

THE BELLS

The squat and sturdy perpendicular tower contains a ring of six bells, which for generations have been held in high esteem among bell ringers for their clarity and quality of tone, and their ease of ringing. There have been bells here since well before 1500, and the inventory of 1553 in the reign of King Edward VI listed "*three bells and oon lytell bell*". The oldest existing bell, at present the fourth in the ring, was cast in 1602, in the reign of Elizabeth 1st, and is adorned by her elaborate royal cypher. The tenor (heaviest) bell dates from 1611, (the year of King James Authorised Version of the Holy Bible), and a century later the present second and third bells of 1719 were hung. These two were almost certainly recast from the three bells of the 1553 listing, by one of the most famous of English bell founders, Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester. In 1838 the present fifth was added, and finally in 1866 the ring was augmented to the present six bells with the gift of the Treble bell by the Rev. H. R. Bramley. There is also a small sanctus bell of 1811, cast by James Wells of Aldbourne, and weighing just two quarters. All were rehung in a new frame in 1963

These bells were apparently well appreciated in earlier times, for on September 16th, 1733, the famous Oxford diarist, Thomas Hearne, recorded that:

" Mr. Sacheverel, of Denman's Farm in Berkshire near Oxford, who died a few years since, was looked upon as the best judge of bells in England. He used to say that the Horspath bells, though but five in number and very small, were the prettiest, tunablest bells in England, and there was nor a fault in one excepting the third, and that so small a fault as it was not to be discerned but by a very good judge".

From the above account, it would seem that Mr. Sacheverel heard the bells prior to 1719, as he noted five - probably the three mediaeval bells, and the present fourth and tenor bells, since between 1719 and 1838 there would have been only the four bells.

St. Giles also possesses a fine set of twelve 19th.c handbells, most probably cast at Mears & Stainbank, Whitechapel, which are rung on special occasions such as the service of lessons and carols at Christmas, and when carol singing round the village.

DETAILS OF THE BELLS.

TREBLE. Weighs just 3 cwt., and in the key of G sharp. Cast in 1866 by Mears & Stainbank, of Whitechapel, London.

Inscription: "DEUM LAUDO DIGNIS PLAUDO - GIVEN BY THE CURATE OF HORSPATH, REVEREND H. R. BRAMLEY, 1866"

TWO. Weighs 3 cwt. 2 qtrs., key of F sharp. Cast 1719 by Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester.

Inscription: "PROSPERITY TO ALL OUR BENEFACTORS"

THREE. Weighs 4 cwt, and in the key of E. Also 1719, by Abraham Rudhall.

Inscription: "JOHN CHANCELOR & THO HESTER, CHURCHWARDENS 1719"

FOUR. The elaborate royal cypher of Elizabeth 1st. adorns this bell, which weighs just above 4 cwt., in the key of D sharp. Cast by Joseph Carter of Reading in 1602.

Inscription: "THIS BELL MADE 1602 J C"

FIVE. William & John Taylor of Oxford cast her in 1838, weighing 5 cwt., in the key of C sharp.

Inscription: "DEO ET ECCLESIAE"

TENOR. Cast by William Yare of Wokingham, and weighs 6 cwt, in the key of B.

Inscription: "THIS BELL WAS MADE 1611 W Y"

and....

SANCTUS. Popularly known as the "ting tang", this small chiming bell dates from 1811, weighs just 2 quarters, and made by James Wells of Aldbourne.

Inscription: "JAMES WELLS ALDBOURN FECIT 1811"



The six bells “up”, and ready to ring. The treble is at centre bottom, and bells two to six are clockwise round the photograph.