

Baroness Bountiful

Charles Dickens wrote frequently to "that Lady Bountiful, at once wise and gentle and charitable". The excellent article (pp.767-769) on the lost ring at Holy Trinity, New Westminster, British Columbia, Canada brings Angela Burdett Coutts to life once again. When she died in 1906 at the great age of 92 she was able to look not only at a good number of churches and dioceses endowed from her munificence but at more than one ring of bells provided and paid for at her express wish. Inheriting £2,000,000⁽¹⁾ she resolved to do good with it, and although considerable amounts remain of that good, much has been destroyed. A Victorian philanthropist through and through, she decided that the poor were going to be done good unto and later commentators have been far from kind to many of her efforts. Her "model homes" in Bethnal Green for instance "have . . . all the grimness which was to become standard"⁽²⁾; "models for the destruction of the City's coherence . . . precursors for to-day's tower blocks"⁽³⁾. Her chosen architect was Henry Darbishire whose later creations, the Peabody Dwellings, frequently partake of the nature of 19th-century prison architecture yet were a vast improvement on their predecessors on the site both in hygiene and durability. There was a fountain by Darbishire in Victoria Park, Hackney (is it still there?) an "elephantine polygonal structure . . . in a Gothic-cum-Moorish style"⁽⁴⁾. Many of her model dwellings have been destroyed - for the better. At the other end of the scale the Holly Village built for her servants at Highgate survives; some call it ludicrous, but I rather like it. Darbishire built it and her greatest secular monument, Columbia Market, Bethnal Green, "a most spectacular piece of design and one of the great follies of the Victorian age"⁽⁵⁾. Never the success Angela Burdett Coutts anticipated, even its great clock tower was demolished in the sixties after half a century of disuse - even the City gave it back to her⁽⁶⁾.

For her churches, the Baroness (as she became in 1871) chose Darbishire for only one St. James, More Park Road, Fulham, a cheap (£4,500) building of originality and charm. It was consecrated in 1867 and demolished in 1980. Others of her churches followed a like fate, the fine St. John, Hallet Street, Limchouse (Henry Clutton 1852/3) being bombed; St. Stephen, Carlisle also demolished and St. James, Hatcham - famous for ritual controversy during the incumbency of the much persecuted Fr. Tooth - now in secular use.

It is perhaps not surprising that the Fulham and Hatcham churches do not appear in the Whitechapel books, as they together with that in Limchouse probably received their single bells as simple parts of canonical furniture. St. John's, Deptford received its Mears & Stainbank eight in 1874, 20 years after its building. Four of them were memorials to individuals, the remainder given by the Vicar and Church Wardens.

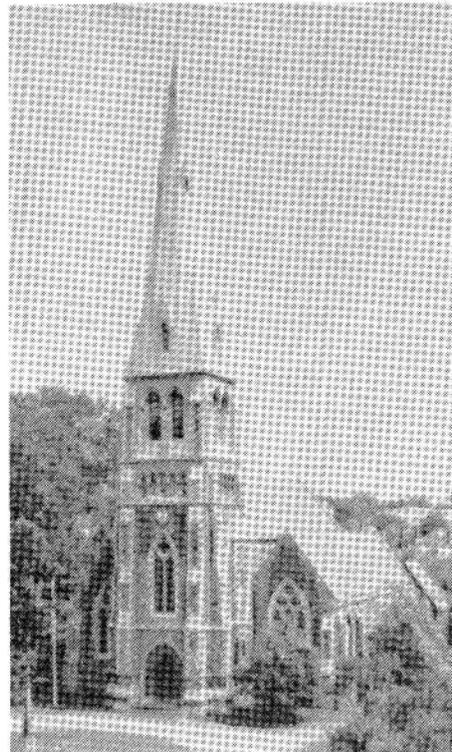
But it had been to Mears that Miss Coutts turned when she endowed her first church, St. Stephen, Rochester Row. The *Ecclesiologist* (the journal of the Cambridge Camden Society) noted that "the foundress was not previously known to have given her adhesion to the principles of ecclesiology; the progress of the building will be watched by many interested in that study with some anxiety"⁽⁷⁾.

Her architect was Benjamin Ferrey and his designs and their results pleased the ecclesiologists. To-day the building cannot be studied from any distance, and most of its fine spire has been removed. Through the kindness of Bill and Alan Hughes I was able to copy the following and other items from day-books and ledgers at Whitechapel:

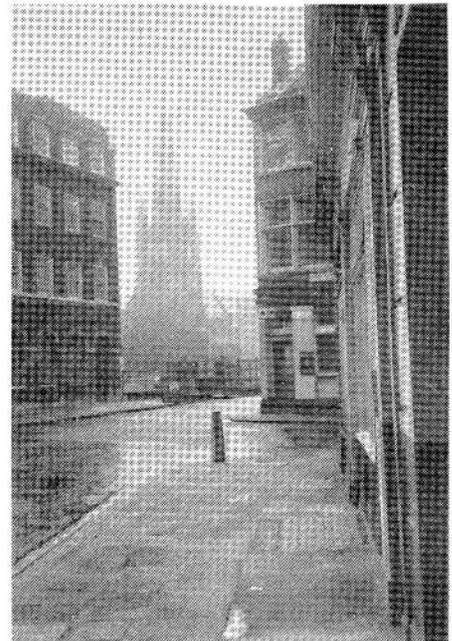
13th May 1850
Mifs Burdett Coutts
for St Stephen's Church Westminster
To a peal of 8 Musical Church Bells

Tenor	24 0 18	
	18 0 10	
	14 0 2	
	11 3	
	9 2 13	
	8 3 2	
	7 1 18	
	6 2 22	
	100 2 1 @14d	£650 13s 2d
8 Clappers		10 --
8 Stocks, Wheels, Ironwork, Brasses Rollers & Ropes		64 --
Oak Frame making fixing & hanging Bells		84 --
8 Extra Rollers		
105 Yards line 17/-		
32 ft oak 4 by 2 11/6		
Nails 2/-		
C. Oliver Junr ⁽⁸⁾ , T. Hurry, J. Hurry ⁽⁹⁾ 1 day ea	5 5 --	
Boxes for ringers to stand upon		15 --
Timber 5/7 Nails 1/6		
Hurry 3/4 day		
		£820 13s 2d

Each bell carries the inscription:
C. & G. MEARS FOUNDERS, LONDON 1850
and, on the waist, from Treble to Tenor:
BLESSING
GLORY
WISDOM
THANKSGIVING
HONOUR
POWER
MIGHT
BE UNTO OUR GOD FOR EVER AND EVER.
AMEN. HALLELUJAH.



St. Anne's Church, Brookfield, Highgate.



A lost view - St. Stephen, Rochester Row before nearby development and truncation of the spire.

The lettering is rather a quaint Gothic which the Mears brothers were fond of using for "ecclesiological" churches at the time; the succession of Spiritual Virtues places WISDOM as the third, as at New Westminster, and the whole ascription in this form is consistent with the reading in Revelation ch.7 v.12 (A.V.).

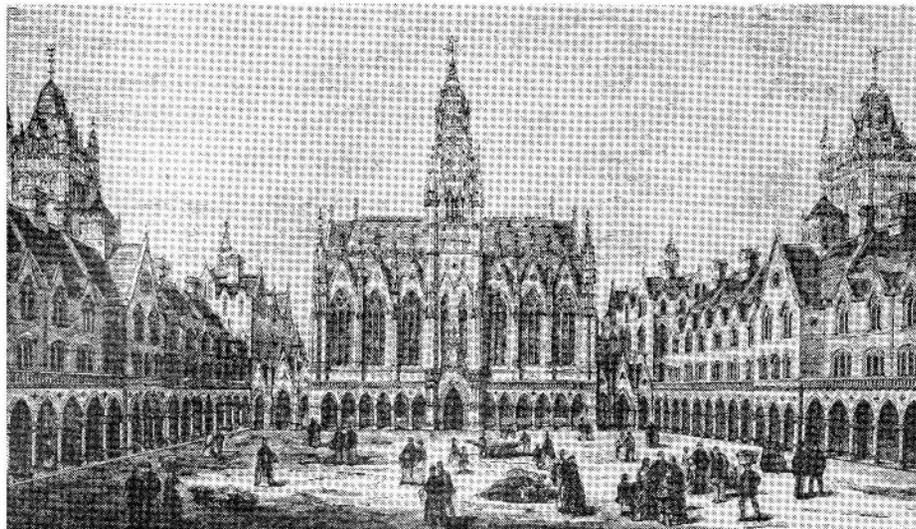
St. Stephen's (possibly like new Westminster) are very much squeezed in, and all who have rung there will have experienced the effects of total internal reflection through the central clock-case. The bells hang in the frame provided in 1850 and like many of their counterparts in the area are somewhat elderly; despite this the tower, when available, has ever been popular and has produced ringers of the calibre of J. N. Oxborrow, the first Secretary of the Westminster Abbey band.

Although it was to be ten years before Holly Village came to Highgate, Miss Burdett Coutts' connections interested her in the building of St. Anne, Brookfield, which to me is one of the most satisfactory churches in the locality. Designed by Thomas Bellamy it was completed in 1853, when a bell had already been bought. Miss Coutts clearly wanted something a bit better and the present ring of eight is the result as C. & G. Mears' invoice shows:

21 Feb 1854
Mifs Angela Burdett Coutts
for St Ann's Highgate

To A Peal of 8 Bells	Tenor	14 2 3	
	7	9 2 6	
	6	7 3 11	
	5	6 2 13	
	4	6 1 0	
	3	5 1 13	
	2	4 2 23	
	Treble	4 1 16	
		50 1 1 @£7	£414 16s
8 Clappers			8 --
Stocks, Wheels, Ironwork, Brasses & Ropes			56 --
A Substantial frame of Eng ^l Oak fixing do & hanging Bells as p Estimate			52 --
Mefrs Cubitts a/c for floors &c			73 --

From the total of £603.16/- the Mears brothers allowed £32 by an "Old Bell Stock &



Columbia Market, Bethnal Green, 1869-1961.

Wheel” and as no other particulars are given it was perhaps a single bell of theirs intended for the church. It seems that the Lady got in just in time, and ringers have every cause to be grateful both to her and the present generation of London and Middlesex enthusiasts and to George Morley for keeping the bells as she would have wished, and probably much as she heard them.

By the time her next English order came through, the New Westminster bells were cast and ringing. I know little about the Carlisle church (perhaps the Harraby ringers will oblige us with an article one day). Just as she had matched New Westminster with a St. Stephen, Rochester Row type ring, so she matched St. Stephen, Carlisle with a varied setting of the Highgate ring. It was a more expensive exercise; bell metal in 1850 was £8 per cwt; in 1854 it was only £7; by 1859 it was 8 guineas, and had fallen to 7 guineas by the time St. Stephen's bells were cast:

3rd April 1865

Miss Angela Georgina Burdett Coutts
Stratton Street, Piccadilly
St Stephen, Carlisle

To a peal of 8 bells	Tenor	14 2 26
	7.	10 0 13
	6.	8 0 11
	5.	7 1 13
	4.	6 1 11
	3.	5 2 19
	2.	5 0 7
	Treble	4 3 5
		52 0 21 @ £7/7/- £457 1 7

8 Stocks, Wheels, Clappers, Ropes,
Rollers, Brasses, Gudgeons &c &c 68 15 0

Making a substantial English Oak
Frame for 8 bells, hanging bells,
including Mens time, Journey's, Use of
tackle and all expenses 100 0 0

Carriage of Bells, Frame &c &c 14 7 1

£640 3s 8d

Clearly this rather expensive ring of eight, now of course tuned, refitted and hanging at St. Elisabeth's, Harraby, made significant and costly inroads into the manpower, resources and distance incurred in the installation by the firm which was now in the hands of Robert Stainbank.

At this time, the Columbia Market development was being pushed ahead. The centrepiece was a magnificent clock tower (far more ornate than its rival at Caledonian Market) with jacks striking the hour and four quarters on Stainbank's bells. I have never yet

heard what happened to the bells, but the whole complex was regrettably demolished. The clock was designed by Messrs. Moore, of Clerkenwell, and the bells supplied to their instructions but invoiced out to the Lady herself:

8th April 1869

B. R. & J. Moore a/c

Miss A. G. B. Coutts, Stratton St. Piccadilly
for Columbia Markets

order of B. R. & J. Moore

To 5 Bells	4 2 1	
	2 0 9	
	1 2 6	
	1 0 3	
	3 4	
	9 2 23 @ £7/0/0	£69 13s 9d

This must have been Miss Coutts' cheapest order with the Foundry, but the great clock with its Jacks, awaits a proper article on its history, movement and (sadly) fate. By the sixties the bells had been removed (not to the Foundry) and one is tempted to wonder if they and the Jacks are with their clock in some GLC store awaiting another Lady Bountiful.

The last order I find, for another church now demolished (and to my knowledge there is no photograph), is dated 14th September 1870, just a few months before her being raised to the Peerage. To Stratton Street went the following account:

St. Thomas' Ch, Bethnal Green	
To 4 bells about 25 cwt, to make with old bell a peal of 5.	7 1 6 B
Taking down old Bell and hanging the 5 on a lower Stage.	6 2 9 C#
New stocks, Ironwork and Lever Clappers, to 4 bells.	5 1 2 D
Including taking out and replacing Clock dial.	4 2 18 E
Carriage and all expenses	23 3 7
A Ringing Machine for 5 Bells & fixing	£210 — —
	£25 — —
	£235 — —

This very large church by Lewis Vulliamy was built in 1851⁽¹⁰⁾ and a miniature⁽¹¹⁾ seems to indicate a south-west tower and spire. After a century in the appropriately-named Baroness Road, it was demolished, the five bells being cleaned, tuned, refitted for chiming only and augmented to eight for the new church of St. Andrew, Roxbourne, just south of Pinner near Rayner's Lane Station. St. Andrew's has a bold tower with a helm-spire à la Sompting though I have never seen whether the interior arrangements would suit a ring. The augmented chime is in fact cast to ringing weights, the tuned weight of the tenor (the "old Bell")

being 9-2-6 in A. The work was carried out in 1957 by Mears & Stainbank.

When St. Paul's received its new ring of 12 in 1878, Baroness Burdett Coutts associated herself with the Turner's Company in providing numbers 3 to 6 of the new Taylor ring, but there is nothing to suggest that Robert Stainbank had lost her patronage and perhaps there are other bells endowed by her or at her suggestion – for example the 1874 Mears ring at her church in Deptford is well and truly after her example.

In later years, more especially after the death of her great friend and companion, Mrs. Brown, the Baroness led a less hectic life. In 1884 she laid the foundation stone of the chancel of St. Saviour in Paddington (now replaced by a modern edifice). She also took on a rather extraordinary marriage which shocked Queen Victoria; in 1894 she had the satisfaction of seeing the Local Government Bill passed into law including provisions for which she had worked so hard. In her will, she provided for herself (and Mrs. Brown) to be entombed in her beloved St. Stephen's in Rochester Row "embedded in a layer of charcoal in brickwork well-cemented"⁽¹²⁾. Mr. Brown beat her (and Mrs. Brown) to it. It is fitting that she was eventually to lie in Westminster Abbey, almost in earshot of St. Stephen's bells.

Columbia Market, her well-meaning dwellings for the poorer class, and half of her churches have gone; so sad therefore that the bells of New Westminster should have come to a tragic end. In her own country in Bow, Burdett Road and Coutts Road perpetuate her in E14, and more charmingly Angela Street, Georgina Gardens and Baroness Road adjoin Columbia Road, E2. In active and regular use at Rochester Row and Highgate, at Harraby and Roxbourne and at St. Paul's itself – and in the sturdy survivor at New Westminster – church and ringers alike owe more than we possibly realise to the determination and to the bounty of Angela Georgina, Baroness Burdett Coutts.

DAVID CAWLEY.

Footnotes

- (1) Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F. L. Crosse; entry.
- (2) N. Pevsner, The Buildings of England, London Except the Cities of London and Westminster, Penguin Books 1952.
- (3) Jones & Woodward, A Guide to the Architecture of London, 2nd Ed., Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1992, p.23.
- (4) London Except the Cities of London and Westminster, lit. sup., p.173.
- (5) Hermione Hobhouse, Lost London, Macmillan 1971, p.183.
- (6) Ibid., See also London Except the Cities of London and Westminster, p.72, and illus., p.57.
- (7) Quoted by Francis Bumpus, "London Churches Old and New" II, James Pott (NY) p.201.
- (8),(9) The Oliver family had 200 years' unbroken connection with Whitechapel from the late 18th century and cast some bells in their own right. One, by C. Oliver sen., remains at St. John's old tower, Wapping. The Hurrys were Norfolk folk whom Mears brought to London – several of their East Anglian installations (St. Andrew, Norwich, the most fantastic) remain much as they were hung. They worked for several founders as independent bellhangers.
- (10) London Except the Cities of London and Westminster, lit. sup., p.58.
- (11) It seems to appear on a broadsheet of 1850, showing ten new churches in Bethnal Green 1840-50, reproduced in M. H. Port's, "Six Hundred New Churches" SPCK 1961, pl.XII.
- (12) B. F. L. Clarke, Parish Churches of London, Batsford 1966, pp.186-7.