Shincliffe Local History Society

NEW BELLS FOR SHINCLIFFE

By

Olga Walker

The installation of a ring of six bells at St Mary the Virgin, Shincliffe.

This article, ‘New Bells for Shincliffe’ was one of three pieces comprising the booklet “Babies, Baking and Bells” which detailed the origins of three community groups: The Playgroup, The Women’s Institute, and the Bellringers. They are a record of three short talks given at the Society meeting in March 2005.

The original article was written by Olga Walker (née Jopling), based on notes left by her father, Mr Tom Jopling, with additional information by Jean Woodward.

“Babies, Baking and Bells” was first published by Shincliffe Local History Society in 2005.

For this online edition, the text is essentially unaltered, with some minor edits for ease of reading. Photographs have been improved.

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By

Olga Walker (née Jopling)

A former rector of Shincliffe, Canon Lathaen, said that quite often big happenings start through a remark in casual conversation or someone expressing a longing, which at the time seems impossible to make reality.

On good authority he was led to believe that this is how the new bells of Shincliffe emerged, from a dream to actuality.

The Original Bells

At Shincliffe we had only three bells when the church was first built. These bells were cast in Dublin in 1852 but probably weren't specifically for Shincliffe.

We assume this to be so because the words 'St Mary's Shincliffe' were not inscribed on any of the bells when cast, but were later incised on their waists.





The original three bells which were to be replaced.

The second bell also bears the words 'bought by penny subscription' and here may lie the clue to the history of the bells and their odd tuning.

It could be that the parish only had two bells originally, the first and third, in G and E flat. All that could be afforded to augment the original two bells at the time was a ready cast bell with a note somewhere in between - F sharp.

However, the resulting combination made it impossible for the bells to be augmented further without recasting or retuning.

There are plaster casts at the back of the church of the inscription on the original bells – a roundel with a crown above a harp, surrounded by shamrock leaves and the words 'J Murphy, Founder, Dublin 1852'.

For years the bells, although hung for ringing, were only chimed from the vestry below by three ropes. Two of these ropes were tied around the clappers of the two bells. The third was fixed to an improvised hammer alongside the tenor. If anyone happened to swing the tenor and the hammer was out of position, it would have to be nailed back on to the wooden beam and this was why part of the lip of the tenor was missing, thus affecting the sound of the bell.

This was not all that was done. The Spire, Belfry and ringing chamber were cleaned out, decorated and furnished, a new ceiling was put in the ringing chamber and, with help from other ringers in the county, a keen band of ringers was taught how to ring a bell. However, such was the enthusiasm of these young ringers, that there was an interest in augmenting to six bells.

Raising the Funds



With a group of bell ringers are, front right, tower captain Tom Jopling and his wife Dolly. Top right is the Revd S Moore.

A fund-raising committee was set up in May 1965 with the President '65-'67 Revd S Moore and Chairman '65-'68 Mt G Reeves. From 1968 onwards the Chairman was Canon A Lathaen, Vice-Chairman Mr G Reeves, Treasurer Mr F Stone, Secretary Mr T Jopling and members were Mrs J T Brockbank, Mrs E E Cleaver and Messrs D A Bayles, W Calderbank, M E Johnson, R H Langdon, F A Martin, Revd J W Rogerson, T Walker, and K Wilson.

By May in 1965 a total of £36.10s had already been raised with a target of £2,000. The money was raised in various ways:

1. The collection of waste paper raised £130 but with the lowering price paid for waste paper it proved not to be worth it in the end as the price per ton dropped from 5/6s to 2/-. In 1966, a year of great fund raising activity, the collection of waste paper was unfortunately hindered by severe weather.
2. An Open Day at the *Seven Stars* pub, coffee morning and pile of pennies - £21.
3. A Garden Party at The Orange Tree home of Mr and Mrs Brockbank.
4. The day England beat Germany in the World Cup - £90.
5. A performance by Police Male Voice Choir in Durham Town Hall - £13.
6. Mr and Mrs Eric Cleaver living at Bowburn Grange opened their gardens to the public - £75.
7. Whist Drives were also held, various donations received, and pens were sold.



A group of bell ringers set about collecting waste paper to help the cause.

By early 1967, £500 had been raised. The year 1967 also brought an interregnum. Fund raising had to be suspended as money had to be raised to renovate the Rectory.

Canon Alan Lathaen took over as Chairman and soon a light ring of six bells was agreed on. There was a possibility of buying the bells of St Peter's Church Jarrow, but this proved unproductive.

In 1968 progress was made as the Sir John Priestman Charity Trust donated £300 for a bell. The gift of £200 for a bell was promised from another source and it was possible to proceed.

A telephone call was made to Whitechapel Bell Foundry with a view to an order being placed. Problems with the rail-network put back their visit and the production of firm plans.

Early in 1969 when plans were finalised, the Treasurer announce that an interest-free loan had been offered. The Bell Fund Committee and Ringers moved closer towards having the new bells installed.

The six bells were cast by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. They were:

1. **Treble** (1-3-14) note B
   'The gift of ringers who raised the money by the collection and sale of waste paper.'
2. **Bell 2** (1-3-24) note A
   'The gift of the bell-fund committee and parishioners.'
3. **Bell 3** (2-1-25) note G
   'The gift of John and Rosalind Rogerson in recognition of the work of Thomas Jopling, Tower Captain.'
4. **Bell 4** (2-3-10) note F sharp
   'Cast from the original three bells of this parish and a bell given by the parish of Chester-le-Street, formerly in the mission church at Chester Moor.'
5. **Bell 5** (3-1-9) note E
   'The gift of Sir John Priestman Charity Trust.'
6. **Tenor** (4-0-14) note D
   'This peal dedicated to the Glory of God. W A Lathaen, Rector, E E Cleaver and C Hawkins, Churchwardens.'

All voluntary work was done by Messrs H Jopling, A Hindmarch, I Croft and T Jopling and all work was supervised by Matthew Hayton B.Arch., FRIBA.

Christmas Deadline

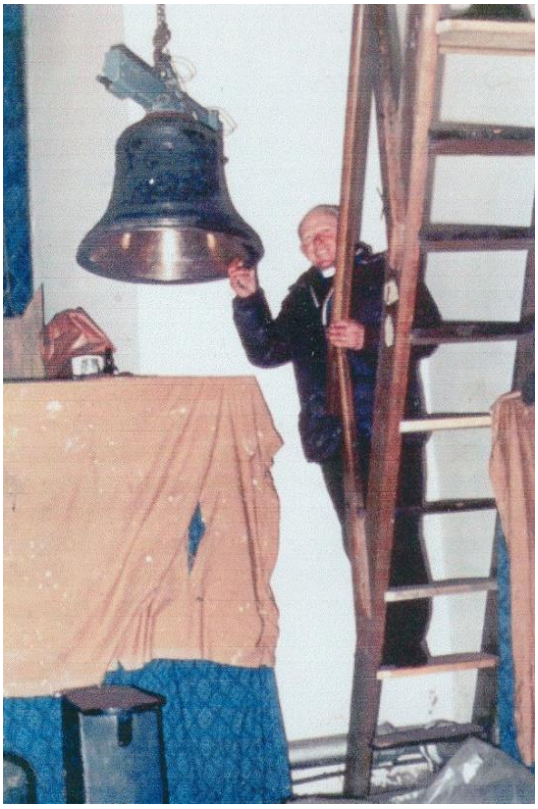
After a 'faculty' (a form of diocesan planning permission) had been applied for and received, a trap door was cut in the floor to lower the old bells with block and tackle borrowed from the Dean and Chapter.

Marsh of Sunderland had the contract for making the frame to the specification from the foundry. Timber was given by Bell & Ridley, a local firm of builders, and some had to be bought. The Bells had to be hung before Christmas 1969 and the Dedication on the 20th December. We had to press on with sound control, more timber had to be bought, sand and wood-chips had to be acquired and all material had to be winched up into the tower.

By late November we were almost ready to take delivery of the bells. In December men arrived from Whitechapel to check everything was ready for delivery of the bells, just two weeks before the date arranged for dedication.

The bells had left Whitechapel on the Monday and on Tuesday, they had not arrived. They were eventually traced to Watson Carriers in Spennymoor who delivered them early on Wednesday morning.

When the bells arrived, we were not pleased as, after examining them, the second, fifth and tenor bells were damaged round their lips. The damage was done in transit, probably with a crowbar.

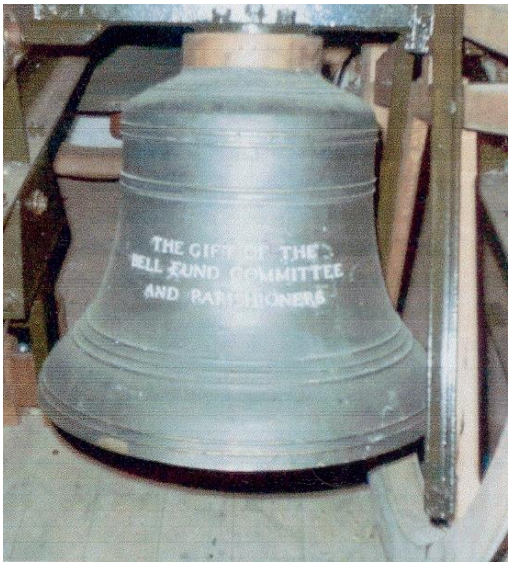


Canon Lathaen supervises the hanging of the six new bells in time to meet the Christmas deadline of December 20, 1969, when the bells were dedicated by the Dean of Durham the Very Revd J H S Wild.

After the bells were unloaded and taken into Church, the bells were winched up into the tower with all their fixtures and fittings. A week before dedication the bells were ready for testing and sounding great.

Word came through that the fifth and tenor bells would be replaced after the dedication, but the second would remain. The Dean of Durham, the very Revd J H S Wild MA Hon DD dedicated the bells on December 20th. The bells were rung by representatives of the Durham and Newcastle Association of Church Bell Ringers.

The loan was repaid by March 1970 and a Social evening was held on May 14th 1970 to celebrate the completion of the bell restoration project after six years.





Two of the six new bells: left - Bell 2 inscribed 'The gift of the bell-fund committee and parishioners', and right – Bell 4 inscribed 'Cast from the original three bells of this parish and a bell given by the parish of Chester-le-Street, formerly in the Mission Church at Chester Moor'.

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The brass plate in the vestry records the dedication and there is a written plaque by Olga Walker (née Jopling) placed prominently in the church.

In her original notes, Olga Walker adds "I cannot take all the credit for the above notes; they were handed down to me after dad died as I am the only one out of the family that has continued to ring. However, I do remember everything that happened. Church and ringing was always a constant topic of conversation in our house. I do hope these notes will prove useful.
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