

ISLEWORTH

The 14th century west tower is of Kentish ragstone with battlemented parapet with pinnacle at each corner, built on the Middlesex bank of the river Thames. From the roof, the winding course of the river can be seen for a long distance, including a sight of the tower of St. Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill. During this period, the sexton spent much time in the tower room tolling a bell at 4.00 a.m. and curfew at 8.00 p.m. Also, he would look through an opening from the tower into the original church in order to chime a bell at the appropriate time. This opening is now a cupboard and the outer side is blocked up. In 1988 the external outline of this opening was discovered and a cross placed where the aperture would have been. This is visible from the inner courtyard.

In 1768 the ringing chamber floor was lowered, the Tudor fireplace removed and a wash basin installed with a tank in the chimney and later mains water piped to it, until 1943 when the arson fire burnt down the church and melted the lead piping to the tower. The door to the cupboard and ringing chamber door were both constructed with hand forged nails.

The Churchwardens' Accounts demonstrate the activity of bells rung for coronations and the birthdays of royalty, as they passed the Church on their journeys by river to and from the nearby Syon House. In 1663 Woods of Brentford was paid one pound and one shilling for a set of bell ropes. The Accounts, annoyingly, do not say for how many bells. The earliest reference to a ring of bells appears in 1667. These bells were recast into a ring of six by William Eldridge of Chertsey, again recast by Lester & Pack who added two more in 1767. Finally, two trebles were added in 1931 by Mears & Stainbank and rededicated by the Lord Bishop of Kensington on Saturday July 13th, 1931. In 1975 the donation received from Mr. & Mrs. C Scott Ashbrook, of Singapore, enabled the Whitechapel Bell Foundry to rehang the bells on ball bearings with clappers and fittings renovated.

In 1679 a cupola was erected with a Saints' bell. The cupola lasted for over one hundred and fifty years, and the bell, used for the striking of the clock, is now housed in the tower above the ten bells. The clock is by Thwaites of Clerkenwell. Its mechanism, installed in 1774, occupies space around the three walls in the ringing chamber. At the extreme north-west corner are the weights; the cables from these lead to the north-east corner where the main mechanism is located. From thence shafts and bevels convey the movement around the south-east corner to the face and hands which are on the south wall of the tower.

The walls of the ringing chamber are steeped in ringing history, with numerous peal boards and commemorative cards and by the entrance door is a large board displaying Ringers' Rules, unique in Middlesex because it has survived from 1893. If the ringer arrived late to ring for a service he incurred the fine of one and a half pence. This amount was doubled if he was absent.

Miss D Lidbetter was Isleworth's first lady ordinary ringing member of the Middlesex County Association in 1929.

The first peal was rung here on March 7th, 1768, in the reign of King George III, of 5040 changes of Plain Bob Major in three hours eleven minutes by: Winstanly Richardson, Thomas Bennett, Jarns Lance, Robert Holmes, William Scott, William Mills, James Darquit, and Joshua Monk who conducted it from the tenor. The 500th peal in this tower took place two hundred and twelve years later and was rung by members of the London County Association.

Source: *Sundial: Isleworth parish magazine* July 1988; Harold W Rogers; *Ringling World* July 21, 1967 p 511, July 18, 1980 p 639 and August 7, 1998 p 769; Association records.