

## **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 2nd, '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-15th 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.