Bridlington Priory, St. Mary

Bridlington Priory was founded in around 1113AD by Walter de Gant, Lord of the Manor of Hunmanby, for Augustinian Canons Regular. Built on the site of a Saxon church, the monastery was one of the earliest and largest Augustinian houses in the country. When complete, the building was over 400ft long and 75ft wide, with transepts 150ft long. Above the central crossing stood a magnifi­cent tower, somewhat taller than the present south-west tower, surmounted by a corona not unlike that at Newcastle Cathedral. Evidence suggests that it was planned in the 15th century to extend the west towers rather like Beverley Minster; it is unfor­tunate that this work was never carried out.

A very wealthy monastery (at the time of the dissolution, it had an annual revenue of £547) it owned land stretching from Blubber-houses in the north, and Askham Richard in the West Riding, down to the Spurn Peninsula. This wealth was no doubt helped by the number of pilgrims who travelled to Bridlington to visit the Shrine of St. John, a former Prior who had been canonised in 1401.

William Wood, the last Prior, was one of the leaders of the Pil­grimage of Grace in 1536. He was imprisoned in the Tower of Lon­don, and eventually tried and executed at Tyburn in 1537. Bri­dlington Priory was dissolved on May 23rd, 1537, and in the space of a few short years most of the great building had been de­stroyed; only the nave survived to serve as the Parish Church, together with the Bayle or gatehouse which housed a school. Much of the stonework was used to repair local houses and the harbour.

Before the dissolution, Richard Pollard surveyed the monastery in some detail for the King. His writings provide documentary evi­dence of bells:

*"The Steple beyng Towre ffashyon ys highe & daungerously in decaye. There be in the same Steple seven Bells mete to be rongen all at one tyme yff yf so happen."*

It is evident that the tower was in some danger of collapse, as huge buttresses were built on the north side of the nave in the 15th century to stop it leaning.

The history of the bells from this time until the eighteenth century is scarce. It is known that there were at least two bells, and that these were rung regularly. An extract from a churchwar­den's account of 1669 reads:

*Disburst by the Church Warddains of the p'ish of Bridlington for the yeare 1669.*

*Ringeres for the king 29th May 11/0.*

*Matth. Harrison for 2 belles mend 1/6*

*November the fift day 1669*

*paid ringers 13/6*

By the early eighteenth century, the remains of the Priory were in a ruinous state. The great West Window had been blocked in, and was partially obscured by the low roof. A small brick cupola had been added to the south-west tower to house a clock. James Harri­son, a bellfounder from Barrow-on-Humber, added three bells in this tower; two were dated 1763 and one 1782. Their weights and inscriptions were as follows:

Treble: Diameter 3'0" Weight 8-1-24 Note approx. B

For light restor'd is heard my silver sound,

To songs of Praise to wake ye village round.

Second: Diameter 3'2" weight 9-2-12 Note approx. A

Nor joy nor grief employs my peaceful voice;

Mine 'tis in consort only to rejoice.

Tenor: Diameter 3'5" Weight 10-2-18 Very flat of G

To Speak a Parting Soul is giv'n to ME:

Be trimmed thy LAMP, as if I toll'd for THEE.

Cors. Rickaby, Minister;

Henry Booth, Willm. Simpson, Rob't Hardy,   
Churchwardens. 1763

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the first of a number of restorations of the Priory began, culminating in the major remodelling a hundred years later by Sir George Gilbert-Scott. He redesigned the roof, opened up the West Window, and built up the west towers to their present height. The clock was replaced, and the three bells retained.

In 1897, John Taylor Jr. visited the Priory, and, after discussion with the Rector, Revd. Allan Pride, quoted for a ring of ten bells in a wooden frame, tenor 3lcwts, at a cost of £985. Several other quotes were prepared with varying weights of tenor, but nothing came of the ten bell idea, probably just as well as there is very little spare space in the belfry and the trebles would have been mounted above the rest.

In early 1902, Mr. William Jameson contracted John Taylor to supply a ring of eight bells, in memory of his father Alfred. The old bells were rung for the last time on April 16th for a wedding, dismantled and stood in the church for some time. They were even­tually taken to the foundry at Loughborough and melted down in July 1902 where the metal was used for a chime of eight bells for Christ Church, Fulwood, Sheffield.

The new bells were cast at Loughborough during the last fortnight of April 1902, and were fitted during the last week of May, over 100ft up the south-west tower. Mounted on a massive cast iron H-frame, the installation included Hastings stays and self-lubricating plain bearings. The bells hang on hollow box cast iron headstocks, and have a rope-draft of nearly eighty feet. A Cam­bridge chiming mechanism for the clock was also donated; sadly, this part of the clock was disconnected some years ago and is now derelict. The total cost of the installation was £886; as a com­parison this is only slightly more than a set of eight bell-ropes would now cost.

The bells were dedicated by the Archbishop of York on Saturday June 7th, (dreadful weather didn't stop hundreds of people gather­ing on Church Green to hear them) and were rung to a quarter peal of Grandsire Triples the next day.

The weights of the bells and inscriptions: (these weights differ from those in Doves Guide and the ringing room, which refer to the untuned bell weight)

Treble: Note D 6-1-21 Diameter 2'7"

Second: Note C# 7-0-3 Diameter 2'8"

Third: Note B 7-0-25 Diameter 2'10"

Fouth: Note A 8-1-1 Diameter 3'0"

Fifth: Note G 11-1-20 Diameter 3'4"

William B. Jameson

Donor

Sixth: Note F# 13-1-2 Diameter 3'6"

Robert Medforth JP

Churchwarden 32nd Year

Inspector \* Reflector \* Detector

Seventh: Note E 17-3-9 Diameter 3'11"

J Allan Pride MA LLB DCL

Rector \* Corrector \* Director

Tenor: Note D 25-2-14 Diameter 4'5"

J Alfred Jameson JP

Pro Memoria

All are additionally inscribed John Taylor & Co Loughborough 1902 and on each bell except the tenor, just below the crown, are attached two 1902 pennies.

The first peal on the bells was one of 5024 Kent Treble Bob Major, rung in 3hours 18minutes on Saturday 2nd August 1902 by a band from as far afield as Newcastle and London. The first all-local peal did not take place until 1949 and in fact very few peals have been rung due to the Priory's close proximity to housing.

As part of the Priory's extensive Restoration Appeal, attention turned in 1991 to the belfry. As a result, the back three bells were re-hung on new bearings and provided with new clappers in early 1992, and the remaining five (which still ran in their original plain bearings) were similarly re-hung early in 1993.

Other Bells in Bridlington

Christ Church, Quay Road, possessed two bells by Mears dated 1841. According to the Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, these two bells found their way to Flamborough to join an earlier bell there. Christ Church obtained six steel bells from Naylor Vickers, Sheffield, in 1858-59, but these were found to be discordant and unsatisfactory; they were removed at the turn of the century. In their place came "a set that would play the Westminster Chimes" but a report in the Bridlington Chronicle of April 5th, 1902 says that the clock was not powerful enough to work the bells properly, and in any case many people thought the bells were out of tune.

By 1922, the church contained eight tubular bells, but by 1949 these had been removed and were replaced by a single chiming bell cast by Taylor's in 1950.

Holy Trinity, Promenade, contains three bells by Mears, tenor around 13cwt, which were originally hung for full-circle ringing, but are now hung for clocking only and in fact are not presently rung.

Paul Hodgson