

The Bells of St. Mary's, Southampton, Hampshire

Originally 8 bells in 1914, Augmented to 10 in 1933, Destroyed by enemy action in 1940 and Recast in 1945

St. Mary's church was founded in A.D. 634 at the time of St. Birinius. He landed at Southampton, then known as Hamwic, on an evangelical mission and built on this site the first of the churches. The area next to the River Itchen was very marshy, with poor drainage, but which proved to be ideal for the new London and Southwest Railway and its Southampton Terminus station in 1840.

The second church, known as the great church of Our Lady Blessed Mary, was paid for by Queen Matilda, wife of King Henry I. In 1546, Leland the Chronicler wrote "St. Marychurch at this day in token of the ancientness of Old Hampton, is mother-church to all the churches in New Hampton". The following year the tower was demolished to prevent it being used as a landmark for the many French raiders.

The third church was constructed in 1711, paid for partly by the incumbent, Archdeacon Brideoake, and partly with money from the Corporation. First a new nave was added to the old chancel, and ten years later the chancel was rebuilt. An early 19th century painting shows this church with a small turret and cupola. The growth of Southampton outside the walled medieval town gradually increased the size of the congregation, and by the 19th century the capacity of the church was inadequate.

The fourth church was constructed in 1833, and would serve for the next 45 years. During this period the structure was gradually weakened by many alterations.

On 12th August 1878 the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) and his Princess laid the Dedication Stone for the fifth church. It was designed by G. E. Street as a memorial to Bishop Wilberforce, who had been appointed Rector to St. Mary's in 1871. The incomplete building was consecrated on 19th June 1879. By 1884 building was complete, except for the tower and steeple. The latter was roofed over just below the present ringing chamber.

Important to many, in 1890 the St. Mary's church football team began playing on the Deanery field, behind the present vicarage. This gradually developed into Southampton Football Club which has maintained its ecclesiastical connection via its nick-name "The Saints". The present Team Rector is the team's padre.

The Rector, Canon Lovett, later to become the first Bishop of Portsmouth, oversaw the completion of the fifth church with first a tower as a memorial to King Edward VII (1901 to 1910) and a spire in 1912 as a memorial to Canon William Durst. In 1913, the local newspaper announced that "... to give voice to the finished structure Mary Ann Wingrove will provide an octave of bells in memory of her late husband Robert at a cost of £909-2s.". A commemorative plaque survived World War II and can be seen on the wall of the tower, just inside the south door:-

To the Glory of God
The peal of bells was presented to this Church
In memory of
Robert Wingrove of 3, East Park Terrace, Southampton
By his Widow
Mary Ann Wingrove A.D. 1913

A suitable inscription was cast into each bell by the bell founders, John Taylor & Co. of Loughborough. The tenor bell weighed 22 cwt. 1 qr. 7 lbs. with the note of E^b. The eight bells arrived at Southampton Terminus station during the first week in May 1914. Each was then mounted on a horse-drawn trolley and decorated to represent the various festivals of the church. Parishioners were chosen to ride alongside each bell, the youngest by the treble and those near 90 by the tenor. Led by a band for the two mile route, the pageant passed St. Michael's and Holy Rood with each sounding forth their octaves in welcome. The bells were hung, using plain bearings in a modern cast iron frame by Taylors, and the installation was dedicated by Canon Lovett at the close of Evensong on Sunday 3rd May 1914. These successful celebrations were, alas, soon to be forgotten with the outbreak of World War I on 4th August.

Even greater publicity was achieved later that year when Douglas Furber and the Australian composer A. Emmett Adams, on a dark, wartime night, heard St. Mary's original octave sounding across the River Itchen while waiting for their liner, and were inspired to write the song "The Bells of St. Mary's". Introduced to the U.S.A. in 1917 as the college song of the New York State Maritime College, it achieved international popularity when recorded by Bing Crosby on 2nd March 1946. The first full peal on the new octave was not attempted until Saturday 8th January 1916, when Stedman Triples, conducted by George Williams, was scored on bells which were half-muffled to remember those who had fallen in the Great War.

The WINCHESTER DIOCESAN GUILD OF change RINGERS

At the Church of St. Mary, Southampton, Hampshire
On Saturday 8th. January 1916

A PEAL OF STEDMAN TRIPLES

5040 Different Changes

Taking 3 hours and 13 minutes

Weight of Tenor bell 22 cwt. 1 qt. 7 lbs. in E^b.

Henry W. Wilkes	Treble	Alfred Mears	5
William G. Edwards	2	William T. Tucker	6
Pte. A. A. Jones, A.S.C.	3	William H. George	7
George Williams	4	Ernest Dumper	Tenor

Thurstans' Four-part

Conducted by George Williams

First peal on the bells

Rung half-muffled for those who had fallen in the War.

Augmentation to ten bells took place in 1933. Two trebles were the gift of the Barron Bell Trust, shown as part of the inscriptions cast on the bells by John Taylor & Co. These were hung on the very modern ball bearings in a frame on top of that housing the octave. These were dedicated on 13th January 1934, and the first full peal was rung on 12th September 1934. This was achieved by an entirely local band of ringers, only one of whom had rung this mathematical method before.

The WINCHESTER AND PORTSMOUTH DIOCESAN GUILD OF church BELL RINGERS

At the Church of St. Mary, Southampton, Hampshire
On Wednesday 12th. September 1934

A PEAL OF GRANDSIRE CATERS

5039 Different Changes

Taking 3 hours and 35 minutes

Weight of Tenor bell 22 cwt. 1 qt. 7 lbs. in E^b.

John W. Faithful	Treble	Arthur Butler *	6
O. Neville Curtis †	2	Frederick Mursell †	7
D. Cecil Williams, Mus.Bac.	3	Harry Reeves †	8
Alfred E. Newman *	4	Reginald Brown	9
Thomas W. Thrikell †	5	John Elliott *	Tenor

Composed by H. Hubbard

Conducted by John W. Faithful

First peal on the ten bells

First peal on the ten bells and by the local band at first attempt.

* First peal.

† First peal on ten bells.

First peal as conductor.

First peal of Grandsire Caters by all except ringer of the 3rd.

BELL	WEIGHT	YEAR	INSCRIPTION	NOTE
1	4cwt. 0qt. 2lbs.	1933	Around the crown:- JOHN TAYLOR & CO.*FOUNDERS* LOUGHBOROUGH	G
2	4cwt. 0qt. 26lbs.	1933	On the waist, one side:- TO THE GLORY OF GOD THIS BELL WAS GIVEN BY THE BARRON BELL TRUST 1933 EMMA BARRON, FOUNDER F. HOPKINS C.M. WALROND TRUSTEES H.W. ELDRED On the waist the opposite side:- TAYLOR LOUGHBORO	F
3	4cwt. 2qt. 13lbs.	1914	Around the crown:- RING OUT THE FALSE, RING IN THE TRUE	E ^b
4	5cwt. 0qt. 19lbs.	1914	On the waist, one side:- MARY ANN WINGROVE GAVE ME	D
5	5cwt. 3qt. 27lbs.	1914	JOHN TAYLOR MADE ME	C
6	3cwt. 0qt. 24lbs!!	1914	1914	B ^b
7	9cwt. 1qt. 0lbs.	1914	On the waist the opposite side:- TAYLOR	A ^b
8	11cwt. 2qt. 0lbs.	1914	LOUGHBORO	G
9	15cwt. 1qt. 2lbs.	1914		F
10	22cwt. 1qt. 6lbs.	1914		E ^b

On 1st September 1939 German troops invaded Poland after the 6 a.m.. bombing of Warsaw. 1,270,000 women and children were evacuated from 81 British cities, including Southampton and Portsmouth, in spite of the installation of 2½ million Anderson air raid shelters in U.K. gardens. 3rd September was marked by the declaration of World War II. Little was heard about hostilities for the rest of the year, and the phrase “phoney war” came into common use.

The perilous position of the U.K. became clear in 1940. Operation Dynamo began on 27th May, lasting until 4th June, when 338,226 soldiers were evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk by thousands of little ships. The 8th August is regarded as the start of “The Battle of Britain”, when the few R.A.F. fighter pilots defended the daily attacks on their airfields. 24th August marked the start of “The Blitz”, when German aircraft heading for their military targets, flew off-course and dropped their bombs on London by mistake. The following day, by orders of the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, 40

R.A.F. bombers attacked Berlin. Retaliation by Hitler took the form of continuous bombing, day and night, by German bombers, commencing on 7th September

On Thursday 13th June a “Control of Noise Defence Order” was issued by the Ministry of Home Security. It ordered a total ban on the sounding of church bells except as an invasion warning. On Sunday 16th June, newspapers reported “....for the first time for more than a thousand years, not a single church bell was heard anywhere in the land. ...” “The Ringing World” reported, “..... no prior warning had been given of this ban and in many towers bells had been left ‘up’. There was no possibility of ringing them ‘down’. Luckily St. Mary’s bells are always lowered after practice so that the well-known clock chimes can be engaged. On Sunday 15th November 1942 the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill ordered the well-known ringing to mark the victory at El Alamein. Alas the destroyed bells at St. Mary’s and at Holy Rhood could not participate, but the few ringers not in the armed forces were able to assemble beneath the eight bells in St. Michael’s Church. On the 50th. anniversary, ringers were asked to write about their memories of this day in 1942. These occupy several pages of “The Ringing World” issue 4255 (13th Nov. 1992)

The spread of German attacks to other major cities led to the destruction of Coventry Cathedral, with 568 civilians killed in surrounding buildings on 14th November 1940. On 30th November and 1st. December it was the turn of Southampton. It is estimated that 105 tons of bombs fell over two nights. This comprised thousands of incendiary bombs and 800 of high explosive. 137 civilians were killed, 391 injured, 372 buildings were totally destroyed in downtown Southampton, including fifteen churches. 797 buildings were so badly damaged that demolition was required, while 4636 suffered considerable damage.

St. Mary’s Church was devastated, the steeple gutted and the damage to the bells was extremely severe. The 6th bell was broken and had fallen through two floors into the ringing chamber, apart from the crown which remained attached to the headstock in the bell chamber. During the inspection by Messrs. John Oldham and John P. Fidler from John Taylors on 19th March 1941 it was found that the 5th, 8th, and 9th bells had large, open cracks in their crowns and the 7th had lost most of its resonance. It was thought that most of the bell frame members could be re-used, but in 1946 many were found to be too damaged. The work of restoring the Tower and Spire was carried out by Messrs. W. P. Brazier & Son, Ltd., a Southampton firm. The tower was supported by an array of sloping girders, acting as supports, up until 1956. The bells were removed by Taylors in April 1942 and re-cast in Loughborough following celebrations for Victory in Europe on 8th May 1945. Organisation had been in the hands of the Rector, Canon R. B. Jolly, whose name appears on the recast tenor, utilising the Government Compensation Scheme. His departure left the Captain of the Ringers, John W. Faithful, in charge of negotiations. Not only was he an immaculate ringer and a first class leader, but he was also one of the four Hampshire ringers handicapped during World War I with the loss of

one arm. Apart from ensuring a lighter ring of 10, John promoted a scheme to hang all the bells in a redesigned frame on one level. His memorial for 25 years of captaincy is the excellent, new bell frame and a brass plaque at the bottom of the tower, just outside the spiral staircase of 87 steps:-

THIS TABLET RECORDS THE SERVICE OF
JOHN WALTER FAITHFULL
 CHORISTER: BELLRINGER
 CHURCH COUNCILLOR
 FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS
 CAPTAIN OF THIS BELFRY
 ERECTED BY FELLOW RINGERS
 AND FRIENDS 1964

ROY CHAMBERLAIN M.A. RECTOR
 H.T. COOK W.F. MEERING CHURCHWARDENS

The bells were hung in April 1948 and were dedicated at a moving service held in the ruins of the church on Sunday 20th June 1948. The Rector, Rev. Spencer Leeson, led the Mayoral Party from the Chantry Hall, the temporary place of worship, to the sound of Southampton Police Band. Prayers were offered by the Right Rev. Bishop Lovett, Rector 1912 to 1925, who had dedicated the original octave on 3rd May 1914. The address was given by the Right Rev. Bishop Lang, Assistant Diocesan Bishop. The local ringers, now able to sound forth on their own bells, were:-

Messrs:- R. BROWN; M. BUTLER (Father of the current Tower Captain); N. CURTIS; R. CURTIS; F. CAVE; F. DURNFORD; J. W. FAITHFUL (Captain); R. FAITHFUL; J. R. FAITHFUL; A. HEATH and D. CECIL WILLIAMS.

The Misses:- A. C. NICHOLAS and B. SAFFREY.

“The Ringing World” of 2nd July 1948, described the occasion and added “ They were the first ring of bells in this country to be restored after being brought down by enemy action”

Details of these new bells follow:-

BELL	DIAMETER	WEIGHT	YEAR	INSCRIPTION	Note
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1	25¼ ins.	4cwt. 0qt. 2lbs. 206 kg.	1933 1945	Around the crown:- JOHN TAYLOR & CO.*FOUNDERS* LOUGHBOROUGH On the waist, one side:- TO THE GLORY OF GOD THIS BELL WAS GIVEN BY THE BARRON BELL TRUST 1933 EMMA BARRON, FOUNDER F. HOPKINS C.M. WALROND TRUSTEES H.W. ELDRER On the waist the opposite side:- TAYLOR LOUGHBORO RECAST 1945	G
2	26½ ins.	4cwt. 1qt. 14lbs. 225 kg.	1933 1945		F
3	28 ins.	4cwt. 3qt. 9lbs. 248 kg.	1914 1945	Around the crown:- RING OUT THE FALSE, RING IN THE TRUE On the waist, one side:- MARY ANN WINGROVE GAVE ME JOHN TAYLOR MADE ME 1914 On the waist the opposite side:- TAYLOR LOUGHBORO RECAST 1945	E ^b
4	29 ins.	5cwt. 1qt. 0lbs. 270 kg.	1914 1945		D
5	31½ ins.	6cwt. 1qt. 13lbs. 327 kg.	1914 1945		C
6	34 ins.	7cwt. 2qt. 5lbs. 387½ kh.	1914 1945		B ^b
7	37 ins.	9cwt. 1qt. 8lbs. 479 kg.	1914 1945		A ^b
8	39 ins.	10cwt. 3qt. 20lbs. 561 kg.	1914 1945		G
9	43½ ins.	14cwt. 2qt. 4lbs. 747 kg.	1914 1945		F
10	49 ins.	21cwt. 2qt. 8lbs. 1108 kg.	1914 1945	Around the crown:- RING OUT THE FALSE, RING IN THE TRUE On the waist, one side:- THIS PEAL OF TEN BELLS WAS RECAST IN 1945 AFTER DESTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH BY ENEMY ACTION ON ST. ANDREW'S DAY, NOVEMBER 30 TH., 1940 R. B. JOLLY, RECTOR G.A. WALLER R.T. SMITH CHURCHWARDENS On the waist the opposite side:- MARY ANN WINGROVE GAVE ME JOHN TAYLOR MADE ME 1914 RECAST 1945	E ^b

The local newspaper, The Daily Echo, reported on the Saturday:-

“SOUTHAMPTON is preparing to hear a sound it has not heard for the previous eight years.

At 3.30 p.m. precisely tomorrow the bells of St. Mary’s Church will ring out for the first time since an air raid during November 1940. A large congregation is expected at the church to hear the bells, which were damaged in the raid but now have been repaired.

‘The sound of St. Mary’s bells will indeed be a stirring symbol of recovery begun and will seem like a herald of yet further recovery to be’ said the Bishop of Winchester.

A B.B.C. recording van will be on hand so records can be made of the bells ringing out across Southampton”

It should be said that without sound insulation, in 1953 when I was living in Winchester Road, the sound of St. Mary’s bells was quite clear outside all the houses.

Eight days later, in time for the visit of George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the first peal on the new, lighter ring was achieved. It took nearly 4 hours due to lack of sound insulation and the swaying of the brick tower with no church building to support it.

The WINCHESTER and portsmouth DIOCESAN GUILD OF church bell RINGERS

At the Church of St. Mary, Southampton, Hampshire
On Wednesday 28th. June 1948

A PEAL OF KENT TREBLE BOB ROYAL

5080 Different Changes

Taking 3 hours and 55 minutes

Weight of Tenor bell 21 cwt. 2 qts. 8 lbs. in Eb.

Mrs. F. J. Marshallsay	Treble	Rev. K. W. H. Felstead	6
John W. Faithfull	2	Roy Faithfull *	7
Charles H. Kippin	3	Reginald Brown	8
Mrs. E. F. Salmons *	4	Reginald A. Reed	9
Maurice J. Butler	5	Ernest F. Salmons *	Tenor

Composed by York Green

Conducted by Charles H. Kippin

First Peal on the bells since restoration and a welcome to the King and Queen on their visit to Southampton Docks.

* First Peal of Treble Ten.

In 1954 it fell to Romilly Graze, F.R.I.B.A., F.R.S.A. to create modern St. Mary’s from the roofless shell, maintaining Street’s original plan. It is described as a mid-20th

century neo gothic building, representing the very last reconstruction of its kind. This was dedicated by the Bishop of Winchester on 12th June 1956, the bells being rung by the reformed band, augmented by members of Southampton University Guild of Change Ringers. Once again the Rector, Rev. H. C. N. Williams, for the last time led the Mayoral Party from the Chantry Hall to the west door, where the Bishop used his Pastoral Staff to knock three times before entry. D. Cecil Williams, Master of the Music, led his choir on the magnificent new organ, an instrument that would push his future bell ringing interest into second place.

Afterwards a celebratory peal of 5039 Grandsire Caters, composed and conducted by Charles H. Kippin, was scored in 3 hours and 24 minutes.

The WINCHESTER AND PORTSMOUTH DIOCESAN GUILD OF church BELL RINGERS

At the Church of St. Mary, Southampton, Hampshire
On Tuesday 12th. June 1956

A PEAL OF GRANDSIRE CATERS

5039 Different Changes

Taking 3 hours and 24 minutes

Weight of Tenor bell 21 cwt. 2 qts. 8 lbs. in E^b.

Robert C. Kippin *	Treble	Charles H. Kippin	6
John W. Faithfull	2	Kenneth S. Croft	7
Jessie M. Kippin	3	Maurice J. Butler	8
Rev. K. W. H. Felstead	4	Frederick W. Rogers	9
Betty Smith †	5	O. Neville Curtis	Tenor

Composed and Conducted by Charles H. Kippin

Rung to celebrate the opening of the re-built Church, which was consecrated by the Bishop of Winchester in the morning, and as a welcome to the new Rector, the Rev. H. C. N. Williams, rung late owing to the re-building.

* First peal in the method.

† First peal on ten bells.

Since 1914 a total of 244 full peals have been rung on the Bells of St. Mary's, with participants coming from every part of the British Isles. Famous bell ringers have written for permission to bring their own group to attempt mathematically complicated

peals and, although the Environmental Health Officer in 1997 limited the amount of ringing on these famous bells, he allowed such peals at monthly intervals. Our own bell ringers have maintained the standard over the past years, and in 1995 scored the first ever peal of St. Mary Surprise Royal in 3 hours and 11 minutes.

The WINCHESTER and portsmouth DIOCESAN GUILD OF church bell RINGERS

At the Church of St. Mary, Southampton, Hampshire
On Sunday 29th January 1995

A PEAL OF ST. MARY SURPRISE ROYAL

5040 Different Changes

Taking 3 hours and 11 minutes

Weight of Tenor bell 21 cwt.2 qts. 8 lb. in E^b

Brian J. Woodruffe	Treble	Stuart J. Heath	6
Colin J. Butler *	2	Derek C. Jackson	7
George E. Evenden	3	Dennis A. Chapman	8
Christine R. Hill †	4	Nicholas I. Kimber	9
Stephen J. Donovan	5	Steve Castle	Tenor

Composed by W. Barton

Conducted by George E. Evenden

First peal of St. Mary Surprise

* 50th peal.

† Circed the tower.

**THE BELLS OF ST. MARY'S
(Douglas Furber/ A. Emmett Adams)**

The Bells of St. Mary's
Ah, hear they are calling
The young loves, the true loves
Who come from the sea

And so my beloved
When red leaves are falling The love bells
shall ring out, ring out
For you and me

Derek Jackson

Details of bells and fittings supplied by John Taylor, Bellfounders.

Tuesday, 07 March 2006