

A Celebration of 300 years of Bells 1706 - 2006 at St James' Badsey with Aldington



A brief history reproduced with the kind permission of **The Badsey Society**.
This information is taken from the award winning website **www.badsey.net**

Bell History by Roger Savory

After the church was restored in 1885, it was not long before the six bells then inhabiting the tower were "rehung". This involved removal of the centuries old worn out wooden frame in which the six bells were originally hung, and replacing it with a new steel frame. An excellent job was made of this rehunging in 1898 by the Loughborough bellfounding firm of John Taylor and Co. With admirable foresight, the church installed a frame designed to house eight bells, although at the time the church possessed only the six old bells, cast in Evesham in 1706 by William Clark. After their rehunging of 1898, four full "peals" of 5040 changes were rung on the six old bells. But it wasn't long before the parish had raised the money for the two additional bells, and these were installed in their waiting "bell pits" in the new steel frame, just in time for Christmas 1902. The two new bells were cast and installed by the London firm of Mears and Stainbank from their bell foundry in Whitechapel. This then completed the octave ring, which we know today.

The first full "peal" on the eight bells was rung on December 30th, 1902, under the leadership of one of the most famous ringers in the country at that time, the Reverend F. E. Robinson, then vicar of Drayton, Berkshire. The peal was 5040 changes of Stedman Triples.

BADSEY.
Peal of Eight Bells.

On Treble.

I.H.S.

Cur. Honor. Prince. A.P. Vo.

Ja. Schenck.

Honor. Kren. } Examen Custoditis MCMII.

I.H.S.

A.M.D.G. VICTORIAE Reginae

Dilectissime Regnae Nos Carissime.

MCMII.

	<u>Cuts</u>	<u>Quar</u>	<u>Lbs.</u>	<u>Note.</u>	
Treble	4	2	12	F	} Moore & Steinbank
II	5	0	20	E	
III	6			D	
IV	6			C	
V	8			B	
VI	9			A	
Tenor	15	0	4	G	

Rehung by John Taylor & Co., Loughborough.
December, 1950.

The Old Bells

We have fairly good records about the two new bells installed in 1902, but what do we know of the six old bells, which now form the heaviest bells in today's octave? Perhaps the most interesting fact lies up there in the tower, in the form of an inscription cast around the upper waist of the "Tenor" bell, (the heaviest bell, with the lowest note). The inscription is in Latin, as most bell inscriptions were in those days. But the most intriguing thing about this inscription is that it contains an encrypted date. Although all the letters are what we call "upper case" (capitals), some of the letters are much larger than the others. All these large letters, with one exception, are also used as Roman Numerals, i.e.

$M = 1,000; D = 500; C = 100; L = 50; X = 10; V = 5; I = 1.$

Here is the inscription: -

MVTAVIT : VIGILANS : IN : SEX : NOS : CVRA : ROBERTI : HILL : IOI :

VJC : GVL : CLARK : EFFICIT : ARTE : SVA : ANO

If we ignore the capital letter "R" in the name Robert, and add up the other big letters which are acting as Roman Numerals, we get: -

One M = 1,000 / (There are no D's) / Four C's = 400 / Five L's = 250 /

One X = 10 / Seven V's = 35, and Eleven I's = 11, giving a Total of 1706, i.e. the year in which the bell and its five sisters were cast.

The Latin inscription has been translated and reads as follows: -

"The watchful care of Robert Hill, Vicar, changed us into six. William Clark effected this by his own skill".

From this it is clear that, until 1706, there had been 5 bells of unknown age housed in the church tower. But, as we see from this inscription, they were melted down and recast to form the six heaviest bells of the ring of eight we have today. The 1706 bell founder involved was William Clark of Evesham, a partner in the Evesham bell foundry of Clark and Bushell, who together cast several other rings of bells in the area.

There is, I understand, in one of the old Badsey church accounts, the record of a sum of money being paid for "Tayking Ye Great Bell to Evesham and Bringing Her Home Again". So perhaps all was not well with the original casting and some "adjustments" had to be made. We'll never know for sure. But the curious among us can look up in the church accounts just what that little trip to Evesham cost!

In local 19th Century ringing reports and records, Badsey's Tenor bell was reputed to weigh approximately 17 cwt, and maybe that's the weight that William Clark got paid for. However, it was also quite common for the plain journal bearings used in bell hanging in that era to eventually deteriorate and become badly worn. The symmetry of the bell hanging also got "out of true", and consequently the bells no longer turned as easily as they should. This made the bells (and particularly the tenor) "feel" and "go" a lot heavier than they really were. That was certainly the case at Badsey and by the late 1940's they were a far from easy ring to handle. What we do know about the weight of the tenor is that, in 1950, all eight bells were removed from the tower and taken to John Taylor's bell foundry in Loughborough for overhaul. At that time the "cannons", which are like thick bell metal hoops cast on the crown of each bell to provide a means of attaching the bell to its wooden headstock, were removed from each of the Badsey bells. This was done to facilitate the application of more modern bell hanging techniques. After the "cannons" had been removed, the tenor bell was weighed before sending the bells back to the tower for reinstallation. The tenor bell, now minus its cannons, weighed in at 15cwt 4 lbs. We can estimate that the "cannons" from a bell that size accounted for about one cwt of metal. So the tenor bell's original weight, as cast by Clark in 1706, was probably about 16 cwt. This bell produces a strike note approximately in the key of F.

Hundredth Peal for the Queen Mother

At Badsey in April 2002 the bellringers rang a "half-muffled peal" in memory of the Queen Mother. But no one at the time knew that the peal had another special significance. It was the one hundredth full peal to be rung in the tower of St. James Church.

Roger Savory who grew up in Badsey but now lives in America has compiled the Peal Record for the bells of St. James Church. He was surprised to find his total came to 99 full peals. He phoned his friend Gerald Hemming in Hampton and told him of his finding. Gerald's reply was, "Well, that means we rung the '100th Peal in the Tower' last week! It was a half-muffled Peal, In Memoriam the Queen Mother". Roger comments "For ringers it's a bit like a Test cricketer scoring 100 runs".

Roger's digging into the peal records at St. James Church has revealed some other facts. Of those 100 peals, the first four were rung on the old six bells. This was in the 1898 - 1900 period, which was before the bells were augmented to a ring of eight. The first peal to be rung on the eight was on December 30, 1902.

A Full Peal of Badsey Surprise Major was rung by members of The Worcestershire and District Guild of Bellringers on **Saturday 22nd July '06** In celebration of St James' Day, the 105th Flower Show and as part of the commemorations of the 300th anniversary of the bells.

Change ringing

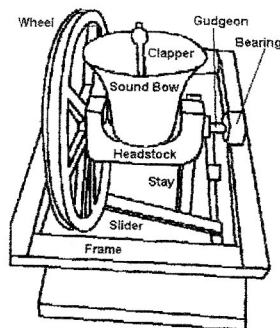
For centuries church bells have been chimed from below by means of ropes attached to simple levers fixed to the headstocks from which the bells were hung. The replacement of levers by full wheels, which began in sixteenth-century England gave the ringers better control of their bells, allowing sets of bells (rings) to be rung in systematically changing patterns.

How is it done?

The bells are tuned to a normal (diatonic) scale and it is usual to start with ringing down the scale, a sequence which ringers call "rounds". The order in which the bells sound is then altered to give different sequences called "rows" or "changes".

Changes may be called out individually by the conductor, and this style is known as call-change ringing. Alternatively, the changes may be made to a pre-set pattern or "method", and each ringer must learn that method in order to know when his or her particular bell must sound in each row. This style is known as method ringing.

Call changes and a few standard methods are rung in most towers and this makes it very easy for ringers to visit and ring with other bands. There are many more advanced methods which provide a continuing challenge as ringers gain proficiency over time.



Would you like to ring?

New ringers and visiting ringers are welcome.

Please contact Mr & Mrs Bolton

01386 830246

or john.r.hilarybolton@btinternet.com.

Practice night is Monday 7.30 - 9pm.

When are bells rung?

- * For church services
- * for weddings
- * for special occasions
- * for ringers' practice and pleasure

Bell ringing is good fun!

What's in it for me?

- A hobby which involves:
- * being part of a team
 - * providing a service for the church
 - * a good social life
 - * continually learning something new