

THE BELLS OF HOLY TRINITY CHURCH GREAT PAXTON

THE INSCRIPTIONS, DIAMETERS AND WEIGHTS OF EACH BELL ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. M.T.XP.T.V. (MATER CHRISTI VIRGO) (CAST BY WILLIAM DAWE 1400)	27" DIAM.	4CWT. 2QRS.
2. THOMAS RUSSEL MADE ME 1721 (RECAST)	28 ¹ / ₂ " DIAM.	5CWT. 0QRS.
3. JOS. EAYRE ST. NEOTS FECTE 1756 (RECAST)	30" DIAM.	6CWT. 0QRS.
4. SANCTA CATERINA ORA PRO NOBIS (CAST BY WILLIAM DAWE 1400)	33 ¹ / ₄ " DIAM.	6CWT. 3QRS.
5. PRAISE THE LORD 1758 (CAST BY JOSEPH EAYRE)	35" DIAM.	8CWT. 2QRS.

The earliest account of the bells of Great Paxton or **Much Paxton** as it was then known was in 1400 when two bells were cast by William Dawe, an itinerant founder from London. The no. four bell still hangs in the tower today. In the year 1529, three more bells were cast by Robert Oldfield, another itinerant founder, making the bells into a ring of five. These three bells were paid for by a bequest from a will.

Although a complete peal, these bells were of poor quality and rough cast (tuneless). In 1550, the tenor bell was recast by William Culverden of London having been broken by the local ringers. The neighbouring inhabitants of Little Paxton and Toseland, both being part of the same Parish, each paid 6 shillings and 8 pence towards the cost of repair with the remainder being paid for by the inhabitants of Much Paxton.

The bells at this time were hung in a large oak bell cage (bell frame) which dated from 1529 and was far bigger than the present frame.

EXTRACTS FROM THE CHURCHWARDEN'S ACCOUNTS

1629 Work at the bells (renewing sherdand, brads and spiles)

1630 Paid for 1j bellropes

1631 Paid for 1j bellropes

1633 Paid for a new bellrope

1637 Paid for two bellropes.

In 1721, Thomas Russel of Wooten, Bedfordshire, recast the second bell. The bell being away for longer than expected owing to Russel's ill health.

1738 July Three days work, iron 3 shillings, three bunches of rope 1 shilling 6 pence, 200 spiles and brads 6 pence.

1739 31st. October One new Cotterel and Staple 6 pence.

In 1756, The St. Neots bell founder Joseph Eayre recast the third.

In 1758, The tenor bell was recast again, this time by Eayre. With the craftsmanship of Russel and Eayre, the bell gave out a more melodious sound.

In 1888, The treble bell was recast by Mears and Stainbank of Whitechapel, and the original inscription was reproduced.

In 1896, The bells were taken down and rehung in a new oak bell cage, with the back four bells being quarter turned.

By the 1970's the bells were in a semi-unringable state owing to lack of maintenance.

In 1985, The H.C.B.R.S. did major restoration which much improved the go of the bells.

THE BELL CUSTOMS

The Death Knell : this was rung as soon as possible after notice of death. The Teller strokes were nine strokes on each bell for a man and seven on each bell for a woman. In both cases, starting with the treble bell down to the tenor chimed before the knell. The knell was rung on the tenor for an adult and on the third for a child. The bell was rung up and tolled for an hour in 30 second strokes.

The Funeral Bell : the same two bells were used for tolling before a funeral at 30 second intervals for 30 minutes.

Sunday Uses : Until 1886, the vicar served three parishes, the two Paxtons and Toseland (unusual at this time). Therefore the second was rung at 8am to signify a morning Service and similarly a bell was rung at noon to announce an afternoon Service. The bells were either chimed or rung.

Wedding Peals : The bells were rung occasionally after a wedding and sometimes on the day after.

Vestry Meetings : The treble was sounded before the commencement of the meeting by the overseer.

Fire Bells : In the case of a fire in the village, the bells were fired (shot / cannoned) i.e. all pulled together.

Chris Higgins, Huntingdonshire Church Bell Restoration Society, May 1997.