

The Bells of the Stellenbosch Moederkerk

Tertius de Wet

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3658-6811>

Stellenbosch University

tdewet@sun.ac.za

Jef L. Teugels

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Jef.Teugels@kuleuven.be

Pieta van Deventer

Stellenbosch University

pjuvd@sun.ac.za

Abstract

The Dutch Reformed Moederkerk of Stellenbosch has a long history, being the second oldest congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. The history of the church has been well documented, including the architecture and building of the church buildings over its 332 years of existence. However, although bells have from the beginning played an important part in the church's history, very little has been written on the bells. This paper reports on research carried out into that important aspect of the church's life, in that way adding to Moederkerk's recorded history.

Keywords: Church history; Stellenbosch; Dutch Reformed Church; Gruhl; Otto; Bochum; Rincker

Introduction

Although bells have a very long history (see e.g. t'Hart 1972; Huybens 1994; Lehr 1991; Siegel 1995; Rombouts 2017) and have been part of the South African cultural and religious landscape since the earliest days of the settlement of the Cape Colony (Schoeman 2008, 116 and 137, quoting from Commander Wagenaer's Dagregister), little research on bells in South Africa has been carried out. In previous papers the authors made some first attempts at rectifying this (see e.g. De Wet et al. 2012, 2014, 2018). Furthermore, to make information obtained on bells in the Western Cape more accessible, it has been placed in the digital image repository of the Stellenbosch University Library. The collection is updated from time to time as more information becomes available (<https://digital.lib.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.2/3975>).

In this paper research on the bells of the Dutch Reformed Moederkerk (Mother Church) in Stellenbosch is reported. Regarding their history, there are few churches in the Western Cape of South Africa that can compete with the Moederkerk. The richness of this history can be



Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae

<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE/index>

Volume 44 | Number 3 | 2018 | #4338 | 19 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/4338>

ISSN 2412-4265 (Online)

© The Author(s) 2018



Published by the Church History Society of Southern Africa and Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

illustrated by looking at issues such as architecture and building activities, pastoral service, developments in the congregation, succession of pastors and organists. Although much has been written about the congregation, its history and the architecture of the current church building (see e.g. Hugo and Van der Bijl 1963; Krige 2015; Fensham 1986), research on the bells of the church has been very scant. This paper contributes to its history by focusing on the bells, past and present, that have been hanging in the towers of the church(es) over its 332 years of existence. Not only have these bells played an important role in the day-by-day activities in the life of the congregation, but some of them form part of the collection of precious artistic church objects. Moreover, focusing on these bells offers an opportunity to highlight and to discuss the important role that individuals from the congregation have played over the course of time.



Figure 1: Current Moederkerk Building

Furthermore, this focus on the bells of the Stellenbosch Moederkerk provides the opportunity to illustrate the historic, economic, artistic and hereditary value of bells for this specific building. As such it should be considered as a reminder to those that carry the responsibility for the church and its bells to be fully informed about these valuable objects, to update the information on them and to take special care for their protection.

In what follows, most of the attention will be on the bells in the Moederkerk, but where relevant, reference will be made to interesting and related material about other bells as well.¹

The Role of Bells

Before focusing on the historic aspects of the bells in the Moederkerk, it is worthwhile to emphasise the importance of bells within a community. Quoting Reindell (1961), the ringing of bells offers unmistakable proof of the local presence of a religious community. The main role of bells is indeed to enhance the religious atmosphere within a congregation, something that is true in Christian religion as well as in some other beliefs such as Buddhism. Bells call individual parishioners to the services and remind them to pray and ask for intercession. This can be illustrated by the *Betglocke* that one finds in many Lutheran churches. Bells prompt members of the community to think on how they spend their time on earth, from the day of their birth with the *Taufglocke* up to their final days with the *Sterbeglocke*, which is used to comfort the congregation in the face of death.

But bells play a role in the life of the community at large too. Apart from informing the people about the exact time, they used to warn people about potential danger or tragedy. They announced fire or the advancing of enemy troops. In rural communities, bells would solicit the available manpower to gather for community work. Bells were also used to announce the visit or presence of an important visitor. On festive occasions bells joined in celebrations like the announcement of a peace treaty or the marriage of an influential parishioner. Reference to bells occurs in the Bible in a number of instances, e.g. in Exodus 28 verses 33 and 35 and Zechariah 14 verse 20.

There are also less audible but visible uses of bells. Inscriptions on bells are very often inspirational and refer to texts from the Bible. Such texts were mostly in Dutch, from the Statenbijbel, and were intended to provide specific inspiration. A fine example is the bell in the church of Heidelberg (in the Western Cape) where one finds the inspirational sentence:

Het Woord des Heeren blyft in der Eeuwigheid. Petr. 1. v. 25.

Also a judicious choice of the keynotes of the bells such as the combination E, G and A refers to the Lutheran *Te Deum laudamus*, or its German version *Herr Gott, dich loben wir*. For further information on the role of bells, see e.g. Siegel (1995), Coleman (1928) and Thompkins (1995).

1 A large number of references are from archival sources. These are housed in one of three locations. References to public administration from the colonial period are from the South African Archives. Since these are also referenced in Hugo and Van der Bijl (1963), the original reference as well as the Hugo and Van der Bijl (1963) page number where it appears, are given. Minutes of Moederkerk Church Council (Kerkraad) and its Commissions are housed in the Archive of the Dutch Reformed Church in Stellenbosch. This location will be referred to as the DRC Archive. Thirdly, some documents, especially letters, are in the Moederkerk Archive, located at the church. This location will be referred to as the Moederkerk Archive. Items in the latter are not indexed.

Pre-Gruhl Period

The first meeting place of the Moederkerk congregation in Stellenbosch was at the location of the hotel Oude Werf in what is currently Church Street. A picture in Hugo and Van der Bijl (1963, 16+), *Afteekening van de Colonie van Stellenbos aan Cabo de goede Hoop, den 15de Februarij AO 1710*, shows the relevant area in 1710. As can be seen on that drawing, the church had a small tower that imitated similar cupola church towers in the Netherlands. According to these authors, the tower in Stellenbosch was one of three of that type, the other two being the tower on the Castle of Good Hope and that of the Burgerwaghuis, both in Cape Town. The last two towers were made of stone; but the one in Stellenbosch that contained a bell, was made of wood and steel since it was put on top of the church with its thatched roof.

Referring to Resolution L. & H., 21 August 1691, Hugo and Van der Bijl (1963, 27) report that in 1691 the wooden structure was too weak to hold the bell and that the bell had to be lowered. This is the first reference to a bell in the Moederkerk. In 1696 the bell had to be lowered again, this time over a distance of 3.5 feet (see Hugo and Van der Bijl 1963, 27; Resolution L. & H., 13 February and 18 January 1696). It is most probable that the bell remained there until 1710 when the church burned down together with a large area around it. Since the bell tower was part of the church it is most probable that the bell was damaged by the fire and could not be used in a new church. Remains of this first church can still be seen in an underground area of the abovementioned hotel. A few years after the fire, the congregation started building a new church on its current location, in Drostdy Street, at the top end of Church Street. In the period between destruction of the old church and completion of the new church, the congregation met in a temporary wine cellar in the current Ryneveld Street where there was a wooden bell tower outside the cellar (Inkomende Brieven C. 436 III, given in Hugo and Van der Bijl 1963, 97). That bell was the only one in town and was also used by the Landdros and Heemrade to announce its meetings. Hugo and Van der Bijl (1963, 97) mention that a wooden bell frame in front of the church broke down in 1719 and the bell had to be taken down. Unfortunately, the next day was a "sitdag" (meeting day) at the Drostdy and when the Landdros sent his clerk to go and ring the bell, he found it on the ground. He then had to get two slaves to keep the bell in the air while being rung. The Landdros and Heemrade were very upset and saw this as disrespect on the part of the church.

One might be tempted to think that the bell in this wooden frame was the first one that was previously hanging in the tower on top of the thatched roof. However, this is very unlikely, since the first bell would most probably have melted because of the fire. It therefore looks likely that there was a new bell installed after the fire. When the new church was nearly completed in 1722 a new bell was requested from the colonial government because the present bell was cracked and broken (Church Council Resolution, 3 August 1722, DRC Archive; Hugo and Van der Bijl 1963, 97). How this happened is unclear but probably related to the unreliable stability of the wooden frame as mentioned above.

When the new bell arrived it still took some time before it was hung in a wooden frame in front of the church. For this frame a wooden beam was bought for the installation on 20

February 1722 (see Kasboek GEM-K 2079: Notules 1700–1727, pages 122–123, DRC Archive). The latter was partially paid by the government but also from the church's income. For example, on 30 July 1726 Jan Nel received payment for two journeys made to Cape Town for building material for the bell.

On 25 August a wooden beam was brought from the Cape to be used for the bell and on 8 November, the beam had been sculptured (see Kasboek GEM-K-2124: Notules 1725–1769, pages 11–12, DRC Archive). On 24 March 1735 the bell frame was painted (see Kasboek GEM-K 2124: Notules 1725–1769, page 69, DRC Archive).

In 1750 a more lasting cement/stone frame was constructed and painted later. The bell tower was erected in front of the church and to the right hand side of the entrance (Church Council Resolution, 22 January 1747 and 29 March 1750, DRC Archive). There are pictures of the bell tower that consisted of two free standing pillars with the bell hanging in between on an iron rod (Hugo and Van der Bijl 1963, 98).

Gruhl Bells

This situation continued until 1863 when the church was renewed, considerably enlarged and with a tower that could contain bells. As part of this new situation, on 5 May 1863 Jan Beyers offered the Kerkraad (Church Council) *een groten klok* (“a large bell”). A few months later on 31 August, Philip Myburgh offered a second bell (Hugo and Van der Bijl 1963, 173 and 174).

In July 1865 three bells with a total weight of about 1500 lbs. arrived in Cape Town from Germany after an eventful voyage over the oceans (from Church Council Resolution, 10 July 1865, DRC Archive). The bells were cast by Ernst Friedrich Gruhl, son of the founder Friedrich Gruhl, in Kleinwelka, a small village close to Bautzen in Germany. The payment for the bells was done by bank transfer to the treasurer of the *Rheinische Sendlinggesellschaft* in Barmen, Germany.

There is the possibility that the architect of the new church in Stellenbosch, Carl Otto Hager, had a hand in the choice of bell founder. Hager originated from Dresden, Germany, a city some 60 km away from the foundry of Gruhl. It is not impossible that Haager knew about the quality of the Gruhl bells and therefore helped in providing a link between Stellenbosch and Gruhl.

A closer look at these bells reveals the following. As a kind of founder's emblem, Gruhl bells have canons with four carefully carved angels that, in a sense, are reading the text on the bells. On the smallest bell, nicknamed by the community as *Oubaas*, the text is:

Geschonken Door C.F. Beyers C.F.Z. 1864.

... with a reference to the foundry on the bell's waist:

Gegossen Von Friedrich Gruhl, in Kleinwelka Bei Bautzen.

The second bell is nicknamed *Flip*. Besides the reference to the foundry, on the bell the text given is:

Geschonken Door P.A. Myburgh R.Z. 1864.

The decorations on the largest bell, nicknamed *Jan*, would have been very similar except that the donor was J.M. Beyers, probably followed by an acronym.

All three sponsors of the bells were influential people within the congregation. The donor of *Jan* was Jan Martinus Beyers from the farm Nooitgedacht and deacon in the congregation. *Flip* was donated by Philip Myburgh from the farm Eenzaamheid and also a deacon. Finally, *Oubaas* was donated by C.F. Beyers from Muldersvlei; he was a relative of Jan Beyers and a member of the congregation. No trace could be found to this last gift in the archives of the church (Church Council Resolution dated 10 July 1865, DRC Archive; Hugo and Van der Bijl 1963, 189).

The Gruhl founders were also responsible for the two beautifully cast bells in the Genadendal Moravian Church, dated 1870 and 1897, reported on in De Wet et al. (2014). On their 1897 bell the following sentence is inscribed:

Komt, laat ons Aanbidden en Nederbukken. Laat ons Knielen voor den Heer Die ons Gemaakt Heeft. Psalm 95, 6.

Further bells from the Gruhl Foundry can be found in the Moravian out-station Berea (1866) close to Genadendal and in the Moravian churches at Mamre (1872) and Enon (1870). An even better comparison with the situation in Stellenbosch can be found in the St Martini Church in Cape Town, for which the foundry cast three bells in 1887 (see figure 2). Two of these bells are still in use while the largest one had to be replaced after it had cracked. It was replaced in 1961 by a bell from the German foundry Rincker (see Bütner 2011).



Figure 2: St Martini Lutheran Church Gruhl Bells

It is worthwhile to mention that the totality of Gruhl bells in the Western Cape makes up a substantial portion of the output “still in existence” of the foundry as most of its bells in Germany were confiscated during the two World Wars. Unfortunately, when the Gruhl Foundry in Germany stopped its activities in 1897 the order books were destroyed by a rival founder. Tracing the itineraries of Gruhl bells from Germany to Africa is therefore an almost impossible assignment.

When the Gruhl bells were installed, the old bell was removed and went to Heidelberg Dutch Reformed Church. In the album that was published at the 150th anniversary of the Heidelberg Church it is written on page 57: *“By die eerste kerk was daar ’n klok wat in 1868 deur die heer J.D. Beyers van Klapmuts aan die gemeente geskenk is en wat waarskynlik die ou kerkklok van Stellenbosch was.”* (At the first church there was a bell that was donated to the congregation in 1868 by J.D. Beyers from Klapmuts and which was probably the old church bell from Stellenbosch.)

It is known that the Beyers family has large property in the Riviersonderend valley and it could be that in those days the Dutch Reformed Church for the whole area was located in Heidelberg, where the congregation was established in 1855, so that the Beyers farms in that area fell within the Heidelberg congregation. (The Riviersonderend congregation was only established in 1922.) A few years later the Heidelberg church itself got a new bell. This bell rivals in beauty the Gruhl bells (see figure 3). The canons consist of six angels, similar to the Gruhl bells. Below the shoulder is a wide laurel frame followed by the inscription on the front side:

Gegossen von C. Voss & Sohn, In Stettin 1880. No 806.

... and by the inspirational phrase mentioned before. What makes the bell historically important is that the text also refers to:

De Nederduitsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Heidelberg.

... which shows that the bell was made specifically for the Heidelberg Dutch Reformed Church.



Figure 3: DRC Heidelberg Voss Bell of 1880

What happened since then with the Stellenbosch bell is uncertain. A source claiming that this bell was later transferred to Witsand, not far from Heidelberg, could not be verified as there now hangs a bell from Petit and Edelbrock at that church.

Otto Bell

Some time at the end of the 19th century a new bell arrived at the Stellenbosch Moederkerk, although no reference to its ordering or payment could be found in the church records. The bell received the name soprano bell, probably because of its fresh tone. On the shoulder are some nice flower decorations. The seal on the waist of the bell identifies the founder (see figure 4). Below the shoulder figures a circular emblem that contains a bell in the middle surrounded by the text:

F. Otto in Hemelinarii.

This phrase refers to Hemelingen, a section of the German city Bremen. The Otto Foundry there started in 1874 and has been active up to the present time apart from the two periods of the World Wars. On the reverse side of the bell stands 1899, the year of founding. The bell is used as hour clock and currently hangs above the six Rincker bells that are included as a bell group (see below). The bell has no canon and is directly fixed at the ceiling, is 67 cm in diameter and its clapper has been replaced by a hammer. It is not impossible that the bell was

an element in the installation of the tower clocks which normally include a bell to announce the hours.



Figure 4: The Soprano Bell and its Otto Emblem

THE BOCHUM BELL

Around the turn of the century, *Jan*, the largest of the Gruhl bells, was removed. In 1902 it was replaced by a bell from the Bochumer Verein. The decorations on this bell are traditional for the foundry. On the shoulder between two pairs of moulding wires is written:

Gev. V. Bochumer Verein Bochum 1902.

The same foundry also made the two bells that are currently standing next to the Rynse Kerk in Stellenbosch, the two bells in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Worcester and the pair that hangs on the market in Wuppertal.

The reactions by the public on the replacement of *Jan* by the Bochumer bell were rather negative. The two lowest Gruhl bells gave E^b and F. If the lowest was a C, then C, E^b , and F give the *Te Deum* sequence, easily recognised by the community. Since the overtones of steel bells are substantially different from those of bronze bells, it is not surprising that the overtones of the new steel Bochum bell were not in accord with those of the two bronze Gruhl bells. As a result, the overall appreciation was that the bells together sounded badly tuned. Later on, similar remarks have been made by the Taylor Foundry when asked if the three existing bells (2 Gruhl bells and the Bochumer bell) could be incorporated into a larger bell-set.

In Fensham (1986, 59), an album published on occasion of the 300-year anniversary of the Moederkerk, there is a paragraph stating: “*In 1981 het dr Antonie Melck die Kerkraad daarop gewys dat die Moederkerk se klokwerk vals is.*” (In 1981 Dr Antony Melck made the Church Council aware of the fact that the bell arrangement of Moederkerk is false.) He had heard via

his brother that the question is being asked whether Stellenbosch is not ashamed of its rather false bells, being unworthy of a congregation with such a status and history. In a letter of 11 March 1982 from Antony Melck to minister W.J.B. Serfontein, it was mentioned that the clappers of the existing Gruhl bells had been replaced by new ones that were relatively too short. As a result, the sounds of the bells had been somewhat changed and their loudness diminished (Moederkerk Archive).

Pre-Rincker Period

In this section a reconstruction is given of the operations from the beginning of 1981 until the inauguration of the bells in 1985. Since copies of some of the relevant letters and documents are not available, the information might still be a bit incomplete.

Dissatisfaction with the Existing Bells

Early 1981 Antony Melck (see figure 5), the substitute organist, wrote a message to the Kerkraad (Church Council) informing them about the poor quality of the bells in the tower. In its meeting of 23 February 1981, the Eiendomskommissie (Property Commission) instructed the Kerkraad to thank Melck for his interest and activity but that the costs were too high to be supported by the congregation (Meeting Eiendomskommissie 23/2/1981, page 35, DRC Archive). One month later, Dawid van Velden, a member of the Kerkraad, in a meeting of the Kerkraad, made a request that enquiry should be made about the costs to replace the odd-sounding bells. It was decided to refer the request to the Eiendomskommissie to consider it in the light of the financial position of the church (Minutes of the Council Meeting of 23/3/1981, page 45, DRC Archive). The position of the Kerkraad remained unchanged, however, when the issue was brought up again later in the year (Minutes of the Council Meeting of 2/11/1981, page 111, DRC Archive).

In spite of these negative reactions, Van Velden started to find sponsors for the project to solve the awkward situation of the church bells, while Melck himself began the process of finding the best solution for the church and to obtain prices from different founders.

Early 1981, Melck contacted the Taylor Foundry in Loughborough to see if it was possible to extend the set of three bells (2 Gruhl and 1 Bochum) into a good peal of five bells starting with a B^b. On 18 May 1981 A.P.S. Berry, General Manager of the Taylor Foundry, replied by asking for a tape recording of the two Gruhl bells, checking if it would be possible to include them into a peal (potential inclusion of the Bochum steel bell in a bronze peal was immediately discarded). He also offered a price of £11 634 (approximately R20 475) for a completely new set of five bells with described keynotes, diameters and weights. This price included fittings, frame and shipment.

There was some secondary correspondence by Berry in which he stated that the recordings show that it would not be impossible to extend the Gruhl bells with a new set of three, but that the simultaneous tuning might turn out to be problematic. The price would lower to

approximately £9 500. On 8 March 1982 Melck indicated that he was abandoning the idea of the incorporation of the Gruhl bells.



Figure 5: Antony Melck in the 1980s

Steps towards a Solution

With the price proposal of the Taylor Foundry in hand, Melck then wrote an extensive and very detailed letter to Dr W.J.B. Serfontein, Chair of the Kerkraad. In this informative letter of 11 March 1982 he explained that the current situation of the church bells was very inadequate. He gave detailed information on the four existing bells: The two Gruhl bells of 1864; the Bochum bell of 1902; and the Otto bell of 1899. He then reported on his correspondence with the Taylor Foundry that led him to the proposal to ask support for a set of five new bells (A^b, C, E^b, F, A^b) since the incorporation of any of the existing bells would be acoustically very difficult and ultimately not much of a cost saving. He also suggested hanging the two Gruhl bells in a tower outside the church, similar to that of the tower at the Stellenbosch Rhyne Sending Kerk. He finished with a heart-warming plea for the acquisition of a set of bells that would be an honour for the entire community (Moederkerk Archive).

Melck's message to Serfontein was brought before the Eredienskommissie in its meeting of 15 March 1982. For the first time there sounded positive support for Melck's initiative since in the meantime, Van Velden already succeeded in finding financial support from different sponsors. The commission proposed to the Kerkraad to appoint an *Ad-Hoc Kerkklokkommissie* to discuss the matter further. This happened a week later in the meeting of the Kerkraad (Minutes of the Council Meeting of 22/3/1982, page 48, DRC Archive) when a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Van Velden and with i.a. the organist P. de Lange and Melck as members.

In a further letter dated 26 March 1982 to Serfontein, Melck added some technical and financial details on his proposal as he took them from the letter of 19 February 1982 of the

Taylor Foundry, including that the proposal for a motor system could be omitted (Moederkerk Archive).

Strongly encouraged by this new development, Melck wanted to find the best possible solution for the congregation. To be able to compare prices with those of the Taylor Foundry, he contacted three other foundries, Whitechapel in London, Glockengiesserei in Heidelberg and Gebrüder Rincker in Sinn, the last two being in Germany. In a letter of 21 April 1982 he raised seven points: He asked for: (i) a price for two sets of five bells (B^b, G, F, D, B^b and A^b, F, E^b, C, A^b) for tolling; and (ii) with counterweights for swinging side to side. He added (iii) a question on the amalgamates used; and (iv) on the tone accuracy. After requesting information (v) on the additional costs for operation by automatic reversing motors, he inquired (vi) about cost for shipping and insurance and (vii) about the estimated delivery date.

By the middle of May, Melck had four full proposals ready. It became clear that based on the quotes, Melck would discard the proposal by Whitechapel in favour of that of the Taylor Foundry and that of Glockengiesserei Heidelberg in favour of that of the Gebrüder Rincker proposal.

Decision on Approach

The Ad-Hoc Kerkklokkommissie investigated the different proposals and reported to the Kerkraad of 6 September 1982. After duly explaining the necessities for a change, the committee offered its recommendation to support the project, since already about one third of the required financing was available (Minutes of the Council Meeting of 6/9/1982, page 93, DRC Archive). It also stated that the quotation of the Rincker Foundry (amounting to R23 420.77) for the (A^b, C, E^b, F, A^b) combination was by far the lowest and since the foundry has been operational since 1590 it should be sufficiently reliable. The Kerkraad accepted these recommendations and gave permission to its financial commission to continue with the acquisition of support.

Supported by the decisions of the Kerkraad, Melck then wrote to the four foundries on 16 September 1982 informing them about the choice. In the case of Whitechapel and the Heidelberg Giesserei the letter is rather formal. The letter to the Taylor Foundry, however, contained a fragment in which it stated that a principal donor, on whose generosity Melck had pinned his hopes, had largely withdrawn from the scheme for personal reasons. Melck also made it clear that his personal preference would have been for the Taylor Foundry if the financing had been available. The further correspondence with Rincker is discussed in the next section.

Set of five Rincker Bells

On 13 September 1982, Melck wrote to Gebrüder Rincker mentioning that their proposal for the (A^b, C, E^b, F, A^b) combination was getting wide support, but that the necessary financing was still lagging behind. He therefore asked if the quotation could be extended until the end

of the year. In the booklet that was offered with the quotations, Melck discovered a similar five-bell set at the Reformationskirche in Neuss and asked about people's appreciation for this peal. Later, on 11 October 1982, Melck wrote to Neuss to find out, but we can only guess that the reply was very positive (Moederkerk Archive).

He also contacted Gebrüder Rincker in connection with a number of practical questions such as the expected volume and weight of the bells, how they would be transported, and how the insurance for the transportation would be arranged. The replies to these questions had to be positive since in the further correspondence details about the bells started to appear. As a token of their appreciation, Gebrüder Rincker sent a personalised invitation to the Kerkraad to attend the founding of the bells on 25 March 1983.

On 22 February 1983 the Ad-Hoc Kerkklokkommissie met again. In its report to the Kerkraad the committee stated that the quotation of ±R24 000 by Gebrüder Rincker had been accepted. Furthermore, that Dr J.P. Beyers, a businessman from Stellenbosch involved in international trade, had agreed to order the bells and to take care of the payment by a letter of credit. He also agreed to arrange the transportation of the bells from the harbour of Hamburg in Germany to that in Cape Town and to take care of the necessary paperwork. Moreover, he offered to pay R3 000 for the two Gruhl bells, a proposal supported by the committee. Added to the already accumulated support, the fund for the bells stood at ±R15 000. On 28 February 1983, Beyers sent the order for the bells to Gebrüder Rincker Foundry, with details about the financial arrangements.

In its next meeting, the Kerkraad gave its consent to the activities of the Ad-Hoc Kerkklokkommissie (Minutes of the Council Meeting of 14/3/1983, page 56, DRC Archive). When the Eiendomskommissie met on 13 June that year it could already take action for the imminent installation of the bells. When the Kerkraad met on 25 July, the chairman could report that the bells had been installed and would ring for the first time on Sunday, 31 August 1983. He also mentioned that a special collection would be held and that a full financial report would be delivered later (Minutes of the Council Meeting on 25/7/1983, page 119). No further references were found to either of these two promises in the archives.

When the ultimate bill came from the foundry, the administrators of the bell fund provided a cheque of ±R15 000 to the address of Beyers. However, Beyers did not cash the check. When the minister of the congregation, Ds. T.J. de Clercq, visited Beyers to ask for clarification, Beyers informed him that he had decided to pay the entire amount of the Rincker bill in exchange for the two bronze bells that had been donated to the church some 120 years ago by his ancestors (written private communication by D. van Velden, 1986, Moederkerk Archive).

As yet we do not know how the transportation from Hamburg to Cape Town happened, except that they left the foundry on 4 May 1983. After arriving in Cape Town the bells were taken to Stellenbosch on 16 June 1983, where they were installed after the existing bells had been removed. The five bells with keynotes A^b, C, E^b, F and A^b all carry the same minimal decoration on the front side. We find:

Gegiet deur Gebrüder Rincker vir die
Moederkerk Stellenbosch 1983.

The formal inauguration of the bells was on 31 July 1983 with a special service as fully explained in a brochure that was specifically printed for the occasion. As part of the ceremony, a number of bell tunes were illustrated like the *Gloria* motive, the Lutheran *Te Deum* and the *Salve Regina*—see the pamphlet “In Gebruikneming van die Nuwe Klokke, 31/7/1983” (Pamphlet on the Inauguration, Moederkerk Archive).



Figure 6: A 1983 Rincker Bell

Additional Rincker Bell

The cost for the installation of the set of five bells had amounted to about R18 000, which left a surplus of some R12 000. It was, therefore, decided to increase the number of bells. Various options were suggested and extensive correspondence happened between Van Velden and Melck, the latter who at that time was staying in Germany and had regular contacts with the Rincker Foundry. Late in 1984, Melck's hope was to add two more bells (F and B^b) to the set of five. Due to changing financial information he was forced to lower his expectations to a single bell, a B^b bell, between the A^b and C bells. In the meeting of 10 February 1985 Van Velden informed the Kerkraad that a sixth bell had been ordered (Minutes of the Council Meeting of 10/2/1986, page 37, DRC Archive). On 20 February 1985 Melck gave instructions to Van Velden how the ordering of the sixth bell should happen. Again Dr J. Beyers intervened to assist with the ordering and the subsequent transportation of the bell.

This time good information is available on the itinerary of this sixth bell. The bell left the foundry for Hamburg on 18 December 1985. At the same time Gebrüder Rincker forwarded

the bill to Beyers's company, Nitrophoska. On 8 January 1986 the bell was loaded on the ship Michele of the *Mediterranean Shipping Company S.A.*, with estimated date of arrival 6 February.

Unlike for the other bells, the casting date of 1985 does not appear on the circular band below the shoulder but was put on the waist above the knee. Moreover, only the sixth bell carries the traditional emblem of the Rincker Foundry similar to what was also found on other bells in Cape Town and in Beaufort West.



Figure 7: The Rincker Emblem on the 1985 Bell

Returning briefly to the involvement of the Kerkraad, in its meeting of 29 July 1985, two years after the installation of the five-bell set, the Kerkraad asked the Ad-Hoc Kerkklokkommissie to look for name plates that refer to the sponsors of the new bells (Minutes of the Council meeting of 29/7/1985, page 9, DRC Archive). In May 1986 the Finansiële Kommissie met and advised the Kerkraad to charge the Eiendomskommissie to find a proper place in the church for such a plaque. A few years later the Kerkraad was informed on the advice of the Finansiële Kommissie to ponder a method that expressed a permanent thank-you to donors such as the Venters and the Beyers family (Minutes of the Council of 8/2/1988, page 242, DRC Archive). Later this recognition of the sponsors was unanimously endorsed (Minutes of the Council meeting of 14/3/1988, page 268, DRC Archive). As far as could be ascertained, the practical implementation of this decision has never been worked out.

Removed Bells

With the installation of the six Rincker bells, the bells that had been hanging in the tower before had to be removed. These are dealt with separately since it is difficult to keep a chronological description of their fate.

The Largest Gruhl Bell

The fate of the largest Gruhl bell, *Jan*, remains a mystery. First of all, there has been no reference to the fact that anything was wrong with the bell. However, it is not impossible that—as happened with the largest Gruhl bell in the St Martini Lutheran Church in Cape Town—the bell cracked and had to be replaced. If something like this happened, it was customary to send the bell back to the founder with a request for repair. Unfortunately, the Gruhl Foundry was closed down in 1897, long before the silencing of the bell. It would, therefore, not be surprising that the Kerkraad looked for a replacement. As mentioned above, the replacement happened in 1902 with the Bochum bell.

According to some sources, the bell remained in the tower until 1983, the time when the Rincker bells were installed. This looks highly questionable, since then Beyers would have claimed it together with the two other Gruhl bells. According to others, the bell was given to someone who had it mounted in Dorpstraat. It remains mysterious that no verification could be found of this fact.

The Bochum Bell

The Bochum bell was removed in 1983 when the new Rincker bells were installed. According to the pamphlet printed at the occasion of the installation of the new bells, this bell was given to W. van Wyk and this is in agreement with archival notes by Johan Krige, where it is mentioned that the Bochum bell has been given away (Moederkerk Archive). What happened to it later is still unknown. However, it reappeared some time later at an auction where it was bought by Kevin Thorpe from Milnerton. He had it mounted in a very attractive wooden construction in 2011 (see figure 8).



Figure 8: The Bochum Bell in Milnerton

The Two Other Gruhl Bells

The two Gruhl bells ended up at the Beyers family farm Ganzekraal, close to Riviersonderend, where they started a second life. The setting of the bells is unique and overwhelming (see figure 9). Next to the construction is a ladder that allows visitors to climb up to the bells. The text on a plaque at the construction reminds the visitor that the top bell in the structure is *Oubaas*, the smallest of the three original bells. This bell has no canon. A possible explanation is that this bell was used as an hour clock. This would mean that it was not mounted on a wheel but rather fixed with an outside hammer as illustrated by the current Otto bell in the Moederkerk.



Figure 9: The ex-Moederkerk Gruhl Bells at Ganzekraal

Conclusion

South Africa, and especially the Western Cape, is blessed richly with a large number of historic bells, very often found in the churches of the province. After the establishment of a refreshment post by the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) in 1652, an influx of bells from Dutch founders started, followed by German immigrants with bells from German founders and later, with the British annexation of the Cape Colony, an influx of British immigrants and bells from British founders. Whereas in Europe many bells were destroyed during consecutive wars (religious wars of the 16th century, the French Revolution, the two World Wars), bells in South Africa have not experienced similar devastations. As a result, the Western Cape is still blessed with many bells, mostly in their original location, sometimes somewhere else. The latter is particularly true for bells that were recovered from shipwrecks.

The Moederkerk in Stellenbosch, dating from 1686, is the second oldest congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, preceded only by the Groote Kerk in Cape Town. Therefore, the Moederkerk plays an important role in South Africa's church history and in

particular in that of the Dutch Reformed Church. Although its history has been well researched, that research paid little attention to the bells of the church. This paper reports on research on the bells that have been part of the congregation's life over its 332 years of existence. Such research also aims to create a greater awareness of the rich cultural heritage that bells have as part of South Africa's larger heritage. Furthermore, similar research done and reported on by the authors forms part of an effort to create a wider appreciation of the important part bells, and in particular church bells, form in the country's total cultural and ecclesiastical heritage.

Further research in this vein is ongoing, including bells from the mission stations of the Berlin Mission Society and the Rhenish Mission Society. These will be reported on in subsequent papers. Furthermore, the inventory of bells established, maintained and extended by the authors as part of the Stellenbosch University digital image repository, creates a source available to other researchers and for general interest.

Acknowledgements

This research was partially supported by a grant from the NRF.

References

- Bütner, Hans-Dieter (ed.). 2011. *Festschrift zum 150 jährigen Jubiläum*. Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische St. Martini Kirchengemeinde Kapstadt.
- Coleman, Satis N. 1928. *Bells: Their History, Legends, Making and Uses*. Chicago: Rand McNally. Reprinted in 1971 by Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn. and in Classic Reprint Series, ISBN 9781494112387.
- De Wet, T., J. L. Teugels, and P. J. U. van Deventer. 2012. "The Cape Town Carillon: A Forgotten Heritage." *S.A. Journal of Cultural History* 26 (2): 31–60.
- De Wet, T., J. L. Teugels, and P. J. U. van Deventer. 2014. "Historic Bells in Moravian Missions in South Africa's Western Cape." *Historia* 59 (2): 94–119.
- De Wet, T., J. L. Teugels, and P. J. U. van Deventer. 2018. "Historische Glocken in Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchen in der West-Kap Provinz Südafrikas." To appear in *Jahrbuch für Glockenkunde*.
- Fensham, F. C. (ed.). 1986. *Drie Eeue van Genade*. Kaapstad: NG Kerk Uitgewers.
- Hugo, A. M., and J. van der Bijl. 1963. *Die Kerk van Stellenbosch 1686–1963*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg Uitgewers.
- Huybens, G. 1994. *Beiaarden en Torens in België*. Musea Nostra, Gemeentekrediet van België.
- Krige, Ode. 2015. *Carl Otto Hager—Argitek tot Eer van God, 1813–1898*. Hemel en See Boeke. ISBN 0992221978, 9780992221973.
- Lehr, A. 1991. *Beiaardkunst in de Lage Landen*. Tielt: Lannoo.

- Reindell, W. 1961. "Die Glocken der Kirche." *Leiturgia*, 4, 858–886.
- Rincker, Hans-Gerd. 1979. *Rinckers kleine Glockenkunde. Glocken- und Kunstgiesserei Gebr. Rincker*. Fleisbach: Druckerei Roth.
- Rombouts, Luc. 2017. *Singing Bronze*. Leuven: Davidsfonds.
- Schoeman, Karel. 2008. *Kolonie aan die Kaap*. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis.
- Siegel, R. J. 1995. "A Survey of the History of Campanology in the Western Christian Cultural Tradition." *Sacred Music* 122 (4): 7–20.
- t'Hart, L. 1972. *Campanology: A Handbook for the Carillonneur*. University of Michigan.
- Thompkins, J. 1995. Bells and Religion. *The Bell Tower* 53 (2).