

THE "REMARKS AND COLLECTIONS" OF THOMAS HEARNE

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Essay No. 23 for the Friends of the Central Council Library

February 2016



THOMAS HEARNE M.A. of Edmund-Hall Oxon.

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Scholar, editor and publisher, staunch friend and persistent enemy, the Oxford antiquarian Thomas Hearne maintained a daily record, not so much of events as of his interests and observations. From 1705 onwards, when he was twenty-seven years old, his method was to carry a notebook, in which to jot things down immediately; there are 114 of these, often referred to as his "Remarks and Collections", although Hearne himself used no particular title, other than "these matters", or occasionally, "this memoir".

The notebooks contain a full account of his work, of course, the editing and publishing of ancient texts. There are drafts and copies of correspondence, and accounts. The non-juring principles that dominated his life are powerfully expressed, with sustained contempt for the usurping Hanoverians. The University, its customs and its people are portrayed without mercy. And withal, to use a Hearneian expression, there's wonderful trivia: stories, old rhymes and sayings, reported conversations, rumours, gossip, all with a rare gift for epithet and invective: "Sep 27 1709 - Milles Bp of Waterford has been at the Bathe for about a quarter of a yeare ... He sneaks and sharks about at Bathe, where the Clergy and honest men do not care to keep him company. Yet this thin, meagre, illnatur'd, illiterate, low-church Bp is courting one Mrs Pontin, a Gentlewoman of about 17 years of Age, and reckon'd to be the most celebrated Beauty at Bathe.."

And yet the memoir remains virtually unknown: the complete text still awaits publication. The ringing community is indeed fortunate that Canon Ellacombe and later writers have presented their readers with a selection of the many entries to do with church bells, but these mostly concern just two episodes towards the end of Hearne's life, the peal attempts by "the Londoners" in 1733, and by Oxford ringers the following year. Valuable as they may be, there are others meriting attention.

RINGING AND TOLLING

Ringling and tolling was part of everyday life at Oxford, and all the way through there are entries that "the bell rang out" at a church, or College, or more than one, to announce a death. Public and private celebrations are rung for, and paid for, more or less generously. On 28 Sep 1711 there was the installation of Dr Atterbury as Dean and Dr Smallridge as Canon of Christ Church: "At 8 Clock (as is usual upon these occasions) little-Tom (for so they call the biggest of the 10 bells in the Cathedral) rung out 'till 9. The Great-Bell (commonly call'd Great-Tom) over the Great Gate should have rung, if the Motion were not very dangerous (as certain it is, as they have experienced in former times) to the Fabrick in which it hangs."

Rings are augmented - "They have lately turn'd New College 8 bells into ten, by adding two lesser; they are now turning Magd. Coll. six into eight." (18 June 1711) – and at least one is not: "Mr Sacheveral (who died two or three years since at his House in Cumnor Parish) as he was an excellent Ringer, so he was an extraordinary Judge of Ringing. When Dr Shippen was Vice-Chancellour of Oxford, 'twas proposed to have St Marie's six bells in Oxon made either eight or ten

Dr Shippen was mightily for it, & referred the management to Sacheveral. Upon wch Mr Brookland (my Printer & a good ringer himself) went over on purpose about it to Sacheveral & desired him to go forthwith to Dr Shippen, but Sacheveral (who said, if they were made either eight or ten, provided the fifth were new cast, it would be the best Peal in England) neglecting to go, ye matter was dropt & wholly laid aside" (6 May 1727).

Men of quality are more or less generous to ringers: on his arrival in "a Coach and Six", Sir John Smith "gave the Ringers of St Marie's three Guineas, three Guineas to the ringers of St Aldate's (where he and his Lady lodge & where she hath been for some time), eight Guineas to the Ringers of four other Churches in Oxford ... to say nothing of other Extravagancies, plainly shewing him to be touch'd, as 'tis thought he is." (24 April 1728)

There's ringing for royal occasions, and after the accession of George I no good word for any of it – "This being the Day on which the late Queen Anne died, and on which George Duke & Elector of Brunswick usurped the English Throne, there was

very little Ringing in Oxford. The Bells only jumbled, being pull'd by a parcel of Children and silly People: but there was not so much as one good Peal rung in Oxford." (1 Aug 1715)

AUTHORS AND BOOKSELLERS

In the entry for 17 Jan 1718/19, "Dr John Blackbourne, formerly Fellow of Brasen-Nose Coll. & now Rector in Northamptonsh. of one of the best Livings in that College Gift" is "a mean poor Scholar". However - "This Dr., tho' so poor a scholar, hath, however, a good mechanical Head, & was once a famous Ringer, & is said to have been the Joint Author of a Book called Campanalogia. He is good also at curing smoaking Chimneys."

"Anno 1733 came out in London, a little book in 12o, being the third edition of Campanalogia, or the Art of Ringing ..." (9 July 1734) This is "Campanalogia Improv'd", and the bookseller who promoted the first edition in 1702, In George Sawbridge, had made an earlier appearance, in disgrace: "Mr Sawbridge the Bookseller is found guilty of Reprinting ye Memorial of ye Church of England with a pretended answer, and Mr Pettis is also found guilty of writing ye said Answer" (21 Feb 1706) ... "Mr Pettis was order'd in the Court of Queen's Bench to stand in the Pillory three times ... At ye same time Mr Sawbridge ye Bookseller was fin'd 200 Marks for printing ye same, & order'd to be expos'd in Westm. Hall, with a Paper affix'd to his Hat signifying his Crime." (27 April 1706)

CANON ELLACOMBE'S "SUPPLEMENT"

And there's the change-ringing, noticed by Ellacombe and included in the "Supplement of Bell Matters of General Interest" appended to his "Church Bells of Gloucestershire" (1881). The first is the account, at some length, of the visit in 1733 of the ringers from London, their arrival "on Whitsunday last" after walking the whole way, their excellent ringing - "most surprizingly fine, without the least fault from beginning to end, such as never before was in Oxford" - and their misfortunes, with the tenor falling into the pit at Christ Church, and ropes breaking at Magdalen and New College. (May 24). Then comes the peal by Oxford ringers "for a wager", and the series of attempts for long length of "6876 Cator changes", pointing the contrast between the standards of "the Londoners" and their own.

Other material is given, including the notice the Campanalogia of 1733, with its reference to "one Annables" - Benjamin Annable - "putting out a new edition of the same book, which 'tis said will be the best book of its kind that ever yet was printed on the subject. This said Annables is one of the London Ringers that rang at Oxford on Whitsuntide in 1733. He rang the 9th bell, and is judged to understand ringing as well as, if not better than, any man in the world." There's a set of ringers' rules from Hornsey in "rustick verses". Also, "I hear the Oxford Ringers rang this Whitsuntide above 30000 changes excellently well at Warwick." - this entry is for 31 May 1735, just ten days before his death.

THE HISTORY AND ART OF CHANGE RINGING”

In his “History and Art”, Ernest Morris was content to follow Ellacombe. - He acknowledges this in an introductory paragraph, then gives the entries of the Londoners and the Oxford peal attempts, with a few words along the way – for instance, on the Londoners' journey, “One wonders how many London ringers of today would emulate their enthusiastic ancestors of theirs, and *walk* such a distance for a week's ringing.” This is in Chapter V, “Ancient Ringing Societies: Norfolk, Suffolk and the Midlands.” The paragraph on the third edition of *Campanalogia Improved*, with the reference to “Annables”, is placed in Chapter XIII, “Famous Ringers, Composers, etc.” After all, Morris's subject was change-ringing. The Ellacombe extracts furnished what he required.

A CREATIVE APPROACH

The method of J A Trollope was very different. He began with the Oxford peals, as had Ellacombe and Morris, in a series of “Notes By The Way” during 1927. As often in his writings, there is a poetic imagination at work: on the Londoner's walk, for instance - “If you have to walk a long distance, there is no better time than Whitsuntide when the days are long and the weather generally bright and fine, and when English country is at its best” (RW 4 March 1927). He is well able to fill in gaps: for example, in their peal attempts “it was pretty certain that Grandsire Caters would have been rung – a method to which Annable had given much attention.” (11 March).

A creative approach leads to a surmise on one of the attempts for 6876 in which “a bob was missed being called before they had got to two hundred” (28 September 1734): “I should rather like to know how he knew the bobs were missed: He had a keen ear, and was a very careful listener, and perhaps this is the first account we have of a peal being taken down outside the tower ... It was not till some time after that he got to know what did happen in the tower, but he records the omission of one bob the day after the attempt was made” (1 April) For one thing, “missed” might mean simply that the bob was late, rather than a miscall; also, Hearne may well have heard what had happened on the day, for all he recorded the details later.

More creativity appears in “Oxford Bells and Bellringing” (RW 5 Oct 1940), with the remarkable suggestion that Hearne's interest in ringing arose from his relationship with one Thomas Wells, a schoolfellow at Bray. “To young Hearne, Tommy Wells, with his great physical strength, his skill in ringing, and his sunny and lovable temper, was a schoolboy hero, and though, so far as we know, he never rang himself, yet, for the sake of his old friend, he took a lifelong interest in the art.” The supposition might just as well be made that Hearne's interest in change-ringing began in making contact with Joseph Brookland, the “good ringer” who by 1727 had taken the place of John Rance as his printer – this certainly would explain the lack of earlier comment.

“THEY RANG SO EXCELLENTLY WELL ...”

A most interesting entry appeared in “The Ringing World”, as part of “Oxford Society – Bicentenary Celebration” (RW 6 Oct 1933), an account of the hitherto unnoticed first attempt for the 6876. This was at Christ Church, on Easter Monday 1734, and, in marked contrast to later attempts, the ringing came in for Hearne's warmest praise: “They agreed to begin at ten clock exactly in the Morning, and some of them sent notice of it a few days before to me ... at a quarter, or a little more, after ten they began the changes, and continued till above a quarter after one in the afternoon, when the rope of the ninth bell, some how or other, happening to twist, the ringer of that bell, Arthur Lloyd, was out, & thereupon they all stopped of a sudden ... which I was very sorry for. For indeed they rang so excellently well, that I was even ravished with it ... I could observe but six faults, besides the grand one (which was the seventh & put them out) in all their ringing, which six faults, however, had they performed the whole, I should have looked upon as so inconsiderable, that I should have thought the peal might be said to have been rung without faults...”

This was either overlooked or ignored by both Ellacombe and Trollope, for reasons which can only be a matter for conjecture: that Trollope was unaware of it, composing his “Oxford Bells etc” just seven years later, seems unlikely.

THE LAST ENTRIES

In 1735, Hearne was a sick man. "Being indisposed with a Diarrhoea", he had, been unable to go out to listen to the last unsuccessful attempt for the 6876, on 12 March, and again on 22 March, for the same reason, when the peal was scored. The condition persisted: on Easter Sunday he considered himself better, but in less than a week there was a relapse. Even so, he endeavoured to continue his work - "I am now printing Joannis Beveri Chronicon from an ancient MS in the Harleian Library" (10 May) - and almost to the end, bells were in his thoughts, with the entry on 31 May quoted by Ellacombe.

He died on 10 June 1735: in due course, the notebooks were acquired by the Bodleian Library. An edition in eleven volumes was published by the Oxford Historical Society, somewhat abridged - and expurgated - the phrase "Remarks and Collections" having been coined as its title. Ellacombe and his successors may have been selective, and almost certainly there is more to be discovered in the unpublished material: even so, thanks to their efforts, ringers can pride themselves on knowing more than most about this very singular man and his remarkable "memoir".

Notes:

The eleven volumes of "Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne", printed for the Oxford Historical Society at the Clarendon Press, appeared over a period of more than thirty years (1885-1921), during which editorial policy, and conventions, were subject to change. In the earlier volumes, contractions and abbreviations are transcribed literally - "Ye" for "The", "wch" for "which", "yt" for "that", and so forth - which I have endeavoured to follow: later, there's some discreet modernisation. Also, "rung" in modern usage is "rang"; in telling the time, "o'clock" is "clock" - "ten clock", for instance - and the excellent word "jambled" is as printed.

The series is available online at "archive.org", as is Canon H T Ellacombe's "Church Bells of Gloucestershire".

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