. The material for this essay has been obtained either by looking through the stock – and I find this a delight! – or from records such as those printed in *The Ringing World*.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jean Dobson, for much help in sorting out the details of the career of the Rev. William Meredith Morris, of whom more deserves to be known. Jean is one of our group

of regular researchers of Hereford(shire) history that uses the extensive local collections in Hereford Reference Library.



Henry Thomas Ellacombe.



(Above) The second version of Ellacombe's bookplate
(Below) A fine seal armorial bookplate, dating from
Ellacombe's later years.

Rev. H. T. Ellacombe,
Clyst St, George.

TOPSHAM.



Alfred Heneage Cocks

*Bt. at Sale of late Rev. H. T. Ellacombe's
Books, May 14. 1886.*

(13)

Cocks's bookplate, with a note recording the provenance
of his copy of Tyssen's *Church Bells of Sussex* (1864).

Wm. Meredith Morris

July 5: 1910.

After a diligent search
extending over many
years I have at last
succeeded in finding
this copy of the rare
first edition.

Wm. Meredith Morris's charming inscription in the front
of his copy of *Campanalogia* (1677).

Br. P. H. L.
Vol. 10 p. 200

W^m Meredith Morris.
Clydach Vale Vicarage.
January 20th 1911.

[Paid Schulze, of Edinburgh
five guineas for this
charming copy of a very
rare book.]

Edwin H. Lewis

Rare indeed! The inscription in the front of the Central Council Library copy of *Tintinnalogia* (1668).