

The Church Bells - Memorandum in the light of
a recent happening.

Since the Meeting of the Council on Wednesday last, an incident has been reported to me by Mr. T.B. Worsley, of such seriousness that I think it should be brought to the notice of the Standing Committee for consideration and possible action. The information was not available for the Council Meeting.

On Oct. 6th, a gudgeon broke on the Tenor bell at Todmorden Unitarian Church. The bell is approximately the same in size as the Tenor bell at Deane. It weighs 13 cwts. At the time the bells were being rung. The ringer scented danger and lowered his bell. It was discovered that the gudgeon had bent before breaking, thus giving warning. The bell was arrested by the frame before falling any distance. No damage was consequently done to the Tower or ringers below.

This accident is of the very type which Mr. Worsley and responsible Ringers fear increasingly may happen at Deane, under the present condition of the frame and of the working of the bells. The Ringers have already been warned to jump to the sides of the Tower if anything goes wrong during ringing. The framework at present cannot be expected to arrest a falling bell. There is nothing to hinder its descent and it must not be forgotten that the Choir-boys' Vestry is below the Ringing Chamber. The boys cannot be expected to jump for safety in time in the event of a bell falling.

Two considerations emerge - EITHER (1) That the danger is remote and that we must ignore any attempt at scare-mongering. OR (2) The danger is real and action must be taken to avoid great responsibility.

Taking these points in detail - No.1 - If we can be sure that the breaking of a gudgeon is either impossible or exceedingly unlikely under present conditions, we may dismiss the whole matter until a careful survey of the whole position has been made at convenience.

Against this we must set the following points -

1. The running of the bells is found more and more difficult each week. This clearly means increasing strain upon important parts of the bell hanging.
2. Nothing has been done in connection with the movement of the bells for 40 years.
3. The ringers themselves are apprehensive. The only point in their minds at the present moment is a desire to be safe and to feel safe. There would certainly seem to be more in all this than a desire to 'make our flesh creep'.

Regarding No.2 - If the danger is real, then action of some sort must be taken at once.

Two ways are open. We can either

- (a) Place a strong flooring of steel girders and reinforced concrete as close to the bells as possible, to arrest any falling bell. Certain helpful proposals have been made in this connection; but the plan does not get to the root of the matter. It is a precaution to limit damage to life and property. It will not prevent the breaking of a bell or a part. We shall not avoid any expense incurred through such a breakage. That possible expense will still loom before us.

or

- (b) Undertake a definite constructive policy by entirely renewing or strengthening the existing framework, so that the bells may run freely without excessive movement in their setting.

This would remove all strain during ringing. Possibly the new frame could be constructed to arrest a falling bell almost at once.

N.B.

ANY QUESTION OF RECASTING THE BELLS IS ENTIRELY AN EXTRA, TO BE CONSIDERED ONLY WHEN THE MAIN QUESTION OF SAFETY HAS BEEN SETTLED.

The essential matter to be decided is this - Are our hands being forced by possible responsibility for life and property, so that we must act at once, even against our will and desire?

Upon the Incumbent rest special responsibilities in regard to the ringing of the Bells. He cannot set these aside. At the same time, in a matter of this kind, it is most advisable that he should have ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ the position clearly before those who cooperate with him on the Council and that the good-will of Deane people should be secured in regard to his decision, if possible. I therefore invite the closest consideration of this Memorandum, so that we may approach further consultations with a clear mind.