

## Essay for the Friends No. 8

### THE REVD. H.T. ELLACOMBE AND HIS CAMPANOLOGICAL WORKS

The biographical details of the Rev. H.T. Ellacombe are well known. He was born in 1790, and after starting a career as an engineer, later took Holy Orders. First he was curate of Cricklade, and then from 1817 to 1835 was curate-in-charge of Bitton: in the latter year he became vicar. He was preferred to the family living of Clyst St. George in 1850 which he held until his death in July 1885. Fuller details of his life can be found in *Giants of the Exercise* (2nd edition, 1999).

Ellacombe became interested in the history of bells and ringing at a relatively early age, probably stimulated by the considerable struggle that he had with the ringers at Bitton. Certainly his interests in belfry reform and antiquarian matters concerning the belfry developed together. When he gave a talk on church bells to the Bristol and West of England Architectural Society on 10 December 1849 he prefaced this talk with some remarks on belfries and bellringers. His paper on church bells was published in the *Report* of the Society, but his other remarks were published separately as a pamphlet by George Bell of Fleet Street, London in 1850, entitled *Practical Remarks on Belfries and Ringers*, costing 1s. (5p). This embodied his experience in dealing with the ringers at Bitton and gave a description of the hammers that he invented to enable the bells to be chimed by a single person, and included the set of rules that he drew up for the ringers at Bitton to follow. The pamphlet was not illustrated.

There is no indication of how many copies were printed but in 1859 it was either reprinted or reissued with a new title page, which stated that it now had an appendix on chiming and

illustrations. The publisher was Bell and Daldy. The appendix was separately paginated and dated 1860 and described the action of his chiming hammers, with seven illustrative plates. Six of the plates show bells and their method of hanging, including the full wheel with the rope passing through the sole at the 12 o'clock position and a 'fillet' or bolt through the shrouding at the appropriate position to cause the hand stroke. Five of these six plates seem to have originated as illustrations for his lecture in 1849, and the sixth was taken from a Warners' catalogue. The seventh plate was cut by a Mr. Brown of Brompton in February 1859, from a drawing made by Ellacombe, especially to illustrate this appendix on chiming, and shows Ellacombe's chiming apparatus. In the inscription band of the bell in the plate are the words BITTON CHIMES 1821, indicating the place and date when the hammers were first set up. In his history of Bitton, published in 1881, he states:

'In the basement of the tower is a manual within a case for chiming the bells for services by means of a hammer striking the inside of the bell. This was set up in 1822. The method was suggested to me by Sam Watts, a clever workman, and is supposed to be the first thing of that sort. Since that time the contrivance has been set up in about 200 towers.'

The proper second edition of *Practical Remarks...* was published in 1861, but with the Appendix of 1860, again with separate pagination. A third edition, costing 3s. (15p), came out in 1871, being first advertised in the issue of *Church Bells* of 21 October 1871, and it was in this edition that the two sections of the book were first integrated with continuous pagination. Another plate was added, showing Ellacombe's plan for preventing wear of the rope at the fillet, where it doubled back at every stroke. Essentially it was what we now call the fillet or garter hole, but with two cheeks to reduce flexing of the rope.

It was at this period that Warners plagiarised Ellacombe's drawing of his hammers in their catalogue, but substituted a Warner bell for that drawn by Ellacombe. Naturally he was incensed, and wrote a long letter which was published in the *The Builder* on 26 April 1872 and reprinted in *Church Bells* on 11 May 1872. However, it was not until 23 June 1877 that an apology from Warners was published in the pages of *Church Bells*.

A fourth edition of *Practical Remarks...* followed in 1878, of which 500 copies were printed. This was soon sold out, and a fifth edition was produced in 1884, the year before Ellacombe died.

The paper that Ellacombe read to the Bristol and West of England Architectural Society dealt with bells in an antiquarian way, and the content shows that essentially it was taken from published sources. However, the length of his interest in the subject is indicated by the sentence:

'but I have for many years kept a Portfolio marked "Bells," and from it have selected a few loose stray leaves,...

He continued to collect such information.

The first of the major works on bells themselves with which his name is associated is his work on the church bells of Devon. In his seventy-second and seventy-third years he ascended all but one of the towers in Devon to obtain details of the bells. The results were given in a paper that he read to the Exeter Architectural Society on 7 June 1866 and which was printed in the *Transactions* of that body in 1867. The paper included a list of bells in Cornwall that Ellacombe had compiled by post. It was published as a book in 1872, being a straightforward reprint of

the paper but with the numbering of the pages altered to form a separate publication. He clearly took advantage of his portfolio, for he published a supplement entitled *Bells of the Church*, paginated continuously with *Church Bells of Devon*. This supplement contains a wide selection of topics relating to bells and ringing, and still makes fascinating reading today. It was illustrated with 18 plates, the penultimate one showing how a bell is rung at hand- and back-stroke, derived from two plates in Troyte's *Change Ringing* (1869). Subsequently the supplement was issued as a book in its own right, with the pagination of the text (but not of the Errata) appropriately altered, with the main text now starting at page 3. Problems with pagination in the prelims were caused with the insertion of a Preface, as well as two poems dedicated to Ellacombe, one dated 19 June 1872 being written on receipt of Ellacombe's book by the Rev. J.T. Fowler of Durham. Subsequently, the text of a paper by Ellacombe giving further information in the bells of Exeter cathedral, read on 23 January 1873, was included, with, curiously, two consecutive pages numbered 362! The title page for all versions of *Bells of the Church* is dated 1872, although in the case of the final variant mentioned above this is clearly incorrect.

As the mother church of the Diocese, Exeter cathedral was of particular interest to Ellacombe, the bells there having a long and well-documented history. The information that he gathered was published in several parts in the *Transactions* of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society, and these he subsequently integrated and published in book form in 1874. This was reviewed, with an extensive summary, in the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* on 4 December 1874, the review being reprinted in *Church Bells* on 3 April 1875.

The method of obtaining information by post was used by Ellacombe to collect the material for a book on the church bells of Somerset. He first wrote to the incumbent, and in a number of cases, when he was ignored by the incumbent, he obtained the information through the church-wardens, parish clerk or sexton. The results were read as a paper at a meeting of the Somerset Archaeological Society on 24 August 1871 but were afterwards rewritten and lengthened and published in the *Transactions* of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society. It was reprinted in book form in 1875, the opportunity being taken to add another appendix which Ellacombe called *An Olla Podrida of Bell Matters of General Interest*.

Ellacombe's book *Church Bells of Gloucestershire* was produced in the same way as his Somerset book, and the information he collected by post was read as paper before the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society on 4 October 1877, the paper being printed in the Society's *Transactions* for that year. It was reprinted as a book in 1881, again with an appendix, this time called *A Budget of Bell Matters of General Interest*.

The printer of the *Transactions* of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural society was William Pollard of Exeter, and so all of Ellacombe's books described above, with the exception of the various editions of *Practical Remarks..*, were printed by Pollard. The articles and papers from which the books were derived all appeared in the first four volumes of the new series of the *Transactions*.

## MAJOR PUBLICATIONS BY THE REV. H.T. ELLACOMBE

### 1. *Practical Remarks...*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Edition</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<i>Practical Remarks on Belfries and Ringers</i>	1st	1850	No illustrations
<i>Practical Remarks on Belfries and Ringers with an Appendix on Chiming</i>	Reprint or reissue	1859	First edition with new title page and appendix, separate pagination, 7 plates.
do.	2nd	1861	Separate pagination
do.	3rd	1871	Eighth plate added, continuous pagination
do.	4th	1878	500 printed
do.	5th	1884	

There are copies of all editions of *Practical Remarks...* in the Central Council Library, except for the reprint of 1859, the title page of which is taken from a copy in my personal collection.

## 2. Other Works

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Comment</b>
The Church Bells of Devon	1872	Reprint of article in Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society
Bells of the Church	1872	Issued both as an appendix to <i>The Church Bells of Devon</i> and as a book in its own right
The Bells of the Cathedral Church of S. Peter, Exon	1874	Material from articles integrated into a new publication
The Church Bells of Somerset	1875	The appendix Olla Podrida... was continuously paginated and not issued separately
The Church Bells of Gloucestershire	1881	The appendix A Budget of Bell Matters.. was continuously paginated and not issued separately

With the exception of the first printing of the separately paginated *Bells of the Church*, the Library holds copies of all the books listed above, including both printings of *The Church Bells of Devon*. The 1867 printing of *The Church Bells of Devon* is bound with a copy of the later version of *Bells of the Church* with separate pagination, while the 1872 reprint is bound with the continuously paginated version. Details of the first printing of the separately paginated *Bells of the Church* are taken from a copy in my personal collection, bound with a copy of the 1867 printing of *The Church Bells of Devon*.

PRACTICAL REMARKS

ON

BELFRIES AND RINGERS.

BY

THE REV. HENRY THOMAS ELLACOMBE, M.A.,

OF OXFORD COLLEGE, OXFORD; VICAR OF BITTON, CLOUCHESTRESHIRE.

READ WITH A PAPER ON BELLS (OMITTING THE APPENDED RULES) BEFORE  
THE BRISTOL ARCHITECTURAL SOCIETY, ON MONDAY, DEC. 10, 1849.

LONDON:

GEORGE BELL, 186, FLEET STREET.

BRISTOL:

JOHN RIDLER, HIGH STREET.

MDCCL.

PRACTICAL REMARKS  
ON  
BELFRIES AND RINGERS;  
WITH AN  
APPENDIX ON CHIMING.

With Illustrations.

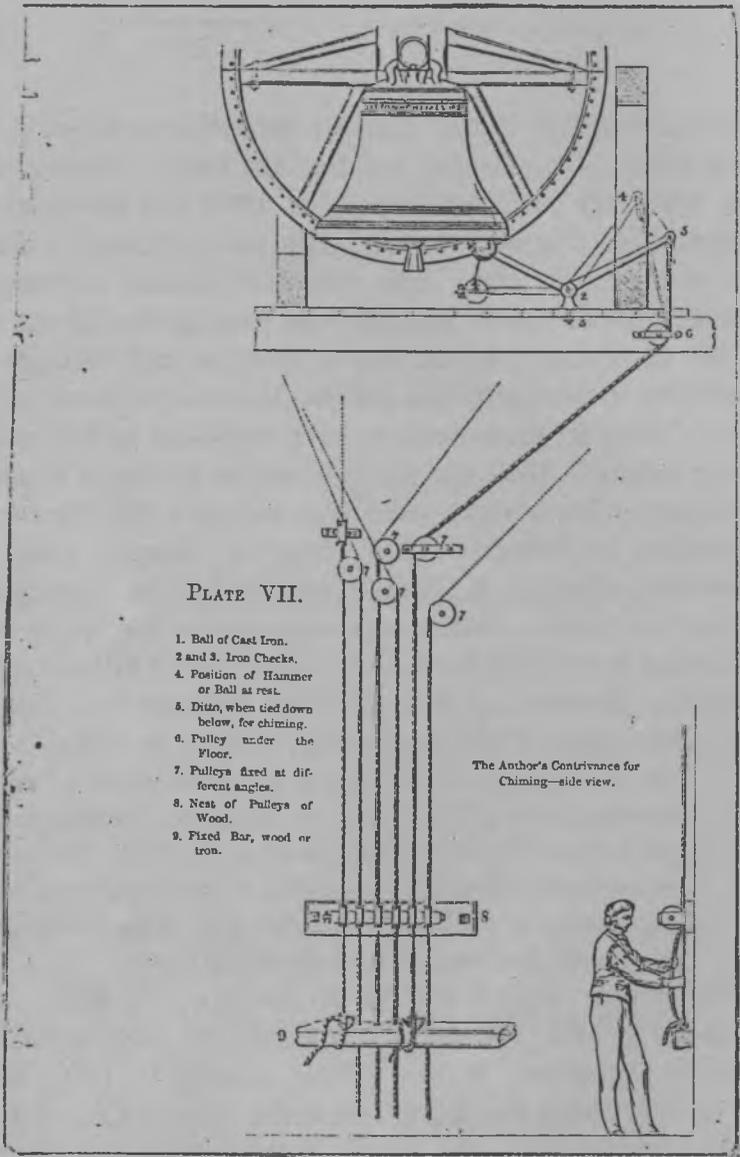
BY  
THE REV. HENRY THOMAS ELLACOMBE, M.A.,  
OF GRIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD; RECTOR OF CLYET ST. GEORGE, DEVONSHIRE;  
FORMERLY VICAR OF BITTON, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.



LONDON:  
BELL AND DALDY, 186, FLEET STREET.

MDCCLX.

The title page of the 1859 printing of *Practical Remarks on Belfries and Ringers*;... (From the personal collection of J.C. Eisel).



The plate made from Ellacombe's drawing of his hammers, afterwards plagiarised by Warners.

THE  
CHURCH BELLS OF DEVON:

WITH

A LIST OF THOSE IN CORNWALL,

TO WHICH IS ADDED

A SUPPLEMENT

ON VARIOUS MATTERS RELATING TO THE

“BELLS OF THE CHURCH,”

BY

THE REV. H. T. ELLACOMBE, M.A., F.S.A.

OF GRIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD; RECTOR OF CLYST ST. GEORGE, AND  
DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE EARL OF HARRINGTON.

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“*For clamantis—Dirigitte biam Domini.*”

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EXETER:  
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY WILLIAM POLLARD, NORTH STREET.  
1872.

# BELLS OF THE CHURCH:

A SUPPLEMENT

TO THE

“CHURCH BELLS OF DEVON,”

BY

THE REV. H. T. ELLACOMBE, M.A., F.S.A.

OF CRUEL COLLEGE, OXFORD; RECTOR OF CLYST ST. GEORGE, AND  
DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE EARL OF HARRINGTON.

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“*Vox clamantis—Dirigitur sicut Dominus.*”

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EXETER:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY WILLIAM POLLARD, NORTH STREET.  
1872.

THE  
CHURCH BELLS OF SOMERSET,

TO WHICH IS ADDED

AN OLLA PODRIDA  
OF BELL MATTERS OF GENERAL INTEREST.

BY

THE REV. HENRY THOMAS ELLACOMBE, M.A., F.S.A.,

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ARCHÆOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND, &c. ;  
OF OUNEL COLLEGE, OXFORD, RECTOR OF CLYST ST. GEORGE, DEVON ;  
AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE EARL OF HARRINGTON.

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"Oh ! what a preacher is the time-worn tower,  
Recalling great Sermons with its iron tongue !"

—*Old Poem.*

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EXETER:  
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY WILLIAM POLLARD, NORTH STREET.  
1875.

THE  
CHURCH BELLS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

A BUDGET

OF BELL MATTERS OF GENERAL INTEREST

BY

THE REV. H. T. ELLACOMBE, M.A., F.S.A.,

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND, &c.,  
OF CHIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD,  
RECTOR OF CLYST S. GEORGE, DEVON.

"Oh! what a preacher is the time-worn tower,  
Reading great Sermons with its iron tongue!"  
OLD POEM.

"He that hears bells will make them sound what he list,  
As the soule thinketh, so the bell clinketh."

BURTON'S ANATOMY.

EXETER:  
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY WILLIAM FOLLARD, NORTH STREET,  
1881.