

## The Tower and Bells



There are 6 bells in Smarden Church, the tenor weighing just over 18 cwt.  
Details of the bells:

<b>Bell</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Diameter</b>	<b>Cast</b>	<b>Founder</b>
1	6-0-5	30"	1922	Alfred Bowell
2	6-3-0	32"	1922	Alfred Bowell
3	7-2-19	34"	1922	Alfred Bowell
4	9-3-21	36 <sup>7</sup> / <sub>8</sub> "	1922	Alfred Bowell
5	13-1-21	41"	1922	Alfred Bowell
6	18-1-21	46"	1922	Alfred Bowell

N.B. Bowell measured the 2nd to be 31<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>". The diameter given is from Hayward Mills, 2004.

## History of the Bells

- 1464 William Matteras gave 5 marks towards a new bell. William Marlar gave 13s. 4d. to the new belfry.  
1498 John Skinner left 12d. to the belfry.  
1546 A new bell was cast.

- 1552 Record of 4 bells.
- 1601 A bell was cast by Robert Mot (3rd of 5). Others may have been recast at the time.
- 1609 A bell was recast.
- 1729 4th (of 5) recast by Richard Phelps.
- 1760 Treble and tenor (of 5) recast by Lester & Pack.
- 1769 2nd (of 5) recast by Pack & Chapman.
- 1922 Bells recast into a new ring of 6 by Alfred Howell.
- 1922 May: To recasting and rehanging the bells £300. Extra metal added, fixing floor under bell frame and fixing clock hammer £25. Total £325. Paid cq. on a/c £50. cq on a/c £200. cq on a/c £65 13 July 1922. cq £10 2 Feb 1923.
- 1933 9 Nov: Set of 12 muffles, tie-on, @ 2/6 each £1-10-0. Paid cash 13 Dec 1933.
- 2004 Bells rehung on ball bearings by Hayward Mills Associates.

## **Ringers Today**

We have about 6 regular ringers at Sunday services though Wednesday practices are sometimes attended by as many as 10.

You do not need to be strong, musical or brainy to learn to ring, although a sense of rhythm helps. You only need to practice one night a week and ring for service on Sunday though you will improve faster if you can do more.

## **Change Ringing**

The art of change ringing on Church Bells has developed in England over the last 500 years but it has spread to few other parts of the world outside of Great Britain.

To the uninformed, English bells may sound the same as those in other parts of the world, but our style of ringing is much more formalised. Most bells in England are hung so that they can be rung 'full circle'. The bell is bolted to an iron or wooden headstock. The headstock and bell are clamped to a wheel with the bell rope attached. A stay, fitted to the headstock, helps the bell to stand upside down by resting against the slider. The slider is fixed at one end and the other end is pushed from side to side by the stay. When the slider has moved to its limit the bell cannot turn any further.

Before change ringing can start the bells have to be rung into the 'UP' position, with the mouth of the bell pointing upwards. The rope is pulled and the bell turns through a full circle. The next time the rope is pulled the bell returns through the circle in the opposite direction. The bell must be kept from going 'over the top' otherwise the rope will wrap itself round the wheel and the ringer will be pulled upwards as is often depicted in cartoons and comedy sketches. Each time the bell swings round the clapper swings and strikes a note on the side of the bell.

N<sup>o</sup> 1  
A BELL IN HER USUAL POSITION

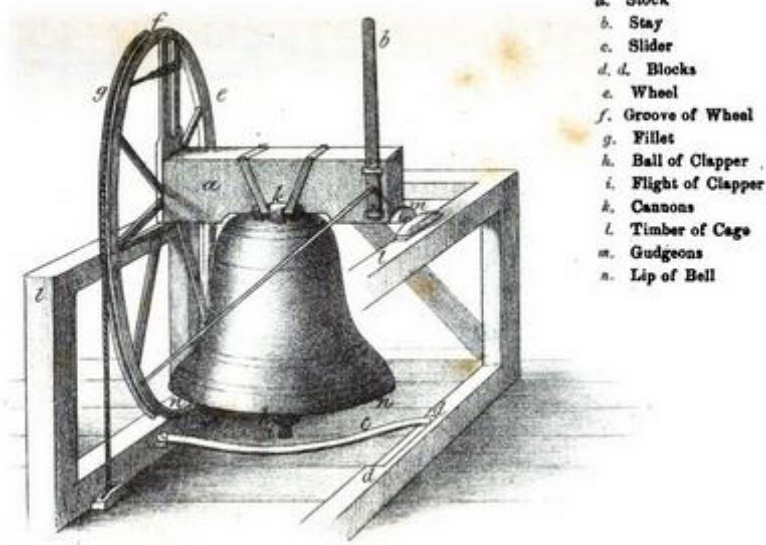


Image from <http://www.archive.org/details/changeringingan00troycggoog>

One ringer is needed for each bell and the first step is to learn to control it. The amount of time this takes varies a great deal but usually takes several hours of practice over a few weeks.

The next stage is learning to ring in Rounds - that is, ringing the bells in order, from the treble (the smallest and highest sounding bell) down to the tenor (the heaviest and deepest toned bell).

After that we start to ring 'changes'. This involves changing the order that the bells sound in, either by calling each bell individually or by following a pattern or 'method'.

This specialised exercise started many years ago. It used to be the province only of men and they accompanied their ringing with drinking large quantities of ale. Indeed they had quite a reputation in those days! (Some would suggest that this is still an important part of ringing; although it is no longer done in the tower).

Some ringing methods have been known for many years - you may have read *The Nine Tailors* by Dorothy L Sayers and recall the peal of Kent Treble Bob Major that included Lord Peter Wimsey. We are still ringing methods that were invented in the 17th century but very many new methods have been invented since.

There are simple methods, those that you hear at Smarden on a Sunday like Plain Hunting, or there are more complicated methods such as you would hear from Westminster Abbey or St Paul's Cathedral at a Royal event. They, of course, have ten bells and twelve bells whilst we have just eight.

## Why do we ring bells?

This is a question that is asked of us at regular intervals. Not surprisingly the most frequently heard answer is, quite simply, 'for the Glory of God' and to call people to

worship. Church bells are rung for Sunday service all over the country. We also ring for special services whenever possible and we can be asked to ring for Weddings, Christenings and Funerals. We ring to celebrate special events, such as the ending of hostilities in a conflict or ordination to the priesthood. On solemn occasions the bells are rung half-muffled. This causes all bells to ring alternately strident and soft and is a distinctive sound. A leather pad is strapped to one side of the clapper ball to achieve the muffling. Ringing on Remembrance Sunday is half-muffled.

Sometimes we ring quarter peals. These can last for about forty-five minutes and usually comprise 1260 changes; that means that each bell sounds 1260 times in a different order. Some of us have even rung full peals or 5000 or more changes that last for three hours. In order to achieve this the method has to be fully memorised and practised. Concentration has to be maintained throughout to avoid the peal "firing out" (going wrong) and thus being void.

If we are on holiday in UK and some other countries it is possible to visit towers in the locality and invariably we are warmly welcomed You can also attend residential courses in different parts of the UK to improve your ringing.

We hope that we give both pleasure and joy to those who hear us and, in a restless world, a reminder of the place of the Church in our lives.

We are always looking for new ringers to join our band.

If you would like to find out more please contact our **Tower Captain – Tim Munt on 01622 891724 / 07590 918994 or come along to a practice night on a Wednesday evening between 7.45pm and 9.15pm.**