

Westminster Cathedral – three small bells

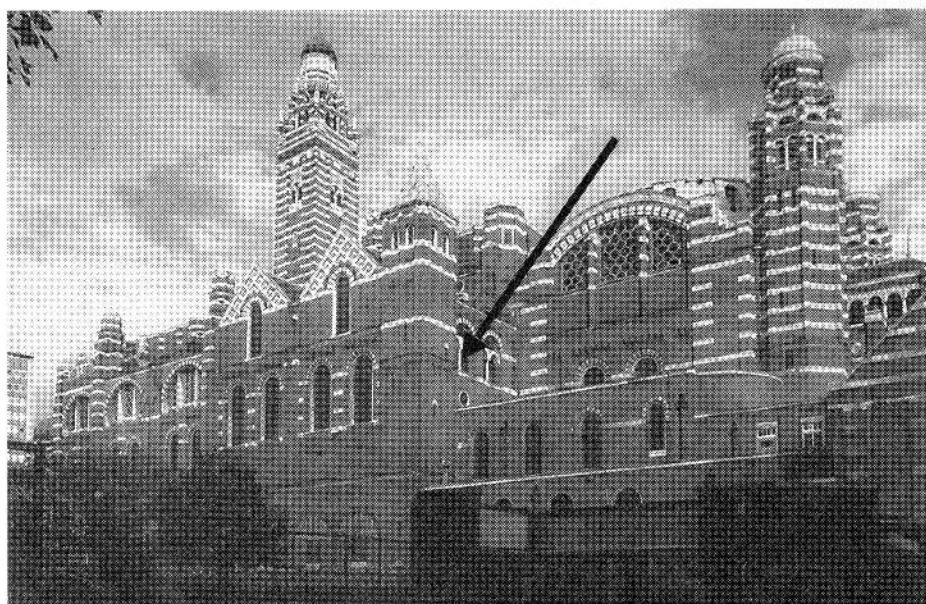
In the article on the recommissioning of Big Edward (RW 1996, p.848), the last sentence reads: "On every other day of the year the Angelus is tolled on one of the three small bells which hang above the Lady Chapel". These bells are visible from outside in Morpeth Terrace, if one knows where to look. I first saw them after reading in the *Universe* that they had been rung at the Coronation, and wondered where they had come from; but only this summer did I succeed in getting permission to examine them.

The three bells are clamped in a row to a girder in one arch above the Lady Chapel. A piece of some soft material, probably leather, has been sandwiched between the crowns of the bells and the girder. Each bell is clamped to the girder with three bolts; the largest has two additional, unused, holes in the crown, forming a square.

The inscriptions and dimensions of these bells are:

Flank	Soundbow	Diameter		Internal Height	
		in.	mm.	in.	mm.
RAPHAEL	—	19	485	13½	343
MICHAEL	—	21	536	15½	391
GABRIEL	... SOUL OF	36½	922	25½	650
A1903D	MARY				
	FLORENCE HIS				
	WIFE+PRAY FOR				
	THE GOOD				
	ESTATE OF				
	HENRY HIVES...				

The remarkable thing here is, that except for the word GABRIEL which is raised, all the inscriptions are sunken. Using the point of a key to scratch the dirt out of the letters, in order to read an inscription, is a new experience to me. Except on very ancient bells cast by the lost wax process, sunken inscriptions are a rarity. Part of the inscription on Gabriel could not be read, as it is on the outside; and it was not possible to climb out onto the sill because of wire netting fitted to exclude pigeons. To read the missing part, one would need a ladder to reach the sill from the roof of the Lady Chapel below.



Westminster Cathedral showing location of the three small bells. Photo taken from Morpeth Terrace.

Although these bells do not bear the name of a bellfounder, or any foundry mark, the following quote was found in the cathedral archives: "Crowning the eastern view, rises the window-pierced circle of the sanctuary dome, flanked by the two white cupolas of the turrets (Plate X). The south-east turret contains three bells named Michael, Raphael and Gabriel (the gift of the Sheldrake Brothers), which were cast by Mr. S. B. Goslin at his foundry in Southwark. Their tones are never heard, because persons living in the neighbourhood found them disturbing and made a request for their silence to Cardinal Vaughan."

The last sentence is fortunately no longer true; the three bells are now sounded by external electromagnetic hammers. None of these bells has an internal clapper, or crown staple from which to hang one; nor are there any marks on the insides of the soundbows to

suggest that any of these bells was ever so sounded. There is no mention of this founder in a comprehensive list of English bell-founders². Can any reader tell us who this Mr Goslin was, whether any more of his bells are still extant and whether the foundry in Southwark still exists?

Gracious thanks are expressed to Mr Frank Warrender for seeking information on these bells in the cathedral archives, and for admitting me to parts of the building not open to the public.

ALAN BLAIR

1. Winefride De l'Hôpital (Grand-daughter of the cathedral architect John Francis Bentley); Westminster Cathedral and its Architect, Hutchinson and Co. London, 1919.
2. H. B. Walters; Church Bells of England, Oxford University Press 1912, pp.367-384.

Jewel in the crown?

Whilst on business in India earlier this year, I was able to visit Poona and, with the permission of the incumbent, Father Thomas, see the bells at the Church of the Holy Name.

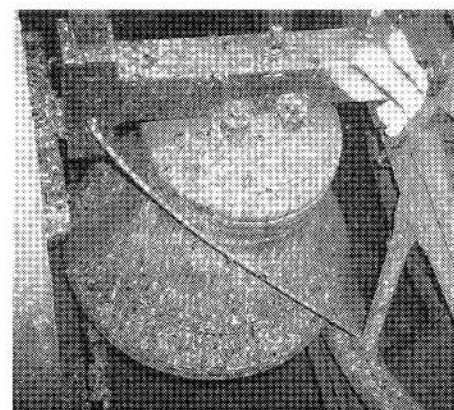
Poona (now Hindi-fied as Pune) is some 192 kilometres from Bombay by rail – a four-hour journey – and not much more than half that distance as the crow flies. Of equal interest to me was the rail journey from Bombay to Poona by the Deccan Express, travelling on the locomotive for the section up the Western Ghats, the 700 tonne train being assisted by three banking locomotives up gradients as steep as 1 in 30.

The city's situation in the Sahyadri Hills five hundred metres or so above sea level makes the climate much more comfortable than Bombay, and the city became the traditional resort of the English in the area for the hotter parts of the year, and the base for much of the British Indian army. It is not a surprise that English bells should be found in such a place, but it is something of a puzzle that the Church of the Holy Name should be the location for them. A Roman Catholic church, it is not sited in a noticeably English part of the city, or particularly close to the old garrison area.

Although other churches I visited, such as Bombay Anglican Cathedral and St Mary's in Fort St George, Madras, would look quite at home in the City or East End of London, the Church of the Holy Name is built in an elaborate Italianate style, as is its imposing detached tower. This tower, however, houses a very familiar-looking Taylor eight, given in Dove as 25 cwt, and dated 1893. They are hung on plain bearings in a H-frame, and appear to be complete with all fittings except ropes and pulleys, having traditional wooden stays and metal sliders running on a bar attached to the frame.

Given the absence of pulleys I would be surprised if they had ever been rung full-circle, and their situation at the top of a thin, free-standing brick tower would probably make them rather a handful, particularly for teaching and maintaining a band. A couple of the bells are rung by "clocking", and the main use seems to be as passing bells – I was asked not to try striking any as "people would ask who has expired".

Father Thomas and his daughter Elizabeth told me they had had a number of ringing visitors, but it seems only two previous visits have been reported in *The Ringing World*. Pat Cannon visited in 1944; somewhat later Mr P.



G. Bellamy-Knights was able to see the bells but not photograph them, as the tower housed an air-raid siren during a period of tension between India and Pakistan. The photographs of the bells accompanying this item may therefore be the first to be published in *The Ringing World*.

Has anyone any knowledge of the circumstances in which these bells were installed, and of any ringing activity that may ever have taken place?

WILLIAM BARTER