

## DARTMOOR SHEEP BELLS

BY R. HANSFORD WORTH

(Read at Barnstaple, 22nd June, 1938.)

IN my younger days I sometimes heard the sheep bell on Dartmoor; it may not yet be silent, but I do not meet it in my wanderings.

I might probably have borne the loss in silence, letting it pass without record, as so much passes and is lost to-day. But I heard from the late Mr. J. E. Giles, of Walkhampton, the tale of one particular bell. And I remembered that Edward Worth, who died in 1756, married in 1711, Joan Giles of Walkhampton. Joan died young, and my great grandfather had also died when the story began.

In 1776 Abraham Giles of Walkhampton acquired the bell and caused it to be inscribed:—

Abr<sup>m</sup> Giles

Walk<sup>tn</sup>

1776

It was put in use, and went to Moor; then followed a long gap in the record. The bell was certainly lost, since it was picked up on the Moors, some twenty years ago, and brought to Mr. J. E. Giles, who had a handle fitted to it, and converted it into a table bell.

It is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter at the mouth, and stands  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches high, without the suspension loop. The metal is white bronze, consisting, probably, of about 35 per cent. copper and 65 per cent. tin. From the careful manner of the inscription it would not appear to have been one of many bells, distributed over the flock, but rather to have been borne by the bell-wether as leader of the flock. This would accord with my recollection, that one animal only was belled. The only other evidence which I at present have comes from Mr. Richard Norrish, of Cator, who has told me that, on Holne Moor, on the other side of Dartmoor:—"They used to be great at sheep bells, using one bell to each score of sheep." He evidently considered this to be a rather prodigal allowance.

The Walkhampton example might serve as a type for all but one of the bells which I have seen, although the inscription is fuller and more careful, and, indeed, only one half of the number are inscribed. I am indebted to Mrs. Munday and Mrs. Sayers for having got together for my inspection those bells which appear in the following list as from Cator and Dartmeet district, with one exception.

## WHITE BRONZE SHEEP BELLS.

<i>District.</i>	<i>Inscription.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Diameter at mouth.</i>	<i>Height without suspension.</i>
1. Walkhampton	Abram. Giles	1776	$2\frac{1}{8}$ ins.	$2\frac{1}{4}$ ins.
2. N. Bovey	W.H.	1778	$3\frac{3}{8}$ ins.	$2\frac{3}{8}$ ins.
3. "	H.R.	1785	$3\frac{1}{16}$ ins.	$2\frac{1}{8}$ ins.
4. Cator and Dartmeet	A.H.	1798	$3\frac{1}{8}$ ins.	3 ins.
5. "	T.H.	none	$2\frac{1}{8}$ ins.	$2\frac{3}{8}$ ins.
6. "	none	none	$3\frac{1}{2}$ ins.	3 ins.
7. "	none	none	$3\frac{1}{8}$ ins.	$2\frac{7}{8}$ ins.
8. "	none	none	$2\frac{1}{2}$ ins.	$2\frac{3}{4}$ ins.
9. Peter Tavy	2B/14	none	$3\frac{3}{4}$ ins.	$2\frac{3}{4}$ ins.
10. "	none	none	$3\frac{1}{2}$ ins.	$2\frac{5}{8}$ ins.

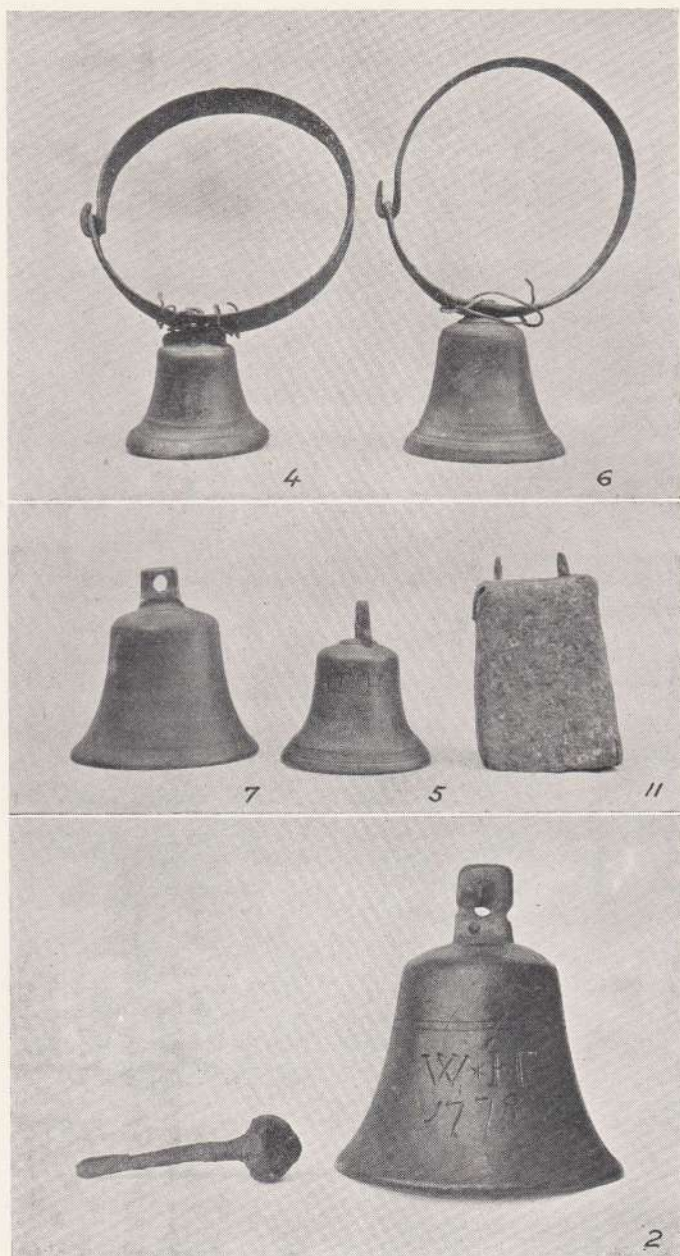
The numbers identifying the bells are those also used on the plates accompanying this paper. It will be seen that Nos. 4 and 6 still have iron collars attached, which are merely wired on. It is probable that this is the original form of collar. No. 5 has lost its original suspension, which has been replaced by an iron loop. In No. 8 the thickness of the metal is  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch in the general body of the bell; and on No. 9 the 2B/14 is apparently a maker's mark.

The date of the bells, where this is known, is interesting; the period covered is but from 1776 to 1789, twenty-two years. I believe that this marks the time when the old iron bells were displaced by bell-metal; but further information is desirable.

Of the iron "canister" bells I have seen but one, and heard of another. This one which I have seen was among those got together by Mrs. Munday and Mrs. Sayers. I have numbered it "11." Its height, without the suspension, is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches, at the mouth it measures  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and at the top  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches by  $1\frac{5}{8}$  inches. It is rather badly worn. I am not certain whether this particular bell has been so degraded, but it had a companion which was badly worn by being used for scraping the carcasses of pigs, for which purpose the base of a candlestick should have been employed.

Sheep Bells may seem a trivial subject, but not to those in whose memories they yet ring; they were a part of that countryside which has suffered so much change, and is still changing, to our sorrow.





*R. H. Worth.*  
 Sheep Bells—To follow Plate XXVIII