

The Bells of St Peter's Harborne

The tower contains nine bells: the modern ring of eight, and a bell dating from 1691 which is the preserved tenor of the old ring, now hung dead and used as a service bell.

The ring of eight, cast in 1923 by John Taylor of Loughborough, originally belonged to another belfry: that of the Bishop Ryder Memorial Church, Gem Street, near Lancaster Circus in Birmingham city centre. The bells were a recasting of an earlier eight (tenor 11½ cwt) by William Blews & Sons of Birmingham, 1868.

Partly on account of the spacious tower at Gem Street, but principally of course thanks to their vintage – a great era in Loughborough's true-harmonic bell production – the new bells were regarded as among the very best of their kind, too good indeed to be lost to Birmingham's ringing community. When closure and demolition of that church was in train in 1960, arrangements were fortunately made for the whole ring with its fittings to be transferred to Harborne, where it replaced an existing old-style eight which was in poor condition. The cost of the relocation and a new iron-and-steel bell frame was borne by Francis Henry Hawkins of Harborne in memory of his sister Johanna Julia Hawkins, and the ring formally rededicated here in March 1963.



Whether there was any ringing tradition at St Peter's in the post-Reformation period prior to 1691 is not known, but at that date a new ring of six (tenor 9 cwt) was made for the church by William Bagley of Chacombe, Oxfordshire. Of these, the second was recast by Thomas Mears of Whitechapel in 1799. Two trebles were added by John Warner & Sons of London in 1877. Some rehangng work was done by J.E. Groves of Birmingham in 1924.

William Chattel, a formidable leader of ringing in mid-19th century Birmingham, is buried in St. Peter's churchyard, as is John Day (1825-1902), Chattel's pupil and a subsequent leader and historian of Birmingham ringing who lived in the parish and who had promoted the idea of

making the six in this tower up to eight. John Day's father, and uncle Thomas Day, the eminent conductor and composer of peals, had been ringers at St. Peter's for a period in their youth in the 1810s.

All eight modern bells bear the Taylor foundry mark and are inscribed:

WILLIAM BLEWS AND SONS, BIRMINGHAM, 1868 /RECAST 1923

In addition, the tenor has:

TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN MEMORY OF GEORGE AND MARY STEPHENS
THESE BELLS WERE RECAST AND REHUNG BY THEIR NEPHEW
ROBERT RAISBECK GELLING 1923* * *CANON G.E. BADGER, VICAR
JAMES GEORGE, RINGING MASTER

The preserved old bell is inscribed:

BE IT KNOWNE TO ALL THAT DOE MEE SE
THAT WILLIAM BAGLEY OF CHACOM MADE MEE 1691

Weight approximately 9 cwt, note G