

THE SUDBURY BELL FOUNDERS

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HENRY PLEASANTS 1696-1708

JOHN THORNTON 1708-1720

THOMAS GARDINER 1709-1760

**WALTER A PERRY
DECEMBER 2009**

PREFACE

Little is known of the Sudbury bell founders apart from passing references in books on Sudbury's history and the detailed books on Church Bells of Essex and Suffolk by Rev J Raven.

An excellent framework was in place to research, infill and join together the many missing details to complete a History of the Sudbury Bell Founders. Who were they ? and how they came together and created over sixty years of bell founding in Sudbury. The first half of the 18th century was the where bell founders from across the whole nation prospered, Sudbury did very well and outshone many larger towns and cities. Suffolk's large number of Churches and the use of the River Stour for transportation played an important role for the prosperity of the bell founder and also the town.

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Today there are only two bell founders in the whole of Great Britain, Taylors of Loughborough and the Whitechapel Bell Foundry who have a history dating back to about 1570 making it the oldest commercial company in Great Britain. Three hundred years ago Sudbury had three bell founders, Henry Pleasants, John Thornton and Thomas Gardiner. These were the golden years of the bell founder right across the nation.

Before we get onto the Sudbury bell founders we must have a look at where and how this golden age of the bell founder came into being. About 1610 at St Benedicts, Cambridge an unknown carpenter made and fitted a double flanged wheel to a bell, added a small pulley block to feed the bell rope onto the double flanged wheel. Now the bell could be swung and raised into an upright position like a tea cup. The bell now could be rotated through 360 degrees and be fully controlled by the bell ringer. A whole new concept on how bells could be rung was born, making England unique in the world in the controlled way of ringing bells. Prior to this new innovation bells were rang like the Victorian school bell swung quite uncontrollably through a 120 degree arc, as they do on the continent, Italy is a good example. There has been no recorded date and place where this new system of ringing Church bell occurred, but a subsequent chain of events, all at Cambridge indicate that this was the birthplace of the English system of ringing Church bells. It is recognised in the bell ringing fraternity that St Benedicts was the home of this new innovation and in sixty years would create the golden age of the bell founder.

On the 5th November 1635 the first bell ringing society (1) was formed, known as the Ancient Society of College Youths. Papers from their inaugural meeting have survived. The first five members were William Bereton (later Lord), Thomas Joyce, Edward Flower, Matthias Buraby and Clifford Clifton (later Sir). These were young men from the colleges who were trying find a system of ringing bells based on simple mathematics as opposed to music. It was briefly recorded in 1642 that the College Youths had rang six score of changes (2). They were on the right track, as six score is 120 and 120 is the maximum number of changes that can be rang on five bells with out a repetition. The college Youths were later centred in London. Next year it will be their 375th anniversary.

This new concept had to survive the coming conflict of King and Parliament and then the following Puritan period when Churches were desecrated. Church bells were left untouched, but the ringing of them was very severely curtailed. Bell ringing and the new developments still in their infancy stood still and would not be rekindled until after the restoration of the Monarchy.

1660. The restoration of the Monarchy heralded a re-interest in bell ringing. At Cambridge, the father of campanology, Fabian Stedman published two works, *Tintinnalogia* in 1668 and *Campanologia* in 1677 (3). Both these provided the basic principles of how bell ringing is done today. Bell ringing had now emerged into campanology.

At St Benedicts there is a plaque to Fabian Stedman, recording in 1664 that he was teaching young men from the colleges the art of campanology. He was also a leading member of the Ancient Society of College Youths. Campanology started in the colleges, but this new system of ringing quickly spread across the nation, initially taking in the trades and business people. Bell founders quickly sprang up to meet this new demand and the golden age of the bell founder was born.

CHARLES NEWMAN. Not a Sudbury bell founder, but was instrumental by circumstances in getting two of the three bell founders for Sudbury. Newman had an iron works/ foundry at Haddenham, Cambridgeshire, which Christopher Gray, of the famed Miles Gray bell founding family of Colchester, used frequently from 1666 to 1684 when casting bells in the Cambridge area (4). Charles Newman took up bell founding guided by Christopher Gray and cast his first bell in 1684 Charles Newman's son, Thomas was born in 1682 and in thirty odd years would work with Sudbury's third bell founder Thomas Gardiner. Later Gardiner was to purchase Thomas Newman's bell foundry in 1727.(5).

The demise of three generations of the Miles Gray, Colchester bell founding family came with the death of Christopher Gray in 1686. The Colchester foundry was purchased by Charles Newman and Henry Pleasants (6). In 1686, Henry Pleasants cast his first bell at Colchester in 1691, it was the treble bell for Peasenhall Church. Within the Colchester partnership they cast bells in their own names. Pleasants cast the Lamarsh bell in 1695 (7) and Newman cast Clare tenor bell in 1693 (8). These are nearest of their Colchester founding work to Sudbury.

The bond that was formed between Newman and Pleasants was to last down the next generation of bell founders and encompass almost eighty years. Sudbury's second bell founder, John Thornton was starkly left as an outsider. Charles Newman's will proved at Bury St Edmunds in 1709 (9). Gives his son Charles four properties in St Botolphs Colchester, and to his other son Thomas all his bell founding tools, bell metal and foundry. The Colchester dual ownership ended in 1696 when the Colchester bell foundry was sold.

Charles Newman purchased the Brocandale bell foundry at Norwich . Henry Pleasants returned to Sudbury. He had been a resident here when he was a bell hanger, but returned with the added skills of a bell founder. (10).

HENRY PLEASANTS 1696-1708. Was Sudbury's first bell founder. Henry was born at Wicken, Cambs on 12th September 1640 the son of William and Thomasine. Their home was registered for a hearth tax, which indicates Henry came from a good home by the standards of the day. Six miles from Wicken is Haddenham the home of Charles Newman. It is most certainly here that Henry learned the skills of a bell hanger at Newmans foundry from Christopher Gray.

In 1673 Henry Pleasants wife Catrina died, and her funeral was at St Peters Sudbury. Also at this time Henry was re-tuning Long Melford Church bells.⁽¹¹⁾ At this time the only way to tune a bell was by re-casting, but Henry was not yet a bell founder. I very strongly suspect that Henry was re-hanging the bells with the double flanged wheels that had been pioneered at St Benedicts some sixty years earlier. The controlled ringing of bells sounds better than un controlled ringing. The re-tuning explanation of the bells is not accurate, but is however appropriate.

Bell hangers did most of the work in the Churches but left no record of their work, whereas a bell founder would most certainly leave his name and a date on the bells that he cast. At this time many Churches had their bells re-hung to to the St Benedicts innovation, but for various reasons did not have new bells or the older ones re-cast. Henry was a bell hanger resident in St Peters parish Sudbury. Whether he was independent or working with or on behalf of Charles Newman or Christopher Gray from the Haddenham foundry we have no idea.

Clearly the Haddenham bell foundry was the focal point that bought, Pleasants, Gray and Newman together and later the subsequent purchase of the Colchester bell foundry from the Miles Gray family. After ten years in their joint partnership Newman and Pleasants sold the Colchester foundry. Newman went onto Norwich and Pleasants returned to Sudbury with the added skills of a bell founder, plus other skills as we shall see later.

Sudbury was quickly to the fore, being in a prime position with its first bell founder and the golden age of the bell founder was just starting. Henry returned to his old home in King Street, where he had his forge / metal works, near the timber yard. (12). It was small and restricted to accommodate a bell foundry. Henry wisely chose to site his new bell foundry by the river down by Ballingdon bridge. Use of the river as a means of transportation had been considered for many years..

Sudbury as a centre for a foundry was clear in other respects, the county with a large number of Churches and the finest were along the banks of the Stour. Most Churches still had the same bells that were noted in the great Church inventory of 1553. (13). Many were not very well tuned and required re-casting, also additional new bells were needed to meet the requirements of the new system of ringing that had been pioneered at Cambridge. The Sanctus bell which many Churches had retained was often used to make additional bell metal. With a large amount of new bells being cast, bell metal was now in short supply.

Henry's chosen foundry site down by Ballingdon bridge, somewhere near the Boat House restaurant. In 1841 the Boat House site was known as Hospitalers Yard. In *Bells of Norfolk*, author John L'Strange quotes from the Bury and Norwich Post on an article by the Rev Dr Charles Badham, Vicar of All Saints. There had been two bell foundries in Sudbury. One was in Hospitalers Yard and the other one just off Curds Lane. This is reiterated in Hodson's *History of Sudbury*. In 2002 traces of foundry sand was found on a statutory site examination by the local authority prior to the construction of the apartment houses between Curds Lane (now Weavers Lane) and Burkitts Lane. This may well have been the site of the second bell foundry owned by John Thorton.

When Henry Pleasants started his bell foundry he was in his late fifties. He was a good bell founder and his bell inscriptions were

always "Henry Pleasants" then the year date. Bell inscriptions are made by pressing lettered wooden blocks into the bell mould. These can be used many times, just as the old print compositor would do with lettered type for printing. With their imperfections, style and size they are identifiable. H C Hawkins⁽¹⁴⁾ in his book points out that some of the lettered blocks Henry was using were from the old Miles Gray Colchester foundry.

In 1707 at Maldon All Saints, it is the only triangular Church tower in Britain. It had only three bells and Henry was commissioned to cast three additional bells to make a ring of six bells. He departed from his usual mundane bell inscription by inscribing one of the new bells with this verse and a pun on his name.

"When three this steeple did hold
They were emblems of a scold
No music then, but we shall see
What Pleasant music six will be".

At Ipswich St Margaret, this verse was inscribed on a bell.

"Henry Pleasants have at last
made me as good as he can cast"

Before we leave Henry Pleasants, he was commissioned to make a clock for St Peters Church. Below is a transcript of an agreement between the Church Wardens, Overseers and chief inhabitants of the town and Henry Pleasants bell founder. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Memorand that it is agreed between the present Church Wardens, Overseers and chief inhabitants of the Parish of St Peter in Sudbury, whose names are here under subscribed and Henry Pleasants of the same parish, bell founder, this 31st day of March Anno Domi 1701.

Imprthat the said Henry Pleasants shall well and workman like and

with his best skill and art, make and frame one substantial clock with a pendulum to ye same as large or rather than for better than for use as generally made. And shall set up and fix the same in such a place of the Church or Chapple of St Peter afore said as the Church wardens and Overseers or the greater number shall appoint. And further that the said Henry Pleasants from tyme and at all tymes during his abode in the said parish as a parishioner thereof being liable to ye paying of parish rates and performing parish duties keep and maintain the clock with its necessary supports, stays and appendages in good and sufficient repair and such good order that with our winding up it may keep and perform true and regular moction.

And in consideration thereof it is agreed on the part of the Church Wardens, Overseers and parishioners that Henry Pleasants shall during his time of abode in the afore said parish be wholly free and exempted from ye payment of all parish rates and assessments and from all parish offices to which he maybe liable during his time of abode as a parishioner in the said parish.

<i>Thomas</i>	<i>Hall</i>	<i>Thomas</i>	<i>Mann</i>	<i>Henry Pleasants</i>
<i>Thomas</i>	<i>Firman</i>	<i>Thomas</i>	<i>Dansie</i>	
<i>William</i>	<i>Hall</i>	<i>Samuel</i>	<i>Brasior</i>	
<i>Danoll</i>	<i>Gibbon</i>	<i>Nath</i>	<i>Gilson</i>	
<i>John</i>	<i>Baker</i>	<i>Edward</i>	<i>Hart</i>	
<i>Joseph</i>	<i>Wait</i>	<i>Henry</i>	<i>Ballony</i>	
<i>John</i>	<i>Pack</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Mizon</i>	
<i>Thomas</i>	<i>Taylor</i>			

This replaced the first clock St Peter's had. Henry's clock did not have Chimes, as there were none detailed in his contract of 1701. St Peters at this time had only six bells, so the choice of chimes was very limited. The popular Cambridge chimes we have today were not composed until 1793. A St Peter's terrier dated the 3rd June 1813 lists all six bells with a clock and chimes (16). The chimes were

added in later years and been a simple chime on two or three bells. In 1820 the new spire was erected and sheathed in copper, with a louvered opening for a clock bell to sound from. The new clock bell that was used to strike the hour was cast by Thomas Mears in 1831 and was housed in the spire. The new clock of 1825 could use the Cambridge chimes on the then six bells using the treble, second, third and tenor bells. The hour was struck on the Mears clock bell of 1831. When the two new bells of 1874 were installed the Cambridge chimes were re-arranged to strike on different bells, which are used today at St Peters. Mears clock bell of 1831 was now redundant. It was used in 1978 to make additional bell metal for the two new bells that were cast to celebrate the Queens Silver Jubilee and the 250th anniversary of Thomas Gainsborough's birth in 1725. These two new bells now made a ring of ten bells.

Henry's clock lasted from 1701 until 1825, its replacement lasted less than fifty years. Henry's skill as a bell hanger where he has to make all the bearings that the bell rotates on, make all the other iron fittings, including all the nuts and bolts that held every thing together. These skills were needed when he built St Peters clock and showed us a measure of his skills. No buying in of parts, each and every part was hand made by Henry. Henry Pleasants cast over 72 bells that are still in use today, others may have been lost through recasting.

One that survived was his bell of 1701, and now is the third bell in All Saints Church tower. It is the only bell in Sudbury cast by a Sudbury bell founder. How this came about was that seven of the eight bells were to be recast, including Henry Pleasants bell. Wisdom prevailed and All Saints purchased this bell, fortunately it was the right note to match the then existing five bells that All Saints had at this time (17) On this bell the inscription reads " Geo Dashwood and John Crysell Church wardens, H P 1701" Henry Pleasants initials and the year date. In 1701 there were no Church wardens of these names at All Saints. St Gregory's parish records for this time are missing

Henry Pleasants funeral was at St Peters on the 20th December 1708. He was survived by his second wife Millicent. With Henry's funeral and that of his first wife Catrina in 1673 indicate they were residents in St Peter's parish in 1673 and 1708. The recorded history of a bell foundry/ironworks near the timber yard in King Street (18) which is in the parish of St Peter may well have been their residence with the iron works which Henry needed when he was only a bell hanger as he was in 1673 when at Long Melford "re-tuning the bells" Space for a bell foundry may well have been too restricted in his King Street premises. Hence his move down to Ballingdon bridge.

Letters of administration were granted to Millicent on the 12th February 1708 (19). This was on the old Julian Calendar, when the last day of the year was on the 24th March. On today's Gregorian calendar this date would have been 1709.

Before Henry Pleasants death, Sudbury's second bell founder, John Thornton was already established and had cast three bells for Great Cornard Church (20). It would have been impossible for him to be the inheritor of Henry Pleasants foundry. The Edwardstone story will confirm this. We will leave John Thornton for a while and carry on with the Edwardstone bell castings of 1709 and 1710, by Henry Pleasants foundry man, John Waylett, late of Colchester. Henry's widow Millicent now having letters of administration was able to direct John Waylett to cast two bells (a treble and second bell) for Edwardstone Church. This work may have been undertaken by Henry but died before he could complete the undertaking.

The treble and second bells were cast by John Waylett in 1709. A William Culpeck declared that the second bell was out of tune. He was very forceful and insisted that this bell be re-cast and inscribed "Tuned by William Culpeck" (21) This was done later in 1709. Both these bells are attributed to John Waylett as shown on the bell details displayed in the belfry. There are no bell founders names on either of

these two bells. H C Hawkins (22) put forward the view that Waylett not being a bell founder in his own right could not put his name on these two bells, nor could he use his late employers name or the future inheritor of Henry's foundry (Thomas Gardiner) was not yet established. Under these circumstances a bell founders name is excluded. Henry's widow Millicent may well have felt let down by Waylett so Thomas Gardiner was appointed, he may have purchased the foundry or had a rent or buy arrangement. Gardiner was a young man and may well have worked for Henry Pleasants We do not know but clearly Gardiner was known.

THOMAS GARDINER 1709-1760 SUDBURY

Also at Norwich 1724-1754.

C H Hawkins (23) From Gardiners bell inscriptions identifies the letter blocks as those used by Henry Pleasants, which clearly indicate the Gardiner had inherited Henry Pleasants foundry down by Ballingdon bridge. With the new river barge traffic becoming established, this foundry was too valuable to abandon.

Thomas Gardiner was called to Edwardstone in 1710 to correct Culpecks tuning of the second bell. He was commissioned to re-cast the tenor bell. He reaped his revenge with this very poignant inscription on the newly re-cast tenor bell.

“About ty second Culpeck is wrett
Because the founder wanted wett
Thair wisdom were bad at last
Or this bell I never had to cast”

Early 18th cent Suffolk dialect,

Ty =The, Wrett = Angry, Wett = Wisdom, Thair = Their.

It would appear that the re-cast second bell under Culpecks direction was now out of tune with the tenor bell, which subsequently had to be re-cast to bring all six bells into tune with each other. How ever

Thomas must have had a large measure of vested interest in the disputed issue over the second bell. The short comings of Waylett or his loyalty to Henry's widow Millicent. This is another confirmation that Gardiner took over Pleasants foundry in 1709/10. Waylett had no further connection with Gardiner, although he remained in the area and worked at times for John Thornton.

Before we leave Edwardstone and Thomas's vengeful inscription. In the 1970's a huge fund raising project was headed by Sarah Titford to overhaul and re-hang the bells. A major prize was a flight on the new Concorde aircraft. During the restoration it was found that the tenor bell was cracked and required re-casting. It has been preserved, with our Thomas's inscription by the generosity of Morden College. Sir John Morden the 17th Century college founder, had close links with Edwardstone It is on permanent loan to Morden College with Thomas's inscription blatantly displayed. This was a kind response to Morden College for all the help they gave for the re-hanging of Edwardstone Church bells. (24)

Thomas Gardiner proved to be a good business man his success may have been enhanced by the goodwill he inherited from Henry Pleasants. At Newmarket St Mary's in 1719 he and Thomas Newman, the son of Charles Newman cast the tenor bell. The relationships that had been forged at Haddenham flourished down to the next generation of bell founders. In 1727 Thomas Newman moved to a Cambridge foundry, leaving the Brocandale, Norwich foundry which his father Charles had purchased in 1696. Thomas Gardiner purchased this foundry from Thomas Newman and ran it until 1754 and was the last Norwich bell founder. (25). During his Norwich years he had William Sadler as his foundry man at Sudbury.

At Great Horksley William Sadler was to re-cast the tenor bell, but made such a poor job of it complaints were made. Thomas returned to Sudbury to put right William Sadler's work and re-cast the Great Horksley bell. The bell was recast and the bell was inscribed

“William Sadler who was a negligent partner caused me to be cast by Sudbury Gardiner 1747”. This being libelous, part of the inscription was erased leaving only “cast by Sudbury Gardiner 1747” Parts of the erased inscription are discernable (26). We have seen a couple of Thomas’s inscriptions, which creates a view that he was a no nonsense man with a Jack Blunt attitude. Another practice Thomas indulged in was to press Queen Anne pennies into a bell mould and when the bell was cast they became fused into the new bell.

Gardiner was a very successful bell founder, at one time running two bell foundries. His bells were average to good, none outstanding but otherwise none were bad. Over 51 years and at his two foundries he cast well over 260 bells, spread across Bedfordshire, Cambs, Essex, Herts, Norfolk and Suffolk. He cast his last bell in 1760 and died in 1762. Thomas Gardiner’s funeral was at St Peters Sudbury.

JOHN THORNTON 1708-1720.

Little is known of John Thornton. He arrived in Sudbury and post 1720 had left. He did not inherit any thing from Henry Pleasants bell foundry. Although he did not last long in Sudbury he was a good bell founder and his bells were rated as quite good. It is clear that the drive of Thomas Gardiner drove him out of business by very keen competition. In his twelve years Thornton cast thirty five bells, by contrast Gardiner in his eleven years when they were both in competition with each other Gardiner had cast forty eight bells. At the height of the bell founders golden years Thornton could not match Gardiner. There was a bond of fellowship that stemmed from Christopher Gray, the Haddenham bell foundry, the Newmans, Henry Pleasants and down to Gardiner, which the customer, the Church recognised. Not being of this bond Thornton was left on the outside.

Past recorded history and recent finds about Curds Lane, now Weavers Lane indicate quite strongly that this was the site of Thorntons bell foundry. In St Gregory’s Parish Books 1718/19 John Thornton was paid eleven shillings for the repairs to the bells. (27).

John Thornton's largest commission was to cast five bells at Newmarket All Saints and had John Waylett of Edwardstone fame as his foundry man (28).

Thornton's thirty five bells are mainly local in Essex, Suffolk and two or three in Cambs

At the time of Thomas Gardiner's death the golden age of the bell founder was fast drawing to a close. Many bell foundries had ceased before 1762, even in the larger cities, Norwich is a good example when Gardiner as that cities last bell founder left in 1754. Into the nineteenth century the decline continued leaving about a dozen foundries at the end of the Victorian age. At the end of the Second World War there were only three bell foundries operating Warners of London which closed down in the 1960's, leaving only the two surviving bell founders Taylors of Loughborough and the Whitechapel bell foundry.

Bell founders large and small, over the years have left us with a little piece of history tucked away unseen high up in the tower of every town and village Church.

CHURCH BELLS OF SUDBURY

With some history and customs from each Church.

ALL SAINTS

The 1553 Church inventory gives three great bells (over 4 cwts) and a Sanctus bell. (up to one cwt). In 1821 there were only five bells in the tower. Today there are eight bells.

Treble and Second bell	Both cast by John Warner of London in 1874.
Third bell	Cast by Henry Pleasants in 1701. Before 1821 was in St Gregory's Church tower. All Saints purchased this bell and is the only bell in Sudbury cast by a Sudbury bell founder.
Fourth bell	Miles Gray Colchester 1671
Fifth bell	Sancta Katerina Ora Pro Noblis (pre 1553)
Sixth bell	Sum Rofa Pulfata Mundi Matia Tocata (pre 1553)
Seventh bell	Stella Maris Succurre Pussima Nobilis (pre 1553)
Tenor bell	Re-cast by John Warner, London 1875 This bell was re-cast from a bell by Stephen Toni of 1576. Stephen Toni was a notable bell founder of Bury St Edmunds in the 16th century.

The tenor bell is Sudbury's largest bell weighing twenty six and half hundred weights.

SAINT GREGORY.

The 1553 Church inventory gives five great bells and a Sanctus bell. In 1701 Henry Pleasants cast a bell to make a ring of six bells. At a vestry meeting on 28th March 1787 two extra bells were asked for. Thomas Osborn of Downham Market Norfolk was to cast the two additional bells and use the old Priory bell (29) for extra bell metal. The cost was £63 9s 3d. This amount was to be raised by public subscription, but this was not met. A rate was levied on St

Gregory's parish to meet the outstanding debt. Thomas Osborns account could not be settled until 1789 (30). Osborn's greatest work was the casting of all ten bells in the same year, known as a maiden peal, for St James Church at Bury St Edmunds, now the Diocese Cathedral Church..

In 1821 seven of the eight bells were to be recast, including Henry Pleasants bell of 1701. This was saved by its purchase by All Saints Church. Six bells were re-cast plus a replacement for Henry Pleasants bell all cast by Thomas Mears. The surviving tenor bell had been cast by Pack and Chapman in 1774. Thomas Mears, Pack and Chapman were at different times owners of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. Although it has been in existence since 1570 it has had many owners over the centuries.

Treble to the seventh bell. Thomas Mears 1821 Whitechapel

Tenor Pack and Chapman 1774 Whitechapel.

Weight of the tenor bell sixteen hundred weights.

SAINT PETERS.

The 1553 Church inventory gives five great bells but no Sanctus bell. Today only three of the five pre-reformation bells have survived. The other two may well have been re-cast into other bells in the tower.

Treble To commemorate the Queens Silver Jubilee in 1977
Provided by Peter A Taylor in memory of his mother
Clara Ann Taylor 1897-1959. Whitechapel 1978

Second The gift of the East Anglian Artists Commemorating the
250th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Gainsborough
in 1727. Whitechapel 1978

Third and

Fourth John Warner London 1874.

Fifth John Darbie made mee 1662 Ipswich

Sixth James Edbury 1603 Bury St Edmunds.

(RB, IS, RS, IW, RF, RB, TB, WB, IC, EC.)

These initials maybe the sponsors of this bell.

Seventh	Sit Nomen Domini Beneictum	Kebyll circa 1470
Eighth	In Multis Annis Refonet Campana Johannis	Kebyll circa 1470
Ninth	Miles Gray made mee 1641	
Tenor	Intonat e Celis Vox Campane Michaelis	Kebyll circa 1470

Latin translations

Seventh	Blessed be the name of the Lord
Eighth	May John's bell sound for many years
Tenor	The voice of Michael's bell thunders from heaven

These are the surviving pre-reformation bells from the 1553 Church inventory. These three bells have beautiful inscriptions, like fine script on vellum. Unseen high up in the Church tower, they match the work of the carpenter and mason whose work we can see and admire in our Churches. These rate amongst the best nationally for the fifteenth century and are one of Sudbury's treasures. When you hear St Peters strike the hour it is Thomas Kebylls bell of 1470 giving you the time of the day

The treble and second bells should have been cast in 1977 but we were a year late.

ARTICLES OF AN AGREEMENT

These articles drawn up by the bell ringers of St Gregorys and St Peters on the 3rd July 1786 and are signed by the ringers of St Gregory and St Peter.

(This agreement is rather protracted and has very severe penalties. I have condensed the contents. In 1787 two new bells were planned for St Gregory's, so maybe there was an incentive to get the belfry into order) (31)

- 1/ All who sign to be a member shall meet each Monday at seven o'clock At St Gregory's steeple. Any lateness over five minutes will incur a forfeiture of 2d.
- 2/ Should a member absent himself for the appointed ringing he will forfeiture 3d
- 3/ Should a member absent himself for over a year he will be excluded from the company for ever. He may rejoin in less than a year with the provision of forfeiture of all monies while he has absented himself.
- 4/ Should any member but is with liquor and being unable to ring shall forfeit as being not attended.
- 5/ Any blasphemy or lie a forfeiture of 1d
- 6/ Any member who drops his bell rope on the floor, or fails to tuck the bell rope in when he has finished ringing forfeit 1d.
- 7/ Alterations of times of meetings shall be decided by the majority.

Signed

Henry Ginn (Independent) Richard Chinery Thomas Ginn

Henry Fish (his mark) Richard Clubb (his mark)

John Munelles.

Struck off members.

Francis Noble Ambrose Noad George King Thomas Wright

Details of this Article of agreement were very noble, but very severe in an age where the bell ringers were almost independent of the Church and the Church belfry was left to the bell ringers to manage. This was open to wholesale abuse. Drinking and smoking in the Church belfry was accepted by turning a blind eye to what

was happening.

During the mid to late Victorian age The Church and the new emerging County / Diocese bell ringers Guilds and Associations which were formed about this time, took steps to reform Church bell-fries from the drinking and smoking practice that had been endemic for many years. Many Churches had bell ringers gotches that had been presented and used regularly. A gotch is a large pottery vessel with a large opening at the top to pour beer in and a small hole at the bottom to accept a tap from which the beer may be drawn from. Most were destroyed in the Victorian times There are four that survived in Suffolk One is in the Moyes Hall museum at Bury St Edmunds, one in the Woodbridge area Hadleigh and one at Clare.

The Clare gotch is inscribed "The Clare Bell Ringers 1729" It was presented by the then Vicar of Clare the Rev Matthew Bell (1727-1750). The inscription shows that there was an established band of bell ringers at Clare in 1729. This indicates how fast and popular bell ringing had become since its early days in Cambridge and sustained the golden age of the bell founder.

The reason for the use of the gotch was when the bell ringers rang for some occasion, a wedding, civic function and a payment was to be made, this was usually in the form of so many pints or gallons of beer from the nearby six bells pub as a means of payment. The bell ringers collected their "payment" in beer and retired to the belfry to enjoy their drink.

A photograph of the Clare bell ringers gotch is on page 21

USES THAT CHURCH BELLS HAVE BEEN PUT TO.

In 1777 at St Peters vestry meeting it was agreed that John Lilley be paid two pounds per year to ring the curfew bell at nine PM each evening and at five AM each morning on every day of the year. At this

time the curfew bell was mostly a traditional gesture. Or that the appointed Constable of the Peace could enquire of anyone of their presence on the towns streets during these hours. Many village Churches rang the gleaning bell. This was a signal that harvested fields were open for people to glean for any un-gathered corn. It was never rang on a Sunday any prospective gleaners presence was expected at Church.

The passing bell. The tenor bell is tolled to let the parish know of a death in the parish. This was always done during the daytime and had a simple way of letting the parish know of the age and sex of the deceased. A young person under twenty one, male or female, just one toll for each year of their age, male or female. A female of sixty seven requires sixty seven tolls of the passing bell. One single toll leaving sixty six tolls in thirty three groups of two tolls. For a man aged seventy. One single toll leaving sixty nine tolls in twenty three groups three tolls. This practice petered out after the Second World War. Half muffled bells at a funeral is likened to joy in heaven and sadness on earth.

During the Second World War in 1940 ringing of Church bells was banned unless there was the threat of a German invasion was imminent. This had been applied in 1801/1802 when there was the threat of a French Invasion by Napoleon. In an age before communications which we take for granted bells were on of the few things that could alert the population. Many coastal towns and villages depended on Church bells to alert them of any dangers or disasters at sea.

Bells at weddings are a most joyous and are a vital ingredient. This rather fell short in 1863 when the ringers at St Peters planned to ring for the marriage of the Prince of Wales which was during Lent. The Rev Molyneux, Vicar of St Peters did not approve of weddings during Lent. Knowing of the bell ringers intentions to ring the bells to celebrate the Royal wedding, the Rev Molyneux had the belfry door locked. The bell ringers intent on ringing for the wedding gained

Access to the nave roof, opened the small access door from the belfrey onto the nave roof, gaining access to the belfrey. The bells were rang to the delight of the public.

Clock Chimes. The major secular use of Church bells with the most favoured are the Cambridge chimes, as used by Big Ben and St Peters Church. Clocks have a history of over four hundred years. The Church tower being the tallest and most prominent buildings in the town or village to display the clock. Simple clock chimes came about three hundred years ago. The Cambridge chimes that are most popular to day were composed in 1793.

The verse for the Cambridge chimes.

Quarter past	“All through this hour
The half hour	Be god thy guide
Three quarters to	That by his power
The hour	No step may slide”



The Gotch
 A beer jug presented
 to the bellringers in
 1729 by the then Vicar
 Reid Matthew Bell. It
 holds 32 pints. A
 bell and crown are
 embossed on it - a
 reference to the
 Crown Inn owned
 by the family

**THE CLARE BELL
 RINGERS GOTCH**
 Inscribed "The Clare
 ringers 1729".

The Gotch

A beer jug presented to
 the bellringers in 1729 by
 the then Vicar Reid
 Matthew Bell. It holds 32
 pints. A bell and crown
 are embossed on it - a
 reference to the Crown
 Inn owned by the former.

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