

THE BELLS

Of

ST MARY'S



**BARBY LOCAL
HISTORY GROUP
MARCH
2024**



St Mary's Church in Barby, Northamptonshire, dates from around the thirteenth century. It is built from local yellow sandstone and Warwickshire red sandstone.

Until the year 2002, the tower, dating from 1660, housed four bells. In his history of the county (researched in the first decades of the eighteenth century, but not published until 1791), Bridges stated that they were housed in the tower built with a steeple, but there is no reference to a steeple elsewhere, although steeples were traditional in Northamptonshire.

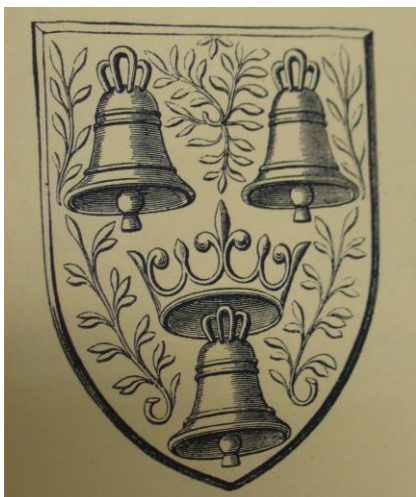
The four bells dated from 1605 to the 1620s; two of them are still in use today, but it is not clear which of the four these are. There is also confusion about the particular dates, as Bridges and North, the author of the history of the county's bells published in 1878, differ in their reports. Until 1922, the bells were:

1, dated 1622 by Bridges: however, North dates it at 1621. It was inscribed (in Latin): *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, Son of God, have mercy on me*; and was also inscribed with a shield, the mark of the bellfounder Hugh Watts (1582-1643) of Leicester.

2, not given a definitive date by either Bridges or North, inscribed *Santa Catarina*. This was an unusual inscription since the church is dedicated to Saint Mary. It was also inscribed with a shield, the mark of Thomas Newcombe of Leicester, whose bellfoundry remained within his family until it was taken over by Watts, after 1612.

3, dated 1606 by Bridges, 1605 by North. This had the inscription: *Be yt knowne to all that doth me see that Newcombe of Leicester made mee*.

4, dated 1621 by Bridges but 1625 by North. Its inscription reads (in Latin): *If you do not come with this sound, you will never want to pray*. It also bore a Watts shield.



Watts Shield



Newcombe Shield

The ringing patterns and death knell of the bells were recorded by North. He also reported the existence in the tower of a cracked bell, said to have come from a small chapel which existed formerly in Onley, at that time a hamlet in the parish.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the bells were in poor condition: one had a piece of the soundbox missing, another was cracked, and the other two had been badly worn by the striking of the clappers. In 1902, two bell foundries were asked to inspect the bells and provide estimates of the cost of refurbishment. They were weighed and ranged from 8 cwt (about 400 kg) to 14.5 cwt (about 735 kg).

John Taylor & Co, Bell Founders & Bell Hangers of Loughborough, submitted that 'the two largest bells being cracked must be recast. 'The other two appear to be sound but are much worn by the clappers ... They should be quarter turned so that the clappers would strike them on fresh places'. Mears & Stainbank, Church Bell Foundry of 34 Whitechapel Road, East London, concurred with this analysis. They added that:

The Tenor has a large piece broken out of the soundbox, which has quite destroyed its tone ... The two smaller bells ... are not nicely in tune together, but they are of fair tone, and when they have been properly tuned and quarter turned, and the large bells recast they will form a pleasing set of four. The quarter turning will not necessitate any mutilation of the old bells, the alteration being effected by simply attaching to the old crown staple a new one to reverse the action of the clapper.

The inspections also covered the bells' support system. John Taylor reported: 'As to the fittings and framework there is nothing to be said but that they are in a most dilapidated condition and thoroughly worn out and must consequently be entirely renewed'. Mears & Stainbank added: 'The Framework ... has been wedged and built into the tower walls in all directions, and nothing less than entirely new Frames and supporting beams would be of service'.

Mears & Stainbank's estimate specified that the fittings were to consist of 'Clappers, Elm Headstocks, with steel gudgeons in iron shields, gun metal bearings in iron carriages, oak wheels, wrought iron wheel braces, stays, sliders, rollers, ropes and 2 reversed staples for the old bells' together with a 'new Bell frame of best seasoned English oak, properly mortised and the joints secured with double strap bolts coupled together with long vertical bolts through each brace the entire depth of frame'. The new framework was to include an extra bell space as the Rector, Rev Mitchison, was contemplating the purchase of a fifth bell.

The work was carried out by John Taylor & Co, but was not completed until 1922, perhaps, as the newspaper report (overleaf) from the *Rugby Advertiser* of 8 December 1922 suggests, because of a shortage of funding.

Nearly eighty years later, in May 2001, a band of visiting bellringers suggested that a fifth bell be added to the existing ring. The Barby bellringers (Eileen Thompson, Ros Atchison, Kathy Turrell, Mike Cook, Peter Box and Hazel Parsons) decided to find a bell with which to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. Assisted by David Kelly, one of the visiting ringers, they searched for a suitable second-hand bell through the Keltek Trust. By the end of the year, the Trust had found a bell which they could buy for £1500. The bell-ringers set about raising funds and, within six months, raised £8000 from donations, grants and fundraising events. This sum was sufficient to cover the costs of the new bell, its hanging and restoration of the existing four. Grants were received from the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, the Peterborough Diocesan Church Bell Ringers, the Sharpe Trustees and Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust. Eayre & Smith Limited, Bell Hangers of Derby, began work in July 2002 and the bell was dedicated at the Harvest Festival Evensong in September of that year.

BARBY.

On Saturday a very enjoyable and successful "Pedlar's Fair" in aid of the Church Bell fund was held in Barby School. At the opening, Canon Mitchison first addressed the people on "The Bells," and then Mrs. Mitchison declared the sale open. The school children who were taking part sang a song "Come to the Fair" and then began the sale. There was a jumble stall, in charge of Miss Harrison, Mrs. Pittom, and Mrs. Haddon, where no doubt many people found good bargains. Miss Coles had a fancy stall, and was assisted by a party of small girls—May Eaglestone, Hilda Sheasby, Eva Flavell, and Marjorie Whitney. The girls of the upper class were pedlars, and wore coloured handkerchiefs on their heads—viz., Constance Batchelor, Adelaide Hallam, Kathleen Hall, Celia Haddon, Phyllis Goodyer, Nellie Rowe, Rossie Haddon, Eva Bedding, Selina Dodd, and Constance Chase. Their wares they carried in baskets and trays, and walked about the room asking people to buy. The elder boys had a grocery store and a magic pump, out of which came not water, but small fancy articles. The boys in charge of the pump were Walter Flavell, William Rowe, and Raymond Sheasby, and the grocers were Frank Hallam, Harold Sceney, and Reginald Haddon. There were various guessing competitions and a mock auction conducted by Canon Mitchison, whose goods varied from live rabbits to antique spoons and buns. Tea was provided under the management of Mrs. Flavell, assisted by Mrs. Cox and Miss Ellard. The sale ended at 7 p.m., the total takings being £28 16s. 6d.

The photograph below was given to the Group by Henry Flavel (1922-2018), but is undated. It may have been taken in 1922, when the work planned in 1902 was finally completed.





The new bell (left in a photo by Hazel Parsons) was the largest of three bells from a quarry in Llandybie, Swansea. It was expected 'to fit without tuning as the note is only a few cents different to the ideal'. It came originally from the Mears foundry; its date was probably 1871, as the other two bells of the set were so dated.

The set of five bells is now rung on a regular basis for services and special occasions, continuing a long tradition, as local newspaper reports record.

REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADE.
 —Members of the British Legion and St. John cadets paraded on Sunday. A wreath was laid at the Memorial by Mr. G. Elkington. The parade then attended the church service, which was taken by the Rector (Rev. J. W. P. Boughay). Before the service a muffled peal on the bells was rung by Messrs. W. Weston, H. E. Weston, O. Weston, P. Coles, B. Smith, I. Mason, W. Flavel.

A PEAL was rung on the church bells on Monday evening to celebrate the birth of the new Prince. Ringers were Messrs P. Cole, T. Mason, H. E. Weston, W. Weston, R. Smith, D. Weston.

Left: 12 November 1948

Above: 19 November 1948

The bell ringers practise once a week and are members of the Daventry branch of the Peterborough Guild of Church Bellringers, who meet monthly.



BELLRINGERS AT WORK ON 11 NOVEMBER 2018

Left to right: Eileen Thompson, David Cooke, Mike Cooke, John Thompson, Douglas Thompson

More photographs of the bells, their fittings and the bellringers, taken in 2011 by Norman Smith, can be found at barbyandonleyparishcouncil.co.uk, the website of Barby & Onley Parish Council.

SOURCES

Bridges, John, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Northamptonshire* (Oxford, 1791)

Brown, Carol, *A History of Medieval Leicester*

(issuu.com/artreach4/docs/celebrating_medieval_leicester/s/11332019)

North, Thomas, *The Church Bells of Northamptonshire* (Leicester: Samuel Clarke, 1878)

Rugby Advertiser

Correspondence between John Taylor & Co and Messrs W & C A Bassett-Smith

Correspondence between Mears & Stainbank and Messrs W & C A Bassett-Smith

Correspondence between the Keltek Trust and Mrs H M Parsons

Quotation from Eayre & Smith Limited

(Copies of the above documents are held by Barby Local History Group)