



# Ideford Bells



## The Ringing of Bells

*Taken from the Order of Service to mark the Dedication of the Restored Bells on 26 January 1989*

The ringing of bells 'in peal', swinging them full-circle with rope and wheel, is a particularly English art, and a very ancient one, which developed in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and is now spread all over the English speaking world but nowhere else. Requiring as it does a team of people willing to work together, with calmness, perseverance and a sense of order, it seems to appeal to, and spring from, some special qualities in the English character.

It is an art which calls for skill rather than physical strength, a keen ear, and loyalty: like the Christian life, its only standard is a perfection which is never attainable but always striven for, and a good ringer is one who never stops learning or trying to do better – like a good Christian.

It produces the most powerful and far-reaching music made by man, and the loudest sound that man makes for no other purpose than the glory of God. In a world full of noises which man makes for his own profit or glorification, this is no small testimony.

When bells are rung 'in peal', they are swung through a complete circle, first one way and then the other, each bell speaking once in each revolution.

Only in this way can the full tone and beauty of the bell be heard, and by changing the order in which the bells are rung a great variety of music can be created.

**J.G.M.S**

Prebendary John G M Scott, Diocesan Advisor on Towers and Belfries, Member of the Towers and Belfries Committee and the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers

## History of the Ideford Bells

According to the Devon churches inventory of 1553, Ideford then had three bells. Two of these three survived until just over 100 years ago, and their inscriptions, which were in Latin, can be translated as: Treble 'The people all rejoice the more they hear me' and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 'With my lively voice I drive away all things harmful'. These inscriptions, recorded before the bells were scrapped, indicate that they were cast by one of the Exeter founders during the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century or a little later. The original Tenor was probably of the same date, and was recast in 1666 (the year of the Great Fire of London, and in the incumbency of Francis Stroude at Ideford). The founder was John Pennington of Exeter, who put his initials on the bell along with the names of the Churchwardens, Richard Langley and John Endacott. This bell still survives and is a very fine example of John Pennington's work.

In 1884 the two mediaeval bells were melted down, and with the additional metal cast into five new bells to make a ring of six. The work was done by John Warner of Cripplegate, but the new bells were a poor match for the fine old Tenor. The new six, for which there was very little space in Ideford belfry, were hung in an oak frame by Harry Stokes of Woodbury. The frame had to be built in two tiers, and the confined space compelled the hanger to use rather slight timber. From 1975 the bells were sounded with 'Ellacombe hammers' instead of being rung full circle. The Ellacombe apparatus allowed one person to sound the bells by operating hammers to strike them, but this was a poor substitute for ringing them.

The Ideford Bell Trust was set up in response to a desire to do whatever was necessary to enable the Ideford Bells to be rung again. Much specialist advice was taken and eventually the scheme accepted by the Parochial Church Council involved recasting (with more metal) the five smaller bells and tuning them and the old tenor bell in the key of B-flat. The whole ring would also be hung on completely new steel fittings and framework, the work being done by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry.

On Thursday, 26 January 1989 a service was held to mark the Dedication of the restored bells by the Lord Bishop of Exeter, the Right Reverend Geoffrey Hewlett Thompson.

The Project costing in the region of £40,000 restored the five smaller bells and the original 1666 Tenor Bell that you can hear ringing today.



## The Six Bells at St Mary the Virgin, Ideford

Bell	Diameter	Note	Weight
Tenor	2' 10 3/8"	B flat	7-3-9
5 <sup>th</sup>	2' 7"	C	5-3-2
4 <sup>th</sup>	2' 4"	D	4-1-9
3 <sup>rd</sup>	2' 2 5/8"	E Flat	3-2-19
2 <sup>nd</sup>	2' 0 3/4"	F	3-0-24
Treble	1' 11 5/8"	G	2-3-20

The Tenor was cast in 1666 and all other bells were cast in 1884, melted down and re-cast with added metal in 1988.

For those unfamiliar with Imperial measures, the weights are given in hundredweights (cwt), quarters (qtr) and pounds (lb). The approximate conversions are:

1 hundredweight = 112 lb = 51 kg

1 quarter = 28 lb = 13 kg

## Fancy Having a Go?

What sort of person rings bells? In the average tower you will find a very wide cross-section of old and young, professionals and tradespeople, churchgoers and non-churchgoers, men and women.

In these days of spectator sports, it is good to find a single activity that offers a well-balanced mix of physical exercise and mental challenge – plus the informal social contact of the weekly practice night.

**For more information contact:**

**Ann Rigby-Jones on 01626 852344**

**Martin Sampson on 01626 853391**

**We practice most Thursdays from 7.30pm – 9.00 pm**

## So what exactly is up in the Belfry?

Bells are rung by swinging them from the very top of their stroke with the bell upside down (mouth up), through a full circle until they are again upside down in the opposite direction (over 360 Degrees), and then back again.

The bells can be stopped at the top (Set) by taking them just beyond top dead centre (the Balance) where they then rest on a stop. This stop, known as the stay and slider, the slider is movable to allow this to happen in either direction.

