

CITY, HOLBORN, HOLY SEPULCHRE

The Church of St Sepulchre without Newgate was originally dedicated to St. Edmund the Martyr King until the time of the Crusades.

It is the largest Parish Church in the City of London. Four parts of the parish lie in the City and the fifth part in the County of Middlesex. It is featured in the nursery rhyme 'Oranges and Lemons' as the Bells of Old Bailey.

The top of the 15th century tower was rebuilt 1711-14 and repaired 1873-8. The height of tower to the top of the pinnacles is 150 ft. During 1539 the six bells, the largest 36cwt from St. Bartholomew's Priory, Smithfield came here but perished in the Great Fire of London. The metal was salvaged for John Hodson to cast six bells. From this time on many entries referring to the bells appear in the Churchwardens' Accounts. Eight bells in 1677 were augmented to ten by 1746 when on April 7th, the Society of Eastern Scholars rang the first known peal of Treble Bob Royal.

The first known reference to a bell is in the 1345 Ordinance of the Spurriers' Company.

The inventory of Edward VI's reign (1547-53) mentions 'one great bell called Barnard Castell, that servyth the clock, with syxe other bells in one ryng, and on sates bell.'

It was probable that this 'great bell' was used for tolling at the time of executions of condemned prisoners in Newgate Prison, the site now occupied by the Central Criminal Court of the Old Bailey. In 1605 Robert Dow, merchant tailor, died and bequeathed £50 for the ringing of this bell, a custom which lasted until the late 19th century. On display in the church is a handbell used by the sexton and one of his eerie jobs was to traverse the underground passage linking St. Sepulchre to the prison and use this handbell outside the condemned cell at midnight with a special prayer urging the prisoner to pray and repent.

On November 28th, 1631 members of the Society of Cheapside Schollers rang the bells. The treble was rung single-handed by ffrancis Lucas, the 2nd bell by John Silvertown and Peirce Jones, the 3rd by Thomas Yates and Henry Bromsall, the 4th by Robert Eaton and John Brookes, the fifth by Thomas Malton, Symon Owen, John Hirste and Raphe Hartley, whilst the tenor bell was rung by Henry Robinson, Samuell Sandford and ffrancis Mead, (Symon Wilmott and Edward Hooke stood by).

These ten bells were popular with other societies. The College Youths frequently practised here. The Middlesex County Association rang a peal on May 13th, 1899 of 5000 changes of Treble Bob Royal in the Kent variation being the first peal of Royal by the Association.

The bells, still in Robert Catlin's massive wooden frame of 1739, became difficult to ring after the Second World War. After appeals for funds to cover costs, the bells were lowered at Easter 1983. Two trebles were cast from the metal of three bells acquired from the National Westminster Bank. The dedication took place on June 11th, 1985 and the first peal on the twelve bells was rung November 9th.

Source: Charles W Pearce, *Old London City churches, their organs, organists & musical associations* (n.d.) pp 21-2; Basil F L Clarke, *Parish churches of London* 1966, p 21; Richard Tydeman, *A short guide to the church of the Holy Sepulchre London* compiled 1970, pp 3, 4, and 9; J R Jerram, manuscript in the care of The Revd. D L Cawley; Charles Brown, Churchwarden, *Ringing world* September 4, 1964; W T Cook, *Ringing world* September 4, 1964, pp 596-7 and January 12, 1973 p 24; *Bell news and ringers' record*, January 29, 1887, p 359; *Ringing world* April 18, 1986, p 329; Association records..