

The Bells Of Holy Trinity Church, Ashford-in-the-Water

Ian Pykett. September 2024

In the tower of the Church of Holy Trinity, Ashford-in-the-Water are six bells hung for change-ringing, plus one pre-Reformation chiming Sanctus bell.

Bells Hung for Change-Ringing, Ashford-in-the-Water										
Number	Weight				Date & Foundry				Inscription	Service of Dedication
	cwt	qtrs	lbs	kg	Original casting	Foundry	Recast	Foundry		
Treble	2	2	23	137	1966	Taylor & Co, Loughborough	n/a		Jean Whittaker 1907-1965	Dedicated by Bishop Warren Hunt October 4 1966
Second	3	0	14	159						
Third	3	1	10	170	1954	Taylor & Co, Loughborough	n/a		Glory be to God on high God save the Queen 1954 In Memoriam Henry Ernest Sherlock Vicar 1912-1939	New third; recast fourth and tenor; new steel bell frame Rededicated by Bishop George Sinker October 20 1954
Fourth	3	3	4	192	1612	Godfrey Heathcote (1558-1643) Chesterfield	1954	Taylor & Co, Loughborough	IHC Gloria in Excelsis Deo GH	
Fifth	4	2	0	229	1750	Thomas Hedderly, Nottingham			Richard Bennett CW 1750 Thomas Hedderly Founder Ashford-in-the-Water	
Tenor	6	0	8	308	1612	Godfrey Heathcote (1558-1643) Chesterfield			IHC Gloria in Excelsis Deo 1612 GH Holy Trinity	

The two oldest change-ringing bells were cast by the bellfounder Godfrey Heathcote of Chesterfield in 1612¹, and a third was cast by Thomas Hedderly of Nottingham in 1750.

Because three bells provide only six possible ringing sequences (changes), there was little opportunity for the ringers to practise 'the Exercise' beyond a fairly rudimentary level. They could therefore not ring the methods that would be heard in neighbouring towers blessed with larger peals.

Nevertheless, in 1889 it seems that the Ashford churchwardens wanted to restrict even further the ringers' freedom to practise their art, and instead adhere to a very specific set of ringing instructions, as can be seen from the notice (overleaf) which is still posted in the tower.

¹ See the Appendix.

The first intimation that Ashford's three old bells needed remedial work was in 1936, when Revd Henry Sherlock was vicar. It had been discovered that the oak beams supporting them were being attacked by beetle, and further expert inspection resulted in a decision in 1938 that the bells "should not be tolled from this date until the necessary repairs had been carried out". Moreover, it was later noted that recasting the bells would be necessary, because "the melody of the three bells was not in tune".

Thus began a 16-year period during which the bells were silent – a hiatus that encompassed the arrival and departure of two successors to Revd Sherlock, and the austerity of the Second World War.

It was when Revd Thomas George arrived in 1953 that the project gained real momentum, ably and enthusiastically supported by the churchwarden George Thorpe, and his wife, Ida.

The cost for recasting the three old bells and installing a new steel frame was to be £827: £195 more than had already been raised by that time. But Revd George was undeterred. Indeed, he was sufficiently emboldened to further propose that, "we should add to the ring of three by a new bell as a memorial to the late Revd Sherlock". This required an extra £176 (provided in part by a £100 legacy from Revd Sherlock himself) bringing the total project cost to £1,003 – a value of around £85,000 today. There was even sufficient optimism and vision to make the new frame large enough to accommodate two further new bells at some point in the future.



These four bells were first rung in May 1954 to herald the safe return of Queen Elizabeth II from her first Commonwealth tour, and were dedicated on October 20th 1954 by Bishop George Sinker.

A section from the old oak bell-frame that had not succumbed to beetle was salvaged, and now stands at the eastern end of the nave of the church. It bears the name of one of the churchwardens of the time – William Smith – and is dated 1612.



The foresight to construct the new steel frame to accommodate a peal of six bells was rewarded twelve years later when a village resident, Mr Denis Whittaker, pledged to underwrite the manufacture and installation of two new bells in memory of his wife of 35 years, Jeanie Rose (née Brock).

George and Ida Thorpe were once more at the forefront of organising the project, which had a total cost of £677 (around £30,000 today).

The bells were dedicated on October 4, 1966. Equally exciting was the occasion when the first peal on six bells was rung the following year.

ASHFORD-IN-THE-WATER, Derbyshire.—At the Church of the Holy Trinity.
On Fri., June 23, 1967, in 2 Hours and 32 Minutes,
A PEAL OF 5040 PLAIN BOB MINOR
 Being seven different extents. Tenor 6 cwt.

Timothy Wylie Treble Barrie Bateman 2 Gladys Richardson 3		Susan E. Davis 4 *Clyde I. Bateman 5 Alex Richardson Tenor
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Conducted by Alex Richardson.

* First peal. First peal on the bells.
Rung in memoriam Jean Whittaker, 1907–1965.

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The most ancient bell in Ashford's tower – which is more than 500 years old – is still rung during the consecration of the Holy Communion. But, unlike the other bells, it can not be used for change-ringing.

This sanctus bell is sometimes known as the 'ting-tang' bell after its characteristic sound, but is also called the 'pancake bell' because it was traditionally rung on Shrove Tuesday. In 1864, the Ashford-born antiquarian and businessman Thomas Brushfield recounted this old custom, which even then had been of at least 60 years' standing²:



'Shrove Tuesday – also called Goody's Tuesday – was held as a notable day in the village. At eleven o'clock in the morning of that day, a bell, called the 'pancake bell,' was rung in the church tower, and on the first sounding of that bell the children of the schools in the village were released from their studies, and had the rest of the day for holiday purposes – indeed it was a general holiday. The game of football was generally played during the after part of the day. These customs are still observed – the pancakes, the bell-tolling, and the football-playing – and there is no harm in them ...'

The 'pancake bell' bell was exposed to the weather for many years when it was suspended in an exterior bell-cote above the chancel. At the time of major building renovations between 1868 and 1870, the architect, James Medland Taylor, designed a new sanctus bell turret. However, his suggestions were not adopted, and the bell was taken down and stored in the tower. It was forgotten for 23 years, until it was rediscovered and rehung in the tower, where it remains today.

Prior to those renovations, access to a 40-seat west-end gallery, installed in 1735, had been via a winding staircase, which had filled up the space under the tower arch. Along with a wooden partition, this had cut off the tower from the nave. The only access to the tower during this time had been via an exterior door on its south wall. However, the gallery and partition were removed ca. 1868-1870, and access to the tower was once more – as now – available from the nave.³

² Brushfield, Thomas. *A Second Notice of Customs, Notions, and Practices, at Ashford-in-the-Water, Sixty Years Ago. The Reliquary, Vol. 5.* Ed. Llewellynn Jewitt. Bemrose & Sons, Derby & London. 1864-5. p. 153.

³ Pykett, Ian. *The Life and Times of John Reddaway Luxmoore (1829-1917), with Special Reference to his Renovation of Holy Trinity Church, Ashford-in-the-Water.* Spiral Books. 2022.

Although it is an ancient tradition, change-ringing has at Ashford now been brought into the 21st century.

Firstly, with the clappers tied back so that the bells do not ring, electronic sensors detect the rotation of the bell wheels as the bell ropes are pulled. Playback of computer generated recordings of each of the bells is thereby triggered at exactly the same time as they would have sounded. The recorded bell sounds are then amplified and fed to loudspeakers in the ringing chamber. Recordings are available of the Ashford bells themselves; bells in other towers; or simulated bell sounds. The system may be used by a single person ringing on one rope, a complete band of six ringers, or anything in between, with the unused bells (and even computer-generated bells beyond the actual six) being rung by a change-ringing simulator. This greatly assists teaching and learning, including preparation for ringing in a larger tower with more bells. An added advantage is that the neighbours are not disturbed!

Secondly, one of Ashford's ringing teachers has designed, fabricated and fitted a mechanism that can automatically tie back a bell clapper, to temporarily silence the bell. This automated mechanism, which is used in parallel with the simulator, can be actuated via the touch of a button in the ringing chamber below, thus saving the time and effort required to climb into the belfry to tie back the clappers manually.

Finally, remotely-controlled shutters can be moved into place over the tower windows to protect the belfry from the elements, or to reduce the external sound level when the bells are being rung normally.

However, the bells are always rung by real human beings (!) and heard in their full glory before Sunday services and on special occasions.

APPENDIX I

The marks of the Heathcotes bellfounders of Chesterfield, and their relevance to the bells of Holy Trinity, Ashford-in-the-Water

In its revision of 1979 by Revd Graham Foster,⁴ Revd John Norman's history of Holy Trinity Church, originally published in 1961, says of the two oldest bells that are hung for change-ringing:

"Before recasting [in 1954], the oldest bell was the fourth. Though undated, it bore the founder's mark of George Heathcote of Chesterfield, who died in 1558. As the mark is also to be found on the tenor bell dated 1612, and as both carry the same inscription, opinion differs as to whether both were hung in 1612 or the undated one first."

The present revision of the church guidebook says essentially the same.

In her extensive volume of the Heathcote family history⁵ Evelyn Heathcote comments in Chapter I,

"By the end of the fifteenth century the clan, which had spread throughout the Peak as well as in other parts of the county, had established itself in and about the town of Chesterfield, where for many generations a considerable branch, whose pedigree can be traced with certainty from that time to the present, flourished in the respectable trade of braziers and bellfounders, taking a leading position there from the date of the earliest mention of their name in connection with the place. ..."

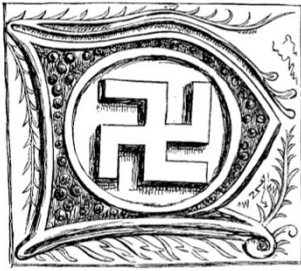
"Ralph [Hethcote], who married Ellen Tomson ... was the undoubted founder of the line of Heathcotes, who for several generations were established at Chesterfield as braziers and bellfounders."

The will of this Ralph Hethcote is dated 1502, but his inventory list was dated 1525, which is probably around the date he died. This bellfounder,

"was Alderman of Chesterfield and a considerable tradesman there ... who advanced loan money to the king, early in the reign of Henry VIII ... so it is clear that he was one of the more substantial people of the county."

⁴ Norman, John. *Ashford-in-the-Water and its Church*, 1961. Extended 1962; revised and enlarged by Graham Foster incorporating notes by the late George Pace, 1979; revised, reprinted and retitled *Holy Trinity Church, Ashford-in-the-Water*, 1996.

⁵ Heathcote, Evelyn D. *An Account of some of the families bearing the name of Heathcote which have descended out of the county of Derby*. Warren & Son, Winchester, 1899.



Attributed by Evelyn Heathcote to Ralph Hethcote of Chesterfield. d. ca 1525.

See footnote 4, Chapter I, page 16.



Attributed by Llewellynn Jewitt to George Heathcote of Chesterfield. Will dated 1558.

See footnote 4, Chapter I, page 17.



Attributed by Llewellynn Jewitt to Ralph Heathcote (?-1576/7) of Chesterfield.

See footnote 4, Chapter I, page 18.



Attributed by Llewellynn Jewitt to Godfrey Heathcote (1558-1643) of Chesterfield.

Godfrey Heathcote seems to have also placed the inscription 'Gloria in Excelsis Deo' on his bells, with the fylfot cross nestling within the first letter G.



See footnote 4, Chapter I, page 21 & Chapter I, page 1.



Attributed by Llewellynn Jewitt to Ralph Heathcote (1592-?) of Chesterfield.

See footnote 4, Chapter I, page 23.

In arguing her case against Llewellynn Jewitt⁶ she concludes that it is extremely unlikely that this Ralph Hethcote's fifth son – also a Ralph – continued in the bell founding business, and therefore infers that,

"A mark of great rarity, which appears on the fifth bell at Matlock, one of the oldest as well as most interesting bells in the county, may, perhaps, belong to [the elder Ralph Hethcote]."

She says, however, that there is no doubt that the elder Ralph Hethcote's third son, George Heathcote (died ca. 1558), was a bellfounder. And George's eldest son – another Ralph (d. 1576/7) – was, like his father and grandfather, also a brazier and bellfounder.

Godfrey, the second son of this latter Ralph, who was baptised 1558/9 and died in 1643, was a brazier and bellfounder, and a Mayor of Chesterfield.

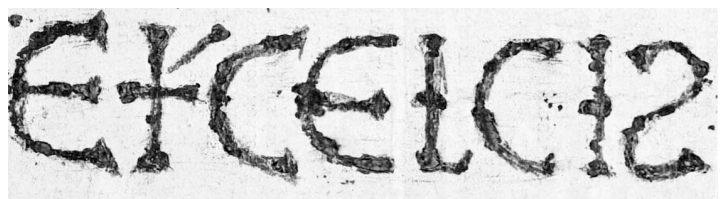
According to Jewitt, Godfrey's second but eldest surviving son – yet another Ralph (baptised in 1592) – was, also a bellfounder.

Jewitt observes that nearly all the marks which he assigns to the Heathcotes bear the mediaeval Anglo-Saxon "fylfot cross" as a prominent part of their design. The mark of Ralph Heathcote (d. 1576/7) appears to be the only exception.

In his unpublished *Notes on the Church of Holy Trinity, Ashford-in-the-Water*,⁷ John Stonhouse Luxmoore (1863-1940) – son of John Reddaway Luxmoore, the long-serving Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Ashford-in-the-Water – writes:

"The 1st bell is inscribed as follows: 'I H C GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO'⁸ in one line round the haunch, in early English Gothic letters, of the usual elegant thin character of this series of bells.

"Beneath the 'I H C' is the founder's mark 'G H' on a shield, with a fylfot cross below the initials. In the 'G' of 'GLORIA' is the fylfot cross. The 'S' in 'EXCELSIS' is turned backwards-way.



'Rubbing from one of the bells'

⁶ Llewellynn Frederick William Jewitt (1816-1886), founder and editor of the illustrated multivolume antiquarian journal *The Reliquary*. Evelyn Heathcote reproduces the Heathcote bellfounders' marks attributed to the Heathcotes of Chesterfield from Vol. 16 of *The Reliquary*, with permission.

⁷ Luxmoore, John Stonhouse. *Notes on the Church of Holy Trinity, Ashford-in-the-Water*. Derbyshire Record Office, D7672/Lx.C-30.

⁸ I H C = *Iesus Hominem Salvator* (Jesus Saviour of Mankind).

"The third bell: exactly the same as in the case of the first bell, except that after 'DEO' is the date 1612.

"Who were the founders of these bells?"

"'G H' on the 1st and 3rd bells. This mark appears on a large number of Derbyshire church bells. In every case it appears to be the mark either of Godfrey (or Gilbert) Heathcote, or of George Hedderly. It seems that there are some 5 Derbyshire churches having bells known to founded by George Hedderly, of which two are dated 1791: also none of George Hedderly's bell marks have the fylfot cross, as have the Ashford ones. The date and the bell-marks combined seem to prove that George Hedderly was not the founder of 1st and 3rd bells at Ashford.

"On the other hand, all the bells cast by the two Heathcotes have the fylfot cross, while some of them have, in addition, 'GLORIA etc', and also the initial 'G' with a fylfot cross in it. It is claimed that 10 churches in Derbyshire have bells cast by the Heathcotes, and bear dates ranging from 1603 to 1620. We know that Godfrey Heathcote lived from 1588 to 1633 [sic]. The date on the Ashford bells, and others marked like them, and the bell-marks on these bells, make it certain that Godfrey Heathcote made the two Ashford bells."

Evelyn Heathcote's family history book states (in Appendix III, p 233) that the "1st bell" at Ashford-in-the-Water has "the same ... founder's mark of Godfrey Heathcote [b. 1558, d. 1643]" as does the 4th bell at Alfreton, and both also show "the inscription 'Gloria in excelsis Deo', with a fylfot cross placed within the letter G of the first word."

The above-referenced published research by Evelyn Heathcote and Llewellynn Jewitt, together with JS Luxmoore's unpublished *Notes*, support the conclusion that the two oldest change-ringing bells at Ashford were both cast by Godfrey Heathcote of Chesterfield (1551-1643), and not by his grandfather, George Heathcote.

One bell is inscribed with the date 1612, which is within the lifetime of Godfrey Heathcote, but not within the lifetime of George, who died ca. 1558. Both include the text 'I H C GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO'. When the bells were re-cast and re-hung on a new steel frame in 1954, a section from the old oak bell-frame that had not succumbed to beetle was salvaged, and now stands in the nave of the church: it is dated 1612. There therefore seems to be no reason to doubt that both of these Heathcote bells were originally cast in that year.

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