CONTRACT BETWEEN THE CITY OF EDINBURGH AND JOHN MEIKLE, FOR A CHIME OF MUSICAL BELLS

BY

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The Entire Book

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CONTRACT BETWEEN THE CITY OF EDINBURGH AND JOHN MEIKLE, FOR A CHIME OF MUSICAL BELLS, 1698. FROM THE ORIGINAL PRESERVED IN THE ARCHIVES OF THE CITY OF EDINBURGH. COMMUNICATED BY DAVID LAING, ESQ., F.S.A. SCOT.

In collecting materials to illustrate the history of St Giles' Church, Edinburgh, I met with a somewhat curious document, being a contract for supplying a chime of Bells in the year 1698. But the Church had previously been supplied with various other Bells. In the Council Records, 20th July 1554, there is an Act "anent the Bellis," by which it is declared that Sir Henry Loch the Sacristane, was not only "to find stringis to all the Bellis inwith the stepill, but siclik to watter and soup the Queir once every oulk (week); and further, that in all tymes cuming the grete Bellis be nocht roung fra ten houris at evin quhill fyve hours in the mornyng." At a later period (8th May 1560) the Council understanding that the Kirk might be "servit with three Bells, one rung to the prayeris, ane uther for serving of the knok [clock], and the third to be the common bell," the Dean of Guild was ordained "to tak doun the Marie Bell," and to keep the same till he received further instructions. Accordingly, on the 26th of the same month, the Council resolved that the said Bell and the brazen pillars within the church be converted into artillery, and sent for that purpose to Flanders, if this could not "be gudlie done in this country." 1 We however find that these brazen pillars, amounting to 218 stone weight, were sold by warrant of the Council for 18s. (Scots) per stone; and as no further notice is taken of the Mary Bell, it had been allowed to remain, and it evidently was THE GREAT BELL OF ST GILES, which is described as curiously ornamented with figures of the Virgin and Child, and having a Latin inscription, dated in the year 1460. This Bell, in consequence of having suffered damage, was taken down in 1774, and I fear it was then destroyed for the sake of the metal. 2

1 See the Bannatyne Club volume, "Charters of the Church of St Giles, Edinburgh," pp. xlvii. xlix. Edinb. 1869. 4to.
2 Ibid. pp. xix. cix.
But now for the Chimes, with one remark. The music bells were designed to gratify the citizens of Edinburgh between the hours of one and two, or their dinner hour, when it was customary to have the shops closed and all business suspended. But times have changed, and the bells also. Being myself daily within their sound, I could wish that these bells, whether performing popular airs or ringing peals on occasion of public rejoicings, were not quite so doleful.—The date of the contract is 1698, but previously, in 1681, when it was proposed to divert to other purposes the amount of Moodie’s bequest for building a new church in Edinburgh, upon the ground that the town had no use for another church, it was stated: “The Towne offers to buy with it a pele [peal] of bells to hang in St Geills’ steeple, to ring musically, and warne us to the church,” and also to build a new Tolbooth, &c.” But these and other proposals were not sanctioned, as it came “near to sacrilege to invert a pious donation.” The Scottish Parliament, on the 15th of June 1686, passed an “Act in favours of John Meikle founder,” granting him for 19 years the privileges of a manufactory “for casting Bells, Cannons, and other such useful instruments.” From the list of donations, supra, p. 159, it will be seen that a hand-bell, with Meikle’s initials, and the date 1696, has been presented to the Society. The Contract is as follows:—

“AT EDINBURGH the Eighteenth day of March Jn vjc and Nynty eight years, It is agreed, contracted, and finally ended, betwixt the parties following, To wit: Sr. Archibald Mure of Thorntoune Lord Provost of Edinburgh, William Menzeis, Archibald Rule, George Mitchell and James Nairne Baillies thereof, Patrick Halyburton Dean of Guild, and Samuel McClelant Thesaurer of the same, Together with the remanent Council and deacons of Crafts, ordinar and extraordinar of the said burgh for themselves, and as representing the whole body and community thereof On the one part And John Meikle founder burges of Edinburgh On the other part, In manner following, That is to say, forasmuche as the said Lord Provost, Baillies and Council, haveing (conforme to their act of the date the Eighteenth day of February last) approved of a Re-

1 Fountainhall’s Historical Notices, vol. i. p. 824; see also vol. ii, pp. 656, 867, regarding the appropriation of this bequest for erecting the Canongate Church.
port of ane Committee of their number anent ane agreement and communing betwixt the Committee and the sd John Meikle for making a good and sufficient Cheme or Sett of Musicall Bells exactly tuned conforme to the Rules of Musick to be placed and fixed according to Arte upon the high Church Steeple of St. Jeills for the decorment of the City after the fashion and manner of other Cities abroad, which the sd John Meikle did undertake to performe in manner mentioned in the sd Report. Therefore the sd John Meikle hereby binds and obliges him his aires exe hers and successors whatsoever to make a good and sufficient Cheme or Sett of Musicall Bells according to the Rules of Musick for the use of the good toun of Edr consisting of fifteen in number and to be of different Notes of Musick rising or falling gradually according to the Scheme or Scale condescended on by the sd Committee and the sd John, and subscribbed be the Lord Provost and Magistrates and the sd John Meikle, So that the smallest or uppermost bell of the highest Note be C—sol—fa and about Six pound weight, and all the rest of the same mettall to descend gradually conforme to the said Scheme till they come to the lowest or largest Bell, And to be made of good weell mixed mettall fit for the purpose and exactly tuned conforme to the sd Scheme, which tuning is to be determined or judged by Thomas Pringle wryter to the Signet Mr George Barclay minister of the Gospell, Henry Crumbain and Francis Toward Masters of Musick, after the Bells are finished, And binds & obliges him and his fors d to put the present Magistrates names and year of God on the largest Bell, All which the sd John Meikle binds and obliges him and his fors d to doe and performe betwixt and the first day of July next, And that under the penalty of Ane Hundred pounds starling money. For the which causes the sd Lord Provost, Baillies and Council bind and oblige them and their Successors succeeding to them in their re xive offices and places to content and pay to the sd John Meikle the sume of Seventy two Shillings Scots for each pound weight of the sd Bells made in manner fors d And that immediately after the finishing thereof, Declaring allwayses Lykeas it is hereby expressly declared with consent of both pairties, that in case the sd Bells be not exactly made & tuned in manner fors d then the sd Lord Provost Baillies and Council are and shall in no manner of way [be] obliged to pay any money for the same, And for the more security, both pairties are content and con-
sent to the registration hereof in the Books of Council and Session or
any others competent. That Letters of horning and all oyters needfull on
six dayes may pass hereon, And for that effect constituts,

Their pro &c. In witnes whereof (written be Alexander Sympson wryter in Edinr) both pairties have subscribéd thir presents with their hands, place, day, moneth and year of God above written Before thir witneses, James Nasmyth clerk deput of Edinr and Richard Strachan wryter in Edinr.

Ita est Æneas McLeod clericus
Communitatis Burgi de Ed\r\nNot: Pub: au te regali in pre-
missis requisitus ac de sp\' ali
mandato dicti Prepositi Bali-
vorum Consulum et Decan-
norum artium dicti Burgi
Testan hoc meo signo et
Subscriptione manuali.

Æ. Macleod.

J. Nasmyth witnes.

Indorsed

Contract and AGREEMENT betwixt
The good toun of Ed\r And
John Meikle Cheime of bells 1698./

For the use of the above Contract I am indebted to James Laurie, Esq., one of the City Clerks; and in like manner the following illustrative documents, preserved among the old vouchers of the Treasurer’s Accounts, were kindly communicated by Robert Adam, Esq., City Accountant, a Fellow of the Society:—

ACT OF COUNCIL IN FAVOURS OF JOHN MEIKLE, 1699.

Edinburgh the first of September 1699 year ynty-nyne years.
The which day, the Lord Provost Ballives Council and Deacons of
Crafts ordinar and extraordinar being conveend in Council The Com-
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committee appointed to consider the petition given by John Meikle Founder anent the Cheyne of Musical Bells. They heard him fully thereon and found that over and above his contract with the Good Town, he did furnish six other Musical Bells, and having taken advice of the best musicians in the Town, they declared that they were extraordinary well done, and that the Nobility, Gentry, and the whole neighborhood of the Good Town were well pleased and satisfied therewith, and the Committee, having considered that the said John Meikle was really a considerable loser by his contract with the Town, and that he had been at great expenses in going abroad to take advice and buy the metal, and his frequent casting of several of the said Bells three or four times before they could be brought to their true tune. Were therefore of opinion in consideration of his great trouble, charges, and expenses, and the making of the said six other musical Bells not contained in his contract, and upon his making other two big Bells F and G Sharp he should have the sum of One Thousand pounds Scots in satisfaction of what he can ask or demand of the Good Town, as the report under the hands of the Committee bears, which being considered by the Council, they approved thereof and appoints the said John Meikle to make the foresaid two Bells F and G Sharp to be tuned at the sight and by the advice of the persons named in the former contract, and appoints the present Town Thesaurer to pay to him the one-half of the foresaid sum of One thousand pound Scots presently and upon finishing and delivering of the said two other Bells, appoints the said Thesaurer to pay the other half, in satisfaction of all that he can ask or crave of the Good Town upon that account or any other manner of way. Wherefore this present with his discharge shall be a warrant.

(Extracted) JA. Stewart.

Declaration Mr. Barclay and Mr. Toward anent the two Bells F and G Sharp 1700.

Wee, Mr. George Barclay Minister and Francis Toward Musick Master doe hereby testify and declare to the Honorable Counsell of Edin that the two Bells F and G Sharp which John Meikle founder was appointed by Act of Counsell to furnish are accordinglie casten and furnished by him,
and are weel tunn'd bells and have been hinging and play'd upon in the high steeple of this Burgh these three months bygane As witnes these presents subscribed with our hands Att Edinburgh the twenty-fourth day of July 1700 years

Geo. Barclay.
Francis Toward.

On the back of the above Act of Counsell there are two receipts by Meikle, or as he writes it, Meikell, acknowledging his having received from George Lawson present Toun Thesaurer the sum of £500 Scots, 27th November 1699; and of other £500 in full and compleat payment, &c. 5th July 1700; each of them are signed

John Meikell.

In the Treasurer's Accounts, 1698–1700, these sums are thus entered:

"To John Meikle in compleat payment of the Musick Bells, per Act and discharge . . . . £1000 (Scots)."