

English-style bells and bellringing

For well over 1000 years, bells have been associated with Christian churches. They also played an important role within local communities, announcing public events, and marking public rejoicing.

Around 400 years ago in England there evolved a unique style of bellringing, and the special way of hanging bells that made it possible. The bells are rung in sequence, rather than clanging randomly as they do in many parts of the world. The bells are fitted with a wheel, and while ringing, swing full circle, from mouth up to mouth up. This makes possible the accurate timing needed to synchronise the bells with each other, especially in the continually changing sequences of change ringing. Change ringing bells weigh from a few hundredweight to a few tons, but the way they are hung and rung makes it possible to control their swinging to an accuracy of a fraction of a second.

Worldwide there are nearly 6000 rings of bells hung for full circle ringing. They are rung by around 50,000 active bellringers.

All Saints has had a ring of bells for over 300 years, during which time they have been periodically restored and renewed, culminating in the most recent restoration in 2004, when the two pictures below were taken.



New 6th bell



Retuned 8th bell

Bells ready for hauling up the tower in 2004

Ringling times

The bells are rung regularly for services and other occasions.

Sunday morning service : 8.50 – 9.25

(Except in exceptional circumstances)

Sunday evening service: 17.50 – 18.25

(Not in August) (Pre-arranged bands for quarter peals some weeks: 17.30 – 18.25)

Monday practice : 20.00 - 21.30

(Except bank holidays, Holy Week and AGM day)

For details of special ringing and other events, see:

www.allsaintswokinghambells.org.uk/calendar/

Further information

To find out more about bells, ringing and ringers in Wokingham, with an overview of ringing and ringing history, visit the tower website:

www.allsaintswokinghambells.org.uk/

If you are interested in learning to ring, see:

www.allsaintswokinghambells.org.uk/learning/

Or contact the tower secretary:

secretary@allsaintswokinghambells.org.uk

For information about the wider world of ringing, see Central Council of Church Bellringers website:

www.cccb.org.uk/



Views of the tower before and after external restoration in 2005

All Saints Wokingham



All Saints Wokingham has a ring of 8 bells hung for English-style 'full circle' ringing. Some of them are over 300 years old, and they were most recently restored in 2004.

This leaflet gives an overview of the bells and their history.



Bells in the 'down' position



Bells in the 'up' position, ready for ringing

History of All Saints bells

In 1704, Reading bellfounder Samuel Knight installed a ring of six bells in the 15th century tower at All Saints in Wokingham. Only the heaviest two bells survive, as bells 7 and 8 of the modern ring.

In 1767, the bells were 'rehung' (scope of work unknown) by Robert Turner, Bell Hanger to Messrs. Lester and Pack. In 1814, Thomas Mears of Whitechapel replaced what were then bells 1 and 4 with new bells. The bells were again 'rehung' in 1873 (scope of work also unknown).

In 1903, there was a major restoration. The old 6-bell timber frame was replaced, along with the supporting timber beams, which were rotten. Two more bells were replaced (the old 2 and 3) and a further two bells added to make up a ring of 8. Mears & Stainbank of Whitechapel cast the new bells, and Webb & Bennett of Kidlington hung them in one of their characteristic 'Meccano-like' frames.

In 1958 Mears & Stainbank rehung the bells on ball bearings, and installed the rope guide in the ringing room. Both made the bells easier to ring.

In 2004, the bells were restored by Whites of Appleton www.whitesbellhangers.co.uk/ The bells were rehung on metal headstocks, with new clappers, bearings and modern fittings. The bells were tuned to modern standards, so that the different tones of each bell are in harmony with one other, and all the bells sound in the proper relationship to each other. Bells are tuned by carefully removing metal from different parts of the bell, to control the different frequencies. Some of the bells (1, 2, 3, 6) were too far from the ideal for full tuning to be practical, so they were replaced with new bells. The casting and tuning was done by Whitechapel Bellfoundry, www.whitechapelbellfoundry.co.uk/

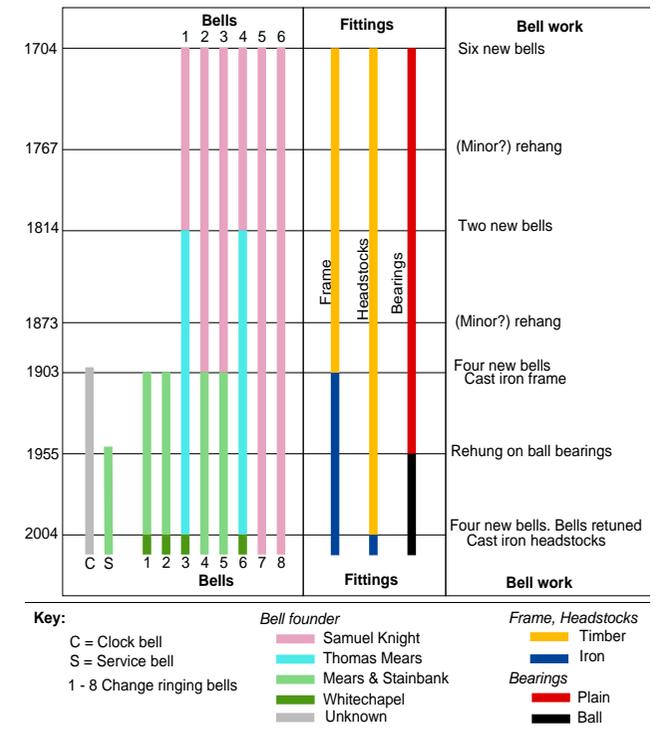
In former times, the replaced bells would have been melted down for scrap, but three have already found new homes in churches in England and Australia, and it is hoped that the other one will too, all thanks to the agency of the Keltek Trust: www.keltek.org/

Change ringing bells

	Diam (app)	Weight (cwt-qtr-lb)	Bell inscriptions (date order, not physical layout) ● = Whitechapel crest, ■ = Knight's shield	Headstock plaque
1	29"	5-2-7	CELEBRATING COMMUNITY APPEAL RECAST 20 ● 04 WHITECHAPEL MEARS & STAINBANK. FOUNDERS. LONDON. 1903	Headstock donated in memory of Eleri Siân Goyder
2	30"	5-3-3	ALL SAINTS BELLRINGERS RECAST 20 ● 04 WHITECHAPEL MEARS & STAINBANK. FOUNDERS. LONDON. 1903	Headstock donated by John and Jan Douglas
3	32"	6-1-25	TELL OUT MY SOUL THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD RECAST 20 ● 04 WHITECHAPEL T. MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1814	Headstock donated by Eve Reader
4	34"	6-2-14	RECAST BY MEARS & STAINBANK LONDON. 1903 S ■ K 1704	Headstock donated by John Reader
5	36"	8-0-7	RECAST BY MEARS & STAINBANK LONDON. 1903 S 1703 K	-
6	38"	10-0-5	GIVEN BY JOHN & ANNE HARRISON RECAST 20 ● 04 WHITECHAPEL T. MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1814	-
7	43"	13-3-10	JOHN HAWES ROBERT HUNT CW 1704 S ■ K	Headstock donated by Esme Few
8	46"	15-2-11	JOHN HAWES ROBERT HUNT CW SAMUEL KNIGHT MADE THIS PELE 1703	Headstock donated by Margaret and Arthur Moss

Other bells

	Diam (app)	Weight (cwt-qt-rlb)	Bell inscriptions
Service bell	24"	4-0-0	TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN MEMORY OF CANON BERTRAM LONG, RECTOR 1904 - 1933 AND OF MABEL HIS WIFE RECAST IN 1952 AND GIVEN BY THEIR CHILDREN AND PARISHIONERS MEARS & STAINBANK
Clock bell	18"	2-3-0	-



Time line showing changes over 300 years



Oak leaves and shield on the Knight bells



The 1903 Webb & Bennett frame (in 2004 while the bells were out – middle member removed for access)