

HOLBORN, ST GILES IN THE FIELDS

The Royal and Municipal Church of Holborn is headquarters of the Middlesex County Association and London Diocesan Guild and houses the Association's Library. A previous Rector, the Revd. Gordon C Taylor, VRD.*, M.A., FSA, RNR, gave his valued support not only when our President from 1955 but he continued to do so as Vice-President until he retired from the parish in 1999.

The west tower and steeple "sits astride" the roof instead of rising from the ground. The first portion is a rustic pedestal supporting Doric pilasters. Above the clock is an octagonal tower with three Doric columns, supporting a balustrade with vases. On this tower stands the belted spire, surmounted by a gilded ball and vane. The clock with a transparent dial faces the four points of the compass. This was one of the first clocks in London to be illuminated by gas. Access to the ringing chamber is by a stone spiral staircase.

The subject of bells occurs in the Churchwardens' Accounts for 1617, the year when the steeple replaced an earlier round tower capped by a dome. Four of the bells were rehung in the present tower which dates from 1733: four more were added in 1736.

During the time of King Charles II, prisoners passing by on their way from the Tower of London and other places, were halted at the lych-gate or Resurrection Gate and one pint of "Olde Ale" was given them from 'Ye Old Cock Tavern' at the expense of the Churchwardens. The tenor bell was tolled as they travelled their last journey to Tyburn. The bodies were buried in the churchyard.

In 1774 Robert Chapell and Robert Lundall were the Churchwardens at the time when William Wrench was the Steeplekeeper. It was his job to ring the bell at 5 o'clock in the morning and at 9 o'clock in the evening to inform the local workforce of the time.

Dates of peal boards in the ringing chamber range from the late 18th century to the present day, recording outstanding peals by various societies. The earliest board had to be restored, the work being undertaken by Charles Bussell in 1884.

It must not be forgotten that the administrative side of the Association has to be attended to. At specific dates of the year, officers, members of special committees and elected representatives of the Districts make up the Central Committee who meet to discuss, plan and organise, not in the tower, not in the main body of the church but in the largest connecting vestry. In the middle of this particular room stands a very large oval oak table which accommodates seating for 30 to 40 persons. The carpenter who made this magnificent item of furniture in the late 17th century was paid £1.16s.

In present times many well known names in the ringing fraternity can be recalled having served as Tower Captain, Steeplekeeper and posts within the present St. Giles Ringers' Guild who ensure the bells are heard for special services: the Thursday Lunchtime Service Band consists of ringers working in the area and retired personnel and welcome visitors from near and afar.

Source: *Report and Statement of Accounts* 1950, pp 13-15; L C Loveless, *The story of the Parish Church of St Giles-in-the-Fields 1101-1931*, 1931, pp 13-15 and 29;

Mervyn Blatch, *A guide to London's churches*, 1979, p 265; Richard Casserley; Association records.