

Have you heard the church bells yet this year, or the church clock striking out the passing of time?

If so, have you ever wondered just how old those bells are and for how long they have been ringing out their messages of passing events in history, and, tolling out the passing of time as the hours slip away?

Well, this year of 2022 marks the 300th anniversary of the casting of the bells of St Marys' Church. They were made by Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester.

Most of the following information was compiled by Paul Adkins who for over twenty years was the previous Tower Captain to John Sharp who became the present Tower Captain in 2011.

Seven of the eight bells carry the date of 1722 and two are dedicated to Church Wardens of that time, but the treble bell being the smallest at approximately 4Cwt, was recast in 1803 as it was damaged when the tower was struck by lightning. The bells were cast to match each other and did not need tuning, called Maiden Bells, and as such carry a preservation order. Although there are no records about the casting of the seven bells in the Records Office at Gloucester, there are extensive records on the re-casting of the treble, and we know it cost sixty pounds and two shillings.

There are Church wardens accounts from as early as 1626 showing specific payments for the repair of bells and payment to bell ringers, so it is more than probable that the bells we hear today were recast from those originals.

The main body of the Church as we know it today was completed in 1781 but the old tower remained in which the bells were hung. In 1749 a set of chimes were installed in the tower commissioned and paid for by the Rev. John Wight, the tune was to Psalm 113 which dated from 1562, it is also called, 'The old one hundred and thirteenth'. The plaque commemorating its installation can still be seen in the ringing chamber of the tower.

As the old tower was showing signs of cracks and leaning a new tower was commissioned by William Hamilton Yatman who lived at Highgrove, Doughton. The tower was to be built in memory of his only son, William, Frederick Hamilton Yatman, who died at the age of 31. The rebuilding of the tower which took place between 1891 to 1893 was also to include a new clock and a new set of chimes together with a legacy for their maintenance.

The clock and chiming mechanism were made by Gillett and Johnston of Croydon Surrey who are still in business to this day and have quite recently repaired the clock. Whilst Paul was collating his information, he contacted Gillett and Johnston who forwarded him a copy of the ledger sheet commissioning the original work. The page is dated 1891, the cost for the clock was £115, £85 for the chimes and to rehang the bells in a huge oak frame £200. The chiming mechanism still plays the original tune of those commissioned by Rev John Wight.

Over time bells need to be turned as they wear from constant striking; the bells of St Marys' were rehung in 1965 at a cost of £1,100 paid by public subscription to commemorate the death of Winston Churchill. They were rehung in their existing frame by John Taylor & Co. of Loughborough. Also, over time the ropes and muffles wear, muffles are used on Remembrance Day and for funeral requests to give the soft echo effect as the bells strike, they are small cups made of leather to fit each individual clapper. With a generous donation

from the Feoffees to boost the tower fund we were able to replace both ropes and muffles in 2019.

Each bell has an inscription cast around its mouth and that of the heaviest bell, the tenor at approximately 16 Cwt, carries the inscription, “ I TO THE CHVRCH THE LIVING CALL AND TO THE GRAVE DOE SVMMONS ALL. 1722”