

# The History Behind the Bells of St Laurence's Church, Lighthorne



Lighthorne's oldest bell (back right in photo) is from 1410-1420; we don't know the exact year it was cast. The village is known to have had three bells since at least 1552, but these would have been housed in a wooden belfry until the stone tower was built in 1771. However, while the tenor has survived, the other two mediæval bells have both been recast over the years. This is not unusual as, until the late 1800s, the clapper inside a bell was mounted on a cast-in iron staple. Over time, as the iron rusted, it would expand and put pressure on the bell metal which finally cracked under the strain. Bells can also be cracked if the clapper remains held against the inside of the bell when struck, as the vibrations cannot then dissipate in the usual way and the stresses are concentrated in one place, or through simple physical abuse.

It should also be pointed out that mediæval bells could be purchased "from stock" and delivered, or itinerant bell founders would cast them on-site, leaving them to be hoisted up the tower once they were cool enough. It certainly seems possible that the tenor was a stock bell, as it is one of a few hundred similar bells, and the other two were cast on site - which might go towards explaining their limited ability to survive the ravages of time.

Modern bells have their clapper bearing mounted on a rod which is bolted through a central hole in the top of the bell. This means that modern bells are cast with a flat top, and directly bolted to a steel or

cast iron headstock. Older bells were cast with canons – loops of metal through which the bell could be strapped to a wooden headstock. Most ancient bells, including all of those in Lighthorne, have had their canons removed and their tops ground flat when they've been re-hung.

A fourth bell was added to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1890. In 2006, two more bells were cast to augment the Lighthorne ring to six.

To ring a bell in the English change-ringing style, it has to be able to swing through a full circle. This means that the headstock has to have a bearing at each side, and these bearings have to sit on a frame so that the bell is suspended above the belfry floor. These frames are substantial pieces of engineering, as the swinging bells produce a force roughly equivalent to twice their weight and these forces need to be transferred smoothly to the structure of the tower.

When the stone tower was built in 1771 it appears that the bell frame, which was anti-clockwise in layout, was transferred from the old wooden tower. When the fourth bell was added to the ring in 1890, the frame had to be extended to accommodate it. However, the belfry floor had to be strengthened to support it all and so an additional steel joist was added in 1935. Two more were added in 1963.

The wooden bell-frame was replaced with fabricated, galvanised steel when the ring was augmented to six in 2006. Part of the old wooden frame, complete with an original 1890 Llewellyn & James plain bearing in a hinged wooden cover, can seen in the bell-chamber.

The first record of the church dates from 1291, with the first rector named as Henry de Hampton in 1307. However, the stump of a 10C preaching cross can be seen in the churchyard, and shows that the site has been in use for worship for more than a millennium. The Domesday Book (1086-7) entry for Lighthorne mentions a priest, but there is no mention of a church.

The present stone church has been rebuilt at least twice. The first time that we know of was in 1774, after the present tower was built in 1771 by Samuel Eglinton. The body of the church was rebuilt again in 1875-1876 by John Gibson in late 13th century style. No remains of the earlier mediæval church have been found to date, though glass from 1413 has been set into the window in the chancel behind (east of) the pulpit.



15th century glass in the church

# The Bells Through History

## The “Royal Heads” Bell (circa 1410-1420)

The Tenor Bell | 5-2-6 (282 kg) | 32" (81cm) | 985Hz (B-5c)

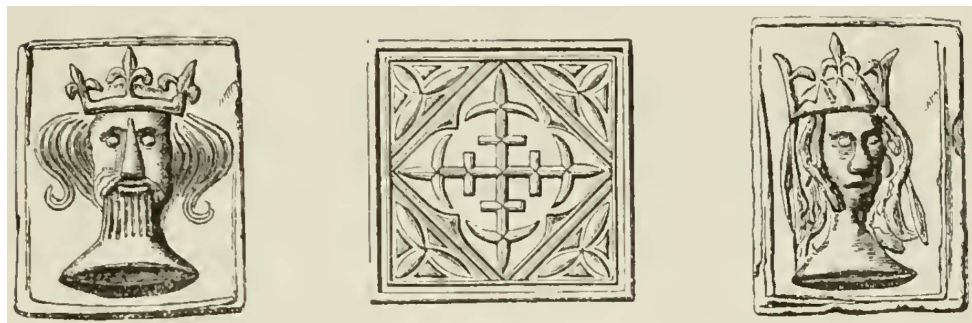
Founder: Worcester Foundry

The inscription reads:

[cross] I o h A N N I S [king] P R E C E [queen] d V L C E [king]  
S O N E T [queen] E T [king] A M E N E

(Perhaps “John prays for a sweet sound and action”)

This listed, historic bell is one of many “Royal Heads” bells, the inter-word symbols supposedly representing King Edward III of England and his Queen, Philippa of Hainault.



Royal Heads (above) and Henry V (right)

**On the throne:** Henry V (also called Henry of Monmouth) was born on 16 September 1386 at Monmouth Castle. He was the son of Henry IV and Mary de Bohun. He acceded to the throne of England on 21 March 1413, following the death of Henry IV, and was crowned on 9 April 1413. On 2 June 1420 he married Catherine of Valois in Troyes Cathedral. They had one son, also Henry, who became Henry VI upon his father's death on 31 August 1422 at the Château de Vincennes, aged 36.

**His reign:** Henry V was a successful and ruthless monarch. He was quick to re-assert the claim to the French throne he inherited from Edward III, continuing



what was later called the Hundred Years' War. The war was not a formal, continuous conflict but a series of English raids and military expeditions from 1337 until 1453. There were six major royal expeditions; Henry himself led the fifth and sixth, but these were unlike the smaller, frequent, provincial campaigns. In Henry's first major campaign he invaded France, captured Harfleur, made a chevauchée to Calais and won a near-total victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt despite being outnumbered, outmanoeuvred and low on supplies. In his second campaign, he recaptured much of Normandy and in a treaty secured a marriage to Catherine of Valois. The terms of the Treaty of Troyes were that Henry's and Catherine's heirs would succeed to the throne of France. This condition was contested by the Dauphin and the momentum of the war changed. In 1421, Henry's brother Thomas, Duke of Clarence, was killed at the Battle of Baugé, and Henry V died of dysentery at Vincennes in 1422.



A Henry V  
halfpenny.



A Henry V  
silver groat.



Fashions in the fields, around 1410.

**Lighthorne's** Lordship was sold by the Mundeville family to the Earls of Warwick in 1277 and stayed with them until the end of the 14th century, when it passed to the King following Warwick's attainder for treason. It was returned to the Earls of Warwick on the accession of Henry V in 1413. The old chancel glass and the tenor bell were probably installed to get back in the King's good books.



# The (now recast) Henry Bagley bell of 1679

Founder: Henry Bagley, Chacombe, 1679

The inscription read:

THOMAS GREEN AND WILLIAM TOWNSIND CHVRCHWARDENS

The second of the three mediæval bells, the details of which we no longer have, was recast to make this bell. The treble was recast by another member of the Bagley family nearly a century later (see the next section). However, both of these bells were subsequently recast once again (see later sections).

Let's see what was happening in and around 1679.

**On the throne:** Charles II was born on 29 May 1630 at St James's Palace. He was the son of Charles I and Henrietta Maria of France. When his father was executed in 1649 during the Civil War, he became king of Scotland, but was deposed and exiled in 1651. When the monarchy was restored in 1660 he became king of England, Scotland and Ireland until his death on 6 February 1685 at Whitehall Palace. He married Catherine of Braganza in Portsmouth on 21 May 1662. They had no children. However, Charles had 14 children by seven mistresses, including two by Nell Gwynne. It is probable that he had seven other mistresses.



By John Riley, c. 1680-1685

**In 1679** Charles faced a political storm over his brother James, a Catholic, being next in line to the throne. The Exclusion Bill sought to exclude the Duke of York from the line of succession. Fearing that the Bill would be passed, and worried by other events which seemed to him to indicate a more favourable public mood towards Catholicism, Charles dissolved the English Parliament, for a total of three times that year.

When a new Parliament assembled at Oxford in March 1681, Charles dissolved it for a fourth time after just a few days. During the 1680s, however, popular support for the Exclusion Bill ebbed, and Charles experienced a nationwide surge of loyalty. For the remainder of his reign, Charles ruled without Parliament.



A medal of  
1667.



Dutch villagers, 1673.

**In Lighthorne**, the Verney family first bought land here in 1436. In 1667 the rectory was granted to Sir Greville Verney. By 1829 the Verney family owned all but 8 acres of Lighthorne parish. However, it was the Pope family who held the manor here from 1542 until 1702, with a short break between 1662 and 1666 thought to result from the mortgaging of the lordship to raise a marriage dowry. The Popes held the manor through the years of the English Civil Wars (1642-1651) and Great Plague (1665-1666). It is probably the Popes who built Church Hill farmhouse around 1548, on the site of the former manor house.

The Church records start in 1548 and many family names can be traced to this period. The village seems to have supported the Parliamentary cause in the English Civil Wars, and to have escaped the worst of the destruction. Despite the closeness of Edge Hill, where a battle ("the Kington fight") took place on 23 October 1642, the parish records show no evidence of any burials nor reports of robbery or damage to church property, even though we know Cromwell's men were billeted in various properties in the parish.

## **The (now recast) Matthew Bagley bell of 1774**

Founder: Matthew Bagley, Chipping Norton, 1774

An earlier mediæval bell, of which we have no details, was broken up and used to cast a new treble bell. Accounts show that metal from a "Littel bell", possibly the Sanctus mentioned in the 1552 inventory, was also used in the recasting. We don't have details of any inscription on the new bell.

The Victorians eventually recast it once more, along with acquiring a new bell (see the next section), but let's take a look at life around this time.



**On the throne:** George III (George William Frederick) was born on 4 June 1738 at Norfolk House (31 St James's Square, Westminster). He was the son of Prince Frederick (Prince of Wales) and Augusta of Saxe-Gotha. Upon the death of his grandfather, George II (George Augustus), on 25 October 1760, he became King of Great Britain and King of Ireland. Upon the union of the two countries on 1 January 1801 he was King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland until his death at Windsor Castle on 29 January 1820, aged 81. He married Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz at St James's Palace on 8 September 1761. They had 15 children.

**During his reign:** The American War of Independence was brought to a head over the lack of American representation in Parliament, which was seen as a denial of their rights as Englishmen and often popularly focused on direct taxes levied by Parliament on the colonies without their consent. The colonists resisted the imposition of direct rule after the Boston Tea Party of 16 December 1773. Creating self-governing provinces, they circumvented the British ruling apparatus in each colony by 1774. Armed conflict between British regulars and colonial militiamen broke out at the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775. The colonies declared their independence in July 1776, listing grievances against the British king and legislature while asking the support of the populace. The gilded equestrian statue of George III in New York was pulled down.

A working-class woman wears a short dress or bedgown,  
a patched and mended petticoat, and neckerchief  
(England, c. 1764).



**Lighthorne's** lordship passed to Sir John Mordaunt in 1707, and then to the Lords Willoughby de Broke in 1715. In 1723 it became the first Warwickshire village to have its common fields enclosed as a result of an act of parliament passed in 1721. Legislation like this enabled the big landowners to improve the land; impossible where fields had been divided into strips owned and part-owned by many people. Reduced labour needs and comparatively easy returns from sheep farming over mixed farming led to a conversion to this type of agriculture. This in turn led to a loss of population, as many of the smallholders relying on agricultural trades to supplement their living then became unable to support themselves.

The enclosures created great wealth for the landowning families. This led to the construction of most of Lighthorne's older buildings. The Old School (which opened in 1781), The Old Rectory, Bishops Farmhouse, Curacy Farm and the Antelope Inn are thought to date from this period. Records also indicate that there were two mills in the village; a windmill on Mill Field, and a watermill which may have been a mill for fulling wool rather than grinding grain.

The church was taken down and entirely rebuilt between 1771 and 1774, a stone tower replacing a previous wooden belfry. The recasting and hanging of this bell clearly coincides with the building of the new church.

## The Victorian Bells

The Third Bell | 2-3-10 (144 kg) | 26 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (66.3 cm) | 1317.5Hz (E-1c)

The Fourth Bell | 3-1-9 (169 kg) | 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (69.5 cm) | 1234Hz (D $\sharp$ -15c)

Founder: Llewellins & James, Bristol, 1890

The inscription on the third reads:

LAUS DEO  
W R VERNEY RECTOR  
W WILKINS  
W LATTIMER CHURCHWARDENS  
1890

*Laus Deo* is Latin for "Praise God".

The inscription on the fourth reads:

M BAGLEY MADE MEE  
I WAS RECAST IN MEMORIE  
OF THE QUEENS JUBILEE 1890

A major refurbishment of the bell installation was carried out for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The three bells were removed, the original



treble bell (now the fourth), which had been cracked since 1875, was recast, and a new treble bell (now the third) was provided. After installing new oak framing for the treble, together with four complete sets of new bearings, the four bells were re-hung. The invoice, from Messrs Llewellyns & James of Bristol, was for £90.

**Queen Victoria** (Alexandrina Victoria) was born on 24 May 1819 at Kensington Palace. She was the daughter of the Duke of Kent and Strathearn and Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, and the granddaughter of George III. She became Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland on 20 June 1837, and on 1 May 1876 she adopted the additional title of Empress of India. On 10 February 1840 she married Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha at St James's Palace. They had 9 children. She died on 22 January 1901 at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, aged 81.



The Jubilee bust

Her Golden Jubilee was celebrated on 20 June 1887 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of her accession. It was celebrated with a banquet to which 50 European kings and princes were invited. The following day, she participated in a procession in an open landau through London to Westminster Abbey escorted by Colonial Indian cavalry. On her return to the Palace, she went to her balcony and was cheered by the crowd. A commemorative bust was commissioned from the sculptor Francis John Williamson. Many copies were made, and distributed throughout the British Empire.



Victoria's Golden Jubilee silver double florin, 1887.

Engineer Adolphe Alphand wears a topcoat or overcoat with a velvet collar, 1887.

**Lighthorne** has very few records referring to developments here in the period between 1723 and 1926. We do know that, in addition to the buildings mentioned above, the Broadwell was built and the stream enclosed in a conduit, eliminating the ford in the centre of the village.

The body of the church was rebuilt again in 1875-1876 by John Gibson in late 13th century style. This work was undertaken in memory of the son of the Patron of the Living, Lord Willoughby de Broke, who died whilst serving with his regiment in Ireland in 1872. The tower of 1742 was not rebuilt, but we know that the Bagley bell cracked in 1875 so it seems possible that it was somehow damaged during the building work.

## The Verney Bell

The Fifth Bell | 4-1-1 (216 kg) | 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (74 cm) | 1102Hz (C#-11c)

Founder: Bond & Son, Burford, 1913

The inscription reads:

*RECAST 1913 TO THE MEMORY OF  
WALTER ROBERT VERNEY  
RECTOR 1873-1907*



State portrait by Sir Luke Fildes, 1911

**George V** became King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions, and Emperor of India on 6 May 1910. He was born George Frederick Ernest Albert on 3 June 1865 at Marlborough House. He was the son of Edward VII and Alexandra of Denmark and hence Queen Victoria's grandson. He married Mary of Teck in St James's Palace on 6 July 1893. They had six children. The coronation took place on 22 June 1911 in Westminster Abbey. He died on 20 January 1936 at Sandringham, aged 70.

George inherited the throne at a politically turbulent time. The 1911 Parliament Act permanently removed, with a few exceptions, the power of the Lords to veto bills. Then, with no veto now possible, legislation was introduced that would give Ireland Home Rule. George tried to broker a negotiated settlement between the Unionists and the Nationalists, but political developments in Britain and Ireland were overtaken by events in Europe, and the issue of Irish Home Rule was shelved. On 4 August 1914 the King wrote in his diary, "I held a council at 10.45 to declare war with Germany."



Left: The hobble skirt was a skirt with a narrow enough hem to significantly impede the wearer's stride. It was a short-lived fashion trend that peaked between 1908 and 1914.



Above: A half-sovereign minted during George's reign (Bertram Mackennal, sculptor)

**Lighthorne's** War Memorial was dedicated by the Bishop of Coventry on 22 August 1920. There are ten names from WWI, Sgt WJ Treadwell DCM being the only one to have a military grave in the churchyard.

The Verney estates in Warwickshire were broken up and sold off in a series of sales in the late 1920s, the last sale in Lighthorne being in 1930.

We know that the previous bell cracked in April 1898. The 1890 fittings were reused for the new bell. The frame had to be further strengthened by the insertion of supporting steelwork in 1935 and again in 1963.

## The Modern Bells

The Second Bell | 2-3-1 (140 kg) | 24" (60.9cm) | 1473Hz (F#-8c)

The Treble | 2-2-15 (134 kg) | 23" (58.4cm) | 1641Hz (G#-21c)

Founder: Whitechapel, London, 2006

The inscription on the second reads:

2006  
NOW 6 BELLS  
TO RING OUT  
IN PRAISE OF GOD  
REJOICE

The inscription on the treble reads:

COVENTRY DIOCESAN GUILD  
OF  
CHURCH BELLRINGERS  
CENTENARY BELL  
2007

The metal for the two new bells came from a bell removed from the church of St Peter, Charles Street, Harnall, Coventry. That bell, which had been 7-1-7 (371 kg), 34" (86.4cm) in B♭, had been cast by C&G Mears in 1853.

The old ring of four bells in Lighthorne had been chimed by parishioners as part of the millennium celebrations, but had not been rung full-circle for many years due to their poor condition, the treble being described as having "a 'wormy' headstock". The Parochial Church Council decided to restore the bells in September 2004. Shortly afterwards they decided to add two more bells as well.

Local fund-raising took place during 2005-6. Help was obtained from the Coventry Diocesan Guild of Church Bellringers (whose centenary fell in 2007) as well as other charitable bodies and many personal contributions. The new ring of six bells were dedicated by the Rt. Rev. Colin Bennetts, Bishop of Coventry, on 26 November 2006.

In February 2006 the bells and bell-frame were removed. Then new steel joists and soundproofed flooring were installed in the bell-chamber together with a new galvanised steel bell-frame. The tower roof was repaired and the lighting was replaced. In May the refurbished and re-tuned four bells were re-hung. The two new bells were cast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London on 1 September, overseen by the incumbent, Rev. John Burrell, and two members of the parish. Finally, in November, the two finished new bells were hung. To complete the job, the ringing room was re-decorated and refurbished.



The new treble is hoisted aloft.

The majority of the work was carried out by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry of London. The total cost of all the work was about £50,000.

The first peal since augmentation (of 5040 Surprise Minor) was rung half-muffled on 19 January 2008 "in memory of Sir Adam Butler who was instrumental in the success of the project to rehang & augment these bells".

*If you live locally and would like to know more about learning to ring, please contact Mike Rigby (Tower Captain) on 01926-651420. If you are an experienced ringer who would like to arrange a visit, please contact Sally Dick (Secretary) on 01926-650078. You can also find out more about The Exercise at [bellringing.org](http://bellringing.org).*