Bells in the Province of Southern Africa
by Colin A. Lewis

Location

The (Anglican) Church of the Province of Southern Africa encompasses South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, the islands of St. Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha and other South Atlantic groups and extends into Mozambique and Angola. This is the area, with the exception of Angola and Namibia, covered by this exploratory article. Further research will, no doubt, add much information on the bells of the Province.

The earliest bells

The first bells known to have existed in the area now covered by the Province were reported from *St. Helena* in 1588, when Captain Thomas Cavendish wrote that on the and there was "a church ... [and] a frame ... whereon hang two bells." At that time St. Helena was used by Portuguese seamen and the bells were probably imported from Portugal. They apparently hung outside a church in the valley in which Jamestown is now sited. No trace of them now exists (Lewis, 2004a).

Dutch rule

The first permanent settlement of Europeans in South Africa was established by the Dutch East India Company in 1652, at what is now Cape Town. Their first church was built in 1665 at the Castle in *Cape Town* (Oxley, 1992). The oldest bell known in South Africa (apart from bells in museum collections) was cast in 1697 by Claud Fremi of Amsterdam and hangs above the entrance to the *Castle* at *Cape Town*. "The elaborate decoration, Latin inscription, and founder's mark, V. O. C., are beautifully executed" (Sheppard,1959; V. O. C. is not the founder's mark but the [Dutch] initials of the Dutch East India Company).

During Company rule other churches were subsequently built at Stellenbosch (1687), Drakenstein (1691), Cape Town (the *Groote Kerk*, opened in 1704), Tulbagh (1743), Malmesbury (1745), Cape Town Lutheran church (1780) and Graff-Reinet (1792). The *Groote Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church) in Cape Town had a bell of about 500 kg "which fell down the tower in 1725" (Sheppard, 1959). The bell was recast by Jan Albert de Grave in Amsterdam and now hangs in the tower of the church.

British rule

The English occupied "The Cape" in 1795, but withdrew in 1803. They reoccupied it in 1806 and gradually extended their control over the remainder of what became South Africa. Lesotho and Swaziland became British Protectorates. Under British rule many churches were built, initially in what is now the Eastern Cape, as at *Grahamstown (St. George's,* now the Cathedral: 1824) but later at many other sites. By permission of the Dutch Church authorities Anglican services in Cape Town were held in the Groote Kerk until *St. George's Church, Cape Town* (now the Cathedral) was opened in 1834 (Oxley, 1992).

Under British rule bells were imported from Britain for church, clock and other use, such as the bells imported in 1834 and cast in Greenock, Scotland, by Caird and Co. in that year. One of these bells, of 525mm diameter at the mouth, was sent to a mission station on the then frontier of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope. This bell hangs at the church at *Hertzog*, near Fort Beaufort in the Province of the Eastern Cape (Lewis, 1997).

Between 1803 and 1806, when The Cape was again under Dutch rule, bells were cast by the Bochum Verein for *Stellenbosch*. Three exist, bearing the date 1805 (Sheppard, 1959).

The Great Trek

Following the Great Trek of 1835 and succeeding years, when Afrikaner frontier farmers moved beyond the limits of the (British) Cape Colony (Venter, 1985), churches were gradually built in what is now the interior of South Africa and in KwaZulu-Natal, although in the latter area many were built by British and other non-Boer settlers. Bells of diverse origins were hung in such churches.

Mozambique

Within Mozambique, which was formerly a Portuguese colony, there are long waisted bells, such as those at *Catandica*, that were probably cast in Portugal.

Rings of bells

By August 2006 there were eight sets of bells hung for full-circle ringing after the English style and one set hung for ringing after the Veronese fashion (Mauli, 1991). The English-style rings are at *Grahamstown* (10 bells), *Woodstock (Cape Town)* (8), *Cape Town Cathedral* (10), *St. Paul's, Durban* (8), *St. Mary's, Greyville, Durban* (10), *St. George's, Parktown, Johannesburg* (8), *Hillandale,* near *Grahamstown* (6) and *All Saints, Fourways Gardens, Johannesburg* (3, in a 6 bell frame). The above bells have already been described in *The Ringing World* (Lewis, 1999, 2001a, 2006). A ring of six bells in an eight bell frame is planned for *St. Cyprian's Cathedral, Kimberley.* The Veronese style bells are located in the Roman Catholic cathedral in Durban but appear to be unringable at present. Two bells hung for full circle ringing exist in the central tower at *St. Michael and All Saints, Queenstown, Eastern Cape.* They were cast by John Taylor and Co at Loughborough and left the foundry in 1923 as the treble and tenor of a planned ring of eight (Pickford, 1997). The plan awaits completion!

Carillons and chimes

A 37 bell carillon, cast by John Taylor and Co. of Loughborough, England, exists at the City Hall in *Cape Town*. Taylor's initially cast five clock bells for the City Hall in 1905. In 1925 thirty-two more bells were cast and added to form a carillon of three chromatic octaves (Morris, 1951). The bourdon is ~2,350 kg (Sheppard, 1959).

A 23 bell carillon/chime was installed in *The Settlers Campanile* in *Port Elizabeth* in 1936. The bells were cast in Croydon (London) by Gillett and Johnston that year. The bourdon weighs 3,314 kg in A (Gillett and Johnston Bell Records, 1877-1957). Gillett and Johnston also cast a 23 bell carillon for *Germiston Town Hall, Johannesburg,* in 1934-5, with a bourdon of ~725 kg (Morris, 1951). For the *City Hall, Pietermaritzburg,* Gillett and Johnston cast a chime of twelve bells in1899: "the tenor is about a ton" (Sheppard, 1959). Gillett and Johnston also cast eight bells hung as a chime at *Michaelhouse College,* near *Pietermaritburg* (Gillett and Johnston Bell Records, 1877-1957).

The Dutch founders, Petit and Fritsen, cast a chime of 12 bells that hangs at *Clover Dairies* in *Durban.* They also cast a chime of 12 bells for the *Easter Exhibition Grounds, Rand, Johannesburg,* a chime of nine bells for the *City Hall, Pretoria* and another set of nine bells for the *Reformed Church, Totiusdal.* Petit and Edelbrock cast 14 bells for the *City Hall, Parrow,* near Cape Town.

An American founder: The Ohio Bell Co. cast a chime of six steel bells for a Nonconformist chapel in *Alice,* in the Eastern Cape, which has since been removed from the tower (Lewis, 1997).

In 2005 a swing chime of three bells, operated by electric motors, was installed at the German Lutheran Church, *Pretoria.* The bells, which had been tuned by the Whitechapel Foundry in London, were supplied by Nicholson's Engineering of England. The largest, of 325 kg, was cast at Whitechapel by Mears in 1824. The other two bells were cast in London by John Warner and Sons in 1888.

Clock bells

Clock bells are widespread in South Africa, as at *The City Hall, Durban* (five bells, by Gillett and Johnston), the *Town Hall, Port Elizabeth,* (Gillett and Johnson, five bells, tenor 550 kg in A), *Grey High School, Port Elizabeth* (Gillett and Johnston, five bells, tenor 235 kg in D), *Queenstown* (Post Office, also Gillett and Johnston), *Christian Bothers College, Green Point, Cape Town* (five bells, Gillett and Johnston 1936, tenor 269 kg in C: after many years silence these bells and their clock were being restored for use in 2005), *Umtata Town Hall* (three bells by Gillett and Johnston, cast in 1907), the *Dutch Reformed Church, George* (three bells by Gillett and Johnston, cast 1906), *Lovedale College, Alice* (five bells, cast in 1926 by Gillett and Johnston), *St. John's College, Johannesburg*; *St. Andrew's College, Grahamstown* and elsewhere (Gillett and Johnston Bell Records,1877-1957; Lewis, 1997). They include three bells at the *Dutch Reformed Church, Dordrecht* (Gillett Bland and Co., Croydon, 1883) and a single bell at the *Dutch Reformed Church, Barkly East* (J. Warner and Sons, London 1880; Lewis, 2002b).

Single bells and manual swing chimes

Although Anglican churches usually seem to possess bells cast in England, Dutch Reformed churches possess bells cast in The Netherlands, Germany and locally. Matthew O'Byrne, the bellfounder of Dublin in Ireland, cast at least nineteen bells for Roman Catholic

churches in South Africa, the largest of which weighed ~1,300 kg (O'Byrne, 1962). The Swiss founder, Ruetchi of Aarau, cast three bells for *Umtata Roman Catholic Cathedral* in 1955 (Lewis, 1997), while Glockengiesserei OTF.TO Emelingen of Bremen cast three bells dated, in chalk, 1956, hung for swing chiming at *McKay's Nek, Transkei*, near Queenstown (Lewis, 2004b).These, and the Umtata cathedral bells, are swing chimed, as are four small bells by Gillett and Johnston at the Anglican Cathedral in that city (Lewis, 1997). John C. Wilson of Glasgow apparently cast at least three bells for the Free Church in South Africa. One of them, cast in 1881, exists in Elliot, Eastern Cape (Lewis, 2000a, b).

At the *Church of St. Alban, Cathcart*, a bell of ~600 mm diameter bearing the inscription H. BISSEKER BIRMINGHAM 1893 hangs at the Anglican Church (Lewis, 1997). Henry Bisseker 'acquired the brassfounding and general interests of William Blews and Sons, the Birmingham bellfounders, who sold their bellfounding business to Charles Carr of Smethwick in 1891' (Pickford, 1997). Cathcart was established as part of a settlement of German soldiers who had been recruited to form the German Legion to fight for Britain in the Crimean War. After the war they were offered land on the then frontier of 'British' territory in the Eastern Cape of South Africa (Schnell, 1954). Henry Bisseker, whose surname may be of Germanic origin, may have had connections with the German community that led to him being asked to provide the bell for Cathcart.

A number of bells with ornate canons exist, as at the Moravian Church in *Clarkson*, west of Port Elizabeth. These may have been cast in Germany, as were at least some of the bells hung in Lutheran churches. Czech founders have also sold bells to South Africa.

Among the most interesting single bells is that of *St. Francis Xavier's church, Barkly East*, which was cast in 1940 in Changhai, China. This bell, 580 mm in diameter at the mouth, has a statue of The Virgin and Child cast on one side of the waist of the bell, and a statue of Joseph and the Child on the opposite side and is a beautiful example of the craft of bell founding (Lewis, 2002b).

Two bells by Eayre and Lewis, cast at the Xmeco Foundry in Port Elizabeth in 2003 and 2005, hang as a swing chime at Camphill Farm Community near *Hermanus* in the Western Cape.

School bells include an example by Thomas Blackbourne of Salisbury, England, cast in 1901and hung at *Diocesan Girls' School*, Grahamstown (Lewis, 2000c; Massey, 2000; Skelton, 1976), where there is also a bell by Eayre and Lewis cast by Xmeco in Port Elizabeth. Eayre and Lewis bells also exist at *St. John's College, Johannesburg; Kingswood College, Grahamstown* and *St. Andrew's College, Bloemfontein*.

Ships' bells are used in various island churches, as at *St. Mary's, Tristan da Cunha* (from the *Mabel Clark*, which ran aground in 1878); and at *St. Helena and the Cross* (from the *Mutlar*, dated 1856) and *Rupert's Valley* (from *HMS St. Helena*), in *St. Helena* (Cannan, 1992). Ships' bells are also used on the southern African mainland, as at *Wilderness*.

Market and other bells exist in a number of locations, as at *Barkly East* (Lewis, 2002b).

Slave bells were formerly widespread and existed on many farms. Some were of steel and cast in America by the Ohio Bell Co, as were curfew bells used to warn Blacks to leave White areas before dark, such as that at the *Drostdy Arch, Grahamstown*, cast by the Could Manufacturing Company of Sennaca Falls, New York State, USA.

An Eayre and Lewis bell of 22 kg, cast at the Xmeco Foundry in Port Elizabeth in 1999, was supplied to the Forest Lodge Hotel, *Storms River*, to mark the new millennium and hangs between two pillars for swing chiming. At the request of the proprietor of the hotel the inscription on the bells spells "millennium" with one n!

Handbells

Sets of handbells for tune and change ringing, cast by English founders that include John Warner and Sons, John Taylor and Co, and the Whitechapel Bellfoundry, are known to exist at *Grahamstown, Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Johannesburg* and *Queenstown*. School and other handbells, fitted with wooden handles, are cast at the Johannesburg Foundry (Lewis, 1995).

Bellfounding in the Province of Southern Africa

Little is known of early attempts at bellfounding, although it is possible that bells were cast in The Western Cape when it was under Dutch rule. In the Eastern Cape an attempt was made in 1850 to cast a bell, by members of the Moravian Mission at *Goshen*, near Tarkastad. "The brethren were so excited about the bell they were casting that they dug it up before the metal had cooled completely and it cracked" (Beal Preston, 1976). A subsequent attempt was successful and this bell is on display in the *Queenstown Museum*.

The first commercial founder known to have cast bells in Southern Africa was *John Jolly* (1835-1898). Jolly came from Chepstow, in Monmouthshire (Wales) and emigrated to South Africa. In 1880 he traded as the Albany Iron and Brass Foundry, in *Grahamstown*. Jolly cast bells for Basutoland, one of which still exists in the *New England* area, near Barkly East, and is 375 mm in diameter at the mouth (Lewis, 2002a). He may have also cast bells for other areas. Another founder who is reputed to have cast bells was *Thos Peacock* of *Bloemfontein*, but none of his bells have been discovered (Sheppard,1959).

During the 1980s Mr *Bekker* of *Despatch*, who had learned bell founding in The Netherlands, cast a number of bells in the Eastern Cape, one of which exists at the *Cuyler Museum* in *Uitenhage* (Lewis, 1997). Tower bells of 20 kg and of 80 kg, as well as school handbells, were cast at the *Johannesburg Foundry* in the 1990s using gun metal (10% tin) instead of bell metal. The tower bells were thin in the soundbow and had a distinctive tone. The *Denville Foundry*, also in the Johannesburg area, cast bells of up to 90 kg in the 1990s. Their bells were squat, like an old fashioned beehive (Lewis, 1995).

Xmeco Engineers of *Port Elizabeth*, a firm established by John Exley from England, "

cast many small bells for Roman Catholic churches, especially those in Transkei, [prior to 1996], to a pattern supplied by a German or Swiss priest who was stationed in Umtata" (Lewis, 1997). In 1996 Xmeco cast two bells of 57 kg each using strickles based on those of the tenor of Arthur Jopp of Stoulton, Worcestershire, England. In the same year they cast a bell of 176 kg designed by Dr. Ray Ayres of Eayre and Smith Ltd. of Derby, England. Over twenty bells designed by Ray Ayres and of traditional English ringing bell profiles, were cast by Xmeco between 1996 and the end of 2005 under an agreement with Eayre and Smith and Colin A. Lewis.

Conclusion

Although there are presently only eight sets of bells hung for English-style full circle ringing in the Province of Southern Africa, church bells have been used in the area covered by that Province for over five hundred years. They mainly represent the products of English and Dutch foundries, but some have been cast within the Province while others were cast in Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland and elsewhere.

References

Beal Preston, D. M. 1976 *The story of a frontier town* (Tarkastad).

Cannan, E. 1992 *Churches of the South Atlantic Islands, 1502-1991.*

Lewis, C. A. 1995 "Bell founding in South Africa", *The Ringing World*, 27.10.1995,1095.

Lewis, C. A. 1997 "Bells and bellfounders of the Eastern Cape, South Africa", *The Ringing World*, 14.2.1997, 161-2.

Lewis, C. A. 1999 "New bells, new founder. Hillandale, South Africa", *The Ringing World*, 25.6.1999, 598-9.

Lewis, C. A. 2000a "A Scottish bellfounder", *The Ringing World*, 9.6.2000, 582.

Lewis, C. A. 2000b "John C. Wilson: a Scottish bellfounder", *The Ringing World*, 4.8.2000, 763.

Lewis, C. A. 2000c "T. Blackbourn, bellfounder", *The Ringing World*, 31.3.2000, 334.

Lewis, C. A. 2001a "Bells and bell ringers in South Africa, 1835-2000", *The Ringing World*, 6.3.2001, 341-3, 367; 27.4.2001, 425-8.

Lewis, C.A 2002a "John Jolly: the Grahamstown bell founder", *The Ringing World*, 2.8.2002, 787.

Lewis, C. A. 2002b "Barkl[e]y East bells and the British Empire", *The Ringing World*, 9.8.2002, 818.

Lewis, C. A.2004a "The bells of Jamestown, South Atlantic Ocean", *The Ringing World*, 24.9.2004, 917-9.

Lewis, C. A. 2004b "The bells of north western Transkei, South Africa", *The Ringing World*, 2.7.2004, 632-3.

Lewis, C. A. 2006 "The Johannesburg project", *The Ringing World*, 3.3.2006, 196-9.

Massey, G. W. 2000 "Thomas Blackbourn, bellfounder and bellhanger", *The Ringing World*, 21.4.2000, 395.

Mauli, G. 1991 *Campane nei secoli.*

Morris, E. 1951 *Bells of all nations.*

O'Byrne, M. 1962 *Matthew O'Byrne Bell Catalogue 1962.*

Oxley, J. 1992 *Places of worship in South Africa.*

Pickford, C. 1997 "Bells in South Africa", *The Ringing World*, 21.3.1997, 285.

Schnell, E. L. G. 1954 *For men must work.*

Sheppard, V. 1959 "Let loose in Africa", *The Ringing World*, 6.3.1959, 157; 13.3.1959, 173.

Skelton, N. O. 1976 "Thomas Blackbourne, bellfounder", *The Ringing World*, 9.4.1976, 320.

Venter, C. 1985 *The Great Trek.*