

CHAPTER 3

The Bells of St George & St Lawrence Church: Some Questions Answered and Others Created.

By Thelma Fysh



Why, when, and how did the practice of installing bells in churches begin?

Hand bells have been in existence since ancient times, partly used to signal special events and partly used in making music. Bells were probably not introduced into the Christian Church until some time in the 5th century. Previously a trumpet had been used to summon people to worship in public places.

The earliest known reference in Latin Christian literature specifically to large church bells (*campana*) was in the seventh century, and that was in northern Britain.¹ The Venerable Bede in Northumbria (c.710) recorded the use of a lone bell at Whitby sounding the hours of religious services, calling the nuns to prayer, back in 680 AD, having been rung at the passing away of St. Hilda.² The evidence also suggests that in Celtic lands generally, but especially Ireland, extraordinary importance was attached to bells, called *clocca* or *clog* in Celtic.

¹ Information on origins mainly taken from the New Catholic Encyclopedia online : www.newadvent.org. This source gives a full and comprehensive history of the use of church bells.

² Bede, Hist. Eccl., IV, xxi

During the eighth century church towers began to be built for the express purpose of hanging bells in them. The "*Liber Pontificalis*" tells us that Pope Stephen II (752-757) erected a belfry with three bells (*campanae*) at St. Peter's in Rome. Bells began to be regarded as an essential part of the equipment of every church, and the practice developed of blessing them by a special form of consecration.

In his book '*The Church Bells of the County and City of Lincoln*' (published as a limited edition in 1882), Thomas North gives some further historic background to the history of church bells in this country. He says that around 740-50 AD, King Egbert (later King of Wessex 802-39 and, briefly c.829-30, ruler of all England) is said to have commanded every priest to ring a bell at his church for the purpose of calling the hours for Sacred Worship.³ The bell - hung simply on a spindle, and chimed - was rung on each hour throughout the day and night.

The 10th century saw a great surge in the building of churches throughout England. At the time, any Anglo-Saxon '*churl*' (a freeman of the lowest rank), or any freeholder not of noble birth but who had extensive property, was lawfully able to obtain a higher rank as a minor nobleman. To achieve this rise in status he must possess more than five hundred acres of land and, crucially, have a church with a bell tower on his estate. This probably accounts for the rising number of churches with towers that date from the period leading up to the Norman Conquest.

³ North, (1882) p.3.



Might this have been when Springthorpe's bell-tower, came into being?

There are no records proving this, but there is strong physical evidence to suggest a Late Saxon/Early Norman tower (see Chapter 1). Interestingly, historian Robert Lacey in his book *'Great Tales from English History'* (2003), tells us that at the time of the Viking raids in England, during the early 11th century, many Saxon churches had high bell towers.⁴ They were customarily used both as lookout stations and to sound alarm in times of danger. He goes on to tell us that if the Vikings captured a church, their first task was to pull the bell from the tower. Its metal was valuable to them - to melt down and re-shape into new swords and helmets. There was also the added satisfaction and triumph of having captured the Christian Church's 'unique sound'.



What do we know about Springthorpe's early status as a church with working bells?

We know very little, but considering that by the 13th century bells were no longer a rarity, and Springthorpe certainly had a tower at least from the 11th century, it is likely that there was at least one bell here from that early date. Every church owned at least one priest's bell, and often as many as three working bells existed in churches in rural areas. In medieval England it was distinctly laid down in canon law that the church bells and ropes had to be provided at the cost of the parishioners. The canon law assumed that a parish church had two or three bells.

During the 14th century there is evidence that bell ringers began to experiment with new ways of hanging bells. They wanted to gain ever-

⁴ Page 47

greater control over the heavy bells. Tests began with a *quarter wheel* with a rope attached to its rim in order to give the bell a greater ‘swing’. Gradually, and later still, bells were remounted onto a *half wheel* (fig.54), giving the ringer even more control. This was the situation in most towers by the time of the reign of King Henry VIII.

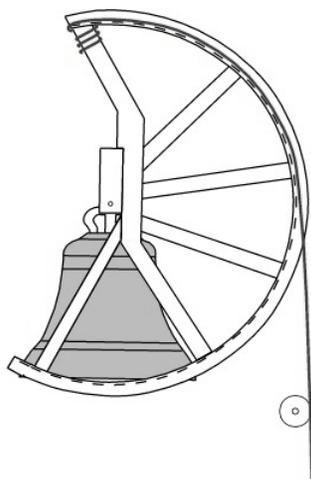


Fig.54: Half-wheel

The first documented evidence of bells at Springthorpe is also from the reign of Henry VIII, from ‘Exchequer Church Goods, 1533’:

*"19 May 1553. The commissioners delivered to Rychard Robynson, curate of the Parish Church of Spryngthorp, and to Henry Wygelesworthe and William Garvie, churchwardens, iii great bells, and i sanctus bell, and i challys of p'cell gylt weying x ownces saffly to be kept by them and their successors. By me Richard Robinson, p'son".*⁵

On that date, then, three great bells and one Sanctus bell were delivered to the Rector of Springthorpe Church, Richard Robinson. One of these

⁵ Oxoniensis, “The History of Heapham, Pilham and Springthorpe” (1905) p.16. This was recorded rather differently in Lincs. Notes & Queries v.XIX p38: “*The com^{rs} have del^d to Sir Rychard Robynson curate and Henrye Wygglesworthe & Wyllm Hansone churchwardens iij gret bells, one sanctus bell & one challys parcell gylt weynge x ownces.*”

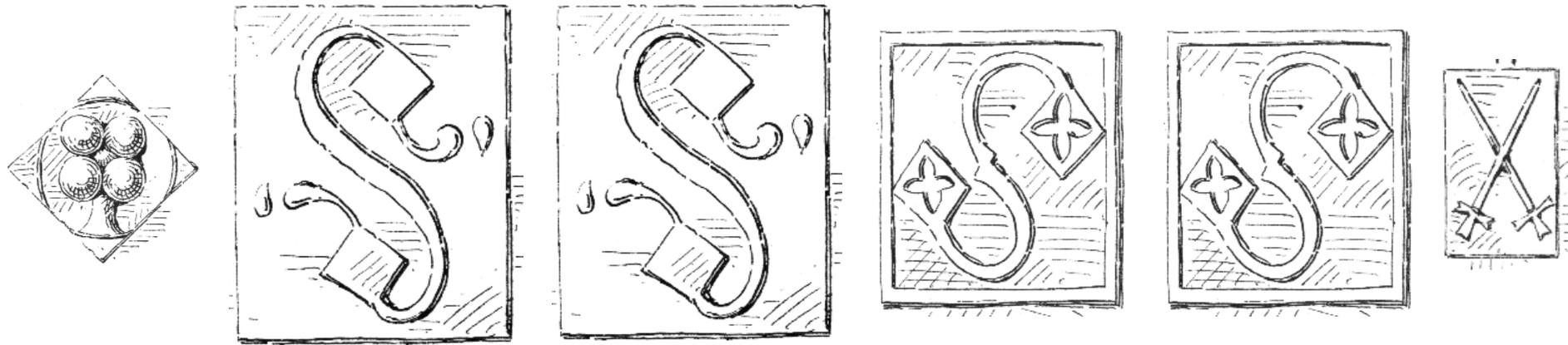


Fig.55: Founder's stamps on the 16th century bell at Springthorpe Church.

still remains as a working bell in Springthorpe's tower and is one of the county's oldest bells. The bell bears the inscription:

GEORGIUS ☐ CAMPANA ☐ UOS ☐ SONAT ☐

DULCITUR ☐ BENE ☐

Each box denotes the position of a stamp, the combination of which could identify the bell-founder. Four different stamps have been used, two of them repeated (fig. 55).

Only a year after the delivery of the bells to Springthorpe, Henry VIII was declared Supreme Head of the Church of England and the English Reformation began in earnest. The religious doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church underwent drastic reform. This was a turning point in the history of bells in churches throughout England and Wales. Many bells were destroyed with the desecration of the Roman Catholic Churches in which they hung⁶. A papal interdict banned the ringing of bells in English Catholic churches.



What happened to all these bells after they were removed from church towers?

Robert Lacey goes on to tell us that Henry VIII had taken a great interest in the artillery used in his war ships.⁷ When fighting against Spanish galleons, the English galleons apparently carried twice the cannon power of their enemies. Henry's interest had encouraged new gun-building technology, which was developed directly from bell founding techniques. In 1588, some of the older English cannon had been recast from the copper and tin alloy (bell metal), melted down from the bells of the

⁶ *Great Tales from English History*, page 215

dissolved monasteries. It is easy to surmise that more bell metal may have been taken from destroyed rings of bells in churches, too. However, the *terrier* of 1566 examined in Chapter 2, telling of the destruction of all items associated with *papistrie* at Springthorpe Church, makes no mention at all of the bells (perhaps they were ‘kept quiet’!)⁸.

During the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and also William and Mary, many inventories of church goods were carried out by royal command. These inventories tell us today the status of bells during the 16th and 17th centuries. Gradually, as restoration and repair took place in the newly Protestant churches, bells were re-hung. The next available inventory of church goods at Springthorpe, also cited in Chapter 2, is not until the 18th century, when Thomas Wells was Rector and Samuel Hill Churchwarden. It stated that there were then ‘3 bells’ at Springthorpe, but were they the same three bells? We do not know, but we have so far found no documentary evidence to suggest otherwise.

These three great bells may have continued to serve the village until 1865, when two of them were sent to the founder (J.Taylor & Co., Loughborough, where they were to be recast to make three. These details were first published in a book that appeared in 1882 entitled ‘*The Church Bells of the County and City of Lincoln*’ by Thomas North, F.S.A.⁹

⁷ *ibid* - page 239

⁸ In 1566, other churches reported ‘bells lost or missing’. Some were hidden away in people’s houses to prevent destruction - from Peacock, Florence: “Church Bells: When and Why they were Rung” in *Curious Church Customs*, ed Wm. Andrews (1898) P.43

⁹ A limited edition numbering 210 copies, was printed by Samuel Clarke, Leicester.



How do we know so much about the history of our working bells?

Since bells began to be used in church towers as a means of calling the faithful to worship, there have been many who have studied with great interest, church bells and their usage. Hence the developments designed to make the activity smooth and manageable.

Enthusiastic followers of the art of bell-ringing began to visit and record all the bells existing throughout Britain, searching out churches large and small, documenting bell sizes, ages, musicality, and even the inscriptions which had been founded on their surfaces. These researchers spent much of their spare time travelling from place to place (not an easy task before the era of fast cars), subjecting themselves to the most amazing danger when crawling through minute spaces between great, dusty, heavy bells in order to copy and make drawings and plaster casts of the bold inscriptions on them. Deciphering these inscriptions became a passion among the knowledgeable, and led to further data being accrued.

Thomas North's book had come about because a Lincolnshire-born man, Rev. Joseph Thomas Fowler of Winterton (1833-1924), wanted to know about *every* working bell in Lincolnshire. For many years he visited towers, documenting and recording bells. With additional help from clergy and laity in the county, Rev. Fowler began to compile a most comprehensive list of all bells in the whole of Lincolnshire. Wishing to see his work published, and realising that he would be unable to complete his work satisfactorily, in 1880 he handed all his notes, sketches and casts to Thomas North. He challenged Mr. North to complete the work, and to be sure to publish it. (Thomas North had by that time already published

books on the bells of other counties plus other scholarly works related to architecture and archaeology.)

Among those notes were full details of Springthorpe's bells, which had been visited by Rev. J.T. Fowler himself, These details are given in North's book as follows¹⁰:

SS. GEORGE AND LAWRENCE 4 BELLS AND A PRIEST'S BELL
Bells 1,2,3. J.TAYLOR & CO., FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH
1865

(Weights: 1st, 7cwt. 3qrs. 0lbs: 2nd, 8cwt. 1qr. 24lbs:
3rd, 9cwt. 3qrs. 10lbs.)

4. GEORGIUS □ CAMPANA □ UOS □ SONAT □ DULCITUR □ BENE □

[“George. The bell sounds you sweetly well.”¹¹]

Priest's Bell: - Blank



Who else has shown an interest in the bells of Springthorpe?

Ranald W.M.Clouston, who had rekindled an interest in checking the data contained in Thomas North's publication, was an enthusiastic researcher into the history of parishes in various parts of the country, including their church bells. During his visit to Lincolnshire, he was able to add further information to Thomas North's work. He came to Springthorpe on 14th August 1969. Mr. Clouston has published various books and pamphlets on bells, bell ringing, and the history of parishes.

Another such expert, who also came to Springthorpe, was George A. Dawson, of Loughborough, Leicestershire. His findings regarding church

¹⁰ Ibid, page 662.

¹¹ Ibid, p.265. Compare Rev. Davies translation p.

bells have been included in various articles published by him, including ‘*The National Bell Register*’, which is still being updated frequently.

After visiting Springthorpe, he wrote a letter of thanks to Mr. Michael Anyan, churchwarden of the parish. The letter is dated 3rd January 1988.

In it, Mr. Dawson states:

“I was particularly interested in the tenor (4th) bell. It turns out to be one of a group of bells cast by an as yet unknown York bell founder who seems to have been working about 1440 to 1470.”

The tenor bell must therefore have already been over 100 years old when it first came to Springthorpe church in 1553!

Mr. Dawson explained that the lettering on this bell (see fig.55) had enabled various groups of castings in the North of England finally to be identified as the work of a York foundry. That is to say, that the particular order in which the ‘stops’ between the words of the Latin inscription had been placed signified the work of an ‘unknown’ founder. Having found a similar pattern of stops on the bell at Springthorpe, Mr. Dawson was finally able to link a series of bells around the North of England which had proved to be a mystery. The same founder - one who, unlike other bell founders, had never signed his work made them all. He is believed now to be John Hoton of York, who made bells for York Minster in 1470. This was an important find in the study of the history of church bells in Britain.

Interestingly, discoveries made by George Dawson, working a hundred years or so after John North and Rev. Fowler, invite more questions with regard to the bells remaining in Springthorpe between 1553 and 1865.



We know that in 1865 two bells were taken to be recast, and were made into three. Does that mean they were the two, ancient ‘sister’ bells to ‘George’ - the tenor?

No, not necessarily. Mr. Dawson fears that it is impossible to specify the age of the two bells that were taken to J. Taylor’s to be melted down. Records show that in 1765 there were still three working bells in the tower at Springthorpe. But it cannot be assumed that the two treble (lighter) bells were the ones cast in the Middle Ages. It was quite common at that time, if a bell became damaged, that a local founder would remove it from the church, recast it, and replace it again - thus sustaining a viable ring of bells.

Another method of keeping the bells operational was by asking the local blacksmith to perform a simple repair. There were also knowledgeable craftsmen who worked as itinerant bell founders. They would move into an area, dig a huge pit and build a furnace - sometimes in the churchyard to save the having to travel any distance with a heavy load - and recast damaged bells there and then. Mr. Dawson is certain that there is no evidence of this having occurred at Springthorpe. Repair work however, often went unrecorded by the incumbent of a church or by its churchwardens. They simply got on with arranging repairs that were urgently needed. This could easily have happened at Springthorpe.



Fig.56 The Sanctus Bell

A fifth bell in the church - the sanctus bell - diameter 11½ inches - was primarily hung for chiming (when calling people to church), and was founded by an unknown 18th century founder. It has no inscription or decoration.

The vicar or the sexton would usually have rung it. It now hangs within the tower's small Saxon 'keyhole' window (fig.56).



How rare are the oldest bells in Lincolnshire - and where does Springthorpe's tenor bell fit in the group?

Dr. Ketteringham, Mr. Dawson, and many others collectively, spent many hours visiting and re-visiting more than 721 towers and belfries all over the county in order to verify details for their proposed book. We can therefore be sure of their knowledge and expertise. In the year 2000, Dr. Ketteringham chronicled a total of 2,388 bells in churches. In his book he noted that "*15% of the bells now in Lincolnshire churches were cast before the English Reformation*". At that time, the oldest surviving bell in the county was of 12th century origin, and there were 37 others pre - 15th century. 136 bells were cast during the 15th century, less than 6% of the total of Lincolnshire's bells, and Springthorpe's tenor is one of them, which makes it quite rare.



During the 19th century, alterations were made to the tower of St. George and St. Lawrence's church at Springthorpe. Was this associated with the re-hanging of the newly formed ring of four bells?

The new bell frame, suitable for hanging four bells, was installed while the tower was clear of all bells in 1865. This frame, still present today, is unique of its type. Built around the outer walls of the belfry, it remains entirely free-standing, with its base resting firmly on the floor - unusual, in that frames are normally built on beams which reach across the tower and are embedded in the walls. Springthorpe's bell frame was never

designed to be attached to the walls of the tower. Its strength is in its ability to move gently when the bells are in motion.

*** insert - photo showing bell frame? ***

The downside of this arrangement is that the beams are exposed to the prevailing weather on the outer rim. - particularly on the west side of the tower, where the treble bell hangs. A further problem is that the wood used is a less-resilient, softer wood than oak, which would have been better. This has led to the occurrence of some rotting and instability.

Rebuilding of the top of the Anglo-Saxon tower took place in 1895, thirty years later than the installation of the new 'ring' of bells. Architectural historians such as Pevsner, have referred to this work as having been '*the addition of a 'bell stage'*'. Some doubt may be cast on this assumption, as usually the 'bell stage' additions to towers were made in order to create more space for the bells. Could this really be the case at Springthorpe? The low-sided frame was already *in situ*, dating from 1865! Unless of course the intention had been to create more 'head-room' within the existing space?



Have the bells had major work done on them in living memory?

Former local ringer Lionel Stephenson clearly remembers the bells being removed from the tower during the 1930's when he was a youngster. He cannot remember why, but recalls that the event certainly caused disruption in the village. He easily recalls the service of dedication when

the bells were rung again.¹² The fund-raising bazaar that the Rector, Rev. Benjamin Davies organised, was reported in the local newspaper. There we are told the circumstances that caused the bells to need reworking:

*“A representative from the well-known bell founders of Loughborough – Messrs. Taylor & Co., - had visited the Church and thoroughly examined the bells and reported thereon. New fittings and replacements were necessary, new stays, gudgeons, head stock and ball bearing, etc., were suggested at an estimated cost of £110.”*¹³

In January of 2003, Bob Smith - at that time an inspector and bell hanger from the firm of bellhangers and engineers, Eayre and Smith, inspected the belfry and its bells.¹⁴ In his subsequent report, he confirmed that in the 1930s the bells were rehung on ball bearings, which would have made the ringing easier and smoother. *“Cast iron ‘bedplates’ were fixed onto the top cills of the frame to create flat, rigid surfaces into which the new bearing housings could be mounted.”*



All working machinery needs care and maintenance. How is this organised in belfries?

The bells in any Church of England church belong to that church and its parish, and as such, the churchwardens and incumbent are responsible for the maintenance and care of those bells. Naturally, they traditionally pass the task to a local interested person. In some parishes, the Parochial Church Council officially appoints him or her to the position, giving them

¹² See Rev. Davies own account of the rededication of the bells in Appendix 4

¹³ Gainsborough News?? 17 April 1931

the rather grand title of ‘Steeple Keeper’. Sometimes - typically, in small village parishes - caring for the bells has been, and sometimes still is, quite a haphazard affair. Occasionally, the bell ringers themselves are required to look after the oiling of moving parts, general cleaning etc. Springthorpe, being so small in terms of population, has found it difficult over the years to keep continuity in respect of the care of its bells.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, Springthorpe had a thriving and enthusiastic band of ringers among the local churchgoers. As far as can be ascertained, the bell ringers here could be counted on to oversee any day-to-day work that needed doing, as well as ringing for church services, weddings, funerals etc. The bells, reached by means of a very long wooden ladder being leaned against the rim of the central trapdoor to the belfry, were oiled and tended by various people.



Who has authority for major work to be carried out on the bells in a church?

As always, it remains the duty of ringers, whether visiting or local, to report anything untoward regarding the safe and sure ringing of the bells, to the churchwardens or incumbent. They in their turn take appropriate action.



Church bells are very expensive to buy and to maintain.

Who was working on them during the 20th century?

Gradually, as happens in every tower, ringers left the local band for various reasons. Mrs. Bessie Anyan, who for many years was

¹⁴ Bell-hangers Eayre and Smith merged with John Taylor Bellfounders Ltd to form the company Taylors Eayre and Smith Ltd, based in Loughborough, Leicestershire.

churchwarden at St. George and St. Lawrence's Church, felt responsible for inviting ringers from outside the village to augment the band for Sunday service ringing - and whenever the need arose.

One such person, who made frequent visits to ring here, was Mr. Derek Till - tower captain and steeple keeper of Upton All Saints' Church. Concerned about the extreme effort needed to ring the Springthorpe bells, he sought permission to spend some time working on the belfry and the bells. He, with the help of his son Ian Till - tower captain and steeple keeper at Messingham Holy Trinity Church (also a keen and active member of the West Lindsey Guild), cleaned, oiled, tightened and repaired where possible. A slight improvement was noticed after all their efforts. Mr. Till invited various ringers to join him in keeping Springthorpe's bell ringing alive. Among them were John Kyneman - Blyton, Bruce Linegar - Lea, Thelma Fysh - Upton. Sadly, Derek Till died, and fresh arrangements had to be made to carry on his good work at Springthorpe.



Is there a Steeple Keeper currently responsible for the Springthorpe bells?

Yes, there is, although in the absence of a village band of ringers, Mr. John Kyneman is the official person. He is ringer, churchwarden and steeple keeper at Blyton St. Martin's Church, and is willing to act in the interests of St. George and St. Lawrence Church whenever possible. He keeps the belfry at Springthorpe clean; carries out minor repairs; and notifies the churchwarden when more serious work needs to be done in the belfry. He always tries to be on hand whenever visitors arrive to view

the bells - whether they are from the diocese or from a firm of bell hangers wishing to do repairs.

The churchwarden notifies Mr. Kyneman when the church is in need of a band of ringers for services, weddings etc. In the absence of a village band, Mr. Kyneman has a long-standing arrangement with Corringham St. Lawrence's tower captain Mr. J. Wilson, who arranges for a group of ringers from either his own band, or that of Lea St. Helen's to help Mr. Kyneman on the appointed day. Considering that at the time of writing, the bells at Springthorpe - especially the treble - are notoriously difficult to ring (for want of some urgent repairs), it is particularly kind of the supporting group of bell ringers - and typical of the nature of ringers towards other towers' needs.

DEVELOPMENTS IN BELLS AND BELL RINGING

*“A large bell can nowadays be rung comfortably by a single man. But we have seen that when Prior Conrad presented five bells, about 1110, to Canterbury Cathedral, the first and second bells required ten men, the third eleven, the fourth eight, and the fifth twenty-four men, to swing them”.*¹⁵



How has bell ringing changed since the Reformation?

The Reformation was a magnificent opportunity to resurrect former experiments to make church bells more easily ringable. Springthorpe could well have taken advantage of the advances when the *whole wheel*, around which the rope travelled, was finally introduced (fig.56). Ringers

¹⁵ www.archive.org text archive: Church bells of England, " Ringing and Ringers", 79.

were now able to speed up and slow down the tempo of the swing of the bell where necessary. During ensuing years, further refinements were made to the smooth working of the church bell. Bell ringing, as it is now practiced throughout Britain, had arrived.

It is entirely realistic that Springthorpe's elders would want to introduce the newest technology to their tower too. The adoption of the whole wheel made it possible - for the first time relatively comfortably - to vary the order in which bells were rung. This would have made a massive effect on bell ringers everywhere - including those here.



How does each bell ringer know when it is 'his' turn to pull the rope?

Each ringer knows the number of 'his' own bell. Bells in every tower are numbered in 'rounds' - that is, in order, starting from the lightest (the highest toned 'treble') and usually down to the heaviest (the tenor) - the bell with the deepest voice. Springthorpe's bells are unusual in this respect, as the 3rd bell, with its weight at 9cwt 3qrs 6lbs, is marginally heavier than the Tenor, or 4th bell, which weighs just 9cwt 2qrs. Yet the tones remain in the correct order. In most towers, the heavier the bell; the deeper the tone.



Does the 'whole wheel' make a difference to what we hear outside the tower?

Making the bells more 'comfortable' to ring meant that it became easier for bells to follow one after another in a more tuneful, less jangling way. That became more acceptable for people outside the building to listen to. After the introduction of the whole wheel, it also became possible for the

captain of the ringers to call out two adjacent bell numbers, after which those bells changed places, and so on until all bells had moved to a different place. It became possible for bells to be rung in constantly changing patterns.

In 1668, a Cambridge printer, Fabian Stedman, having devised a method of ringing a series of changes without the need for anyone to call anything at all, printed the first book ever to be produced on the art of ringing. It was a method that could be written down, learned and rung according to certain rules. Gradually, as word spread, ringers around the country began to devise more and more complicated methods, and so it has continued through the centuries, to the present day.



What do we know about bell ringing in village churches over the last two centuries?

A Lea and Gainsborough bell ringer during the mid-20th century, G.L.A. Lunn, was, for more than fifty years, the secretary of the ‘Gainsborough District and West Lindsey Branch of the Lincoln Diocesan Guild of Bellringers’. Recording many of the bell ringing developments that occurred during his life as a bell ringer, Leslie (as he was known to the locals), wrote a book which was printed by the Lincoln Guild in 1985. In it he discussed - even then - the gradual decline in the number of church services. “How do congregations compare with those of the 19th century?” he asked. “Most churches had two services per Sunday, few have more than one today, but then, 100 years ago there was an incumbent for almost every parish.”

Yet, the number of church services made a difference to the number of times the bell ringers were required, but it was still necessary for the same number of ringers to be available when needed.



There is talk of there having been a period of decline in bell ringing at around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Why was that?

One reason, given by Denis Frith in his book chronicling happenings in bell ringing during 100 years of Lincoln Diocesan's Guild, *'Ring in the True'*, was that beginning in November 1904, and continuing through to the following May, there was an outbreak of typhoid in Lincoln. Many people died. Guild members were advised to stay away from the city. Mention was also made of 'strange goings-on' in the Gainsborough District early in 1906, when Gainsborough Parish Church and the Corringham towers switched membership from one District to another. It is unlikely that either of these occurrences would have made much difference where Springthorpe ringers were concerned.



World War I, 1914-18, was to have a real impact on bell ringing everywhere. Tower bell ringing, other than Sunday service ringing stopped. It was thought that the sound of church bells ringing after dark, might enable the Zeppelin airships from Germany, to locate built-up areas and reveal the location of coastal towns to enemy gunboats. Ringing after dark was voluntarily suspended, though gradually these orders were ignored, and bell ringing crept back almost to normal again.

However, in 1916, threat of increased enemy bombing caused officials to ban nighttime ringing altogether. Even daytime ringing stopped in towns

and cities, so munitions workers who had been on shift work, could get some sleep. Many church clocks were silenced too. Records show that a third of Lincolnshire's ringers served in the war, and many of those died.

No records exist of the Gainsborough Guild's minutes for the period of the war. Mysteriously, the relevant pages of the minute book had been removed.



What happened about the bells in Springthorpe during World War II?

In G.A.Lunn's book, *'The history of the Gainsborough District and West Lindsey Branch, 1890 - 1984'*, he recorded in 1940, that emergency measures were introduced in Britain, in order to avoid any 'surprise and intrigue' such as that which happened throughout Europe, when Germany invaded and overran several countries. When France's turn came, on June 4th, the enemy was dangerously close to Britain. His Majesty George VI's government declared that from June 18th, no bell must sound except as a warning to the population that enemy troops had landed. For the first time for many centuries, bells hung silent, by order - including those in Springthorpe.

Mr. Lunn went on to relate how, in November 1942, after General Montgomery's great offensive defeated General Rommel's crack forces in N. Africa, the Sunday following was declared a day of thanksgiving for the victory at El Alemein, and the bells were allowed to be rung just for that day. Mr. Lunn took his car, filled with ringers, and rang at as many towers as possible in the district. What a welcome they got everywhere

they visited! No-one seems to have recorded whether the bells of Springthorpe rang at all on that day.

On May 27th 1943, the ban on ringing church bells was lifted. Although for many churches, there were not many young men available to keep bells ringing during the rest of the war years.

Finally, Mr. Churchill the war-time Prime Minister, announced that at midnight on May 7th 1945, all fighting would cease, and the following day, would be a day of public rejoicing for victory in Europe (VE Day). The Archbishop of Canterbury asked on the radio for church services to be held at 12 o'clock that day and that church bells were to be rung around the country.



Have there been other dates when bells have been required for national or regional celebration?

Yes, there were several occasions during the decade following the war when the Archbishop of Canterbury was to request that the bells of the nation should ring collectively.

- November 20th 1947 - Wedding of Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh.
- 1952 - all bells rang half muffled on the death of King George VI.
- June 2nd 1953 - Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.
- In July 1983, fresh repairs and redecoration of the church were complete, and in keeping with tradition, the bells were rung in celebration. Ringing for the service of thanksgiving and dedication

were: Henry Marshall, Lionel Stephenson, and Fred and Jack Marshall.

- Later still in the century (1999), the Lincoln Diocesan Guild of Bellringers celebrated its achievement of 100 years as a guild. The Bishop of Lincoln asked that as many towers as possible should ring their bells to mark the occasion.
- In the year 2000, the New Year and the Millennium were rung in and celebrated, throughout the land.



Who can still remember the bands of ringers in Springthorpe during the 20th century?

There are few details existing for Springthorpe's very early years of the 20th century. Joan Newton was able to tell that her husband's elder brother Jack was a bell ringer, following in the footsteps of their father Isaac. Isaac Newton was the church's sexton, which meant that he 'did everything' from digging graves, to attending to the needs of the church. Being the Tower Captain too, he taught all the lads of the village to ring the bells. They apparently learnt to ring when they left school, although some, including Fred's other four brothers, declined to continue after a while. It was Isaac who would at that time have looked after the bells in the belfry, oiling and greasing moving parts when necessary.



Johnny Middleton followed Isaac into the job of sexton. It was he, too, who used to ring the hand bells (which still exist, and are the property of the village). Michael Anyan acts as custodian of the set of six.

 Lionel Stephenson, one of those who learnt to ring on leaving school, and who still resides in the village, remembers the team of the 1930's, 40's and 50's:

Fred Newton - the tower captain

Arty Wilcox

Reg Key

Johnny Middleton

Fred Fields.

Girls and ladies were apparently not actively encouraged to ring the bells at Springthorpe's tower in those days!

Several well-known local personalities, who came to visit the tower during Lionel's years as a ringer, include Henry Marshall, Leslie Lunn, and John Kyneman. They would have rung by the light of paraffin lamps as electricity was not yet installed.

 Before each Sunday service, the bells were rung, calling the faithful to worship. Lionel thinks they may have rung for about half an hour - ample warning for the villagers to walk to the church. The bells were first rung 'up' (to a position where their mouths would be facing upwards) in readiness for the two peals of changes, after which they would have been rung down again, and the tenor chimed alone as the final 'calling' bell. Special services during the year would be rung for - ie: Easter, Harvest and Christmas. There would be practice nights to attend too.

"We rang 'changes' a bit, though we didn't get involved in anything too difficult," he said. "But some of the lads used to go out and ring at other

towers round about, though I never did. Young Fred Newton was proud to have rung at the Cathedral once.” No doubt ‘Young Fred’ would have met G.L.A. Lunn there too as it would most probably have been one of the Lincoln Guild Annual Meetings he went to.

Lionel, reminiscing about the duties expected of the above team of ringers, talked about the traditions followed with regard to funerals. The passing bell would be rung before the service whilst the coffin was being carried towards the church. The number of tolls of the bell told the age of the deceased. From this, the locals could easily work out who was to be buried.



On at least one of these occasions Fred Newton, Fred Fields, Arthur Wilcox and Reg Key cycled all the way from Springthorpe to Lincoln to ring on the then 16 bells high up in the tower of the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary. At an AGM of this nature, after initial ringing, a business meeting was followed by a service in the oldest part of the Cathedral - the bell ringer’s Chapel. The ringers - from all over Lincolnshire - would then have sat down to an enormous ‘bell ringers’ tea’, followed by more ringing, either up the spiral staircase at the cathedral, or in another Lincoln tower. An extremely exhausting (though enjoyable) day for the four young men who had still to cycle all the way back - 18 or so miles - to Springthorpe.

Sadly Fred Newton, Tower Captain at St. George and St. Lawrence’s for very many years, died after a long illness in 2006. His widow Joan (still living in the house opposite the church, as she and Fred had done for a long time during their married life together), confirmed much of what

Lionel was able to tell of the happy, bell-ringing years. She never felt the urge to learn to ring and join the band, though was happy to support Fred in his dedication.



A few of the occasional ringers at Springthorpe now are John Kyneman, Bev Brumby, Bruce Linegar, Glenys and Gary Beaman - all of whom come by arrangement with John Wilson at Corringham. Three other ringers who deserve mention here are two willing people new to bell ringing, but who live in the village - Gillian and Julian Cowan. They have learnt to ring at Willingham-by-Stow church with the tower captain there - Mrs Susan Faull, who is also Master of the West Lindsey Guild, and in addition, Master of the Lincoln Diocesan Guild. On occasions, they have also helped out at Springthorpe (which has a ‘ground ring’ - that is; one where the ropes extend down to the ground floor for pulling).



Why didn't ladies ring bells until relatively recently?

John Camp in his book “Discovering Bells and Bellringing” notes that “*It has been said that to be a ringer in eighteenth century England was to be a layabout and a drunk.*” He goes on to tell us that in rural areas bell-ringing was a kind of hobby and every opportunity was taken to ring. The standard of behaviour in most belfries became appalling: “*cursing, swearing and smoking were normal and in many towers a barrel of beer was always ‘on tap in the ringing chamber.*”¹⁶ Much of the ringing seems to have been carried out for secular purposes, and it was not until the Church reforms of the Victorian period that ringing began to resume its main function as a part of worship.

¹⁶ Camp, p.16.

This situation may have made bell ringing strictly a man's world, or may have gradually deterred girls and women from participating. The excuse, as always, was that it would prove to be too heavy (or big) a task for the fairer sex. They were at all times welcome to provide huge teas for the hungry men after their task was over, but that was all. Bell ringing - except in exceptional circumstances - was not for them. (Nevertheless, the incident of the girl Mary Hill who was killed in a bell-ringing accident suggests that perhaps in rural parishes it was not so unusual to have girl bell-ringers.¹⁷)

Gradually, strong-minded women infiltrated the man's world, and proved to be more than equal to the task on many occasions. The first lady to ring a peal for the Lincoln Guild was in 1913. Nowadays, as in so many other walks of life, bell ringing would be in a very sorry state if women were still not acceptable in the ringing chamber - including in the tiny village of Springthorpe, relying as it does on outside bell ringers to keep the bells active. Among the ranks of the women who visit Springthorpe tower occasionally are farmers, teachers, antique dealers, and even Lincoln Guild Ringing Masters. Discrimination has no place in bell ringing.

¹⁷ See Appendix 7 "The Maiden's Garland"