

The Bells of St Martin's Church

When the church was built in 1898, the tower was provided with a heavy ring of six bells, though curiously they were installed in an eight bell frame. The bells were made by John Warner and Sons. They produced a fine, powerful ring of six bells in the key of E flat, beautifully cast and on the whole well tuned. The first Tower Captain was a Mr Richard Adams who was a forester on the Portman Estate. The other members of the team also came from the estate and were employed as herdsmen, shepherds, gardeners and carpenters. The bells were rung every Sunday when the Portman family were in residence and were heard muffled for the first time at the funeral of the 2nd Viscount Portman in 1919. George Courtney took over the captaincy of the tower in the early 1920's and later, when the estate broke up, he continued to teach others until his death in 1951.

The first peal on the bells was rung in 1965. Although there are references to a School Campanological Society in the late fifties and early sixties, next to nothing is known of its activities. The present society dates from 1975 when the school reopened the church. From the early eighties, its activities increased to include more advanced ringing, regular quarter peels and in 1992 its first peal.

By 1995 and after nearly 100 years the bells had become well overdue for a major overhaul. Hung on plain bearings and with a tenor weighing in at nearly a ton, they were never very easy for young ringers to handle. Furthermore the two empty pits in the frame clearly demanded their missing bells. Following the death of Geoff Udall, a former Chairman of the Governors, it was suggested that two new bells be cast in memory of Geoff and his wife, Ellie. Nicholson's Engineering were commissioned to undertake the re-hanging and work began in the summer of 1995. The six bells were lowered from the tower and transported to the Whitechapel bell foundry for re-tuning. In the Autumn, they were returned with the two new light treble bells and re-hung on modern ball bearings in the original oak frame. The bells were dedicated on 16th June 1996 and members of the School Bell Ringing Society rang the first peal on the new eight the following day.

The bells of St Martins are well regarded by the ringing community, especially for their magnificent tone. There are regular quarter peal and peal attempts by visiting groups besides the service and Society's weekly practice. The bells are available to visiting ringers and may be booked through the Tower Captain.

For safety reasons the staircase is remained locked though access may be gained via the Tower Captain or the Chaplain.

Bell	Diameter	Weight Cwt-gtr-lb	Note	Date	Inscription
Treble	30"	5 – 2 – 19	E flat	1995	GEOFF Whitechapel 1995
2 nd	31"	5 – 2 -24	D	1995	ELLIE Whitechapel 1995
3 rd	33 ¼ "	6 – 0 – 20	C	1898	Cast by John Warner and Sons Ltd. London 1898
4 th	35"	6 – 3 – 11	B flat	1898	As above
5 th	38 1/8 "	9 - 1 – 6	A flat	1898	As above
6 th	40"	10 – 1 - 3	G	1898	As above
7 th	44"	12 – 3 - 14	F	1898	As above
8 th	48"	16 – 3 - 27	E flat	1898	As above