

## Celebration of Bellringing at Holy Trinity Ashford-in-the-Water

**OCTOBER 20TH 2024** will mark the 70th anniversary of the dedication of three recast bells, one new bell, and a new bell frame in Ashford's church tower.

These four bells were first rung in May 1954 to herald the safe return of Queen Elizabeth II from her first Commonwealth tour.

Two more bells were added in 1966, and the first peal was rung on June 23rd 1967.\*

Our bellringers will be celebrating these events at an Open Day in the church tower on the afternoon of **Sunday October 20**, and by ringing quarter peals every day of the week leading up to that. (By happy coincidence, the annual Peak District Quarter Peal week runs from October 12 – 19, so you may hear bells ringing in many other local villages as well!) We'll also be marking the anniversary at our 9.45 am service on the following **Sunday October 27**, after which there'll be an opportunity to partake in a celebratory drink!

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, this can not be used for change-ringing. The two oldest bells that *are* hung for change-ringing were cast by the bellfounder Godfrey Heathcote of Chesterfield in 1612, and a third was cast by Thomas Hedderly of Nottingham in 1750.

The first intimation that these three 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". However, "it was resolved to launch an appeal immediately for funds to carry out the work, the work to commence as soon as a substantial amount of money had been raised."

Thus began a 16-year period during which the bells were silent, including those years when the massive societal and economic changes unleashed by the Second World War necessarily focussed priorities elsewhere.

---

\* A "peal" is the gold-standard in change ringing, where the bells are rung continuously in different sequences. For six bells, the number of possible permutations (the "extent") is  $6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 720$  different changes, and a peal comprises several extents, to give a total of 5,040 changes over a period of approximately 3 hours. A "quarter peal" – rung more commonly – meets most of the rules for a peal, but is just a quarter the length.

Many were no doubt disappointed that Ashford's bells could not be rung on May 8th 1945 to celebrate the occasion of Victory in Europe. However, fund-raising was re-started immediately after the War, encouraged most notably by Mr George Thorpe and his wife, Ida – the same Ida Thorpe who re-established Ashford's well-dressing custom.

A village-wide meeting in 1951 came "to the definite decision that there should be 'ringing' bells (as opposed to chiming bells or an electronically recorded system)", but it was not until Revd Thomas George arrived in 1953 that the project gained real momentum. He felt that "if we waited for our money to catch up with costs, we should wait a long time."

Ultimately, the cost for recasting the old bells (necessary because "the melody of the three bells was not in tune"), and installing a new steel frame, was to be £827: £195 more than had already been raised. 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.

The three old bells were duly removed from the belfry on January 4th 1954. On one very cold morning with snowflakes in the wind, when the bells were awaiting transportation to the bell foundry in Loughborough, local resident John McCrindle wrote, "I took a photograph of my three-year-old son, Alistair, sheltering in one of the bells. It was certainly the chance of a lifetime for him, for it was the first time one of the bells had been down for more than three hundred years." John's photograph was published in *The Church Times*; the reproduction was very poor, but our Tower Captain, Linda Pelc, has skilfully re-created it here.



Fund-raising continued apace, but Revd George must have been wondering if they'd ever achieve their target when he wrote to *The Church Times* in March 1954, "800 villagers have been chasing rising prices, and now need £1,100. They have raised £800. Tired now. If you can help, please write to Revd TDW George".

The goal was indeed finally reached, and on October 20th 1954 Bishop George Sinker led the service of dedication.



*L-R: William Twelves, Kathleen Hurst, Herbert Bennett, Rev Thomas George Vicar of Holy Trinity, Rt Rev George Sinker Assistant Bishop of Derby, Audrey Greenhalch, Clifford Roberts, Ida Thorpe, Dora Eyre (nee Hurst), George Thorpe. Wednesday October 20 1954. Photo courtesy David Windle.*

The belfry floor had had to be removed to lower the bells, and this enabled a large royal arms from the reign of King George I to be retrieved. It had been placed there on the previous occasion that the floor had been removed, when the third of the old bells had been installed in 1750. This hatchment was restored and re-hung over the tower arch in 1985.



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 bears the name of one of the churchwardens of the time – William Smith – and is dated 1612.



The foresight to construct the new 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).



*L-R: Ida Thorpe, Maureen Walker, Revd John Legg Vicar of Holy Trinity, Rt Rev Warren Hunt Suffragan Bishop of Repton, June Brocklehurst, Ian Birchenough, Geoff Calladine, Lillie Edwards, Christopher Hawley, Cliff Roberts, George Thorpe.  
Photo courtesy Lillias Bendell.*

The bells were dedicated on October 4, 1966, the event being recorded nationally in *The Ringing World*. Equally exciting was the occasion when the first peal on six bells was rung the following year.

**ANOTHER RING OF SIX FOR  
DERBYSHIRE**

Ashford-in-the-Water is a pretty village standing on the River Wye, a tributary of the Derwent and a few miles from Bakewell. For many years the Parish Church of the Holy Trinity possessed three old bells. In 1954 these were recast and a treble added, the four bells being hung in a new frame for six and now, 12 years later, thanks to Mr. D. Whittaker, the ring of six is complete.

The two new bells were dedicated at a special service on October 4th by the Rt. Rev. W. Warren Hunt, Bishop of Repton. The church had held its harvest festival the previous Sunday and the appropriate decorations had been retained, which added to the impressiveness of the service. There was a good congregation, amongst whom were Messrs. F. J. Smallwood and B. Morris as well as Mr. and Mrs. A. Richardson, of Fairfield, along with the young members of Fairfield band. Mr. John P. Fidler represented the founders, Messrs. John Taylor and Co. After the service Mr. Whittaker invited the visitors to a buffet supper at his residence. J. P. F.

*"An event of outstanding local importance and a landmark in the world of campanology took place at Holy Trinity Church, Ashford, on Friday June 23rd when a group of Derbyshire campanologists rang a peal of 5,040 changes on the church bells.*

*"The peal, the first ever in Ashford Church, was made possible by the gift of two bells in memory of Jean Whittaker and was timed to coincide with the anniversary of her birthday."*

**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**

<b>Being seven different extents.</b>				<b>Tenor 6 cwt.</b>
Timothy Wylie .. .. .	Treble	Susan E. Davis .. .. .	4	
Barrie Bateman .. .. .	2	*Clyde I. Bateman .. .. .	5	
Gladys Richardson .. .. .	3	Alex Richardson .. .. .	Tenor	

**Conducted by Alex Richardson.**

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

*Reproduced by permission of The Ringing World.*

We are grateful to all those who donated their money, time and talents to acquire and install our bells; and to today's bellringers who provide such excellent service Sunday by Sunday and for many special occasions, and volunteer countless hours training new ringers from across the Peak District.

Ian Pykett. October 2024.