



Guildford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers

When were Church Bells first used?



Croyland Abbey, in Lincolnshire, had the first known ring of bells tuned to a musical scale over 1,000 years ago!



These French Bell-founders are ‘fettling’ one of the new bells recently installed at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

How long do bells last?



Saxon churches often had round stone towers like St Peter's, Yaxham. Four of the bells in this tower are 400 years old

Where are bells made?



Johanna Sturdy cast this bell in London in 1460. She is 555 years old. She is one of the bells at Stoke D'Abernon and is rung every Sunday.

Bell restoration



Although bells last a long time, they do need maintenance. A sponsored abseil was part of the money-raising effort at Epsom

What is English Change Ringing?

The simplest sort of ringing is 'Rounds', where bells are rung continuously down the musical scale with 1 being the lightest and 8 being the heaviest bell:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

This would be monotonous after a while, but the music can be varied by the conductor, who calls bells to change position. Some musical changes are

Queens:
1 3 5 7 2 4 6 8

Tittums:
1 5 2 6 3 7 4 8

Whittingtons:
7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

On ten bells, there is more variety, such as Roller-coaster:
3 2 1 6 5 4 9 8 7 10

And on twelve bells, full Whittingtons:
5 3 1 2 4 6 11 9 7 8 10 12

Whittingtons is said to be what Dick Whittington heard the bells of London ringing, calling him back to become Lord Mayor of London.

Much more interesting music is created by constantly changing the order of the bells. Ringers do not use written 'music' for this: instead they learn a pattern which allows the bells to weave between each other, rather like barn-dancing.

These methods often have quaint names, like:

- ◆ Grandsire
- ◆ Plain Bob
- ◆ Reverse Canterbury Pleasure Bob Doubles
- ◆ Double Norwich Court Bob Major

There are strict rules for ringing and naming methods, maintained by the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

- Doubles means that five bells are changing
- Major means that eight bells are changing
- Royal means that ten bells are changing
- Maximus means twelve bells are changing

If you look on the peal boards in the tower, you will see names for changes on other numbers of bells.

Plain Hunt Minor

1 2 3 4 5 6
2 1 4 3 6 5
2 4 1 6 3 5
4 2 6 1 5 3
4 6 2 5 1 3
6 4 5 2 3 1
6 5 4 3 2 1
5 6 3 4 1 2
5 3 6 1 4 2
3 5 1 6 2 4
3 1 5 2 6 4
1 3 2 5 4 6
1 2 3 4 5 6

Can you see the pattern here?

Each number represents a bell, and the position in the row gives the order in which the bells ring.

This pattern is called Plain Hunt.

It is the simplest change-ringing principle, but it only gives 12 changes before repeating.

However, 720 different changes are possible on six bells.

The challenge is to ring all 720 possible changes in such a way that each change is rung once only and in perfect rhythm.

Bell-ringers learn the pattern for each different 'method' and use it to work out the order of the bells as they go along – no memory aids are allowed.

Expert bands like to change the method as the ringing proceeds.



Ringers like to record their achievements on Peal Boards. This shows a very early peal on eight bells rung at Epsom on 11th January 1776.

The Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London is Britain's oldest manufacturing company. It was established in 1570 (during the reign of Elizabeth I) but is on or close to the site of even earlier foundries—see the Johanna Sturdy bell above.

Ringers are known for their economy. The stool below is made from the headstock of an ancient bell, with legs made from four bell-frame sliders.



Ringling chambers are often high up in the tower and can be dark, dusty and mysterious places