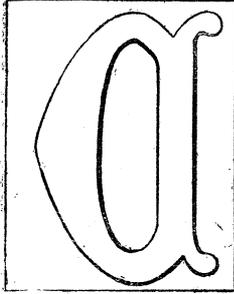


NOTICE OF "THE CHURCH BELLS OF
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE."

BY ALFRED HENEAGE COCKS.



CONSIDERABLE surprise and disappointment is naturally felt by subscribers to the above volume at the unaccountable delay in its publication, so I gladly avail myself of our Editor's suggestion that I should insert a few lines on the subject in the RECORDS.

Long as many subscribers have had to wait for the book, the unfortunate author has had to wait even longer to see his bantling hatched; and, even now, some months must elapse before it sees publicity.

As long ago as May, 1890, the MS. being complete, negotiations were opened with a well-known publisher, who at once accepted the book, but did nothing further; and it was not until after the loss of nearly fifteen months that, with the assistance of a firm of solicitors, the author was once more free, and able to place the MS. in the hands of Messrs. Jarrold, of Norwich, who had, meanwhile written, offering to undertake the publication.

The prospectus was at once issued by them (towards the end of July, 1891), the names of subscribers already received, being printed on it. A good many other names were soon added; but many subscriptions were necessary before anything like the cost of producing the book would be covered, and when at last the publishers had received a sufficient number to guarantee them against heavy loss, they were very busy with other books, so it was not until January, 1893, that the printing of "The Church Bells of Buckinghamshire" was begun, and even now, late in 1894, much still remains to be set up.

Sometimes the author has had to wait months for the next bit of proof from the publishers, while shorter waits have been the general rule. On the other hand, the author has frequently kept the publishers waiting; in one instance as long as six weeks, for some interesting matter, of the existence of which he was previously

unaware; but as the gentleman who alone possessed it then kindly sent it, the delay was well worth the candle. Shorter delays have been produced by various causes, as, for instance, when, on receiving a bit of proof, some doubtful point has shown itself which could only be solved by a visit to the Record Office or British Museum, etc., or by another visit to some tower at a distant part of this awkwardly-shaped county; or, when fresh casts from bells had to be procured before drawings could be made, and illustrations from them prepared.

However, though Messrs. Jarrold cannot be said to have been expeditious, it is confidently anticipated that the printing and get up of the book will do them credit. The twenty-four full-page plates promised in the prospectus have swelled to thirty-three, and the figures in the text are numerous. All but two or three of the latter, and all but six of the former, are done, while the sketches for the remaining finished drawing are nearly all executed.

To visit (in several cases twice, or oftener) all the churches in the county (except perhaps a dozen quite modern district churches, possessed of one or two equally modern and uninteresting “tinklers”)—and to work sometimes as many as thirty towers in a week, with the subsequent literary work, and constant visits to the various public libraries, has been no small task. It has, however, been full of interest, not unmixed occasionally with amusement; as, for instance, in one little village, where “the sort of a man what looks a’ter the church,” as the good old sexton was described to us, became possessed of the idea that we had laid dynamite under the sacred edifice, and though he kept us carefully in view, spread such alarming reports afterwards, that the congregation was afraid to come to church on the following Sunday! Or, as was most frequently the case when applying for the key, the church official would be out, and we have treated in his absence with the ladies; if the sexton was the official to whom I was referred, his wife would say, “Be you the man what’s come to mend the clock?” I would assure her that was not so, but that I merely wanted to look at the bells. She would then be persuaded that I was from some bell-hanging firm, come to do a little (frequently much needed) “restoration;” and when I had come down from the tower, and returned the key, “Be um all right now, sir?” was sure

to be the next question. When it was the school-master's wife to whom I had to apply, her soul, I found, was above clocks, and she supposed I had come to tune the organ. But a rector's wife made what I thought the funniest mistake: she responded to my application, "But they are not for sale! Mr. (naming the rector) does not wish to part with the bells!"

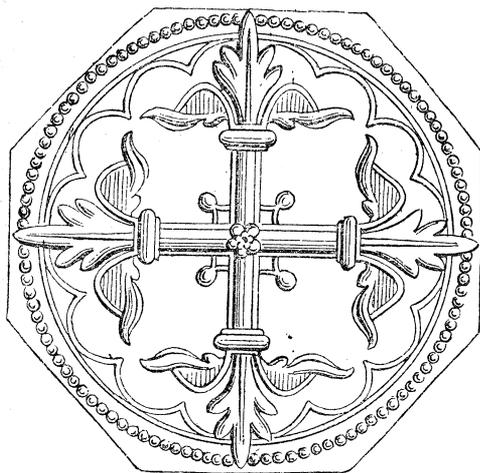
Most of the figures in the text are too large for reproduction here, but these two give a fair idea—so far as they go—of the beauty of a large proportion of the letterings and ornaments used on bells, especially those of pre-Reformation date.

The lettering of which the initial C is a sample, is on a bell at Broughton, by a London founder in the second half of the fifteenth century, but it probably originally belonged to another man a generation earlier.

The beautiful cross was also the property of a Londoner about the middle of the same century, who used

it on the tenor at Wingrave. The lettering and other ornaments on this bell are all very handsome.

When this particularly interesting bell was visited in 1886, it was already cracked across crown and shoulder, and the mis-



chief has been allowed to spread unchecked ever since, so that now there is very little tone left in it.

A clock-hammer, far too heavy for the bell, and which, by resting improperly on it between the blows, checks the vibrations, is materially hastening the end; and, to crown all, the bell is only now sounded by "clapping" instead of chiming—a usage which should never, under any circumstances, be permitted.