

CITY, ST PAUL'S

*Sunday Silence! With every street a dead street,
Alley and courtyard empty and cobbled mews.
Till "tingle tang" the bell of St Mildred's Bread Street
Summoned the sermon taster to high box pews.
And neighbouring towers and spirelets joined the ringing
With answering echoes from heavy commercial walls
Till all were drowned as the sailing clouds went singing
On the roaring flood of a twelve-voiced peal from Paul's.*

The above sound-bite of a City Sunday between the wars comes from the pen of Sir John Betjeman who loved the sound that pours down from Wren's tower. He could often be seen on a Tuesday practice night or Sunday outside the West end of the Cathedral with his head cocked to one side as he gave himself to the all-embracing throb of this majestic ring. The second heaviest twelve in total weight, and the heaviest to hang in a wooden frame that has needed no maintenance in its lifetime.

The front eight are hung by canons from the original wood headstocks. The ninth is a flat-topped bell hung on its original wood stock, while the back bells, cast with flat tops, have been rehung on cast iron headstocks. The twelve hang on one level and all have wrought iron clappers.

The first conductor, James Pettit, in 1878 wore a frock coat and top hat. When I first started ringing at the Cathedral in the early 1950's, dark suits and waistcoats complete with watch chains were the order of the day and bowler hats were worn. In these modern times the dress is much more casual with sweat shirts, jeans and trainer shoes. The ringers now live far greater distances from the tower, travelling thirty miles or more. One ringer travels sixty miles to Sunday ringing and one even comes from Solihull to ring for services. However, one factor has remained constant since the bells were installed in 1878 and that is the pursuit of ringing excellence.

Mr. A J Phillips

GREAT TOM

In the south-west tower hangs the bell known as "Great Tom". Originally cast during the reign of Edward I, it used to hang in a tower facing Westminster Hall.

Bought for St. Paul's in 1699, recast in 1700 and 1710 by Philip Wightman, this ancient bell was recast again in 1716, this time by Richard Phelps with extra metal. It is used as the hour bell for the Grimthorpe clock made by John Smith & Sons of Derby. Great Tom is tolled only for the death of a member of the Royal Family, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, the Dean or the Lord Mayor of London in office.

The British Broadcasting Corporation first used Great Tom as the time signal in 1935.

Source: *Ringings world* November 19, 1976 p 978

GREAT PAUL

The operation to cast this massive bell began at 10.30 p.m on Wednesday November 23rd, 1881. Three furnaces were used and over twenty tons of bell metal took over eight hours of melting. Three days later the metal had cooled sufficiently for the bell to be removed from its mould.

The journey from Loughborough to London had to be made by road with the bell on a specially constructed carriage hauled by a steam traction-engine with a reserve in attendance. The exhibited bell left on Thursday May 11th, 1882 and after two days of travelling, tarpaulin covered the bell to prevent by-standers creating their graffiti on the outside. The conveyance had to negotiate the ascent and descent of the countryside and at one point disaster struck when the wheels sank into soft ground.

This massive bell arrived at Highgate on Saturday May 20th. Crowds of spectators lined the route to the Cathedral. The next stage was to off load the bell to its final destination - the south-west tower and it was finally dedicated on Saturday June 3rd by Canon (afterwards Dean) Gregory. At first it took about eighteen men to swing the bell high enough for the clapper to strike the soundbow. From May, 1971 it has been operated by electricity.

A full-scale replica of this bell was pulled by tractor engine from Liverpool Street to the Cathedral for the 100th anniversary of installation of Great Paul during the "Wren Fair" commemorating the 350th anniversary of the birth of Sir Christopher Wren.

Source: W T Cook, *Ringing world* January 21, 1972, p. 48 and January 28, 1972, p. 87; *Ringing world* January 14, 1972 p. 24 and July 30, 1982, pp. 629 and 635.

OLD ST. PAUL'S

The central tower and spire rose to a height of 520 ft built in 1222.

There were five bells at the 1552 Inventory. They were destroyed in 1561 when the spire was struck by lightning. There were also four heavy bells in a separate tower to the east of the old Cathedral. These belonged to "The Guild of the Name of Jesus" and they passed into the possession of Sir Miles Partridge who sold them for scrap. The story goes that Sir Miles won the tower and bells in a game of dice against a stake of £100.

Source: W T Cook, *The bells of St. Paul's* pp 1 and 3, and *Ringing world* November 3, 1978 p 930