

THE BELLS OF ST MARY'S WILLINGDON

St Mary's enthusiastic band of ringers, ranging in age from 11 years to three score years and ten plus, ring the bells weekly for services. Practice night is every Thursday from 7.30 - 8.30 pm. Visiting ringers are very welcome and also anyone interested in learning to ring. Please contact the tower secretary for further details - 01323 500192.

There are six bells hanging in the late 12th century tower of St Mary the Virgin Willingdon. The tower, approximately 20 metres high, has three levels; the ground ringing floor, the 1st floor clock chamber and the 2nd floor belfry.

St Mary the Virgin Willingdon						
BELLS						
Bell	Weight	Nominal	Note	Diameter	Dated	Founder
1	4-0-5		F		1939	Gillett & Johnston
2	4-2-7		Eb		1732 recast 1860 recast 1933	1732 - Richard Phelps London 1933 - Gillett & Johnston
3	5-1-3		Db		1732 recast 1933	1732 - Richard Phelps London 1933 - Gillett & Johnston
4	5-3-16		C		1676 recast 1933	1732 - Richard Phelps London 1933 - Gillett & Johnston
5	7-1-21		Bb		1618 recast 1933	1732 - Richard Phelps London Gillett & Johnston
6	10-1-14		Ab		1732 recast 1933	1732- Richard Phelps Londond Richard Phelps London Gillett & Johnston

Some History:

1618 Sir Nicholas Parker Knt. gave a large bell

1676 Sir Robert Parker Bt.added a bell

1727 In the Register – “Memorandum that Thomas Upton, weaver, sent to John Lambert of the Cliffe Lewes fourteen shillings to pay for four bell ropes for the two least Bells in Willingdon according to ancient custom of the said parish. The said Thomas Upton is contented to pay the same charge for the least two bells in Willingdon for a piece of land called Farmers Croft, which he possessed. The said money was sent and paid by me Henry Hosdon Vicar on Tuesday May 7th 1728 being the Archdeacon's Visitation”.

1732 5 bells were made from the metal of the 4 old ones and inscribed: ' Sir Walter Parker and William Hyland Churchwardens The Rev'd Hosdon DD Vicar. R Phelps Londini Campanarius me fecit'.

1860 Canon Lowe reported 'This autumn the first bell in the peal was re-cast by Mears of London at the expense of the parish.'

A new bell was put in the tower this summer in place of the old third bell which had long been broken and the other bells were re-hung and put in perfect order and repair by Mears and Stainbank Bell founder of Whitechapel London.

Inscriptions:

Treble - In memory of Alexander Wells vicar's warden of this parish for 38 years given by his family 1939.

Bell No. 2 - Richard Phelps made these five bells.

Bell No 3 - The Rev Henry Hosden DD vicar. Richard Phelps of London made these five bells 1732.

Bell No. 4 - Sir Robert Parker added a bell to this church 1676.

Bell No. 5 - Sir Nicholas Parker Knt. Gave a large bell to this church Anno Domini 1618.

Bell No. 6 - These five bells were made from the metal of four old ones AD 1732 Sir Walter Parker Baronet & Mr William Hylands Churchwardens. R Phelps Londini campanarius me fecit. The peal of 5 bells was recast by Gillett & Johnston Croydon 1933 GF Handel Elvey vicar Alexander Wells Frank Sogno Churchwardens.

1887 10th December 'The Bell Notes and Ringers' Record – The ancient church of Willingdon, near Eastbourne, has a peal of 5 bells of the following dates: Treble, 1860; second, 1732; third 1876; fourth 1618; tenor 1732. The diameter of the tenor is 38 inches. It weighs probably about 10 cwt. Sir Walter Parker of Ratton gave this bell, and his ancestor, Sir Nicholas Parker, was the donor of the fourth bell. The second, third and tenor were cast at the Whitechapel Foundry. Owing to the tower being so small, several of the ropes are led to the ceiling by means of wooden "shoots".

1897 The bells rang peals at 5am and during the afternoon and evening on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

1901 Muffled peals for the death of Queen Victoria.

1910 Muffled peals for the death of King Edward VII

1933 Extensive repairs were needed to the bells. Two bells were badly cracked, number 1 and 4 and the 200-year-old English oak bell frame was loose at the joints. Whilst ringing for the Morning Service on Easter Day the clapper of the tenor bell fell off with a loud crash, due to the bell wobbling on loose bearings.



Willingdon ringers 1908



Re-cast bells 1933

When work commenced it was also found that the Tenor bell number 5 was also cracked. It was decided that all five bells be re-cast in order that the whole peal would blend together harmoniously. The estimate was £207 but the cost escalated to £277. An appeal was launched to pay for the work and a special Gift Day was held.

1939 The gift of a sixth bell, a treble, was made by the family of the late Alexander Wells who had been churchwarden for 38 years.



Treble bell 'Wells' inscription



Inspecting the bells

The bells are rung regularly for Sunday services, for weddings and on Royal, National and other special occasions. They were rung in 2000 to mark the Millennium and in 2012 to mark both the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II and also for the opening day of the London Olympic Games.

On 9th May 2015 at 11am, together with thousands of bells in Cathedrals and churches across the country, the Willingdon bells were rung to commemorate the 70th anniversary of VE Day. The same bells had rung out across the parish at 11am on 9th May 1945 to mark the end of the war in Europe and for the first time since hanging silent for the duration of the Second World War.



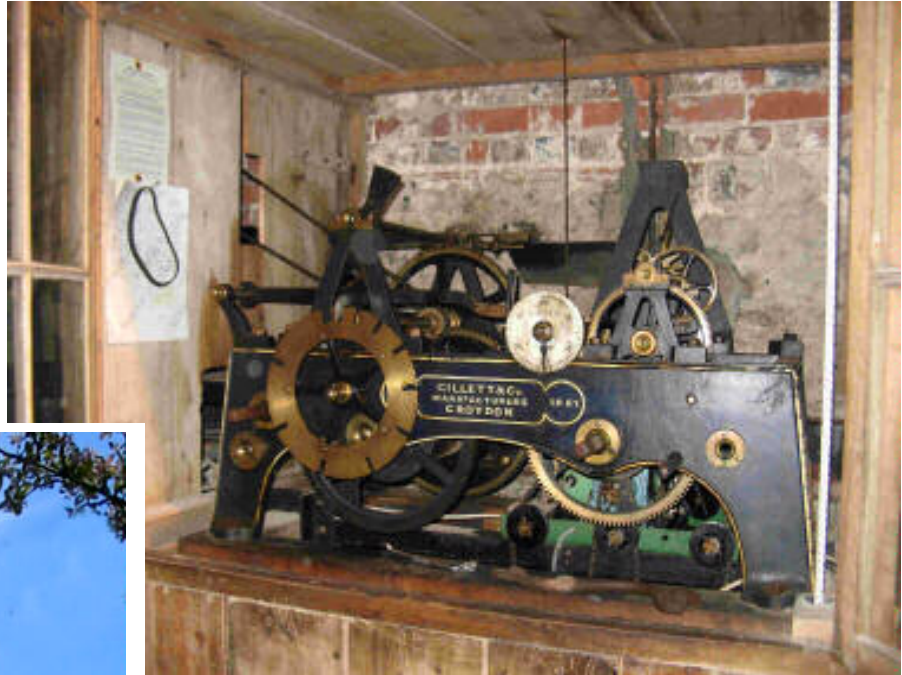
The 30th June 1916 was the Battle of the Boar's Head at Richebourg France, named "The Day Sussex Died" due to the catastrophic losses of the Royal Sussex Regiment. Across the county bells rang out on 30th June 2016, from Chichester Cathedral and parish churches in towns and villages. At St Mary's we joined this commemoration remembering the two men from our village named on our war memorial who were killed in the battle: Arthur White and Ernest Wooller

To mark the 100th Anniversary of the Armistice 11th November 2018, the bells of St Mary's were rung at 12.30pm and at 7.05pm Ringing out for Peace together with the majority of church bells across the Nation.

Maundy Thursday 18th April 2019 at 6.30pm - The bells of St Mary's Willingdon rang out with the bells of Cathedrals and Churches across the Nation in solidarity with Notre-Dame Cathedral that suffered a devastating fire 15th April 2019.



The Jubilee Clock



To mark the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign the clock was installed in the tower by public subscription. It was made by Gillett & Co. of Croydon and uses the Tenor bell to strike the hours and half hours. When installed there were just two faces on the South and West walls of the tower. Two further faces were added in 1949. A report in 'The Bell News and Ringers' Record' for 10th December 1887

states: *'The clock has been place in the tower this Jubilee year, which is a boon to the inhabitants. It strikes the hours on the tenor bell with a hammer weighing about 20lbs bringing out the fine tone of the bell admirably.'*

Above the south door of tower a stone plaque was inserted which reads:

'The clock in this tower was erected by the inhabitants and owners of property in Willingdon as a permanent memorial of the Jubilee of her Majesty Queen Victoria June 21 1887 Laus Deo. Rev'd Thomas Lowe Prebendary of Chichester Cathedral Vicar.'

