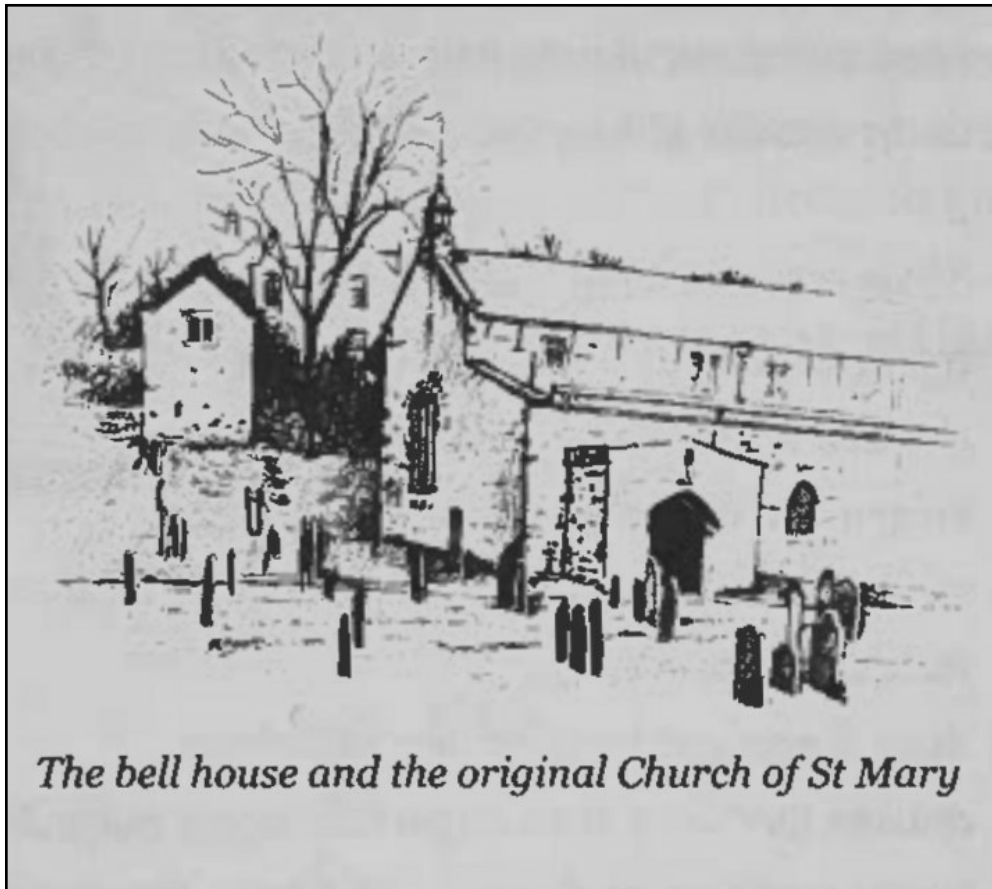


**THE BELL HOUSE  
& BELLS AT  
MIDDLETON-IN-TEESDALE**



*The bell house and the original Church of St Mary*

# The Gift

Dr William Bell was Rector of Middleton-in-Teesdale from 1549 to 1559.

During this time, the monarchy and country had swung between Catholicism and Protestantism.

Queen Mary had restored Catholicism and Dr Bell was an adherent of it. His Will of 1558 contains the bequest for the Bells:

In the nayne of God amen. I wil'm Bell prest and p'son of middleton in tesdail in the countie of duresme holl of mynde ...

... bequithe my soule unto the blessed trinite being thre p'sons and one verey god and to our Ladye saynt marpe the virgyn and tholl compane of hebon and my bodye to be burped w'in the quere of the said middleton.

Item I geue and bequithe unto Middleton churche thre bells of an hundrethe weght which I despere my lord of Lyncoln and doctor Watson of the colledge of duresme at my costs and charges to hange in fframe the said belles and for the said frame I have prepared XX tres there and all the tymber that remaineth ouer and besides the makynge of the said fframe I bequithe to the said p'ishe churche to builde in the said church one He and to make stalles...

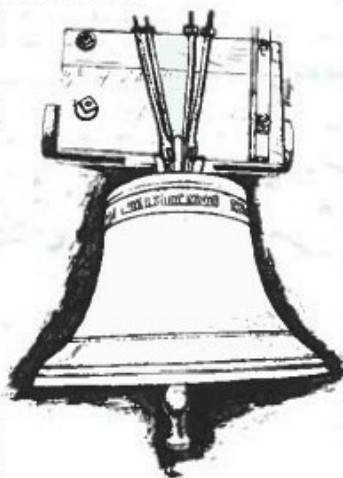
The oldest bell is dated 1557. The other two bells were recast (that is melted down and remoulded) at later dates.

The detached bell house is an unusual feature. It was built on higher ground so that the sound would

travel over the low-slung medieval church and the rooftops of the houses below. This would have been much cheaper than building a high bell tower as part of the church itself.

It is thought that both the bell house and bell frame were constructed to hold the original three bells.

The bells were originally tuned as a ring of three. They were arranged for full circle ringing by means of wooden bell wheels, headstocks, and ropes. The bells and frame are located on the first floor of the building, with the ropes passing through the floor to the ringers below.



## The Inscriptions

These provide an interesting insight into the history of the times.

Bell N° 1

The Treble

Dating from 1557, this is the sole survivor of the three bells given by William Bell, and it is he to whom the inscription refers. It is difficult to decipher, being in medieval black letter, but reads as:

TELL ONE KNELL WHEN AT HIS ENDIG AND FOR HIS SOUL SAY ONE PATERNOSTER AND ONE AVE: ANO DNI 1557

that is, tell one knell at his ending and for his soul say one Our Father and one Hail Mary, AD 1557. The words 'one paternoster' are upside down and back to front, and the invocation to say one Our Father and one Hail Mary are a reflection of his

Catholicism. The word 'tell' one knell rather than 'toll' relates to the formerly common practice of 'ringing the tellers'. On the death of a child, three blows were struck on one of the bells; two by three blows for a woman and three by three blows for a man.

### Bell N<sup>o</sup> 2

The Second

This inscription reads:

GLORIA IN ALTISSIMIS DEO 1697

that is, Glory to God on High, and with the initials of the Churchwardens W A R T and L A C P  
CHURCHWARDENS

It also has a decorative border made up of the Samuel Smith (Senior) foundry badge of 'SS Ebor'.

### Bell N<sup>o</sup> 3

The Tenor

This bell is inscribed:

MARK SHERLOCK & JOSEPH SPENCE  
CHURCHWARDENS PACK & CHAPMAN OF  
LONDON FECERUNT 1780

'Fecerunt' means 'made me'. The churchwardens' names have been cut in with a chisel after casting, suggesting that this bell may have been bought from stock rather than cast specially.

Illustration of the bell's clapper and headstock mechanism.

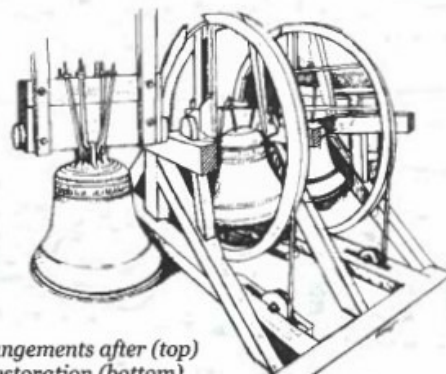
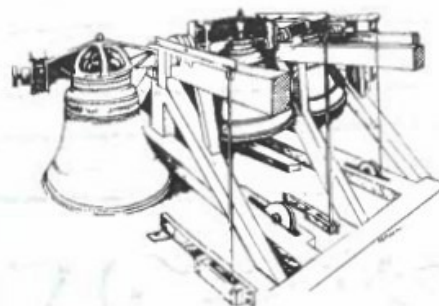
Illustration of the bell's inscription: GLORIA IN ALTISSIMIS DEO 1697. Below the inscription are the initials W A R T and L A C P.

Illustration of the bell's inscription: MARK SHERLOCK & JOSEPH SPENCE CHURCHWARDENS PACK & CHAPMAN OF LONDON FECERUNT 1780.

## The Restoration

By the late 1990s the bells had not been rung for years, and the building, bells and frame were all in poor condition.

Restoration work began in 1999. The building was renovated; one of the bells (which was cracked) was welded; all were re-hung with new clappers in new metal headstocks. It was decided that even when repaired, the old wooden frame would be unable to withstand the dynamic forces generated by full-circle ringing. Consequently the bells have been hung for half-circle ringing (swing chiming), so as to produce less stress on the frame, and thereby enable it to be retained.



Ringling arrangements after (top) and before restoration (bottom)