

KENSINGTON, ST MARY ABBOTS

There were three small bells in the 50 ft high tower of 1370 which was replaced in 1772 by one built of red brick with white cupola. With battlements and bell-cote, it reached the height of 86 ft. The present tower and spire date from 1879 with an overall height of 278 ft, the tallest in London and the eighth tallest in the country. On a blustery winter's day The Revd. E Carr Glyn courageously climbed the scaffolding to the top of the spire and laid the cap stone into position with a silver trowel and blessed the 14 ft. metal cross. The tower stands on the north side of the church at the east end. Access to the ringing room and belfry is from a spiral staircase with entrance on the south wall of the tower. Additional access is from a wide spiral staircase inside the church at the north-east end, through the choir room, and onto the main staircase.

There were six bells in 1704. In 1772 Thomas Janaway hung a new ring of eight bells with a tenor of about a ton. The initials of "E.L" inscribed on the sixth bell represent Edward Lulham, Thomas Janaway's foreman or bell hanger. Warner augmented the bells to ten in 1879.

The first peal ever rung in this parish was of 5040 changes of Bob Major by the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths on March 21st, 1773 in three hours twenty-four minutes:- John Frazier, William Mathiss, Michael Purser, William West, John Povey, Abraham Smith, Samuel Muggeridge, George Gross - conductor - rang the tenor with George Fleury. The Revd. James Waller was Vicar and Thomas Stokes and John Fosbrooke were the Churchwardens at the time of the peal. Many peals followed this date. The tower is rich in possessing fascinating peal boards, several peals commemorating royal occasions, particularly as St. Mary Abbots is the parish church of Kensington Palace.

The St. Mary Abbots Guild was formed in 1896. The United Ringing Society based here was launched in July 1976, survived for four years and served five other churches. The St. Mary Abbots Guild also provides Sunday ringing at St. Luke, Chelsea, St. Stephen, Westminster and monthly at St. James, Clerkenwell. It also formerly provided ringing at St. Vedast-alias-Foster. The Centenary of the Guild was celebrated in fine style.

Source: The Revd. A M Allchin, *St Mary Abbots Kensington: a brief history and guide* 1960, pp 2 and 9; Elizabeth and Wayland Young, *London's Churches* 1986, p 150; Whitechapel Bell Foundry records; David Holdridge; William Willans, *Ringling World* June 28, 1996, pp 649-50; *Ringling World* April 7, 1944, p 147, July 12, 1963, p 465, and November 16, 1979, p 969; Association records.