

The carillon and bells of the Collegiate Church of St Mary's Warwick

It's noon on Monday and *Home Sweet Home* chimes out from the bells. The same tune was heard at 9 o'clock and is repeated every 3 hours through daytime. This tune is played on the 10 bells, hung about two thirds of the way up the tower. The bells range in weight from 5 cwt to 25 cwt (250kg to 1,250kg) and are tuned in D. The tunes are played using the bells as a carillon. This is operated by an electric powered pegged drum which triggers hammers against the sides of the bells. The carillon sounds a different tune for each day of the week. The *Easter Hymn* is played on Sundays followed by *Home Sweet Home*. Tuesday hears *Thaxted (I vow to thee my country)* and then comes the *Blue Bells of Scotland*. *Minstrel Boy* chimes out on Thursday followed by the *Warwickshire Lads and Lasses* and Saturday hears the *Last Rose of Summer*.

For several months in 2013 the tunes were silent awaiting a repair which was made possible by a kind donation from John and Linda Edwards, Warwick residents. Previous silences occurred around 1901 when there was major restoration work to the bells and again in 1925 when repairs were needed to make the tower safe. After WW2 it was said the chimes never really got going again. The original apparatus was made by Worton of Birmingham and installed in 1783. It was described as a remarkable piece of craftsmanship but earned the status of a "museum piece" at the end of WW2. In the late 1940s John H Tibbits and P J Lees (organist at St Nicholas, Warwick) initiated a campaign to restore the chimes with modern apparatus. The cause was taken up by the Mayor of Warwick, Councillor T T Bromwich, who formed a committee and launched an appeal for the costs of £1,450. The Vicar, Joseph McCulloch, was quoted in the local press saying "the town will be whole-heartedly in favour of this venture of faith" and when the funds were raised said "this remarkable achievement has been made possible by the generosity of the citizens of Warwick."

But as the chimes were being made ready to ring out again in May 1952 there was some controversy. P J Lees informed the Committee that the original tunes had included *God Save the Queen*, *Over the water to Charlie*, *There's no luck about the house*, and *Life let us cherish*. He recommended that these should not be reintroduced but the ones heard before the war restored. The contractors, Smiths of Derby, had their own ideas proposing a list including *Jerusalem* but this was summarily dismissed as was also a suggestion that two bells could be struck simultaneously. The Committee agreed that the tunes *Jenny Jones* (a Welsh air) and *March in Scipio* which had been heard before the war should be replaced with *Thaxted* and *Warwickshire Lads and Lasses*. This latter tune was the regimental march of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Apparently it had a number of variations and the Committee, anxious that the march should be correctly played, consulted a former Bandmaster of the regiment who arranged a suitable scoring for the bells. Despite these efforts by the Committee about the tunes E George Tibbits and Mary L Tibbits wrote to the Warwick Advertiser lamenting that the old clockwork apparatus had not been repaired and that the *Jenny Jones* tune had been discarded.

There were bells in St Mary's before the carillon was installed. Five bells were hung in the 16th century and by the mid-17th century these had been augmented to a ring of 8. All the bells were destroyed in the 1694 Great Fire of Warwick. At the start of the 18th century eight new bells were cast by Abraham Rudhall, a Gloucester bell founder, and very soon these were augmented to a ring of 10. Thomas Mears, a bell founder working at the Whitechapel Foundry, then recast the tenor bell

in 1814. (This London foundry established in 1570 continues to make bells and claims to be the oldest manufacturing company in the country.) The ring was completely overhauled in 1901 by John Taylor (a Loughbough bell foundry also still in operation) and six of the bells were recast. The current ring of 10 contains these 6 Taylor bells, three of Rudhall's bells from 1701, and the 25cwt tenor bell is the one recast by Thomas Mears in 1814.

Apart from the carillon the bells are also used for ringing before Sunday services and on other occasions including weddings. When the bells are raised into an upright position for change ringing it is necessary to disable the tunes and chimes. The art of change ringing dates from the 16th century and involves continuously moving bells up and down the ringing order using a defined sequence or "method." Typical methods rung on these bells are Grandsire, Stedman, Cambridge and Yorkshire. Peals are rung from time to time to commemorate royal occasions, civic events and other happenings. A peal consists of 5,000 or more continuous changes in the order of the bells and at St Mary's takes about 3¼ hours; over 100 peals have been rung in the tower since the first was recorded in 1786. Visitors are always welcome in the ringing chamber either on Sundays or at the practice held every 1st and 3rd Wednesday evening of the month. The ringing chamber is about halfway up the tower and the ringers are happy to explain their art and can arrange for people to be taught how to handle a bell for change ringing.

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