

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BELLS by John Meredith

There is evidence of bells at Southwell before the Norman Conquest, but this is not unique.

The first mention of the Minster bells is in the 1050's when Archbishop Kinsius gave two to the Saxon Church half a century before the present building was begun, but whether or not these were moved at the time of the rebuilding is not known. The next mention occurs in the year 1475 when complaints were received about the priests not arriving in the Quire until after the bells had finished ringing. There were more complaints in 1478 about the curfews, and in 1481 when it was pointed out that the bells were not being looked after in the correct way. It would appear that not much notice was taken as several more complaints were made between 1483 and 1519.

We do not know how many bells existed in the tower in the early years. The first time a set number was mentioned was in 1535, when an instruction was left in a will for three peals to be rung on five bells at the time of a death. However, some recent research by the Minster Librarian has revealed that repairs were carried out on the No. 8 bell in the year 1430. It therefore seems probable that at least 8 bells existed in the tower at that time.

In 1693 a set of chimes was given to the Minster by Thomas Wymondesold of Lambeth and £1.00 per annum thereafter for their upkeep. There is a plaque on the wall in the North Quire Aisle to this effect.

On November 5th 1711 a thunderstorm passed over Southwell and lightning that struck the South West Tower started a fire. This quickly spread to the central tower and records show that eight bells melted (See: *A Flash of Lightning on Guy Fawkes Night 1711*, by Richard Beaumont). In 1712 a new set of bells was cast by Clay of Leicester. These were not satisfactory, and in 1721 Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester cast a complete new ring of 8 bells to replace them. The total weight of these was about 5 1/2 ton and the cost of £170 was raised by public subscription. These were hung in a wooden, anticlockwise frame, the tenor bell weighing about 28cwt.

In 1819 the 4th and 5th bells were recast by Thomas Mears of London and in 1849 the 2nd bell was recast by C. & G. Mears of the same foundry. In 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, two new treble bells were given to the Minster to enable the National Anthem which needs 10 bells, to be played on the 1693 set of chimes, the chiming machine having been rebuilt after the fire. The new bells were cast by John Taylor of Loughborough and remain in the present ring today.

Over the years the Rudhall bells gave good service and were noted for their fine tone. I well remember the joys of ringing on them as a boy, having cycled 15 miles for the pleasure of doing so.

1961 brought about big changes when a generous donation was given for the bells to be augmented to 12. The work was carried out by Taylors and the old bells were recast with the exception of the 1897 bells. These were retuned and included in the new ring as numbers 5 & 7. The total number in the tower at present is thirteen, a ring of twelve, with a semitone flat 6th to give a light ring of eight. At the time of recasting Taylors wanted to fit a new steel frame, but permission was refused, so the new bells went back into the old Rudhall frame. This makes them the only anticlockwise ring of twelve in the world! The tenor is a little than the old one, being 25 cwt.

The old ringing gallery came out from the sides of the tower wall in about the same position as the ringing chamber today. The centre was open and when ringing it was possible to see the Minster floor below. This was most unusual as the only other ringing gallery in the country was that at Merton College, Oxford. Unfortunately the gallery was removed in 1961 along with the old bells, but I am sure the ringers feel much safer now the centre is filled in.

The Minster bells are rung regularly, both for Sunday worship and for practice on Tuesday evenings.

Over the years the bells have been rung for any special occasions, for example, for the enthronement of Bishops of Southwell, the Installation of Provosts of the Minster, and to mark many significant events of history. In 1956 they were rung to welcome Princess Margaret to the Minster for its Millennium celebrations. Perhaps the greatest event to date has been in 1984 which was the centenary year of the founding of the

Diocese of Southwell. On Thursday April 19th of that year the bells rang out to greet the arrival of Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh for the service of the Royal Maundy.

The original cover of this history, which was designed and drawn by the late Don Keefe, shows the beautiful Norman central tower in which the bells are hung. Like all large churches, the staircase entrance to the ringing chamber is not straightforward. Access is by the outside door at the bottom, western side of the south transept. The spiral staircase ascends in the corner of the transept to a passage along the clerestory, past the round windows, to a final spiral staircase in the south-west corner of the central tower.

(John Meredith, former Head Verger and Ringing Master, 1971 - 1980)

For detailed information about the present bells, see the file about the Building.

SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRESENT BELLS

There are thirteen bells in the tower and they are rung anti-clockwise.
The tenor is tuned to D

<u>BELL</u>	<u>INSCRIPTIONS & DATES</u>	<u>DIAMETER</u>	<u>WEIGHT</u> <u>cwt. qr. lb.</u>
Treble	John Taylor & Co. Founders, Loughborough 1961. (new 1961)	25¾ ins	3 3 18
2nd	John Taylor & Co. Founders, Loughborough 1961. (new 1961)	26½ ins	4 1 0
3rd	ABR: RVDHALL OF GLOCESTER CAST VS ALL 1721. <i>On waist:</i> Recast by John Taylor & Co. Loughborough 1961.	26¾ ins	4 1 14
4th	Recast by John Taylor & Co. Loughborough 1961. <i>On waist:</i> C & G Mears, Founders, London 1849	28¾ ins	4 3 7
5th	+ Domine Savum Fac Reginan + <i>On waist:</i> Ex Voto Ludovici Randle Starkey de Norwood A.D. MDCCCXCVIII. <i>Reverse waist:</i> Taylor Fecit. (All in black letters with Gothic Capitals) (retuned 1961)	29¾ ins	5 1 14
6th	Prosperity to this Town. A☉ R 1721. <i>On waist:</i> Recast by John Taylor & Co. Loughborough 1961. (in ring of 12)	31¼ ins	6 0 21
6th ^b	*J. Taylor & Co* Founders * Loughborough * 1961. (new 1961 to make light ring of 8) + Domine Fiat Pax in Virtute Tua +	31¼ ins	6 0 7
7th	<i>On waist:</i> Ex Voto Ludovici Randle Starkey de Norwood A.D. MDCCCXCVII. (retuned 1961)	34 ins	7 0 0
8th	Recast by John Taylor & Co. Loughborough 1961. <i>On waist:</i> T. Mears of London, Fecit 1819	35½ ins	7 3 14
9th	Recast by John Taylor & Co. Loughborough 1961. <i>On waist:</i> T. Mears of London, Fecit 1819.	39 ins	11 0 0
10th	Prosperity to this Chapter. A☉ R 17121. <i>On waist:</i> Recast by John Taylor & Co. Loughborough 1961.	41½ ins	13 2 0
11th	Prosperity to the Church of England. 1721 <i>On waist:</i> Recast by John Taylor & Co. Loughborough 1961.	46 ins	18 0 0
Tenor	I TO THE CHURCH THE LIVING CALL AND TO THE GRAVE DO SUMMON ALL. 1721. <i>On waist:</i> Recast by John Taylor & Co. Loughborough 1961. <i>Reverse waist:</i> By the generosity of Sir Stuart Goodwin our bells were reconstructed and augmented in 1961.	52¼ ins	25 1 3