

St. Canice's Cathedral Bells

By J. S. Gibb

THE first mention of the bells of St. Canice that I can find is in Friar Clyn's account of the falling of the belfry tower in 1332. He speaks of the disaster as involving the roof and the bells and as being a horrid and pitiful spectacle to the beholder. The five holes in the groining of the transept would seem to indicate that on the rebuilding of the tower, bells were again rehung in the belfry. In 1630 in the book of Kilkenny the accounts of the Corporation show that a parish bell and a sanctus bell were provided at a cost of £6 4s. 0d. assessed on the parish. The parish bell was cast by a Welshman (not necessarily from Wales). The bells of St. Canice's were taken away by Cromwell. Bishop Williams, in his book written in 1661, speaks of "the five great and goodly bells taken away." This Bishop Williams had a new bell cast, he paid 15d. per lb. for the two broken bells of St. Mary's, and he mentioned that he should have only paid 10d. per lb. and puts the blame on the Church warden. The bell was to cost £120 and actually cost £154.

In 1658 in the White Book of Kilkenny a long verbose resolution was passed about the repair of the Cathedral and mention that one of the things necessary was a good ring of bells. Nothing seems to have been done at the time, but in the disbursements for the year 1673 appear the following items, among others, Walter Barry, for Bell Metal, £6 8s. 4d.; Thomas Barry, for Iron work for tower, £8 18s. 0d.; Mr. Roche, Block Fire, £6 12s. 0d.; spent going to Callan for cract metal for bells, 2/6; spent going to Durrrow for timber for bell frames, 5/6.

Bishop Parry, in 1634, wrote to the Mayor, Aldermen and citizens of Kilkenny about the bells, referring to the Duke of Ormonde who had promised to give £100 and also

to use his influence to get metal from Callan. He gave a list of expenses which amounted to £225 13s. 4d. for casting, timber work, etc. In another letter he states that the cost was £246, and that he had the bells done mainly at his own expense. Some confusion is evident as is often the case in money matters even to-day. The six bells were cast probably in the Churchyard or nearby by a company of bell founders from the West of England, either from Salisbury or Bristol district. They included William and Roger Perdue and Tobias and William Covey. This party of bell ringers came to Ireland to cast bells for St. Patrick's and Christ Church in Dublin, and Limerick Cathedral. It is quite evident from the size of the bells in the various places that the same moulds or patterns were used for St. Canice's. They also cast two bells for the Duke of Ormonde in 1682, one for Dunmore Church which was removed in 1875 and is now in St. Mary's, and one for the Castle clock, which is still in use there. The six bells cast by the Perdues and the Coveys were in use until 1724, when the 4 and 5 (counting from the treble) were re-cast because of cracks appearing. The bells weighed from $22\frac{1}{2}$ cwts. to 7 cwts. The number 6 bell was probably cast from the bell provided by Bishop Williams. The bells had inscriptions on them naming Bishop Parry and the bell-founders. The bells re-cast in 1724 were done by Joseph Kipling of Portsmouth, a very excellent founder.

In 1773, the Corporation Book of Kilkenny records a visit by the Mayor and Aldermen to the Lord Bishop of Ossory asking him to provide a grand set of bells, and offering to pay the balance between the cost and the money obtained from the old bells.

The ring was evidently badly looked after and four of the six bells showed damage. In 1859 Thomas Hodges of Dublin was employed by the Dean and Chapter to recast the damaged bells, but he had not the ability to cast single bells in tune, and so he broke up all the bells and recast them. He used moulds of his own and Mr. Richd. Langrishe pertinently remarked that he had not the wit to use the excellent moulds of the Perdue Company. Against

this, at the time the bells were recast, experts in Dublin pronounced them perfect and the most musical peal in Ireland. Another and later opinion will be given later.

All the bells have from time to time been chipped to tune them. In 1892 the bells were added to by the present treble and No. 2. Cast by Mr. M. Byrne of Dublin (still casting), the treble is fair, but No. 2, though it has been extensively chipped, is not a good bell. In 1908 Mr. Lindoff of St. Patrick's made a report on the bells—read report—but nothing was done until 1925, when, after ringing a muffled peal on the bells, which left the ringers down and out, I was authorised to make a report on the mechanical condition of the bells. The then Dean, our present Bishop, on reading the report, said that if the condition was half as bad as stated they would have to be rehung. Mr. Lindoff came down and reported again, and finally Messrs. Mears and Stainbank took the bells down and rehung them in the most modern fashion, including ball-bearings on all pulleys and bearings. The bells are a pleasure to ring, the go, as it is called, is very easy. The belfry is rather noisy but we are used to it.

The ringing of the bells is a labour of love, and it is to be hoped that the bells of St. Canice will never be silent.

(Authorities consulted: Lord Ormonde, Prim and Graves, R. Langrishe, Joyce, Minute Book of St. Canice's Change Ringers, etc.).

KEARNEY'S TOWER

A peal of six bells were cast by Meares and Stainbank of Whitechapel, in 1854, and were placed in a tower at Blanchville, Dunbell. There is no record of these bells being rung by change ringers, but the bells were hung for ringing. The clock in the tower struck the quarters and hours on them. Within the past three years the bells have been placed in a new Church of the Augustinian Fathers at Limerick, and are now being rung there. One of the Fathers has learned to ring, the first in Ireland.

CHANGE RINGING

The first published work on change ringing was by Fabian Stedman, a publisher of Cambridge. The work was published in 1668 and was called *Tintinnologia* (*Campanology*). It is certain, however, that change ringing had been practised for some time previous, but not before the 17th century, though there is a reference of some kind of concerted ringing in a book entitled, *Ralph Roister Doister* in 1553.

The St. Canice's Society of Change Ringers rang a variety of plain bob changes to illustrate the second part of the talk on Change Ringing.

The National Bank

(From the "Kilkenny Moderator," January 6th, 1886)

FIFTY years ago the first branch of the National Bank of Ireland ("O'Connell's Bank" as it was then called) was established in the City of Kilkenny, under the management of the late Mr. James Morris, who was succeeded by his son, Mr. James Morris, the present popular and esteemed Manager of the branch (and brother of Mr. Simon Morris, J.P., Patrick Street). The first local directors who were associated with the late Mr. Morris in the establishment and working of the branch, were the late Mr Edmund Smithwick, the late Mr. John McCraith and the late Mr. Edmund Doyle.