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Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number:
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Archaeological Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/raij20>

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Published online: 15 Jul 2014.

To cite this article: John Chessell Buckler & Charles A. Buckler (1888) St. Mary's Church, Melbury Bubbe, Dorset, Archaeological Journal, 45:1, 359-373, DOI: [10.1080/00665983.1888.10852325](https://doi.org/10.1080/00665983.1888.10852325)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00665983.1888.10852325>

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ST. MARY'S CHURCH, MELBURY BUBBE, DORSET.¹

By JOHN CHESSELL BUCKLER AND CHARLES A. BUCKLER.

The scenery of the district comprehending the parishes of Melbury Sampford, Melbury St. Osmund, and Melbury Bubbe, in the County of Dorset, is of wild and romantic character; the ground is diversified and rises in forms of bold elevation, the beauty and picturesque effect of which are improved by the rich clothing of wood wherewith the neighbourhood abounds. At the foot of Bubbe Down, one of the most prominent features of the landscape, a site was chosen for the church, in the vicinity of which are the residences of a small portion of the inhabitants of the villages, of whom the greater number have always dwelt at the hamlet of Wolcomb Maltravers, about one mile distant, where there was anciently a chapel, now destroyed. In former times, when lords of manors resided with hospitality in their mansions now, with rare exception, reduced to the condition of farm-houses, the locality may be supposed to have been less secluded than it is in these days, and if the public ways were not more certain it is probable that they were better known and more frequented; still there was something refreshing and satisfactory in visiting a place so difficult of access as Molbury Bubbe, previously to the formation of the railway from Dorchester to Yeovil. There stands the venerable manor house in close proximity with the church, each has its inclosed plot of ground, the one for the recreation of the living, the other hallowed for the repose of the departed. An archway in the stone wall of separation opened a communication between them.

The figure of the church is plain; the gabled roofs extend from east to west, an advantage more than

¹ Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, May 9th, 1888.

counterbalanced by the distinctive feature in general formed by the south porch, which, in this instance, is supplied by the area of the tower. The scale of the building is sufficient to admit of a design of meritorious detail; the windows on the sides of the chancel differ from the rest by being square-headed, a variation arising from choice, and perhaps in some measure from the moderate height of the walls, none of which have ever being finished with a parapet. The leaden roof of the nave overhangs the eaves and the retention of this economical covering has saved the timber-work from greater injury than it would otherwise have sustained from the weather. The windows present an interesting diversity of tracery in walls of sufficient thickness to give the arches and mouldings deep recess, but the tower alone rises from its foundations with a plinth, nor are there any buttresses except to the angles of the tower. The gables of the nave terminate without crosses, but there was doubtless this symbol of the faith of our fathers at the east end of the chancel, and probably over the chancel arch. The tower received the chief embellishment, bestowed with due regard to the scale of the structure, and it will be admitted that everything essential to the stability and becoming appearance of the church was maintained, so that it exhibits neither poverty nor excess in any part of the design or construction.

The exact date of the foundation has hitherto eluded research. Walter Bokeler, priest, was instituted to the rectory by William Fitzalan,¹ Earl of Arundel, Baron Maltravers, K.G., 1466.—Richard Beauchamp being bishop of Salisbury. No doubt there was, at that time, urgent reason for the immediate renovation of the church; it was probably a small building of remote antiquity, and so far impaired by decay as to have prompted the good desire to supply its place with a more becoming edifice, a generous purpose which was fulfilled with the laudable zeal which distinguished the period.

The entire demolition of the earlier church was inevitable, and the erection of the present structure on the

¹ The Earl and his Countess were buried on the south side of the Fitzalan Chapel, at Arundel; one of the iron prickets for

candles still remains in position on their chantry altar.

same site, was accomplished in a substantial manner, and in the then prevalent style of ecclesiastical architecture, during the ascendancy of which many noble churches in this part of the country were rebuilt, while others were enlarged or merely embellished, as if the period had arrived when the decay of the original buildings, and perhaps in some measure their pristine character, gave an irresistible force to the spirit of improvement testified by the extent to which patronage was bestowed on such work.

A church consisting of nave and chancel together less than fifty feet in length cannot be supposed to admit of any deviation from the common type, although in the relative proportions of these members a conspicuous difference may and often does exist : but with respect to the position of the tower, this instance leaves no doubt that if it had been consigned to its usual place, at the west end, the little church would have presented a less pleasing character than it now assumes.¹ It forms the south porch, and though in altitude it is not equal to the length of the church, yet its wall so soon becomes detached from the eaves of the nave that the symmetry of the design is seen with good effect from every point of view, and the advantage of a western gable will be generally admitted.

The tower fully forty-two feet in height, stands to this day as firm, erect, and perfect as when it was first built, the small pinnacles alone are wanting to complete the design. The north wall at the left hand of the entrance to the church is pierced for the staircase which leads only to the belfry. So far as this formed part of the original construction the building remains sound, but in the seventeenth century, when many alterations were made in the interior of the church, after the ravages of the Puritans, a gallery was erected at the west end and an entrance to it was formed through the south wall of the church from the ancient staircase, a violence so barbarously performed that the wall was reduced to a state of ruin, and the roof in this place weakened to an alarming extent.

¹ Compare the interesting chapel of St. built by an abbot of Bath.
Catharine, in the parish of Batheaston,

This handsome and well built tower, was formerly terminated with a pinnacle springing from the coping of the central battlement on each side. The elevation consists of three stages, and the internal arrangement of three parts, the porch, ringing chamber and belfry, with massive floors of timber. The oldest bell is without date, the others were cast in the seventeenth century.

The four windows of the belfry are uniform; the ornament on each face of the middle stage is a shaft in the centre, springing from a corbel sculptured with an angel holding a shield, a feature which, viewed with the pinnacle on the summit, and the intervening mullion of the window, was evidently an arrangement intended to convey the effect of a vertical sub-division of the width of wall, one of the leading characteristics in the design of many of the more stately towers of the same age in the adjacent county of Somerset.

The most conspicuous enrichment appears in the band between the middle and top stages, consisting of an uniform series of quatrefoil panels inclosing foliage, roses, and shields, of which one only is charged with any kind of device: it is on the south side and presents in strong relief the initial Lombardic letters W.B. interlaced. In another panel on the same side may be observed a Lombardic B on an outspread leaf. It happens unfortunately in this, as in many other instances, owing to the severe reduction or entire removal of the ornaments which were superadded to those less easily separable from the structure, that various tokens designed to perpetuate the happy memory, rather than the taste and liberality of founders and benefactors, have disappeared.

The oak screen and panelled seats which remain elsewhere, and upon which was bestowed the merit of carved work in great variety, frequently include devices of historic value.¹ Some such there may have been in the old church, the preservation of which would have fully perfected the scattered traces and evidences

¹ The badge of a snail marks the work and period of Bishop Beauchamp afore- said, in the Cathedral of Salisbury. and St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

of the rector and founder whose identity these remnants in the fabric and in the beautified glass, are amply sufficient to attest. **Dūs = Walt = Bokeler** may be observed on the outer arch opening to the tower, but the more prominent and durable tokens of the individual influence exercised in the reproduction of this church are exhibited, as already mentioned, in sculptured stonework on the exterior of the tower, where, except the rose of York, one of the regal badges of the period, no device that can be ascribed to another is seen.

Besides the initials, the recurrence of the blank shields may be remarked, in this instance, as having direct reference to the name, an expressive symbol the use of which is retained, and for the origin of which we may refer thus far back into antiquity.

“Alludit ad nomen illius, nam Bucler Anglis
Significat Scutum.”¹

The old English orthography of the surname Bokeler, as here given, is in accordance with that authorized by Chaucer, in his prologue to the “Canterbury Tales,” and frequently occurs.

The indubitable testimony still preserved in the ornamental features of the architecture above enumerated that this church was built and adorned by Walter Bokeler, pbr. towards the end of the fifteenth century greatly enhances the interest wherewith it is viewed, at this distant period, but apart from this circumstance, it presents to the antiquary as great a variety of curious remains as have escaped removal in the course of ages during which it has been exposed to neglect, alteration and decay. The injury of these combined influences has made such fearful havoc on the main walls of the fabric that great care and considerable expense will be required to restore and place them in condition to last for years to come.

Alterations of ancient date in some cases proved detrimental, in the lapse of time, but in this church no

¹ Parkhurst's Epigrams, an. 1573, p. 23

structural change has been made; every window and doorway remains as it was originally formed and fixed; the finished work of the founder subsisted entire till the period arrived for its spoliation in the sixteenth century, from which time to the year 1852, when these notes and some sketches were made, its vigour and beauty have gradually decayed until both are sadly impoverished.

The font is the only visible relic of early date; it is an elaborate piece of sculpture wrought in a single stone, circular, contracted at the base, as of part of an inverted column, moulded at the top and bottom, the intervening surface covered with a group of reversed and contorted animals, saurian and serpentlike forms, and monsters with knotted tails in slight relief, as if the sculptor and geologist of the period borrowed ideas from the blue lias fossils and cave bones. The hart may have borne allusion to the tract for the benediction of the font:

"Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum."

The font retained the position assigned to it, facing the south entrance, without elevation above the level of the pavement.

The windows are of various designs, of well finished stonework from the quarries of Ham Hill, in the county of Somerset, a durable material which was employed in the dressings and in the construction of all the angles, the walls being built of rubblestone of another quality, but equally good for the purpose, brought from Yetminster.

It has been remarked that the appearance of the exterior is rendered pleasing by the southern position of the entrance tower. There is another entrance at the west end, and the priest's door on the south side of the church. All these entrance archways are of the plainest form; the south doorway of the nave consists of a plain moulding without label; it is surmounted by a stone pedestal for a figure. There is no label to the chancel doorway, although the exterior of every window has received this embellishment. The pointed arch of the west doorway is surmounted by a straight-sided weather moulding, its apex in contact with the sill of the window over, the moderate height of this entrance allows of good proportion to the window; the side walls scarcely surmount the arches of

the window, which are and always were shrouded by the overhanging eaves of the leaden covering of the roof. An elegant niche with ogee canopy which surmounted the east window was displaced and the traces of its position obiterated. It formerly contained a sculptured figure, the whole being wrought in good taste in a single block of Ham Hill stone.

If we except the screen and rood loft and the chance seats, the entire removal of an ancient feature from the original design of the interior has not taken place. The altar stone is eight feet long and three feet wide. The sedile, priscina and ambry remain in the chancel, and a window north and south, near the angles of the chancel arch, of lower level than the rest. In the nave are the arched roof, of substantial timber, and several ancient oak seats.

The floor is paved with a miscellaneous variety of materials, stone, tile, and brick, among which there is an ancient gravestone in the chancel, close to the site of the screen; it is without inscription and from its position we are lead to imagine that it covers the grave of the founder.

The walls have been so abundantly and repeatedly supplied with whitewash, that all traces of mural painting, if such adornments still remain are effectually concealed from view; the whole interior surface is much roughened by ill-usage, and this is almost the only application that has been made to repair damages which required more substantial treatment.

The roof of the nave is of oak—unpainted and in almost perfect preservation, except at the foot of the rafters, where they have not been sufficiently protected from the weather; the double wall-plates from the same cause have suffered injury in an equal degree. The figure of the roof produced by curved ribs springing from the cornice or inner plate and terminating at the collar of the principal forms an arch of somewhat depressed proportion.

There are four ribs more prominent than the rest by their strength and by their carved bosses, with various patterns of foliage, two being distinguished by the cross of St. George: the intermediate arches which are thickly set are of the same form and nearly on the same plane,

which is a great advantage to the appearance of the roof. The eastern bay of the roof, beneath which the rood loft stood, has been finished in a manner superior to the rest: the main principal is coloured and gilt, and one half of its thickness was included in the framework or panelling which once distinguished this place: nothing remains to assist conjecture as to its design.

It is certain that the rood loft stood in front of the chancel arch; the way up to it was in the angle of the north wall, which is scooped out in the upper part to gain room for the stone steps, of which rude fragments still remain. The splayed jamb of the north window was sloped away, and the arch corbelled over in an eccentric manner: it is further to be observed that this window has no mouldings and consequently no recess on the outside, as in the other windows, all the depth that could be gained was wanted on the inside to prevent the necessity of forming a bulge on the outside of the wall: a loop window framed of oak as high as it could be placed, was provided as the only means of obtaining a direct gleam of light in the rood loft.

The destruction of the roof of the chancel a considerable number of years since injured the appearance of the interior. Its form seems to have resembled that of the nave, the curve of its oaken ribs having been made to harmonize with the figure of the arch of the chancel, the eastern side of which is finished with mouldings springing from the walls, as if the intention were to produce a corresponding effect on either side.

In other respects the main mischief has been inflicted by time, and well it is that greater has not befallen, for it abounds in interest without possessing any refinements of architecture; excepting the east window, there is less detail than is seen in the windows of the nave. Two windows with the priests' door between them, occupy the full length of the south wall. In the splayed recess of the upper window are the stone seat and piscina, and in the narrow margin of wall beyond, the ambry, in which there has been a shelf of wood, the height of the recess being carried above the arch. The other window on this side is rather longer or lower down in the wall, with a stone seat in the recess.

The recesses of the windows throughout, in the interior, except that over the altar, are carried down as if for the purpose of forming seats, the arches of all but those on the sides of the chancel being finished on the angles with mouldings, in most instances springing from slender shafts with moulded capitals and bases: these additions to the elegant design of the tracery render the windows admirable, that at the west end being worthy of a place among the best specimens of the style.

It seldom happens that the windows of a little church in a rural district are permitted to retain so large a share of the original painted glass as still ornaments this interesting structure. Scattered fragments meet the eye in very many instances, but in this the tracery lights of four windows are scarcely less perfect than they appeared in the fifteenth century. No doubt its safety was partly owing to the protection of the founders' kin, who dwelt around at Wolcomb Malhavers, Stokewood, &c., and to the seclusion of the situation, not that these circumstances often secured to a church the retention of its treasures. To whatever cause the preservation of such frail fragments may be ascribed, they are viewed with gratitude and admiration, and we fondly hope that these precious relics may never again be exposed to profane hands.

Their description may be preceded by the remark that greater care and delicacy in the execution of the designs can scarcely be hoped for, nothing of expression or effect being lost in the attention which was evidently bestowed upon them by the artist, and the preference given to plain surfaces of blue and ruby, in contrast with the custom of heightening enrichment with diapered patterns, is a distinctive merit of this glass.

East window: The cusped heads of the three compartments and the elegant tracery of the east window retain the original painted glass in nearly perfect preservation: of the subjects that were displayed below, there is no record. The objects which appear in the upper part seem to have formed a portion of their backgrounds.

They present no uniformity, but lead us to conjecture that the several lights were filled with representations of the mysteries of Redemption, in chronological order, without canopies, as was frequent in designs of the fifteenth century.

The top of the central light contains four trees of quaint form and various hue, with gnarled and knotted stems, relieved by a field of the brightest ruby. The ground of the corresponding part of the side lights is blue: that towards the north presents a crocketed turret, between two red roses, and the head of the southern compartment is filled by the elevation of a church with embattled parapet, crocketed gables, octagonal tower and spiret.

The quatrefoil at the apex of the window displays on a parti-coloured field of ruby and azure, the sun in splendour, a badge of King Edward the fourth. The white rose occurs over two coats of arms pertaining to the ancient lords of the manors of Melbury Bubb and Wolcomb Maltravers, they occupy prominent positions in the tracery.

1. Gu. crusily fitchy, a lion rampant argent. *Warre.*

2. Sa. a fret or. *Maltravers.*

In the next range appear, beneath crowns, the four emblems of the Evangelists: the eagle and winged lion, the angel and the winged bull: beneath these in two smaller quarries, on scrolls ingeniously contorted to resemble the letters W.B., are inscribed in old English letters, the commemorative words:

~~Dns Walterus Bokeler.~~ Rector-ist' lori;

In the uppermost cusps of the window over the sedile are two crowns argent. The low side windows, north and south, near the chancel arch have lost every vestige of coloured glass.

In the south windows of the nave but few intelligible vestiges of painted glass remain: the two north windows, towards the old manor house, have been more highly favoured.

The Annunciation is beautifully represented in the two lights of the tracery of the window near the remains of the approach to the rood loft. St. Gabriel appears in alb, kneeling and holding a sceptre and scroll with the words ~~Ave-gratia-plena-Dns-tecum~~; the background is of vivid ruby, that adjoining is azure. The Blessed Virgin arrayed in white tunic, blue super-tunic and crimson robe, is standing with uplifted hands, at her feet a yellow flower vase—on a scroll arched over her head is written ~~Ecce ancilla-Dni-fiat-michi-secundum-verbum-tuum.~~

The sacred dove descends in rays which issue from a cloud. The floor is cross-checquered black and white. The summits of two canopies occur in the upper cusps of the side compartments of the window. The window directly facing the principal entrance from the tower, retains a third of the glass of two of the compartments, and may be regarded as a fair specimen of the instructive splendour which vitreous embellishment originally bestowed on the interior of the church. It is immediately over the font, and was intended to demonstrate the divine institution of the Seven Sacraments, and their efficacy derived from the Precious Blood. In the centre, beneath an exquisite canopy, is a majestic figure of Our Lord, crowned with thorns, robed in deep blue, with hands up-raised and crimson streams flowing from the sacred wounds to the hands of the ministers of the sacraments. The back of the niche is ruby. In the side light, which has a blue ground, remains a group of which the subject is an ordination of priests. In the centre stands the bishop, in full pontificals, with pastoral staff: a jet of the Sacred Blood is represented as flowing from the left hand of Our Lord to the uplifted hand with which the bishop gives the blessing, his left hand rests on the tonsured head of the foremost of the ordinati, who is dressed in a red chasuble, and is accompanied by two others in blue and purple vestments. A priest in girded alb and blue cope holds their book. The pontifical is supported by one of the bishop's chaplains in surplice and choir tippet. Two heads, seen in the background, and a few trees complete the picture. Over this interesting and devotional design the masterly treatment of which combined the ability of the artist with the teaching of the theologian, is a scroll inscribed with the word *Quia*. Happily the counterpart of this composition is preserved in the east window of the north aisle in the church of Doddiscombeleigh, Devon.

Above is a similitude of the kingdom of heaven. In the four principal lights of the tracery are the ten virgins with their lamps. All are similarly attired in tunic and mantle, the prudent virgins being further distinguished by wearing a bridal chaplet. In their hands they bear small cressets, those of the five prudent are burning

whilst the lamps of the foolish virgins are held inverted.

On four quarries are as many words :

quinq : prudentes ; quinq : fatue ;

and on small scrolls tastefully disposed over the groups — the words of the sacred text ;

“Date nobis de oleo vestro : quia lampades nostræ extinguntur.

Ne non faciat nobis et vobis, ite potius ad vendentes et emite vobis.”

In the top spandrel is the figure of the heavenly bridegroom with the words on a scroll :

“Vigilate itaque quia nescitis diem neque horam.”

The west window which in design and dimensions is superior to the rest, has four compartments and numerous subdivided tracery within an arch of good proportion. The ancient glass remains in the cusped heads of two of the compartments and in all the tracery lights. Above all is the emblem of the Holy Trinity and in two lateral openings on scrolls the words Sancta Trinitus. In three cusped lights in the centre are the emblems of the three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity, and the words, Pater, Filius, Spiritus Sanctus. Four winged angels with thuribles are arranged in small spandrels. In six tracery lights, three on each side, are figures of the apostles, two and two holding their respective emblems. The cusps over their heads are filled by scrolls with their names : “Petrus,” book and key. “Andreas,” book and saltier cross. “Jacob’s maior,” pilgrim with book, staff, and wallet. “Johes,” chalice and dragon. “Thomas,” spear. “Jacob’s minor,” book and long knife. “Philip,” processional cross and book. “Bartholomew,” flaying knife. “Matthew,” three alms boxes. “Simon,” halbert. “Thaddeus,” club. “Mathias,” scymeter and book. In four narrow spandrels are the evangelistic symbols, the winged lion, winged bull, angel, and eagle.

The top of the southernmost of the four compartments of the window contained a representation of the last supper. The head of our Blessed Saviour in the centre of the group is distinguished by the cross on the nimbus. A scroll with the words **Cena Domini** - is relieved by a ground of pale blue.

The next compartment presents the head of a knight in conical helmet with visor raised, and the eyes

directed towards the throne of the Heavenly Father: on a scroll are the words "Orans Patrem:" another face is visible, and the conical tops of several bascinets in the background: there is no nimb in either instance. The principal figure may be intended for William Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, Baron Maltravers, patron of this church, who appointed Walter Bokeler to the rectory.

The coat of arms in the lozenge piercing between this compartment and that before described is lost; as the corresponding quarry retains an outline of the armorial bearings of the Warre family, there is good reason to conjecture that the fret of Maltravers accompanies them, in this instance, as in the east window.

The church does not contain a single sepulchral memorial: several gravestones in the floor appear to have been inscribed, but there was no room for altar tombs; the sinking for a strip or two of brass are all the evidences that remain within, of ancient sepulture. Without the walls, in later times tombs of ponderous character were set up, and are thickly clustered between the tower-porch and the church-yard cross.

The first in point of date, and immediately facing the entrance to the church, bears the following inscription in the front, towards the north:

**Here lieth the Body of Alexander
Buckler . Año . Dñi . 1568
Bilt By m^r chub his Daughr = 1622**

The will of Elizabeth Buckler, of Woolcombe Maltravers in the co. of Dorset, widow, dated 15. Nov. 1579 proved in London 5th Feb. 1579-80. "My body to be buried in the Parish Church of Bubdowne."

By the side of the last named tomb, is that of Thomas, of Wolcomb Maltravers, grandson of the aforesaid Alexander: **HERE LIETH THE BODY OF THOMAS BVCKLER, DIED THE 14 OF APRIL, ANO DNI 1634.**

These monuments sought shelter near the remains of the venerable cross—whose tall shaft was probably not erect on its pedestal, when they were built.

Of the family of Hardy, of Wolcomb Maltravers, there is not to be found the slightest sepulchral memorial either within the church or outside its walls.

The large and orderly placed slabs in the avenue of the nave, by their marginal lines appear formerly to have borne inscriptions: in this manner the floor is almost wholly covered, there were but small spaces left for tiles, of which, however, there are still sufficient remains to show that they present ornamental patterns of yellow upon a red surface.

Between the most eastern of the gravestones and the step to the chancel is a small oblong slab with a deep indent, apparently intended as a socket to receive the stem of a lectern or desk for occasional use, it being unlikely that there was originally a fixed pulpit, in this church, within which there never could have been more than sufficient space. This, although limited, was reduced in the seventeenth century by the introduction of two high-figured memorial pews, which in the altered state of affairs were deemed indispensable. The absence of ancient monumental inscriptions, and the loss of the first volume of the parish registers are felt in this instance: their historic value would have been appreciated in this place, where other sources of information fail.

The fabric carries with it much of its history, and includes much that relates to those who in former times were its patrons, its benefactors, its guardians, and the attendants at the sacred services.

Their memorials have not altogether departed: their desmene lands and mansions have found other owners, but the tokens of their influence and their zeal for the glory of God and the beauty of His House, survive.

Considerable portions of the massive foundations of the rectory house remain in the ground. On or very near the site, were found fragments of wrought stone, worthy of note, as they are likely to have belonged to the house in its better days, and render the idea probable that the building once presented a good architectural character, of scarcely less ancient date than the church.

Hard by the church, towards the north-west, stands the manor house, upon the picturesque character of which innovation has only slightly trespassed. The walls are built of stone and the windows are well finished, some few are of oak, a material which has been abundantly used in forming the various partitions throughout the interior.

The gables give a steep pitch to the roof, which was covered on the exterior with heavy slabs of Ham Hill stone.

Shortly after the description of the church was written, the roofs were taken off and the roodbeam in the chancel arch was destroyed. The altar stone and old grave stones were removed, and re-placed by common paving tiles.

The two north windows of the nave were moved westward and a third window was inserted, the original glass was taken out and stowed away in the tower, and after the lapse of 34 years, by the care of the present Earl of Ilchester and the rector, the Reverend Rowland Hill, has been skilfully re-leaded and re-inserted in the year 1887—by Messrs. Clayton and Bell.