Some creepy bell stories

There is a legend that tells of how all the Church bells in Jersey were once sold to the French. This dreadful act was punished when the ship sank in St Ouen's Bay, taking all the bells with it. At least into the 19th century the sound of the bells were said to be heard, a bad omen that told fishermen to stay ashore as a storm was coming and lives would be lost.

The monastery at Bosham, West Sussex, was attacked by Vikings. The much prized tenor bell was carried off but the monks did not give chase. As soon as the invaders were gone they rang the remaining bells, the sound carrying out to sea. The stolen bell added its own note to the peal, the sound so strong and true that it caused the planks of the ship to break and both the ship and the bell were lost to the sea.

When thunderstorms approached, the bells were rung to invite prayer, but the people thought this meant that the very sound of the bells could prevent damage from lightning. Evidence to the contrary – that tall steeples holding bells were natural attractors of lightning – did little to destroy this idea. In Brittany, on Good Friday of 1718, a violent storm broke out and lightning struck no less than twenty-four churches, despite their defensive bell-ringing, whilst churches who did not sound their bells emerged from the storm unscathed.

Last Tuesday a terrible Fire happen'd at Cherriton, near Alresford, in the County of Hants, which consum'd the Church, and melted a Peel of five Bells; also six Houses, five Barns, two Stables, a Hay Rick, five Load of Wheat in Sacks, Eighty Quarters of Oats, one Horse and a Calf. The whole Damage amounts to about Six Thousand Pounds. It was occasion'd, 'tis said, by an old Woman's throwing Wood-Ashes against an Outhouse.(*Reading Mercury:* Mon. 4 June 1744) In 1746 a new ring of five bells was cast for the church by John Stares of Aldbourne, Wilts.

Dummer All Saints' bells, weights and notes

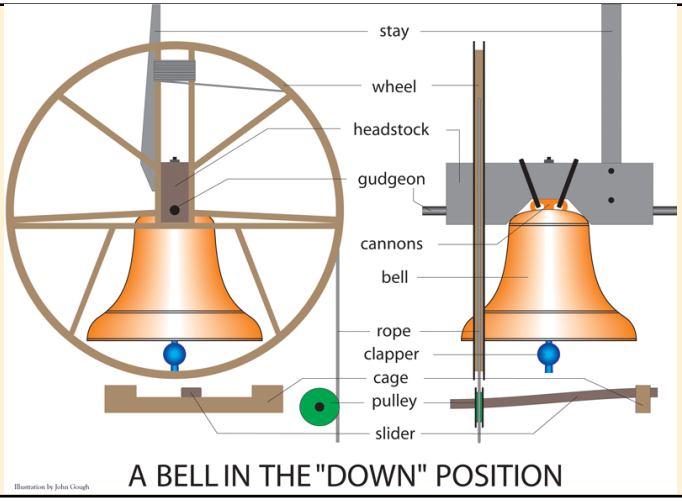
bell	diameter	weight	note	date	founder
Tenor	37 ¾"	9 cwt	G#	1591	Joseph Carter, Reading
Fourth	33 ½"	7 ¼ cwt	A#	1599	Joseph Carter, Reading
Third	31 1/8"	6 cwt	B#	1590	Joseph Carter, Reading
Second	29 3/8"	4-2-22	C#	1911	Mears & Stainbank, Whitechapel
Treble	27 ½"	4 ¼ cwt	D#	1811	James Wells, Aldbourne
Sanctus	c.9"	¼ cwt		c.1499	Wokingham foundry

Tower Captain; Sheila Harden Tower Secretary: Jan Marks

Guild: Winchester and Portsmouth Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers

Practice night Mondays 7pm to 8pm

Bellringing at All Saints' Dummer



A bit of history

Because bells were so heavy, they could not be transported by horse and cart on rough tracks. If bells were wanted for a Church, either new ones or repairs, itinerant bell casters would dig a large pit next to the Church, cast the bells, and hoist them up to the top of the tower using chains. The quality varied a lot.

Dummer's 5 bells were refurbished in 2011, 100 years after they were last taken down, restored and a frame to hold them installed.

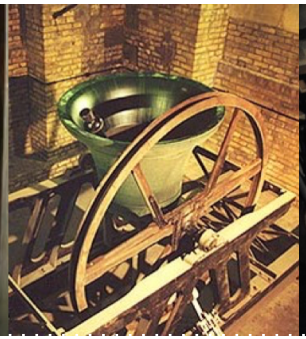
Before refurbishment

The 4th after refurbishment

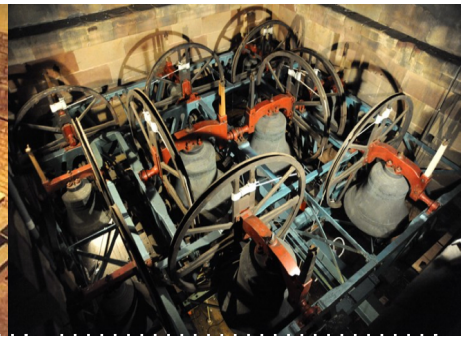
In order to get the bells out, the access trap in the ringing room was opened and the bells were lowered one by one from the frame to the floor of the church using chains and pulleys. The little Sanctus (calling bell) was also taken for restoration.

Unlike the other bells this one is just chimed from the floor of the Church.

Bell down – can be chimed



Bell up – ready for ringing

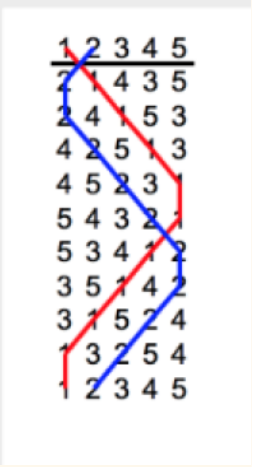


Bells in their frame.
These are all in the down position

The bell rests facing downwards. To begin, you ring the bell up by pulling on the rope and gradually letting it out as the swing increases until you can balance it against the stay which is the position it should be in for ringing.

There are two types of ringing, call changes and methods. Neither will give you a tune. There is one fundamental rule – no bell can move more than one place at a time. In call changes a ringer will give a series of calls which when followed change the order in which the bells are rung. The aim of these is to start with rounds, in our case 12345, treble through to tenor, and return to that, having moved all the bells through different places. That takes some concentration.

The other type is to ring a method. There are lots of these composed for different numbers of bells. For 5 bells they are known as Doubles. The pattern is created by moving the bells up and down the ringing order to a defined sequence of changes, known as a method. It is impossible to learn the numbers, especially for the longer methods so you learn the pattern instead. Then whichever bell you are ringing, you can ring the pattern. The pattern is shown on the blue line above. The red line shows the route of the lead bell, the treble. That's the theory anyway. The practice is more difficult than that!



Plain Hunt Doubles