

## Details of the present ring of bells

Bell	Note	Diameter	Weight	Origin	Founder	Date
Tenor E		3' 10"	14-1-22	Larkhall	Warner, London	1905
7th F#		3' 4¾"	10-2-06	old 6th	Bilbie, Chew Stoke	1748
6th G#		3' 0½"	8-3-06	new	Whitechapel	1992
5th A		2' 10½"	6-3-19	old 3rd	Bilbie, Chew Stoke	1743
4th B		2' 7½"	6-1-14	old 2nd	Taylor	1878
3rd C#		2' 7"	6-1-27	old Treble	Taylor	1878
2nd D#		2' 5½"	5-2-23	new	Whitechapel	1992
Treble E		2' 4¾"	5-2-06	new	Whitechapel	1992

## Details of the 1878-1992 ring of bells

Bell	Note	Diameter	Weight	Founder	Date
Tenor D		4' 4¼"	25-3-00	Taylor, Loughborough	1877
7th E		3' 7½"	13-1-17	Llewelin & James	1872
6th F		3' 4¾"	11-0-17	Bilbie, Chew Stoke	1748
5th G		3' 2¼"	8-3-14	Bilbie, Chew Stoke	1743
4th A		2' 9¾"	6-1-10	P Llewelin Whitechapel	1849
3rd B		2' 10½"	7-2-02	Bilbie, Chew Stoke	1743
2nd C		2' 7½"	6-3-16	Taylor, Loughborough	1878
Treble D		2' 7"	6-3-24	Taylor, Loughborough	1878

Neill Bonham, Churchwarden, September 1993

## The Bells at St John the Baptist Parish Church, Glastonbury

St John's was probably founded in the Saxon 950s when Dunstan was reforming the life of the monks in Glastonbury Abbey. The Norman abbots later appropriated the church's income and with it responsibility for the parish; this lasted until 1539. However, much of the medieval work to the church and its fittings was financed by the parishioners. Some of the Churchwardens records date back to the 1300s giving details of the maintenance and rebuilding of the church in medieval times.

The central Norman tower partially collapsed in the early 1400s and the present west tower replaced it by about 1475. Dunstan is said to have introduced bellfounding in Glastonbury 1,000 years ago. Although all of the pre-reformation bells were recast at least once we may still be ringing some of the bellmetal that was in the tower over 500 years ago. The earliest bell reference is for the replacement of three ropes in 1403. In 1439 the clapper in the middle bell 'in the broken down tower' was repaired. In 1490 three bells were rehung (for 7s) and in 1500 a reference to both a 4th bell and a middle bell infer a peal of five. Also in 1490 the Sanctus bell, housed in a bellcote over the chancel arch, had a new rope. This bell cracked in 1922 and was recast with its old inscription: 'Sancte Stefane, ora pro nobis'.

The Fifth was recast in 1612 with the inscription: 'I sound to bid the sick repent in hope of life when death is spent'. A heavier Sixth bell became the Tenor when it was added in 1648, with the inscription: 'Hark! How I call, prepare your hearts to come to the house of God, and Kingdom of His Son'. The First, Third and Fourth bells were recast in 1743 and 1748 by the local Thomas Bilbie of Chew Stoke. The Second bell was recast in 1849; although inscribed as cast by P Llewelin of Bristol it is recorded at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry as being cast there.

The Tenor's Commonwealth inscription was not transferred when the bell was again recast in 1872, together with the Seventh, by Llewelin and James of Bristol. The tone or pitch of the recast Tenor was not satisfactory and, in trying to modify it, the rim was chipped and it broke. In 1877 it was again recast, this time by Taylor and Son. In the following year Taylors provided new Treble and Second bells to make a peal of eight (thus all of the bell numbers above need two adding to them to identify the pre-1992 bells). It may be this that necessitated the building of a new timber frame higher in the tower where the thinner walls give more space.

In 1992 the bells were re-modelled and a lighter ring placed on a metal frame lower in the tower, below the position of the medieval frame. Ringing, especially by novices, had been difficult because of: the long draught (the tower is 134½' high); the poor ringing circle; considerable movement of the tower and the frame within it; and fittings that were obsolete, being mostly 100 years old. In addition, this generation's High Street shopkeepers and their customers found the bells, positioned high against the belfry window openings, too loud to compete with. This was the first major expenditure on St. John's bells and their fittings since 1878.

With the smaller interior dimensions of the tower lower down it was not possible to continue to use the old 4'4½" 25¾cwt Tenor bell. It is now in St. Matthew's church in Albury, NSW, Australia. The present Tenor is the redundant 14¼cwt Tenor from St. Saviour's, Larkhall, Bath. The wordy 1830 inscription on this bell identifies the architect as John Pinch who had also been employed by St. John's, Glastonbury, Churchwardens in 1822 to rebuild the top of their tower.

In 1992 Whitechapel Bell Foundry cast new Treble and Second bells and recast the old Fifth, retaining its 1743 inscription, as the Sixth bell. The 1612 inscription from the old Seventh was cast onto the new Treble. The Second has an inscription which follows an old tradition of recording the names of the Vicar and Churchwardens at the time of casting; in this case Christian names only. The eight bells were re-tuned a tone higher, in E (slightly above the old concert pitch). The Taunton bell hanger, Robert Parker, designed the alterations, built the new frame and installed the bells. The cost of this work was £35,000 and the new ring was first heard at the Harvest Thanksgiving on October the 3rd, 1993.

The payment of St John's ringers for ringing on special days or to mark particular events illustrates the changing value of our currency and/or the value placed on the ringers by different generations:

3d	1497	Ascension day	
5s 0d	1584	Elizabeth I's Coronation Day	
3s 4d	1625	Visitation of the Bishop of Bath & Wells	
10s 0d	1789	Recovery of George III from his temporary insanity	
10s 6d	1794	Lord Howe's naval victory over the French at Brest	
5s 0d	1794	The burning of Tom Payne in effigy	(paid for by the townspeople)
7s 6d	1798	Nelson's victory of the Nile	
6s 8d	1814	Lord Wellington's Victory.	

## Inscriptions on the bells

### Tenor

This Peal of eight Bells was the gift of Wm. Hooper Esqr. of this parish and placed here AD 1830 + Chas. Abel Moysey-Rector, Chas. Geary & Danl. Howe, Churchwardens of Walcot, John Pinch Architect + I. Rudhall Fect.

The Peal was rehung and this bell recast AD 1905  
John Alexr. Jacob-Rector  
Cast by John Warner & Sons London

**7th** Thomas Whitegent Churchwarden T Bilbie fecit 1748

**6th** Mr William Cassell & Mr Thomas King Ch Wardens gave the casting of me Thomas Bilbie cast me 1743  
Recast 1992 Whitechapel

**5th** Mr William Cassell & Mr Thomas King Ch Wardens  
T Bilbie 1743

**4th** J Taylor & Co Founders Loughborough 1878

**3rd** J Taylor & Co Founders Loughborough 1878

**2nd** Andrew . Neill . Patrick 1992 Whitechapel

**Treble** I sound to bid the sick repent in hope of life  
when breath is spent 1612 1992 Whitechapel

## Inscriptions from the 1878-1992 bells not retained in the present ring:

**old Tenor** J Taylor & Co Bellfounders  
Loughborough Leicestershire 1877

**old 7th** I sound to bid the sick repent in hope of life  
when breath is spent 1612  
Recast by Llewellyn & James Founders Bristol 1872

**old 5th** Mr William Cassell & Mr Thomas King Ch Wardens  
gave the casting of mee Thomas Bilbie cast me 1743

**old 4th** P Llewellyn cast me & M Shepherd hung me  
J Rocke & J Roach esqs Churchwardens 1849