

THE BELLS OF ST.MARTIN IN THE FIELDS, WESTMINSTER

**An account written by Chris Pickford for a proposed book
about the Swan Bell Tower in Perth, Western Australia,
where the old bells from St.Martin's have hung since 2001.**

Note: This account (written in 2011) has been newly researched from primary sources and includes a great deal of fresh material that was previously unknown. It traces the more or less complete history of St.Martin's bells before the old church gave way to the new in the 1720s and shows how the ring grew. The history of ringing is also explored.

The bells of St.Martin-in-the-Fields

This chapter concerns the bells of St.Martin-in-the-Fields – the bells now at Perth. Without them, there would have been no project and no Bell Tower. But what was their history, and how did they come to be available for relocation to Perth?

This section therefore aims to provide an authoritative account of the bells based on fresh research combined with a thorough re-appraisal of previous accounts – explaining for the first time how the bells of the mediaeval church evolved by augmentation (and increase of metal) to form the ring of twelve installed in 1725-7. A number of statements made in the past about the bells have been re-examined and found to be untrue, and this account will amend these errors and offer a fresh – and hopefully more accurate – interpretation of the facts.

The Church and parish

The origins of the church and parish can be traced back to Norman times. Originally in the open fields belonging to the monks of Westminster Abbey, St.Martin's was first built in the C12th. It was definitely in existence as a chapel of the mother parish of St.Margaret's by 1222. It became a parish church in its own right under Letters Patent granted by King Henry VIII in 1542. Although commonly regarded as being in London, the parish actually lies within the City of Westminster which is an entirely separate administrative area from the "square mile" of the City of London which lies some distance to the east. Still relatively rural when the earliest maps of London and Westminster were published in the 1560s, the area round Charing Cross and St.Martin's was developed in the seventeenth century and by the 1620s the population of the parish was greatly increased.

The church we know today is by no means the first on the site. Moreover, its impressive situation at the north eastern corner of Trafalgar Square is of relatively recent creation. Until the early nineteenth century the church was tucked away in an area crowded with narrow streets, shops, workshops and dwellings. The clearance of the area in a scheme of gradual improvements was begun by the architect John Nash in 1826 and continued with the laying out of the fine square in front of the National Gallery of 1838. This eventually created the fine open vista which allows the church to stand so proudly in the backdrop to one of England's great public spaces.

Of the architecture of the original chapel little is known, as even before the building of the present church in 1721-6 it had been much altered and enlarged. A virtual rebuilding took place in 1542-4 after it became a parish church, which was again rebuilt and much enlarged in 1606-9. It is clear, however, that the old chapel had a tower or belfry in the north-west corner that was later to be rebuilt in 1663-9 and capped with a new cupola in 1672.

The first bells

The tower, of course, contained bells. The first definite information on these come from the first volume of Churchwardens accounts – no longer extant, but transcribed and published in an edition by J.V. Kitto in 1901 – commencing in 1524/5. In the first few years, the accounts refer to the “littill bell” (1525), “Midull bell” (1532-3) and “grete bell” (1528), suggesting that there were then three bells in the belfry. There was also a separate “santis bell” (1533-4), still referred to in the accounts as the sanctus bell until at least 1592 even though its original usage would have lapsed after the abolition of the Mass.

In 1537 the old bells were all recast for £13 and hung in a new frame at a cost of £5.13.4. The number of bells is not indicated, but the accounts for 1538-9 mention the first payment to the ringers (4s) and purchase of four bellropes – possibly implying that there were by now four bells. Despite a later reference to the middle bell in 1567, the accounts otherwise seem to indicate that from 1538 until 1584 the number of bells at St.Martin’s was four. During that period several bells were recast or replaced.

One of the St.Martin’s bells was recast at Houndsditch by an unidentified founder in 1545. A Mr. Cardon gave ten shillings towards the cost of the “casting of the lytyll bell” for which “the bellfounder” received a little over two pounds. In late mediaeval times London’s bellfounding industry was concentrated just outside the eastern bounds of the City, at Houndsditch and at nearby Aldgate where the early predecessors of the Whitechapel Foundry were based. William Culverden (fl.1497-d.1522) certainly worked at Houndsditch, as did his successor Thomas Lawrence who, however, was in Norwich by 1541. The Royal gunfounders John and Robert Owen built a foundry at Houndsditch in 1532. They are perhaps most likely to have cast the St.Martin’s bell in 1545 but this is by no means certain. Another candidate is Peter Bawde who operated as a bellfounder and gunfounder at Houndsditch in the 1530s but seems to have been working in Sussex by 1543.

Another broken bell was recast in 1570 with extra metal at a cost of £3.2.4. Again, the bellfounder is not named. The accounts show that the sum of £3.12.2. was collected in the parish “to paye for the newe castinge of the broken bell”.

In 1573 the tower was adorned for the first time by a clock, put up at the expense of “mr Hatton, mr Mackwilliams and the rest of the gentlemen of the paryshe”. This showed the time on an outside dial and struck the hours on one of the bells, both the dial and the clock hammer being mentioned in the later accounts. In 1605 two more dials were added, and the accounts record alterations to the works of the clock in 1607 and 1614 by Richard Patricke “smith” and Leonard Tenant “Clockmaker” respectively. In an inventory of 1617 it is described as “one greate clock of iron with two wayts belonging to it”. Originally striking on one of the ringing bells, the hammer was made “to stricke uppon ye Saints bell” instead in 1628. This bell had just been recast by Thomas Bartlet of Whitechapel, who had increased its weight from 83kg (1-2-15) to 146kg (2-3-13) to make it more suitable for the purpose.

In 1579 a collection was made to raise funds for recasting the great bell. On this occasion the founder was Hugh Walker, a Londoner who is also known to have cast a bell for St.Mary Woolchurch Haw in the City in 1584. His new tenor for St.Martin’s was cast successfully at the second attempt in 1580 and weighed 512kg (10-0-9) – this being the first definite indication of the weight of the largest bell in the ring. The weight was increased slightly, the old tenor having weighed only 473kg (9-1-6), with the addition of 39.5kg (87lbs) of extra metal. Of the total cost of £4.18.3, the sum of £2.19.0 was raised by a special collection and the rest was borne from church funds.

Throughout the Elizabethan period, the bells were heavily used with the ringers being paid at parish expense to ring on many public occasions. The use of the bells is a subject in itself, to be covered later. However, the need for a more impressive set of bells befitting the status of the church and able to make a strong impact when rung for royal and state occasions led to the enlargement of the ring, both in numbers and in weight.

Enhancing the ring

In some historical accounts of the church it is stated that the bells were recast and augmented to a full ring of eight by order of Queen Elizabeth I in the 1570s. There is no evidence at all

to support this claim, and rather a lot to refute it. The number of bells was not increased to eight until 1714 and the accounts make it pretty clear that the cost of any work done on the bells in the Elizabethan period was borne by the parish and not by the Queen.

The old bells were, however, replaced by an entirely new set in 1584, a subscription having been raised for the purpose in the previous year. A list of subscribers entered in the account book shows that the collection raised a total of £25.4.6. in all, the principal contributors being the Rt. Hon. Sir Thomas Bromley knight Lord Chancellor of England with £2.13.4., Thomas Fowler with £1.10.0., The Earl of Rutland with £1, six people giving 10s each, two of whom one was Christopher Hayward, the Vicar, donating 5s each.

The work was carried out by Robert Mot, the Aldgate bellfounder, who provided a new set of five bells, the number being clearly indicated by the accounts in which the treble, fourth and fifth bells are mentioned. The new tenor probably weighed about 750kg (15 cwt), and the total weights of the bells was increased from somewhere in the region of 1500kg (30 cwt) to about 2500kg (50 cwt) as is clear from details recorded in the later accounts.

On 6 May 1584 Mot received £14.6s. “for ye castinge of our belles and for the over waight of ye newe Metall”, the carpenter was paid £6 for hanging them and a Mr. Westley had 10s for tuning them. Quite a lot of money was needed to pay for incidental expenses, including 5s.2d. spent at the White Lyon “for A supper for ye ringers of London” and 1s.6d. “to make ye ringers Drinke”.

Mot’s new bells were not entirely successful, however, and only two years later the forebell (or treble) has to be recast. For this work the parish went back to Hugh Walker who had recast the old tenor in 1580. For “ye newe Treable Bell & for ye newe castinge of ye old fore bell” Walker was paid £13.7s. in 1586. The wording is slightly confusing, and interpretation is not helped by other entries which show that the Churchwardens of 1585 collected £15 “towards the newe great bell” and handed it over their successors on 20 February 1585/6 as money held “at the appointment of ye Mrs [masters] of the parishe for ye providinge of a newe Bell”.

Despite the implication that a further bell was being added, the balance of evidence seems to indicate that the treble was simply recast – unless it is the mention of a fifth bell in 1584 that is erroneous. If that were the case, then maybe Mot only cast four in 1584 with Walker recasting one and adding another in 1586. Unfortunately we are reliant on Kitto’s transcript, and it is not now possible to refer to the original accounts for clarification.

In 1592 another London bellfounder entered upon the scene to try his hand at providing bells that met with the approval of the parish authorities. This was Lawrence Wright, a founder largely known from documentary references since only one example of his work survived into modern times. This was a bell at Thurnham in Kent (recast in 1886) dated 1586 which bore a small mark with the royal insignia E (crown) R, three bells and a rose and also the founder’s initials L W. Wright cast bells for a handful of churches in and around London between 1586 and 1599, and there existed a chemist’s mortar dated 1595 which bore his name in full. Chiefly, though, he is known for his failures at St.Michael Cornhill in 1587 and at Hillingdon in about 1590.

At St.Martin’s, Wright recast the fifth or great bell in 1592, returning in the following year to provide new bells in exchange for the treble and fourth of Mot’s ring. The recasting of the tenor in 1592 cost £10, while in 1593 the accounts show that the parish £8 to “Laurence wright ye bell founder for ye exchange of the iiiijth bell beinge craket & for ye exchange of ye treable bell”. Again, the cost was met by subscription with a list of “ye names of such As weare contributory to ye Bells” being entered in the account book.

Starting in 1595/6 the account books contain annual inventories of church goods. These list the bells and from this date there is no further need for any doubt over the number of bells in the tower – by then there were five bells in the ring plus the saints bell, the number remaining unchanged right through until the series ends in 1657. The actual wording in the first of these inventories reads “It’m in the Steeple v great Bells one sainctus bell And a Clocke”. Later ones also refer to the “clappers, wheels and ropes” (e.g. 1608) or “stocks, wheelles & ropes” (1616/7). The cost of repairs to the fittings placed a heavy demand on the

parish budget and the accounts contain careful descriptions of the expenditure – not without interest, but too complicated and detailed for examination here.

A heavier ring, 1604

Clearly the bells cast in the 1580s and 1590s were never considered to be entirely satisfactory, and in 1604 the churchwardens had another clear-out of the belfry. This time they contracted with Robert Mot of Whitechapel. The records contain the by now usual list of contributors and sums received “towards the new casting of the Bells, beeing five in number, with their frames & other their materials”. The accounts record the expenditure on “The Charges of the new Bells, with suche mettalls as was added, with the quantitie & prices, as also the making the frames new with new Iron worke and other their materials”. In other words, we have an extremely detailed record not only of the work done but also of how it was paid for.

Of particular interest and importance are the very precise accounts of the old metal traded in to the bellfounder (weighing 2450kg or 48-1-1) and of the 570kg (11-0-24) “of new mettall to make the bells bigger”. This gives us the first definite evidence of the size of the bells, showing that the five bells had total weight of 3020kg (59-1-25) – suggesting individual bell weights of 360, 400, 560, 710 and 970kg (7, 8, 11, 14 and 19 cwt). A later record shows the exact weight of the second bell to have been 370kg (7-1-4). This is a little lighter than might have been expected, suggesting that the trebles were smaller - and the tenors correspondingly larger - than in the approximate figures shown here.

The accounts also record the purchase of new timber for the bellframes and for stocks, payments to the sawyers for cutting the timber, purchase of new ironwork, carriage of the bells to and from the foundry at Aldgate, sums paid to “the Tuner of the bells” and other incidental expenses including twelve shillings paid for “mending the pavements that were broken when the new bells were first hanged”. Evidently some damage was caused in getting the bells in and out of the tower. The main workmen involved were John Warwick, the carpenter who contracted for hanging the bells and did the work on the bellframes, William Smith and “Arrowsmith the smith in harts horne lane” who made the new ironwork, and several other carpenters and artisans who are named in the accounts. Interestingly, the work was not handled as a single contract but instead it was done by a large team of independent tradesmen working alongside each other.

One of these was Philip Walton, the bell-hanger. Walton’s name occurs in the records of several London parishes between 1604 and 1630. Originally a carpenter, he evidently became a specialist in the hanging of church bells at a time when ringing was gaining in popularity as a pastime and in the very early days of change-ringing. At St.Martin’s he received three pounds “for taking downe the old bells and taking up the newe & making two new wheeles and one new stocke, three new braces & a Catch as appears by bill”. Walton was to be associated with the bells of St.Martin’s for almost three decades, his name as “bell carpinter” or “bellhanger” occurring in the accounts frequently from 1614 until 1631 when another bellhanger, Robert Turner, took over responsibility for any necessary repairs to the fittings.

One of the new bells may have been exchanged by the founder quite soon after the new ring was installed, the accounts for 1605 recording a payment to Thomas Wilson “for carrying & Recarrying one of the Bells” and another to Edward Rowland “letting down of the Bell and drawing up the same”. It was quite common for bells to be guaranteed for a year and a day from the time of first ringing, and so the cost of recasting would have been borne by the founder. The bell is not identified, but it may have been the third as the accounts include a payment “for Iron used for the third Bell”. In 1607, Robert Mot recast another bell – this time the fourth – at a cost to the parish of £10.16.11.

One other bell required recasting during the lifetime of the 1604 ring. This was the second, which was recast in 1631 by Thomas Bartlet “neere the Barres without Aldgate” in east London – Thomas having previously recast the sanctus bell for use with the clock in 1628 as already noted - the new bell having a weight of 373kg (7-1-10). Thomas Bartlet, the

founder, died between December 1631 when the bell was cast and 26 March 1632 when the account for £5.15.4. was settled with his widow, Eleanor Bartlett, who gave a bond “to warrant the said Bell to continue sounde, and tuneable for a yeare”. The Bartlet bell only lasted just over fifteen years and it was again recast in 1648 by Francis Knight of Reading and increased in weight by 25kg (56lbs) to 398kg (7-3-10).

So, by 1650 St.Martin’s had a ring of five bells and a sanctus/clock bell as follows:

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Founder and date</i>	<i>Weight</i>	
		<i>Kg.</i>	<i>C.q.l.</i>
1.	Robert Mot, 1604	360	7 cwt
2.	Francis Knight, 1648	398	7-3-10
3.	Robert Mot, 1605	560	11 cwt
4.	Robert Mot, 1607	710	14 cwt
5.	Robert Mot, 1604	970	19 cwt
Sanctus	Thomas Bartlet, 1628	146	2-3-13

Shortly after the new bells were cast in 1604, the church itself underwent extensive rebuilding and enlargement. It was in 1607-9 that the building was remodelled in the form in which it survived until it was demolished to make way for the present church in 1721. Its appearance is preserved in two later engravings by George Vertue, and there is a mid-eighteenth century plan on which the chancel and great west door are shown as having been built in 1607 and 1609 respectively. The old tower stood within the body of the building at the west end of the north aisle.

The accounts for 1604 refer to a payment of twelve shillings “for seaven foot of spikes uppon plate for the particon betweene the belfarie and the vestry contayning lij spikes at iijd the spike” – clearly indicating a need to deter unwanted visitors from entering the space at the bottom of the tower, which may have been used as the ringing room at the time. References such as this help to indicate how the space in the church and tower was used.

Such payments also add to our knowledge of the appearance of the tower. In 1605 there is a payment for “gilding and setting the vane upon the toppe of the turret” at the apex of the steeple. The vane was taken down and refurbished in 1621 and in 1629 a Mr. Brewer was paid eighteen shillings “for a plate of Copper to make the Vane to sett on the top of the Steeple”. In that year the vestry had agreed to the addition of “a lanthorne or Cage on the top thereof for the Saints bell”.

The clock dials were another feature adorning the tower, as were the ornamental sundials that are first mentioned in 1623. In 1627 a painter named John Gomersall received twenty shillings “for takeing the declination of the Sunn & placing the Cocks of the two Sunn Dyalls & for drawing ye Lines of Cancer & Capricorne of the equinoctial uppon the dyall on ye south side of ye steeple” and a further £4.0.10 “for painting and gilding the sun dial on the south side of the steeple”.

The tower can be seen as having a dual importance to the parish and community, both as the home of the bells that were rung for public occasions as well as being used for church purposes and also as a visual landmark. The first indication of trouble with the tower came in 1640-41 when the parish incurred expenditure on minor repairs. In 1651-2 there are payments to Captain Ryder “for worke don about the Steeple” and also for work “about the church”. This is the first mention of the architect Richard Ryder (d.1683) who, with John Davenport, was to eventually be responsible for the rebuilding of the tower in 1663-9.

New tower and bells 1663-9

Serious planning for the building of a new tower began in earnest in February 1656/7 when the parish bore the costs of “severall meetings with Master workmen concerning the new building of the steeple”. There were two reasons for the rebuilding. First – although the bells continued to be rung right up until the old tower was taken down – there were concerns about the safety of the structure. Second, the parishioners wanted something grander – a tower that

was of a better architectural quality – to adorn their church. Ryder and Davenport surveyed the tower and in 1662 a committee was appointed to oversee the necessary work.

The annotated plan of the old church indicates that the steeple and belfry were “cased with stone 1669”. Examination of the parish records shows, however, that the work was more of a rebuilding than merely a re-facing of the old structure, although perhaps some of the lower parts of the mediaeval tower were retained. Richard Ryder was a Master Carpenter by trade, eventually succeeding John Davenport in that role in the Office of Works in 1668, but he was also an architect, surveyor and speculative builder who was actively employed on a wide range of projects in the London and the South East of England from the 1640s to the 1670s. The tower of St.Martin’s was a notable example of his work.

Begun in 1663-4, but the project suffered a number of setbacks and work stopped in 1665-6. Although a rate had been agreed it proved hard to collect all the money required to pay for the work. After a gap of a few years work resumed in 1668 and the tower was eventually completed in 1669-70. The main contractor was Anthony Ellis. The new tower was in three main stages with diagonal buttresses almost to the top. The lower stage had a door in the west side. The middle stage evidently contained the ringing chamber, lit by two-light classical windows. The top stage had clock dials and two-light belfry windows. At the top, the tower had an open parapet behind which was later added a cupola built in 1672 to a design provided by Christopher Wren.

The original estimate of 1663 for the rebuilding included provision of £50 “For a New bell frame for 5 bells with new stocks & hanging of them”. By the time the work was nearing completion six years later the parish had more ambitious plans for its bells. Rather than simply put the old bells back in the new tower the parishioners decided to have a new ring. Various donors came forward, including the Earl of Northumberland who gave ten pounds “as his hon free guift towards ye charge of our bells and Chymes”.

Between 1645 and 1652 the bellhangers and bellfounders John and Christopher Hodson had been looking after the old bells at St.Martin’s, replacing defective fittings, making new wheels, repairing clappers, casting new brasses (or bearings) etc. By the late 1660s the Hodsons had a successful bellfoundry at which they cast the great bell of St.Mary-le-Bow in about 1669 – a bell of 2500kg (50 cwt) – to which seven more were added in 1677 replace the famous “Bow Bells” lost in the Great Fire of 1666.

To the east of London, the old foundry that supplied the original bells in 1604 was still active under Anthony Bartlet (d.1676). Thomas Bartlet had cast the clock bell in 1628 and recast the second in 1631. The Bartlets were among the predecessors of the present Whitechapel Bell Foundry, and were themselves the successors of Robert Mot who cast bells for St.Martin’s at various dates between 1584 and 1607.

Interestingly the commission for providing new bells for St.Martin’s was not given to either of these founders with previous associations with the church, but went instead to William Eldridge I of Chertsey. The Eldridges had been bellfounders at Wokingham and at Horsham before moving to Chertsey in about 1620. Thomas Eldridge (fl.1565-1592) was the first of a line of founders which came to an end in 1714. William took over the foundry from Bryan Eldridge in 1662 and went on to cast a number of complete rings for churches in the adjacent counties including those for Chelsea (c.1673), Isleworth and Woking (both 1684), Albury (1695) and Rusper (1699). Bryan Eldridge had previously cast rings for Lingfield (1648), Fulham (1652) and Harmondsworth (1658).

On 3 May 1669 the vestry considered “how many bells shalbe hanged in ye Tower”. It was agreed that there should be “Six good & sonable bells” and the churchwardens were empowered to obtain them “with all convenient speed” and instructed “to take care alsoe that they bee well hanged”. Although the accounts name Eldridge as the founder of the new bells, which must have been cast in 1669, the entries are tantalisingly vague on exactly what was done. There is no explicit information regarding the weight of the new bells, but it seems reasonable to suppose that the total weight of the ring of six would have been around 4100kg (4 tons) with a tenor of about 1170kg (23 cwt). The later accounts from 1672 and inventories of c.1675 and 1708 confirm that from this date there were six bells in the ring.

Among the payments in the accounts for 1669-70 are the following relating to the bells:

Paid Mr Eldridge the bellfounder as by his bills appeare	£198.2.0.
Charges in taking downe ye Bells loading them & unloading them out & in getting them up	£1.15.6.
Expended at severall tymes in adviseing with workmen about ye bell frame and hanging the bells	£1.2.6.
To the Ringers at severall tymes for ringing and giving their Judgment concerning the goodness of the Bells	£1.15.0.
Laid out in goieng to Chercy 3 times to take ye weight of our old bells and to see the new bells cast som of ye parishioners being with me	£7.5.6.

In addition there are payments to Mr. Wilcox, the carpenter, and Mr. Parbury, the smith, who supplied the woodwork and ironwork for the new tower and also for the bells.

At about the same time a new clock was supplied by Mr. Wise – a London clockmaker of the period, probably John Wise senior who made turret clocks for St.Sepulchre’s Holborn in 1671 and St.Dionis Backchurch Street in 1686. The accounts record three payments to the clockmaker totalling between 7 March 1669 and 3 Aug 1670. There are various references to the chimes, but it is unclear whether this relates to quarter chimes on the clock or a tune-playing chiming machine.

Also mentioned in the accounts for 1669-70 are the sundials. A Mr. Pynke was paid £3.10.0 “for ye south sun diall and other painting about ye window & diall in ye Church & Steeple”. The later prints do not show a sundial on the south side of the tower, however, but only a large one over the great west window and main entrance to the old church.

As already mentioned, the tower was completed in 1672-3 by the addition of a cupola on the top. This was designed by Christopher Wren and built by Wilcox, the carpenter who had worked with Anthony Ellis on the rebuilding of the tower. Presumably the Bartlet bell of 1628 was hung in the newly completed cupola and reconnected to the clock.

Nell Gwynn and the ringers

The story goes that Nell Gwynn, the actress and long-term mistress of King Charles II, left money for the ringers at St.Martin’s. Born in Hereford in 1650, Nell first appeared on the London stage in 1665 and by 1668 her name was being associated with that of the King. Pepys referred to her as “pretty, witty Nell” and to this day she is still viewed by many as an archetypal figure of Restoration England. From the 1670s she lived in Pall Mall where she died, aged only 37, on 14 November 1687. She was buried at St.Martin’s. Writing in 1819 in his *New Picture of London*, Samuel Leigh describes St.Martin’s church and its “excellent peal of twelve bells”. He also states “The celebrated Nell Gwyn left the ringers of this church, she being buried in its ground, a sum of money to supply them with entertainment weekly, and which, we believe, they still enjoy.” The first of these statements may be true but the second is not, as the ringers ceased to enjoy these perks many years before this particular book was written.

Since there is no mention of provision for the ringers in Nell Gwynn’s will, some writers have concluded that the story must be apocryphal. However, the explanation could be that this was not a bequest but a benefaction made to the parish during Nell Gwynn’s lifetime. There is some evidence to support this view.

A writer in *The Champion*, June 3rd, 1742, No. 398, on ‘the Fraudulent Practices of Parish Vestries, and in particular that of St.Martin’s-in-the-fields,’ observes, ‘I cannot forbear mentioning one action more laid to the charge to these honest men, viz – Nell Gwynn, player, left a handsome income yearly to St.Martin’s on condition, that on every Thursday evening in the year, there should be six men employed, for the space of one hour in ringing, for which they were to have a roasted shoulder of mutton and ten shillings for beer; but this legacy is of late diverted some other way, and no such allowance is now given.’

This seems to suggest quite clearly that such a benefaction had been made, but that by 1742 the funds had been diverted - and fraudulently so, it is implied - to other uses. At all events, any such payment in meat and drink to the ringers lapsed so far back that its existence

had been all but forgotten very long ago. It is mentioned, though, in a book on *Curious Church Customs* of 1895 by William Andrews.

However, the mention of six ringers is interesting and significant, since St. Martin's had only six bells from 1669 to 1714. Thus the supposed benefaction ties up quite neatly with what we know of the bells and ringers as they were during the later years of Nell Gwynn's short life. It seems likely that she could well have made such provision could well have been made in the 1670 or in the 1680s when the six bells were still quite new.

From six to eight, 1714

It might perhaps be thought that the work undertaken in 1669 would most likely represent the last major outlay on the bells before the comprehensive rebuilding of the church in 1721-6. Indeed, previous writers have assumed that Mot's ring – modified only by the recasting or replacement of a couple of bells – survived down to the time of the rebuilding.

It was therefore surprising to find that in his description of the church in his book *Pietas Londinensis: or the present ecclesiastical state of London* of 1714 the writer James Paterson stated that the stone tower contained "eight Bells newly Cast, and hung up this Month of March 1714". New bells, cast and hung just seven years before the old church was taken down for rebuilding and only 11 years before the casting of the Rudhall ring? Surely this must be a mistake.

Reference to the parish records shows, however, that such a recasting – the provision of an entirely new ring of bells with two more added to complete an octave – did indeed take place. One of the things to be borne in mind when studying history is that people living in the past would have been unaware of future developments and events that are obvious to us with the benefit of hindsight. Clearly in 1714 there can have been no immediate intention of pulling down the old church and building a new one, and future plans were therefore no obstacle to dealing with a current problem - or perhaps it was felt that the bells could be simply moved to a new church later.

The old bells, it would seem, had fallen into a very poor state of repair. On 15 November 1713 the Vestry met to consider the matter, the Churchwardens having reported that "most of the Bells of the Church were broken and useless". A month later, the Vestry met again and gave orders to the Churchwardens to "treat with Matthew Bagley and Richard Phelps Bell Founders which of them will cast the Bells the best and cheapest, and report the same to the next Vestry". After further consideration, the Vestry chose Bagley over Phelps and on 13 January 1713/14 they approved the draft articles between Bagley and the parish "for casting the old Bells and adding two new Bells".

Of the two founders, Bagley was in some ways the less obvious candidate of the two. Phelps, the proprietor of the Whitechapel Foundry, took over from the Bartlets in 1700 and during his first ten years he succeeded in developing the business, casting new rings of bells for places as far afield as Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the North-east and Plymouth in the West of England as well as in the counties around London. He cast the original great hour bell, weighing nearly five tons, for St. Paul's Cathedral in 1710. In 1711 he cast a heavy ring of eight for High Wycombe and in 1714 he was engaged to cast an octave of similar size to that at St. Martin-in-the-Fields for the London City church of St. Magnus the Martyr in Lower Thames Street. It was Phelps who laid the foundations for the very great success of the Whitechapel founders in the middle and later years of the eighteenth century.

Bagley, on the other hand, was better known as a founder of ordnance than as a maker of bells. He is believed to have been connected to the bellfounding Bagleys who operated very successfully at Chacombe, Northamptonshire, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but the exact relationship has not yet been established. He became a member of the Founder's Company in 1686. In 1693 he cast two bells for Chigwell in Essex. He is not mentioned again until 1705 when he took over the Royal Foundry in Moorfields previously operated by the Wightmans. William Wightman began casting bells in about 1680, being joined in 1685 by Philip Wightman who later took sole control of the business from 1694 until his death in 1702. Between them they cast a number of notable rings, including the

eights for St.Clement Danes in Westminster (1693) and Dartford (1702) and sixes for Mortlake (1694), Tottenham (1696), St.Albans Abbey (1699) and - further from London - at Yalding in Kent (1696) and Wirksworth in Derbyshire (1702).

In 1700 Philip Wightman took out a long lease of the Moorfields property, owned by the Corporation of the City of London, with a clause enabling him to improve the property by building “a workhouse for casting & founding bells & guns”. He died only a couple of years later, and by 1705 Matthew Bagley had taken occupation of the foundry under a sub-lease from his widow. Bagley certainly cast bells there, but apart from one ring of five made for Northbourne in Kent in 1711 only a handful are known. Also of this period were a small number of bells by James Bagley (1710-1718) and one by Julia Bagley (1719). While the Wightmans had cast several rings of the size and number required for St.Martin-in-the-Fields, their successor was much less experienced as a bellfounder - and Bagley’s output was certainly very small compared with that of his contemporary rival at Whitechapel.

Bagley it was, then, who cast the new bells and provided St.Martin-in-the-Fields with a full ringing peal of eight. The bells were to be short-lived, however, lasting only eleven years. So too was the bellfounder, who died as a result of a horrific accident in the Moorfields foundry in May 1716. His son, Matthew Bagley jun, was also killed and in all sixteen people suffered serious injuries in the blast which was caused by pouring molten metal into damp moulds. The business never recovered, and after Andrew Schalch became Master Founder to the Board of Ordnance in 1718 the Royal Foundry moved to Woolwich. Julia and William Bagley were declared bankrupt in 1719.

The St.Martin’s churchwardens’ accounts contain various payments relating to the work on the bells, including the cost of transport of the old bells to Moorfields and weighing them, expenses for meetings with the bellfounder and visits to the foundry, gratuities to the founder’s men, returning the bells to the church, surveying the steeple, and “expence on the Judges of the bells” when they were first hung in March 1714. The Churchwardens also bought “Eight Matts for the Bellropes”. The main payments for casting and hanging the bells do not seem to be recorded in the accounts, but about a year after the work was completed a payment of £150 to “Mr. Bagley the bellfounder” was authorised by the Vestry on 15 February 1714/15.

Although not recorded in the contemporary accounts, details of the weights of the bells were noted later when they were sent away in 1725. The individual weights of the Bagley bells were as follows:

Bell	Kg	C.q.l.	Bell	Kg	C.q.l.
1.	316	6-0-24	5.	560	11 cwt
2.	337	6-2-15	6.	678	13-1-10
3.	398	7-3-9	7.	841	16-2-7
4.	465	9-0-17	8.	1180	23-1-5

The exact weight of the fifth bell is not noted as it was retained in London and not sent to Gloucester with the others for recasting. The total weight of the ring was approximately 4780kg (94-0-3).

The rebuilding of the church, 1721-6

Three years after the new bells were hung, the parishioners petitioned for an Act of Parliament to allow them to rebuild the church and raise money for the purpose. This was secured in 1717. There had been concern about the safety of the building for some time, and surveyors had reported in 1710 that the walls were being forced outwards by the weight of the roof. In addition, the old building was of a rather ramshackle and inferior appearance, comparing unfavourably with the churches of neighbouring parishes. Together these factors led to the building of an entirely new church on an altogether more ambitious scale and in an imposing architectural style.

James Gibbs (1682-1754) was chosen as the architect in 1719, and after a great deal of debate and careful thought his plans were finally approved in 1721. A pine and mahogany model was also made to give an idea of the final appearance of the church. This had a roof which could be lifted off to reveal the interior. Built and fitted out at a cost of over £33,500, the church took five years to complete. The first stone was laid on 19 March 1721/2 and the consecration took place on 20 October 1726. The full story of the rebuilding cannot be recounted here, but some consideration of the design and construction of the steeple is directly relevant to the history of the bells.

The design of the church is classical, of course, and one of the great features of the building is its temple front at the west end - an imposing portico with its six tall Corinthian columns flanking the main entrance to the building and its pediment carrying the Royal Arms of King George I who was a churchwarden at the time of the rebuilding. One of the problems faced by the architect was that of how to incorporate a steeple in a building of wholly classical design. Gibbs had already suggested combining the portico and steeple in some of his earlier designs for other London churches in 1713-14, but the design for St. Martin's was the first to be built. His solution was highly successful. Indeed, the arrangement has been widely imitated subsequently in large numbers of churches in the British Isles, in North America and in India.

The design for the steeple underwent some modifications both to enhance its appearance and also to accommodate the bells. In 1721 it was determined that "the basis of the steeple be raised higher than is expressed in the Modell" but Gibbs allowed to determine how much higher it should be. During construction in 1724 it was decided to thicken the walls of the belfry stage to provide a more substantial base for carrying the weight of the steeple. This was to cause problems with the bells, as noted below. In addition, there were difficulties with materials and workmanship, with building being suspended for a while in 1722 while matters were resolved.

Standing to a total height of 58.5 metres (192 feet) from the church floor or 65.5 metres (215 feet) to the top of the vane from the pavement below the steps leading to the portico, the steeple is the crowning glory of the church. A labourer, William Stacey, lost his life when he fell from the top of the new steeple in August 1724. Built in Portland stone, it was completed towards the end of that year, as reported in *The Weekly Journal: or, British Gazetteer*, on 19 December 1724:

This week was finish'd the Steeple of the new Church of St. Martin's in the Fields, when the Vane and other Ornaments of copper gilt were put upon it. The Steeple is 215 Foot high, being a most beautiful Design, and an exquisite Piece of Workmanship; and the Church and Steeple are look'd upon to be the handsomest in England, to the Honour of the Commissioners concern'd in building them, the Reputation of Mr. Gibbs the Surveyor, and the Credit of the Parish.

In referring to the completion of the steeple it would be remiss not to include a brief mention of Cadman's spectacular descent by rope from the top of the spire. This took place in July 1727. Cadman - probably Robert Cadman (1711-1740) who lost his life in a dare-devil flight over the River Severn at Shrewsbury although the sources name the performer at St. Martin's as Thomas Cadman - descended on his belly head first down a rope stretched from the top of the steeple across St Martins Lane into the Royal Mews, grasping burning torches in both hands. It was one of several stunts of its kind that led to a bit of a craze for "steeple flying" through the 1730s that ended abruptly with Cadman's dramatic and very public death at Shrewsbury in February 1739/40 all very graphically described in a poem published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* soon afterwards.

The clock and bells

It was only as the steeple was nearing completion in 1724 that attention turned seriously to the matter of the clock and bells. Outside the responsibility of the Commissioners appointed to oversee the rebuilding, this was a job for the Churchwardens. The building was designed with bells and clock in mind, the tower having a ringing room just above the roof level of the

church and a belfry stage with large louvred sound openings. Next it has a shallower stage, recessed in the corners and with urns, designed to have clock dials on all four sides. Above this is an octagonal lantern - in which the service bell was to be hung - below an obelisk spire supporting the ball and weathervane.

Dealing with the clock was relatively easy. The clock from the old church was among the items that had been sold after the tower was taken down. It had been bought by a Holborn clockmaker named Thomas Stubbs, and towards the end of 1724/5 the Churchwardens (John Walker and John Sawcer) decided to buy it back and have it reconditioned for installation in the new steeple.

On 16 March 1724/5 they entered into an agreement with Stubbs for the work, requiring him make dial work "to carry and Turn four hands on the out side of the Steeple" and to set up the clock "to raise a hammer suitable to the Bell on which it is to Strike". For this Stubbs was to be paid £60 and the work was to be completed before 16 September 1725. The old clock was to do duty for some thirty years before being replaced by an entirely new one made by John Leroux & Son of Charing Cross in 1759. With the Cambridge (or Westminster) quarter chimes added in 1862, the Leroux clock remains in use to this day.

The story of the bells was rather more complex, and to see what happened we need to go back to the preparatory stages in 1721. Before work could begin on demolishing the old church the parish had to make alternative provision for holding services while the new church was being built. They erected a temporary church (known as the Tabernacle) at the edge of the churchyard, transferring various items to it including the organ, a clock and two of the bells. Under the Tabernacle they constructed vaults for the storage of memorials and other items that were to be put back in the new church later.

The demolition of the old church in 1721 was not without incident, and the records refer to the payment of relief to "a poor labourer who had the misfortune to have his skull broke in pulling down the Old Steeple". The old bells, though, were safely removed and in June 1721 the Commissioners ordered that "the Saints Bell be hung up in the Tabernacle for Ringing and such other Bell as the Workmen shall think proper for Tolling and that the rest of the Bells be laid up in some convenient place to Preserve them". The two bells - Bartlet's Sanctus bell of 1628 and the fifth bell of Bagley's 1714 ring - were hung in the Tabernacle and the rest were placed in the vaults below. On 8 August 1721 it was agreed that Mr. Timbrell and Mr. Phillips, who built the Tabernacle, should "do what work is necessary to be done in relation to the taking down the Bells and other Work belonging to the old Church".

The accounts record these payments for the work:

2 Sept 1721 By 7 Days work getting the Bells under the Tabernacle and 30 20d Nails	£1.0.2.
6 Sept 1721 By Sinking the Vaults under the Tabernacle lower and Hanging the Bell up in the Tabernacle	£7.0.0.

There the matter rested until 1723. Presumably it was originally intended to keep the old bells in store until the new tower was ready to receive them. It is unclear when the idea of replacing them first originated, but On 7 September 1723 a report appeared in *The Weekly Journal: or, British Gazetteer* that "A new set of Bells for the Parish of St. Martin's in the Fields, is casting in the Country". This turned out to be but a rumour. In March 1723/4, however, the Commissioners drew up a list of estimates of cost for the remaining works and this included a sum of £400 for "Casting the Bells" and for the frame - suggesting that by now the idea of a new set of bells was firmly in contemplation.

As work on the church proceeded, so attention turned to the furnishings. These included boxes or galleries on either side of the altar, one for the Royal family and Royal Household as St. Martin's was and is the parish church for St. James's Palace and the other for the Admiralty. Buckingham Palace (but not the grounds) is also in the parish but this did not become a Royal residence until some time after the rebuilding. King George I gave the organ - a fine instrument dated 1726 which, although replaced in 1799, still exists at Wotton under Edge in Gloucestershire - at a cost of £1500. He made this gift, or so it is said, to make up for his inability to fulfil his duties as churchwarden owing to his Royal responsibilities.

The Prince of Wales - the future King George II - was to be associated with the bells by virtue of an offer of a substantial contribution towards the cost. At this date relationships between father and son were openly hostile, and the Prince may have been moved to assist

with the bells in an attempt to snub or rival the King's gift of the organ. The offer certainly attracted some publicity. First announced in London in the *General Post Office Letter* on 21 November 1724, where it was reported that "The Prince had given a Ring of 10 Bells to the new Church of St. Martin's in the Fields", the gift was quickly reported in a number of provincial papers. It was noted in the *Northampton Mercury* on 23 November, and on 28 November the *Norwich Gazette* - a paper that enthusiastically reported news of bells and ringing - carried the following:

We hear that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has signified his Intention to present a ring of Ten Bells to the new Church of St. Martins in the Fields.

Despite all the hype, there is little evidence to suggest that the Prince was quite so generous in meeting the cost of the bells as these reports would indicate. It is certainly far from clear what proportion of the cost, if any, he bore. The records, however, provide a great deal of information on the efforts of the Vestry and Churchwardens to secure a peal of bells worthy of the new church.

The story begins on 22 September 1724 when Sir John Colbatch informed the Vestry "that he had spoken with the Bell founder of Gloucester ab^t. New Casting the Bells". The bellfounder in question was Abraham Rudhall the younger, whose father - Abraham Rudhall I - had established his foundry at Gloucester in 1684. An able businessman, the elder Rudhall built up a very successful enterprise and supplied large numbers of bells and complete rings to many parts of the country including London and the south east. He retired and handed over the running of the foundry to his son Abraham junior in about 1718. The two Abrahams died within a month of each other, the son on 17 December 1735 and the father on 25 January 1735/6.

Abraham Rudhall I was a bellringer and he became a member of the College Youths, the famous London ringing society, in 1699. He certainly cultivated his London connections and must have made many friends in the London ringing fraternity when Henry Brett - a Gloucestershire landowner who "dissipated a plentiful fortune" through "travelling about the country with a company of ringers, at a vast expense" - was master of the Society in 1701-2. Between 1705 and 1710 he advertised at intervals in *The Post Man*, a London newspaper of the time.

The extent of the Rudhalls' work in and around London is indicated by the following extracts (with the dates of the bells added to the information given in the original document) from a catalogue issued by Abel Rudhall in 1751

A CATALOGUE OF BELLS / Cast by the RUDHALLS of Gloucester, from 1684 to Lady-Day, 1751, / For Sixteen CITIES in Forty-four several COUNTIES: / The Whole NUMBER being 2972, to the entire Satisfaction of JUDGES of BELLS,

City of London

St.Bride's	12	1710/1719
St.Martin's in the Fields	12	1725-7
St.Dunstan's in the East	8	1700
St.Sepulchre's	3	1699/1701

Middlesex

Fulham (Mr. W. Skelton gave 2 Trebles)	8	1729
BRENTFORD (to make 6)	1	1713
Southwark, St.George	8	1718

Surrey

Walton upon Thames (The Gift of John Palmer, Esq. To make 6)	1	1726
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If Occasion, Direct for ABEL RUDHALL, in GLOUCESTER

These were major commissions, and it is a mark of their reputation and success that the Rudhalls were chosen in preference to the London founders to cast these bells. The ring of twelve at St.Bride's in Fleet Street is of particular significance, since it was the first of that number in the Capital and regarded as an exceptionally fine peal. The back ten bells were cast in 1710 by Abraham Rudhall senior, with two more being added by his son in 1719 to make twelve.

Indeed, it was the enormous popularity of ringing and the enthusiasm of the main societies for ringing peals of over 5000 changes that fuelled this interest in enlarging existing peals of bells and adding new ones. The report in the *Norwich Gazette* of 28 November 1724 referred to above also said:

There is a Talk, that most or all of the Eight Bell Rings in London will be augmented to Ten or Twelve, and those of Six to Eight or Ten.

The first recorded “peal” was rung in Norwich on 2 May 1715 - although there are unproven claims that the full extent of 5040 Triples had been rung at St.Sepulchre’s, Holborn, on 7 January 1689/90 - and soon afterwards the ringing of peals became commonly accepted as the benchmark for proficiency and endeavour in most parts of the country where change-ringing was practised. This form of performance certainly took hold in London where the leading Societies - the College Youths, the London Scholars and the Union Scholars - vied with each other to secure the first peals in different methods and to ring greater numbers of changes. Many of these early London peals were rung on the Rudhall rings at St.Dunstan in the East and at St.Bride’s. A contemporary press report of a peal rung on the twelve bells at St.Bride’s in January 1724/5 shows that the ringers’ new pastime also attracted public interest, it being noted that “There was a vast Concourse of People to hear it, who were all of Opinion, that it exceeded every thing of that Nature that had at any time before been done in England”.

In this context, it becomes clear that the rebuilding of St.Martin-in-the-Fields created an opportunity for adding another substantial ring to the growing list of eights, tens and twelves in London. It was the thing to do - both to equip the church with a worthy set of bells and also to meet the aspirations of the ringers. Moreover the reputation of the existing rings from the Gloucester foundry qualified Rudhall as the man for the job. In fact, the foundry reached its peak of production at this time, casting more bells *per annum* in 1720-1722 (reaching 137 in 1722) than at any other period in the long history of the Rudhall bellfounding dynasty from 1684 to 1835.

In answer to Sir John’s enquiry, Rudhall “... proposed to take the old Bells to be there delivered at one Shilling per pound weight and to deliver as New Sett at Gloucester at one Shilling and three pence per pound weight and that he was willing of the said proposalls were liked off (upon Notice to him Given from this Board) to come to London to agree for the same”. On 22 September 1724 the St.Martin’s vestry deferred discussion to a future meeting, agreeing that “upon calling thereof it be incerted in the Summons’s to Consider of a New Sett of Bells”.

The meeting took place some six weeks later on 3 November when the Vestry voted first on “whether a New Sett of Bells should be had”. This was agreed unanimously. Then they voted as to the number of bells, and it was agreed - again *Nemine Contradicente* - that “That Eight Bells should be had”. Finally, it was “Ordered and Agreed That Mr. Ruddle of Gloucester’s proposal about making a New Sett of Bells communicated to the Vestry by Sr. John Colbatch Knt be agreed unto And that the Said Mr. Ruddle be Employed to make the said new Sett of Bells accordingly. And that the said Sr. John Colbatch be desired to acquaint him from this Board that they have agreed With his said proposals and to desire him to Come to Town to agree about the same.”

A month later, the vestry met again on 8 December 1724 to consider the suggestion that two more bells should be added to make a ring of ten - perhaps as a result of additional money having been made available through the gift from the Prince of Wales. Rudhall, it would seem, was in attendance at the meeting, and which:

A Motion being made and the Question put for adding two Bells to the Number of Bells Agreed on at a Vestry held the third day of November last past, *Agreed* that there be two Bells added to the said Number of Bells.

A Motion being made that the Tenor of the said Bells Should not be less than thirty hundred Weight, *Agreed* that the Tenor be about but not less than thirty hundred Weight.

Mr. Rudhall proposed and offered to this Board that in Case after the Bells shall be Cast any Crack or other visible Damage Shall appear in any of them when they are delivered at London That then and in such Case he would at his own Costs and Charges recast the same Except the

Charges of Carriage and Recarriage. **Ordered and Agreed** that Articles of Agreement for new Casting the Bells be prepared And in such Articles there be inserted that the Bells so to be cast be all as Sound good and Tunable [i.e. tuneful] as any Bells in the Citys of London and Westminster or the Suburbs thereof And that the Churchwardens be made the parties to the said Articles and that they Execute the same And this Board will Indemnify them their Successors Executors and Administrators of and from all and every such covenants and agreements as on their parts and behalf are to be paid done and performed

By this date the Churchwardens at St.Martin's were John Walker and John Sawcer. They were to have responsibility for dealing with the bells. Their names are cast together on the second largest bell of the new ring. They wasted little time in sorting out the agreement with the bellfounder which was read and ratified at the next meeting of the Vestry on 14 December.

Soon afterwards, the news about the bells was reported in several newspapers with similarly-worded reports appearing in the *St. James's Evening Post* of 15 December, *The Weekly Journal: or, British Gazetteer* of 19 December (as given here) and the *Northampton Mercury* on 21 December:

Mr. Abraham Ruddle [sic], of Gloucestershire, Bell Founder, has agreed with the Parish for casting a Peel [sic] of ten Bells, the Tenor of which, is to weigh at least 3000lb. The Design was to have had 12 Bells, but the Tower being taken in six inches of a side, has render'd it incapable of holding so many.

The reference to the alteration of the design refers, of course, to the thickening of the walls of the bell chamber ordered by Gibbs in 1724. The report is interesting in showing that at the time it was felt that the bell chamber was not large enough to accommodate twelve bells of this size. Later, however, it was found possible to add two more bells to complete the ring. On 14 December 1724 the Vestry had "Ordered That the Churchwardens be desired to take the Stocks from off the Bells and to Weigh the said Bells and send them to Gloucester to be delivered unto Mr. Rudhall upon the Key there as soon and in the cheapest manner as conveniently they can". Four or five weeks later the bells were duly sent away, with slightly inaccurate reports appearing in the *Whitehall Evening Post* of 28/30 January 1724/5 and *The British Journal* of 30 January stating that "The eight Bells, belonging to St. Martin's Church, which is newly rebuilt, were on Monday last sent to Sevenoaks in Kent, to be new cast". The bells, of course, went to Gloucester and not to Kent. On 20 April 1725 a letter received from Mr. Rudhall was reported to the Vestry concerning the weight of the old bells. The Clerk was instructed to reply "by this post" and to "Enter the weight of the said Bells in the Vestry Book" which duly records the "weight of the 7 old bells" as already noted above. The Clerk also noted that "The three Biggest Bells had each a false Clapper fastned to the other Staples (which was cast) in the Bells The weight of which was 23lbs For which Mr. Rudhall proposed to allow 2d per pound, and agreed to be accepted"

By this date, an agreement had been made with Thomas Stubbs for the work on the clock. Rather than have the clock strike on one of the ringing bells, it was decided to have a separate clock bell. On 3 May 1725 the Vestry discussed "the Bell for the Clock to Strike on" and ordered that "the Churchwarden be desired to Speak with the Clockmaker to be Informed what weight the Bell should be for the Clock to Strike on and that he be Impowered to Employ Mr. Rudhall of Gloucester to Cast one, accordingly And that the same Bell doe Serve for a Saints Bell". A later reference in 1727 indicates, however, that this was not the only bell used for the striking of the clock.

This bell, which remains at St.Martin's, was hung for ringing in a wooden frame in the octagonal lantern stage at the base of the spire. It arrived with the other bells in 1726, and its note was very close to that of the second bell of the ten (later the fourth of the twelve). It was supplied as an extra bell, and although it might be one of the "rejects" (see below) that Rudhall decided not to include in the ring it is definitely not - as might be supposed - one of the original trebles later replaced in 1758. Its details are as follows:

Inscription

A (bell) R 1725 (vine border)

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Founder and date</i>	<i>Diameter</i>		<i>Pitch</i>		<i>Weight</i>	
		<i>Mm</i>	<i>Ins</i>	<i>Hz</i>	<i>Note</i>	<i>Kg</i>	<i>C.q.l.</i>
1.	Abraham Rudhall II, 1725	724	28½	1225	Eb-27	279	5-1-26

So far so good. Money had been promised towards the cost of the new bells, the options had been explored and a decision made on what was required, the order had been placed and the old bells had been safely delivered to Gloucester. In the summer of 1725, however, it became clear that Rudhall was having difficulty in casting bells that he considered to be good enough for the church. He was mindful, no doubt, of his obligation to make them as “sound good and Tunable as any Bells in the Citys of London and Westminster or the Suburbs thereof”. It was to be some time before they were ready.

On 19 June 1725 Rudhall wrote to the Churchwarden, John Walker, to explain that the delivery of the bells would be delayed and to make a number of suggestions regarding the hanging of the bells. The letter was discussed at a meeting of the Vestry on 27 June at which it was ordered that the full text be entered in the minute book. It reads:

Gloucester ye 19th of June 1725

Sir,

Yours by Mr. Head came to me dated the 14th instant and will take what care I can to send the Bells according to your directions but am afraid they will not be finished this two or three months yet. I have already cast ten Bells that was design'd for St.Martin's but some are to be cast again. I am thinking them not good enough for your Church. I loose no time that can be helpt it not being for my advantage so to do, but am willing to cast them till they are as good as I can make before I send them away and as soon as they are all cast so well as I think will do well, I'll send you a Letter of it while they are tuning & clapping & I desire to know whether or no you would have a Clapper fitted into the Clock Bell. The dimensions of the Bells are as followeth, The Tenor is 4 foot 7 inches and an half wide, The Ninth is 4 foot 3 Inches wide, The eighth is 3 foot 9 inches wide, the Seventh is 3 foot 7 inches wide, The Sixth 3 foot four inches wide, The fifth 3 foot one Inch wide, The fourth two foot 10 inches wide, The third two foot 8 inches and an half wide, The second two foot 6 inches and an half wide, The first two feet 5 inches and an half wide.

I should be glad if you employ the two Williams's to make your woodwork I having seen often very ingenious workmen as have not been used to hang Bells & some as have been used to it spoile good Bells in hanging and never saw one that could do it well for several peals at the beginning of their practising it,

I am Sir, Your most humble Servant

Abr: Rudhall Junr.

To Mr. John Walker, one of the Churchwardens, St. Martin's Parish in the Fields, in London

With work on the church and its fittings still very much in progress, the delay over the bells was of no great concern to the Vestry. As regards the hanging, the Vestry agreed on 27 June to treat with “the two Mr. Williams's” about “making the Woodwork for hanging up the new sett of Bells in the Steeple if not contrary to any preceding order of this Vestry for that purpose”.

There were bellhangers in London, one of whom - William Cole or Coles - was to become involved at St.Martin's quite soon after the new bells were hung. John and Richard Williams, however, had hung the new bells at St.Bride's in 1710 and in view of the success of that ring it can be imagined that Rudhall's recommendation that they should be employed at St.Martin's met with ready support.

The Williams family originated from Kings Sutton in Northamptonshire. Thomas Williams is first mentioned in 1664 and his name appears regularly in the Kings Sutton accounts for work on the bells until 1699. His sons John (baptised in 1670) and Richard (baptised in 1677) appear in the accounts from 1695 and 1697 respectively. The first instance of the Williams family as bellhangers occurs at Salford Priors in Warwickshire in 1687. In January 1694/5 “Thomas Williams of Kings Sutton in the County of Northampton, Carpenter” contracted with the parish officers at St.Nicholas, Warwick, to make “one good

and Sufficient Frame of Tymber” and hang the six new bells therein. The contract survives in the parish records.

Thomas died in 1708, but his sons John and Richard carried on the trade and hung a great many new rings of bells in central England in the opening decades of the eighteenth century. Indeed in an advertisement placed in the *Ipswich Journal* of 7 May 1743 the last of the family, John Williams junior, claimed to have “... hung most of the peals in and about London”. The Williams family were certainly among the leading bellhangers of their time. A number of their bellframes survive, often placed diagonally in the tower and usually signed and dated with carved inscriptions as at Chicheley, Bucks (1718), Pangbourne, Berks (1720) and formerly at Bletchley, Bucks (1712) and at St. Bride’s (1710).

The St. Martin’s Vestry did not take long to settle the affair, and by September 1725 they had contracted with the Williams brothers for the work. The following minutes record the details:

30 Aug 1725 [marginal note “about ye Williams’ to hang the Bells”]

Ordered and Agreed that a Committee be appointed to meet on Wednesday next at 10 a Clock in the forenoon to Consider of hanging the Bells and that they be Impowered and they are hereby Impowered to treat and make a final agreement with Mr. Jno. Williams & partners about hanging the said Bells and that the Gentlemen present at this Board and the Gentlemen of the Committee for Considering of a house for lodging and maintaining of the poor be the said Committee.

Ordered that Mr. Gibbs Surveyor and Mr. Cash (*sic - recte* Cass) Mason have notice to be present at the meeting of the said Committee

Ordered that Mr. Timbrell & Mr. Phillips Carpenters be summoned to be then present and the said Committee are hereby Impowered to treat and agree with them the said Mr. Timbrell and Phillips for providing the Timber to be used in hanging the said Bells and likewise with any person or persons for the Brass & Ironwork to be used in hanging the said Bells

21 Sept 1725

The Committee appointed to treat and agree with Mr. John Williams and partners for hanging the Bells Reported they had, at a meeting of them the said Committee of the first of September instant, agreed with the said Mr. John Williams and partners for hanging the Bells as followeth, Viz:

It is agreed and the said John Williams, Richard Williams and John Williams the younger do promise and agree In Consideration of the summe of £70 to be paid them as is hereafter mentioned that they the said John Williams Richard Williams and John Williams the younger shall at their own proper Costs & Charges make finish and Compleat in Workmanlike Manner (as soon as Conveniently may be) fit and proper frames Wheelles and Stocks for hanging the said peal of ten Bells and the Sts Bell in the Steeple of the Said parish Church and Shall and will well hang up and fix the Said Bells in the jettings out in the said Steeple without making any alteration or any Damage to the said Steeple having Such Quantity of Timber provided at the Costs and Charges of the Parish and also Iron Work and brass work as shall be necessary for hanging up the said Bells in Manner aforesaid.

And this Committee do agree to and with the said John Williams Richard Williams and John Williams the Younger that such quantity of Timber Ironwork and brass work as shall be necessary for hanging up the Said Bells as aforesaid shall be found and provided at the costs and charges of the parish and that the summe of £70 shall be paid to them the said John Williams Richard Williams and John Williams the Younger for making such frames Wheelles Stocks and hanging up and fixing the said Bells in the Steeple as aforesaid from time to time in such manner parts or proportions as the Churchwardens shall think proper and the remainder when they shall perfectly have Completed the said Work and hung up and fixed the said bells in manner aforesaid. [Marginal note “Timber to hang the Bells to be found by the parish”]

And the said Committee further reported that they had agreed with Messrs. Timbrell and Phillips Carpenters to find and provide sufficient of Timber for hanging the said peal of Bells and Sts Bell and Mr. Thomas Gerves Smith the Ironwork

The arrangements were now in place, and it should be noted that the intention was to hand some of the bells in the “jettings out in the steeple” - i.e. hanging into the belfry window openings. Little could be done, however, until the bells arrived from Gloucester. Through the autumn of 1725 and into the spring of 1726 the churchwardens received a series of letters

from Rudhall reporting further delays with the bells, all entered into the Vestry minute book as before. The text of the relevant minutes and letters is as follows:

21 Sept 1725

The Churchwardens laid before this board a letter from Mr. Rudhall of Gloucester relating to some Misfortunes which happened to Some of the New Sett of Bells he is now Casting for this Parish. **Ordered** that the Churchwardens be desired to return an Answer to the said Letter that the Gentlemen of the Vestry are willing to Stay as long as necessary for the well finishing and Compleating the said new sett of Bells

2 Dec 1725

Mr Churchwarden Sawcer likewise acquainted this Board that he had received a Letter from Mr. Rudhall Bell Founder at Gloucester Intimating some further Misfortunes happening to the peal of Bells he is now casting for the use of this Parish, and desiring a further time to Recast Such of them as Should be necessary. **Ordered** that the Churchwardens be desired to return an Answer to Mr. Rudhall's letter to acquaint him that the Gentlemen of this Board are willing to Stay as long as necessary for the well finishing and Compleating the said new sett of Bells

7 April 1726

Mr Churchwarden Sawcer acquainted this Board that he had received a Letter from Mr. Rudhall Bellfounder at Gloucester Informing him that the Bells he is Casting for this Parish are near finished and will be ready to be Sent to London by Saturday Sennight next the Sixteenth of this Instant April. **Ordered** that Mr. Churchwarden Sawcer be desired to write to Mr. Rudhall to know which will be the safest way to have then sent whether by Sea or Land Carriage

24 May 1726

The Churchwardens laid before this Board a Letter from Mr. Rudhall Bellfounder at Gloucester Intimating that the sett of Bells he had been Casting for this Parish are coming for London the weights whereof are also particularly mentioned in the said Letter. **Ordered** that the weights of the said Bells be entered in the Vestry Book of Orders which are as follows, vizt: [individual weights (as noted in table below) with column totals and total weight, i.e. 141-1-3, the tenor bell weighing 31-2-18 (1610 kg)]

In advance of the arrival of the bells the churchwardens had made arrangements to get them hung. Walker and Sawcer looked after things until April 1726 when their term of office as churchwardens came to an end and Walter Turner and William House were elected as their successors. There are no detailed references to the work in the accounts, but incidental payments in the accounts suggest that the frame was installed late in 1725 with the main installation work taking place later in June 1726:

24 Nov 1725 Thomas Sledge At Belfry Door next the portico making good the Brickwork that was broke down by Hoisting timber for the Bells 2s.6d.

23 Dec 1725 Timbrell & Phillips for beams and flooring in the tower [gives sizes of beams etc]

22 April 1726 Mr. Griffith "Stuff Delivered to Mr. Williams & Used in the Steeple" with a note of lengths of timber used at the church between 22 April and 15 June 1726

18 June 1726 Mr. Griffith "By 70 foot of large Trunk to convey the Sound of the Bells to the Ringers and Cutting the Floors and fixing £3.10.0"

27 July 1726 Mr. Griffith "By Nailing up the Fence after the Great Bell 7s.10s."

5 Aug 1726 By Nailing down Matting under the Bells 2s.6d.

In addition, two receipts survive - one for the final payment on the main contract for £70 and another for extra work costing £8.10.0. - as follows:

Aug^t. The 2^d. 1726

Rece^d then of M^r. Walter Turner Churchwarden of the parish of S^t. Martin in the ffields Twenty One Pounds w^{ch}. with fforty Nine Pounds before reced of M^r. John Sawcer late Churchwarden of ye said parish is in full of an Agreement made wth. the said parish for making fit and proper Frames Wheels & Stocks & hanging a Peal of Ten Bells & a S^{ts}. Bell in the Steeple of the Church of the aforesaid parish £21.0.0.

We say rece^d. in full for the same £21

John Williams, John Williams and Richard Williams [signatures]

M ^r . Churchwarden Turner D ^r . to Jn ^o Williams for ye Parish of St.Martin's, 2 Aug.1726	
To lining y ^e weatherboards of the Bell windows	£3.10.0.
To making a new fframe for y ^e Treble	£3.3.0.
To making five staves for y ^e ... [<i>illegible word</i>] Bells	£1.5.0.
To making 7 Trunks for the Ropes	£0.7.0.
To cleaning 10 pair of Brasses	£0.5.0.
	[Total £8.10.0]

Aug^t. the 2^d. 1726 Rece^d then of M^r. Walter Turner Churchwarden of the parish of S^t. Martin in the fields the full Contents of this Bill

per John Williams, John Williams [signatures]

Contemporary newspaper reports confirm that the bells were installed in June 1726. First, the *Daily Journal* of Saturday 11 June 1726 reported that “They are beginning to put up a new Set of Bells at the Church of St. Martin in the Fields, 5 of them being already brought thither from the Country”. The, a fortnight later, the *Evening Post* reported on Saturday 25 June that “The Tenor of St. Martin’s Peal of Bells, arriv’d safe at that Church Yesterday”.

Shortly after the bells were first hung, the Duke of Somerset “went for the first time to see the New Church of his Parish”. His visit on 20 July 1726 was widely reported in the London and provincial newspapers, in which it was stated that had given “100 Guineas towards the new Set of Bells” at the church. This money was apparently set aside and later used in 1727 to provide two additional bells.

The Vestry met on 29 July when the Churchwardens presented “a Bill or Charge made and delivered to him by Mr. Rudhall Bellfounder for the Casting the new Sett of Bells according to Certain Articles of Agreement between him and the Churchwardens amounting to £525.2s.9d. and a further charge of £45.6s.9d. for a new Bell for the Clock to strike on and new Clappers”. The Vestrymen were not prepared to pay the bill until the bells had been tried and proved to be satisfactory, and so they gave the following orders:

Ordered that the Gentlemen present at this Board and any other of the Gentlemen of the Vestry that please be, and they are hereby appointed a Committee to meet at the Vestry Room on Monday next [1 August] at one a Clock in the Afternoon to Consider of the Bells and whether they are Cast done and performed according to the said Articles of Agreement And that the said Committee may (upon the Approbation and good liking thereof) give directions to the Churchwardens to pay to the said Mr. Rudhall £300 in part of his Bill and the said Churchwardens are hereby Impowered to pay the same accordingly out of the monies Subscribed by the Inhabitants of this Parish and that the remaining part be paid according to the Contract.

Ordered that the Churchwarden be and he is hereby Impowered to Treat the Ringers who shall Ring the Bells on Monday next in such manner as he shall see proper

The *Daily Journal* of 1 August 1726 carried the following announcement:

London, August 1. This Day being the Anniversary of his Majesty’s Accession to the Throne, the new Sett of Bells at St. Martin’s in the Fields are to be rung out for the first Time;...
[Continues with short description of other festivities]

The trial having taken place on 1 August, the Vestry met again on 16 August 1726 when the verdict was discussed. It was reported:

This Committee having met to Consider the Goodness of the Bells and upon such Consideration expressed their Approbation and good liking of the same and severall Gentlemen of the said Committee having declared that many Gentlemen who had Judgment in Bells had Expressed their Approbation & a Generall Satisfaction of the Goodness of the said Bells. And Mr. Abraham Rudhall the Bellfounder appearing before this Committee and having declared and Agreed that if any fault shall hereafter be discovered in any of the Bells he will at his own proper Costs and Charges rectify and amend the same. **Ordered and agreed** that the Churchwardens do pay Mr. Rudhall the Bellfounder £300 in part of his Bill and that they do settle and adjust the whole account with him

Unfortunately for Rudhall, the matter did not end there and a short while later the Vestry met again to discuss the tenor bell. On 6 September 1726 they ordered that the Churchwarden

should retain £70 from the money due the founder until further orders owing to “fault being found by severall Persons of Judgment in bells of the untuneableness of the Tenor”. The bell was later taken down and another one substituted as we shall see. No doubt Rudhall gave satisfactory assurances, as on 27 September the Vestry considered a letter received from Rudhall “desiring the Payment of the Remainder of the money due to him ... for the new Sett of ten Bells by him Cast for this parish”. William Turner was authorised to pay a further £200 and “to cause the two Bells in the Tabernacle to be immediately taken down” and sent to Rudhall in part settlement. Turner was also directed to advise Rudhall “that the Vestry will settle with him the remainder of the account when he is in London”.

So, the ten bells were delivered in May 1726, hung in June or July and first tried on 1 August, with matting being laid under them to adjust the volume inside the tower shortly after completion. The London ringers must have been very keen to make use of them, but there are no further reports of any ringing until after the keys to the completed church were formally handed over to the parish authorities on 4 October 1726. The consecration and official opening of the church took place on 20 October, but before that date peals had been attempted and rung on the new bells.

The first attempt took place on Monday 10 October when the College Youths went for a peal. The attempt failed, but it was nevertheless reported in the *St. James's Evening Post* and in provincial papers as far afield as Gloucester, Bristol and Norwich. Both the wording of the report and the circulation it achieved give a measure of public enthusiasm for ringing at the time and reflect the level of interest in the new bells. The following version from the Norwich paper (but with elements from other reports added in brackets) tells the story: Last Monday [October 10th] a Sett of Ringers, call'd the College Youths, began to ring a Peal of 5000 and odd Changes on St. Martin's Bells [which were cast by the noted Mr. Riddal [sic], Bell-founder at Gloucester]: When they had rung 3 Hours incessantly, one of the Bell-Ropes broke; to the great Disappointment of the Gentlemen, and a numerous Audience in the Street, for one Hour more would have compleated their Purpose.

A second attempt the following Monday resulted in a peal being successfully rung. The details are recorded in the peal books of the Ancient Society of College Youths, it being only the eighth peal ever rung by the Society. The members of this band were to become well-known, and Annable especially being remembered to this day as a notable ringer of the times.

St.Martin's In the Fields

The Company rung on Monday October 17th 1726
a complete Peal of 5076 Grandsire Cators, it being
the First that was done in that Steeple

Mr. William Woodrove	Treble	Mr. Peter Merrygarts	6th
Mr. Robert Catlin	2d	Mr. William Laughton	7th
Mr. John Dearmor	3d	Mr. Benjamin Annable	8th
Mr. John Ward	4th	Mr. Matthew East	9th
Mr. William Thompson	5th	Mr. Thomas Fernyhough	Tenor

Mr. Benjamin Annable Call'd Bobs

A short while afterwards, the London Scholars rang 5,040 Grandsire Caters at St.Martin's. The exact date is not known, but the performance is mentioned in a list of the peals rung by the rival societies in the *Daily Journal* on 30 March 1731. The peal was disallowed as it was “a false Peal, having 90 Changes over again in the Composition”.

There are no more reports of peals or other ringing from around the time of the consecration until well into the following year. By April 1727, however, an order had been placed for two more bells to complete a ring of twelve and arrangements had been made to replace the “untuneable” tenor. At the same time, various alterations were made to the hangings and bellframe as described later. As far as the trebles were concerned, *The Weekly Journal: or, the British Gazetteer* of 15 April 1727 reported:

The 10 Bells lately hung up in St. Martin's Church Tower, are to be made 12, by the Addition of 2 Treble Bells or Leaders, to be cast by the fame Person who Cast the 10, as also those at St. Bride's, and they are to be ready before the 28th of May, then to be rung for the first Time.

May 28th was the 68th birthday of King George I and clearly it was hoped that the full ring of twelve would sound out for the first time to mark the occasion. Less than a month later he died, and on 11 June George II succeeded his father as the second Hanoverian King of Great Britain and Ireland. According to the inscriptions (see below) one of the bells was a gift from the St. Martin's Vestry, this bell being dated 1727. The other may have been paid for from the money donated in July 1726 by the Duke of Somerset.

It is not entirely clear when the present tenor was exchanged for the original one, but it seems most likely that the new one was delivered with the two trebles and hung at the same time. Dated 1726, the tenor bears the name of the Vicar - the Rev. Zachariah Pearce (generally referred to as Zachary Pearce in contemporary accounts) - and those of Walter Turner and William House who served as Churchwardens from April 1726 to April 1727. The new bell was evidently cast between September 1726 and April 1727 - and it should be borne in mind that in contemporary usage the date 1726 could refer to the period between 1 January and 25 March 1726/7 and not just to the closing months of the old year.

According to the agreement with the founder, Rudhall would have borne the cost of the recasting and the parish was only responsible for transporting the old and new bells and for removal and reinstatement. There is therefore very little information about the transaction in the accounts beyond a payment for carriage of the bell in April 1726, but a Vestry minute refers to the matter:

28 June 1727

Upon reading a Letter from Mr. Rudhall, Bellfounder of Gloucester, in relation to the Casting a New Tenor Bell for this parish laid before this Board by Mr. Walter Turner late Churchwarden. Ordered it be referred to the said Mr. Walter Turner and Mr. William House and Mr. Charles Corner the present Churchwardens to pay the said Mr. Rudhall what they shall think proper

The history of ringing at St. Martin's will be looked at separately below (with full details of all known peals being given in Appendix D), but it should be noted here that the first major performances on the full ring of twelve took place on 14 and 15 March 1727/8 - some ten months after the bells were installed. Some major work - described below - may also have taken place to improve the hanging of the bells in the period between the original installation of the bells in 1726 and this ringing match in 1727/8 between two of the leading London bands.

Over two days of extended ringing, the London Scholars and the College Youths both rang long peals of Grandsire Cinques. The London Scholars rang a peal of 6000 changes on the Thursday, and on the Friday the College Youths successfully attempted a slightly longer peal of 6314 changes. Both peals were recorded on painted boards in the belfry and widely reported in the London and provincial newspapers. Most interesting, perhaps, is this report from *Mist's Weekly Journal*, of Saturday 23 March 1727/8 which comments on the nature of the contest and on the quality of the ringing:

Last week was a Trial of Skill in Ringing, between the two Societies of *London Scholars*, and *College Youths*, which should, at fewest Trials, ring a Peal of 6000 and odd Changes on twelve Bells, at St. Martin's in the Fields: the *latter* perform'd at their *seventh* Trial, (*with much ado*) in four Hours 27 Minutes; but the *former* at the *second* Trial, in two Minutes less, and, in the Opinion of all Judges in that Art, made a much better Peal.

Just before these historic peals were rung came the news that the newly completed tower of St. Michael's Cornhill in the City was to have a new ring of twelve. The *St. James's Evening Post*, *London Evening Post*, and *The Post-Boy* of 7 March 1727/8 all carried a report that:

'Tis agreed by the Parish of St. Michael, Cornhill, to have a fine Set of Twelve Bells, which are to be cast by Mr. Rudhal [sic] of Gloucester, he that cast St. Bride's and St. Martin's in the Fields.

In fact, the Cornhill bells - a heavier ring with a tenor of around two tons - were to be cast by Richard Phelps, and not by Rudhall. Either the report was wrong or maybe there was

a change of plan, but by April 1728 a firm order for the new bells had been placed with Phelps at Whitechapel. One wonders if this might reflect some disappointment with the new bells at St.Martin-in-the-Fields, which were perhaps not quite what the London ringers had hoped for.

At all events, Rudhall's grip on the London market was to suffer from the reputation of the new bells at Cornhill - first rung on 4 December 1728 - which were quickly pronounced to be "in Goodness exceeded by none" and "very fine and musical, and not inferior to any in this City or Suburbs". That said, few of the original Cornhill bells survived and many have had to be recast - whereas the eighteenth-century ring at St.Martin's as modified in 1758 and 1770 remains largely intact.

The installation of the Cornhill ring also removed something of the novelty and appeal of the St.Martin's bells all too soon. The greater weight of the Cornhill bells meant that the St.Martin's ring was quickly eclipsed as the heaviest ring of its number in London, barely 18 months after the twelve had been first rung. Cornhill bells were in turn to be overshadowed by the still heavier ring installed at Southwark in 1735.

The new bells

Having unravelled the history of the bells down to 1727, it remains to set down the details of the bells as originally installed, take stock of the development of the ring from mediaeval times to the completion of the Rudhall twelve, to review the cost and to attempt an appreciation of the contemporary and heritage significance of the ring.

As completed in 1727, details of the bells were as follows:

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Inscription (wording only)</i>	<i>Diameter</i>		<i>Weight</i>	
		<i>Mm</i>	<i>Ins</i>	<i>Kg</i>	<i>c.q.l.</i>
1.	[no record]	710	28	280	5-2-0
2.	THE GIFT OF THE VESTRY BY SUBSCRIPTION 1727	725	28½	290	5-3-2
3.	GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST 1725	750	29½	330	6-1-27
4.	AND IN EARTH PEACE 1725	775	30½	342	6-2-26
5.	GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN 1725	825	32½	401	7-3-15
6.	ABR : RVDHALL OF GLOVCESTER CAST VS ALL 1725	863	34	442	8-2-22
7.	PROSPERITY TO THE CHVRCH OF ENGLAND 1725	940	37	530	10-1-20
8.	PEACE & GOOD NEIGHBOVRHOOD 1725	1016	40	636	12-2-2
9.	PROSPERITY TO THE PARISH OF S ^N T MARTINS 1725	1092	43	792	15-2-10
10.	FEAR GOD HONOVR THE KING 1725	1143	45	897	17-2-17
11.	IOHN WALKER & IOHN SAWCER CHVRCHWARDENS 1725	1295	51	1200	23-2-14
12.	ZACHARIAH PEARCE D: D : VICAR 1726 / WALTER TVRNER & W ^M : HOVSE CHVRCHWARDENS	1410	55½"	1600	31½

Notes: The inscriptions given here include those of the original second (now at Fulham) and third (recast in 1758). The inscription of the first tenor (1725) is not known. The dimensions of bells 3-11 are as recorded in the Vestry minutes in 1725, the original tenor being recorded there as 1410mm (55½") diameter and weighing 1610kg (31-2-18). The exact weight of the 1726 tenor is not recorded but it may be assumed to have been of about the same mass as the original one. The original weights of the two 1727 trebles (one of which was again replaced in 1727) are not known, but their combined weight is stated to have been 572kg (11-1-2). All details given in italics are uncertain.

The growth of the ring from mediaeval times is illustrated in the following table, which ignores intermediate recasting of individual bells at more or less equivalent weight. The only real uncertainty concerns the weight of the 1669 ring. No information is available on the weights of these bells or on the quantities of metal added in 1669 (nor when the bells were later recast with two more to make eight in 1714). The estimated figures are shown in italics. The details of the bells previous to 1584 are also conjectural but likely to be a fair guess at the approximate weights - certainly good enough as an indication of the increase in the size of the ring over time.

<i>Dat</i>	<i>Number of bells / work done</i>	<i>Metal added</i>		<i>Tenor weight</i>		<i>Total weight</i>	
		<i>Kg</i>	<i>C.q.l.</i>	<i>Kg</i>	<i>C.q.l.</i>	<i>Kg</i>	<i>C.q.l.</i>
<i>e</i>							

152 5	Three old bells in existence	---	---	500	10 cwt	1250	25 cwt
153 7	Recast with extra metal to make four	250	5 cwt	500	10 cwt	1500	30 cwt
158 4	Recast with extra metal to make five	1000	20 cwt	750	15 cwt	2450	48-1-1
160 4	Recast with extra metal - still five	570	11-0-24	970	19cwt	3020	59-1-25
166 9	Recast with extra metal to make six	1080	23 cwt	1170	23 cwt	4100	80 cwt
171 4	Recast with extra metal to make eight	680	13½ cwt	1180	23-1-5	4780	94-0-3
172 5	Recast with extra metal to make ten	2400	47-0-27	1608	31-2-18	7177	141-1-3
172 7	Two bells added to make twelve	572	11-1-2	1608	31-2-18	7750	152-2-5

The question is often asked as to whether or not any of the metal of the original bells - those in use before 1525 - remains in the present ring. The documentary evidence certainly seems to suggest that the metal of the previous bells was used in the recastings that took place in 1669, 1714 and 1725 and so there is certainly some metal of the 1604 ring in the existing bells dating from 1725. For the earlier period, the accounts sometimes mention an exchange of bells and it is less certain that the old metal was re-used. Rather more importantly, it must be remembered that significant quantities of new metal were added as the ring increased in size and number and so the proportion of original metal will have been "diluted" between 1537 and 1725. On balance, however, it seems quite probable that some of the metal of the bells of the mediaeval church of St.Martin-in-the-Fields remains in the bells now at Perth.

Another aspect to consider is the cost. In one source, the total cost of the bells is said to have been £1264.18.3. On the face of it this sum is not easy to reconcile with what is known of the costs from other sources. Rudhall's bills for the ten bells and the service bell only came to £570.13.6. and Williams charged £70 for the hanging. On the basis of contemporary prices - in other contracts of the period 1723-7 Rudhall charged 14 pence a pound for new bells - the cost of the two extra bells would have been about £75. Together these sums come to £715 - a long way short of the supposed cost. However, if the cost of recasting the old bells is added - about £525 for 94 cwt at 12 pence a pound - together with (say) £35 for incidental costs, then the sums do add up to £1265. This means that the total cost was as stated, but the net cost (after deducting the value of the old bells) was only £750 of which part must have been met from the gifts of the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Somerset.

Having been cast as a ring of ten with two trebles added a little later, the St.Martin's bells fail to qualify as the first ring of twelve ever cast - a distinction that belonged to the Cornhill ring of 1728. The twelve at St.Bride's, of course, was also a ring of two dates by one founder (1710 and 1719) and therefore an earlier example of the type than St.Martin's by just eight years.

The fact that the St.Martin's bells were not *the* first should not, however, detract from their significance in the development of rings of ten and twelve designed and completed as instruments for the performance of changeringing. At the time of bells were cast, there were still only a handful of tens and even fewer twelves - and many of these rings were made up of bells of various dates by different founders and not cast as a set.

The casting of complete rings of five, six and even eight had become commonplace by the latter decades of the seventeenth century. Not so for the higher numbers, however, and by 1725 only a very small number of tens had been cast. The first was that at Lichfield Cathedral, a ring with a 1250kg (25cwt) tenor cast by Henry Bagley II of Chacombe in 1688. Most of the later rings were cast by the Rudhalls the key examples being St.Mary's Warwick of 1702-3 (tenor 1370kg or 27 cwt) and the back ten at St.Bride's of 1710 (tenor 1420kg or 28 cwt). There was also a Rudhall mixed-date ring (probably an eight of 1701 made up to ten in 1712) at St.Chad's, Shrewsbury (tenor 1320kg or 26 cwt). Richard Phelps of Whitechapel cast his first ring of ten for Great St.Mary's in Cambridge in 1722 (tenor 29 cwt), and he had

created a ring of mixed dates (the back eight being dated 1714) for St. Magnus the Martyr in London by 1724. That completes the list.

Similarly, by 1726 there were only three other rings of twelve. These were at York Minster - a curious heavy ring completed in 1681 - at St. Bride's where the trebles were added in 1719 and at Cirencester in Gloucestershire where Rudhall augmented an existing eight to ten in 1713 and then to twelve in 1722.

The *Norwich Gazette* may have said in 1724 (as already noted) that there was talk of creating a great many peals of ten and twelve in London. It is clear, though, that when plans were being laid for the new ring at St. Martin's the number of such rings remained very small indeed. Moreover, the St. Martin's bells were to be rather heavier than any of the rings of ten cast previously. By (say) 1750 the casting of such a ring would have been well within the competence of an experienced bellfounder, but in 1725 it was still a job that involved the challenge of stepping into the unknown and opening up new technical frontiers.

It is in this context that the St. Martin's bells need to be recognised as having been the result of experiment and development - as a product ahead of their time. It is perhaps no great surprise that the founder struggled with the job and that his three trebles had to be replaced later. However, the fact that eight of the original bells of 1725 survive, along with the near contemporary replacement tenor of 1726, testifies to the skill of Abraham Rudhall II who produced a ring that can now be regarded as a classic period piece - an eighteenth-century change-ringing instrument of some quality.

Indeed, contemporary opinion of the tonal quality of the ring is neatly expressed in the following report of the death of the founder, Abraham Rudhall II, in 1735. It comes from the *London Evening Post*, of Tuesday 23 December 1735 but was also repeated in a number of other papers:

Yesterday se'nnight died at Gloucester, of an Asthma, Mr. Rudhall jun. the most considerable Bell-founder in England, having cast more Peals from five to twelve Bells than any other two Bell-founders ever did: In the Year 1727 he cast that matchless Peal of twelve Bells for St. Martin's in the Fields, which are so remarkably fine that they will sound his Praise to future Ages. He is succeeded in his Business by his Son, Mr. Able (*sic*) Rudhall.

Today, although retuned in 1922 and again in 1987 to improve the tuning of the intervals between the bells, the overall character of Rudhall's "matchless peal" remains little altered. The St. Martin's ring - now the Swan Bells at Perth - is undoubtedly the best surviving example of an eighteenth-century twelve.

Trouble with the bells and bellframe

It might perhaps have been hoped that a new ring of bells, newly hung in an entirely new church and steeple would have given many years of trouble-free use. Unfortunately, this was not to be. In fact, the bells had hardly been hung and rung before the ringers pointed out defects in the hanging. On 30 March 1727 the Churchwardens reported to the Vestry "that Complaint is made of the present Frame on which the Bells hang". Evidently fault was found with the work of the Williams brothers whose bill had already been paid.

Fortunately, the Churchwardens had been advised that the frame could "be new made for hanging all the Bells on a Levell for the summe of forty five pounds or thereabouts". The Vestry therefore authorised the Churchwardens "to give Orders and directions for making a New Frame for hanging the Bells on a Levell And that they pay for the same". The work was carried out by William Cole (or Coles), the London bellhanger, and the accounts record a payment of £51.11.6. made on 10 July 1727 "To Mr Coles for Altering the Frames & New hanging the Bells". There is also a payment of 15 shillings on 20 July "To the Ringers on Trying the Bells". Quite where this work fits in the sequence of events with the replacement of the tenor and the augmentation to twelve in April-May 1727 is not entirely clear.

Later in the year, the treble bell of the twelve seems to have been replaced. In December 1727 Cole was paid £1.1.0. "for taking down the Treble Bell and hanging up another". Rudhall presumably bore the cost of exchanging the bell as he did when the tenor was replaced earlier in the year. At about the same time, the clockmaker Thomas Stubbs was paid

seven guineas “for taking down and fixing up all the hammers of the clock to the New Bell Frame and new fixing all the dial work”.

The troubles with the new installation continued into the following year, and on 13 September 1728 the Vestry ordered “that the Churchwardens be empowered to Cause the Frames of the two Treble Bells to be altered and the said Bells to be new hung as shall be Necessary”. Cole, again, seems to have carried out the necessary work.

Only weeks later, there was an alarming accident in the belfry. This took place on 11 October. It was first reported in *The Daily Post-Boy* on 18 October 1728 and afterwards noted in several provincial papers. The original report stated:

On Friday Night last, As they were ringing the Bells at St. Martin’s in the Fields, one of the Gudgeons of the Tenor broke, but the Bell fell no further than the Floor; however, it frightened all the Ringers so, that they threw up their Bells, and run to the Sides of the Steeple. The Bell is 3300 Weight.

The bill for the necessary repairs, promptly undertaken by William Cole, survives among the parish records. It reads:

The Parish of St. Martins in the Fields - D ^r . to W ^m . Coles for taking up the tenor when broake Downe, Octo ^r . y ^e 19 th 1728.	
for Repairing the wheels	£1.5.0.
for a new slider	£0.2.6.
for my Selfe 2 days 2 men 6 days each taking up the bell fixing new Gudgeon and fixing swages to the other bell	£2.6.0.
	Total £3.13.6.

Octo^r. ye 16th [sic] Reced then of Mr. Corner Church Warden the Sum of three Pounds three shillings in full of this and all Demands per me W^m. Coles

In April 1730, Cole again invoiced the Churchwardens for £1.5.0. for repairs to the bells, this time “for taking up the 7th bell when broake Downe and fixing in new Gudgeons and fastning the other £1.5.0”. He also, incidentally, looked after repairs to the parish fire engine. The later records have not been searched in detail, but these instances serve to show that there were a number of difficulties with the new bells and their hangings in the period after they were first installed. Clearly the parish authorities were sufficiently unimpressed by the work of the Williams brothers that they were not invited back to put things right. They went instead to William Cole(s).

Not a great deal is known about Cole’s bellhanging activities, but he certainly worked on the bells at Southwark in 1703 and in 1732-3 the rehung the six bells at St. Olave, Hart Street, in a new frame after the top of the church tower had been rebuilt. Of his sudden death in 1735 and of the succession to his business, however, there are two interesting newspaper accounts which tell all and need no explanation:

Tuesday Morning Mr. William Cole, a noted Church Bell-hanger in Fore Street, went into the Castle Tavern at Cripplegate, and call’d for a Glass of Wine, seemingly in perfect health, and when the Drawer brought the wine, he found him dead in a chair in the Kitchen (*St. James’s Evening Post* 2 October 1735)

On Saturday last Mr. Tobias Benton, Bell-Hanger and Engine-Maker, in Fore-street near Cripplegate, who succeeds the late Mr. Cole, took down the Tenor Bell belonging to the Parish Church of St. Mary le Bow (weighing 4909 lb. and which was unfortunately cracked some Time ago) in order for it being recast by the ingenious Mr. Phelps [sic] of Whitechapel. (*Read’s Weekly Journal, or, British-Gazetteer*, Sat. 29 July 1738)

Benton, it should be added, later became a noted bellhanger in his own right. He was responsible, *inter alia*, for hanging the Whitechapel peals at Hexham Abbey (1742) and at Rotherhithe (1748). Like Cole, he did not limit his activities to bellhanging and in 1738 he also described himself as an engine-maker.

Replacing the trebles

Perhaps the greatest technical difficulty encountered by the bellfounders in producing satisfactory rings of ten and twelve was in casting trebles that were strong and clear enough to be audible among the others - and to be well in tune with the ring. In many of the early rings, the trebles were quite quickly replaced. St.Martin's was no exception. The first treble of the twelve was replaced under guarantee within a few months of being installed, and in 1758 the front end of the ring was entirely remodelled.

It would be easy to criticise the original trebles and assume that they had always been unsatisfactory, but two points are worth making. First, the St.Martin's trebles lasted rather longer than the Phelps trebles at Cornhill - cast in 1728 and replaced in 1746. Second, the renewal of the trebles was apparently undertaken at St.Martin's as a conscious attempt to improve the ring rather than as a consequence of failure - a suggestion borne out by the fact that one of the old bells was sold on to a new home and still exists.

Unlike the earlier period when each stage of the process was meticulously noted in the Vestry minutes, the parish records are silent on the work carried out in 1758. There is no mention in either the Vestry minutes or in the accounts. In a letter to the antiquary Browne Willis, however, Abel Rudhall wrote on 30 March 1759 saying "... When I went up to London, I agreed for St.Martins Trebles, but have not sent them yet, having been laid up with the Gout & Rheumatism &c".

Rudhall, it would seem, replaced the first three bells of the twelve. In the case of the treble and third there is no doubt as the surviving bells are dated 1758. Whether the second was recast in 1758 is less certain as the bell was again recast in 1770. In fact, the work undertaken at St.Martin's was only part of a complex arrangement that also involved the replacement of the trebles of the ring of ten at Fulham - and the fact that the original second from St.Martin's survives and remains in use there confirms that Rudhall did indeed provide three new bells (and not just two) in 1758.

Fulham bells - the last major Rudhall job in the London area - were cast in 1729, just a few years after the St.Martin's ring. Rudhall recast the six old bells, to which two trebles were added to make a ring of eight with a tenor of 961kg (18-3-18). It is on record that when the new bells for Fulham arrived by water in January 1729/30 "the barge they were in sunk ... and it was a week before they could be weighed up". The trebles were a gift from William Skelton, a graduate of Oxford University who is believed to have been the registrar to the Bishop of London. His home was at Fulham. He joined the College Youths in 1715 and in 1733 he went with the Society on a ringing expedition to Oxford.

Not surprisingly, Fulham became a popular tower and ten peals were rung there in the 1730s and 1740s - including a long peal of 10,080 Bob Major in 1735. In 1746 the bells were augmented to ten by the addition of two trebles, the new bells being cast by Robert Catlin and presented by Theodore Ecclestone. Having inherited a substantial estate, Ecclestone spent much of his money on bells and ringing. He had joined the Eastern Scholars in 1735, transferring to the College Youths in 1744 and later serving as steward in 1747 and as Master in 1751. As well as the bells installed in churches near his Suffolk estate at Coddham (1740) and Stonham Aspal (1742), he also made gifts of bells to Winchester Cathedral (1742), Mortlake (1746) and to Fulham.

The Catlin trebles at Fulham were evidently considered unsatisfactory, and in 1758 a plan was hatched to replace them. What eventually happened is that Abel Rudhall cast a new treble (dated 1759) for Fulham and supplied an old bell from St.Martin-in-the-Fields (dated 1727) to replace the Catlin second. The second at Fulham still bears its original inscription "THE GIFT OF THE VESTRY BY SUBSCRIPTION 1727". The result of all this is that the St.Martin's trebles were replaced and Fulham were changed from a ring by mixed founders into a complete Rudhall ten.

The Fulham churchwardens' accounts show that in 1761 Mrs. Rudhall was paid £12.15.9. "for exchange of 2 bells as per bill". At the time of Abel Rudhall's death in February 1760, one of Catlin's Fulham trebles was still at the foundry and the probate inventory of his goods drawn up on 19/20 February 1760 lists a bell weighing 318kg (6-1-1) inscribed "The gift of Theodore Ecclestone Esq^r".

The long story of the creation of the St.Martin's ring ends with the recasting of the second bell by Thomas Rudhall of Gloucester in 1770. The Vestry minutes of 31 August 1770 simply record a resolution that it was "Agreed and ordered that the 2nd Bell belonging to the Church be new Cast". The original weights of the replacement trebles are not recorded, but the inscriptions and diameters of the trebles of the completed ring were as follows:

Bell	Inscription	Mm	Ins
1.	RECAST BY A (<i>bell</i>) R 1758 (<i>scroll border</i>)	680	26 ³ / ₄
2.	M : HART & W : CHAPMAN CHURCH WARDENS 1770 : T (<i>bell</i>) R :	712	28
3.	RECAST BY A (<i>bell</i>) R 1758 (<i>scroll border</i>)	737	29

With this work, the ring took the form in which it was to remain for the next two hundred years at St.Martin-in-the-Fields and as it is now at the core of the enlarged peal at The Bell Tower in Perth. There was, however, a further adjustment to the tuning of the bells, reported in the *Daily Advertiser* of 25 June 1773:

On Tuesday were compleatly tuned, by the celebrated Mr. Wyatt, of Kensington, that matchless Peal of 12 Bells, at the Parish Church of St. Martin in the Fields. The same Evening they were opened by a select Band, from the most Antient Society of College Youths, who think it their Duty to return Thanks, in this publick Manner to that ingenious Gentleman, for his great Care and Assiduity in so noble an Undertaking.

Quite what this work involved is unclear, except that the bells must have been chip-tuned in the tower to adjust their strike notes.

The Rudhalls

Finally, a brief word on the later Rudhalls - Abel and Thomas - may be helpful in showing how the completed St.Martin's ring sits in the context of the output of the Rudhall bellfounding dynasty.

As already noted, the two Abrahams (father and son) died within a few weeks of each other in 1735-6. On the monument to Abraham Rudhall the elder in Gloucester Cathedral it is said that he was "fam'd for his great skill; belov'd and esteem'd for his singular good Nature and Integrity". He was 78 at the time of his death. Abraham Rudhall the younger was only 55 when he died. A notice of his death in the *Gloucester Journal* 6 January 1735/6 said: A few days ago died here [Gloucester], the Celebrated Mr. ABRAHAM RUDHALL, jun. whose incomparable Skill and Ingenuity in Bell-Founding procur'd him the Admiration and Esteem of all who are judges of Musick. His Loss will be greatly regretted but that he is succeeded by his son, Mr. ABEL RUDHAL, whom he industriously instructed in his own Art, and whose early Knowledge and Performances have already rendered Him conspicuous in the Countries which he has served with Bells.

Barely 21 when he succeeded his father and grandfather in 1736, Abel Rudhall maintained a thriving business. The foundry was rather less busy, with output declining significantly in the 1740s. Under Abraham Rudhall I the average number of bells cast annually was 43 reaching a peak of 98 in 1709. This increased to 59 a year (and 137 in 1722) under Abraham Rudhall II, while for Abel the figure fell to just 33 but with a noticeable increase in trade through the 1750s with good years in 1753 (57) and 1757 (49).

Abel, however, improved the quality of the bells emanating from the foundry and today he - rather than Abraham I whose bells, despite his contemporary reputation, are generally judged to be pretty poor - is regarded by many as "the best of the Rudhalls". Moreover, he cast over 820 bells, including 75 complete rings (16 fives, 45 sixes and 14 eights but no rings of ten or twelve). Of these the most noteworthy was undoubtedly the heavy peal of eight (tenor 2240kg or 44 cwt) cast for Wells Cathedral in 1757.

Abel Rudhall - who clearly suffered from ill health as indicated in his letter to Browne Willis in 1759 when he complained of having gout and rheumatism - died on 8 February

1760. He was only 46. His three sons, all of whom were to eventually play a part in the running of the foundry, were too young to take control. From 1760 until 1762 when Thomas Rudhall came of age the business was run by Francis Tyler, a Gloucester plumber who has married Abel's sister.

Thomas was to cast 536 bells in all between 1762 and 1783, his best year being 1773 when he produced 51 bells. The average annual output declined to 26 bells a year during this period, but Thomas cast several complete rings including a number of heavy eights and a ring of ten (1777) for Christ Church at Macclesfield in Cheshire. When he died in 1783 tributes appeared in a number of provincial newspapers, including this report from the *Hereford Journal* of 23 October 1783:

Yesterday sen'night died at Gloucester after a lingering and painful illness, which he bore with great resignation, Mr. Thomas Rudhall, Bell-Founder, a man of great eminence in that business which has been for many generations in the family: and universally respected for the undeviating rectitude of his conduct

The business then carried on for a couple of years under the management of his brothers Charles and John Rudhall, whose advertisement in the *Gloucester Journal*, Mon. 3 November 1783 also appeared in a number of other papers:

Glocester

Charles and John Rudhall, Successors to their Brother, T. Rudhall, Bell-Founder, deceased, beg Leave to return their most grateful Acknowledgements to the Public for the Favours so constantly conferred upon their Family for a hundred Years past, of which they humbly hope for a Continuance: They likewise desire to inform them, that the Business will be carried on in the most extensive Manner: and all orders for Bells will be executed with the utmost Dispatch, and upon Terms as reasonable as at any Foundry in the Kingdom.

Orders addressed either to Mr. John Rudhall, at Glocester; or to Mr. Charles Rudhall, at Brightelmstone, Sussex, will meet with due attention.

Those persons, who are indebted to the late Thomas Rudhall, are requested to pay the same to Mr. Abraham Rudhall, Mercer, Glocester.

In 1786 John Rudhall took sole control of the business, continuing the Gloucester foundry until his death in 1835 when the goodwill was bought by Thomas Mears II of Whitechapel. Mears, who was succeeded by his sons Charles and George in 1844, ran the Gloucester foundry alongside their main Whitechapel one until 1848 when it finally closed. Throughout the closing decades output of the foundry fell to an average of 16 bells a year, picking up slightly in the 1820s when ten-year production reached almost 200.

The figures show that the St.Martin's bells were cast when the Rudhall foundry was at its peak in the mid-1720s, but the pride in the family business taken by Abel and later by Thomas meant that they were still well placed to improve the trebles and recast a broken bell when the need arose.

A catalogue produced in about 1830 shows that the Rudhalls cast 4521 bells - in fact a figure of 5177 seems more likely - including four peals of 12, ten of 10, eighty-two of 8, two hundred and ninety-five of 6 and one hundred and thirty-one of 5. This is an impressive list, and until the latter years of the eighteenth century when the Whitechapel founders had gained the ascendancy no other English bellfoundry could claim such a tally. In size and number the twelve bells of St.Martin-in-the-Fields held pride of place in the list.

Rehanging and repairs

Although there were a number of initial difficulties with the frame and fittings, it is clear from the amount of ringing recorded at St.Martin's that the bells gave good service from 1730 until well into the early twentieth century without the need for a full-scale restoration. It is known that John Wooding - a Whitechapel bellhanger active in the period from 1808 until about 1820 - did some work at St.Martin's in about 1810, but neither the date nor what was done are known. The accounts and minutes have not, however, been studied in detail. At some stage before the 1920s the back ten bells had been quarter turned and the canons of bells 9-12 had been removed.

In April 1790 two bellfounders visited the church together to take details of the bells and a plan of the bellframe as it existed at the time is preserved in a copy of the original notebook compiled by one of them. The two men were George Hedderly, a Nottingham bellfounder and bellhanger who spent some time in London in 1789-90 and later emigrated to America. The other was John Briant, the noted Hertford bellfounder. The details of the bells are recorded in Hedderly's notebook which also includes frame-plans and measurements for several other London rings.

Hedderly's plan shows all twelve bells hung on one level, with the three trebles in parallel pits swinging into the west window of the bell chamber and bells 5 and 6 similarly hung on the north side of the tower. This arrangement resulted in the ropes of the four smallest bells hanging in a straight line. There are later plans of the frame in the archives of the Loughborough and Whitechapel bellfoundries - both firms having inspected the bells at various times to quote for repairs - and these show that the frames for the trebles were later altered to improve the circle. By 1900, if not before, these bells were hung on two levels with nos.1 and 2 being hung in the top tier above nos.3 and 4 - all swinging north-south. The rest of the frame, however, was clearly unaltered between 1727 and 1922 when it was removed.

One other incident needs to be mentioned, as it must have caused some damage to the fittings of the bells. On 28 July 1842 the spire was struck by lightning, the event being reported in a contemporary description of the "awful thunderstorm in the Metropolis" at about 12 o'clock on Wednesday night:

The church of St.Martin-in-the-Fields has suffered severely from this awful visitation. The spire, which has always been so much admired, received such serious injury as to render it quite unsafe. The lightning entered the clock-house and forced open the door of the clock, and also that of the box standing near it; it then entered an aperture of the floor, and tore up the massive boards two or three inches above the level; after which it passed out of the circular window above, with such tremendous force that the two side stones of the niche were dislodged from their places and fell on the roof of the church. The key-stone was also removed several inches outwards. The west angle is split from the bottom upwards, and the figures on the north and west sides of the dial plates are turned black. The stone which composed the north-east corner is shattered to pieces, and the spire thrown out of the perpendicular. The electric fluid was seen to pass over the gates of the Golden Cross yard, when it struck against the ground and expended itself in a momentary blaze. On its passage a policeman of the A division was forced with such violence against the rails as to be completely stunned, and was removed to the station house, happily without further injury. We understand that upon a survey it has been found necessary to take down the tower as far as the flag-staff. ...

The necessary repairs were put in hand immediately, and the work was completed by the following October. A print was issued showing the church and surrounding buildings with the spire in scaffolding with the caption "The above view shows the scaffolding used when St.Martin's spire was repaired, also the building of the Nelson Column". A carved inscription in the ringing room records the event:

The Spire of this Church was destroy'd by
Lightning 28 July 1842 & was rebuilt
18 Oct 1842. Revd. Sir H.R. Dukenfield, Vicar.
R.W. Pilkinton Esqr. Architect. Samuel Hemmings. Stone contractor
[Names of churchwardens]

In the opening years of the twentieth century, the bells were inspected on a number of occasions with a view to rehung but nothing much was done. Some work was carried out in 1912 when the bells were said to have been "rehung" but the repairs must have been on a fairly modest scale. By the end of the Great War, it was felt that the time had come for a full restoration of the bells. Reports and estimates were obtained from John Taylor & Co of Loughborough and from Mears & Stainbank of Whitechapel, to whom the contract was awarded in 1922. The work involved a complete clear-out of the existing frame and fittings, cleaning and retuning the bells, and rehung in a new cast-iron frame with all new fittings. The *Ringing World* of 17 November 1922 carried the following report of the rededication service on 11 November:

St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.
Famous Bells Restored.

On Saturday last the bells of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London, were reopened after rehung, and by common consent the church now possesses one of the finest equipped peals of 12 in the country. The work has been carried out by Messrs. Mears and Stainbank, and the Whitechapel firm have made a really splendid job of this famous peal. The bells were heavily corroded, and have been cleaned off and the bells tuned. They have also been rehung with entirely new and modern fittings in a cast-iron frame work on a steel girder foundation, of similar type to that just completed at St. Mary's, Taunton. The twelve bells are now hung upon one level, and the even clapping was remarked upon. The tenor at St. Martin's is 30 cwt. 1 qr. 20 lb.

The reopening on Saturday was a very quiet ceremony. The Rector (the Rev. H.R.L. Sheppard), accompanied by the churchwardens and architect (Mr. E. Brantwood Maufe), ascended the tower, where the Rector offered the Dedicatory prayers. Then followed two courses of Stedman Cinques by a band of the Royal Cumberland Youths, conducted by Mr. John D. Matthews, Master.

The Vicar welcomed the ringers back to the tower, and said how greatly the message of the bells had been missed by all during their compulsory silence.

The Master, on behalf of the society, thanked the Rector and the churchwardens for the great interest they had taken in the work of the ringers, and for having the bells put in such fine order. He added they could not help feeling, with such a Rector behind them, that they really were an essential part of the church, as indeed they should be.

Ringling took place up to 5 p.m. in various methods, and visitors to London over the, week-end were offered the use of the bells for Sunday evening service.

After restoration, the details of the bells were as follows:

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Founder / date</i>	<i>Diameter</i>		<i>Note</i>	<i>Weight</i>	
		<i>Mm</i>	<i>Ins</i>		<i>Kg</i>	<i>c.q.l.</i>
1.	Abel Rudhall, 1758	679	26¾	A flat	283	5-2-7
2.	Thomas Rudhall, 1770	698	28	G flat	269	5-1-5
3.	Abel Rudhall, 1758	737	29	F	301	5-3-19
4.	Abraham Rudhall, 1725	762	30	E flat	323	6-1-11
5.	Abraham Rudhall, 1725	824	32⅝	D flat	381	7-1-27
6.	Abraham Rudhall, 1725	863	34	C	421	8-1-4
7.	Abraham Rudhall, 1725	915	36	B flat	504	9-3-19
8.	Abraham Rudhall, 1725	1003	39½	A flat	606	11-3-19
9.	Abraham Rudhall, 1725	1080	42½	G flat	753	14-3-9
10.	Abraham Rudhall, 1725	1159	45⅝	F	851	16-3-0
11.	Abraham Rudhall, 1725	1290	50¾	E flat	1168	23-0-0
12.	Abraham Rudhall, 1726	1422	56	D flat	1546	30-1-20

The work completed in 1922 the bells left the bells in the form in which they remained until 1987. They were last rung in the tower of St. Martin-in-the-Fields on 30 August 1987 and the last bell was lowered to the ground on 12 September - the end of one chapter in their history, but the start of their second life "down under".

Ringling at St. Martin's

The history of ringling at St. Martin-in-the-Fields is a huge subject, larger even than that of the bells, and it cannot be attempted here. However, some coverage of ringling is essential to illustrate the occasions when the bells were used, to explain the complex 'politics' of London ringling as it affected the control of the tower and to highlight some of the historical change-ringing performances on the bells.

The first purpose of the bells, it might be assumed, would be to call the parishioners to worship. That may be so, but the religious use of the bells is an aspect that is least well documented of all the recorded instances of when ringling took place. In general, it is the

secular and recreational usage for which the greatest amount of information survives. There is a simple reason for this since the routine ringing of the bells for daily and Sunday services simply took place without the need for records to be kept. In contrast, payments to the ringers for secular ringing needed to be recorded in the parish accounts. Since the early eighteenth century, at least, ringing societies and ringers have been keen to preserve their own records of peals and other ringing performances.

In terms of daily uses and Sunday ringing, customs have changed over the centuries. Bells have certainly been sounded to announce the times of services since time immemorial, but service ringing as it is known today - with a team of ringers ringing the bells full-circle - has not always been the preferred form of Sunday usage. Indeed, in many places it was common for the bells to be chimed on Sundays and only 'rung' at other times. Occasions when the bells might be rung for church festivals did include Christmas, Maundy Thursday, Ascension Day and events such as confirmations, Episcopal visitations, the annual perambulation of the parish bounds at Rogation tide and the election of churchwardens.

In truth, we simply don't know what form of service ringing applied at St.Martin-in-the-Fields before the Great War although it is probable that a tradition of regular Sunday ringing can be traced back to the so-called Belfry Reform era of the late nineteenth century. Certainly the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths and the St.Martin-in-the-Fields band have provided a band to ring for the main Sunday services and other church festivals for many decades.

When George Morriss was steeplekeeper at St.Martin's in the 1860's he was noted for chiming tunes on the bells using ropes tied to his feet, hands, elbows and thumbs - as illustrated in an account published in *The British Workman* on 1 January 1863 p.388. The picture was actually drawn in the belfry at Clerkenwell but the article refers to the fact that having become responsible for St.Martin's he could be seen there "practising on ten bells with the equal facility as on eight". It is not clear, though, whether he rang the bells in this manner for services.

When the first services were broadcast on the radio from St.Martin's in the 1920s the bells were heard at the start. The bells were usually chimed on the Ellacombe apparatus on these occasions. Again, this may not have been the norm - and it could be that this form of chiming simply suited the limits of broadcasting at the time.

Going back much further, it is clear from the church accounts that in the early seventeenth century - with references in 1621, 1631 and 1643 - it was usual for the sexton to chime a bell before the Sunday morning service. This is listed among his duties. In 1643 it is specified that the bell should cease "by nine of the Clock every Sabbath morning as hath been formerly accustomed". The bell in question may have been the Sanctus bell hung in the cupola on top of the old tower. After the church was rebuilt, the extra bell hung in the lantern under the spire was used as a service bell.

The other usage to be mentioned here is the ringing of daily bells at five o'clock in the morning and eight o'clock at night - not for services but to announce the start and end of the day. The latter was, of course, the curfew bell. The fees paid to the sexton included an allowance for this daily duty.

These were secular rather than religious uses, and this leads in to the subject of paid ringing for public occasions and events of national importance. From the middle of the sixteenth century - at about the time when the English church separated from Rome and became The Established Church - it became common for bells to be rung at public expense for state occasions and anniversaries. The Churchwardens' accounts of every parish in England contain similarly detailed accounts of payments to the ringers.

The examples given in appendix D include complete listings for 1592-3, 1601-3, 1630-2, 1647-8, 1730 and 1795-6 - showing the range of occasions on which the ringers were paid by the parish. The number of times varied from year to year, but the figures for three accounting periods in 1663-4 (10), 1634-5 (5), 1635 (9) and 1637 (7) give an idea of the frequency. By 1730 the cost had risen to almost £30 a year, and so the vestry decided to limit the number of occasions when the ringers would be paid and set a limit of £1.1.0 on each day. Nevertheless, the bells were rung for 13 public ringing days in 1757 and 19 in 1758-9.

The record of such expenditure at St.Martin's is of particular interest, both because the accounts extend right back to 1525 but also on account of the links with the Royal palaces and the offices of state (especially the Admiralty) that made such ringing all the more significant.

The first such payment in the accounts occurs in 1538-9 when the Churchwardens paid fourpence "to the Ryngers that Rang ageynst the kyngs coming by". While most parishes paid for ringing on Royal birthdays and anniversaries, St.Martin's was unusual in having the bells rung to announce the movements of the ruling monarch when coming and going from the Royal palaces. There are many such entries in the accounts (*see* Appendix D for selected extracts relating to paid ringing generally) and those of the Tudor period are of particular interest. Later - and certainly by 1730 - the charges for were borne by the Palace and paid to the ringers as bounty rather than paid by the parish.

The St.Martin's bells rang for significant Royal occasions. These include the death of Henry VII in 1546/7, the arrival of King Philip of Spain after his marriage to Queen Mary in 1554, the burial of Queen Mary in 1558, the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1586/7, the proclamation and coronation of Kings James I in 1602/3, the baptisms of several royal children in the 1630s, the proclamation of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector in 1653 and of his son Richard in 1658 and so on. In fact, a thorough search in the accounts would show that most such occasions were marked by the ringing of the bells and by payment to the ringers in money or in beer.

The royal anniversaries commemorated annually by ringing varied from one period to another. Again, examples from different times can be seen in Appendix D. In general, it was usual for bells to be rung everywhere to mark the anniversaries of the accession and coronation of the ruling monarch, his or her birthday and - at St.Martin's - sometimes for other members of the Royal household too.

Indeed, this was the Royal Church and its bells have been referred to as the Royal Bells although the first recorded use of the description seems to have been in 1863. These were associations that the members of Society of Royal Cumberland Youths were evidently keen to emphasise. Certainly press reports of ringing from the 1860s often refer to the Royal parish, the Royal church and its Royal bells.

Other public occasions of significance when bells were regularly rung included the 5th November on the anniversary of the overthrow of the Guy Fawkes plot to blow up the King and the House of Commons in 1605. At St.Martin's this first occurred in 1606 - one year after the event - beginning a Bonfire Night tradition that continued for many centuries. Even after the execution of King Charles I in 1649 the Churchwardens still met the cost ringing on 5th November each year. The annual commemoration was not so much pro-monarchist as anti-Catholic, and the observation of the tradition remained appropriate in the severely Protestant time of the Commonwealth and Protectorate.

After the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 when Charles II resumed the throne, the old customs continued. In addition it became usual for the bells to be rung on "Oak Apple Day", 29th May, when in commemoration of the time when the King was forced to hide in an apple tree after his defeat at the Battle of Worcester during in the Civil War. As Pepys records in his diary, the Restoration parliament ordained that "the 29 of May, the King's birthday, to be for ever kept as a day of thanksgiving for our redemption from tyranny and the King's return to his Government, he entering London that day".

In more recent times, it became common practice to ring full peals to mark major Royal occasions. The record is incomplete as attempts were not always successful, but occasions when peals were rung (*see* list and details in Appendix D) included the coming of age of the Prince of Wales in 1862, Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1887, the Silver wedding of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1948, and most of the Royal events of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II including her return from her Australasian tour in 1954.

The nature of such ringing - and the way in which it has been recorded - has changed over time, but these examples illustrate how the bells have been unfailingly rung for Royal occasions down the centuries.

No less recurrent was the use of the bells to announce and celebrate victory in battle, with examples being noted from the sixteenth century right through to the present day. Indeed, because of Admiralty office was situated in the parish there was a special tradition at St. Martins bells were the first to ring for a Naval Victory.

Instances of such ringing recorded in the accounts include the defeat of Wyatt's rebellion in 1553/4, the victory over the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the failure of the Earl of Gowrie's conspiracy in 1621 and Royalist victories in Ireland in the Civil War. Later, naval and military victories in the Napoleonic Wars from 1793 to 1815 are chronicles including the historic triumph in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. In later times the bells were rung at the end of World War II - the footnote to the peal rung on 1 December 1945 simply stating "to celebrate peace" - and also for victories during the course of the war such as Montgomery's defeat of Rommel's forces at El Alamein in 1942 when the wartime ban on ringing (which lasted from June 1940 until April 1943) was lifted for one day.

The bells were also rung for events of significance in the parish and the list of peals (Appendix D) includes several examples of ringing to mark the appointment or retirement of successive vicars and curates. Some peals were also associated with significant dates in the lives of some of the ringers such as the silver weddings of two ringing couples in 1948 and in memory of members of the band and Society.

The use of the bells as a mark of respect to brother ringers was a long-standing tradition, of which there are a number of examples in the later nineteenth century when reports were published in *Church Bells* and the *Bell News*. Several leading London and provincial ringers were honoured in this way. When William Estcourt - over fifty years a member of the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths and the leader of a famous band of ringers at Painswick in Gloucestershire - died in 1876, the bells rang muffled as a tribute to his memory. In 1878 the bells were muffled for ringing in memory of John Howe and John Potter, two London members of the Cumberlands. In 1888 the Cumberlands rang in tribute to Francis A.P. Knipe, a young doctor who had rung with the Society at St. Martin's between 1876 and 1879 while undergoing his medical training. He died young at the age of 32 after emigrating to Australia. When the news of his death reached London a month later the bells were rung half-muffled with the traditional "whole pull and stand". Jack Mansfield, the St. Martin's steeplekeeper and one of the ringers from the 1870s, was similarly honoured in 1902 as was Harry Stubbs, a ringer killed in an accident at work on the railway in 1905.

The most detailed and complete record of all the ringing that took place at St. Martin's, though, is that of the 114 full peals of over 5000 changes rung on the bells between 1726 and 1987. Of these the first nineteen were rung in the eighteenth century, a further 37 in the nineteenth century and the rest - just over half the total - in the twentieth. Full details of all the peals are given in Appendix D. It is impossible to give a narrative history here or to attempt to set these performances in the context of London ringing at the time they were rung. Similarly, a commentary on the individual ringers who took part in these peals is way beyond the scope of this section, but some highlights and key statistics are worth mentioning.

The first peal attempt and the first successful peal in October 1726 have been noted already, along with brief details of the "Ringing Match" that took place between the London Scholars and the College Youths in March 1727/8 when two long peals of Grandsire Cinques were rung. A peal of Bob Maximus followed in 1731 with further peals on the full twelve bells from 1771 onwards.

The most notable of these was the 6,204 Stedman Cinques rung in 4 hours 47 minutes by the College Youths on 6 October 1788. This was the first ever peal of Stedman Cinques and a long one too, starting a tradition of progressive lengths in the method that has continued for nearly two centuries until the ringing of a peal of 20,001 changes in 13 hours 11 minutes - the current record - at Worcester in 1983. The 1788 peal is commemorated on an elaborate peal board at St. Martin's, restored in 1988. There is a facsimile copy of the original - commissioned by Laith Reynolds and made in 1987-8 - in the ringing room at The Bell

Tower. The peal was reported in the *London General Advertiser* of October 8 1788 in glowing terms:

Monday last the Society of College Youths rang on the peal of twelve bells at the church of St. Martin in the Fields, a true and compleat peal of 6,204 Stedman's Principle, in 4 hours and 47 minutes, being the greatest number of changes of that peal ever rung in England. This very curious and intricate composition was invented in the last century, but was, by the connoisseurs of the present day, deemed impracticable to be achieved, until these darling sons of distinguished merit have, by this, in addition to many other meritorious performances, shown to their contemporaries that industry and resolution, united, will ever get through the most arduous task.

Although the majority of the peals were in standard lengths of around 5000 changes, the list of peals on the bells at St.Martin's includes quite a few longer lengths. In all there were 19 peals of over four hours in duration, some of those of "ordinary" length being rung in relatively slow times. The following is a list of the eight peals of more than 5,500 changes:

<i>No</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Society</i>	<i>Changes</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Time</i>
2	14.03.1727/8	London Scholars	6,006	Grandsire Cinques	4h.30
3	15.03.1727/8	College Youths	6,314	Grandsire Cinques	5h.15
5	04.12.1734	Eastern Scholars	5,600	Grandsire Caters	3h.45
16	06.10.1788	College Youths	6,204	Stedman Cinques	4h.47
17	02.02.1789	College Youths	5,580	Treble Bob Maximus	4h.24
29	26.10.1837	St.James's Society	7,325	Grandsire Cinques	5h.35
35	26.02.1866	Cumberlands	5,679	Stedman Cinques	4h.27
114	15.08.1987	Cumberlands	6,805	Trafalgar Surprise Maximus	4h.47

Of these the long peal of Grandsire Cinques in 1837 was especially noteworthy, as is the sponsored peal in aid of the restoration of the bells that was rung in 1987. The long peal of Trafalgar Surprise Maximus - the length of 6,805 being chosen with the 1805 date of the Battle of Trafalgar in mind - was the last peal on the bells in the tower.

In all there were 7 peals on eight bells, 18 on ten and 89 on twelve. Of the eight bell peals most were rung on the light eight (or "front" eight) - four between 1737 and 1749 and one in 1868, with only two being rung on the heavy eight (or "back eight) in 1932 and 1936. To summarise the performances in terms of what was rung, a brief analysis of the number of bells used and methods rung is as follows:

<i>Bells</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Methods rung (no of each)</i>
Triples	5	Plain Bob (2), Grandsire (2) and Stedman (1)
Major	2	Plain Bob (1) and Cambridge Surprise (1)
Caters	14	Grandsire (7) and Stedman (7)
Royal	4	Plain Bob (2), Kent Treble Bob (1) and Cambridge Surprise (1)
Cinques	60	Erin (2), Grandsire (13) and Stedman (45)
Maximus	29	Plain Bob (1), Real Double Bob (1), Treble Bob (12), Trafalgar Surprise (1), Bristol Surprise (3), Cambridge Surprise (3) and Yorkshire Surprise (8)

The leading peal conductors at different dates included many of the great figures of London ringing. While it is not possible to go into any details of the individual ringers who took part in these peals, the list of conductors (and their affiliations to the different ringing societies) does give some idea of the bands which performed on the St.Martin's bells. In this list all conductors are listed up to 1850, but thereafter those only who called only one peal (20 people in all, 12 up to the Second World War and 8 from 1945 to 1987) are omitted.

<i>Period</i>	<i>Conductor and affiliation(s)</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Date(s)</i>
Eighteenth century	Benjamin Annable - College Youths	2	1726-1728
	John Cundell - College Youths	1	1731
	Philemon Mainwaring - Eastern Scholars	1	1734
	John Denmead - Union Scholars	3	1737-1738
	John Holt - Union Scholars	3	1748-1751

<i>Period</i>	<i>Conductor and affiliation(s)</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Date(s)</i>
	George Byers - College Youths	1	1771
	John Povey - College Youths	3	1779-1820
	Robert Pye Donkin - College Youths	1	1784
	Thomas Blakemore - College Youths	4	1785-1797
	James Worster - College Youths	1	1789
	John Noonan - Cumberlands (Junior Society)	2	1799-1802
Early nineteenth century	Charles Barber - College Youths	1	1802
	George Gross - Cumberlands	1	1812
	John Cooper - College Youths	1	1829
	Thomas Brook - College Youths	1	1837
	George Stockham - College Youths	1	1844
	Thomas Tolladay	3	1837-1838
Later nineteenth century	John Cox - Cumberlands (5) and St.James's Society (2)	7	1854-1881
	George Newson - Cumberlands	5	1884-1893
	John Nelms - Cumberlands	3	1862-1867
	Henry W. Haley - College Youths (1), Yorkshire Association & St.James's Society (1)	2	1869, 1884
	John Rogers - Cumberlands	2	1887-1889
Early twentieth century	John D. Matthews - Cumberlands	6	1918-1928
	George H. Cross - Cumberlands (7) and Oxford Diocesan Guild (1)	8	1930-1951
	John H. Cheesman - Cumberlands	2	1932
Later twentieth century	Thomas H. Francis - Cumberlands (10) and Guildford Diocesan Guild (1)	11	1950-1950
	Dennis Beresford - Cumberlands	6	1964-1971
	Derek E. Sibson - Cumberlands (6), Middlesex County Association and London Diocesan Guild (1)	7	1976-1987
	Graham A. Duke - Cumberlands	5	1981-1987

A breakdown by Society, approximately in the order of the date of their first peal shows how the bells were used by the London ringers and occasionally by visiting bands from the provinces.

<i>Society</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Date(s)</i>
Ancient Society of College Youths (all branches)	20	1726-1869, 1987
London Scholars	1	1727/8
Eastern Scholars	1	1734
Union Scholars	6	1736/7-1751
Society of Royal Cumberland Youths (including Juniors)	71	1799-1812, 1854-1987
St.James's Society	5	1837-1883
Yorkshire Association and St.James's Society	1	1884
Norwich Diocesan Association	1	1889
Essex Association and St.James's Society	1	1892
Oxford Diocesan Guild	1	1948
St. Martin's Guild [Birmingham]	1	1949
Guildford Diocesan Guild	1	1950
Central Council of Church Bell Ringers	1	1972
Middlesex County Association and London Diocesan Guild	2	1981-1986
Kent County Association	1	1984

Peal ringing, however, had more to do with the fortunes of the societies having control of the tower than with the health of the parish ringers - if such a separate band existed. From the seventeenth century onwards, the leading ringers around London organised themselves into societies and rang at several churches rather than just at one place. These societies often made one of their towers their headquarters. St.Martin's, as one of the most important towers in London, was a prize to be "owned" since control of the belfry gave access to the bells for peals and other ringing as well a prestige by association with such a well-connected and handsome church.

The late William T. Cook, the leading historian of London ringing, has chronicled the history of the various rival societies in the eighteenth century - when the development of peal ringing intensified the competition between them - in his book on *The Society of College Youths 1637-2005*. There is no record of any of the societies taking an active interest in St.Martin's before the rebuilding of the church in 1721-6 although the new ring of eight

installed in 1714 may well have received visits from the London ringers of the day. As we have already seen, though, the bells in the new church were rung by members of the London Scholars and the College Youths within a few days of the completion of the building. At first, it seems, no single society had control of the bells initially and within the first decade at least three sets of London ringers achieved peals on them - the third being the Eastern Scholars who rang Grandsire Caters there in 1734. By 1736, however, the Union Scholars seem to have started meeting regularly at St Martin's and they rang six peals there between 1736 and 1751. This Society was disbanded in 1756.

Some of the Union Scholars joined the College Youths, as did members of the Eastern Scholars. Trouble lay ahead, however, and in 1756, there was a quarrel within the College Youths that resulted in a split in the Society. The older members then made St Martins their headquarters and continued there until 1788 when their branch of the Society became extinct. Dating from this time is a ticket for the Society's anniversary feast. The work of the Italian engraver Francesco Bartolozzi who lived in London from 1764 to 1804, the engraving has a composite view of the towers at which the Society rang - St.Martin's, St. Bride's, Cornhill and Southwark - with the first-named being given prominence. This design is still used as the basis of the Society's current membership certificate.

When the senior branch died out in 1788 the one-time juniors moved into St Martin's, adopting the name of the Ancient Society of College Youths to emphasise their succession to the society established in 1637. It was shortly after this that the Society rang its noteworthy peal of 6,204 Stedman Cinques on the bells. The peal records show that other societies had the use of the bells for peals from time to time - including the rival Society of Royal Cumberland Youths (known as the Cumberlands) established in 1747. But the College Youths had St.Martin's as their headquarters tower until 1849 when they moved south of the river to St.Saviour's (now the Cathedral) at Southwark.

According to the old rules of 1776 the Society met on Thursday evenings "between the Hours of Seven and Eight o'clock", and the members were not "make it later than Nine o'clock before they go up to ring". While they were based at St.Martin's their meeting place was a public house known as The Barn in St Martin's Lane. This was later pulled down to make way for the creation of Trafalgar Square.

The Society had the responsibility for providing ringers to ring on public occasions. In 1839 it was noted in a printed address to the ratepayers regarding the appointment of a new steeplekeeper that the College Youths "have had the ringing of your Bells on all public and rejoicing-days for nearly half a century". At this point the College Youths and the Cumberlands had united to press for the appointment of Charles Clay, a member of the former Society, as steeplekeeper. It is clear from a letter from "Campanalogia" on the state of bells in London printed in *The Times* on 26 February 1836 that the previous arrangements had been far from satisfactory to the ringers. Noting difficulties in several London belfries, the writer reported that at St.Martin's the steeplekeeper appointed by the Vestry was "a decayed housekeeper quite unacquainted with the nature of bells".

It has generally been assumed that the Cumberlands took over at St.Martin's shortly after the College Youths left in 1849. Certainly they rang a peal of Stedman Cinques there in 1854 for which they had a peal board erected in the ringing room. Another board of 1868 marks "the seventh anniversary of George Morriss as steeple keeper and also of the above Society as ringers". Another source refers to the Cumberlands having become "the parochial ringers for St.Martin's" in 1861.

The likelihood that 1861 is the correct date seems to be confirmed by an article on John Rogers, one of the leaders of the Society, in the *Bell News* in October 1894 which states that Rogers "successfully exerted himself in company with other members, in obtaining the important tower of St Martin in the Fields for the headquarters of the Cumberlands".

At all accounts St.Martin's became a Cumberland tower at about that time and it has remained the headquarters of the Society to the present day. Successive steeplekeepers from the time of George Morriss (1861-c.1875) and his successor Jack Mansfield (c.1875-1902) were members of the Society.

By 1874 the state of affairs in the belfry referred to by “Campanalogia” in 1836 had been well and truly rectified. Writing anonymously from Calcutta in September 1874, “C.Y.” - a College Youth serving in India, no doubt - contributed the following account of a visit to St.Martin’s with a description of the ringing room. This appeared under the heading of “a Tour among Bells in Town and Country” in *Church Bells* Vol.4 p.547

It is of no use to talk to me about resisting temptation! When I hear the bells in a tower being raised (and I have a marvellously sharp ear for that operation), go I must. Fortunately, change ringers as a body have always a welcome for strangers who can ring at all, or I should on many occasions have been given to understand that I was an intruder.

On the 18th June, 1873, I was in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross when the Shah was expected to arrive in London; the sound of one or two bells in the tower of St.Martin-in-the-Fields was as irresistible as usual, and I presently found myself at the head-quarters of the Cumberland Society, the able rivals of the College Youths.

The ringing-chamber is oval in form, and rather small; the ropes descend in an excellent circle, but are a little crowded; the room is kept in beautiful order, and ornamented with many boards.

The Shah was welcomed with touches of Caters in the Stedman and Grandsire methods, and with a touch of Treble Bob Royal, all of which were admirably struck.

In 1888, it might be added, the ringing room was further improved by the installation of electric lighting, electricity having been installed in the church in the course of restoration work in that year. A footnote to the *Bell News* report of the peal rung on 9 February 1889 noted that “the ringing room is illuminated by electric light upon the Edison principle” and made the comment that the performance was “thought to be the first peal ever accomplished by this agent of lighting”.

The rest is history. By the early years of the twentieth century - and probably long before - the Cumberlands were holding fortnightly practices at St.Martin’s. Regular Society practices continue to this day. The peal list - which shows that most of the peals on the bells between 1854 and their removal were rung by the Cumberlands - provides a measure of the Society’s ringing achievements. Although opportunities for peal attempts were fairly limited, the College Youths were invited to ring a peal on the bells in recognition of their earlier associations with the tower to mark their 350th anniversary in 1987.

From the 1950s, however, members of the Society who rang regularly at St.Martin’s grew more and more aware of the limitations of the bells, both their tonal quality and the degree of effort required to ring them. The restoration that eventually took place in 1987-8 followed many years of negotiation by successive Cumberland Masters from the time of Dennis Beresford who first became involved with the tower in the early 1950s. It was the Cumberlands who instigated the project and saw it through to completion.

The St.Martin-in-the-Fields church and the community

No account of St.Martin-in-the-Fields would be complete without a mention of its work in the field of social responsibility. More than just a splendid church building and an iconic feature on the landscape of the London and Westminster tourist trail, St.Martin’s has a long and distinguished record of radical preaching on social affairs matched by practical action. Its influence has spread across the world, and among those who were inspired by the ideology and work of the St.Martin’s clergy was John Bell who was Rector of Claremont and later Dean of Perth.

With its Royal associations and its location in a busy and now “smart” part of the Capital it would be easy to assume that St.Martin’s was a church attended only by the upper and middle classes. While its parishioners did include many notable figures and people of substance, the parish also included areas of shops, workshops and crowded tenements. As the parish church St.Martin’s was the official place of worship for the people who lived there too. Over the centuries, therefore, the church accommodated an unusually diverse congregation. Today the church enjoys an active membership from the Chinese community in the parish. During the times when welfare responsibilities rested with the civil parish authorities, the designated officers - the Overseers of the Poor for St.Martin-in-the-Fields - were by no means

free from the challenges that were faced in more obviously deprived parishes. Changes in the provision of social care in the nineteenth century distanced the church and Vestry from such work, and eventually a new form of ministry to the poor and destitute evolved.

This gained impetus during the incumbency of the Rev. H.R.L. (Dick) Sheppard, who served as Vicar from 1914 to 1926. Immediately before taking up his position he had seen active service in the opening months of the Great War as Chaplain at a military hospital near the battle-front. The experience greatly affected him and influenced the beliefs which shaped his work at St.Martin's where he made radical changes. Abolishing pew rents he made the church "open to all", provided a place of refuge for military personnel throughout the war, and opened the crypt as a shelter during the air raids that began in 1916. The first service ever broadcast on the radio went out from St.Martin's on 1924. Dick Sheppard began the tradition of the Vicar's Christmas radio appeal - continued ever since - that has raised huge sums of money for disadvantaged people across the country.

Work with disadvantaged, desperate and homeless people has been part of the St.Martin's ministry since Dick Sheppard's time, ably continued under his successors. Efforts to combat homelessness were formalised with the foundation of the Social Service Unit in 1948. Its work continues today through The Connection at St Martin's, which cares for around 7,500 individuals each year. The cleaning and refurbishment of the crypt in 1987 provided improved accommodation for the unit alongside the excellent restaurant, art gallery, bookshop and meeting rooms that now enable the church to raise money to fund its work.

Never afraid to speak out in the pulpit and on air on social, humanitarian and international issues, the clergy have played an active role in contributing, *inter alia*, to the pacifist and Anti-Apartheid movements. St.Martin's has also keenly supported the work of charitable organisations such as Amnesty International, Shelter and The Big Issue. It is for this work, above all, that Sheppard, Mervyn Charles Edwards (later Bishop of Worcester), Canon Austen Williams and Canon Geoffrey Brown - the Vicar in the late 1980s - are best known. So too is the church.

The strong tradition of pastoral care described here is not without relevance to the story of the bells. In terms of fund-raising and expenditure, the social work of the parish always had priority over the care of the church building and its fittings. This was especially true while Austen Williams was Vicar from 1956 to 1984. While the building was never neglected, there was never any money for inessential work or for improvements. As long as the bells continued to be rung and heard it was hard to make a pressing claim on the limited funding for maintenance and repairs.

As a postscript, though, it should be noted that the church building underwent a multi-million pound restoration and renewal completed in 2008. The reopening of the church on 30 September was attended by Prince Charles, the Duchess of Cornwall, the Archbishop of Canterbury and former British Prime Minister John Major. Taking ten years of planning and nearly two years to complete, the renewal project has both restored many features of the Georgian building and created new facilities to equip the church to continue its work of caring into the 21st century.

Chris Pickford