

When were Church Bells first used?

The origins are lost in time.

We know that Cistercian Monks came to England after the Norman Conquest and built many abbeys that became rich and famous.

These magnificent abbeys had enormous bell-towers, and we know they had bells, because they had a rule that no abbey could be built within the sound of the bells of another abbey.

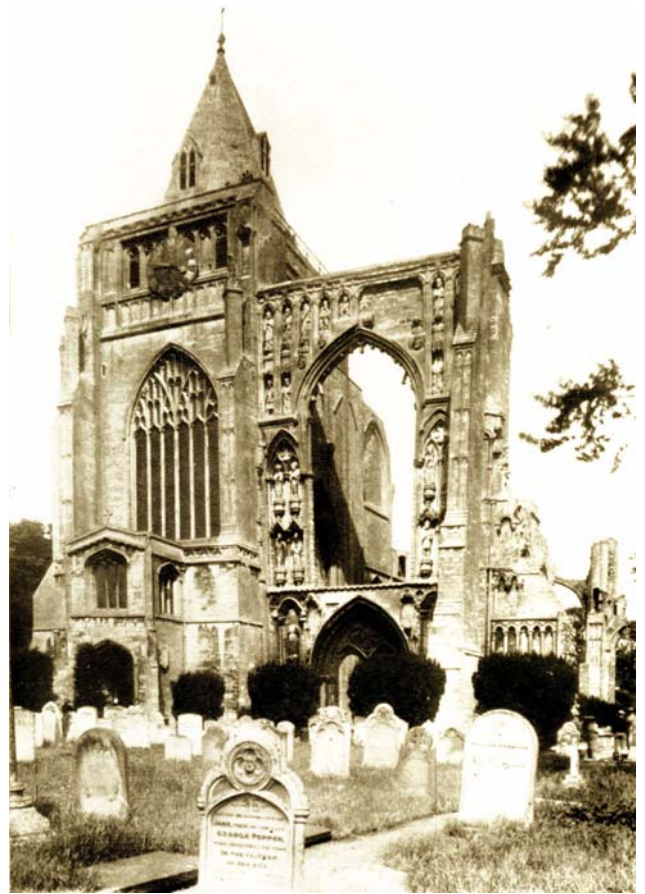
One abbey even had to be moved because of this rule!

But the first ring of bells tuned to a musical scale were installed 100 years before the Norman Conquest at Croyland (Crowland) Abbey in Lincolnshire.

And many Saxon Churches built before the Norman Conquest had towers built from stone, and it is likely that some of these had at least one bell in the tower.

So bell ringing has been practised for over 1,000 years.

In the days before the telephone or television, church bells were rung to tell people the time, to announce church services, and in times of danger, such as flood or invasion.



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

When was English Change-ringing invented?

We do not know when English change-ringing was invented.

The early ringers discovered that bells sound much better if they are rung by swinging them from side to side, rather than striking the stationary bell with a hammer.

But the speed of a swinging bell cannot easily be changed, so the bells would have been rung fairly randomly, as we hear even nowadays on the Continent.

Probably the early ringers discovered that by swinging the bell through a greater arc, they could control the speed of the bell, and so ring them in a more orderly fashion.

Quite possibly, simple 'call-changes' were rung like this, but it must have been very hard work, since the bells would have always started and finished from the mouth-down position, and it takes a lot of effort to raise the bell to the mouth-up position.

Someone discovered that by fitting a full wheel, the bell could be rested mouth up, saving a lot of effort in raising the bell. And this also meant that the timing of the bell was under the control of the ringer.

By the 1600s, 'scientific' change ringing was developing, with the main centres of expertise in London, Birmingham and Norwich.