

The bella

Edited by Jason Smart

John Taverner (c.1495–1545)

[BURDEN]

I 

II [Missing] 

III  The bell - - - a, the

IV  The bell - - - a, the

2 **A**



 bell - - a, we may - dins beryth the bell -

 bell - - a, we may-dins beryth the bell - - - - -

4

 The bell - - - a, the bell - - - a, we may - dins beryth the

 The bell - - - a, the bell - - - a, we

 - a.

 - a.

6

bell - - - - - a. The bell - a, the

may - dins beryth the bell - - - a. The bell - a, the

The bell - a, the

The bell - a, the

8 **B**

bell - a, we may - dins beryth the bell - - - a,

bell - a, we may - dins beryth the bell - - - a, we

bell - a, we may - dins beryth the bell - - - a,

bell - a, we may - dins beryth the bell - - - a, we

10

we may - dyns berth the bell - - - - -

may - dyns berth the bell - - - - -

we may - dyns berth the bell - - - - -

may - dyns berth the bell - - - - - a, the

END

12

a, the bell a.

a, the bell a.

a, the bell a.

bell a, the bell a.

[VERSE 1]

15

We be may - dins fayr and fre: Come ner, yowng men,

We be may - dins fayr and fre: Come ner,

18

be - hold and

yowng men, be - hold and

21

How pra - ty and pro - per now that we be, _____ So

see

see

How pra - ty and pro - per now that we be, _____ So com - ly un - der

23

com - ly un - der kell - - - - -

kell - - - - -

25

- a. The bell - a, the

The bell - a, the

The bell - a, the

- a. The bell - a, the

REPEAT FROM
B TO END,
 THEN CONTINUE

[VERSE 2]

We be

We be ma - dyls

27

ma - dyns fayr and gent.

fayr and gent.

Detailed description: This system contains two systems of music. The first system has two staves with rests. The second system has two staves with vocal lines. The top staff starts with a half note 'ma', followed by quarter notes 'dyns', 'fayr', and 'and', and a half note 'gent'. The bottom staff starts with a half note 'fayr', followed by quarter notes 'and' and 'gent'. Both lines end with a fermata.

29

Wyth yes

Wyth yes grey and brow - ys

Detailed description: This system contains two systems of music. The first system has two staves with rests. The second system has two staves with vocal lines. The top staff has a half note 'Wyth', followed by a quarter note 'yes' with a sharp sign above it. The bottom staff has a half note 'Wyth', followed by quarter notes 'yes', 'grey', and 'and brow - ys'. Both lines end with a fermata.

31

grey and brow - ys bent.

bent.

Detailed description: This system contains two systems of music. The first system has two staves with rests. The second system has two staves with vocal lines. The top staff starts with a half note 'grey', followed by quarter notes 'and', 'brow - ys', and a half note 'bent.'. The bottom staff starts with a half note 'bent.'. Both lines end with a fermata.

33 [$\leftarrow \circ = \circ \rightarrow$]

We be cum for [thys] in - tent,

We be cum for thys in - tent, Our

We be cum for thys in - tent, Our

We be cum for thys in - tent, Our

36

Our selfys now for to sell - - - - -

selfys now for to___ sell - - - - -

selfys now [for] to___ sell - - - - -

selfys now for to___ sell - - - - -

39 [$\leftarrow \circ = \circ \rightarrow$]

- - - - - a.

- - - - - a.

- - - - - a. The bell - a, the

- - - - - a. The bell - a, the

REPEAT FROM **A** TO END,
THEN CONTINUE

41 [VERSE 3]

[Thes wan - ton men you wold in - - - - -

44

- tice May make you rue thys fool - ish

47

As - say you then non of ther spyce, vyce:]

49

For it wyl make your [be-ly to] swell

51

a. The bell - a, the

The bell - a, the

The bell - a, the

[a.] The bell - a, the

REPEAT FROM
B TO END,
 THEN CONTINUE

53 [VERSE 4]

Sys - ter, loke that ye be not for - lorn,

Sys - ter, loke that ye be not for - lorn, For then

For then

56

And say,

For then ev - e-ry man wyl laugh you to skorn And say,

ev - e-ry man wyl laugh you to [skorn And say,

ev - e-ry man wyl laugh you to skorn And say,

59

'Kytt hath got a clap un - der a thorne.'

'Kytt hath got a clap un - der a

'Kytt hath got a clap un - der a thorne.'

'Kytt hath got a clap un - der a

61

A - lak, wher shall we then

thorne.' A - lak, wher shall we then dwell - - -

A - lak, wher shall] we then dwell - - -

thorne.'

63

dwell - - - - -

A - lak, wher shall we then dwell - - - - -

65

- - - - - a?

- - - - - a?

- - - - - a? The bell - - - a, the

- - - - - a? The bell - - - a, the

67

bell - - - a, we may - dins beryth the bell - - -

bell - - - a, we may-dins beryth the bell - - -

69

The bell - a, the bell - - - a, we may-dins beryth the

The bell - - - a, the bell - - - a, we

- a.

- a.

71

bell - - - - - a. The bell - a, the

may - dins beryth the bell - - - a. The bell - a, the

The bell - a, the

The bell - a, the

REPEAT FROM

B TO END

The Text with Modernised Spelling

The bell-a, the bell-a, we maidens beareth the bell-a.

To bear the bell = to take the first place; to be the best

We be maidens fair and free:
Come near, young men, behold and see
How pretty and proper now that we be,
So comely under kell-a.
The bell-a, the bell-a...

kell = a woman's hair-net, cap, or head-dress

We be maidens fair and gent
With eyes grey and brows bent.
We be come for this intent,
Our selves now for to sell-a.
The bell-a, the bell-a...

gent = shapely, slender
brows bent = arched eyebrows

[Two lines missing]
Assay you then none of their spice,
For it will make your belly to swell-a.
The bell-a, the bell-a...

Sister, look that ye be not forlorn,
For then every man will laugh you to scorn
And say, 'Kytt hath got a clap under a thorn.'
Alack, where shall we then dwell-a?
The bell-a, the bell-a...

forlorn = morally lost, ruined

clap = shock of misfortune, mishap; thorn = a source of continual grief or trouble

The Music

All that survives of this four-part song by Taverner is a bass part in a set of partbooks published in 1530, of which only the *bassus* book survives with music, and parts of two other voices preserved on two leaves out of several from discarded manuscripts of polyphony that were cut up and used as flyleaves in one of John Merro's sets of partbooks, New York Public Library, Drexel MSS 4180–5. The fourth voice is entirely lost. The two Drexel fragments transmit what is surely the topmost voice, complete except for the burden and most of the first verse (the missing part of which can probably be restored from verse 3), and one inner part that preserves the burden, the whole of the first verse, most of the second and nearly nine bars of the fourth. David Fallows observed that these two Drexel leaves are remnants of a three-partbook set, and specifically from the partbook that contained two of Taverner's four voices.¹ Since this inner part is copied directly below voice I, he concluded that it must be voice II, the lost voice being voice III. However, the decision as to which of the two inner voices should have been copied with the uppermost one must surely have been arbitrary. The surviving music shows that the song was composed in a high clef combination and that the two inner voices must have been of very similar compass, with the missing voice having a higher, not lower, tessitura than the other. Fallows dated the leaves c.1515, so these inner voices could be countertenor and tenor parts, since at this date these voices were not yet markedly differentiated. Thus the song could have been sung by mean, countertenor, tenor and bass a fifth lower than notated. Alternatively, it is equally possible that it was intended to be sung at pitch by a treble, two means and a tenor.

Editorial Conventions

The original clef, mensuration symbol and first note of each part are shown on the prefatory staves. Editorial accidentals are placed above the notes concerned and remain operative throughout the bar. Coloration is indicated by the sign \square \sqcap . The notation of colored triplets has been halved, except where otherwise stated in the notes below. The spelling of the text follows that of source **A** below. Variant spellings in source **B** have not been recorded. Underlay in square brackets is entirely editorial. This includes the invention of two lines in verse 3 that have been lost. Lost music has been recomposed editorially and presented in small notation.

Sources

- A** *In this boke ar conteynyd .xx. songes* (10 October 1530; B only, complete).
(IV) no.6 in contents table, in column headed 'iiii. partes.': Tauernar
- B** New York Public Library, Drexel MSS 4185 and 4183 (c.1515; parts of M and T only).
4185 (I) front endpaper
4183 (III & I) front endpaper

Notes on the Readings of the Sources

In the notes below, each reference to a bar or group of bars is separated by an oblique stroke. Within these references multiple readings in the same voice are separated by commas and readings in different voices by semicolons. The order within each entry is: 1) bar number; 2) voice(s); 3) source(s); 4) reading of the source. Pitches are in capital letters, preceded by a number where necessary, e.g. ¹C = first note C in the bar.

Proportion Signs

Source **A** invariably signs the triplets with 3; **B** mostly uses 3.1, but in one instance has 3.2.

1 IV **A** 3 before ¹C / 2 IV **A** 3 before E / 3 IV **A** 3 before ¹F / 10 IV **A** 3 before C / 12 IV **A** 3 before ¹B / 13 III **B** 3.1 below ¹G; IV **A** 3 before ¹G / 21 IV **A** 3 before ²C / 23 I **B** 3.1 below ¹G; IV **A** 3 before ¹D / 24 I **B** 3.1 below ²C / 34 I III IV **AB** $\text{\textcircled{D}}$ at start of bar / 40 IV **A** 3 before ¹C / 48 I **B** 3.2 below ²G, 3.1 below ³G (note values quartered to ³B in 49); IV **A** 3 before ²C / 50 I **B** 3 below ¹G (probably originally 3.1, but end lost through trimming); IV **A** 3 before ¹D / 51 I **B** 3.1 below ²C /

Underlay

15–17 III **B** underlay *-dins fayr and fre* clarified by hairlines from syllables to notes / 18 III **B** *ye* deleted below E, hairline from *yowng* to E / 19 III **B** hairline from *and* to ¹B / 36 IV **A** *sel-* below D /

Other Readings

14 IV **A** no fermata / 15 IV **A** mensuration symbol Φ restated at start of verse / 22–24 III **B** rests lost / 26 IV **B** **A** mensuration symbol Φ restated at start of verse / 33 I **B** extra semibreve rest / 39 I **B** ²B is G (producing consecutive octaves with B) / 40 I **B** 4 breve rests cued after B / 41 IV **A** mensuration symbol Φ restated at start of verse / 53 IV **A** mensuration symbol Φ restated at start of verse / 58 III **B** tail only of C survives, but D space is visible so note cannot be higher than C / 63 I **B** new line with clef G3 begins with ²C /

Reconstructed Music Drawn from Extant Notation Elsewhere in the Work

4 I rest and following four notes from 69 / 4–6 II from III in 1–4 / 6 I partly from IV in 3 / 21–23 I small notes from 48–50 / 41–48 III small notes adapted from 15–21 / 67–end III IV from 2–7 / 69–end I small notes from 4–7 /

Directs

Directs at the ends of lines or sections confirm the pitches of the following notes which are reconstructed in the edition. 25 I **B** ²E; III **B** ¹E / 36 III **B** G lost but indicated by direct / 40 IV **A** ²B / 52 I **B** ²C / 66 IV **A** ²B / 69 I **B** D /

¹ David Fallows, 'The Drexel Fragments of Early Tudor Song', *The Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 26 (1993), pp.5–18.