

## **The use of Church bells**

We have had bells in our churches in the Hormeads for over five hundred years. Today our bells are rung almost exclusively to call worshippers to church services. In the past, they were rung far more often, and for secular occasions. Private individuals hired the ringers, and donated money in thanks, to celebrate personal events such as the Lord of the Manor's eldest son being born, or reaching his 21st birthday.

The end of a war, or a great victory in battle, such as Trafalgar and Waterloo, and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, were national events which were joyfully celebrated throughout the country by ringing the church bells. In many villages, a tolling bell very early one August or September morning indicated that gleaning could commence, while the cheerful chiming of the bells had earlier heralded the last load of the harvest being carried home.

Joyless occasions have been marked by the silencing of the bells, or muffling them. They were forbidden 'amusementss' during the drab and dreary Commonwealth period, and all bells were silenced during the world wars. The government ordered their silencing in 1939 with the intention of using them to sound a warning to the nation that we had been invaded, had that occurred. Fortunately, the next time they rang out it was in celebration of the end of hostilities.

The large tenor bell, with its deep, solemn tone, is inextricably connected with death and funerals. It was used in many parishes as the passing-bell, tolled when a parishioner lay dying, giving rise to John Donne's phrase 'For whom the bell tolls'. Muffled by a leather glove tied over the clapper, it was used again to ring the 'nine tailors' when a man died. The name is a corruption of 'tellers' and while nine tolls indicated the death of a man in the village, six indicated a woman and three the death of a child. The expression 'Nine tailors make a man' arose from this practice. Up to the 19th century, they believed that the soul could not leave the body until the tailors had been rung. A muffled peal was rung during the burial service, then the bell was tolled again during the committal for the same number of times as the age in years of the deceased.

In the Hormeads, the tradition of ringing for funerals is different, for we have not used 'tellers' but only tolled the fourth bell slowly before the service. A rope controlling the hammer which strikes the outside of the fourth bell passes down to the old vestry floor where it is used to toll the bell while the mourners file into church behind the coffin. In this village, we also refrain from practising ringing the

bells on Tuesday evening, or singing on a Sunday, if a parishioner lies dead and unburied in the village.

Weddings are the only occasion on which the bell-ringers are paid for their services. The current fee is £35 and that is paid into the bell fund and not to the individual ringers. Change-ringing on all the bells makes the occasion of a wedding one in which the whole village can share in happy celebration.

On Sundays our bells ring out prior to morning services at both Little and Great Hormead. At Little Hormead the church warden or vicar chimes the two bells to summon parishioners to the 8am communion service in the summer months. At Great Hormead six ringers change-ring for 25 minutes before the commencement of the morning service.

On Tuesday evenings from 7pm for a maximum of two hours the ringers practise and teach new ringers.

### **Bell Founding**

The Whitechapel bell-founder Robert Mot was in business from 1570-88. In 1588 he cast cannon for use against the Spanish armada, and also some bells for Westminster Abbey. His foundry is still in business today and is where our bell-ringers go for repairs to the Hormead bells. Just over 100 years ago, we had a new, or re-cast second bell, cast by the firm of Mears, which became part of the Whitechapel foundry in the 18th century. When they made the Hormead bell, they probably sent workmen to Hormead where a large hole would have been dug in or near the churchyard, a furnace made, and the bell cast on the spot. It must have been quite a sight for the villagers, first watching the bell being cast, then hoisted up into the belfry.

Bells are made of 2/3 of their weight in copper and of 1/3rd in tin. Stories of silver being in bells is, alas, a myth, despite our Hormead legend, similar to that of many villages, about a lady with a heap of silver in her lap which she threw into the casting. The bells are cast in a mould, then when told the tuner scrapes off metal from the surface of the bell as he fine-tunes it. Final adjustments are made to perfect its tuning in relation to the other bells in the ring.

### **Great Hormead Bells**

1. The treble bell, made by Richard Keene, 1701. It is inscribed 'William Bull c.w. 1701.' William Bull was the tenant farmer of Hormead Hall at the time, and the 'c.w.'

indicates that he was also a churchwarden. This bell weighs 4-3/4 cwt and is 29" in diameter. According to tradition, about the year 1699 Richard Keene, a bell-founder who had been working for many years at Woodstock, Oxfordshire, set up a temporary foundry at Royston. His career at Royston lasted about five years and he left over fifty bells in this district, only one of which bears his name, though others are easily recognised by the lettering he used. Many bear the date alone, often in very rough figures, the rest usually state the churchwarden's name.

2. Inscribed "C & G MEARS, Founder, London 1845" this bell weighs 5-3/4 cwt and is 31" in diameter. C & G Mears were descendants of the 18th century bell-founders of Whitechapel and their descendants are now part of the firm Mears & Stainbank of Whitechapel who serviced all our Hormead bells in 1952 and 1985.
3. The third bell was made by Robert Oldfield whose inscriptions were in plain roman letters, his favourite Latin one being on our bell, with fleur-de-lys type decorations in between each word: "SONORO SONO MEO SONO DEO Dec 1606". The inscription may be translated as "I, loud sounding, sound with my voice to God."

Robert Oldfield's bell weighs 6-1/2 cwt and is 33" in diameter. Robert, who died in 1640 was resident in the parish of St. Andrew's Hertford. In St. Andrew's Street there is an inn which has been variously known as the Little Bell Inn, the Bell Mould and the Golden Bell. His bells in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Lincoln and Essex, with 48 in Hertfordshire, were made over the period 1605-40.

4. Inscribed "MILES GRAYE WILLIAM HARBERT ME FECIT 1626". William Harbert was the foreman of Miles Graye and made this bell. He also cast his masterpiece, the Lavenham tenor bell, the year before. It is regarded as one of the best-toned bells in England. Robert Cage (d.1655) Lord of Hormead Manor, "obtained a ring of six excellent bells in this Church" and it was probably he who gave bells four to six to make up the ring of six. This bell weighs 8 cwt and measured 36-1/2" in diameter. It is the least pleasant of our bells, both in sound and handling.
5. Inscribed "MILES GRAYE ME FECIT 1623" it is 9-1/2 cwt and 39" in diameter. 40 bells in Hertfordshire were cast by

this Colchester firm between 1615 and 1666. Miles Graye the elder is believed to have learned his craft from the first bell-founder at Colchester named Richard Bowler. Miles Graye died in 1649, and the three largest of our bells bear his name. His business was continued by his son, Miles Graye junior, until his death in 1686.

6. The tenor bell, also inscribed "MILES GRAYE ME FECIT" and made in 1623, is the deepest-toned and largest bell, weighing 13 cwt with a diameter of 43". In May 1920 the parish raised £50 to restore this bell, repaired by Messrs. Meare & Stainbank of Whitechapel.

The bells were all re-tuned and re-hung in an iron frame (replacing the old wooden frame) in 1952. The iron clappers are forged by a blacksmith. The ball part of the clapper strikes the side of the bell on the inside and it gets worn flat with use. In May 1985 our bell clappers were renewed by building the worn sides with new metal. At the same time, the bushes were replaced with new lignum vitae and a general overhaul was given to the bells at a cost of £35. Bell ropes are attached to a wheel that moves the bell. The rope passes through a hole in the floor of the belfry, down into the ringing chamber. It is so long that it would lie in a heap on the floor were the tail not tied up in a knot.

The rope is normally made of Italian hemp which is supple enough to negotiate the acute bends imposed on it while being sufficiently tough to withstand the wear and tear as the rope passes up and down through the garter-hole in the belfry floor.

A few feet from the end of the rope, wool strands are woven into the hemp for a length of about three feet. This section is called the 'sally' and provides a better, and more comfortable grip for the ringer. By tradition, sallies in cathedrals are usually cardinal red. Our Hormead sallies are in the patriotic colours of red, white and blue stripes.

When six new ropes were purchased on 4th September 1790, they cost £2-0-10d but there was an additional charge to the parish for 'John Boswell was paid 8d for bringinnng them'. The new bell ropes purchased in 1982 cost £179.

### **LITTLE HORMEAD BELLS**

Little Hormead has two very old bells, whose ropes reach down to the floor. There is no inscription on one, but the second bore

an inscription reading "SANCTA MARGARETA ORA PRO NOBIS". Until the Reformation bells were dedicated either to Christ, the Virgin Mary, angels, or saints.

This bell asks Saint Margaret 'to pray for us'. It's diameter is 25" and it is one of the oldest bells in the county, reputedly dating from c1400. In 1552 Hormede Parva owned 'ij belles in the steple' and another note says 'item - ij hand belles'. I.e. 2 bells and 2 handbells.

These two bells lack the modern hanging and wheels necessary for easy ringing and with only two it is not possible to do anything other than merely chime them to call worshippers to church in exactly the same way in which all church bells were chimed at the time they were first hung in the steeple at Little Hormead.

## **CAPTAINS OF THE TOWER**

The bell-ringers elect one of their number, an experienced ringer, to be their captain. His duties are to co-ordinate the work of the team, to recruit new members to the team and train them, and to lead the team while ringing by calling the changes in the order in which they are to ring. He also ensures there is a team of ringers for the Sunday services, and for weddings, and a teller for funerals. When other teams visit the tower, it is his duty to greet them, take them up the tower and then literally 'show them the ropes'. Hormead captains of the tower have rarely been so named, but recognised leaders have been appointed. Henry Ginn (1864-1954) was the leader for many years. Arthur Joseph 'Tim' Baker (1900-75) a ringer for over 50 years, was another long-serving leader and after his death there was no nominated leader for some time until Pat Bardwell was elected and served until 1991. He was succeeded by the present captain Basil Clark who has been a bell-ringer since 1960.

## **THE TOWER**

Great Hormead church was built in stages, using flint rubble with stone dressing. The nave is the oldest part, to which a north aisle of three bays was added in the late 13th century. The nave was lengthened by a bay in the first half of the 14th century and later that same century the tower was begun and the nave shortened back to its original length. In the 15th century the top of the tower was completed.

An architect's description of the tower is 'embattled west tower with pyramidal tile roof and diagonal buttresses'. Inside, the tower is in three sections, or storeys. A spiral staircase on the outside of the vestry leads up to the floored-in ringing-chamber. This is roofed over with timber in which small circular holes have been cut to allow the bell-ropes to pass through to the upper storey, the belfry or bell-chamber where the bells are housed.

The tower masonry can easily withstand the downward pressure of the bells hanging dead, but once the bells begin to swing the strain is enormous. At the bottom of the swing the downward force is four times normal weight, and a horizontal force is twice that weight. So, our six bells are mounted in their metal frames in such a manner that when they are ringing the stresses are opposed and virtually cancel out.

### **THE CHURCH CLOCK**

The Reverend George Smith, Vicar of Great Hornead 1890-1901, was responsible for placing the clock in the tower at a cost of £140 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. When it was installed an instruction card for 'winding and regulating' the clock was supplied by the maker, W. Potts & sons of Guildford Street, London. In order to ensure that the clock was accurate, it was suggested 'the Attendant has got the correct Telegraph time from some reliable source'. (Correct time is sent every day from Greenwich to all Post Offices and railway Stations, by Electric Telegraph at 10am) Postal telegraph is best.'

Colin Dedman, our current clock 'Attendant' keeps the clock remarkably accurate by courtesy of the BBC. Henry Ginn and his son Fred looked after the clock for the first 62 years of its life. Henry Ginn was paid 8/6d a quarter (or £1.70p a year). By the time Fred Ginn retired this had been increased to 30 shillings a quarter, and is now £3. Alf Cranville took care of the clock from 1959 to 1975.

For the duration of the first World War the bells and clock were silenced. In the parish magazine for June 1918 the vicar wrote, "Everyone, we believe, was cheered when the church clock found its chiming voice, after being dumb so long." The clock uses the bells for striking the hour and chiming the quarters. The hour is struck on the tenor bell and the quarters are chimed on bells one to four. The quarter is struck on the treble, the half hour on the second bell, the three-quarters on the third bell, and the o'clock on the tenor. The chimes are struck by means of hammers which are spring set outside the bell. The hammers are made to

drop onto the outside of the bell at the appropriate time by means of the clock mechanism, and the spring prevents them remaining in contact with the bell where they might crack it.

### **LOOKING AFTER THE CHURCH CLOCK by Colin Dedman**

"I have looked after the church clock since 1975 I took it over from Alf Cranville who does it when I am on holiday now. The clock keeps very good time, rarely losing or gaining. I get the clock-repairer to it if it gains or loses a minute. There are three weights to pull up 34 feet using a ratchet handle. I pull up the weight for the chimes (6 cwt) four times a week on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, the weight for the striker (6 cwt) once a week, and the weight for the clock (3 cwt) once a week. The clock mechanism is oiled once a year.

I alter the clock twice a year when British Summer time is introduced in spring and ends in Autumn. To put the clock back I have to stop it for an hour. To put it forward, I undo the wingnuts which release the mechanism and twist it round, pausing at the quarter, half and three-quarters long enough to allow it to chime."

### **RINGING MEMORIES**

Several families have memories of bell-ringing which go back for a century or more. It used to be a family tradition that the son followed the father into the tower and learned to ring the church bells. George Bardwell who died in 1985 was a life-long ringer, and his brother A.N. Bardwell who died in 1994 also rang for over half a century. He was followed in the tower by his son Patrick Bardwell who was one of the leaders for several years.

The two Ginns have already been mentioned, Henry (1864-1954) having given a life-time of service to the church as sexton, clock-keeper, church warden, chief bell-ringer, fire-stoker and chorister. When there were three services on Sunday, he was up at the church on the Saturday evening to light the fire down in the stoke-hole in the nave central aisle. (The work done on the tower in 1986 included demolishing the brick flue in the northeast corner of the tower to below the roof timbers, so no more coke fires can heat the church in future). He stoked the fire prior to the 7am communion; he rang a bell then donned his surplice for the 11am mattins; stoked the fire again prior to evensong, for which he again rang a bell and sang in the choir. On one of these visits to the church he would also pull up the clock weights. He once went on a pleasure jaunt on a Sunday

afternoon, taking two ladies to Hertford in a gig. When a wheel came off, he was in such a distressed state over the possibility that he would not get back to Hormead to carry out his duties for evensong, that he vowed never to go out on a Sunday again. Even though he got back in time that evening, he held to his vow. His son Fred also gave devoted service, along with his wife who used to trim and clean the gas lamps. Fred retired in 1981 after 62 years as a bell-ringer. Another ringer who could claim 62 years' service was Frederick Scripps who retired in 1982.

A family who have been bell-ringing for generations is now represented by Colin Dedman. His grandfather Alfred Edward Stewart (born Great Hormead 1886) and great-grandfather John William Stewart (1846-1929) were enthusiastic bell-ringers. Colin has now been ringing for 34 years. Between the wars Jimmy Norris (1882-1940), the Hare Street blacksmith, did a lot to keep the belfry and bells in good working order. He was a small, nimble man, and strong, and did all the running repairs unperturbed by the cramped conditions in the belfry. He was so keen on hearing the bells that he often deliberately arrived late on Tuesday evening, after practise had begun, when he reported whether the other ringers were ringing evenly or not in good time.

A.N. Bardwell,, had many happy memories of the years he spent as part of the bell-ringing team. He wrote, 'Long before I started ringing, and for a number of years after, the ringers disciplined one another by having a 2d fine for non-attendance at Sunday morning ringing (though not the evening service). They had to have a very good reason, health or otherwise, and they usually had because 2d really was a fine in those days – probably a night's drinking money. So they took good care not to get their name on the slate, which the captain met them with, even if they were late. The tolls collected were divided out before the annual outing, shared with the choir, to the coast. They usually went to Southend or Clacton. One of the highlights of this outing was a 'shrimp tea'.

Before World War Two, this tradition of an annual outing was kept up. A farmer's wagon drawn by two horses took the ringers to the station at Royston or Buntingford to catch a 3/6d day excursion train to the seaside. Later, chairs were put inside a covered lorry to make the journey.

### **Ringers in the photograph, taken c1947**

Back Row (left to right):



F. Willson who was shop-keeper in Horsehoe Hill; Alfred (Sammy) Bull who died 1955; George Bardwell of Hare Street, died 1985; Fred Ginn who died 1988; Arthur Joseph 'Tim' Baker, a ringer for over 50 years.

Front row (left to right):

Albert King of Little Hornead (1898-1981); His brother Arthur H. King (1904-81). Alfred Wick (1883-1966) one of the pre 1914-18 war generation of ringers; Alfred Cranville, Little Hornead who rang for several years; Frederick Scripps of Great Hornead, died 1992; Percy W. Cranville of Great Hornead (1914-77) who rang for several years.

There was also a supper at the Vicarage on New Year's Eve, which was provided by successive vicars until the end of the Reverend John A. Hancock's time as vicar (here 1951-55). After the turkey supper, the ringers went to the tower to ring out the old year, and ring in the new.

## **HAND BELLS**

Hand bells have been in use either for signals or to create a metallic noise for both religious and secular purposes since 1500 BC at least. We know that bells were forged in Britain between 100BC and AD43 and used by traders to draw attention to their arrival in a village or market. From the earliest records of Celtic missionaries in Ireland, Scotland and England, cAD470, bishops were presented with a small hand bell at their inauguration. In Medieval times, people who were infirm rang bells to draw the attention of passers-by in expectation of alms being given. Other people used hand bells until by the 19th century it was common to hear them being rung by street traders, railway staff, school teachers, inn-keepers to call 'time', and by house owners to call the maid.

Sets of musical bells were found only in chapels, but as early as the 9th century a manuscript has a drawing of a cleric striking some bells of graduated size, suspended from an arched beam. However, it was not until after 1700 that British foundrymen introduced new techniques enabling a wide range of bells to be cast, and added leather handles for them to be rung in the hand. Modern bells are cast in moulding boxes with metal consisting of about 77% copper and the balance of tin. This is fired at a temperature of 1100°C (2012°F). When cold, the bells are turned on a lathe to give them a high polish. The pitch is determined by the fundamental strike note, depending on size and thickness of the metal, and the 12th or harmonic tone. A

combination of a sensitive ear, tuning fork and electronic equipment now ensure accuracy of tuning to within 100th of one semitone. A fine leather handgrip is provided, again varying in size and length specific to each different size of bell. Each hand bell has its own detachable clapper attached inside the crown of the bell by a forked staple and two brass springs. The springs make the clapper rebound off the side of the bell once it has been struck, allowing the bell to vibrate, and the clapper to return to a position ready for striking again.

## **GREAT HORMEAD'S HAND BELLS**

The hand bells in Hormead have always been used to ring outside the village houses during the fortnight before Christmas. The ringers play carols while a house to house collection is made for distribution to village groups such as the Over 60s, the village hall, the church, etc. And sometimes a small proportion is kept if the bells are in need of refurbishing. The bell-ringing is part of the village Christmas tradition. On a clear, frosty night, the bells ring out with a pure, vibrant sound. Cloudy, misty weather dulls the sound, and it is not possible to ring at all when it rains for the leather handles of the bells get wet. There are now 22 bells in the range used by the Great Hormead bellringers, from an octave below middle C upwards. Originally, there were only 6 bells, which were kept hung up in the bar at the Three Horseshoes in Horseshoe Hill, where Mrs. Bertha Bardwell was the landlady until 1908.

They remained at the Three Horseshoes while Horace Gray and then Alfred Garland were landlords, until c.1939 when they were removed to a box in the church vestry. The ringers only used them at Christmas when they visited the larger houses, and were often invited in for a drink and a mince pie after ringing. In 1951, the six bells were melted down and re-cast into a set of eight making an octave, at a cost of £30. Carols were played by four ringers who each carried two bells. They were still being kept in a box in the vestry but the damp conditions caused green mould to appear on the bells. By 1960 there were 16 bells in the ring, with a further bell added by 1971. In that year, 8 bells were refurbished and given new handles at a cost of £19.66 included purchase tax. All the houses in the villages were now being visited for the ringing of carols at Christmas. In the 1960s Albert King insured the bells, and he cared for them in his house, 1 Willow Pond in Little Hormead, until his death in July 1981. They were next kept in the home of A.N. Bardwell and then of his son P. Bardwell until, in 1991 the ringers decided they would like to ring the bells on other occasions than just at Christmas.

Four more bells, a C. D. G, B, were acquired in July 1990. All 21 bells were cleaned at the Whitechapel Foundry in January 1991 at a cost of £898.41 and separate bags made for each bell in order to keep them better protected. A top A was purchased in October 1992.

The small team of ringers grew to 11 by 1995, and with 22 bells available, they have learned to ring tunes with harmony, instead of the single note method used formerly. The hand bells are rung in practices on Tuesday evenings, following the weekly rehearsals on the church bells in the tower. Several engagements, both in and outside the village, have been arranged during the last five years. The Great Hormead bellringers is now a well-established group, giving performances and enjoying bell-ringing throughout the year. The bells give a great deal of pleasure to the ringers and to listeners who find both watching the players and listening to the music equally fascinating.

### **References**

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| T. Ingram               | Bells in England, 1954.   |
| T. North                | The church bells of Hertfordshire: their founders, inscriptions, traditions and peculiar uses 1886. |
| Victoria County History | Hertfordshire, vol IV   |

### **Acknowledgements:**

The following people have contributed information contained in this pamphlet: A.N. Bardwell, P.N. Bardwell, B. Clark, C. Dedman, Rev. Gerald Drew, R. Ellwood, F. Ginn, I. Lawrence, Rev. Canon L. Morris, F. Scripps, Mrs. D. Williamson, and Mrs. J. Wilson. The pamphlet was designed by N. Oliver. I am greatly indebted to them, and thank them all for their interest and generous help.

### **C.E. Jackson**