

CITY, CORNHILL

In 1421 the new steeple contained five bells, the tenor named St. Michael, the fourth the Lady bell and the third the Trinity bell. Circa 1430 John Whitwell, his wife Isobel and William Rus added the heaviest bell, named Rus, which also served to ring the 8 o'clock Curfew; its weight was maintained at over 30cwt.

Churchwardens' Accounts show the ringers were paid 12d. for the proclamation of Queen Mary and 2s. 3d. for her coronation.

When Queen Elizabeth I was passing St. Michael's, the bells were ringing the changes 1, 3, 5, 2, 4, 6, which the Queen appreciated and this sequence has been known as 'Queens' ever since.

The church was rebuilt after the Great Fire and the present tower was completed in 1722. When Richard Phelps augmented the ring to twelve bells in 1728 this became one of the earliest rings of this number in the country and is still today the heaviest ring of twelve bells in a London parish church. The tenor was recast in 1795 at a weight of 41cwt, and again in 1960 at 42cwt.

The first peal was rung by the College Youths on Friday November 7th, 1729, 5126 changes of Grandsire Cinques in four hours eight minutes. Three men were required to ring the tenor. Thirty peals later, on March 24th, 1900 the Middlesex County Association rang 5040 changes of Treble Bob Maximus in the Kent Variation, composed by John Reeves in four hours nine minutes. The ringers were: Ernest Pye, Harry Hoskins, Charles T Hopkins, John H Cheesman, Charles Wilkins, Isaac G Shade, Arthur R Jacob, Joseph Waghorn, Junr., Harry Flanders, Thomas Groombridge, John R Sharman and William Pye - conductor. This was the first twelve bell peal by the Association and afforded the opportunity for some members to ring their first peal of Maximus.

One of the peal boards in the ringing chamber commemorates the achievement by members of the Ancient Society of College Youths who rang the first strictly non-conducted peal of Stedman Cinques - 5002 changes, on Saturday February 22nd, 1913. To mark the 50th anniversary of this peal in 1963, a companion peal board records another silent peal of Stedman Cinques.

The bells were rehung in a new frame by Mears & Stainbank in 1960, and were rededicated by the Bishop of Stepney on February 14th, 1961

Source: A R Kench; J. A. Trollope, Ringing world August 27, 1937 pp 569 and 70 - and October 25, 1968 pp 822 and 828; Association records.