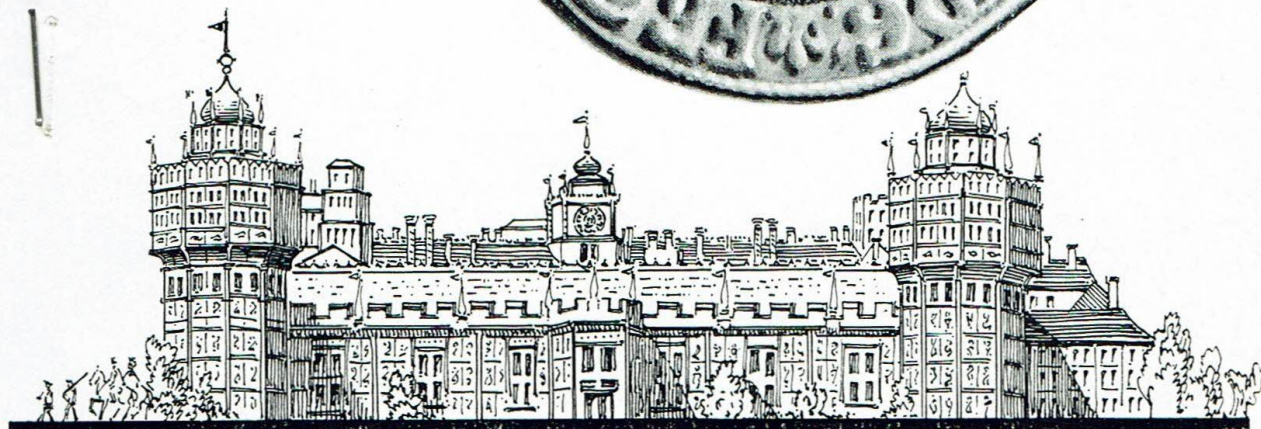

NONSUCH ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY



OCCASIONAL PAPER

6. BELLS OF ST. MARY'S, EWELL

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN,

EWELL - THE BELLS

In the year 1553 Sir Thomas Cawarden, Knight, Nicholas Leigh and William Saunder, Esquires, three of the Commissioners appointed by Edward VI to enquire into the possessions of the "several Churches and Chapels of the Realm", caused a list to be compiled of all the furnishings of the Parish Church of Ewell. This list, dated 17th May (1), included the entry "Also remaining in there charge to the kings use iiij belles in the steeple and a saunce [Sanctus] bell." In this same survey (2) is a reference to "the inventorie nowe newly put into our knowledge", and a copy of the old inventory made by the Commissioners still exists (3) and is headed "Thys copy of the old Inventory examyd by the counterpayne thereof indentyd remaynyth with the comyssioners..." and lists "In primis iiij belles of one ring and a saunce bell". The Old Inventory is probably one of a previous series made in 1548.

Thus it appears that in 1548 there were in the tower four bells and a sanctus bell which would have been somewhat smaller. It is unlikely that the four bells could have been rung as bells are to-day in this country, as the art of Change-ringing was at that time unknown, as was the whole wheel that makes the art possible. The tower in which the five bells hung is all that now remains of the old Church, although one of the arguments for the demolition of the Church in 1847 was that the tower was unsafe!(4)

There remained five bells in the tower until the year 1767 (5) when they were taken down and removed to the Foundry of Messrs. Lester and Pack in London. These founders cast many bells in this County including complete rings at St. Nicholas' and St. Mary's Churches in Guildford and at Ewell. The bells at Ewell were the latest from this Foundry remaining in Surrey in 1884, and still are to-day (6). The five bells were re-cast into a ring of six weighing 51 cwt. 2 qr. 15 lb. (7). Two of the new bells were "Maidens" - bells that do not require to be tuned - and the other four were tuned by chipping pieces off the lip (8). The tenor (a maiden bell) weighed 14 cw 1 qr. 17 lb. and the treble (the other maiden) 5 cwt. 2 q 16 lbs. The diameter at the lip of the tenor was 3 ft. 7 ins. and of the treble 2 ft. 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ ins. Three of the six remain in the present ring of eight. The ring of six bells was hung in the manner of a modern ring, with whole wheel and slider equipment. They cost £77.16s.5 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. The bill was paid between 16th April and 21st August 1770 (9) and with the additional cost of a bell-frame at £69. 15s.7d. and other expenses, the whole cost of the bells, frame and fittings was £160.2s.9 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

By 1830 it had become necessary to re-cast the fourth bell; presumably because it was cracked. The work was performed by Thomas Mears, the successor of Lester & Pack at the London Foundry, now at Whitechapel. The weight of the bell, 8 cwt. 19 lbs., was unchanged, but unfortunately no other details of the work are known (10).

The six bells were transferred to the new Church in 1848 (11) and rehung in the old frame which was also brought from the old building (12). The bells were hung in such a way that the ropes fell neither in a regular circle nor in order but descended in the order Treble-2-3-5-4-Tenor (13). The original fittings were also re-used.

Fifty years of maltreatment and neglect did nothing to improve the condition of the bells, and by 1889 the fittings were disintegrating and two bells, the fifth and the tenor, were cracked, both in the crown, and the fifth

had in addition three canons missing (14). On November 18th of that year Messrs. Mears & Stainbank, again of the London Foundry of Lester & Pack and successors to Thomas Mears, presented the result of an inspection. They recommended that the fifth bell should be re-cast, and the other five quarter-turned. They pronounced the remainder of the fittings to be almost unusable - the iron-work was eaten through by rust; the headstocks were pieced in many places; the bearings were very worn causing the bells to ring unsteadily and heavily thus placing excessive strain on the frame which was in any case designed to fit a different tower. The wheels were as old as the bells, and were split and too weak to repair (15). An attached estimate of the cost of restoring the bells totalled £114 and provided for the re-casting of the fifth bell, six sets of new fittings consisting of elm headstocks with steel gudgeons and gun-metal bearings, wheels, braces, stays and sliders, rollers, and five reversed staples for the clappers of the quarter-turned bells; also included was the cost of removing, renovating and re-tuning the bells. A second estimate, also annexed, added to the above a new frame of best seasoned English Oak to hold eight bells at an additional cost of £73. The eight-pit frame was suggested in case there should be at any time in the future a proposal to complete the octave. The Founders took the opportunity to provide an estimate of £83 for the two new treble bells, thus bringing the total cost of all the work, necessary and suggested, to £270.10s.3d.

On 13th December, at the request of the Vestry, the Founders made a further inspection and found that the tenor bell, being cracked also, should be recast as well, at a cost of £35.11s.9d. (16). The reports were brought before a meeting of the Vestry held the same day and accepted. The Churchwardens were instructed to issue a circular letter of appeal for funds, and at the advice of the founders the bells were declared unsafe to ring from the 1st January, 1890, until restoration was completed. An account was opened at the Epsom branch of the London and County Bank, the appeal being launched on the 28th December, 1889 (17).

The work of restoration was carried out in 1890 & the account dated 23rd June totalled £301.14s.4d. (18). The work carried out included the re-casting of the fifth and tenor bells, the provision of a new frame of oak and the required fittings for the six bells; also the casting and fitting complete and ready for ringing of two new treble bells to complete the octave. The first peal on the octave was rung on Monday, 26th December, 1892, for the Surrey Association of Change-ringers, and comprised Holt's Ten-part peal of 5040 changes of Grandsire Triples. The peal took two hours and fifty two minutes

The last major work to be carried out on the bell was not nearly as drastic as that of 1890. In 1925 the whole ring was rehung on ball bearings in the same frame by Messrs. Gillett and Johnson of Croydon (20), the only time since 1767 that the bells have been overhauled by a bell-founder other than the Whitechapel Foundry of Lester & Pack, Thomas Mears, and Mears & Stainbank.

The inscriptions on the bells, with the weights (21), are:-

		cwt.	qrs.	lbs.
TREBLE	MEARS & STAINBANK WHITECHAPEL FOUNDRY LONDON			
	REV: JOHN THORNTON VICAR	4	0	22
	JOHN H: BRIDGES } GEO. WOOD } CHURCHWARDENS			
2	As Treble	4	3	10
3	AT PROPER TIMES MY VOICE I WILL RAISE AND SOUND TO MY BENEFACTORS PRAISE LESTER & PACK OF LONDON FECIT 1767	5	2	16
4	LESTER & PACK OF LONDON FECIT	6	1	20
5	OUR VOICES SHALL WITH JOYFUL SOUND MAKE HILLS AND VALLEYS ECHO ROUND	7	0	22

cwts. qrs. lbs.

6	T: MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1830 ALEX ^R . BAILLIE VICAR JAMES ANDREW) EDW. ^D NEALE) CHURCHWARDENS	8 0 19
7	MEARS & STAINBANK WHITECHAPEL FOUNDRY LONDON TO HONOUR BOTH OF GOD AND KING OUR VOICES SHALL IN CONSORT RING RECAST 1890	10 0 23
TENOR	MEARS & STAINBANK WHITECHAPEL FOUNDRY LONDON THE REV: JOHN THORNTON M.A. VICAR JOHN H: BRIDGES) A:C: FUGGLE) CHURCHWARDENS RE-CAST 1890	13 3 20

The seventh and tenor of the present ring, before re-casting in 1890, bore the following inscriptions:- (22)

7	TO HONOUR BOTH OF GOD AND KING OUR VOICES SHALL IN CONSORT RING LESTER & PACK OF LONDON FECIT 1767	9 1 22
TENOR	THE REV. ^D JA. ^S HALLIFAX D.D. VICAR OF EWELL AND W. ^M JUBB & JN. ^O STENT CH.WARDENS H. KITCHEN JUN. ^R & J. 14 ALLINGHAM OVERSEERS LESTER & PACK OF LONDON FECIT 1767	1 17

NOTE: Since the bells are numbered from the treble to the tenor, from 1 to 8 in a ring of eight bells, when two additional trebles are added to a ring of six (1 to 6) the bells are renumbered 1 to 8 and as a result the former treble becomes No. 3, the old "2" becomes 4, and so on, the former tenor becoming No. 8.

There are a number of references to the bells in the various accounts of the Churchwardens and in the Vestry Minute Books (23.24). The majority are concerned with

maintenance:-

13 Sep. 1770.	By D. ^o to one pt of Aile [Oil?] for the bells	-. -. 9d.
16 Jly. 1771.	By D. ^o to Mr. Allingham for Bell ropes	£1. 16.0d.
1779.	Stay to a Bell	1.0d.
16 Mar. 1782.	Set of Bell Ropes	£1. 16.0d.
	Oil for the Bells	1.0d.
before		
12 Feb. 1784.	Materials and labour for repairing sound hole in steeple.	2.4d.

Between 16 April, 1770, and 7 April, 1813, nine new sets of bell ropes are recorded, though the intervals between vary considerably, and none at all are recorded after 9 April, 1797. In the same period 7 pints of oil are mentioned, entries becoming more frequent towards the end of the period. It is evident from these figures that the accounts are not complete, and this conclusion is borne out by the fact that in the same period of 43 years only two stays were repaired according to the account, the first for the treble in 1770 and the other in 1779. It is interesting to note that until 1790 a set of ropes cost £1.16.0d., but a set bought in 1797 cost £2.2.0d. Similarly a pint of oil cost one shilling till 1810, but one shilling and two pence after this. A single bell-rope of the length necessary at Ewell now costs about £4. (25)

Other entries in the accounts are not concerned with the maintenance of the bells so much as maintenance of the ringers:-

1795.	Beer for the Bell Hangers.	5. 0d
20 Sep. 1804.	Bill for ringers in 1803	12. 0d
	Beer for D. ^o as per bill.	12. 0d

A further series of payments, of which unfortunately only three are recorded although their nature shows that there must have been regular charges, may be regarded as payment

of a fee or of wages. The bells here as elsewhere were at this period used not entirely or even mainly for religious purposes, but were often rung for any reason at all, or for none:-

Between 13 Sept. and 5 Nov. 1770.

	By D. ^o to Pickering for the Ringers	
	on the Kings Birthday	6. Od.
5 Nov. 1770.	By D. ^o to Mr. Cook for the Ringers	
	on the 5th of Nov.	6. Od.
12 Oct. 1778	By Cash to six ringing days.	£1.16. Od.

In connection with the first of these last three items, it is amusing to note in the Churchwardens' Accounts of Southam, Warwickshire (26):-

1641.	Paid to the King's footman who sealed up the church door for not ringing when the King came to town.	6. 8d.
	Paid also to them for not ringing when the King went out of the town	5. Od.

Besides these secular occasions, a number of ancient customs were observed on these bells. Until 1869 and 1877 respectively it was the practice to chime the bells for a few minutes at seven o'clock and at eight o'clock on Sunday morning and on Christmas day (27). The latter was known as the Matins Bell, and was a survival of a pre-reformation custom (28). The origin of the seven o'clock bell is not known (29).

Apart from the normal round of Service, Wedding and Practice ringing, only one ancient custom survives to the present day at Ewell, the ringing of a Sanctus. This has not at Ewell been a continuous custom since the Reformation, but was revived about 20 years ago. During the Communion Service a bell (at Ewell the sixth) is chimed for three strokes at the consecration of the Bread and again at the consecration of the Wine. Other ringing customs such as the Curfew and the Death Knell or Soul Bell presumably took place here, but there is no record of them. The Knell varies considerably in its form from place to

place, and it is not possible to distinguish which form may have been used here. There is also no note of other customs like that at Herne in Kent where one evening in August or September the bells are rung and the ringers share three shillings and fourpence left to them in the will of a man long since dead who on that day was lost in the woods between Herne and Canterbury and, hearing the bells ringing, was guided to safety.

Finally, one other document is worthy of note. It is the set of "Rules to be observed by the Company of Ringers" of Ewell (30), compiled in August 1857 and amended on October 25th 1861 and again on May 6th 1872. These rules were one set of many introduced by incumbents in towers all over the country at this date in an attempt to curb the general unruliness of the ringers in the belfries during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Consequently they give to the Vicar and Churchwardens considerable and strict control over the activities of the Company of Ringers. For instance, Rule 2 permits the ringing of the bells only with the permission of the Vicar and Churchwardens. Rule 3 forbade the filling of a vacancy in the Company without the approval of the Vicar and Wardens, and these Gentlemen also possessed the power to call together the Company at any one time. In addition any dispute between two ringers was, under Rule 10, referred to the Vicar and Wardens for decision.

In addition, the Rules provided the Company with a form of internal discipline of its own. Under Rules 6 and 7 drinking and smoking was forbidden in the belfry with a penalty of sixpence, and swearing and bad language bore a fine of twopence. A late arrival for ringing was punished with a fine of one penny under Rule 8, and total absence cost the offender twopence. Rule 9 indicated the use to which the fines were to be put:

"9th. The forfeits shall be collected every week by one of the members chosen by the Company to be Treasurer and with all the Presents for ringing shall be paid by Him into ~~the~~ Ewell Savings Bank, so soon as it amounts to Ten Shillings, to be reserved till Christmas when the Money

shall be equally divided among the Company after those Members who have attended the Ringing on Special occasions in the daytime have received ~~Six~~ ^{Twelve} ~~inserted~~ pence for each such attendance; An Account of the above Attendances to be kept by the Treasurer or by any Member deputed by Him."

One can imagine from the sums of money involved that misdemeanours were frequent.

Two curious items included in the code are Rules 4 and 15. Rule 4 provided that any absent member of the Company could with the approval of the other ringers, send a substitute of his own choosing. Rule 15 required that the chiming hammers of the clock be not disconnected within three minutes of the striking of the clock, and also that any damage caused by incorrect disconnection be paid for by the ringers. This last rule was added to the code in 1872; it could be that ~~damage~~ had been caused in this way already. Is this the reason why the fifth & tenor were so badly damaged that they needed to be recast in 1890.

I would like to thank for their assistance in the preparation of this paper, Mr. J. Dent of Ewell and Epsom Borough Libraries, and Miss E. Dance of Guildford Muniment Room for allowing me to consult records in their charge; also Mr. J. Beams, the Secretary of the Ewell Ringers, for information and for kindly reading through the typescript, and especially Mr. W. A. Hughes, a director of Messrs. Mears & Stainbank Ltd., of Whitechapel, who allowed me to examine the private records of the Company and who gave me much advice on technical matters.

Martin Morris

NOTES:

- (1) Sy. A.C. IV 171. "Surrey Church Notes Temp. Edw. VI" J.R. Daniel-Tyssen, F.S.A. (1869) 171.
- (2) Formerly part of the survey, from the wording. Now separate from the inventory itself. Sy.A.C.XXIV 6.
- (3) Sy.A.C. XXI 53.
- (4) "A short History of Ewell and Nonsuch", C.S. Willis (1948) 16.

- (5) Inscriptions on the bells.
"Surrey Bells and London Bellfounders", J.C.L. Stahl
schmidt (1884), page 155.
C.T. Cracklow "Churches and Chapels of Ease in the
County of Surrey" (1823-8) under "Ewell".
- (6) Stahlschmidt op cit. p.104.
- (7) Mears & Stainbank, Whitechapel. Bound Notebook,
arranged alphabetically.
- (8) Ibid.
- (9) Ewell Vestry Minutes Book. Guildford Muniment Room
No. 27/3/11.
- (10) Mears & Stainbank Bound Notebook.
Notice in Ewell Ringing Room.
- (11) Willis, op. cit. p.17.
- (12) Mears & Stainbank Estimates Book 1886-1890. Page
539 verso. Guildford 10/181/(2). Ewell Library.
- (13) Ibid. Glyn Family Documents. No.559
- (14) Glyn 522 e-f.
- (15) Glyn 559a.
Guildford 10/181(2) Mears & Stainbank Estimates
Book 1886-90, p.539 v.
- (16) Glyn 559 b
- (17) Glyn 559 c
- (18) Mears & Stainbank Day Book 14 (1887-1892), p.201.
- (19) Peal Board in Ewell Ringing Room.
- (20) Information from Mr. J. Beams.
- (21) Weights taken from a notice in Ewell Ringing Room.
- (22) Glyn 522 e-f.
- (23) Ewell Churchwardens Account Books. Guildford 27/3/8
- (24) Ewell Vestry Minutes, Guildford 27/3/11.
- (25) Information from Mr. J. Beams.
- (26) Ringing World LIX No. 2742 (8 Nov. 1963) p.749.
- (27) Stahlschmidt op. cit. p.155
- (28) do. op. cit. p.124
- (29) do. op. cit. p.125
- (30) Glyn 588 a.

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The story is carried further in St. Mary's Parish Magazine.
In 1969 Whitechapel Bell Foundry Ltd. was called in to put
the bells once more in full working order, at an estimated

cost of £2500. The main work was not on the bells themselves, but on the frame, the old Oak bell frame being replaced by a new iron one to rest on new steel girders firmly grouted into the tower walls. At Christmas, 1970, after five months of silence, the bells were ringing once more, and in 1971 the new electric clock mechanism was installed. On Saturday, 29th July, 1972, a new peal was rung. It took two hours and fifty-three minutes and was given the name of Nonsuch Surprise Major.

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