

The bells of Perthshire: St John's Kirk, Perth

R W M Clouston*

ABSTRACT

The 63 bells belonging to this church, catalogued in this paper, include eight from before the Reformation, a greater number than from any other British church. One of these, the oldest tower bell in Perthshire, dates from about 1340. The main carillon, of 35 bells, contains an exceptionally fine bell of 1506, by Peter Waghevens of Mechlin (Malines); the other 34 were cast by Gillett & Johnston Ltd, of Croydon, in 1934. A brief historical account is included.

INTRODUCTION

A survey of the bells of Perthshire appeared in volume 122 of these *Proceedings* (Clouston 1992), the eleventh county survey of bells in Scotland to be published. The 63 bells belonging to St John's Kirk, Perth, are of exceptional interest and are treated here separately; their context within the county will be apparent from the earlier paper (Clouston 1992, 453–6). Thirty-five form the main carillon within the timber-framed lead-covered spire, and 13 hang in the side belfry on the north side of the spire; a further 15 hang disused in a metal frame on the floor of the church. A brief historical account of the bells follows the catalogue.

The Ave Maria bell, now hanging in the apex of the side belfry (no 13), dates from about 1340 and is the oldest tower bell in Perthshire. With a weight of about 7cwt (356 kg), this is also the largest bell of this period remaining in Scotland. The disused 'Agnus Dei' bell probably dates from the early 16th century and was cast by a founder whose expertise was not as good as it should have been, or he may just have been unlucky.

The bourdon bell of the carillon, weighing 28 cwt (1429 kg), is an extremely fine casting by Peter Waghevens of Mechlin (Malines) and is dated 1506; it has decorated canons, and a statuette of St John the Baptist and other marks on the waist. This is one of the finest pre-Reformation bells in existence. The only other casting by Peter Waghevens known in the British Isles is the fine cauldron at Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire, dated 1500.

The former Common Bell, cast in 1520, survived until 1804 but was recorded in the 1650s (see below); it bore the name of George Waghevens of Mechlin; he could have been Peter's brother, who died in 1524, or his son, who died in 1529; the former is the more likely. King's College, Aberdeen, had three bells dated 1519 bearing the name of George Waghevens: three trebles to a ring of five with a tenor of 48 cwt (2438 kg) (Eeles & Clouston 1960, 287).

The five Flemish chime bells, dated 1526 (nos 10–14 in the metal frame within the church),

* Pippin Cottage, Hartest, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP29 4ET

are part of a small group in Perthshire which may be the work of Willem van den Ghein of Mechlin (see below; Clouston 1992, 454). The largest of the bells within the frame (no 15) is probably of early 16th-century date, and is possibly of Scottish origin.

In all, there are eight bells at St John's which date from before the Reformation, more than in any other British church: St Lawrence, Ipswich, and St Bartholomew-the-Great, Smithfield, London, each has five.

CATALOGUE

THE CARILLON

Each bell cast in 1934 bears its number in the carillon on the lower waist, the smallest being 1.

- 1 8 ½ in. (216 mm) diameter. D. 17 lb (7.7 kg). No 5142. GILLETT & JOHNSTON CROYDON 1934 (*upper waist: monogram of C.F.J. in a circle*)
- 2 9 ½ in. (233 mm) diameter. C sharp. 20 ¼ lb (9.2 kg). No 5009. (*the same*)
- 3 9 ¾ in. (243 mm) diameter. C. 23 lb (10.4 kg) No 5010. (*the same*)
- 4 10 ½ in. (256 mm) diameter. B. 26 ¾ lb (12.1 kg). No 5011. (*the same*)
- 5 10 ¾ in. (268 mm) diameter. A sharp. 1 qr 4 ½ lb (14.7 kg). No 5012. (*the same*)
- 6 11 ¼ in. (281 mm) diameter. A. 1 qr 7 ½ lb (16.1 kg). No 5013. GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON, 1934. (*upper waist: monogram of C.F.J. not in a circle*); (whole inscription and moulding wires incised)
- 7 11 ½ in. (290 mm) diameter. G sharp. 1 qr 11 lb (17.7 kg). No 5014. (*the same*)
- 8 11 ⅝ in. (303 mm) diameter. G. 1 qr 13 ½ lb (18.8 kg). No 5126. (*the same*)
- 9 12 ¼ in. (319 mm) diameter. F sharp. 1 qr 20 lb (21.8 kg). No 5016. (*the same*)
- 10 13 ¼ in. (335 mm) diameter. F. 2 qrs 1 lb (25.8 kg). No 5017. (*the same*)
- 11 13 ⅝ in. (347 mm) diameter. E. 2 qrs 6 ½ lb (28.4 kg). No 5018. (*the same*)
- 12 14 ½ in. (369 mm) diameter. D sharp. 2 qrs 14 ¼ lb (32.1 kg) No 5019. (*the same*)
- 13 15 ½ in. (384 mm) diameter. D. 2 qrs 26 ½ lb (37.4 kg). No 5113. (*the same*)
- 14 16 in. (406 mm) diameter. C sharp. 3 qrs 12 lb (43.5 kg). No 5021. (*the same*)
- 15 16 ¾ in. (428 mm) diameter. C. 1 cwt 0 qr 8 lb (54.4 kg). No 5022. (*the same*)
- 16 18 in. (457 mm) diameter. B. 1 cwt 1 qr 0 lb (63.5 kg) GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON, 1934. (*upper waist: monogram of C.F.J. not in a circle*) 5140 (normal raised lettering and moulding wires)
- 17 19 in. (483 mm) diameter. A sharp. 1 cwt 1 qr 19 lb (72.1 kg). (*the same, but with 5024 on rear upper waist*)
- 18 20 in. (508 mm) diameter. A. 1 cwt 2 qrs 18 lb (84.4 kg). (*the same, but with 5025 on rear upper waist*)
- 19 20 ¼ in. (530 mm) diameter. G sharp. 1 cwt 3 qrs 23 lb (99.3 kg) (*the same, but with 5046 on rear upper waist*)
- 20 22 ¼ in. (565 mm) diameter. G. 2 cwt 1 qr 15 lb (121.1 kg). (*the same, but with 5125 on rear upper waist*)
- 21 23 ¼ in. (593 mm) diameter. F sharp. 2 cwt 2 qrs 16 lb (134.2 kg). (*the same, but with 5028 on rear upper waist*)
- 22 24 ¼ in. (629 mm) diameter. F. 3 cwt 0 qr 6 lb (155.1 kg). (*the same, but with 5029 on rear upper waist*)
- 23 26 in. (660 mm) diameter. E. 3 cwt 2 qrs 3 lb (177.1 kg). (*the same, but with 5030 on rear upper waist*)
- 24 26 ½ in. (682 mm) diameter. D sharp. 3 cwt 3 qrs 21 lb (200 kg). (*above inscription band:*) 5031 GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON, 1934. (*upper waist rear: monogram of C.F.J. not in a circle*); (*waist front:*) (*Arms of the city of Perth*) / THE / GUILDRY / INCORPORATION / OF / PERTH
- 25 28 ½ in. (724 mm) diameter. D. 4 cwt 2 qrs 6 lb (231.3 kg). GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON, 1934. (*upper waist front: monogram of C.F.J. not in a circle*); (*upper waist rear:*) 5032
- 26 30 in. (762 mm) diameter. C sharp. 5 cwt 1 qr 2 lb (267.6 kg). (*the same, but with 5033 on rear upper waist*)
- 27 31 ½ in. (800 mm) diameter. C. 6 cwt 0 qr 0 lb (304.8 kg). (*the same, but with 5034 on rear upper waist*); (*waist front; a last, crowned*) / SHOEMAKER / INCORPORATION / OF / PERTH

- 28 33 in. (838 mm) diameter B. 6 cwt 3 qrs 6 lb (345.6 kg). (*the same as No 26, but with 5035 on rear upper waist*) (*waist front: an arm holding a hammer*) HAMMERMAN / INCORPORATION / OF / PERTH
- 29 34 ½ in. (873 mm) diameter. A sharp. 7 cwt 1 qr 21 lb (377.8 kg). GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON. (*monogram C.F.J.*) (*upper waist rear:*) 5036 (*waist front: a shield bearing a pair of gloves, three stars above, and below*) GRACE AND PEACE / THE / GLOVER / INCORPORATION / OF / PERTH / 1934
- 30 36 ½ in. (927 mm) diameter. A. 9 cwt 0 qr 10 lb (461.7 kg). GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON. (*upper waist rear:*) 5037 (*waist front: monogram C.F.J.*) / PRESENTED / BY / WALTER E. LEE, D.D. / MINISTER OF / ST. JOHN'S CHURCH. / 1934
- 31 38 ¾ in. (973 mm) diameter. G sharp. 10 cwt 2 qrs 5 lb (535.7 kg). GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON, 1934. (*upper waist front: monogram C.F.J.*) (*upper waist rear:*) 5038 (*waist:*) IN PROUD AND LOVING MEMORY OF / LIEUT. CLAUD NORIE-MILLER, R.A.S.C. / ELDEST SON OF FRANCIS NORIE-MILLER OF CLEEVE, / WHO WAS DROWNED BY SINKING OF THE TRANSPORT / TRANSYLVANIA, ON 4TH MAY, 1917. / DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI. (*lower waist front: incised*) 31
- 32 40 ½ in. (1029 mm) diameter. G. 12 cwt 1 qr 21 lb (631.8 kg). GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON, 1934. (*upper waist rear:*) 5039 (*waist front: monogram C.F.J.*) IN / MEMORY / OF JOHN ALEXANDER DEWAR / FIRST BARON FORTEVIOT OF DUPLIN. / BORN, 6TH JUNE, 1856. / DIED, 23RD NOVEMBER, 1929. / WHOSE INITIATIVE AND GENEROUS / ASSISTANCE DID SO MUCH TO / ACHIEVE THE RESTORATION OF / ST. JOHN'S CHURCH.
- 33 43 in. (1092 mm) diameter. F sharp. 15 cwt 0 qr 26 lb (773.8 kg). GILLETT & JOHNSTON, CROYDON, 1934. (*monogram C.F.J.*) (*upper waist rear:*) 5040 (*waist front: an anchor under*) ANCHOR FAST ANCHOR / IN HONOURED MEMORY OF / PATRICK W. GRAY / SEC. LIEUT. R.F.A. / WHO WAS KILLED BY A SHELL / ON ARRAS FRONT, FRANCE. / B. 4 APR 1898. / D. 9 MAY 1917. / THE ONLY CHILD OF / SIR ALBERT GRAY, K.C.B., K.C. / OF BOWERSWELL.
- 34 48 in. (1219 mm) diameter. E – .20 semitones, 652, 488%, 390%, 326, 163 Hz; 20 cwt 3 qrs 24 lb (1065 kg). (*ornamental border all round inscription band*) (*upper waist rear:*) 5041 (*waist front:*) TO / THE GLORY OF / GOD / AND IN HUMBLE / THANKFULNESS / FOR ALL HIS / MERCIES, / THESE 34 BELLS / ARE DEDICATED / 1934. (*waist rear:*) GILLETT & JOHNSTON, / CROYDON. / (*monogram C.F.J.*)
- 35 53 ¼ in. (1349 mm) diameter. Note D – .22 semitones 580, 429, 348%, 290, 145 Hz; 28 cwt 0 qr 14 lb (1429 kg). illus 1–9.
+ iohannes baptifta vocor ego (*flower*) vox clamantis in deferto (*fleur-de-lys*) mechline petrus waghevens me fo'mavit (*fleur-de-lys*) fit benedictus qui cuncta creavit (*stop*) M (*stop*) CCCCC (*stop*) VI (*on the waist a statuette of St John the Baptist, and the founder's trade shield with two decorative panels spaced between them*).

The 34 smaller bells are from the Croydon foundry of Gillett & Johnston Ltd, and all of them bear the initials of the master founder there at the time, Cyril F Johnston. The whole carillon was set up for playing in the Croydon bell foundry in January 1935, and was inspected by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Ramsay MacDonald, the Lord Provost of Perth, and many others (*Ringling World* 1935, 54).

The bourdon bell cast by Peter Waghevens of Mechlin (Malines) in 1506 is without question one of the finest pre-Reformation European bells in existence. Even the six canons have a decorative panel on their external faces. The argent has six fins radiating from it on the surface of the crown between the bases of the canons; these fins terminate in small hemispherical mounds in the metal. The quality of the casting is excellent, and the decorative ornament is of a very high standard with a border appearing above and below the black letter inscription.

The bell has been tuned in a lathe by Gillett & Johnston, when metal was removed from the inside of the crown and soundbow. The pitches before tuning were recorded as 598, 433, 357, 297 and 147 Hz. The cast-in crown staple remains, and supports a balanced clapper with a counterbalance weight in the crown; a leather liner is fitted.

The bourdon hangs in a lowside cast-iron frame for full circle ringing, and the fittings include a timber headstock and wheel, traditional stay and slider, ball bearings and a rope with sally. Three external hammers are fitted, one for the clock and two for the chiming machine and the clavier. The other 34 bells are hung dead in a metal framework to one side of the bourdon in five levels. The top level houses numbers 14–20 inclusive

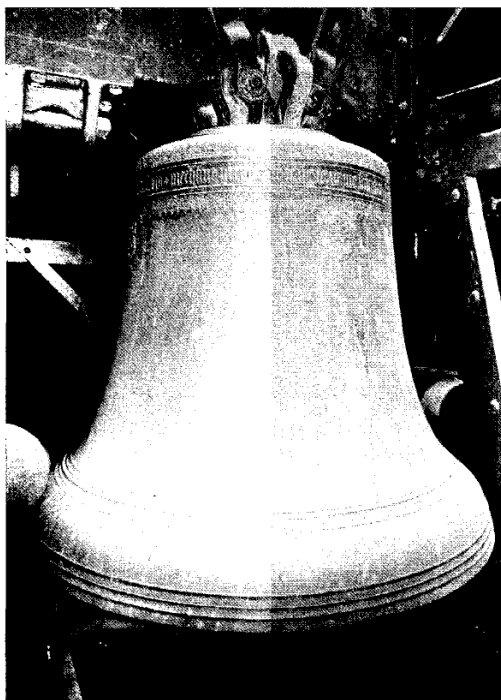


ILLUSTRATION 1 Perth, St John: bourdon

and 22; the next level down numbers 9–13 inclusive, as well as 21 and 23; the third level numbers 1–8 inclusive; the fourth level numbers 24–30 inclusive, and the lowest level 31–34 inclusive. The base of the metal framework is level with the bottom of the louvred openings.

The clavier is housed in a room just under the bells and it is connected to internal clappers in all the bells except the bourdon, which has an external hammer for this duty. All the bells are connected to the manual, and the bottom octave, 11 bells, are also connected to pedals.

The clock was presented by a former Provost, Andrew Graham, in 1879; it was made by Dent's of London and incorporates Lord Grimthorpe's dead beat escapement. It strikes the hours on the bourdon, and the quarter chimes can be operated by either of two barrels: Cambridge Quarters or the Guildford Chimes. The bells involved are numbers 21, 23, 25, 26, 28, 30, 32, 33, 34 and 35, using external hammers.

There is also a tune-playing machine started by the clock and currently set to operate at 9am, noon,



ILLUS 2 Perth, St John: bourdon, crown detail



✠ iohannes baptista vocor ego ✠ vox clamantis in deserto ✠ mechl

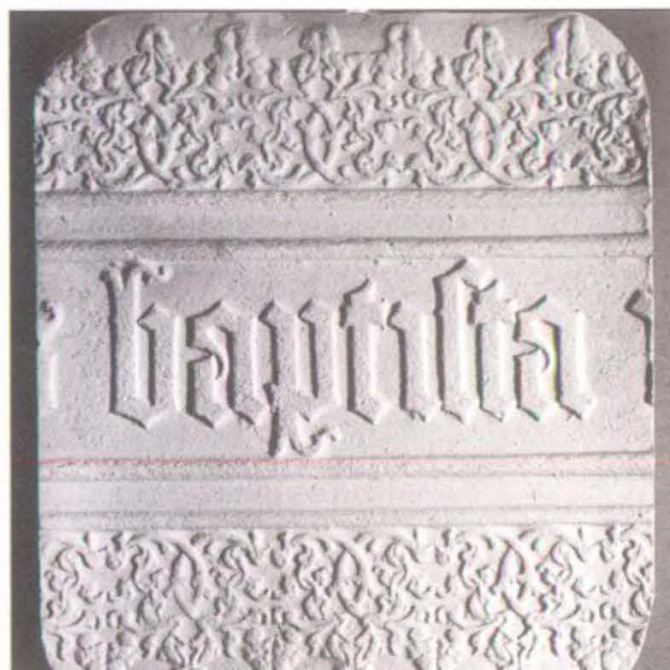


petrus wagheuens me fo'mavit ✠ sit benedictus qui cuncta cr

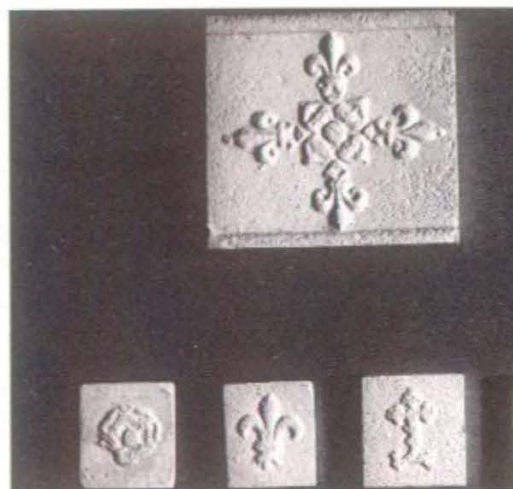




ILLUS 4 Perth, St John: bourdon, border on canons, cast 45 mm wide



ILLUS 6 Perth, St John: bourdon, section of inscription, cast 154 mm wide



ILLUS 5 Perth, St John: bourdon, cross upper cast 63 mm wide



ILLUS 7 Perth, St John: St John the Baptist 48 mm wide



3pm and 6pm. As supplied in 1934 there were 19 tunes on punched paper rolls: There's nae luck about the house; A man's a man for a' that; Corn rigs; The boatie rows; Charlie is my darling; Within a mile of Edinburgh; The Vicar of Bray; Believe me if all . . . ; See! the Conquering hero comes; Highland Laddie; God save the King; Sun of my soul; The day is past and over; Ye banks and braes; The girl I left behind me; The Minstrel Boy; Londonderry Air; My love she's but a lassie yet; Greensleeves.

The machine is started by the clock electrically, 10 volts from batteries. A 2 hp (1.49 kW) air compressor is started, and another electric motor drives a 25-volt generator which powers the motor that moves the punched paper chart for the particular tune selected. As a hole passes between the electrical contacts, the current can flow between them; this opens a solenoid-operated air valve which allows compressed air to operate the internal clapper in the particular bell through a piston assembly.

SIDE BELFRY

On the north side of the tower, level with the base of the spire, is a four-tier timber framework containing 13 bells which are visible from the outside:

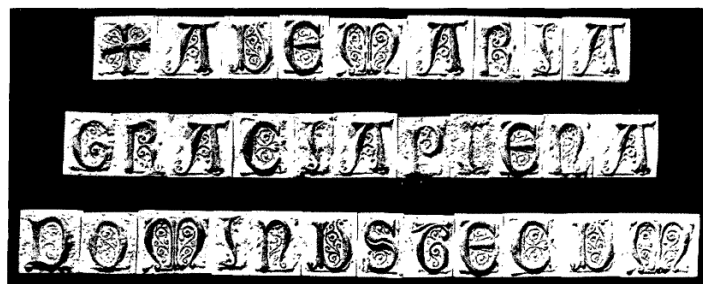
- 1 6 7/8 in. (163 mm) diameter. Blank, smooth casting with handbell argent and cast-in staple. Gold paint on crown; no moulding wires on inscription band, a hump on the outside of the soundbow. 19th century.
- 2 6 1/2 in. (171 mm) diameter. Blank, a rather rougher casting than No 1; no moulding wires at all; handbell argent, cast-in staple. Probably by John C. Wilson & Co Ltd of Glasgow 1901, their No 2378.
- 3 7 1/4 in. (184 mm) diameter. Blank, handbell argent and cast-in staple, no moulding wires below shoulder; above the soundbow one wire and a hump.
- 4 7 1/8 in. (202 mm) diameter. Blank, and design as No 3.
- 5 8 1/2 in. (216 mm) diameter. Blank, and same design as No 3 except that there are two moulding wires above the hump on the soundbow.
- 6 8 1/4 in. (222 mm) diameter. On crown MEARS & CO LONDON. 9 in Design as No 5, but with a moulding wire below the hump on the soundbow and two above.
- 7 9 1/8 in. (238 mm) diameter. On crown very lightly engraved LONDON Handbell argent and cast-in staple. Moulding wires and hump as on No 6.
- 8 9 1/4 in. (251 mm) diameter. Blank, handbell argent and cast-in staple. No moulding wires below the shoulder, two above the soundbow and one by the lip.
- 9 10 in. (254 mm) diameter. On crown incised MEARS & CO LONDON 10 1/2 in. Design as No 8. Damaged at lip and much turned in the soundbow to flatten the note.
- 10 10 1/4 in. (278 mm) diameter. Blank, a much rougher bell, lip turned off to sharpen the note. Moulding wires, crown 1, 2-2, 2-2 lip. Probably by John C. Wilson & Co Ltd of Glasgow, 1901, their No 2381.
- 11 11 1/8 in. (295 mm) diameter. Blank; rather a rough casting, but better than No 10. Much turned at lip to sharpen the note. Moulding wires arranged 2, 0-0, 3-0 (lip). Probably by John C. Wilson & Co Ltd, Glasgow, 1901, No 2379.
- 12 12 1/4 in. (324 mm) diameter. Blank, design as No 11, much turned at lip. Also by John C. Wilson & Co Ltd 1901, No 2380.
- 13 32 1/2 in. (826 mm) diameter. Note D. (illus 10)
+AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA DOMINUS TECUM

A very fine bell, and the largest of its period so far discovered in Scotland. Six large round-section canons and long waisted, a typical early 14th-century casting. The cross and lettering are most delicately ornamented in the Lombardic style; unfortunately the inscription on one side has been attacked by sulphurous gases from coal fires. The original cast-in crown staple remains, but there is no clapper. There are some irregularities at the lip, but no regular tuning marks; the main pitches are 1175, 750, 639, 510 and 247 Hz. The flat crown has a parting line radiating from each of the four corners of the argent. Two wide moulding wires above the inscription, one below, and a hump at the top of the soundbow.

There is a flat surface in from the lip, 3 1/4 in. (83 mm) wide and at an angle of 20° to the horizontal,



ILLUS 9 Perth, St John: bourdon, waist of clapper left cast 74 mm wide



ILLUS 10 Perth, St John: AVE MARIA bell in Side Belfry; letters 35 mm high

pointing upwards. Lip to shoulder at tangent 29 in. (737 mm). Diameter at tangent point 18.2 in. (462 mm). Weight about 7 cwt (356 kg) and cast about 1340. The cross and lettering are not known to exist elsewhere. While the bell could have been cast in England it is just possible that it is a local monastic product. The four parting lines on the crown rather suggest that the bell is not English. With no other Scottish bells of this size and age surviving for comparison it is difficult to be more specific.

It would seem that Nos 1 and 3–9 inclusive were cast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, London, in the period when it was trading as George Mears & Co, 1861–5.

In 1881 the chime was returned by Gillett & Co of Croydon, who supplied a tune-playing machine with two barrels. Each barrel held seven tunes and used to play a tune every day at the half-hours, there being a different tune for each day of the fortnight. These tunes duplicate some now played on the main carillon, but additionally include *Caller Herrin*; *The Flowers of the Forest*; *Scots wha hae*; *The Blue Bells of Scotland*; *The Harmonious Blacksmith*; and *Rule, Britannia*!

On 16 September 1901 John C. Wilson & Co Ltd of Glasgow cast four bells to the order of the Town Clerk of Perth to be tuned in harmony. The mouth diameters are given as 6 3/4, 11, 12, and 13 in. (171, 279, 305 and 330 mm). These were no doubt to replace bells which were considered to be unsatisfactory.

The bells hang with the smallest below, Nos 1–5; next above, Nos 6–9; then Nos 10, 11 and 12, with the ancient bell above. Now all are disused.

BELLS WITHIN THE CHURCH

Preserved in a metal framework presented by the Gannochy Trust inside the church are 15 disused bells (illus 11):

- 1 5 1/8 in. (144 mm) diameter. Handbell argent on a circular raised part of the crown. Stamped 'No 8'. Cast-in staple gone. Has been hammered on outside of soundbow in three places. 19th century, probably by Mears & Co.
- 2 6 3/4 in. (171 mm) diameter. The same note as No 1 and clearly cast as a thicker replacement, but



ILLUS 11 Perth, St John: bells preserved on floor; lower level on left, the five chime bells of 1526 and, on the right, the 'exce Agnuc dei' bell

apparently not used. Cast-in crown staple; handbell argent. Blank. No moulding wires, but there are three incised rims by the soundbow. Turned in a lathe in soundbow. Probably by Gillett & Co 1881.

- 3 5 ¼ in. (143 mm) diameter. The same design as No 1, much chipped at lip. Handbell argent on a circular raised part of the crown. Only slight traces of wear from an external hammer. 19th century.
- 4 5 ¼ in. (146 mm) diameter. Same design as Nos 1 and 3, stamped No 6 on handbell argent. Slight wear from external hammers on soundbow. Replaced in Side Belfry chime in 1901. 19th century.
- 5 6 ⅞ in. (173 mm) diameter. Handbell argent stamped 15, same design as No 1 above. Porous crown, cast-in crown staple, no tuning marks. 19th century.
- 6 7 ⅞ in. (198 mm) diameter. Blank, and cast probably c 1700. Handbell argent with a rectangular hole in it, and six fins radiating out from it on the flat crown, equally spaced. Two moulding wires on the crown, two above the inscription band, two below, a hump at the top of the soundbow with one wire just above, two wires in the middle of the soundbow and two more by the lip. The bell has been much hammered on the outside of the soundbow and is cracked vertically in a number of places in the waist, but they do not extend to the crown or the soundbow. Poor tone. Cast probably in Edinburgh, as suggested by the fins.
- 7 9 ¼ in. (244 mm) diameter. Crown bears 9½ recessed into surface. Cast-in crown staple. Turned in a lathe internally in an effort to tune the bell, probably by Gillett's in 1934. One moulding wire on the crown, two above the soundbow and a wide band by the lip. 19th century.
- 8 8 ½ in. (216 mm) diameter. Handbell argent, cast-in staple broken off. Turned at the lip appreciably to sharpen the note, and has been hammered outside on the soundbow for some while. Moulding on the crown and above the soundbow. Cast probably by Mears & Co.
- 9 10 ¼ in. (273 mm) diameter. Crown bears 20 recessed into surface. Moulding wires as No 7. Cast-in staple remains. Rather rough surface with no signs of wear. Turned-in lathe by Gillett's in 1934 and rejected. Probably by Mears & Co.



ILLUS 12 Perth, St John: largest 1526 chime bell

- 10 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (281 mm) diameter. Inscribed: X IC BEN GHEGOTEN INT IAER MCCCCXXVI One single canon has broken off, five others and the argent remain. The lip has been damaged by a hammer in one place and there is some evidence of the bell having been turned in a lathe in the inside of the soundbow, probably by Mears & Co about 1864. Fair tone. This bell and the four others of the same date are almost certainly by Willem van den Ghein, possibly assisted by his son Peter I, of Malines or Mechlin, in Belgium. All are well designed and cast.
- 11 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (313 mm) diameter. Inscribed exactly as No 10. Argent and six canons remain; appreciable wear on outside of soundbow. Some evidence of turning in a lathe on upper soundbow inside. Tone quite fair.
- 12 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (335 mm) diameter. Inscribed exactly as No 10. Argent and six canons remain, and there is some evidence of turning in a lathe last century at top of soundbow inside. Quite good tone.
- 13 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (398 mm) diameter. Inscribed: X IC BEN GHEGOTEN INT IAER ONS HEEREN MCCCCXXVI The same as the others but with ONS HEEREN added. Six canons, argent and cast-in crown staple remain. Quite corroded internally, and apparently never turned in a lathe. Quite good tone.
- 14 17 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (441 mm) diameter. Note B flat. (illus 12). The inscription is as on No 13, and in this case there is a border all round the bell above. Argent, six canons, and cast-in staple remain; rather corroded inside, but no visible tuning marks. Hammer marks on outside of soundbow. Quite good tone.
- 15 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (546 mm) diameter. Note A flat. (illus 13, 14) Inscribed:
+ exce (cock) Agnuc (flower) dei (crown)

An early 16th-century bell inscribed mainly in black letter and with one Lombardic capital. The detail of a shield above the letters 'exce' is poor but it does seem to bear a lamb, possibly with a flag. The lip has been damaged in places, and in the course of casting the top of the core broke away and lodged where the outside of the crown should be. The canons and argent have gone, and the inside of the crown has a blister corresponding to the cavity outside. Four bolts through the crown were fitted, and the cast-in crown staple is held in with (perhaps) lead. A modern clapper with a two bolt top and a metal U over the staple remain. Tone only quite fair.



ILLUS 13 Perth, St John: 'exce Agnuc dei' bell

Dr F C Eeles considered this bell to be English and 15th century, but the writer feels the casting date was a little after 1500. No wide bands, and the marks are not noted on any English bells, so it is possible that the founder was working in Scotland. Alas, his technique was defective in that he should not have allowed the molten metal to reach the mould with such force that it damaged the top of the core.

The five bells dated 1526 bear no maker's name, but have Flemish inscriptions. The lettering is closely similar to that on the Iona bell dated 1540 and bearing the name of Peter van den Ghein, and the cross is the same on all six bells. The fleur-de-lis on the largest bell at Perth is the same as that used as a stop at Iona. Peter van den Ghein I was born c 1500 and died in 1561; Willem van den Ghein, his father, was casting bells at Malines from 1506 till his death in 1533. Dr G van Doorslaer (1910, 475) gives Peter van den Ghein's earliest date as 1528, giving an overlap with his

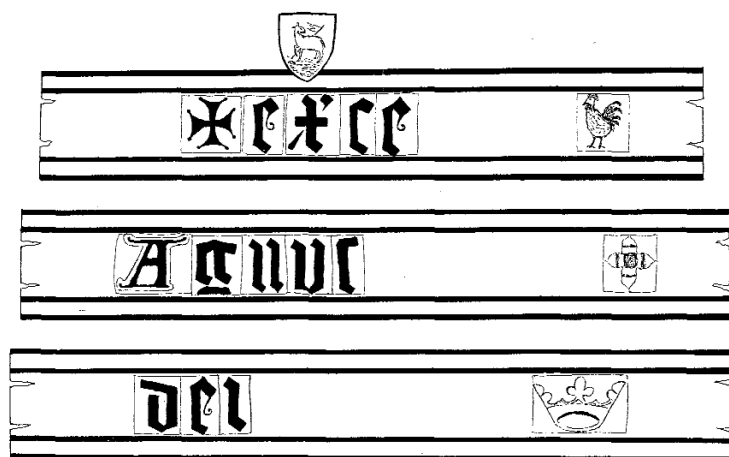


PLATE 14 Perth, St John: inscription on the 'exce Agnuc dei' bell

father of five years. So these five bells of 1526 would be by Willem, although if Peter I was born about 1500 then he would have been of an age to help his father long before 1528, and these bells could be their joint work.

The five 1526 bells are the remains of a chime of seven bells of this date noted in the Visitation of 1653 referred to below. They are important as no other chime of bells of this date remains in Scotland, and other Flemish bells here are only found on their own as single bells. A carillon of 24 bells, cast by Peter van den Ghein I in 1553, is now in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

HISTORICAL NOTES

Fittis (1885, 42) notes that, at the time of the Reformation, St John's Church had at least three large bells, and a set of six small music bells for chiming the half-hours. The first-floor stone vault in the tower has four rope-holes cut in the ribs of the vaulting for bell ropes, to enable some of the bells in the pre-Reformation era to be rung from the ground.

Fittis also quotes from the *Picture of Scotland* that before the Reformation a very large bell was on its way to Perth; the ship which brought it being obliged to unload it at the pier of Friarton, the unfortunate bell fell into the river, plunging down to the bottom of Friarton hole. Some years afterwards a diver undertook to recover it, but came up without success, and in breathless terror, declaring he had found the devil and his dam making their porridge in it.

There is no older account of the bells than that contained in the Report of a Visitation made

at the instance of the Town Council on 21 March 1653 (Fittis 1885, but the *New Statistical Account* gives 1652).

I Preaching Bell

On the upper syde of the Bell without / Meckle pearling is about / Pxx / Joannes Baptiste Votar Ego / Vox clamantis in Deserto / Mechline Petrus Magheneus me formavit / Sit benedictu qui cuncti Creavit / 1506

II Commone Bell

This bell is in the diameter in wydnes wt. ne the lippis 1 ell 1 quarter and ane half (51.15 ins ? : 1299 mm) Joannes Baptisti Votar / Nos autem gloriari oportet in crucem domini nostri Jesu Christi / Anno Domini 1520 This uppermost on the head of the bell. / Pearling on ilk syd / Facta sum meckline per Georgio Magheneus / Ego vox clamantis in deserto / Parata viam Domini / Stamps of John the Baptist on ilk syd / In middest Christ ryding on ane as colt and people crying.

III On the skellocke littill Bell anno dom. 1400 / 253 zeirs old this bell is

IV On the Curfew bell on Iegeabill letters old character No date onlie this read / pro nobis clamare / on it twa crownes / and ane cross

V Seven houre Bellis without the steepill, viz: Anno 1526. on Bell for the haill hor. and six for the half hour. / Inter Ja omnes having / The notes of the haff hor. musick being 32 notes The son of Adam answered them. All glorie to the Sone of man, the Father and the Spirit with . . . and ppetualy Efter the English musical notes of Perth / Vel salutatis Anglica / Ave Maria Benedicata inter mulieres / Et benedicta sit fructus ventris tui.

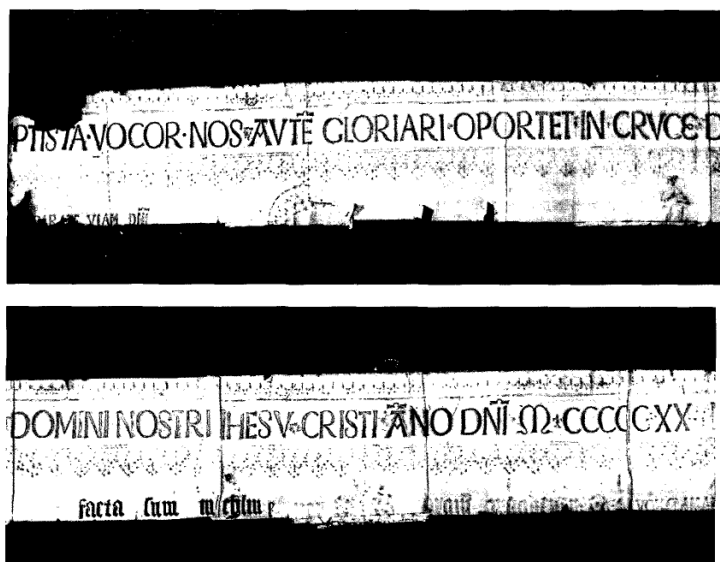
The Preaching Bell by Peter Waghevens of 1506 is now the bourdon of the carillon. The Common Bell, by George Waghevens and dated 1520, survived till 1804 when it was broken on the occasion of some public rejoicing (Fittis 1885, 44). In 1805 the bell was recast by Thomas Mears & Son of London and the original inscription was said to have been repeated on it. In 1848 the recast Common Bell was transferred to the steeple of St Paul's Church. This latter bell, 51 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (1300 mm) diameter, is just the size of the former 1520 bell, but it does not bear the former inscription, alas. Fortunately, members of the Perth Literary & Antiquarian Society, established in 1794, were active before 1805 and a rubbing of part of the inscription (illus 15) is preserved in the Museum & Art Gallery. It reads:

(IHO BA)PTISTA.VOCOR.NOS.AVTE GLORIARI. OPORTET.IN.CRVCE DOMINI NOSTRI.IHESV.CRISTI ANO DNI. M (*fleur-de-ly*) CCCCC XX / . . . facta cum mechline geogio waghevens . . .

The medallions are described above. The lettering is roman in the upper line and black letter in the lower.

The burgh records for 1618 show that the council made an act requiring the inhabitants not to be out of their houses after 10 pm. This was not adhered to on the grounds that the inhabitants did not know the time. It was therefore ordained that bell No 2, the Common Bell, be tolled nightly at 10 o'clock and this continued till this bell was cracked in 1804. Thereafter bell No 1 was used instead.

The earliest reference to the little Skelloch bell appears in the Kirk Session records under the date of 6 October 1578 when James Sym was instructed to buy a rope for this bell; 'the whilk Bell shall be only rung to the affairs of the Kirk, as to the Exercises, or to the Assemblies' (Fittis 1885,



ILLUS 15 Perth, St John: photograph of part of a rubbing of the former Common bell of 1520. (Photograph courtesy of Perth Museum & Art Gallery)

43). In 1810 it went to a depot being built for French prisoners of war. More than twenty years later it was lent to the managers of the Corn Exchange at the foot of South Street. The bell was later returned when the Exchange was given up. Fittis notes that the bell was injured many years ago, and I have been unable to identify any existing bell cast from its metal. The 'exce Agnuc dei' bell has a badly damaged crown and is relatively small, and could be the little Skelloch bell. If so the date is nearer 1500 than 1400. However, the legend is that this bell came from the Greyfriars monastery at the time of the Reformation.

Fittis (1885, 43) considers that the Curfew bell is the existing bell inscribed 'exce Agnuc dei', but there are difficulties. The 1653 Visitation reported that the bell they saw bore 'pro nobis clamare' and two crowns and a cross. The existing bell does not bear any of these three words, and only one crown, so probably it is not the old Curfew bell.

Under the date of 6 February 1586–7 the Kirk Session 'ordains Nicol Balmain to ring the Curfew and workman's bell in the morning and evening, the space of ane quarter of an hour, at the times appointed, viz, four hours in the morning and eight at even'. So it seems more probable that this bell was the predecessor of the Rotterdam bell of 1660 noted below, called the 'old 8 hours bell'.



ILLUS 16 Perth, St John: photograph of a rubbing of former bell of 1660; inscription band 57 in. (1448 mm) long. (Photograph courtesy of Perth Museum & Art Gallery)

The Session records, under the date of 10 July 1560, give: 'The session after the appointment of the order of communication ordains that the first bell shall be rung at four in the morning; the second at half five o'clock; the third at five. The second ministration, the first bell to be rung at half nine o'clock; the second at nine; the third at half ten.'

On 6 July 1703: 'The session appoints that the church doors be opened at seven of the clock in the morning and not till then; as also that the first bell be rung at eight of the clock the second bell at half nine and the third at nine'.

Preserved in Perth Museum & Art Gallery is a rubbing (illus 16) from what was called the 'old 8 hours bell', which was 4 ft 9 in. (1448 mm) in circumference at the inscription band; this would correspond to a mouth diameter of 35 in. (889 mm). The inscription reads:

(cherub) SOLI DEO GLORIA (cherub) CORNELIS IANSEN OVDEROGGE FECIT ROTTERDAM 1660 / (cherub)
PERTH ME FIERI CVRAVIT ANNO DOMINI 1660 (cherub) REDEVNTE AD SOLIVM CAROLO SECVNDOMAGNA
BRITANIAE FRANCIAE ET HIBERNIAE REGE

Below the word HIBERNIAE is a lamb carrying a banner, the arms of Perth. Above and below the inscription is a border which appears on Ouderogge's bell in the Holy Rude Church, Stirling (Clouston 1949, Pl VIII c). The cherub also appears on his bell at Culross.

What became of this 'old 8 hours bell' is not clear. It could have been recast at the same time as the Common Bell by Thomas Mears in 1805 to form the bell numbered 16, 31 ½ in. (800 mm) in diameter, which was noted by Dr F C Eeles in 1895.

In 1769 a new bell was purchased (*New Statistical Account*, 10, 107) from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London; 37 in. (940 mm) in diameter, it was inscribed:

I WAS MADE FOR THE TOWN OF PERTH IN THE REIGN OF GEORGE III IN THE YEAR 1769 CONGREGATE LESTER PACK
AND CHAPMAN OF LONDON FECIT

While ringing for afternoon service on Sunday 11 September 1836 the bell was cracked, and was recast the following year at the same foundry with the inscription noted by Dr Eeles in 1895:

THOMAS MEARS OF LONDON FOUNDER 1837

It was then 37 ¼ in. (946 mm) in diameter. Another bell was bought in 1785, 44 ½ in. (1131 mm) in diameter, from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, inscribed:

WM. MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1785

On 21 October 1895 the late Dr F C Eeles inspected 20 bells then in the tower, and noted their inscriptions and diameters:

1	6 ½ in.	(165 mm)	No inscription
2	7 in.	(178 mm)	No inscription
3	7 ¼ in.	(197 mm)	No inscription
4	8 in.	(203 mm)	No inscription
5	8 ½ in.	(222 mm)	No inscription
6	8 ¾ in.	(222 mm)	(on crown) MEARS & CO. LONDON
7	9 ½ in.	(241 mm)	No inscription
8	10 in.	(254 mm)	No inscription
9	10 ½ in.	(267 mm)	(on crown) MEARS & CO. LONDON 10½
10	11 ¼ in.	(292 mm)	Flemish bell of 1526
11	12 ½ in.	(318 mm)	The same
12	13 ½ in.	(343 mm)	The same
13	16 in.	(406 mm)	The same
14	17 ½ in.	(445 mm)	The same
15	21 ½ in.	(546 mm)	'exce Agnuc dei' bell
16	31 ½ in.	(800 mm)	Thomas Mears I, 1805
17	33 ½ in.	(851 mm)	'AVE MARIA' bell
18	37 ¼ in.	(946 mm)	Thomas Mears II, 1837.
19	44 ½ in.	(1131 mm)	William Mears, 1785
20	53 in.	(1346 mm)	Peter Waghevens, 1506.

At that time the 14 smaller bells were in the frame outside the spire on the north side, and they were disused. He considered that the nine smaller bells were all by Mears of London.

No 15 was disused, and badly injured in the crown. Nos 16 and 19 were also disused as huge pieces had been broken out of their soundbows. No 18 was used as a fire bell. No 17 was disused and clapperless, and hung, as now, above the chime of bells in the framework outside the spire. No 20 was being unsafely clocked, and Dr Eeles noted that it was a wonder that the bell had not been cracked.

Following the end of the First World War, a full restoration of St John's Kirk was undertaken as a war memorial for the County and City of Perth, under Sir Robert Lorimer. The proposal to restore the bells and to install a carillon was mooted by Melville Gray of Bowerswell, and with the help of other donors this task was fulfilled in April 1935 when the carillon was dedicated.

In July 1929, Gillett & Johnston Ltd had quoted £3292 for a carillon of 35 bells, clock chimes, for tuning and hanging the D bell of 1506 and for an automatic player. In February 1930, John Taylor & Co of Loughborough quoted £3152 for the same work.

In 1933, the 'Exce Agnuc dei' bell, the 1837 bell and the 1506 bell were in use for church services and the curfew was rung on the 1837 bell at 8 pm.

In January 1934, Mears & Stainbank of Whitechapel quoted for two schemes with the largest bell of 19 ½ cwt (990.6 kg) or 21 ½ cwt (1092.2 kg) covering two octaves less two lower half notes. The larger scheme with an automatic player and two upper half notes came to £2370. In February 1934, a visit was paid to Mr Clifford Ball, the carillonneur, at his home in Selly Oak, Birmingham,

for his advice. He preferred Gillett & Johnston Ltd as he felt that they had a better connection between the clavier and the bells. In April 1934, Gillett & Johnston Ltd quoted for the scheme, subsequently adopted, £2523, and they accepted the Committee's offer of £2450. At the same time Taylors reduced their quotation to £2670.

(Visited 5 June 1965 and 18 May 1966)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In addition to those whose assistance was acknowledged in the survey of the bells of the county of Perthshire (Clouston 1992, 507), my thanks are due to Mr J A Smellie, Dr David A S Martin, and Mr A D Robertson for their help with the bells of St John's; to Mr Christopher Dalton of Ullingswick, Hereford, for photographs of plaster casts, and to Louis Flood Photographers, of Perth, for those of the bells themselves.

REFERENCES

- Clouston, R W M 1949 'The 'church and other bells of Stirlingshire'. *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 84 (1949–50), 66–109.
- Clouston, R W M 1992 'The bells of Perthshire', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 122 (1992), 453–508.
- Fittis, R S 1885 *Ecclesiastical Annals of Perth*.
- van Doorslaer, G 1910 'Les van den Ghein, fondeurs de cloches, canons, sonnettes et mortiers, à Malines', *Annales de l'Académie royale de l'Archeologie de Belgique*, 62 (1910), 463–666.