

The Bells of All Hallows Church Harthill

There were four bells in 1632, and yet sometime between then and 1660 they all disappeared. This coincided with the era of the Commonwealth of England – the interregnum after King Charles I was beheaded. Many churches in England were denuded of musical instruments, bells, and handbells in this period and Harthill, the chief church in the area, was probably vandalised by ardent Puritans. Fortunately older, more isolated churches like Thorpe Salvin retained their bells.

According to Garbett¹, a parish clerk in 1632 recorded that “4 bells with frames, wheels, throw, new yoakes and iron works” were made for the Parish Church of Harthill by Thomas Ratcliffe of Tickhill, bell wright, with the help of Roger and Richard Belgh of Harthill, axesmiths.

A new church bell was hung in Harthill church tower in 1660. It was inscribed "God Save the King 1660". The bell was evidently ordered and cast sometime before the restoration of the monarchy. The fitting of the bell so near to the event risked those responsible being arraigned as traitors. The bell was cast at Nottingham.

In A.D. 1668 a second bell was placed in the tower inscribed "I sweetly tolling, men do call to taste on meat that feeds the soul". Village legend had it that the old Harthill custom of ringing the "Dinner Bell" each day at noon originated with the installation of this bell. The dinner bell was highly valued by those working in the fields. It was the signal to come in to the midday meal.

So we know that there were four bells in the tower in 1632. These were replaced by a new ring of five bells in 1711. His Grace, Thomas, the 1st Duke of Leeds helped to fund these. *“A frame for 5 bells and 4 new bells were installed by Ffrancis, Butcher of Duckmanton in the County of Derby”*. This information, according to Harry Garbett¹ was entered in the parish records by a William Wood. A sixth bell was added in 1769.

The bells at Harthill have been repaired and rung intermittently since that time – the variability dependent upon having a team of competent ringers with a leader – the Tower Captain.

By the 1930's the timber frame containing the bells had deteriorated to such a degree that it became dangerous to ring. The six old bells were cracked or did not harmonise with the others. The bells fell silent once more.

Harry Garbett¹, the great social historian of Harthill, was asked by the Rector to arrange a play pageant based on events in Harthill's history in order to raise funds to replace the bells. Ostensibly the new bells were to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935. The first pageant was arranged, practised and presented in three weeks during September 1935 on the Rectory lawn at night under floodlights. The time taken was remarkable considering that the participants made all their own costumes and at the same time learnt their parts. More elaborate pageants, with music and villagers acting out scenes from the village history, took place in August

1936 and 1937 and resulted in enough funds to pay for 8 new bells in a new steel frame.

Messrs Gillatt and Johnston of Croydon were given the contract to provide a new peal of eight bells. Unfortunately, due to various delays, the bells were not installed until 1937, by which time King George V had died.

The particulars on the old bells which were replaced in 1937 were as follows:

1. Treble "In memory of the Rev. G Hudson for 36 years Rectory. Died 7 July 1884. Cast by J Warner and Son, London 1889"
2. "John Staniland, James Lister, Churchwardens, MDCCCXIII"
3. "Peregrine, Lord Marquis of Carmarthen, gave me MDCCCIII"
4. "I sweetly tolling men do call to taste on meat that feeds the soul 1668 HO."
5. "God Save the King 1660." G.O (*the monarchy was re-established in 1660*)
6. "I Osborne, R Mullins 1769" (*R Mullins was church warden*) ¹

It would seem that by the 20th century, some of those 6 original bells had been added to, or replaced in the early 1800s – just 3 were labelled as being from the 17th century.

The new bells were cast and installed in the tower and, amid great celebration, were rung for the first time on 12th May 1937. This date was very carefully chosen as it was King George VI's Coronation Day. The weight of the heaviest bell (the Tenor) was 942.3 kg. The total weight of the bells was 3496.8 kg. (The approximate weight of 2 cars today).

On the west wall of the Church near the entrance to the tower room/kitchen is a framed dedication of electro-pneumatic chiming apparatus, dated 29th July 1951.

"The Electric-pneumatic Bell Chiming Apparatus in this tower was installed in 1951 by Gillett & Johnston, Croydon Dedicated 29th July, 1951 by The Right Rev. Bishop George Bame, C.L.E., O.B.E., D.D., M.A. The work was carried out in memory of our glorious dead of the Great Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 These bells, now named after the following Harthill Men of the Ages, ring in tribute to those who fought for freedom".

The bells were named after local men as follows, with dates of their influence in the Parish.

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| 1. William Warrenne bell | circa 1086 |
| 2. Hugh Serlby bell | circa 1297 |
| 3. Nicholas Kneeton bell | circa 1350 |
| 4. Edward Osborne bell | circa 1550 |
| 5. Marmaduke Carver bell | circa 1660 |
| 6. Thomas Osborne bell | circa 1690 |
| 7. John Hewitt bell | circa 1745 |
| 8. Bishop Barne bell | circa 1951 |

The first three bells were named after great landowners and Lords of the Manor in the area during the periods mentioned. Edward Osborne and his son Thomas have great connections with All Hallows – both were great politicians of the time and both are buried within the Church. Thomas was made the 1st Duke of Leeds after the Glorious Revolution. Marmaduke Carver, John Hewitt and Bishop Barne were all Rectors of Harthill.

In the mid-1970s Martin Quay was asked to join a team to restore the Church bells. Canon Richardson had asked David Elliott to take charge of this project as the automated chimes were broken and unrepairable. So along with a team of volunteers and advice from Malcolm Turner, Ecclesfield Church Tower Captain, work began.

The tower had been left unattended for many years; the pigeons had occupied the Bell chamber. Pigeon droppings covered the floor, the bells and the steel frame. Some had fallen through the holes for the ropes to the ringing area. The ringing area was covered in cobwebs and dust and some of the rendering was falling off the walls.

The work took the volunteers several weeks. Huge quantities of pigeon droppings were bagged up and removed. Chicken wire was put up over the louvres to keep the pigeons out. All the equipment was cleaned and restored. New ropes were ordered and the bearings for the bells lubricated.

The old chiming system was removed from the bell-ringing chamber. Everything was cleaned and decorated with a new carpet and extra seating.

Following this, it took about a year to learn to ring the bells under the guidance of the Ecclesfield Church Tower Captain. Martin Quay took over as Tower Captain at Harthill when David Elliott moved away. The team was still raising money for materials when it was discovered that the Tenor bell was cracked. Taylor Bell Foundry from Loughborough came and removed the bell, repaired it and checked all the other bells and the system.

Martin Quay left the area in the 1980s and for a period the bells remained silent again due to a lack of ringers. In early 1993, at the instigation of Rev. Peter Morley, a new band of ringers was taught from scratch by Ian Lloyd and some local helpers. The new band rang at Easter for the first time that year. Ian Lloyd became Tower Captain, having had previous experience as Master of the Cathedral Company of Ringers in Lincoln, and prior to that as Tower Captain at Drayton in Norwich and Sketty in Swansea.

At Millenium the bells were rung 3 times – once on 31st December, half-muffled, again from midnight to 12.30am to “ring in” the new Millenium and then at 12 noon as part of a national celebration!

In 2014 the bells were in trouble again. Ian Lloyd secured around £4000 in donations locally, with support from the Loscar Wind Farm Fund, to refurbish the metal frame around the bells, the bell fittings and the rotting wires surrounding the louvres. The team contributed about 30 hours of volunteer labour to remove the muck, twigs and

general detritus and to perform the refurbishment. Timber was also installed beneath the bells to reduce the noise in the ringing chamber.



Some of the detritus



The bells after the refurbishment

During more recent times, the Harthill ringers have been supplemented with help from ringers at North Anston Church. This became difficult with the change in the Sunday morning service time to 10am in January 2025. Thanks to Ian Lloyd, the current Tower Captain, some new enthusiastic ringers are now being trained by him and, hopefully, Harthill will have its own team again before long.

Many thanks to Ian Lloyd and Martin Quay for the information given in completing this history of the bells.

Sheila Kinghorn

¹ Garbett – The History of Harthill