

*The Weekly Journal for
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Editor: Robert Lewis

Dublin Founders of Ringing Bells

The refurbishment and rehangng in a new frame in 1989 of the eight bells of St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne, Australia, was an indirect compliment to the quality of Irish workmanship. The bells, with a tenor of 13½ cwt, were cast in Dublin by Murphy's Bell Foundry to the order of Bishop Goold. They arrived in Melbourne in 1853. The bells were intended for St Francis' Church in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, which had no tower! Eventually, in 1868, they were hung in the south tower of the cathedral. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were at least four founders in Dublin who cast ringing bells: John Murphy, James Sheridan, Thomas Hodges and Matthew O'Byrne.

John Murphy

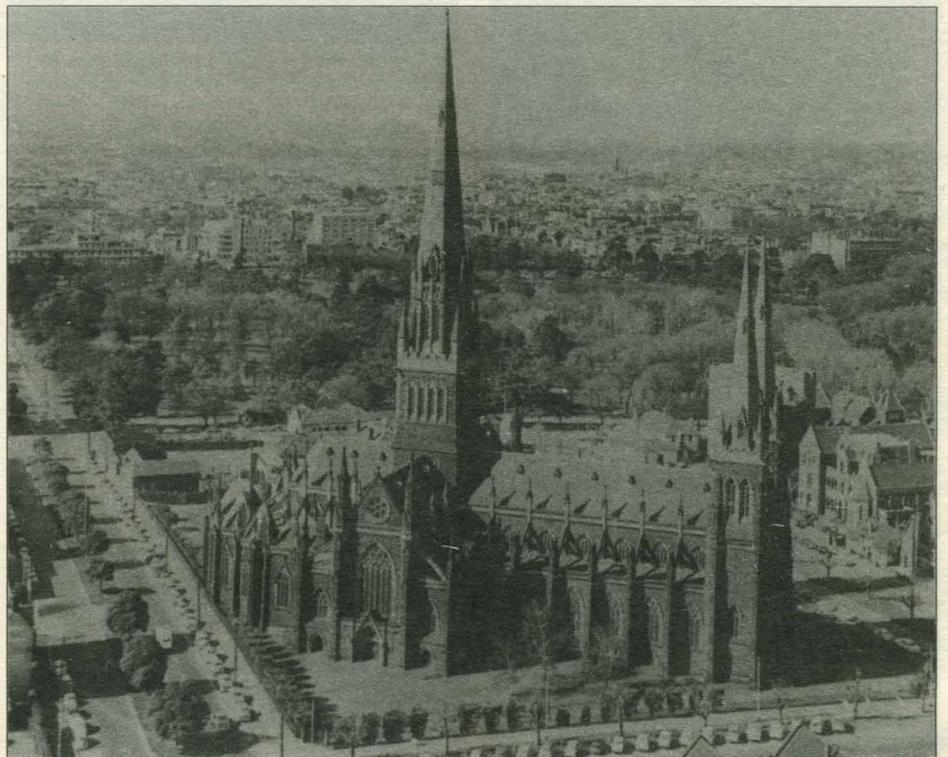
John Murphy was a Coppersmith who established his business at 109 James's Street, Dublin, in 1837. In 1843 he branched-out into bell founding, casting a bell for the Roman Catholic church in Tuam in Co Galway. In the years that followed Murphy cast many single bells and at least eight rings of bells.

In 1877 Murphy cast the Tenor for Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin and it is a matter of some regret that this bell was sent to Taylor's Bell Foundry in 1979 and recast. The writer called a quarter peal of Grandsire Triples on the back eight in 1967 and, apart from the go of the bells, enjoyed their music. The Murphy bell weighed 36 cwts and was in B, whereas the Taylor bell that replaced it weighs just over 45 cwts and is also in B.

Many of Murphy's bells were thinner in profile than bells cast by other founders and intended for ringing, but that did not prevent Murphy bells being awarded prizes at the Dublin and London Exhibitions and First Prize in 1900 at the Paris Exhibition.

Rings of bells by Murphy included those for Melbourne in Australia, St Thomas the Apostle in Douglas in the Isle of Man, St Mary's RC cathedral in Cork, the fine-spired Church of the Immaculate Conception in Wexford, Mount St Alphonsus' Monastery in Limerick, Thurles cathedral in Co Tipperary, St Nicholas' in Cork and Ss Augustine and John in Dublin.

The bells for Douglas were cast in 1852 and are mentioned in Ranald Clouston's (1986) book entitled *Manx Bells*. They were destroyed by fire in 1912 and were replaced by a chime cast by Taylors.



Eight bells by John Murphy of Dublin hang in the south tower of St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, Australia. (Photo courtesy of E. Bleby)

For Wexford Murphy cast a tenor in 1858 and another eight bells in 1882, producing an octave with a flat second. These bells were recast and augmented to ten by Gillett and Johnston in 1930 and are now a magnificent 31 cwt ring in D. What the Murphy bells sounded like is not recorded.

The bells of the Cathedral of the Assumption, Thurles, were cast in 1867 and have a tenor of 57" diameter at the mouth that is reputed to weigh 31¼ cwts. They hang, anticlockwise, in a wooden frame with ringing fittings, but have not been rung for many years. According to Fred Dukes they are now unringable. The architect of the Cathedral, which was completed in 1872, was James Joseph McCarthy (1817-82). He has been called 'The Irish Pugin', but he does not seem to have understood the interactions of ringing bells and towers. The bells were hung far too

high in a detached stone tower that was pierced with windows and louvres and they may well be too heavy for the tower, for ringing purposes, at least in their present position. They sound impressive when chimed.

In 1869 Murphy cast an octave with a tenor of about 18 cwts for St Nicholas' Church in Cork. The bells hang at two levels in a timber frame and were rung between the 1870s and 1920s. They were rehung in 1875 by a Mr Yorke of Bristol and then 'opened' by the band from Waterford Cathedral who had, in 1872, rung the first peal in Ireland. Whether that band scored a peal on their visit to St Nicholas' is not known, although they rang for a long time. The bells are out of tune with each other, sounding F#, E, D, C, A, Ab, F#, E.

The Murphy bells at St Mary's Cathedral in Cork are an octave plus a flat second. They

(continued overleaf)



(Founded by John S Goldsmith)

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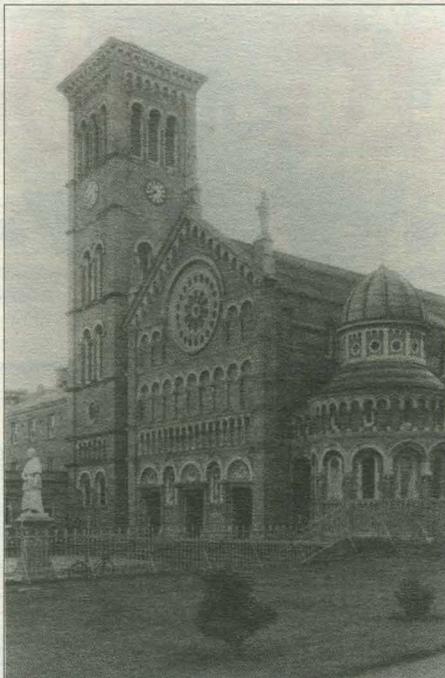
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Murphy's bells are hung high, perhaps too high, in the detached Italianate campanile on the north side of the Cathedral of the Assumption, Thurles, Co Tipperary.

DUBLIN FOUNDERS — continued

were cast in 1870, by which time John Murphy was based at 15, Thomas Street, Dublin. The bells hang in a timber frame and, due to the installation of pipes through the frame, are no longer ringable. The tenor is of 57½" diameter and Fred Dukes speculated that it might weigh about 32 cwts. It is a great shame that these bells are no longer rung: at present they are chimed.

Murphy's cast another ring in 1872, for the Augustinian Church of SS Augustine and John, near the Guinness Brewery in Dublin. The church was designed in 1862 by E. W. Pugin (the son of Augustus Pugin) and George Ashlin (1837-1921), and has a fine tower above an impressive west window. The tenor, of 53¾" in diameter at the mouth, weighs 27 cwts and is in Db. The bells were hung anticlockwise and two trebles, cast by Charles Carr Ltd of Smethwick, were added in 1898. The writer remembers these bells as musically interesting when he called a quarter peal on the front six in 1967. In 1989 all the bells were sent to Taylors' for removal of canons, retuning and new fittings. They were rehung later that year and are now rung regularly.

In 1878 Murphy cast nine bells, an octave plus a flat second, for Mount St Alphonsus' in Limerick. The tenor, in C#, weighed 26 cwts and was 54" in diameter. According to Jennings, a Taylor bell of the same diameter and of the same period would have weighed about 30 cwts, although a Mears and Stainbank bell of that time would have been approximately the same weight as the Murphy bell. The Murphy bells were last rung on 28th April 1947 and were then sent to Taylor's for recasting and augmentation into a fine ring of ten, with an extra semi-tone bell hung dead for chiming.

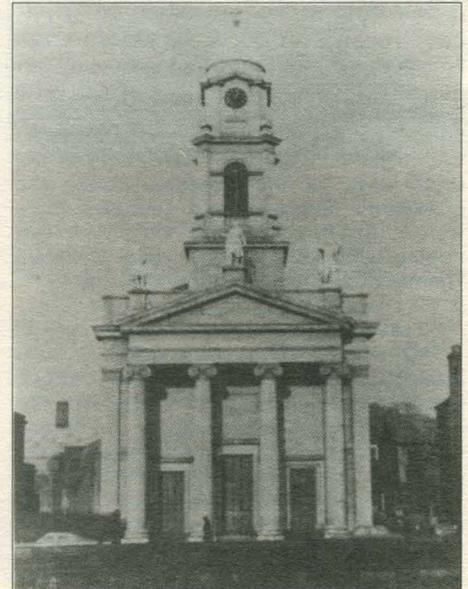
John Murphy, who had founded the business, died in 1875. His son, John J. Murphy, then ran the foundry until it eventually closed. John J. died in 1948. In 1885 Matthew O'Byrne, who ran a foundry in James's Street in Dublin, persuaded James Gaskin to join him. Gaskin had been the bell-

maker at Murphy's. Thereafter the Murphy Bell Foundry declined. According to Fred Dukes the last dated bell traceable to Murphy's was cast in 1900.

James Sheridan and the Eagle Foundry

Another Dublin bell founder was James Sheridan who, in 1809, was listed as an Ironfounder of Church Street, Dublin. By 1826 he occupied premises that had previously been those of earlier bell founders: the Poundens. John Pouden had cast a bell in 1755 for Killucan, in the Co of Meath. In 1761 John was joined in business by Samuel Onge. The partnership was short-lived and various members of the Pouden family continued the foundry in Church Street until 1811. Between 1783 and 1788 John Pouden was in partnership with John Heaviside and one of their bells, cast in June 1783, is still in The Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin.

In the 1840s James Sheridan began to cast bells. His foundry was known as The Eagle Foundry. In 1846 he cast six bells for St Paul's Church, Arran Quay, Dublin. This church was designed by Patrick Byrne (1783-1864) and was built between 1835 and 1842. Surprisingly, in view of the disasters of the Potato Famine during the years 1845-48 (as a result of which the 1851 population of



St Paul's, Arran Quay, Dublin, for which James Sheridan cast a ring of eight bells in the 1840s.

Ireland was some two million people less than the estimated population in 1845, and the 'ramshackle economy' of Ireland had been devastated) Sheridan added two trebles in 1849. These bells were hung for ringing until 1950, when they were rehung as a chime by The Fountain Head Bell Foundry, which had been established by Matthew O'Byrne. The bells were markedly discordant: Fb, Fb, D, C, A#, Ab, Gb, F, and appear never to have been tuned.

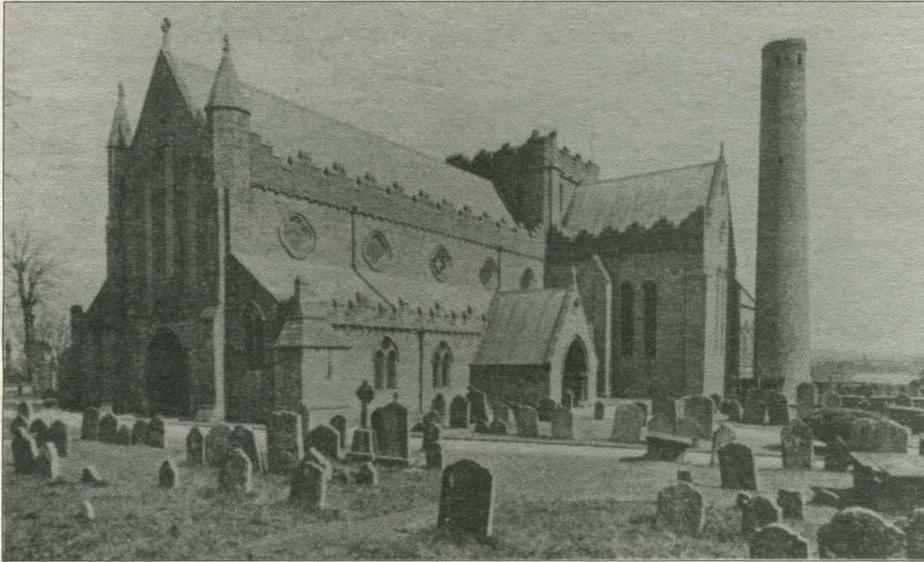
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St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny, home to six bells cast by Thomas Hodges and two trebles cast by Matthew O'Byrne.

Sheridan bells normally carried fine decorations, such as an Irish harp surmounted by a coronet above shamrocks. One of their bells, cast in 1856 for Castlelost in Co Meath, is beautifully decorated above the moulding wires that encircle the bell just above the soundbow as well as carrying a harp and other decorations at mid-waist.

The Freeman's Journal of 17th December 1843 records that Sheridan bells were exported to India, the West Indies, and to Great Britain. In 1859, however, Thomas and George Sheridan took over from their father and the hey-day of the Sheridans as bell founders drew to a close. Bells continued to be cast until 1888, when the Byrne Bell Foundry of James's Street in Dublin took over bell casting for the Sheridans. A bell cast by Thomas Sheridan and Co in 1875 still hangs at Glenfinnan, in the Highlands of Scotland. Unlike James, his sons did not venture to cast rings of bells and the only Sheridan ring was apparently that of St Paul's, Arran Quay.

Thomas Hodges of Middle Abbey Street, Dublin

In 1801 William Hodges was recorded as a Brazier of Lower Sackville Street, Dublin. Subsequently he was described as a Tinplate Worker, Ironmonger, Smith, Brass Founder, and eventually also as a Bell-Founder. Bells by William Hodges were wide in comparison to their height and had flat crowns with canons, like bells cast by the Clarke family of Dublin. They had similar lettering to those cast by the Clarks', suggesting that Hodges acquired the Clarke's patterns and lettering, probably in or about 1832, which is the date of the latest Clarke bell so far discovered.

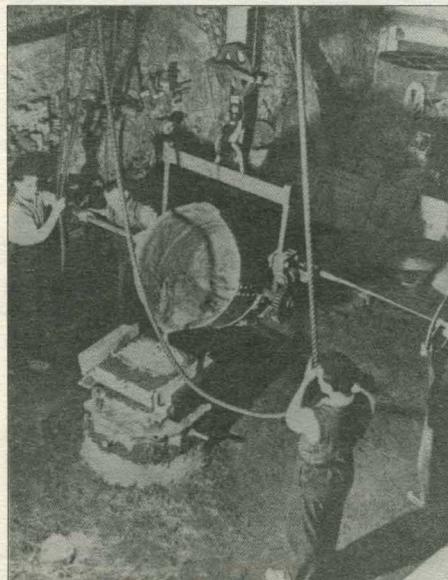
In 1837 the name of Thomas Hodges appears as the operator of the foundry in Sackville Street. Fred Dukes suggested that he was probably a son of William Hodges. In 1848 Thomas moved his foundry to 99 Middle Abbey Street and ran it until he retired in 1865, when William Curtis began to operate the foundry.

Thomas Hodges cast many single bells and, in 1851, excelled himself by producing a ring of six bells for St Canice's Cathedral in Kilkenny. The tenor is 49" in diameter at the mouth, is in Eb and is reputed to weigh 22 cwt. This, according to Jennings, is slightly heavier than Mears and Stainbank and of

Warner bells of that size, but virtually the same as Taylor bells. Probably the reputed weight is only an estimate. The profiles of these and other bells by Thomas Hodges are, in Fred Dukes' opinion, 'of the traditional pattern', unlike those of his father.

Hodges reproduced the inscriptions on the earlier Kilkenny bells on those that he cast in 1851, which indicates his competence as a founder. The bells hang in a timber frame and are separated from the ringing chamber only by the ceiling of that room. Having conducted a quarter peal in 1971 on these and the two extra trebles cast by Matthew O'Byrne of Dublin in 1892, the writer can attest to the very high sound level in the ringing chamber! The bells, however, sound perfectly acceptable when heard from outside and are testimony to the quality of Hodges' work. The central tower of the thirteenth century Gothic-style cathedral collapsed in 1332 and an eye-witness recorded that the cathedral 'was an horrid and pitiful sight to the beholder'. In 1354 Bishop de Ledrede had the damage repaired, but only a very low central tower replaced the earlier structure. There is little

(continued on p.569)



Casting a bell in the foundry of
Matthew O'Byrne.
(Bell Catalogue, 1962).

Editorial

It appears that the doom-mongers and cynics have been proved wrong – the Golden Jubilee celebrations last weekend were, by all accounts, enormously successful and the Queen's face said it all. There can be no doubt that this was one of the most genuine and heartfelt tributes that the nation has ever paid to a faithful and long-serving monarch. Bells played their rightful part in the festivities. The Editor was privileged to take part in a Jubilee Peal at Crowcombe in Somerset on 4th June – contributing to a festive scene that must have been repeated up and down the country.

The Central Council weekend in Norwich proved to be most eventful and we hope to have detailed reports of all the proceedings shortly. One significant development is that The Ringing World Ltd has an entirely new Board. The Editor and staff would like to pay tribute to the retiring Board members for their huge contribution to the well being of this journal, especially in regard to the major changes of the past year. The lack of continuity on the Board will present great challenges – but the new Board members can rely on our loyalty and support in overcoming a difficult period ahead, and in building upon the important achievements of their predecessors.

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First Peal Congratulations

Emily Heilker.

First five in Africa

On May 18 two Taylor trebles were added to the three original Eayre and Lewis bells at Hillandale, giving Africa its first ring of five.

The trebles are a wonderful gift from John Taylor and Company, the Fred Dukes and CCCBR Bell Restoration Funds and ringers in South Africa. Headstocks, wheels and pulleys were made in Grahamstown.

Following prayers by Br Andrew OHC, the bells were rung by Colin Lewis, Carolyn Lewis, Angela Whitehouse, Andrew Cairns and Philip Burnett. Mike Berning participated in subsequent touches. From the grounds of the monastery the bells sound like a little musical box, although sound proofing is still needed between bells and ringers. Full details will be given later.

COLIN LEWIS

DUBLIN FOUNDERS — *continued*

vertical space in this 'new' tower for both bells and bell ringers.

At the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 Hodges was awarded First Prize for his entries in Class 22 and the adjudicators reported that his large bell was 'Excellent'. His brass bell was 'Of remarkably fine tone and of great power'. His four ship's bells were of 'Good tone and powerful'.

In 1853 Thomas Hodges cast a ring of six bells for St Mary's Church, Grassendale, Liverpool, with a tenor of just over 10 cwts. Unfortunately this was his last ring of bells. William Curtis, who took over the foundry in 1865 (by then known as The Dublin Metal Works), cast a number of single bells as well as a chime that still exists at Killyman Parish Church in Co Armagh. This chime was originally installed in Kilshane Church in Co Tipperary. Since members of the Curtis family were ringers at Christ Church Cathedral, St Audoen's, and at St George's in Dublin, it is surprising that there are no rings of bells cast by the family.

Matthew O'Byrne:**The Fountain Head Bell Foundry**

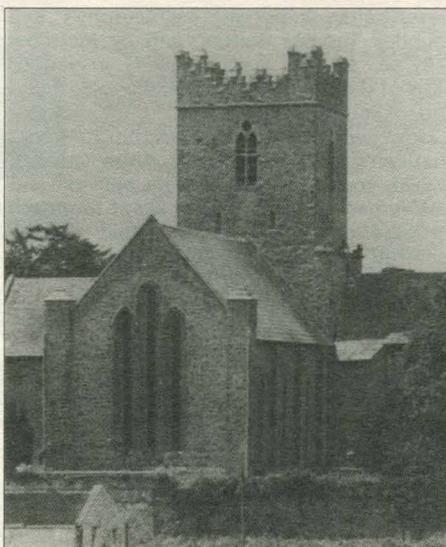
The best known of the Dublin bell founders was, undoubtedly, Matthew O'Byrne of The Fountain Head Bell Foundry. Catalogues of bells produced by this foundry were issued in 1915 and in 1962.

Matthew Byrne had been a Chief Engineer in The Royal Navy. In 1840 he established The Fountain Head Iron Foundry in James's Street, Dublin. His son, Matthew W., changed his surname to O'Byrne. During the 1960s the foundry relocated from James's Street to the Bluebell Industrial Estate, off the main road from Dublin to Naas, on the western side of the City. When the writer visited the works in the late 1960s he was told by C. W. Kinsella, who then ran the business, that bells could still be cast at the former premises. When the writer visited the Bluebell site in February 2001 he was told that no bells had been cast for a number of decades and that the strickles and patterns no longer existed. One of the older employees, who said he had been involved in bell founding, drew from memory profiles of bells of various sizes. He also gave the writer a copy of the profile of a bell of about 8 cwts. That was the only profile that apparently still existed.

The earliest bell listed in the Company's 1962 catalogue was cast in 1862 for The Very Rev Patrick O'Neill, Parochial House, Newry, Co Down. This was a bell of 23 cwts. It is unlikely that Byrne/O'Byrne began bell founding with such a large bell and it is probable that a considerable number of smaller bells were cast in previous years. No other bells cast in the 1860s are listed in the Bell Catalogue of 1962, and there is only one bell from the 1870s. That was a bell of 25 cwts, cast in 1876 for Newry in Co Down.

In 1885 the bell-maker from John Murphy's foundry, James Gaskin, was persuaded to work for The Fountain Head Bell Foundry. Thereafter many bells are listed in the catalogue, such as a 25 cwt bell cast that year for Banbridge in Co Down, bells for Church of Ireland customers in Old Leighlin and Templeshambo in 1886 and Ferns in 1887, and bells of up to 35 cwts in 1888.

By 1890 Matthew O'Byrne and his staff were confident enough to cast sets of up to eight bells. In that year they cast a chime of eight with a tenor of 10-2-0 for Mount Argus in Dublin. The following year they cast two



St Flannan's Cathedral, Killaloe, Co Clare, for which O'Byrne cast a chiming octave in 1896.

trebles to augment the ring at St Nicholas' Collegiate Church, in Galway, to an octave. Sadly, these and the other bells at St Nicholas' were recast in 1935 by Gillett and Johnston and hung dead in the pitchpine frame of 1891. Perhaps The Irish Association should petition for the bells to be rehung as a ring!

In 1892 O'Byrne's cast two trebles to augment the Hodges bells of St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny, to an octave. These bells, thankfully, are still in regular use (along with the Hodges bells) as a ring.

In 1894 O'Byrne cast a chime of eight bells with a tenor of 20 cwts for Drogheda. An octave for the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Holbeck, Leeds, with a tenor of 11-0-25, followed in 1895. In 1896 the chiming octave for St Flannan's Cathedral, Killaloe, was cast with a tenor of 11-0-14. The clock chime for Rathmines Town Hall, Dublin, followed in 1895 with a 20 cwt tenor. In 1898 the fine twelve for Dundalk (tenor 20-3-11) was cast. These were followed by a twelve for Letterkenny in 1901 (tenor 41-0-0), an octave

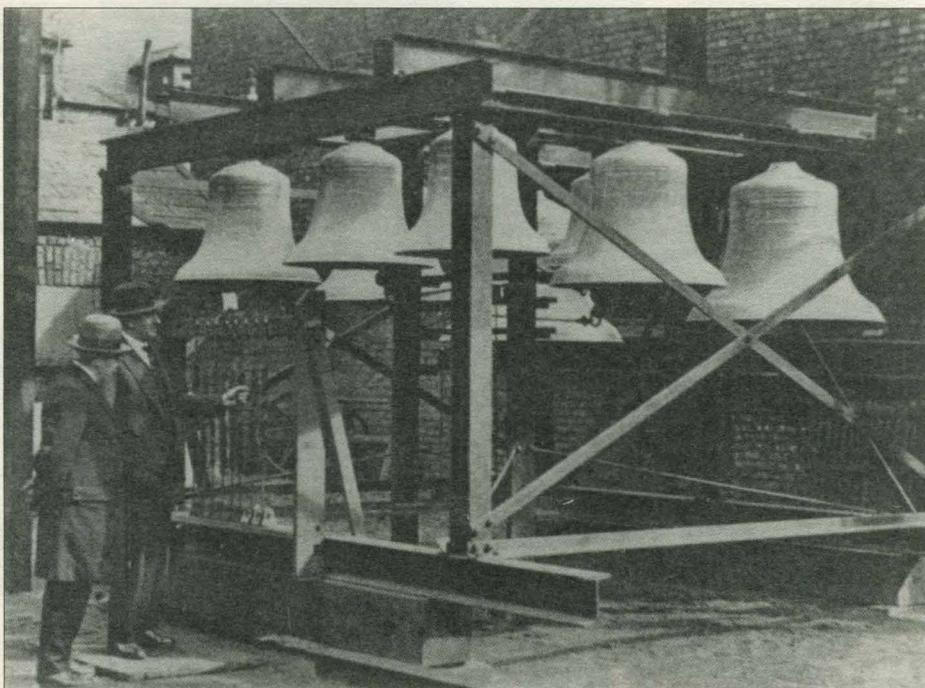
for Dundee in 1902 (tenor 22-1-8), now hung for ringing and whose tenor now weighs 19-2-10 in E; a twelve in 1908 for Lismore in New South Wales, Australia (tenor 42-1-12); twelve for Longford in 1909 (tenor 42-0-8); Hannahstown, Belfast in 1910 (8, 23-0-11); and five for Ringsend in Dublin in 1916 (23-1-21).

After the end of the First World War, between 1920 and 1932, O'Byrne's cast six sets of bells ending, in 1932, with a magnificent octave with a tenor of 23-0-24 for St Mary's (RC) Church in Westport in Co Mayo. The writer well remembers hearing these chimed one evening and being very impressed with their beauty. The other sets were Agherton, Co Antrim (4, 4-1-23, 1920); St Mary's Church, Highfield Street, Liverpool (8, 11-1-6, 1920); St James's Church, Marsh Lane, Bootle, Liverpool (8, 23-1-0, 1924); Kilkea Church, Co Kildare (8, 11-0-0, 1925); and St Brigid's Church, Tullamore, Co Offaly (4, 16-2-21, 1929).

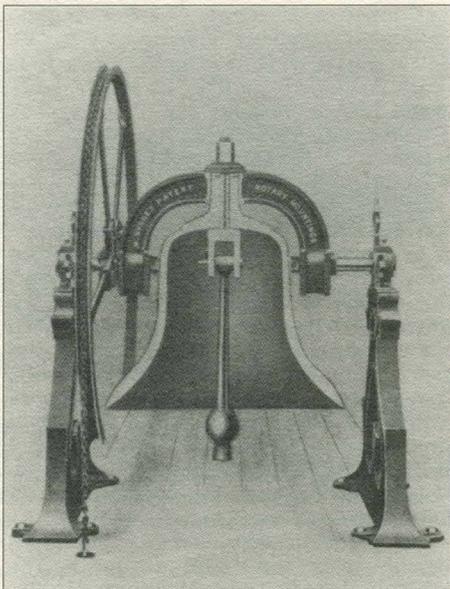
The economic depression of the 1930s brought to an end the production by The Fountain Head Bell Foundry of sets of bells. Thereafter the foundry produced just single bells or, occasionally, two bells for customers. The date of the octave (tenor 26-3-24) supplied to St John's Cathedral in Newfoundland, Canada is not known to the writer.

By the time that the economic boom of The Celtic Tiger took place in the 1990s, Matthew O'Byrne's foundry was no longer in operation and there was no foundry producing ringing bells in Ireland. The new bells cast for Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin as a millennium project were therefore cast by an English founder in England.

Bells by Matthew O'Byrne were cast and, where necessary, tuned in the foundry before being fitted with headstocks and other fittings. In 1887 the 'M Byrne Patent Rotary Mounting' was patented. This was a cast-iron headstock with a tapered hole through which a tapered boss on the crown of the bell was inserted and bolted in place using the crown staple bolt: "we claim that [this] is the best in (continued overleaf)



A chime of eight bells by Matthew O'Byrne. (Bell Catalogue, 1962).



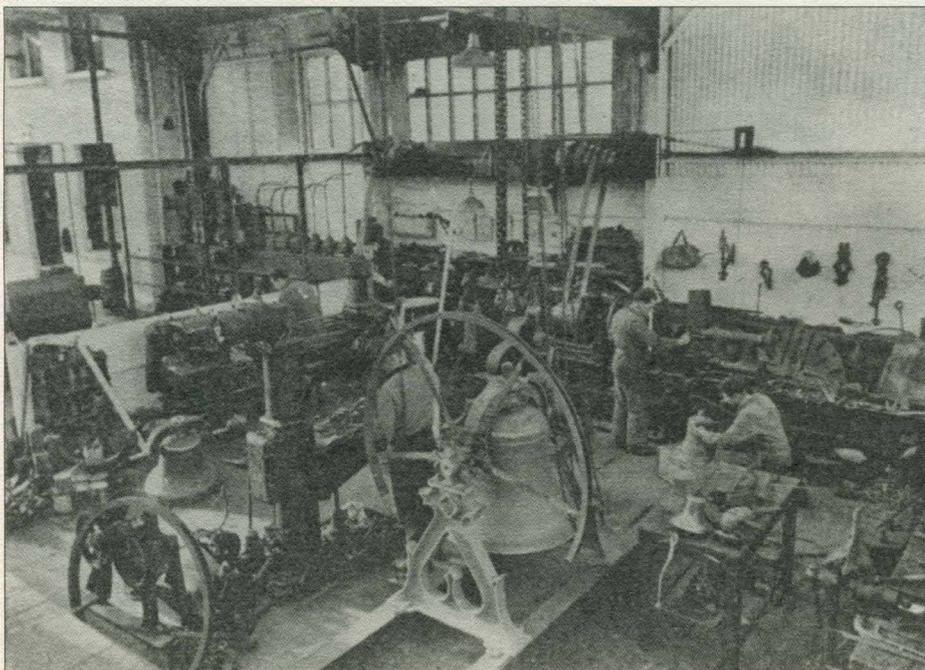
Sectional view of a bell fitted with an 'M Byrne Patent Rotary Mounting'.
(Bell Catalogue, 1962).

DUBLIN FOUNDERS — concluded

existence; in fact, it has no rivals ... By slacking the nuts, the bell can be rotated ... in a few moments, thus presenting a new striking face to the tongue to strike. This increases the life of the Bell beyond measure".

Matthew O'Byrne bells may not appeal to those used to Simpson tuned bells, but, at weights of up to 53 cwts, they are worth listening to. Testimonials published in O'Byrne's Bell Catalogue speak highly of O'Byrne bells. That written by Thomas Mahon, P.P., V.F., of St Joseph's, Boyle, Co Roscommon, on 8th June 1957, is typical: "May I take this opportunity of thanking your firm ... for the beautiful 25 cwt Bell ... It is not only a credit to your Firm, it is a credit to Ireland".

With cessation of bell founding by The Fountain Head Bell Foundry (Matthew O'Byrne, The Bell Foundry) in the 1960s, an important part of the industrial and campanological heritage of Ireland came to an end.



Bells in various stages of production at The Fountain Head Bell Foundry.
(Bell Catalogue, 1962).

Nevertheless bells cast by Murphy's Bell Foundry, Thomas Hodges, and by Matthew O'Byrne, are still rung regularly in various parts of the world, from Australia to Scotland and, of course, Ireland.

How wonderful it would be if James Sheridan's bells at St Paul's, Arran Quay in Dublin, could be rescued from oblivion and restored as a ring. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that Murphy's rings will also be restored and that at least some of the magnificent chimes cast by Matthew O'Byrne may yet be hung for ringing. Perhaps this is a matter for the Irish Heritage Council, which is based in Kilkenny where a complete ring of bells by an Irish founder (Hodges, with trebles by O'Byrne) still exists. Perhaps The Irish Association of Church Bell Ringers could consider these matters at its future meetings and take relevant action? Bells have rung in Ireland for many centuries and their sound is part of the heritage of the Emerald Isle.

Acknowledgements

This article is based mainly on the researches of the late Fred Dukes, with whom the writer had many discussions, and on the following published material: Dukes, F. E., 1994, Campanology in Ireland, Samton Ltd, Dublin; Dove, R. H., 1956, A bellringer's guide to the church bells of Britain, Viggers, Aldershot; Baldwin, J. and Johnston, R. (compilers), 2000, Dove's Guide for church bell ringers to the ringing bells of Britain and of the world, CCCBR, Guildford; Bleby, E., 2001, Their sound has gone forth. A history of change ringing in Australia and New Zealand, ANZAB, Millswood, Australia; Matthew O'Byrne, Bell Catalogue, 1962, Dublin; Jennings, T. S., 1991, The development of British bellfittings, Loughborough.

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BEER MATTERS

"Oh taste and see how gracious the (land)lord is"

You've got to hand it to the Lord; when He designed the Universe, He came up with some pretty ingenious ideas. There's Relativity and Chaos Theory for example, but one of His masterstrokes was to endow the humble yeast with the amazingly useful ability to turn malt into alcohol.

Unfortunately, getting the finished product from the fermenting vat to the glass requires a fair amount of human intervention and this is where things can go horribly wrong - not so much in the brewery, where every step in the process tends to be strictly controlled, but in the cellar. Real beer is a living, breathing organism. Nurtured by a skilled cellarman, it has the potential to mature into absolute nectar. Neglected and abused, it becomes a stale, lifeless liquid which quickly degenerates to vinegar. Then there is the perennial problem that, if the beer is poor, fewer people drink it, turnover falls, the beer deteriorates faster, even fewer people drink it, and so on.

So what can be done? Given the price of beer these days, and most of it tax at that, no-one should be obliged to put up with a product that is sour or less than satisfactory. Bad beer isn't really an issue. No self-respecting drinker should have the slightest hesitation in sending back a pint with a strong whiff of vinegar about it. It's the indifferent pint that concerns me: there's nothing specifically wrong with it, it's just insipid or dull and jaded and you know from the first mouthful that you are not going to enjoy it.

As consumers we should be more demanding. While British stoicism is generally a positive trait, it has its downside in the acceptance of inferior food and drink. Ask to taste the beer. It may not always go down well with the establishment (I remember many years ago incurring the wrath of a licensee when the entire band ordered one half of Young's Winter Warmer - a fine ale when on form but notoriously variable - and passed it round for sampling) but any enlightened landlord ought to welcome a critical appraisal of his wares. After all, happy drinkers will drink more and come back again, while disgruntled customers may never darken his doors again.

Attitudes to quality are slowly changing (just think how ghastly pub food was 30 years ago) and many pubs nowadays are not averse to tasting. Wetherspoons, to their credit, have a well-publicised "try before you buy" policy. Hogshead offer a set of four sample glasses at a price, but that is not quite the same thing.

But in the end, however much good, bad or indifferent ale we might endure, now and again comes an outstanding pint that makes all others pale into insignificance (I think, for example, of ESB at the Duke of Hamilton in Hampstead). You can tell before you even taste it. There is a light, frothy head that quickly subsides, not a tight, fizzy head or a flat, scummy one. You raise the glass to your nose and inhale the fresh, heady aroma of hops. Finally you take a mouthful and the taste buds are overwhelmed with its rich malty flavour and lingering bitterness. And for a moment all is well with the world and you smile and in your heart thank the Lord for His bounty.

MAXIMUS BIBENDUS