

The church is of Norman origin, but it has undergone a great deal of subsequent alteration, especially in the Victorian period. The Perpendicular tower is said to have been built in 1461. It is a low, sturdy structure, with an embattled parapet and distinctive “spike” on the roof. Access to all levels of the tower is by spiral stair in the NW corner. The ringing room, which also houses the clock, is on the first floor. The bells are in the chamber above.

The present bells

Ring of eight bells in the key of F (696.5Hz or F minus 4.86 cents) and a sanctus bell.

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Inscription</i>
1.	173 / TAYLOR OF LOUGBOROUGH CAST ME IN 1929 (<i>floral border</i>) Waist: GIVEN BY / E.P. THOMAS OF CLAINES. / C.T. POWELL * VICAR / J.W. NOAKE } / J. DORRELL } CHURCHWARDENS.
2.	186 / TAYLOR OF LOUGBOROUGH CAST ME IN 1929 (<i>floral border</i>) Waist: COST COLLECTED BY W. PAGE / C.T. POWELL * VICAR / J.W. NOAKE } / J. DORRELL } CHURCHWARDENS.
3.	T. MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1816. J. LUCY T. WOODYATT CHURCH WARDENS.
4.	T.. MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1815. (<i>loop border</i>)
5.	T. MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1816. (<i>loop border</i>)
6.	T. MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1816 (<i>lattice border</i>) J. LUCY T. WOODYATT CHURCH U. WARDENS.
7.	T. MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1816 (<i>border</i>) J. LUCY T. WOODYATT CHURCH WARDENS.
8.	REV ^D . J. MEAKIN. VICAR J. LUCY. T. WOODYATT. CHURCH WARDENS. (<i>guilloche border</i>) Waist: THOMAS MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1816 Opposite: MESS ^{RS} .. { J. WILLIAMS. J. ELCOX. } / J. HOOPER. J. GARNETT } / J. YOUNG. } COMMITTEE.

<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.	John Taylor & Co, 1929	27½	1397	F	4	3	4
2.	John Taylor & Co, 1929	28¾	1315	E	5	1	16
3.	Thomas Mears, 1816	32	1172	D	6	1	16
4.	Thomas Mears, 1815	33¾	1045	C	6	3	16
5.	Thomas Mears, 1816	36⅛	931	Bb	7	3	19
6.	Thomas Mears, 1816	38¼	878	A	9	0	20
7.	Thomas Mears, 1816	40⅝	782	G	10	3	23

<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>
8.	Thomas Mears, 1816	45 $\frac{5}{8}$	696.5	F	15	1	16

The back six are a complete ring by Thomas Mears II of Whitechapel. They are inscribed in mixed-size capitals and bear three different types of ornamental border. Their canons have been removed and the bells have been quarter turned. The trebles were cast with flat tops.

The bells are hung for ringing with Taylor fittings dating from 1929-30. These include cast-iron stocks, fixed steel gudgeons, ball bearings, traditional wheels, stays and sliders. There is also an Ellacombe Chiming Apparatus.

The wooden bellframe of uncertain date, but it was built for eight bells (or nine if the space for the sanctus bell is included). It may be contemporary with the Mears bells of 1816. It has sills, main braces and long heads (i.e. *Bellframes* type 6.A) but with added jack-braces from sill to brace. It is of standard eight-bell layout (*Bellframes* 8.3) but with five parallel pits across the middle, the narrow one in the centre for the sanctus.

There is also a sanctus bell – unhung. It was returned to the church in about 1971 after hanging in a turret over the roof of the Church Hall in Blakefield Road since 1886. In 1995 it was rehung “dead” in a metal frame above one of the belfry windows by Berry and Co. It is fitted with a Taylor trigger-action clapper.

Inscription

+ IHON GREN 1626 / A B M

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Founder and date</i>	<i>Diameter</i>	<i>Cwt.</i>	<i>Qrs.</i>	<i>Lbs.</i>
1.	John Greene II, 1626	15 $\frac{1}{2}$	0	3	0*

History

In 1552 there were three bells and a sanctus bell here – “iij belles a saunce bell”.

By 1707 there were five bells in the ring. In that year, however, the Churchwardens reported to the Bishop that the tenor bell was broken and the other bells were in poor repair. The Churchwardens’ presentments include the following:

19 June 1707 – Imprimis wee present our great Bell to be broke and very much out of reparaire, and all the rest of the Bells to be out of reparaire for want of wheeles
4 June 1708 - Item wee have nothing presentable in our parish to the best of our knowledge except our Bells wich are new Casting

The Churchwardens' account book contains a detailed record of the work, showing that the five old bells were recast and made into a new ring of six by Richard Sanders of Bromsgrove in 1707. The book includes the minutes of a parish meeting on 3 July 1707 when:

... it was agreed by ye majority of voices of parishioners that their five Bells should be cast into six and that the 2 present Churchwardens ... shall have full power and authority to Article and agree with any Bell-founder they shall best approve of for ye Casting of ye foresaid Bells.

Votes for six Bells - 25

Votes for Casting one bell - 18

Clearly some of the vestrymen preferred the cheaper option of just recasting the cracked bell, but the majority voted in favour of an entirely new ring. According to John Hinton, a contract document once existed showing that the parish agreed with Sanders in 1707 "In consideration of the sum of ffifty three pounds of lawfull money of England to take down out of the parish church of St. John the ffive bells now hanged therein and a new cast and run the said bells into six bells of as compleat a form and shape as any bell ought to be made." The accounts give a very detailed picture of the progress of the work:

Accounts 1707

Expenses att the Angell with the Bell-founder upon the accompt of casting the Bells	5s.
Expences in agreeing with the Bell-founder concerning Casting the 6 Bells	9s.
Gave ye Belfounder in earnest	2s.6d.
Spent at Sealing the Articles	7s.
Spent at weighing ye 5 old Bells	2s.
16 Dec Expences & hors-hire in going to Bromsgrove to look after the Bells	5s.6d.
Jan 22d gave to those that weighed the bells when they came home, drink	1s.
pd for 2 letters from Bromsgrove about the Bells	2s.
Gave to the workmen that hang'd the Bells att two times	1s.8d.
pd for drink at ye Angell when the bells were hanged	2s.1d.
Pd Mr. Doolittle for fetching the weights out of Worcester to weigh the Bells	3s.

Accounts 1708

Ap 13th pd for carrying the weights and weighing the 2 new Bells	9d.
8 ^{br} 27 pd Berry for gathering the weights together to weigh the new Tenor	3d.

Memorandum - At a parish meeting held ... on the 26th day of May ... 1709 ... it was agreed ... that a levy ... be assessed and collected to pay Richard Sanders of Bromsgrove for Casting our 6 Bells, and compleating the concerns belonging to them as appears by Articles

Accounts 1709

May 12th pd the Expenses at Mrs. Greens for Meat & drink for the Gentlemen which gave Judgment on the Bells	£1.4.11.
gave the ringers at the same time	2s. 6d.
Pd Richard Sanders the Bell-founder	£52.3.0.

Of the 1707 ring, at least one bell was recast within a few years of installation. The 1751 Rudhall catalogue lists a bell cast for St. John's - "Worcestershire, St. John's in Worcester Suburbs 1" - at some date prior to 1751. The entry recurs in the 1788 and 1804 lists. Sometimes the sequence of entries in the Rudhall lists enables approximate dates to be determined, but the surviving bells for places listed on either side show that the entries are not in date order here.

Eventually, in 1815-16, the Sanders ring gave way to six new bells cast by Thomas Mears II of London. The new bells are listed in contemporary Mears catalogues. The "list of the peals of Church Bells cast by Thomas Mears, Bell-founder, Whitechapel, London, since December, 1810" mentions "St. John's, Worcester, 6 - 16 [cwt]". Before the removal of the canons and retuning in 1929-30 the tenor weighed 16-2-0.

During the C19th the church was much enlarged and underwent numerous improvements. In a report of a ringer's entertainment held on 27 December 1882 in the *Bell News* of 13 January 1883 (p.326) it was noted that there were two empty pits in the frame and the desirability of adding two more bells was mentioned. At that time, the church was about to undergo further improvements and the list of works in the faculty, granted on 3 May 1884, included "to add 2 bells to those in tower". However, the available money was spent on other work and the hoped-for augmentation did not take place until nearly fifty years later.

In about 1886 the sanctus bell was removed from the tower and taken to the new Parish Rooms, where it was hung in an open four-poster turret on the roof. It was hung there with swing-chiming fittings including wooden stock, strap gudgeons, stock hoops and chiming lever. It remained there until some time after 1971, when it was returned to the church. The Hall was sold in the 1970s, but the building (now *minus* the turret) remains in use (March 2011) as the Hawthorn Cottage Nursery at 92 Blakefield Road.

In 1889 the Guild of St. John presented the Church with a Chiming Apparatus, enabling the six bells to be chimed for daily matins and evensong. This was reported in the (*Worcester Diocesan Church Calendar* 1890 (p.226).

A few years later, in 1895, the bells were partially rehung by Mears & Stainbank. The Whitechapel daybook entry for 7 June 1895 indicates that the bells were rehung with new gudgeons and bearings, frame strengthened etc., for £72.5.0. A few years later, probably around 1923, the tenor was again rehung, this time by Gillett & Johnston of Croydon.

When Taylors visited to inspect the bells on 4 May 1929 they noted six bells by Mears in a frame for eight, "the tenor rehung by Gillett & Johnston about 7 years ago". The bells were rehung soon afterwards and augmented to eight, one of the new bells being

paid for by E. Percy Thomas of Claines who also gave bells to Claines and Worcester Cathedral. Known as "Pumpy" Thomas, he was the owner of Thomas & Co, a firm which made windmill-operated water pumps in Claines, mainly for export. He was a great lover of bells and supporter of ringing.

The rededication of the bells on Thursday 13 February 1930 after rehangng and augmentation was reported in the *Ringng World* of 21 February (p.121). The report states that the work involved removing the canons from the back six, retuning and strengthening the old frame with powerful angle plates top and bottom. The St.John's Feoffees undertook the restoration of the old six and provided the Ellacombe Chiming Apparatus. The article states that one of trebles was paid for by E.P. Thomas of Claines, and that the other was obtained through the efforts of Bill Page, a well-known Worcester ringer, who raised £112. As this was more than the £80 required, the surplus was used to meet the cost of internal sound-deadening and shutters to minimise the sound outside the tower when ringing is in progress.

The bells have been silent since 2008 when death-watch beetle infestation was found to have caused serious problems with the tower roof and bellframe foundations. The necessary work, expected to cost £200,000, has recently (March 2011) commenced and it is hoped that ringing will resume later in the year.

The church clock occupies the south-western side of the ringing room. The clock itself was made by Joyce of Whitchurch in 1876. It is listed in a Joyce catalogue of c.1892 as "St.John's, Worcester, [church clock] with one dial and striking the hours and quarters". Originally striking only the ding-dong quarters, it was adapted to sound the Westminster chimes after the bells were augmented to eight in 1930.

Visited: CJP and Nicholas Cronin, 20 May 1970