

THE LIVING HERITAGE OF CHURCH BELLS AND BELLRINGING

Church bells are the biggest and loudest musical instruments. Hidden away in the top of tall church towers, their sound has been part of the rhythm of life in villages, towns and cities across the country for over a thousand years.



Since Norman times church bells have been rung to mark the beginning and end of the working day, to tell the time, to warn people of invasion during times of national emergency, for church and saints' days, for civic and national celebration, and for enjoyment and fun.

Over 3,000 bells that were cast in mediaeval times are still rung regularly today.

Church bells affirm our sense of place and national identity.



"Let me wake up in the morning to the smell of new mown hay, to laugh and cry, to live and die, in the brightness of my day..."

...I want to hear the pealing bells of distant churches sing"

from "Skyline Pigeon" by Bernie Taupin, recorded by Elton John on the 1968 album "Empty Sky". Bells have been a part of daily life since the 16th century and references can be found throughout literature, folklore and popular culture.

BELLS AND THE LANDSCAPE OF ENGLISH MEMORY

WORSHIP, WEDDINGS & FUNERALS
Every week bells are rung by thousands of ringers to call people to church, for weddings and festivals, for civic events and for fun. In 2012 bells were rung all over the land to celebrate the London Olympics. Muffled bells are sometimes rung at funerals and at times of local or national mourning.

NATIONAL IDENTITY
During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) church bells became an important symbol of national identity.

Bellringing—along with the use of bonfires and beacons—was used to mark the festivals and feast days of a newly developed national calendar.



This calendar, which combined historical events from Britain's past alongside the Christian religious cycle, became an instrument for declaring a distinctively national Protestant culture and was designed to break further links with Europe and the influence of Catholic Rome.



There are over 5,200 churches in England with rings of five or more bells hung for change ringing—the familiar sound of bells rung in ever changing sequences.



Church bells have been ringing in England since the 7th century but it was not until the 17th century that the curious tradition of English change ringing developed.

Change ringing is still practised all over the British Isles and abroad in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Canada and the United States of America.

Change ringing is a unique combination of music, mathematics, sport and teamwork. It is practised on instruments which are often hundreds of years old.

BELLS IN LITERATURE, FOLKLORE AND POPULAR CULTURE

With the sound of bells becoming a part of daily life, it was inevitable that reference would seep into literature, folklore and popular culture.

The mediaeval nursery rhyme "Oranges and Lemons" tells a story of London life through its churches and their bells. There are many references to bells in Shakespeare's plays and the great 17th century English poet John Donne wrote

"...for whom the bells tolls, it tolls for thee".

In 1665, in the City of London, Samuel Pepys would console himself with the sound of the

"familiar bells of All Hallows and St. Olave's".

In the 18th century the composer Handel described England as the "Ringing Isle" and this caught on and was used throughout Europe.

In 1850, as Poet Laureate, Tennyson's famous poem *"ring out wild bells"*

tells a tale of Christmas in the Lincolnshire countryside.

The Church Bell written by Elinor Wylie in 1921 begins *"As I was lying in my bed I heard the church-bell ring; Before one solemn word was said, a bird began to sing."*

Dorothy L. Sayers' 1934 novel, "The Nine Tailors" is about a murder in a sleepy English village and Lord Peter Wimsey's knowledge of bellringing helps him solve the mystery.

Poet Laureate John Betjeman's celebration of the City of London's *"steeped forest of churches"*

evokes the sounds of bells breaking the "Sunday silence". It begins with the "tingle tang" of "the bell of St. Mildred's Bread Street", and ends by drowning in "the roaring flood of a twelve-voiced peal from St. Paul's".

"For Whom the Bell Tolls" is a song by the American heavy metal band Metallica. Released in 1984, it was inspired by Hemingway's 1940 novel of the same name.

"He hears the silence so loud... ...for whom the bell tolls, time marches on."



Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St. Clement's. You owe me five farthings, say the bells of St. Martin's. When will you pay me? say the bells of Old Bailey. When I grow rich, say the bells of Shoreditch. When will that be? say the bells of Stepney. I do not know, says the great bell of Bow. Here comes a candle to light you to bed, and here comes a chopper to chop off your head!

THE MAKING OF BELLS

The word bell comes from old Saxon: 'bellan', which means to bawl or bellow.

A bell is a percussion instrument, forming sound through vibration upon being hit by a clapper. Bells are made of a bronze alloy of copper and tin, and the success of bellfounding in England has its roots in mediaeval monastic enterprise.



In the 1890s Canon Arthur Simpson worked out a method of harmonically tuning bells. Today the process of 'Simpson' tuning is greatly aided by

sophisticated technology. The bell is clamped on a vertical boring lathe, mouth uppermost, and is slowly revolved against a cutting tool fixed onto the end of a boring arm.

Although extremely accurate tuning forks and electronic devices are used to appraise tuning, the human ear is still used for final approval.

Peals or rings of bells are tuned in a major scale. The biggest bell, the tenor, gives the ring its key note.



JOHN MARTIN AND THE CITY BELL MAKERS

The City of Worcester had a long tradition of bellfounding from mediaeval times through to the 1690s when the foundries of John Martin and the lesser known William Huntbach operated within the city.

John Martin's foundry was located in Silver Street in the parish of St. Martin's, not far from the church, on the opposite side of the modern City Walls Road.



With the foundry so close, it is curious that the original bells for St. Martin's were cast by Hugh Watts II of Leicester.

How bellfounders managed their work is an intriguing question. The six bells at Martley were cast by Richard Keene of Woodstock. It is not known where the bells were cast, this may have been at Martley or at Keene's foundry in Woodstock before being transported to Martley.

A FAMILY BUSINESS

The first John Martin lived in St. Martin's parish during the first half of the 17th century. His son, also called John, took over the Bellfoundry and ran it until he died in 1697. John Martin II produced 172 bells, 94 of these were supplied to churches in Worcestershire including three of the bells of St. Swithun's in the city.

BELL MAKING EQUIPMENT

A lengthy inventory dated 1697 lists John Martin's bell making equipment which included a crane with rope and pulley, beam scales and weights, a furnace, large shop bellows and a vice. Also listed were nine hundred weight of old brass and a bell.

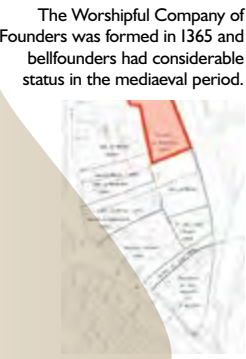


BELL CASTING — ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Documentary evidence for bell casting in Worcester is strong and this is backed up by archaeological discoveries of small pockets of activity around the city. Bell pits and waste materials appear in mediaeval deposits recorded in Sidbury and Deansway.



There is documentary reference to a Simon the Bellyeter in Sidbury in 1226 which is supported by archaeological evidence in the form of kilns and bell mould fragments. In 1306 John Bellyeter owned a number of properties in Worcester and was a Sherriff of the city.



The Worshipful Company of Founders was formed in 1365 and bellfounders had considerable status in the mediaeval period.

Archaeological evidence of bell casting in the city has been discovered in recent years when development, such as the St. Martin's Quarter, has taken place.



BELLS IN THE CITY

the history — and future — of ringing in Worcester

This leaflet depicts the ten panels of an exhibition produced by the Worcester Cathedral Guild of Bellringers which will tour Worcester in 2013. Inspired by the *New Bells for Old St. Martin's* Project, it describes bells and bellringing throughout English culture and history with an emphasis on bell making and ringing within the City. It also outlines the future of bellringing and how the Worcester Guild is at the forefront of developments in teaching this unusual performing art.



www.worcesterbells.co.uk



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This "Prospect of Worcester from the East", painted around 1750 clearly shows the City churches which dominated the skyline. The view from Lansdowne Crescent remains much the same today.

CHURCHES IN THE CITY

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST AND THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY



The Cathedral has twelve bells in the key of B natural with three semitone bells and a bourdon bell (hung dead) for the clock. The bells were recast in 1928 from the previous ring of 1869. The biggest ringing bells weigh 48 cwt and the bourdon bell weighs 82 cwt, over 4 tonnes. Five of the eight original bells, which date from the mediaeval period, can be seen in the Cathedral cloisters.



Many of Worcester's churches from mediaeval times remain as landmarks in the city today.



Standing at the Cross in the heart of the City, St. Nicholas was one of Worcester's ancient parish churches. It was rebuilt in 1730-35 and closed as a place of worship in 1989. The six bells, which haven't been rung since 1938, are in the key of G.



ST. NICHOLAS

The 'Glover's Needle' is all that remains of St. Andrew's church in Deansway. The church was demolished after the Second World War leaving just the 15th century tower and spire, which was added in 1751. One bell remains and it is still rung regularly to herald Worcester City Council meetings.



ST. ANDREW

St John's church is of Norman origin with a 15th century tower. The ringing room also houses the clock. The belfry has a ring of eight bells in the key of F and a sanctus bell.



ST. JOHN IN BEDWARDINE



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ST. PETER

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST AND THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

ST. HELEN

OLD ST. MARTIN

ST. SWITHUN

ST. ANDREW

ALL SAINTS

CHURCHES IN THE CITY

ST. PETER



St. Peter the Great was built in the 13th century on the site of an earlier church dedicated to the saints Perpetua and Felicity first mentioned in the year 969. St. Peter's was rebuilt on the same site in Sidbury in 1838, eventually closing in 1972. It was demolished in 1975-76.

Two of the bells are on view in the Worcester Cathedral Teaching Centre.

ALL SAINTS

All Saints in Deansway was rebuilt in 1739-42, incorporating the mediaeval tower base. The north side of the church was cleared of property in the 19th century and gives us the view we see today. There is a ring of 12 bells in E flat, plus a semitone bell and a disused sanctus bell.



The church of Old St. Martin stands in what was once the commercial hub of the city. The Cornmarket and surrounding streets were densely populated with a closely knit community of family businesses and work people.



OLD ST. MARTIN

The tower contains a ring of six bells and a sanctus bell in the original frame situated above a new ring of ten bells which were installed in 2011. The oldest bell of 1320 is dedicated to St. Martin.

ST. SWITHUN

St. Swithun's in Church Street is one of Worcester's ancient parishes, but the church was extensively remodelled in early Georgian times. It became a redundant church in 1977.



There is a ring of six bells in the key of F natural, three mediaeval bells and three which were cast by John Martin. The six comprise one of the oldest sets of ringing bells in the UK.



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THE CITY OF WORCESTER — LEADING THE BELLRINGING RENAISSANCE

The Worcester Cathedral Guild of Bellringers is at the forefront of the current renaissance in bellringing.



The Cathedral tower is home to the world's first purpose-built Teaching Centre. It comprises eight dumbbells each of which simulate a tower bell of about 6 cwt or 300 kg. Each dumbbell is connected to a laptop and headphones. It works just like a flight simulator. This teaching method has been emulated by the ringers at St. Peter's Cathedral in Adelaide, Australia who have a close partnership with the Cathedral Guild.

Working with local schools, the Guild is developing new and exciting ways to teach this unusual performing art. If you would like to know more please get in touch via email at teaching@worcesterbells.co.uk or look at our website.

www.worcesterbells.co.uk



NEW BELLS FOR OLD ST. MARTIN'S



The tower of Old St. Martin's contains six original bells, five of which pre-date the Georgian building which was completed in 1772. In 2011 the bells, along with the frame and fittings, were conserved and 'hung dead' with new clock hammers. The bells, and the rare 'St. Martin's chime', can be heard once again, after a silence of over 100 years.

Clock chimes strike the Angelus and are used as service bells using a modern chiming apparatus.

A new ring of ten bells, with a bright modern sound, have been hung in a new frame below the original bells in a new intermediate chamber. The bells are easy to ring and Old St. Martin's will become the ringing nursery for young ringing talent in Worcestershire.

www.oldstmartinsbells.co.uk



BELLS IN THE CITY

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THE CITY OF WORCESTER — LEADING THE BELLRINGING RENAISSANCE

The Worcester Cathedral Guild of Bellringers is grateful for the strong support their projects receive from partners, funders and suppliers in the local community and nationwide.

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The Parochial Church Council of Old St. Martin's
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—
Ursula Anderson and Gerhard Hamburg
The family of Bishop Philip Goodrich
Eddie and Elizabeth Prior
The family of Joan Summerhayes
Bernard Taylor
Paul and Gillian Westcott
and numerous personal donations

THE RIGHT REVEREND DR JOHN INGE BISHOP OF WORCESTER



"Bellringing is a quintessentially English tradition which affirms the importance of a sense of place to human experience. It also reminds us of the central importance of the Christian faith and churches to our communities."

"I am delighted that there has been something of a renaissance of this great tradition in recent years and even more delighted that Worcester is at the centre of it."

LORD FAULKNER OF WORCESTER



"Worcester leads the world in church bellringing, and it is one of very few cities where it is possible for would-be campanologists to learn these important and popular skills."

"Well done! Ring out, wild bells!"

Exhibition written and designed by
Mark Regan – Ringing Master, Worcester Cathedral
Justin Hughes – Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service
Richard Nicholls – Enrich Design



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