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# Belgian carillons in UK clock towers. Part 1

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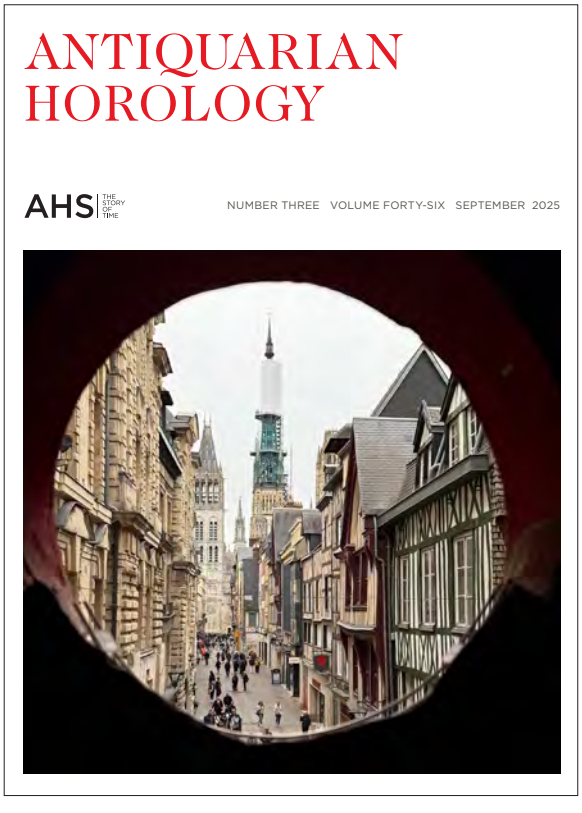


The September 2025 issue contains as usual 148 pages, and includes these articles:

Art and symbols on monastic clocks of Mount Athos, by Spiridion Azzopardi

Belgian carillons in UK clock towers. Part 1, by Darlah Thomas

Time in Biscuit Town, by James Nye

A remarkable correspondence, by Andrew King

Museum profile: The Frick Collection, by Bob Frishman

On the front cover: A view from the clock tower in Rouen. Photo Thomas Muff. The *Gros Horologe* in Rouen was on the itinerary of the AHS Study Tour to Northern France and Belgium, undertaken in May this year and reported in the section AHS News in this issue.

# Belgian carillons in UK clock towers. Part 1

Darlah Thomas*

*This article began as a talk delivered at the Turret Clock Forum at the School of Jewellery, Birmingham City University on 23 October 2024. The day's theme was 'the face and voice of the clock', i.e. dials and bells. Since that day, more information has come to light which has extended the content. The article centres on the carillons of bells which were imported from Belgium and the newly developed carillon machine manufactured by Gillett and Bland from 1867–8 in projects in the UK: three for churches and one for a private setting. These were 'of their time' and suffered from criticism and circumstances to such an extent that only one project has remained intact. In common with many new technologies, subsequent innovations have enabled their legacy — the use of this genre as symbols of peace has seen the installation of many peace towers and war memorials housing carillons throughout the world.*

The focus of this article is narrow and specific, so its scope requires definition.

## What is a carillon?

A carillon is a musical instrument consisting of twenty-three or more cast bronze, traditionally shaped bells, which are precisely tuned so that they can be sounded together to produce chords or played singly. The World Carillon Federation lists qualifying carillons in the world, mainly sited in Europe and the Americas. A carillon of between fifteen and twenty-two bells cast before 1940, qualifies as a 'historic carillon'[1] and the definition is further qualified to include only those which have a baton clavier (keyboard) played by a carillonneur. A carillon may be played manually on a keyboard in which case the bells are struck by clappers hanging inside the bells; in an automatic carillon machine activated by a clock at set times, it raises hammers which are mounted to hit the outside of the bells. A chime has fewer than fifteen bells which may be rung by ropes, a keyboard or Ellacombe system or by a rotating drum, similar to those on automatic carillons.

In the Low Countries, (The Netherlands and Belgium), carillons have been a part of life in towns and villages, in church towers and in civic buildings for centuries. In the past, many played tunes hourly through all twenty-four hours, but this has declined reflecting changes in public taste. In the larger towns and cities, regular carillon recitals of mixed programmes are played by a carillonneur. Unlike UK change-ringing, the bells play musical tunes, often by the classical composers, have a base part and play chords. Simple tune-playing machines have long been playing in towers in the UK, but only one note is sounded at a time and only a small range of tunes are played on a chime of usually eight or ten bells.

Only three of the installations under consideration in this article ever had a baton clavier and all had an automatic playing machine manufactured either by Gillett and Bland (G&B) or by a Belgian company. All four had bells cast at the Van Aerschodt Foundry, Louvain, Belgium.[2] Taylor's of Loughborough began casting carillons c. 1892 (i.e. sets of at least twenty-three bells and their frames); G&B

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1. World Carillon Federation website, https://www.carillon.org/eng/fs_orga.htm.

2. Louvain is the French spelling of this city's name. As it is situated in the province of Brabant, in the Flemish region of Belgium, it is now more often spelled Leuven, although at the time when the four UK carillons were cast the city's name had the French spelling. The spelling of the names Louvain and Malines have both been changed but the old versions are used through the article to avoid confusion. Malines is now Mechelen.



Figs 1, 2 and 3. André Louis Jean van Aerschodt (1814–1888), Séverin van Aerschodt (1819–1885) and Felix van Aerschodt (1870–1943). Source: *Les Van Aerschodt fondeurs de cloches à Louvain*, compiled by Paul-Félix Vernimmen. 1982. (With thanks to Chris Pickford.)

began casting bells in 1877 but did not cast carillons until c.1920.[3] During the nineteenth century, Mears & Stainbank cast chimes of up to eight and sets of small, hemispherical bells. Hence the selection of Belgian bells in the four installations discussed in this article.

## The Van Aerschodt bell foundry, Louvain

The Van Aerschodt family were one of the major bell-founders in Belgium in the second half of the nineteenth century. André van Aerschodt (1814–1888) and his younger brother Séverin (1819–1885) were descended from the Van den Gheyns who had been casting bells in Belgium since the early 1500s. In 1850 Séverin van Aerschodt built a house on Rue Leopold with an adjoining foundry around the corner on Rue de la Station. The first bells were cast there in 1851. Séverin's son Félix (1870–1943) continued the bell-founding business into the twentieth century. Séverin and Félix had both studied sculpture, the father at École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and the son in the workshop of Josef Lambeaux in Belgium. As a result, many of their ringing bells had abundant Baroque or Gothic decoration but those for carillons were

Fig. 4. A highly decorated bell cast by Séverin van Aerschodt for Rev. Haweis. Undated. Image from *Bells and Belfries*, by Rev. Haweis, 1890.

3. Arthur A. Johnston joined the G&B partnership in 1877. Charles Bland had died in 1884 and the name change from Gillett & Bland to Gillett & Johnston occurred around 1887.

4. Paul-Félix Vernimmen, *The Van Aerschodt bell founders in Louvain,* translated: 'His [Severin VA] carillon bells, as well as those of his brother, remain little decorated so as not to influence the tonality'.


Fig. 5. This is thought to be a letterhead of Séverin van Aerschodt's bell foundry in Louvain, Belgium. It records the foundry's success in The Exhibition of Industrial Arts in Belgium, held in Brussels in 1853.

relatively undecorated to maintain their tone.[4]

The Louvain foundry had cast five complete carillons and a large number of other bells by 1867 when the first of the four UK carillons was cast.

Before going further, it is necessary to point out that the bells discussed in this article were judged by 'experts', whose verdicts could be contradictory, the same bells being praised at one time and declared unsatisfactory at a later date. This could result in decisions to re-cast bells, which, with the benefit of hindsight, sometimes may seem to have been made too hastily.

## Van Aerschodt carillons in towers in the UK

The four locations of Van Aerschodt carillons in the UK were:

1. St Botolph's Church, Boston, Lincolnshire, 1867.
2. SS Peter & Paul, Cattistock, Dorset, 1872.
3. Eaton Hall, Cheshire, 1877.
4. St Nicholas' Kirk, Aberdeen, 1887.

(In the timeline of the casting of the four carillons in this article, Eaton Hall and Aberdeen follow Cattistock. However, delays at Cattistock meant that the carillon was not fully installed there until many years after both Eaton Hall and Aberdeen).

## 1. St Botolph's Church, Boston, Lincolnshire

*(More money than sense?)*

There were several bells in St Botolph's tower as far back as the fourteenth century; an inventory of 1552 listed five bells plus a Sanctus bell not mounted with the others, and in 1598, a clock bell was present.[5] In 1709, the clock bell, which weighed 4000 pounds (35.7cwt), was melted down and three new bells were cast from its metal; a new clock bell weighing 533 pounds (4.7cwt) was acquired and hung in the lantern at the top of the tower so its sound would carry further. It cracked in 1754 and was replaced in 1758.[6] Further re-castings occurred later in the

5. 'The bells of St Botolph's, Boston Lincolnshire', in *Ringing World*, 29 October 1982. (No author given).

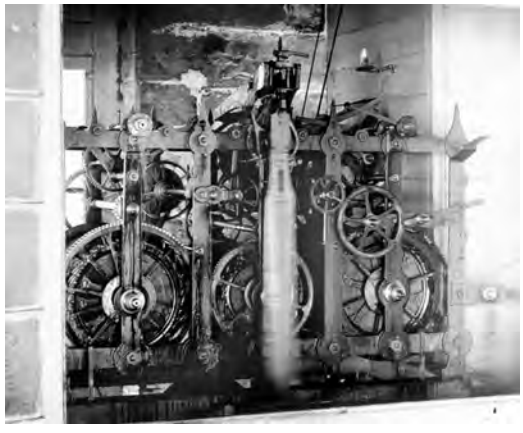


Fig. 6. The clock at Boston signed by William Wynn of Soho, *c*. 1826. Source: Chris McKay collection via Keith Scobie-Youngs.

eighteenth century whenever the need arose. There appear to be no other records of the old clock's existence, but it was replaced *c*. 1826 by a quarter chiming (ting tang) clock signed William Wynn of Dean Street, Soho which drove no dials.[7]

The clock had a deadbeat escapement with rollers to the pallets. His improved hammer arrangement for turret clocks was awarded the Society of Arts gold medal and twenty guineas in 1822.[8]

The parish church at Boston has long benefitted from generous donations of funds from descendants of those Bostonians who crossed the Atlantic in the seventeenth century and founded Boston, Mass. This was the case in the 1850s when £11,000 was donated to the church for restorations which included the tower, when the bells were moved to a higher level.[9]

*A carillon for Boston*

The mayor of Boston proposed the installation of a carillon on the Belgian principle at a meeting of interested townsfolk in September 1865. A sum of £1,000 was suggested and £310 was subscribed immediately. The mayor was delighted and thought the total could be reached very soon.[10]

Daniel Imhof's patent entitled 'Improvements in the machinery of chimes, applicable also to organs', was dated 1867.[11] It removed the job of the barrel pins to raise the hammers again after they had struck the bells, so they were in position ready for the next release by the pins on the barrel (sometimes referred to as a drum) as its rotation continued. Further improvements led to a second patent dated 1868 involving continuously revolving cams which ensured the hammers were reliably returned to their ready position for their next action.

In March 1867, William Gillett visited Boston to show his 'model chimes'. The model was used for marketing purposes but was specially made by Imhof for G&B to copy when making their machines.[12] Gillett met with the town's Chimes Committee where it was agreed to enter into a contract with him to construct the church chimes under terms set out by him

6. Thomas North, *The Church Bells of Lincolnshire (*1882), p. 324. All information on the bells up to the date of publication are from this source.

7. T. R. Robinson, 'Boston's New Clock and Bells', *Horological Journal (HJ)* 15 March 1933, p. 17.

8. *HJ*, April 1888, p. 127. A reply the following month confirmed this maker's abilities but ends by stating that Wynn died in Clerkenwell Workhouse, *HJ*, May 1888, 143–4. Details of the improvements to turret clock hammers are published with drawings in *HJ* October 1899, 16–21.

9. North, *The Church Bells of Lincolnshire*. The bells were moved in 1852–3.

10. *Boston Guardian*, 2 September 1865. (This and all subsequent newspaper reports in this article appear with thanks to The British Newspaper Archive, unless specifically mentioned otherwise.)

11. Daniel Imhof, 'Improvements in the machinery of chimes, applicable also to organs', presented September 1866, sealed 26 March, 1867. The second patent (1868) is the one most often referred to in horological literature. Imhof's 1868 system for releasing and repositioning the bell hammers is fully described in Trevor S. Jennings, *British and Irish Chime Barrel Mechanisms and the Community Response 1550–1930*, privately published in 2000, p. 49. In summary the pre-Imhof method was: one end of the bell-raising lever was raised by a long, sturdy pin while the other end of the lever lowered, pulling the transmission wire attached to the bell hammer and thus raising the hammer which then fell by gravity onto the bell, where it remained until another activation by the pin on the barrel.

12. *Boston Guardian*, 15 August 1868. This information came from a letter written by Imhof to the newspaper concerning the tune barrel and Gillett's complaints about it.

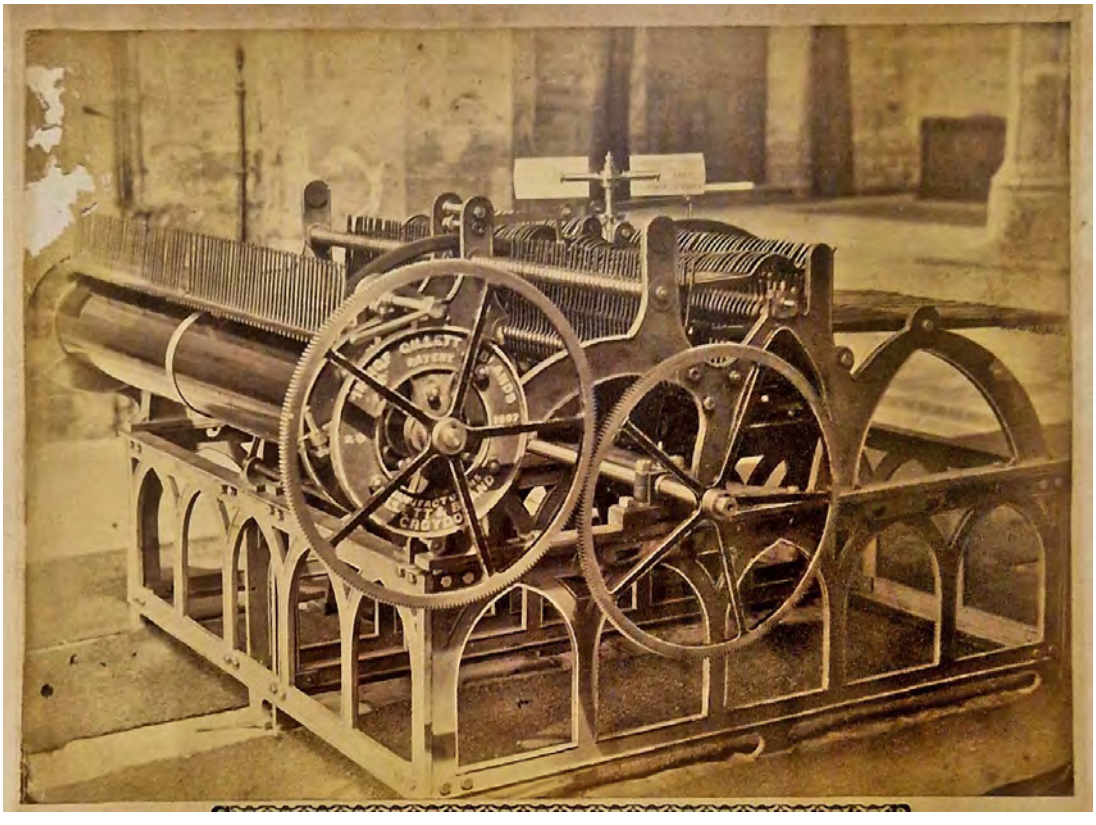


Fig. 7. G&B's first carillon machine. The following is cast on the frame: Imhof, Gillett & Bland's Patent. AD 1867. Manufacturers Gillett and Bland, Croydon. (Punctuation added for clarity.) On the actual image, the title below the image has 'Machinery for Boston Chimes. Fixed by Henry Pearson, May 4th, 1868.' The initials T.H. are also included; maybe this was the photographer. This image is kept at St Botolph's and was photographed for us by Wayne Francis.

in a letter dated 1st May, 1866.[13] This was to be the first of what became known as G&B's carillon machines, and came with a guarantee as it was new and untried, that if it wasn't found satisfactory to the organist Mr Thirtle or to Edmund B Denison, its cost would be refunded by Mr Gillett.[14]

It isn't known whether the agreement between Imhof and G&B was made before or just after the sealing of Imhof's second patent. However, the photograph shown as Fig. 7 which has been discovered only recently, suggests that the 1867 patent had already been sealed when the machine was made, but not the second patent. G&B's agreement with Imhof enabled them to work to the patent specifications, but in the years which followed, they added their own improvements to the system.[15]

*St Botolph, Boston's clock and carillon*

The old tenor bell was broken up at Boston and delivered to Louvain for recasting when a light-weight carillon of thirty-six bells was cast by André van Aerschodt in 1867. When completed, they would have been shipped via The Wash and thence to Boston via the River Witham which flows through the town. The carillon, installed by G&B above the old ring of eight in the tower was to be operated by G&B's automatic carillon machine which itself was controlled by the 1826 William Wynn clock which G&B converted to single fourteen-leg

13. *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 1 March 1867. No trace of this has been found.

14. *Boston Guardian*, 2 March, 1867.

15. The London firm of Lund & Blockley also used Imhof's patent and like G&B, also made their own improvements. They used Warner's hemispherical bells.

gravity escapement. The carillon consisted of five tiers of bells with the smallest twelve on the top tier and the heaviest four at the bottom of the cast iron frame.

In July 1868, a local newspaper reported that the carillon machine had been erected in the tower and that Mr Imhof and Mr Gillett had been working together to prepare the barrels. The machine was tested a few days later for the first time. It was found to 'act with great precision'. The tunes, however, did not impress as the arrangement of the tunes was found confusing. Pre-empting a poor reaction from the public, the newspaper stated 'it must be borne in mind that this is the first trial of carillons in England … there must be considerable difficulties to surmount before the music is finally perfected'.[16] Four mahogany barrels were pinned to play twenty-eight tunes on all forty-four bells; one tune every hour after the Cambridge chimes and a different one each day,[17] but there was no baton clavier. The cost of the project was £1,638. Once completed, the old clock bell dating to 1758 and the quarter jacks dating to 1853, were sent to Messrs Warners for breaking up.[18]

*Dissatisfaction sets in*

Edmund B. Denison had warned those at Boston not to have chords or large and small bells used together in tunes as they would not harmonise; they could be used successfully separately, but not together.[19] He inspected Imhof's new hammer raising system and declared that 'the hammer discharge [*was*] easy and perfect'.[20] He visited Boston at an unknown date and said, 'I and others who went specially to hear them [*the carillon*], thought it a failure'.[21] Initially the bells themselves had been widely praised,[22] but as time passed, criticisms of the installation grew. G&B answered these by blaming Imhof and his tune barrel, which Gillett said made the tunes sound confusing – they were too complicated. He also claimed that the 'novel and unique machinery we *alone* have designed and constructed for ringing the chimes, has elicited the warmest praise from all mechanicians who have inspected it …'. In turn, Imhof defended his reputation by saying it was G&B's incompetence and their chiming machine which caused the problems.[23] Others joined in; trade journals, the elite of the musical world and some manufacturers all gave their opinions. Inhof retaliated by allowing other carillon machine manufacturers to use his patent without a licence and G&B, in anticipation of a decline in orders, sought to further improve on the patent, and have their own patent sealed. In reality, their improvements were small and relied on Imhof's original creation.[24]

Rev. H.R. Haweis studied bells and wrote books and papers on bells and bell music. He loved the carillons of Belgium and described them enthusiastically. He was directly involved with the selection of bells in the UK installations but does not seem to have been heavily involved with Boston.[25] His two publications: a book

16. *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 25 July 1868.

17. After all 28 tunes had been played, the sequence would begin again with tune number one.

18. North, *The Church Bells of Lincolnshire*, for details of the carillon frame, the bells, tunes and cost. The Jacks, a man and a woman, dated to only 1854. The originals were sold that year; they dated from 1777 at the latest.

19. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, ninth edition, pp. 31–32. The author's initials are shown: E.B.. Was this Edmund Beckett?

20. Jennings, *British and Irish Chime Barrel Mechanisms …,* p. 48. Details of the G&B patent have not been traced. It is likely it was never sealed as G&B's 'improvements' were not sufficiently 'new' to qualify. This area is worthy of further research.

21. Lord Grimthorpe, Edmund Beckett, *A Rudimentary Treatise on Clocks, Watches and Bells*, 1903, pub. John Allen.

22. George Lund when presenting his paper to the Society of Arts in 1874 said that Boston's bells were considered to be very good. Reported in *HJ*, April 1874, p. 115.

23. *Boston Guardian*, 15 August 1868. This information comes from two letters to the editor: one from Imhof, the second was Gillett's reply.

24. The lengthy arguments and repercussions are fully detailed by Jennings, *British and Irish Chime Barrel Mechanisms*, pp. 49–51. Whilst writing this article, G&J were approached to discover more about this first carillon machine, but neither descriptions of the machine or details of the G&B patent were found. In order to be patentable, an item's novelty and/or inventiveness have to be proven.

Fig. 8. The vertical tuning lathe at the Van Aerschodt foundry. Image thanks to Paul-Félix Vernimmen, 1982, and Chris Pickford.

entitled *Music and Morals (*1874) and a paper *Bells and Belfries* (1890), lauded the Belgian tradition of carillon playing and yearned for its introduction here.[26] However, he felt that the British public were not sufficiently educated to appreciate bell music; they didn't understand the subtle difference between the sound of bells playing a tune and the same being played on a piano or violin. When Séverin van Aerschodt died in January 1886, Haweis said, 'Severin's bells bearing date of up to 1885 will now rank with choice china produced by defunct manufactories and Stradivarius violins'.[27]

When writing his book on Lincolnshire bells in the early 1880s, Thomas North noted that only seven of the tunes at Boston could be played.[28] Even Gillett's later carillon machines have required frequent attention and adjustment or repairs to keep them in playing order; this first example seems to have suffered greatly. It was no longer operational in 1889.

Another churchman, Canon Arthur Barwick Simpson, published his thoughts on bells; in his opinion, most old English parish church bells were out of tune and he blamed this on the bellfounders. His ideas were published in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1895/6 and in his paper *Why bells sound out of tune and how to cure them* (1897). The traditional tuning method involved tuning forks to judge by ear whether a bell was in tune or not. If not, the only solution, apart from the melting pot, was to chip away specific parts of the inside of the bell with a hammer and chisel to raise or lower the note slightly.[29] This was a difficult, inexact and irreversible process. In addition, many carillons suffered from the resonance of one bell interfering with the sound of the next bell played; this was Edmund B. Denison's complaint, which resulted in a sound which he described as 'noise'.[30] Simpson also noted that Belgian tuning differed from English tuning which gave Belgian bell music its distinctive blending of bell sounds.

From possibly the late 1870s,[32] the Van Aerschodt foundry had a vertical lathe which could remove small amounts of metal as the bell was rotated (Fig. 8); this was used in combination with a large set of tuning

25. *Ringing World*, 25 December 1942, p. 580. The unknown writer also said the carillon machine had been 'done away with.'

26. Rev. H.R. Haweis, 'Bells and Belfries', published in *The English Illustrated Magazine*, October 1890.

27. *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 25 January, 1886.

28. North, *The Church Bells of Lincolnshire,* p. 327.

29. Arthur Barwick Simpson, *Why bells sound out of tune and how to cure them (*1897), available online.

30. *Manchester Evening News*, 28 May 1879. This was a complaint about Manchester Town Hall's bells but could apply equally to others where the resonance of one bell affected the next.

31. Arthur Barwick Simpson, 'On bell tones', in *Pall Mall Magazine* Vol Vll, Sept–Dec 1895, pp. 183–194, available online, and 'Why bells sound out of tune and how to cure them', see n. 29.

32. Eaton Hall bells (of 1877) show markings which suggest they were 'tuned' on a vertical lathe.

Fig. 9. Set of tuning forks belonging to Séverin van Aerschodt. Image thanks to Paul-Félix Vernimmen. 1982, and Chris Pickford.

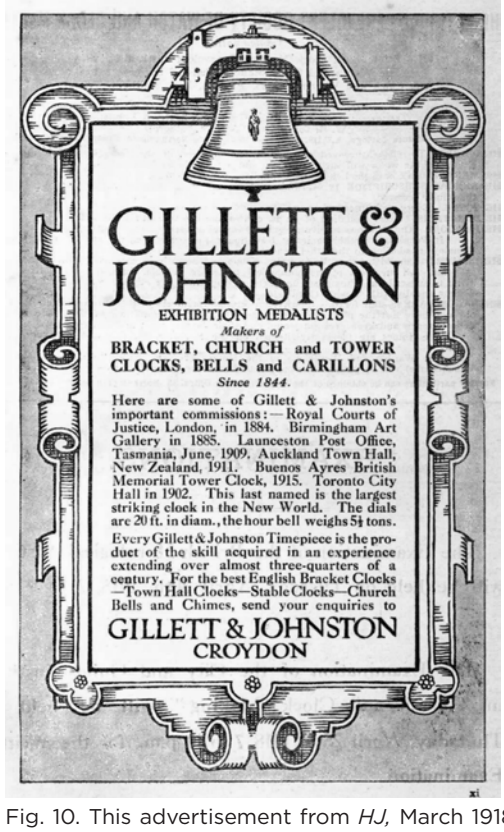



Fig. 10. This advertisement from *HJ,* March 1918, p. xi, suggests G&J had begun casting carillons. (Or does this refer to their carillon machines?)

forks, see Fig. 9. However, Simpson and the experiences in several locations fuelled a growing dissatisfaction with carillon bells.


Fig. 11. This advertisement from *HJ,* August 1919, p. xi, is rather confusing. It appeared at a time when G&J had just begun advertising their own carillons and suggests they were responsible for the whole of the 1868 equipment at Boston, even the bells.

*Drastic action taken*

So it was in 1897, (shortly after the publication of the two papers), that all Boston's carillon bells were recast by Gillett & Johnston (G&J) into four quarter bells for the clock. It has been said that the carillon machine was scrapped at this point, but a letter published in the *Horological Journal* (*HJ* from here) from the organist of St Botolph's suggests that was not the case.He stated that 'the original chiming machine erected by Wynn[*e*] was superseded in 1868 by one of G&B's machines'[33] and that when the thirty-six bells were re-cast, 'the machinery [*was*] altered to play on them [*the four new bells*] and on the eight of the ringing peal.' [34] What appear to be the original seven-

33. This seems to have disappeared at this time most possibly into G&B's store where it would have stayed until reused somewhere or discarded.

34. *HJ*, June 1899, 133–4.

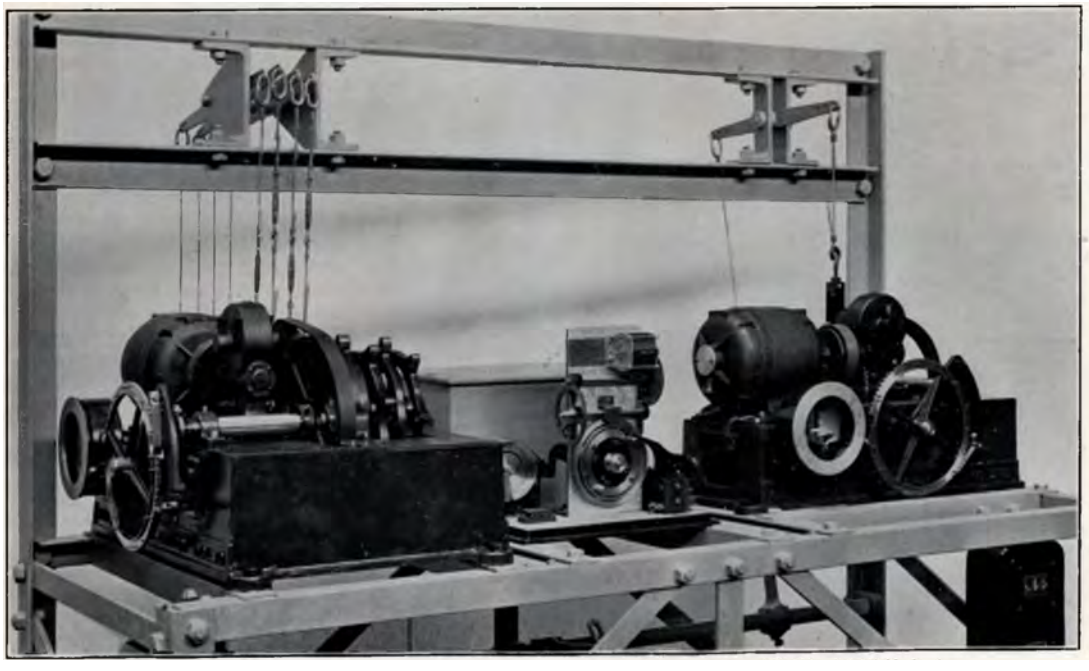


Fig. 12. The electrically driven clock at St Botolph's, Boston by G&B. It was placed within the bell chamber and surrounded by the ten ringing bells; above the clock hung its four strike and chime bells. Image: *Watch and Clockmaker*, 15 March 1933, p. 16, where the caption reads: 'The new Tower Clock: A Synchronous Motor Clock (in centre) operates the Chiming (left) and Striking (right) Mechanisms'.

tune barrels were retained, playing a different tune each day of the week with sacred tunes played on Sundays and Fridays. The chimes rang out every three hours from 9am to 9pm and were silent through the night.

*The twentieth century*

A major restoration scheme was announced in 1926; work was required on the tower, the roof of the church and the interior. A new bell frame and the recasting of all the bells was planned and a new clock was needed to replace the Wynn mechanism. A fund was opened which aimed to collect £30,000 within three years. This was a huge task but was achieved thanks to an £11,000 tercentennial birthday gift from Boston, Mass.[35] In 1931 a deputation from the town visited two bell foundries and selected Taylor's of Loughborough to recast the bells. All the bells were recast including the four 1897 bells which had been cast from the Belgian bells. These now formed a ring of ten and four clock bells which were hung 'dead'. The cost was spread jointly between Boston Lincs. and Boston, Mass., with an inscription on the tenor bell recording this.[36]

A clock by G&J was purchased to replace the Wynn clock which was moved and displayed in the church. The new clock was described by T. R. Robinson thus: '[It] is an electrically operated movement of the electrically-driven synchronous motor form, and runs in step with the AC electricity of the town, the first of its type in a parish church.' Thus, he said, Boston had the distinction of having had two 'firsts', i.e. the first automatic carillon machine and

35. *Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian*, 26 July 1930.

36. Information on the recast bells from T. R. Robinson, 'Boston's New Clock and Bells', in *Watch and Clockmaker*, 15 March 1933, 15–17, and from *Dove's Guide for Church Bell Ringers*, which is available online at https://dove.cccbr.org.uk.

37. Robinson, 'Boston's New Clock and Bells', 16 and 17; there is a photo of the fourteen recast bells on p. 15.

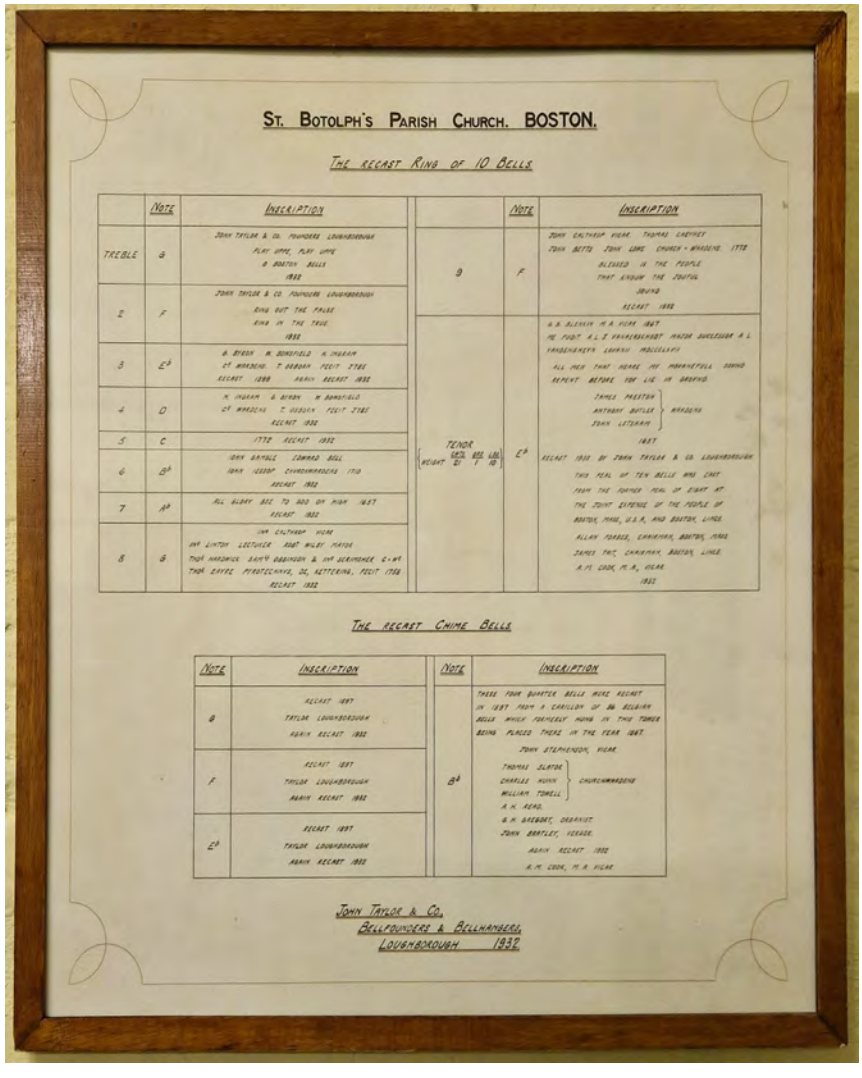



Fig. 13. In 1932, Taylor's provided this chart giving the history of the bells' re-castings. It is in the tower at St Botolph's. Photo taken by Wayne Francis, 30 November 2024.

now the first AC mains-driven church clock.[37] It is not currently known what became of the carillon machine during this restoration.

On completion of the majority of the work, a ceremony of re-dedication was held conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury which was broadcast across the UK and relayed by the Columbia Broadcasting Corp. across the Atlantic to the USA.[38] The bellringers performed and the lantern tower was lit for the first time in many, many years, reviving the tower's role as a guiding light for mariners across the Fenlands.

*More new bells added*

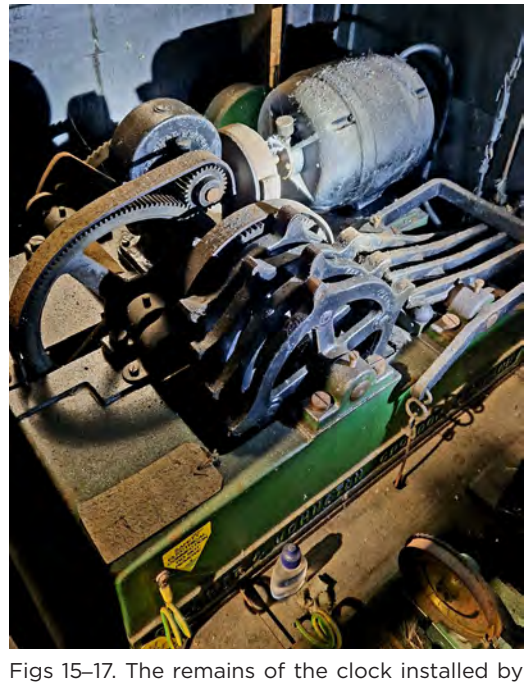
A set of eleven bells was cast by Taylor's of Loughborough in 1949 forming a chime of fifteen which included the four clock bells cast in 1932. The new bells were installed during April and May of 1951[39] and were linked to an electrically operated clavier thus restoring the sound of bell music to the town. The keyboard is not currently functional but there are hopes for its reinstatement (at time of writing). On a visit to St Botolph's in 2024, Wayne Francis took the seven photos shown that follow.

38. Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian, 5 November 1932.

39. Information from Taylor's records via Chris Pickford.

Fig. 14. The new casting of eleven bells and the four 1932 clock bells were hung together in a vertical steel frame inside the outer bellframe housing the ringing bells in 1951. They are now sounded by electro-magnet hammers mounted inside each bell. This is the installation as it existed in 2024.

Fig. 18. Adjacent to the G&J clock is a now unused vacuum-pumped chiming apparatus. This must have been controlled from a now missing keyboard or punch card machine as in fairground organs. There are fifteen levers at the back, but no longer any linkages to the bells. A faint pressing indicates a date of 1952.



Figs 15–17. The remains of the clock installed by G&J in 1932. The three trains are photographed separately as each was a discrete unit. The going train appears to have been replaced at an unknown date.

Fig. 20. The chimes are now controlled from a John Taylor & Co keyboard and an Apollo controller produced by the Belgian company Clock-o-matic, both of unknown dates. This also functions as a clock and sets off the hour strike and quarter chimes.

Left: Fig. 19. The cabinet which still houses the 1932 clock.

## 2. Saint Peter and Saint Paul's church, Cattistock, Dorset

(*Building on the experience of others …*)

This small village parish church in rural Dorset was the next to acquire a Belgian carillon. Following a disastrous fire, a new church tower, designed by Giles Gilbert Scott, jun. was completed in 1876 specially to house a proposed carillon. The first thirty-three bells for it had been cast in 1872 by Séverin van Aerschodt, and were inspected by Rev. Haweis who approved the bells while they were still at the foundry in Louvain. In his *Music and Morals* (1872), referring to his visit to Louvain, Haweis wrote, 'I have never heard a carillon throughout in better tune. They [*the bells*] are composed in the finest tin and copper and their tone is singularly sweet and sonorous'.[40] He arranged for two of them to be exhibited at the Royal Institution in 1879.[41]

The project stalled for many years as the then vicar, Rev. Barnes, who was financing the greater part of the project, was ill. When first announced, G&B were to install one of their carillon machines,[42] but this never happened.

Fig. 21. Early twentieth-century photograph of St Peter and St Paul's Church, Cattistock, Dorset by an unknown photographer. The very large skeleton dial was installed by Gillett and Bland; it was much criticised at the time because of its large size.

*A carillon is delivered*

When the bells were delivered in 1882, the largest eight of them were hung for change-ringing and the remainder were stored in the church. The installation was reported in the local newspaper which also included a list of the inscriptions on each bell. Every bell bore the name or initials of its donor; the largest, the tenor had:

Mark well the passing hour
The tolling Bell
Life's end doth tell.
To the Glory of God.
Séverin van Aerschodt cast me
the Tenor of a peal of eight, at Louvain
and JANET KEITH BARNES gave me to the
Church of S.S. Peter and Paul, Cattistock, 1872.

Fig. 22. A quarter chiming clock by Dent was installed by G&B in 1882. The image shows the clock after subsequent alteration. Image thanks to Cumbria Clock Company.

*A clock for the installation*

G&B supplied and installed a Westminster quarter chiming clock by Dent in 1882, with gravity escapement and epicyclic maintaining power and they fixed a fifteen-foot skeleton dial on the tower. This clock would control the carillon machine when installed.

*A Belgian carillon machine*

In a letter to Rev. Strickland the new vicar of Cattistock *c*. 1892, Haweis wrote that the bells were 'the finest in England'. Strickland visited Belgium on three occasions in 1892, 1894 and 1896 and placed an order with Messieurs Denyn and Somers of Malines, Belgium[44] to undertake the construction of a carillon machine to play the *Rubens March* by Peter Benoit and an air of Rossini's with variations by Josef Denyn at the hour alternately after the chimes. This required daily winding.[45] Two more bells were cast by Félix van Aerschodt

40. *Bridport News*, 2 June 1899. This comment was recalled by Haweis at the dedication service much later on.

41. *Bridport News*, 22 August,1873. This report of a fund-raising bazaar suggested that on shipment to the UK they were to be exhibited at the South Kensington Museum, although nothing further has been traced. *The Globe*, 7 June 1899, in a report on Belgian bells, mentions that two bells were exhibited at the Royal Institution in 1879 when Rev. Haweis was lecturing there.

42. *Salisbury & Wiltshire Journal*, 15 June 1872.

43. *Bridport News*, 17 February 1882. The bells were also listed in W. M. Barbes and J. J. Raven, *The Church Bells of Dorset (*1906), pp. 49–51 and in Christopher Dalton, *The Bells and Belfries of Dorset, Part One* (Upper Court Press, 2000), pp. 50–52.

44. This now has its Flemish name, Mechelen.

45. *Watch and Clock Maker*, June 1937; an anonymous article 'The Clock and Bells of Cattistock' described the installation.

Fig. 23. At an unknown date in the twentieth century the clock was converted to direct electric drive by AC motors, by persons unknown. This image shows the strike train. Image thanks to Cumbria Clock Company.

and were delivered with the carillon machine in April 1899. In addition, a clavier with thirty-five keys and eleven pedals was installed, all the work done by Josef Denyn and his team. After a service by the Bishop of Salisbury to dedicate the bells, the four hundred invited guests were served tea whilst Josef Denyn, who was also the carillonneur of Malines cathedral, played a selection of tunes on the clavier.[46] The installation thus comprised a clock striking on some/all of the eight ringing bells and a carillon machine which had access to both the ringing and fixed bells, thirty-five in total.

*The twentieth century*

In 1900, Josef Denyn began a series of annual recitals held during the Cattistock Fair in July each year; all were well attended. In 1903, nine bells of the originals were recast by Félix van Aerschodt for better tuning and M. Denyn added new tunes to the metal cylinder-barrel. One of his recitals was attended by Rev. Henry

Fig. 24. The going train. Image thanks to Cumbria Clock Company.

Fig. 25. The chime train. Image thanks to Cumbria Clock Company.

T. Tilley (co-author of a book on Warwickshire bells). He wrote about it in glowing terms in *HJ* in a short report entitled 'Belgian Carillons in England'.[47] After the alteration, the carillon

46. *Bridport News*, 2 June 1899.

47. *HJ*, June 1903, 127–8.

Fig. 26. A smaller dial was selected to replace the original. Where the first had appeared too large for the tower, this one appears a little small. Photograph by Robert Wellen, 2015; reproduced here with his permission.

played one of three tunes every hour – a march, played at the odd hours and two national airs at the even hours, the bells being silenced from 9pm until 8am.

The recitals continued annually until 1914. In the very first month of the war, the carillon in the collegiate St Peter's Church at Louvain was destroyed when the building was burned by German troops during what became known as the Rape of Belgium. Huge numbers of Belgians were deported to Germany or massacred, but both Josef Denyn, who spent the wartime in Tunbridge Wells, initially with composer William Wooding Starmer,[48] and Félix van Aerschodt, who went to London, escaped harm.[49] The recitals continued throughout the war years and up to 1929 which was Denyn's last. His pupils or assistants took over for a few years, after which English carilloneurs performed at the recitals. During the 1930s, as W. G. Pike remembers, the clock was setting off either *John Peel* and *Abide with Me* at hourly intervals, day and night.[50] In 1935, the visiting carilloneurs said the bells were out of tune but there was no money to recast them owing to the depression. A ten-year plan was drawn up for the recasting to spread the financial load.

*Disaster!*

War broke out again, and in September 1940 the upper part of the tower, which was in use as an observation post, the carillon and the carillon machine were destroyed by fire.[51] The tower was rebuilt soon after the war though costs prevented the replacement of the carillon. A new peal of eight bells by Mears & Stainbank was cast from new metal and was hung in 1950.[52] At an unknown date the clock was converted to be electrically driven.

[The second and final part of this article will be published in a future journal issue.]

48. Luc Rombouts, *Singing Bronze: A History of Carillon Music* (Leuven: Lipsius, 2015), p. 195. The Denyn family of Josef, his wife Helene and their five children were all accommodated for a time by Starmer who was a well-known carillon expert and had corresponded with Denyn in the years leading up to World War I.

49. Félix van Aerschodt worked as manager at the Warner Bell Foundry in Spitalfields which was employed in making munitions during the war. https://www.hibberts.co.uk/the-van-aerschodts-of-louvain/

50. W. G. Pike, 'Between the Pips and the Chips – The Diary of a Country Watchmaker', *HJ* October 1986, pp. 6 and 7.

51. Dalton, *Bells and Belfries of Dorset.* He recorded that in October 1940, 61½ cwt of metal from the fire-damaged bells was bought by G&J. He did not give a cause of the fire and it was not reported in the local press at the time.

52. Dalton, *Bells and Belfries of Dorset;* all information about Cattistock in the current paragraph is taken from page 154.