

## History of All Saints Wokingham handbells

The first record of a set of handbells at All Saints is in 1873, when change ringing was introduced to All Saints, the Society of Honorary Change Ringers was formed, and set of new handbells was purchased for their use (at a cost between £7 and £8). The practised change ringing, giving a public performance the following year, and almost certainly rang tunes as well, probably at Christmas, since fewer bells would be needed just for change ringing.

Little is known of how much use the bells had since the 1870s, or when the second set was acquired. But they appear to have been unused for many years when the new Steeple Keeper (John Harrison) discovered two sets of handbells in the clock room in 1978. The larger set of 15 bells by William Blews & Sons of Birmingham who operated from 1862 – 1891, is believed to be the 1873 set. No details are available of the smaller set, which is no longer present (see below).

The bells were used in the tower to help teach the principles of change ringing. Towards the end of 1978 the ringers taught themselves to ring tunes on the handbells and rang carols round the parish, raising £100 for the Church of England Children's Society. They did the same in subsequent years but instead of ringing outside while someone knocked on doors to collect donations they rang in pubs, which raised more money for the charity.

Many of the ringers in 1981 were teenagers. They had taken part in the carol ringing, and to give them the opportunity to develop their tune ringing skills further by ringing handbells all year instead of just at Christmas, the ringers formed them into a group that continued to meet on Sunday evenings. Betty Tomlinson, who had learnt to ring in 1977 ran the group from then on.

The bells were ringable but not in good condition, and one of them was cracked. For regular use by the tune ringing group they needed refurbishment. This was done by Taylors of Loughborough who accepted the smaller set in payment for refurbishing the larger Blews set and replacing the cracked bell. The group later acquired a 16th bell (15 C#) that was added to the set.

In 1978 the bells were in an open topped box that wasn't convenient for carrying, so the group had a new custom made box with lockable lid and carrying handles made by Ted Tomlinson.

The group subsequently recruited non-ringers, and over the years became separate from the tower, but continued ringing at Christmas for charities, notably the local MS Society in Reading. Some years later Betty formed a second of Group of retired Emmbrook teachers that met on Tuesdays and rang during the day in local care communities and day organisations.

After the group became too old to continue ringing the bells returned to the tower where they will again be used for teaching and changeringing.

Details of the bells are on the next page.



## All Saints Wokingham handbells inventory

There are 16 English style handbells, mostly be Blews of Birmingham, plus a custom made case to fit 15 bells.

The table below shows the details with the note and size of each bell, together with the size mark and inscriptions on the crown. (The inscriptions in italics and marked \* are indistinct.)

The final two columns show the nearest equivalent modern Whitechapel bells, which would be needed if they ever needed replacing. Note that Whitechapel size codes don't quite align with those used by Blews.

Note	Diameter	Size mark	Inscription	Whitechapel equivalent	
G	5 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	19	WB&S	18	5 $\frac{11}{16}$ "
A	5 $\frac{3}{8}$ "	18	WB&S	17	5 $\frac{3}{8}$ "
B	4 $\frac{7}{8}$ "	17	<i>WB&amp;S*</i>	16	4 $\frac{13}{16}$ "
C	4 $\frac{5}{8}$ "		<i>welded crown?</i>	15	4 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
C#	4 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	14	WB	15	"
D	4 $\frac{3}{8}$ "		W	14	4 $\frac{3}{8}$ "
E	4 $\frac{3}{16}$ "	14	<i>WB&amp;S*</i>	13	4 $\frac{1}{8}$ "
F	4 $\frac{1}{8}$ "	13	WB&S	12	4 $\frac{1}{16}$ "
F#	4 $\frac{1}{16}$ "	13	WB&S	12	"
G	4"		WB	11	3 $\frac{15}{16}$ "
A	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ "		?	10	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
B	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	10	WB&S	9	3 $\frac{7}{16}$ "
C	3 $\frac{3}{8}$ "	9	<i>WB&amp;S*</i>	8	3 $\frac{3}{8}$ "
C#	3 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	8	WB&S	8	"
D	3 $\frac{1}{4}$ "		W....?	7	3 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
E	3 $\frac{1}{8}$ "	7	WB&S	6	3 $\frac{1}{16}$ "