

The Tower and Bells



There are 8 bells in Biddenden Church, the tenor weighing 22½ cwt in D.
Details of the bells:

Bell	Weight	Diameter	Cast	Founder
1	5-1-7	29½"	1915	Alfred Howell
2	5-1-14	29¾"	1915	Alfred Howell
3	7 cwt approx.	33"	1712	Richard Phelps
4	9 cwt approx.	36½"	1599	Robert Mot
5	11 cwt approx.	39¾"	1763	Lester & Pack
6	12-0-0	41"	1922	Alfred Howell
7	16-1-7	45¾"	1915	Alfred Howell
8	22½ cwt approx	52"	1712	Richard Phelps
Priest's Bell	1 cwt approx.	15¼"	1717	Richard Phelps

The old priest's bell that can be found stored in the upstairs ringing chamber possibly came from the bell cote at the east end of the nave.

History of the Bells

- 1599 Present 4th cast.
- 1712 Treble and tenor cast by Richard Phelps and hung in a new frame.
- 1717 Priest's bell cast.
- 1763 3rd (of 6) recast.
- 1784 2 treble bells added by Robert Patrick to make 8 bells.
- 1812 6th recast by Thomas Mears.
- 1915 2 trebles and 7th recast by Alfred Howell who adapted the old frame for 8 and rehung all the bells.
- 1915 22nd July Alfred Howell invoiced: To recasting and rehung the bells £160.
To inscriptions on recast bells 54 letters @ 4d. each 18/-. To refixing clock

spindle and striking hammer £1. To eight new ceiling bosses for ropes 10/-.
Total £162-8-0. Paid £100 by cq. before 22nd July; cq. £37-12-0 16th Aug, cq
£16-1-9 20th Aug, £8-14-3 3rd Jan 1916.
1922 6th recast by Alfred Howell.
1922 21st Sept Alfred Howell invoiced: To recasting the sixth bell £47. Paid cq. 25th
Oct 1922.

Ringers Today

There are about 6 regular ringers at Sunday services, although Tuesday practices are sometimes attended by as many as 9 with helpers from other towers. The age range at Biddenden stretches from teenagers to retirees, and new ringers are welcome, whether experienced or absolute beginners.

You do not need to be strong, musical or brainy to learn to ring, although a sense of rhythm helps. You only need to practice one night a week and ring for service on Sunday though you will improve faster if you can do more.

Change Ringing

The art of change ringing on Church Bells has developed in England over the last 500 years but it has spread to few other parts of the world outside Great Britain.

To the uninformed, English bells may sound the same as those in other parts of the world, but our style of ringing is much more formalised. Most bells in England are hung so that they can be rung 'full circle'. The bell is bolted to an iron or wooden headstock. The headstock and bell are clamped to a wheel with the bell rope attached. A stay, fitted to the headstock, helps the bell to stand upside down by resting against the slider. The slider is fixed at one end and the other end is pushed from side to side by the stay. When the slider has moved to its limit the bell cannot turn any further.

Before change ringing can start the bells have to be rung into the 'UP' position, with the mouth of the bell pointing upwards. The rope is pulled and the bell turns through a full circle. The next time the rope is pulled the bell returns through the circle in the opposite direction. The bell must be kept from going 'over the top' otherwise the rope will wrap itself round the wheel and the ringer will be pulled upwards as is often depicted in cartoons and comedy sketches. Each time the bell swings round the clapper swings and strikes a note on the side of the bell.

N^o 1
A BELL IN HER USUAL POSITION

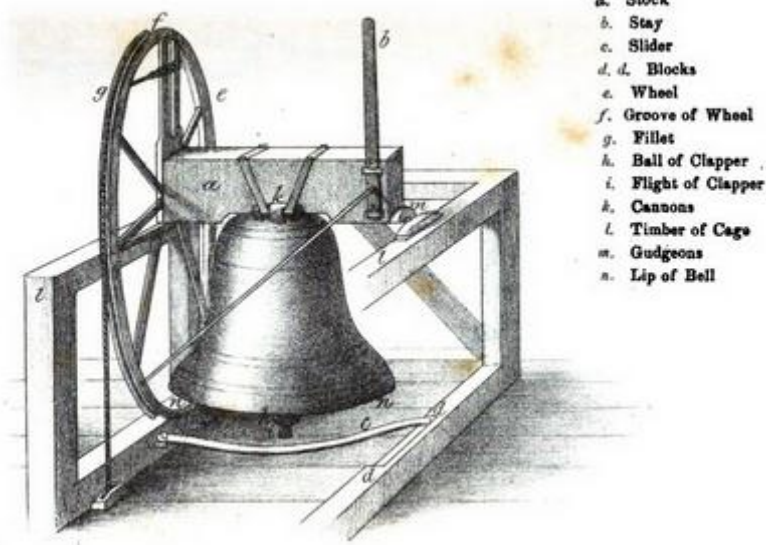


Image from <http://www.archive.org/details/changeringingan00troycgog>

One ringer is needed for each bell and the first step is to learn to control it. The amount of time this takes varies a great deal but usually takes several hours of practice over a few weeks.

The next stage is learning to ring in Rounds - that is, ringing the bells in order, from the treble (the smallest and highest sounding bell) down to the tenor (the heaviest and deepest toned bell).

After that we start to ring 'changes'. This involves changing the order that the bells sound in, either by calling each bell individually or by following a pattern or 'method'.

This specialised exercise started many years ago. It used to be the province only of men and they accompanied their ringing with drinking large quantities of ale. Indeed they had quite a reputation in those days! (Some would suggest that this is still an important part of ringing; although it is no longer done in the tower).

Some ringing methods have been known for many years - you may have read *The Nine Tailors* by Dorothy L Sayers and recall the peal of Kent Treble Bob Major that included Lord Peter Wimsey. We still ring methods that were invented in the 17th century, but very many new methods have been invented since.

There are simple methods, such as those that you hear at Biddenden on a Sunday like Plain Hunting, or there are more complicated methods such as you would hear from Westminster Abbey or St Paul's Cathedral at a Royal event. They, of course, have ten bells and twelve bells whilst we have just eight.

Why do we ring bells?

This is a question that is asked of us at regular intervals. Not surprisingly, one frequently heard answer is, quite simply, 'for the Glory of God' and to call people to

worship. However, religious belief is not a requirement for ringing, and many ringers are motivated rather by a desire both to learn a new skill, and to help keep alive a venerable tradition which is woven deeply into the fabric of English life.

Church bells are rung for Sunday service all over the country. We also ring for special services whenever possible and we can be asked to ring for Weddings, Christenings and Funerals. We ring to celebrate special events, such as the ending of hostilities in a conflict or ordination to the priesthood. On solemn occasions the bells are rung half-muffled. This causes all bells to ring alternately strident and soft and is a distinctive sound. A leather pad is strapped to one side of the clapper ball to achieve the muffling. Ringing on Remembrance Sunday is half-muffled.

If travelling in the UK and some other countries it is possible to visit towers in the locality, and visitors are invariably warmly welcomed. Keen ringers can also attend residential courses in different parts of the UK to improve their ringing.

We hope that we give both pleasure and joy to those who hear us and, in a restless world, a reminder of the continuous part the Church has played in English life for hundreds of years.

We are always looking for new ringers to join our band. If you would like to find out more please contact the Tower Captain – Julian Dickens **(01580 291419)** or **just come along to a practice night on a Tuesday evening between 7.45pm and 9.00pm.**