

B E L L S
A CHRONOLOGY

There seems to be evidence for the existence of a tower in the 13th century. This is deduced from the retention of about 6 feet of the original N outside wall at the W end of the nave, when the 13th century N arcade was built, starting from the W. This short length of wall, now occupied by the War Memorial, seems to have been necessary to be retained to act as a buttress to the N wall of the tower. There is no information about what bells there might have been.

The present tower seems stylistically consistent with a late 15thC date, and would thus give a reason for the acquisition of new bells at that time. Humphrey Stafford, 1st Duke of Buckingham (cr 1444, held Penshurst from 1446) was killed in 1460 at the (Wars of the Roses) Battle of Northampton, supporting the Lancastrian cause (descendants of John of Gaunt). So this tower may have been a memorial to him. Or it could have been in memory of his son, Humphrey, Earl of Stafford, and father of the 2nd Duke, who died in the Lancastrian cause at the first Battle of St Albans in 1455.

The first two known bells were by John Kebyll of London, in the period 1460-80. He is known to have cast seven bells for Kent parishes (Brook, Newnham, and Sandhurst also).

It is on record that John Kebyll's three bells for Sudbury in Suffolk, were for a tower built between 1460 and 1485.

In 1619 Joseph Hatch of Ulcombe, Kent, cast a tenor bell for Penshurst. Ulcombe is SE of Maidstone, between Headcorn and Harrietsham. He cast 155 bells for Kent, his foundry being on the N side of King's Wood, in a field called 'The Welmond Ground'.

A small anecdote bears repetition here. In the translation into Spanish of the old bookmarker guide to the church, the wording 'our tenor bell of 19 cwt, was cast by Joseph Hatch' was at first mis-construed. It had been thought that our tenor (ie a singer), a Mr Bell, of this great weight, had been cast (as for a play) by JH! This gave rise to a very proper call for confirmation, *then* upon the real meaning was revealed.

In 1692 the bell frame was evidently renewed, with the installation of a principal beam bearing the inscription: 'RS 1692 TC'. Unfortunately our detailed list of churchwardens does not cover this period, but the parish register transcript might enable the wardens to be identified.

In 1701, by the generosity of Gilbert Spencer of Redleaf, a fourth bell was added to the tower, cast by Richard Phelips of Whitechapel.

The churchwardens' accounts, so far examined, have shed a little personal light on the world of the bells.

In 1730 payment was made to widow Marshall for sacrament wine and for beer for the bellringers on 3 'Publick days':

11 June	The King's Inauguration	[Geo III]	
30 October	The King's birthday		
20 January	The Prince of Wales's birthday		
			£03-13-0

And there was paid to Thomas Sears for the ringers on 4 'publick days':

29 May	The Restoration		
11 October	The King's Coronation		
6 November	Gunpowder Treason		
1 March	The Queen's birthday		
			£01-04-00

In 1732 there was 'acknowledgment of the setting up of the chimes'.

And in the following year widow Marshall was paid for the bellringers for their efforts on:

11 June			
30 October			
20 January			
14 March	The Prince of Orange married		
			£01-04-00

In 1769 Edward Kydd supplied Oyle, bell ropes and clockline. £1-10-3

On 21 May 1800 William Randell supplied a set of bell ropes. £1-1-0

In 1802 Thomas Mears of Whitechapel supplied two bells under the churchwardenship of Michael Saxby and Richard Woodhams. However, the catalogue of Parochial Documents (p.6) churchwardens' accounts, tells of the '2nd and 5th' bells being 'sold and new ones being installed'. However, there is no record of the bells supposedly sold. Could they be pre 1460 ?

On 3 March 1803 a list of ringing days was agreed at a Vestry meeting by churchwardens and other inhabitants:

5 November	[Gunpowder plot 1605]
The King's birthday	[Geo III - 4 June]
The Queen's birthday	[Charlotte - 19 May]
29 May	[Restoration 1660]

In 1810 the churchwardens paid for a new floor to the tower of the church and for the bell loft. £37-6-4½