

THE BELLS OF THE FLEET AIR ARM MEMORIAL CHURCH

As part of the 1991 restoration package, the original five bells were removed from their late 16th/early 17th century oak frame. Prior to this it is believed that the last recorded work on them was carried out in 1897, in celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, when they were overhauled by Llewellyn's of Bristol. The mediaeval frame itself is of a usual king post and cross bracing construction with supporting beams designed to accommodate the five bells on one level for full circle ringing.

Located at the top of the tower and level with the stone louvres, the frame and beams had unfortunately rotted on the windward (south) side rendering the five bells unsafe to be rung or swing chimed. The oak headstocks on which the bells hung had been attacked by beetle and, in some cases, cracked. This bell frame has been left in situ and preserved as found in its rare unaltered state.

The bells were retuned and augmented to six by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London. On their return to the tower they were rehung lower down on a new steel and cast iron frame with replacement fittings manufactured by Eayre & Smith Limited of Loughborough.

The tenor, second, fourth and fifth bell are all listed by the Church Buildings Council as being worthy of preservation.

Following their restoration the first peals of the ring of six took place on 21 October (Trafalgar Day) 1993.

Bell Position	Date Cast	Founder	Approximate Weight	Approximate Diameter	Note
Treble	1993	Whitechapel Bell Foundry	4-3-2	29 inches	D
Second	1628	Richard Perdue I of Clossworth	4-3-20	30.5 inches	C
Third	1820	John Kingston of Bridgwater	6-0-14	32 inches	B ^b
Fourth	c.1435	Exeter Foundry	9-0-5	36.25 inches	A
Fifth	1591	Robert Wiseman of Montacute	11-1-1	40 inches	G
Tenor	1872	Petter of Yeovil (Recast)	13-0-25	43.25 inches	F

The bell weights shown above are in the classical style of Hundredweight-Quarters-Pounds. There are 28 Pounds in a quarter and four quarters in a hundredweight. So therefore a hundredweight is 112 Pounds in weight. A hundredweight is roughly 50 Kilograms. There are 20 hundredweight in a Ton.

Bell Inscriptions

The 'treble' is the newest bell and was gifted by the Royal Naval Guild of Bellringers to mark the rededication of the church in 1993. It bears the Fleet Air Arm wings and the inscription:

'I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND THAT THEY MAY HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY'

The 'fourth', the oldest bell housed in the tower, is known as the Maria Bell because in medieval times people believed that every time it was rung a prayer was sent up to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is inscribed with the Exeter foundry cross and a shield displaying a man headed lion rampant on a chequered background. It bears the inscription in mediaeval black letter:

'PROTEGE VIRGO PIA QUOS CONVOCO SANCTA MARIA'

(A Medieval Latin verse meaning 'Holy Mary, sacred virgin, protect those whom I summon together'.)

The 'fifth' bears the inscription:

'GEVE THANKES TO GOD ANNO DOMINI 1691'

The 'tenor' bell was originally forged by George Bailey of Bridgwater in 1795. As part of the

Victorian restoration of the church, the bell was recast by Petter of Yeovil in 1872 (the only bell ever to be produced by the company). On its waist is the inscription:

'ME RESOANRE JUBENT PIETAS MORS ATQUE VOLUPTAS'
(Latin, meaning 'I am bidden resound by the call of piety, death and joy'.)
'GEORGE D W DIGBY ESQUIRE LORD OF THE MANOR'
'REGINALD POLE RECTOR 1872'



Bells at the Whitechapel Foundry c.1991.
The Fleet Air Arm bell is being worked on top right.



Overhead view of the bells hung on their metal frame.