

The fourteenth century curfew tower rises over the ~~moat~~ moat of this beautiful castle; it may be seen from the main road quite clearly, a square embattled tower, not unlike that of a church, and surmounted by a flagpole. In this tower hangs the oldest dated bell in the county. Originally it was designed as a curfew bell, and as late as 1887 it was still being used as such; Mr Stahlschmidt was alarmed at the worn state of its sound bow; since then the bell has been given half a turn to bring a rather less worn surface under the blow of the clapper. However, the bell rope is now broken, and the bell is simply used for the striking of the hours by the clock. This clock is of great age, and the writer hopes to have a report on it from Mr D. Rundle, of Asnford in due course. As Mr Stahlschmidt observes, the bell appears from its inscription which commences "L'an....." which is the French for "The year", to be of French origin, and is an object-lesson in showing that the English word "Clock" derives from the French "Cloche", or bell, upon which the clock strikes.

The writer is unable to do more than hazard a guess that the bell was either brought to Leeds from France as part of a hoard of booty, or else cast to the order of a former lord who perhaps had estates in France. Particulars of the bell are as follows:-

Diameter: $22\frac{1}{2}$ - inches.

Height from lip to shoulder at tangent: $17\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

Circumference of shoulder of Bell: approximately 38 inches.

Weight: approximately $2\frac{1}{4}$ cwt.

Thickness of soundbow: Unworn zones: $1\frac{11}{16}$ ins; worn, $1\frac{1}{16}$ and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches, the latter being the present chiming side if bell is swung. There is slight wear on each side where the clock hammer strikes or formerly struck before the bell was turned. The bell has six rather prominent "anses" or canons, and retains its argent. The stump of the former crownstaple cast in to the bell remains, and a false one is fitted over it. This constitutes a serious danger to the bell as there are no louvres, and the bell is exposed to the elements; if the staple expands too much, the bell will crack. Better that it be drilled out than that this priceless bell would perish. The bell has been half-turned, and bears the inscription:-

† L'an * m * cccc * xxx * 5
 [] [] []

The bell is thus dated 1435, but the founder is not known to the writer. Before the inscription is a calvary cross; the stop is a sun with a face; and the bell bears three medallions, as follows: below the first stop, the Madonna and Child; below the final c, the Crucifixion; and below the v, St George slaying the dragon. The moulding wires are arranged thus: two in the crown, two each side of the inscription; two one inch apart on the waist below the medallions; three on the soundbow, and two at the lip, which is chipped. The crucifix is $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches high; the letters $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches, and the medallions $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches; the canons are cable-moulded.

Leeds Castle Curfew Tower bell - contd.

The bell is hung for ringing inverted, and the gear consists of elm headstock, recessed, hooped and single-screw-bolted strap gudgeons, brass bearings, traditional type wheel (which seems modern, the former wheel now hanging on the wall) and ground pulley, and horizontal iron latchet stay and slider. A light clock hammer is fitted. The ballrope is broken and all the fittings are in an advanced state of decay.

The frame is a hotch-potch of old timbers; for example, there is a cut-out for a bearing in one of the ground-cills; it seems to have been reconstructed. Most of the frame beams are decayed, and the top parts, being some 4 ft above the windows, which are unprotected, are in a terrible state. The cross-braces are in a poor condition. It is a great pity to see this bell thus hanging and it is hoped that it may one day be restored.

The clapper, with flat ball & 2-bolt head and U-connector is not of great age, but is dangerous. Visited DLC, NJD, DR, 8.i.1969

Flagpole bears on frame; lead floor; no louvres; roof seems sound, but much damp around. no debris.

The bell is hung for ringing inverted, and the fittings consist of elm headstock, strap-type recessed hooped and single screw-bolted gudgeons, brass bearings, modern traditional pattern wheel (the original is on the wall) and ground roller, and horizontal iron latchet stay and slider. There is a light clock hammer. For the most part these fittings are in an exceedingly bad state of repair, and the writers venture warning that the bell is in great need of rehunging, which in the case of this rare and priceless bell is much to be desired.

The frame consists of heads, cills, and cross braces in ends and sides; the bearings are over four feet above the completely open windows. The horizontal members of the bell frame have been reconstructed, as there is a cut-out for a brass bearing in the bottom cills of the frame, and all in all the frame is in a very poor, rotten condition. Fortunately the bell is not swung - its clapper is of poor design with a 2-bolt head with U-connector and very flat ball - as the rope has snapped; but this does not obviate the necessity of realising its potential danger.

Visited NJD, DLC, DR, 8.i.1969.

Preliminary Report on the Ancient Clock at Leeds Castle

Having had the pleasure of accompanying Messrs Cawley and Davies to the Curfew Tower of Leeds Castle on the 8th. January 1969, the following notes form my preliminary observations on the ancient clock which strikes the hours on the bell described by Mr. Cawley.

The clock movement is situated immediately below the bell and stands on a wooden framework and enclosed in a rough wood casing which opens at the ~~top~~ back and at one side.

At first sight the similarity between this movement and that of the Dover Castle Clock (now in the Science Museum) is most plainly evident. The iron frame in which are the going and striking trains in the identical front and back arrangement, measures approximately 20" high, 19" wide and 24½" long and appears to be slightly smaller than the Dover Clock. The top corner finials are forged to the same shape but are turned more to the horizontal plane; the corner pillars are forged to a slightly more elaborate pattern and some of the dowel pins are better finished and may be of a later date.

The going train consists of only the wooden barrel carrying the great wheel on the outside of which is the pin engaging the strike warning detent and thus turning once per hour. The great wheel engages the 'scape wheel pinion on a round section arbor which pivots in brass bushes. The escapement itself is a recoil 60 conrate teeth wheel controlled by anchor pallets. The wooden two second pendulum is suspended from a wall bracket and is engaged in an open front crutch and carries a heavy cast iron bob. There is a S shaped horizontal spring mounted on the top centre bar which presses against the pallet arbor pivot keeping it held up to the opposite pallet arbor cock hole. Its function is to keep the pallets engaged, but will permit the escapement to be opened and allow the train to run on for adjusting time forward. (A dialless clock of this type has no slipping cannon pinion for correcting error) There may also be some connection between this spring cock and a previous verge foliot cock?

The striking train bears even closer resemblance to the Dover Clock in that the barrel arbor engages an internal teathed locking plate and the hammer is tripped by a cage of seven trundles built on to the great wheel. The great wheel engages the second arbor which is of similar hexagonal section and this in turn engages the fly arbor which carries a similar step pin in the centre. The fly itself is of similar design and situated outside the frame.

Both barrels are wound from the back end, a special shaft and pinion being provide for the going barrel. The winder is shuttered by another control which has to be set and apparently

stepping the clock before winding can take place?

It is hoped that further examination will reveal traces of a bottom verge cock as evidence that this movement had once a verge escapement which would almost certainly place the clock in the Dover Castle Clock period and which is thought to be about 1600

Regarding the existing centre recoil escapement which actually is almost 'dead' in its action. I have met this once before in a Balcon Bracket Clock by J.Lereux circa 1780 and the Horological Journal, January 1969 records the clock at Christchurch, Chalford as having this escapement the date being 1769.

The condition appears to be good considering the environment and the movement seems to be competently maintained and the ropes have fairly recently been renewed.

D.E.Rundle

2nd. March. 1969.

16, Hardinge Rd.,
ASHFORD Kent.