

Old St.Martin in the Cornmarket

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St.Martin's is one of Worcester's ancient parish churches. Like All Saints, St.Swithun and St.Nicholas which were rebuilt in the 1730s, St.Martin's was enlarged and rebuilt between 1767 and 1780. The body of the church and the lower parts of the tower (incorporating some mediaeval masonry) were completed by October 1772 when the opening took place. Several leading architects of the day - including Stiff Leadbetter, Henry Keene and Anthony Keck - were consulted about the erection of the new church, but there is uncertainty regarding the authorship of the executed designs. Keene, certainly, provided designs but Keck appears to have been responsible for overseeing the construction of the church. Very much in the classical style, the church is built in Bewdley brick with stone dressings and the tower carries a simple balustrade with corner pinnacles.

Owing to a shortage of funds the top two stages of the tower were not added until 1780. John Noake, writing in 1848, reports a tradition that "through some bungling in the stipulations" the architect built the tower for one bell only, and was then "compelled to reconstruct it for the accommodation of six, being the same number as in the old tower". This would seem to be incorrect, but we do know from Valentine Green's 1764 *Survey of Worcester* that the old tower had a "pretty set of six bells" and a classical balustrade with urns at each corner.

The present bells (the new ring)

The new bells are as follows:

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Inscription</i>
1. 317 / 20 (<i>Taylor's circular mark</i>) 11 (<i>vine-leaf border</i>) Waist: THE CITY OF / WORCESTER / GAVE ME	
2. 311 / 20 (<i>Taylor's circular mark</i>) 11 (<i>vine-leaf border</i>) Waist: ST MARTIN / PRAY FOR US Opposite: PAUL AND GILLIAN / WESTCOTT / GAVE ME	
3. 310 / 20 (<i>Taylor's circular mark</i>) 11 (<i>vine-leaf border</i>) Waist: IN MEMORY OF / BISHOP / PHILIP GOODRICH Opposite: "RING OUT WILD BELLS"	
4. 278 / 20 (<i>Taylor's circular mark</i>) 11 (<i>vine-leaf border</i>) Opposite: URSULA ANDERSON / AND / GERAD HAMBURG / GAVE ME	

Bell**Inscription**

5. 243 / 20 (*Taylor's circular mark*) 11 (*vine-leaf border*)
Waist: EDWARD AND ELIZABETH / PRIOR / AND FAMILY / IN
THANKSGIVING
6. 267 / 20 (*Taylor's circular mark*) 11 (*vine-leaf border*)
Waist: BERNARD TAYLOR / GAVE ME
7. 298 / 20 (*Taylor's circular mark*) 11 (*vine-leaf border*)
Waist: THE FOUNDATION / FOR SPORTS AND THE ARTS /
GAVE ME
8. 210 / 20 (*Taylor's circular mark*) 11 (*vine-leaf border*)
Waist: THE BRANSFORD TRUST / AND / THE KINNEAR
FAMILY / GAVE ME
9. 151 / 20 (*Taylor's circular mark*) 11 (*vine-leaf border*)
Waist: IN MEMORY OF / JOAN SUMMERHAYES
10. 211 / 20 (*Taylor's circular mark*) 11 (*vine-leaf border*)
Waist: THE / WORCESTERSHIRE AND DISTRICTS / CHANGE
RINGING ASSOCIATION / BELFRY REPAIRS FUND /
GAVE ME

Bell	Founder and date	Diameter	Hz	Note	Cwt.	Qrs.	Lbs.
1.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	19½	2474	D#	2	1	17
2.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	20⅝	2201	C#	2	2	2
3.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	21⅜	1954	B	2	2	15
4.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	22	1854	A#	2	3	1
5.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	23	1651	G#	2	3	23
6.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	23⅞	1468	F#	3	0	8
7.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	25½	1310	E	3	1	11
8.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	26¼	1236	D#	3	3	21
9.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	29½	1100	C#	5	0	13
10.	John Taylor & Co, 2011	32 ⁹ / ₁₆	980	B	6	2	17

The new bells were all cast with flat tops and have standard Taylor mouldings (2:2-2:3:2). They are hung with Taylor ringing fittings including cast iron stocks and ball bearings in a galvanised steel frame manufactured to Taylors' designs by NDS Engineering of Clifton-on-Teme. The installation work was undertaken locally under the supervision of John Slater. The bells were dedicated on the floor of the church on Sunday 4 September 2011 and first rung for the Patronal Festival service on Friday evening, 11 November 2011.

The present bells (the old ring)

The old ring of six remains *in situ* above the new bells, along with the old sanctus bell.

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Inscription</i>
1.	GOD PROSPER ALL OVR BENEFACTORS (<i>vine border</i>) 1780 (<i>vine border</i>) <i>Below (cutting into the mouldings): (arabesque border) JOHN BAND CHVRCHWARDEN (vine border)</i>
2.	THOMAS MEARS OF LONDON FOUNDER 1833 <i>Waist: CHRISTOPHER BARDEN } / JOHN GOODMAN } CHURCH WARDENS</i>
3.	+ (<i>fleur-de-lys</i>) SANCTE (<i>fleur-de-lis</i>) MARTINE (<i>fleur-de-lis</i>) HORA (<i>fleur-de-lis</i>) PRO (<i>fleur-de-lis</i>) NOBIS (<i>fleur-de-lis</i>)
4.	(<i>Arabesque border all round</i>) / (<i>Brasyer shield</i>) DVRANTIA (<i>border</i>) DONIA (<i>border</i>) IN (<i>border</i>) HONOREM (<i>border</i>) DEI (<i>border</i>) 1638 (<i>border</i>) / (<i>arabesque border all round</i>)
5.	1638 (<i>acorn border all round</i>) / (<i>Brasyer shield</i>) THE (<i>mark</i>) GIFTE (<i>mark</i>) OF ROBERT (<i>mark</i>) DURANT (<i>mark</i>) FOR (<i>mark</i>) THE (<i>mark</i>) HONOUR (<i>mark</i>) OF GOD (<i>mark</i>) / (<i>arabesque border all round</i>) <i>On rim: (three coins)</i>
6.	(<i>Arabesque border all round</i>) / + DEO (<i>border</i>) GLORIAM (<i>border</i>) ET (<i>border</i>) GRATIAS (<i>border</i>) SONO (<i>border</i>) BERKELEY (<i>border</i>) 1640 (<i>border</i>) / (<i>arabesque border all round</i>)

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Founder and date</i>	<i>Diameter</i>	<i>Hz</i>	<i>Note</i>	<i>Cwt.</i>	<i>Qrs.</i>	<i>Lbs.</i>
1.	Thomas Rudhall, 1780	28½	1305	E-18	4	3	0*
2.	Thomas Mears II, 1833	31	1183	D+12	6	0	19
3.	Unknown founder c.1400	30¾	1045	C-2	5	2	0*
4.	Hugh Watts II, 1638	33½	991	B+6	7	2	0*
5.	Hugh Watts II, 1638	37¼	886	A+12	9	0	0*
6.	Hugh Watts II, 1640	42"	778	G-13	13	0	0*

The sanctus hangs in an upright wooden frame within the eastern window of the bell chamber. It is hung for swing chiming. It bears the following inscription:

+ THE GIFT OF RICHARD DVRANT 1621

History

We know that there were three bells in 1552. The so-called Edwardian Inventory of that year lists “iij litle belles a saunce bell”. One of the mediaeval bells survives as the third bell in the present ring, inscribed with a dedication to St.Martin. This bell has distinctive gothic lettering with a cross and fleur-de-lis mark found on several bells found mainly in churches in or near Staffordshire. On the basis of their geographical distribution H.B. Walters conjectured that they were cast at Lichfield, suggesting a date “not later than 1350” and linking them with a founder named John Mitchell mentioned in 1313 This is all very tenuous, however, and the shape of this bell and its mouldings suggest a much later date towards the end of the fourteenth century or later.

Walters also suggests that this ancient bell may have been the tenor of the pre-Reformation ring. He cites no evidence, and whether or not this is so is unclear. We do know, however, that the bells were augmented to five and probably increased in weight in 1638-40 through the generosity of Robert Durant and Sir Robert Berkeley.

Durant paid for the casting (or recasting) of two bells, now the fourth and fifth dated 1638. Sir Robert is said to have laid out over £100 in mending and increasing the ring of bells in 1640, at which time he caused a new treble and a new tenor to be made. This evidently refers to the predecessor of the present second (recast in 1833) and the tenor, which was known as Berkeley’s bell. Sir Robert also left funds for the tenor bell to be rung nightly as the “plum-pudding bell” a few weeks before Christmas.

The City of Worcester had a long tradition of bellfounding from mediaeval times through to the mid-1690s when the foundries of John Martin the younger (d.1696) and the less well-known William Huntbach (fl.1685-93) ceased to operate. John Martin’s foundry was in the parish of St.Martin’s and not far from the church. It is therefore rather strange to find that the new bells for St.Martin were cast by Hugh Watts II of Leicester, whose work – apart from one bell of 1641 at Hartlebury, now recast – is otherwise unknown in the County.

The reason may have been that Worcester was temporarily without a resident bellfounder at the time. We know of bells cast in the City up to 1636 but then there is a gap of a few years until the arrival of John Martin the elder in about 1644. During that time, another founder – unidentified to date but apparently associated with Thomas Hancox of Walsall – cast a

few bells in 1640 and 1641 for the Cathedral and for other churches in or near the County.

Whatever the reason, Watts provided St.Martin's with three or four bells of the very highest quality of casting and ornamentation. The three survivors all have beautifully formed inscriptions in three styles of lettering and are decorated with the usual Watts borders and marks. The fifth, in particular, is an especially attractive bell. Their tone, however, is less satisfactory and rather surprisingly so, since Watts cast some very fine-toned bells.

Thus, by the eve of the Civil War – in which Worcester was to feature in the annals of the history of the nation – St.Martin's had a ring of five bells. It also had a small sanctus bell – still in use – cast locally in 1621 to replace the ancient one noted in the 1552 inventory. The inscription records that the cost of the new bell was borne by Richard Durant – doubtless a kinsman of the donor of the 1638 bells, Robert Durant. The identity of the founder is not known, but there are similar bells at Bransford and at Malvern Priory. The Bransford example is documented but, sadly, the accounts only refer to “the casting of the bell” without giving the founder's name.

In May 1674 the Churchwardens of St.Martin's reported the “Bells, Bellropes etc ... in good and decent repare”. Presumably they were still five in number, but in around 1700 a further bell was added to make a ring of six. The precise date is uncertain – and there is also some confusion as to what happened as the inscription of the present treble (dated 1780) implies that it was an addition too – but we can be sure that a bell was added by Abraham Rudhall I before 1704/5.

The Rudhall catalogue of 1704/5 lists one bell supplied by Rudhall to “St.Martin's in the City of Worcester” and the corresponding entry in the catalogue of 1715 clearly states that the bell was supplied “to make Six”. Given Green's clear statement that there were six bells by 1764 there seems to be little doubt that the augmentation took place around 1700.

As already noted, the present tower was completed in 1780 and the bells – silent for some thirteen years – were reinstated. Inscribed “God prosper all our benefactors”, the present treble was cast by Thomas Rudhall in that year. Assuming – as the other evidence suggests – that it was not an addition, then it must have been a recasting of the bell added by Abraham Rudhall some eighty years earlier. The 1788 Rudhall catalogue, however, lists two bells cast by the Gloucester founders for St.Martin's and one

wonders if the ring was remodelled by casting a new treble and retuning the other Rudhall bell as the second. Unfortunately the recasting of the second in 1833 has removed the evidence required for clarification here.

The present bellframe, however, almost certainly dates from 1780. It is of fairly standard construction but on a rather unusual plan with the tenor in the middle. The whole frame is positioned towards the south side of the tower with a wide space on the north.

The bells were rehung in 1812 by Thomas Paul, a bellhanger from Bristol who undertook work at several other churches in the area between 1811 and 1816. His other jobs included 1810 Paul, Thomas Hereford Cathedral (1810), Hereford All Saints (1811), Worcester All Saints (1812), Chipping Campden (1813), Pershore Abbey (1814), Bromsgrove (1815-16) and Hanbury (1815). Exactly what he did at St.Martin's is unclear - his newspaper advertisement in the *Worcester Herald* of 12 September 1812 merely states that he had "just completed the Hanging of All Saint's and St. Martin's" - but it seems probable that most of the present fittings date from this time.

In 1833 the second bell was cracked. John Rudhall's estimate book shows that on 20 June 1833, he gave an estimate to "Mr. Penn, Worcester, [for] recast^g. a Bell in a Peal £5.12 new, £4.4. old if ringers are to pay for it". This must refer to the second at St.Martin's. Rudhall did not get the job, however, and the bell was recast instead by Thomas Mears II of Whitechapel, whose bill for the work survives among the parish records. It reads:

Parish of St.Martin Worcester
To Tho^s. Mears, Whitechapel Bellfoundry, London, Feb^y. 12 1833
1833 Sept^r. 28th.
To 1 Bell 6-0-19 @ 13d per lb £37.8.7.
Cr By Old Bell 6-1-21, [less] Iron Staple ded^t. 7lb, [nett] 6-1-14 @ 9d per lb
£26.15.6.
[total] £10.13.1.
Gentⁿ, I have herewith sent my little acct for recasting one of your Church
Bells which I trust you will find right and that the Bell gives satisfaction
I am Gentⁿ. Yours respectfully,
Tho^s. Mears^r.

There is no evidence that any other work was done in the tower at the time, and the new bell was clearly rehung on the headstock of the previous one. At some time in the nineteenth century the tenor was quarter turned, and in June 1891 John Taylor & Co of Loughborough installed an

Ellacombe chiming apparatus. The following daybook entry of 22 June 1891 relates to the work:

Rev nd . Robert Wylde, St.Martins Rectory, Worcester.	
To Chiming Apparatus for the ring of six bells according to quotation of 12 May 1891	£15.0.0.
To tuning the second bell	£1.10.0.
To 3rd. Class fare to and from Worcester	<u>12s.</u>
	[total] £17.2.0.
Settled 30 October 1891	

At this date the bells were still in good ringing order and regularly rung. When William Saunders – the author of the “Sherborne manuscript” - visited on 22 July 1891 he described them as “well hung”. Indeed, the closing decades of the nineteenth century saw a fair amount of ringing at the tower, however, and the *Bell News* contains several reports of ringing here between 1883 and 1899, as follows:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Method etc</i>	<i>Notes</i>
9 January 1883	720 Grandsire Minor	Half-muffled in memory of Mr. H. Banks, formerly a member of the ringing society attached to the church
21 July 1883	720 Bob Minor	By ringers from Lichfield and Birmingham
16 December 1885	720 Grandsire Minor	By Junior members of the Worcester Society
7 February 1886	720 Grandsire Minor	For the induction of the new Rector
2 April 1888	720 Bob Minor	On Easter Monday
26 December 1888	720 Bob Minor	Also 120 Stedman Doubles
31 August 1889	600 Bob Minor	Attempt for 720 “came to grief owing to loud talking on the belfry steps”
29 July 1890	720 Grandsire Minor	
20 December 1891	720 Grandsire Minor	
2 January 1891	720 Canterbury Pleasure Minor	

<i>Date</i>	<i>Method etc</i>	<i>Notes</i>
28 February 1891	720 Grandsire Minor	
5 May 1898	720 Bob Minor	
2 June 1898	720 Kent T.B. Minor	
21 September 1899	720 Canterbury Pleasure Minor	
19 October 1899	720 Canterbury Pleasure Minor	
22 October 1899	720 Bob Minor and 720 Oxford Bob Minor	For the Harvest Festival

Quite when they fell into disuse is unclear, and there is anecdotal evidence that Saturday afternoon practices were held at St.Martin's into the 1930s. The bells have certainly been regarded as "unringable" since before the second World War.

Mention should also be made of the ancient *clock*, once positioned high in the tower on a platform below the roof of the bellchamber. It is now on display on the gallery at the back of the church. Dating from the seventeenth century, it is an old fieldgate clock in an upright wooden frame with two capstan-wound trains. It used to strike the hours on the tenor and it displayed the time on a dial over the belfry window on the east face of the tower.

Thanks to David Franklin.