



## A Decade's Dreams Fulfilled

St Laurence-in-Thanel Parish Church is one of the oldest buildings in the town of Ramsgate, Kent. Founded in 1062 as a 'chapel of ease' to the church of nearby Minster, it was the heart of the origins of Ramsgate. Situated at the top of the rising ground, about a mile from the harbour, it is a very prominent landmark with its central 'Norman' tower, containing Ramsgate's only ring of bells.

The tower, which is supported on four pillars of massive construction, has a curious feature of Norman Mural Arcades on its east and south sides only. This dominating structure, visible from afar, almost certainly served as a warning beacon in times of marauders as well as being a bell tower. On 26th August 1439 it was struck by lightning and was then re-built to its present height. This can be seen by the 15th century flintwork above the Norman stonework. It is surmounted by a string course bearing grotesque faces and finished with a castellated parapet.

Church records show that as far back as 1615 there were five bells, but they were then of great age and probably some of them dated back to the 12th century, evidently being re-cast at various times.

Hasted in his *History of Kent* gives the number of bells as five and they were inscribed as follows:

- No. 1 Thomas Garret, John Tickner Churchwardens 1729
- No. 2 Sam Knight 1724
- No. 3 Sam Knight 1729
- No. 4 Mr Edward Troward, Daniel Ranier Churchwardens 1704
- No. 5 Mr Edward Troward, Daniel Ranier Churchwardens 1704

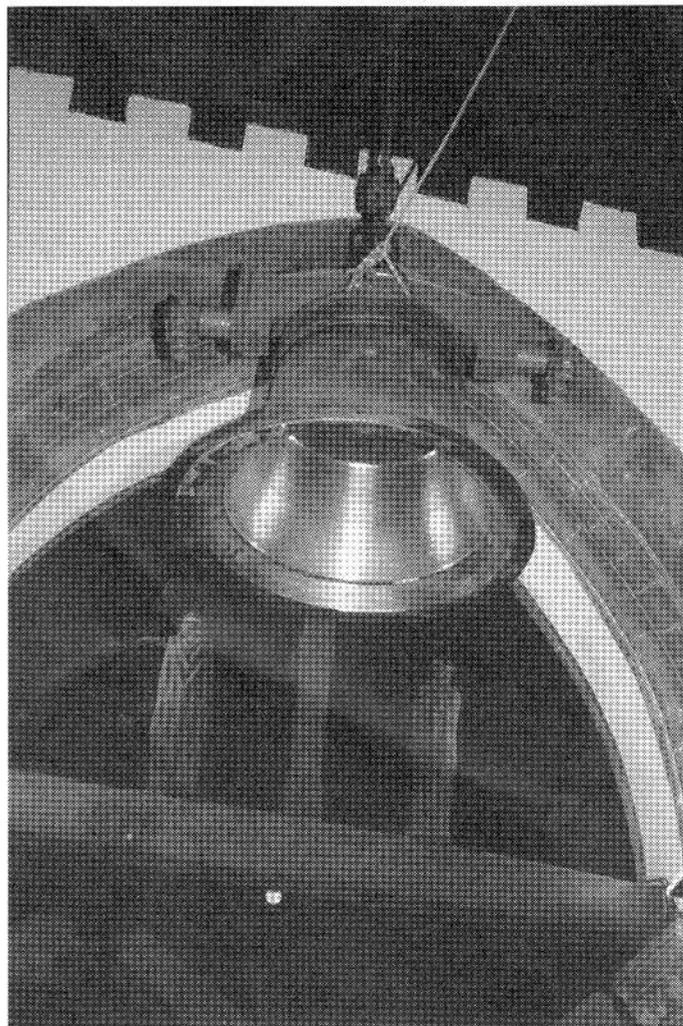
Richard Phelps made these five bells in 1604, numbers two and three were re-cast by Samuel Knight in 1724 and the number one by the same founder in 1729. They were then re-cast again and one added in 1808, making six bells.

In 1890 two new bells were added and numbers three and four re-cast and the whole re-hung with new framework. This was done by Mr Snelling of Sittingbourne and cost £274:8s:6d. The new bells were dedicated by the Dean of Canterbury on 1st May 1891. After this service ringers from Margate, Birchington, Herne Hill and Boughton made the first trials on the bells. The first touch was 153 Grandsire Triples. On the following day a complete peal of Stedman Triples containing 5040 changes was rung in 2hrs 53mins by eight ringers of the Kent County Association of Change Ringers. They also gave a course of Treble Bob Major in the Kent Variation, Thurstons Original.

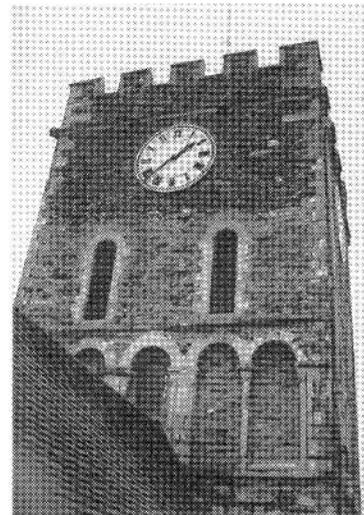
In 1911 the then numbers two, seven and eight were re-cast, a new metal frame installed and all the bells re-hung. This work was carried out by Mears and Stainbank of Whitechapel.

The last two bells, making the present number up to ten were added in 1924. These are named 'Peace' and 'Remembrance' to commemorate the 1914-18 war. To accommodate these two extra bells a new metal frame was installed above the original one, positioning eight bells on one level and two above.

Since 1924 no major work has been carried out on the bells except for normal maintenance. After over 70 years continuous use it was apparent that the plain bearings and other fittings were becoming very worn. Some of the wooden headstocks were warped and the bells were becoming more difficult to control. The Parochial Church Council agreed that an inspection should be made. In February 1988 the Canterbury Diocesan



*The ninth on its way into the tower.*



*The Norman Tower.*

Bell Advisor reported that the best solution to the problems would be a complete re-hang of the bells. The Whitechapel Bell Foundry confirmed the previous inspection report almost word for word.

The fund raising appeal, undertaken by the ringers, was launched on 14th October 1995. It was a social evening with entertainment by our handbell ringers, the local Scout and Guide Band and a presentation with slides about re-hanging bells. The Bishop of Dover, the Rt Revd Richard Llewellyn, who had agreed to be Patron of the Fund, spoke about bells and their church connection throughout the centuries. He then cut a special celebration cake and launched the Bells Restoration Fund Appeal. Over £500 was raised as a direct result of that evening.

When the Bishop launched the fund it seemed to be a very daunting task we had undertaken to raise the required £45,000 to re-hang and tune the ten bells in a reasonable time.

We were further pressed to achieve our aim sooner rather than later when HM Customs and Excise decided to change the rules regarding VAT on work carried out on bells and bell frames. To avoid this possible increase in costs we were committed to placing a firm order with the bell foundry. We took the plunge and, putting our faith in God that we would succeed, placed an order in October 1996 just before the deadline for the rule change.

*(continued on p.354)*

**DREAMS – continued**

Help and assistance has been received in many ways and a great number of fund raising events were arranged: quizzes and concerts, fairs and exhibitions, coffee mornings and collecting boxes, architectural tour and tower open days to name just a few. All these helped to swell the fund.

There were despondent times too. The biggest disappointment came when we were turned down by the Heritage Lottery Committee for a grant, after waiting over a year for a decision. But then we would have a boost with a generous donation or grant or a fund raising event was more successful than we thought it would be. It was at these times when we realised our faith in God was paying dividends.

Sunday 7th September 1997 saw the final ringing on the bells before their removal. A quarter peal was rung and intended to be dedicated to the bells and as a prior welcome to our new Rector (who was to be inducted on 16th September). However tragic events dominated the weekend, and the bells were rung half-muffled, the quarter dedicated as a thanksgiving for the lives of Daphne Gordon (mother of one of our young ringers), Diana, Princess of Wales and Mother Teresa.

Work started in earnest on Monday 8th September by stripping all the fittings off the bells. It was anticipated that this would take two to three days but partly because all the nuts and bolts had been soaked in releasing oil a few days previously we completed this in just one day.

The week before a new trap was cut in the ringing chamber ceiling (this had obviously been put in after the bells were last re-hung). Then on the Friday all the traps were removed – looking right down into the church from such a height was not for the faint hearted.

Eight o'clock Saturday 13th September saw the arrival of the Kent County Association workforce, five members experienced in removing bells from towers, to help us remove our bells. After getting all the lifting gear up into the tower the tenor bell was lowered first. This was done by 8.45am. Everything went very well and the last bell was down by 12.30pm and

placed in the Becket Chapel. A good lunch was then served to all the workers in the Thurstin Room.

During the afternoon the headstocks were removed from the bells and everything tidied up.

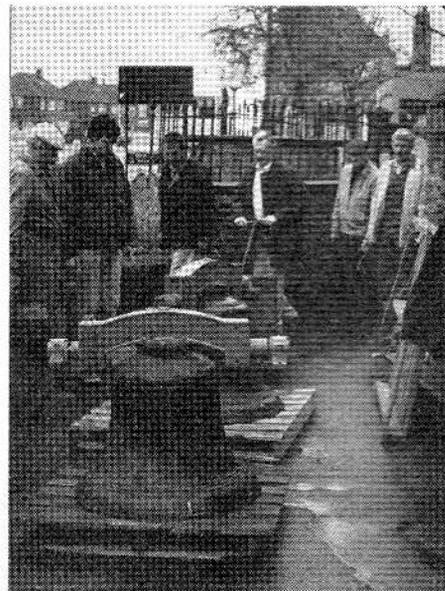
A lot of visitors came on the Sunday to take the chance of a lifetime to see the bells at ground level. We raised nearly £300 through donations, sale of goods and by selling some of the clappers and wheels. Most people were surprised by the size of the bells and the weight of the clappers.

Monday saw the arrival of the lorry at 8.15am and we are very grateful to Bretts Construction of Canterbury for transporting the bells free of charge. Traffic almost came to a standstill as drivers watched the bells being lifted onto the lorry. Once again quite a lot of people came to watch. We finally saw our bells disappearing along the road at 9.20am on their way to Whitechapel.

Whilst the bells were away a group of us cleaned and de-rusted the metal bell frame and painted it. New re-inforcing RSJ support beams were installed in the clock room below the frame.

The newly tuned bells with all their new fittings arrived back at the church early (7.30am) on Saturday 15th November. They should have arrived the previous day but the lorry broke down and 'Bretts' did us proud however by taking another of their lorries off other jobs to ensure we had the bells back in time for the planned open days on the Saturday and Sunday.

Trevor Bailey, the bell hanger, arrived on the following Monday and two weeks intensive work started with hauling the bells back up to their home at the top of the tower and re-hanging them with their new fittings. Three St Laurence ringers assisted in this work and it was quite an insight, experience and privilege to participate in this unusual undertaking. We had the satisfaction of hearing the bells for the first time when the bell hanger rang them up without ropes or stays just by rotating the wheel. It was a nerve-racking experience but well worth watching and listening. When the work was completed a team of ringers gathered to give the bells a trial ring with the bell hanger. We were



*Bells outside the church after delivery.*

all very pleased with the final result. The bells sounded lovely and have a nice ring to them. They also handle much better.

It had been agreed that apart from practising to get used to the feel of the bells, they would not be rung until after they were re-dedicated in January 1998. However an exception was made, with the back eight being rung on Christmas morning. What a welcome sound it was over the parish.

Saturday 17th January 1998 saw the return of the Bishop of Dover for the re-dedication service. There were over 200 people in the church including many members of the Kent County Association, the Mayor of Ramsgate and the Chairman of Thanet District Council. Most of the service was conducted in the church, but the latter part saw the Bishop, Team Rector, and Team Vicar with St Laurence Ringers going up to the ringing chamber for the blessing of the bells, immediately followed by the ringing of all ten bells. This part of the service was relayed to the congregation below. Following the service a sumptuous tea was served in the school hall and then general ringing carried on during the evening.

This was a very historic event in the life of St Laurence. We now have a very fine ring of ten bells of which we are very proud.

The next day, Sunday 18th we recommenced our normal Sunday service ringing and in the afternoon a quarter peal of Grandsire Triples with three covers was rung, being the first quarter on the new bells.

Because we undertook a lot of the work ourselves the cost of the job was considerably reduced from the original estimates. We have now completed the task (apart from some minor works) for around £33,000 with sufficient funds raised to pay the bills raised in 2 1/4 years.

Many thanks are due to Alan Hughes of Whitechapel for all his help, assistance and advice. To the charitable trusts, companies and organisations who gave generous grants, donations and help, and to the many, many people who helped in any way to make the appeal such a success.

**St Laurence-in-Thanet, Kent.** 18 Jan, 1260 Grandsire Triples with three covers: Phil Young 1, Brenda Chatfield 2, Revd Stanley Evans 3, Derek Chatfield 4, Keith Roberts 5, Ian Young 6, Donald Niblett (C) 7, Mike Little 8, Reg Foreman 9, John Paramor 10. First quarter rung on the newly tuned and re-hung bells after re-dedication the previous day by the Bishop of Dover. £5

#### Details of the bells

Treble (4-2-10)	The Great War 1914-18 To the Glory of God and in thanksgiving for 'Peace' This bell was dedicated Armistice Sunday, November 9th 1924.
Second (5-0-21)	The Great War 1914-18 To the Glory of God and in 'Remembrance' of Britain's Sons who laid down their lives by land and sea. This bell was dedicated Armistice Sunday, November 9th 1924.
Third (5-0-15)	Two treble bells presented by J. T. Hedley, Es. 1890
Fourth (5-1-17)	Cast 1808, re-cast 1911
Fifth (5-3-13)	Thomas Mears and Sons of London, Fecit – 1808
Sixth (6-2-9)	Thomas Mears and Sons of London, Fecit – 1808
Seventh (8-1-10)	Re-cast 1890. S. Snelling. Re-hung us all.
Eighth (10-1-7)	Montague Fowler, Vicar. James Front, William Perkins Churchwardens 1890
Ninth (11-2-7)	Cast 1808, re-cast 1911
Tenor (14-1-19)	I with the 2 and 7th was re-cast and the peal re-hung in commemoration of the reign of H.M. King Edward VII We were first rung on the day of the coronation of H.M. King George V, 22nd June 1911

All of the bells were either cast or re-cast by Mears and Stainbank, Founders of Whitechapel, London.