

THE RINGING WORLD

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OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS

ST. PETER and ST. PAUL YALDING, KENT

YALDING lies on the southern slope of the hills above a crossing of the River Medway between Maidstone and Tonbridge. A centre of fruit and hop growing, it was, at the time of the Domesday Book, known as Hallings; a part of the lands of the Clare family, Earls of Gloucester and Hereford. After the building of the Yalding and Twyford bridges in the 15th century, the village grew in importance and many of the older houses date from the following two centuries.

The first stone church was built by Richard de Clare and dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul, with a priest called Laurentius as the first incumbent, in 1184. With alterations and additions over the centuries, this is still the same building in use now. It is not known when the bells were first installed, but the parish records relate how, in 1695, a fire in a corn chandler's by the church spread to the tower and brought it and the bells down. They were recast in the following year and the parish register says:

"Yalding bells were Hanged, Novr 30th, 1696. The Bell Hanger to have £19; he finding wheel and stock for treble, the Parish the rest. The Weight of the Bells:

	Cwt.	qr.	lb.
Imp. The tenor	18	01	15
the fifth	14	00	13
Fourth	11	01	19
Third	09	01	19
Second	08	00	09
First	06	02	04

Ye Tot 67 03 23
The clappers weig: 01 03 00

The founder for casting to have 20s. per Hundred, for all new Mettle he is to be allowwd £6.10 shillings pr Cwt. We had 60c. of or own Metall."

Nothing is said of the rebuilding of the tower (with its curious top and weather-vane) or the installation of the existing frame. Bells 1, 2, 3 and 6 bear the date 1696, but the 4th bears the date 1697. In 1759 a sum of £2. 10s. was paid for the removal of the 5th bell and mending of the clapper, and a further £21 for the recasting of the bell which was done by Lester & Pack, then proprietors of the Whitechapel Foundry. This bell bears the inscription "Lester & Pack of London 1759; Rev'd John Ward, Vicar, Stephen and Henry Groombridge churchwardens". Records show that further work (probably general maintenance) was carried out in 1800 and again in 1847. The bells were last completely rehung in 1914 and further work carried out in 1928.

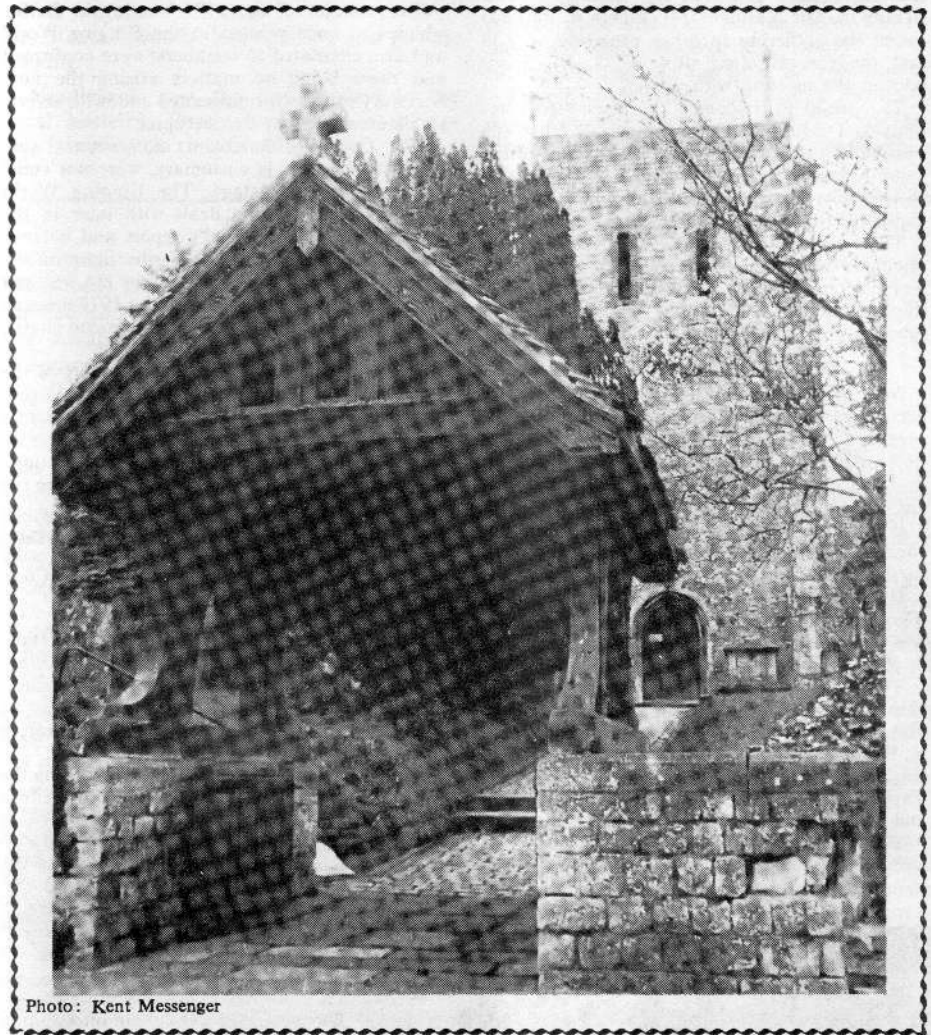


Photo: Kent Messenger

On Saturday, September 11, 1976, history was made when the first peal by a local band was rung on the bells.

5040 DOUBLES (42 extents: 30 Plain Bob; 4 St. Simon's; 8 Reverse Canterbury Pleasure Bob)
2 hours 58 mins.

1. Mark Gibbons
2. Caroline Monckton
3. Philip Parker
4. Richard Young (cond.)
5. Simon Pope
6. Roy Barclay

This was the first peal by the treble ringer and the first as conductor for Richard, who is tower captain. It was only the 11th peal on the bells, the first being in 1913.

In October 1976 ringing ceased, due to the tower and mediaeval frame being found unsafe. A ring beam has been installed and the tower repointed. The bells are now at Whitechapel Foundry where they will be retuned and refurbished. A new frame is also being built at the Foundry, so that the bells can be installed at a lower level. Hopefully the bells will be ringing again in August. The total cost of the project is estimated at £22,000 and most of this has been raised through local events and donations. A large amount of voluntary work is being used to reduce costs but further money is required. Any contributions (addressed to "Yalding Tower and Bell Fund", The Vicarage, Yalding, Kent ME18 6DR) would be most gratefully received.