

# The bells at Holy Trinity Bottisham



A summary of research undertaken by  
the History Group formed as part of the  
project to renovate the bells in 2015

Compiled by Christine Hammond

# The Bells

The bells of Holy Trinity Bottisham have been a part of village life for over 400 years. Our oldest bell was cast c. 1590 and all of the others date from before 1640 with the exception of the treble which was originally cast in 1829 and then recast in 1976.

The original bell frame was made for 4 bells and when the treble bell was added in 1839 the frame was altered in a very unsatisfactory way causing cracks in the west wall of the tower.

In 1929 the 5 bells were rehung in a new oak frame and quarter turned. The frame was designed for 6 bells and in 1976 the treble was re-cast and an additional bell was added to give the current ring of 6.

# Treble Bell



Weight 4-2-14, Diameter 28 3/4", Note D.

# Second Bell



Weight 5-2-21, Diameter 31 1/8", Note C.

## The Kirtling Bell and re-casting of the Treble

### **Background.**

Bottisham Church had been looking for a 6<sup>th</sup> bell since 1929. Then the cost of purchasing a bell was £50, which was deemed too expensive and hence the task was shelved.

During the 1960's the village expanded rapidly with increased interest in church bell ringing. As a result an approach was made in 1966 to The Bell Foundry at Loughborough for a new treble bell. The estimate to provide a bell plus all fittings, delivery and erection amounted to £440.

In 1972 serious consideration was made to investigate further the potential to acquire the 6<sup>th</sup> bell, and in 1973 a fund was started for the purpose of purchasing a new treble bell.

On inspection of the existing bells it was found the current treble had 2 cracks in the crown, so needed to be repaired.

It was discovered that Kirtling, a small Cambridgeshire village, situated to the south of Newmarket, in 1939 had removed its 6 bells from its church due to the tower being declared unsafe, and were stored at Knappets Yard, a scrap metal business, in Newmarket.

In 1973 Kirtling Parochial Council were proposing to sell the bells as they required funds to restore their church.

### **Aim.**

The Kirtling Bell would be retuned to become the 2<sup>nd</sup> bell of a peal of 6 and the present Bottisham treble which was cracked would be recast to form a new treble.

The Bottisham Tower Captain, Derek Latchford took on the responsibility for overseeing the project.

## Developments.

As you may expect Parochial Church Councils are not in a position to just go and purchase bells as they feel fit.

There were numerous hurdles to overcome.

1973 Bottisham Parochial Church Council stated it could not afford to purchase a bell. The matter was approved in principle but as a low priority.

1974 Taylors of Loughborough quoted £1035 to carry out the work involved.

1974 The Bishop's Advisory Committee stated a faculty would be required before a bell could be moved from Knappets Yard.

1975 After numerous meetings with Kirtling PCC an agreement in principle was agreed for Bottisham PCC to loan the bell, on the basis that Kirtling could sell four bells, keeping one bell as required 'to ring the people to divine service'.

1975 The Kirtling Bell was removed from Knappets Yard to Ranks garage in Bottisham.

1976 Whitechapel Bell Foundry Ltd quoted as follows:

Retune the Kirtling bell and return it. £137 + VAT

Bottisham treble collected and recast keeping the inscriptions £417 + VAT

Quote accepted.

1976 When the Kirtling Bell arrived at the Whitechapel Bell foundry it was found the headstock was cracked, also one of the gudgeons was very loose. Additional repairs would cost £121.

1976 The tower required sound proofing due to the building of a Care Home, dwellings and communal area adjacent to the church.

## Inscriptions – Treble Bell

The former inscription

Wm Dobson 1829 Thos Newman & Hny King Churchwardens  
Was put back, recast, with Whitechapel 1976 added at no cost.

In addition the following inscriptions were proposed:

Derek Billings – Vicar

Tony Newman, Fred Cooper – Churchwardens





Carol Maltby (Kitson) with the Kirtling bell at Ranks Garage where the bell was stored prior to it's journey to Whitechapel Bell Foundry. Carol raised £50 towards the renovations by making and selling corn dollies.



Carol with the Kirtling bell when it was removed from the tower in June 2015.

## Inscriptions – Second (Kirtling) Bell

Fecit Miles Graie 1638



On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1976 the Kirtling Bell was ready for collection from Whitechapel Foundry.

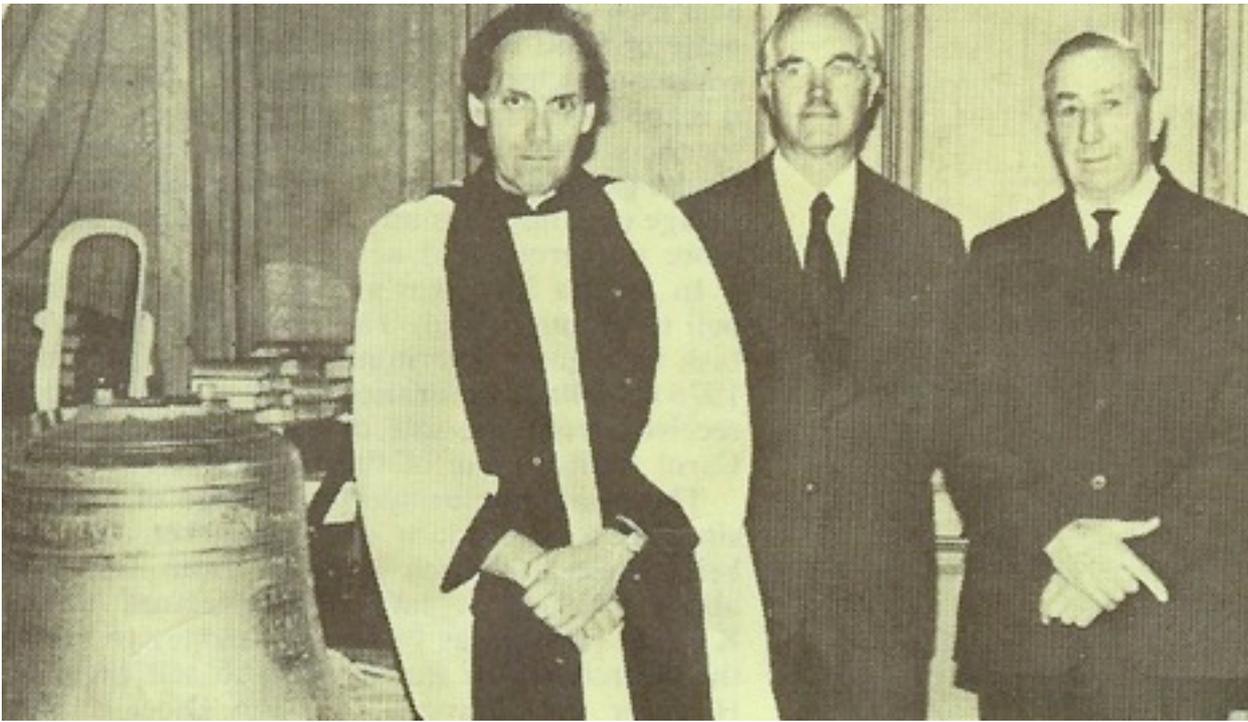
It was rung for the first time on the 27<sup>th</sup> September and dedicated in a service at 2.30pm on the 18th December 1976 followed by ringing throughout the evening.



Tony Newman, pictured with the bell which bears his name as church warden in 1976. The original inscription of 1828 includes the name of one of the then churchwardens, namely Thomas Newman, Tony's great-great-grandfather. Quite remarkably, this was the third time that Tony had seen his bell on terra firma. Apart from 1976, he remembers being taken to see the bells on the grass outside the church as a small boy when the whole ring was last refurbished in 1929.

Sadly Tony passed away in August 2015.





Derek Billings (Vicar), Tony Newman and Fred Cooper (Churchwardens) with the re-cast Treble.

# Third Bell



Weight 6-3-1, Diameter 33 1/2", Note Bb.

## Inscription

John Draper made me 1606 (backwards)



# Fourth Bell



Weight 6-2-4, Diameter 33 7/8", Note A.

## Inscription

John Draper made me 1626 HC



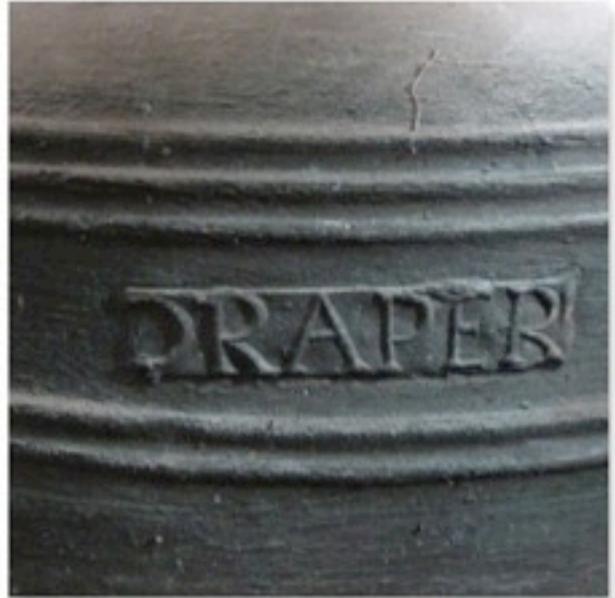
# Tenor (Sixth) Bell



Weight 11-0-7, Diameter 41", Note F.

## Inscription

John Draper made me 1626



# Coin Impressions

All three Draper bells have impressions of coins around the sound bow which became visible when the bells were cleaned by Nicholsons. The Tenor and Third both have five impressions and the 4th has 12. To achieve the impression a coin was simply tapped into the mould before the bell was cast, therefore the better condition of the coin, the better and clearer the impression when the bell is cast.

Opinions vary on the purpose of the coins but the most common view is that they were purely decorative.

Writings of bell historians (Fred Sharpe and others) mention that there are old tales about founders collecting silver coins to improve the quality of the sound – except the coins went into the founder's pocket rather than in the furnace. One reason for the soundbow coins could possibly be as some sort of proof (it isn't, of course) that precious metals went into the cast.





# Fifth Bell

The oldest bell of the six, cast in Cambridge around 1590 in the foundry of Richard Nicholson (Ricardus Nicolson), is a very rare survivor – only two bells from this foundry are known to exist.



Weight 10-0-13, Diameter 38 5/8", Note G.

## Inscription

Ricardus Nicolson me fecit





The firm who carried out the recent work on the bells, chosen on engineering grounds, was Nicholson Engineering of Bridport, Dorset. Andrew Nicholson, pictured with the bell, is a distant relative of Richard Nicholson.

## Holy Trinity Bottisham 5th – a Royal Head bell

The 5th bell in the tower of Holy Trinity, Bottisham, is not only a very rare bell, being one of only two known to have survived from the foundry of Richard Nicolson (sic) of Cambridge, but is also one of the rare bells bearing an impression of the head of a King and a Queen; a so-called Royal Head bell. According to a recent survey by Dr Michael Baron, of the 65,821 bells in the churches in England and Wales only 142 are surviving Royal Head (RH) bells



(Baron, 2015). On the Bottisham bell the heads appear as decorations between words in the inscription on the crown: 'Richardus Nicolson me fecit' (Figure 1, top). This appears to be the most common position. Note that both Raven in 'The Church Bells of Cambridgeshire' (1869) and Baron (2015) misquote the inscription (Figure 1, bottom).



Figure 1 (top). The head of the king can be seen to the right of 'Nicolson'. The head of the queen is just visible on the extreme left.

(bottom). Note that the first name is 'Richardus', not 'Ricardus'

Raven in his monograph on the Bells of Cambridgeshire (1869) thought that the heads represented either Henry VII and his queen, Elizabeth, or Philip and Mary. However, the current consensus among bell historians is that heads of this type represent Edward III and his queen Philippa. The origin of the Royal Heads may go back to the appointment of John Rufford of Bedfordshire as Royal Bell-Founder by Edward III in 1367. The two bells by Rufford in Christchurch Priory, cast 1370, have heads similar to those on the 5th in Bottisham, in both cases Type B heads, as classified by Baron. The Priory bells may well have been gifts from the king. How to explain the occurrence of Royal Heads on bells from other foundries is not clear. The Worcester foundry produced a number of Royal Heads bells in the first half of the 15th century. Interestingly, Ampton, north of Bury St Edmunds, has two bells cast circa 1350 by Thomas Darby of Kings Lynn bearing Royal Heads. However, in this case they are Type A heads, as were those from the Worcester foundry, so not obviously licensed or copied from Rufford. Darby may well have had London connections or moved from there (see Raven, *The Church Bells of Suffolk*, 1890) and one wonders whether it was solely Rufford who was given the right to use the head of the king on his bells. No explanations have been offered why the Bottisham 5th, cast in Cambridge c. 1590, should have borne the head of a monarch who had been dead for two centuries. Perhaps Raven in suggesting that the head may have represented Henry VII had in mind that King's College, Cambridge, was a royal foundation carrying special privileges and the chapel was completed with monies given and bequeathed by Henry VII. However, Richard Nicholson had nothing to do with the bells of King's, said to have been sent over by Pope Calixtus III and long since gone, and Henry VII died in 1509. The one thing that is certain is that the head

on the Bottisham bell does not represent the monarch of the day – Queen Elizabeth I.

The depiction of the head of the king on the bell is reasonably similar to that found on the coinage of Edward III, e.g. on the groat, although taken alone it is hardly proof of identity. From the coinage of Henry VII onwards the monarchs head was shown from the side, never frontal.



Fig 2. An Edward III groat

(from Pictures of U.K. coins, Google images)

A small number of Royal Head bells have been characterised as Type C heads (Baron, 2015) but the identity of the monarch and his queen is uncertain. A prince also appears on some of these.

Very little appears to be known about Richard Nicholson and his foundry. Raven (1869) notes that the heads on the 4th at Great Shelford are very similar to those on the Bottisham bell and suggests that it and the treble, '...made in Cambridge ...', which has identical moulding to the 4th, could have been the work of Richard Nicholson. The lack of the name 'Nicolson' on the bells casts doubt on this attribution and 'made in Cambridge' does not appear on the Bottisham bell. The Great Shelford treble still exists, although now unused, but the Royal Heads bell has alas gone. What is clear is that Bottisham not only possesses a very rare bell bearing rare Royal Heads, but has a bell that by common consent sounds royally indeed. Oh that Richard Nicholson had provided the whole ring of 5, as it then was!

## References

1. Michael Baron, 'The Royal Head Bells of England and Wales', Private publication, (2015)
2. Raven, John James, 'The Church Bells of Cambridgeshire', Samuel Timms, Lowestoft (1869)
3. Raven, John James, 'The Church Bells of Suffolk', Jarrold & Sons, London (1890)

# The Bellringers

## Name inscriptions in the ringing chamber

There are many names inscribed in the walls of the tower, some carefully engraved and others written in pencil. The history group have photographed and catalogued the names and where possible linked the names to other records of the bellringers at Bottisham.

The oldest engravings date back to the late 1700's and early 1800's. Some names appear a number of times with different initials showing how bellringing often spans several generations of the same family. The photographs below show some of the families we have traced across the generations.

## William J Osbourn

William Osbourn rang his first peal at Bottisham on 20th December 1958. He rang a further four peals between 1975 and 1984.

William's daughter Sheila is a current ringer at Bottisham and Sheila's Daughters Lydia and Cecilia both learned to ring at Bottisham.

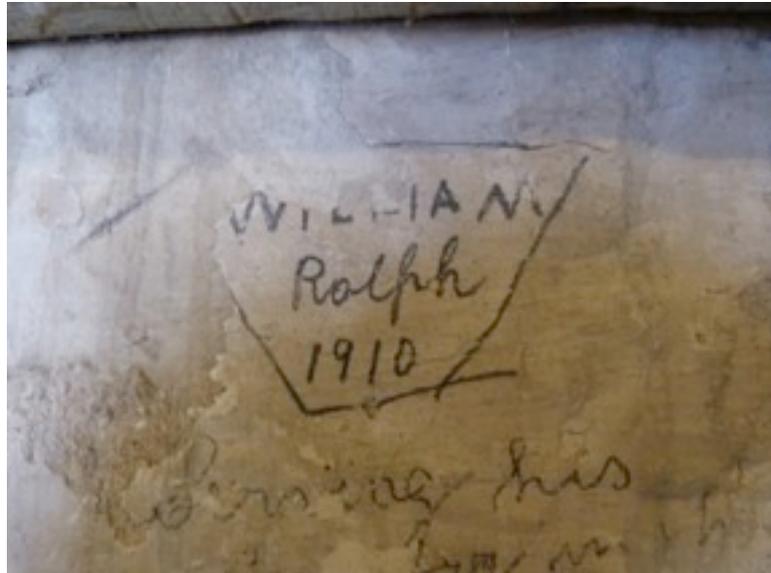
In 1987 a memorial 1/4 Peal was rung in memory of William who had been a tower captain at Bottisham and a church bellringer for 55years. Charles Osbourn who inscribed his name in the tower in 1862 is the brother of William's great grandfather.





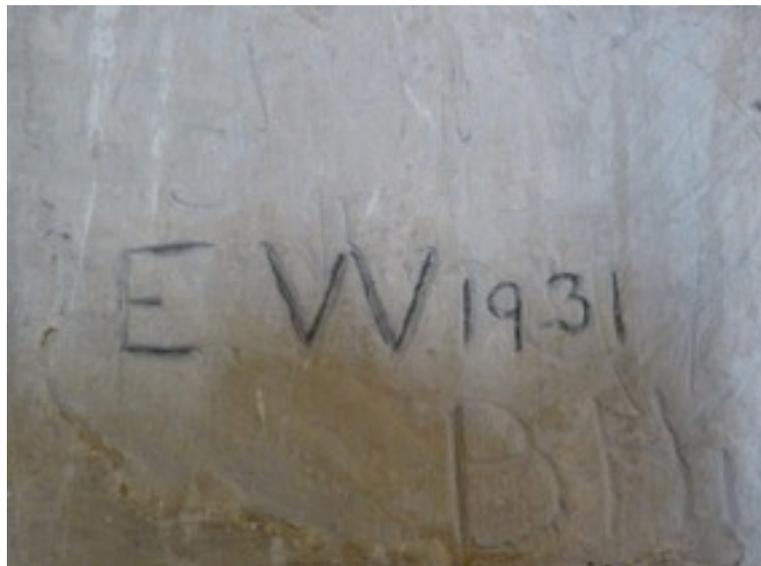
## William Rolph

William is listed as bellringer in Parish magazines between 1904 and 1912



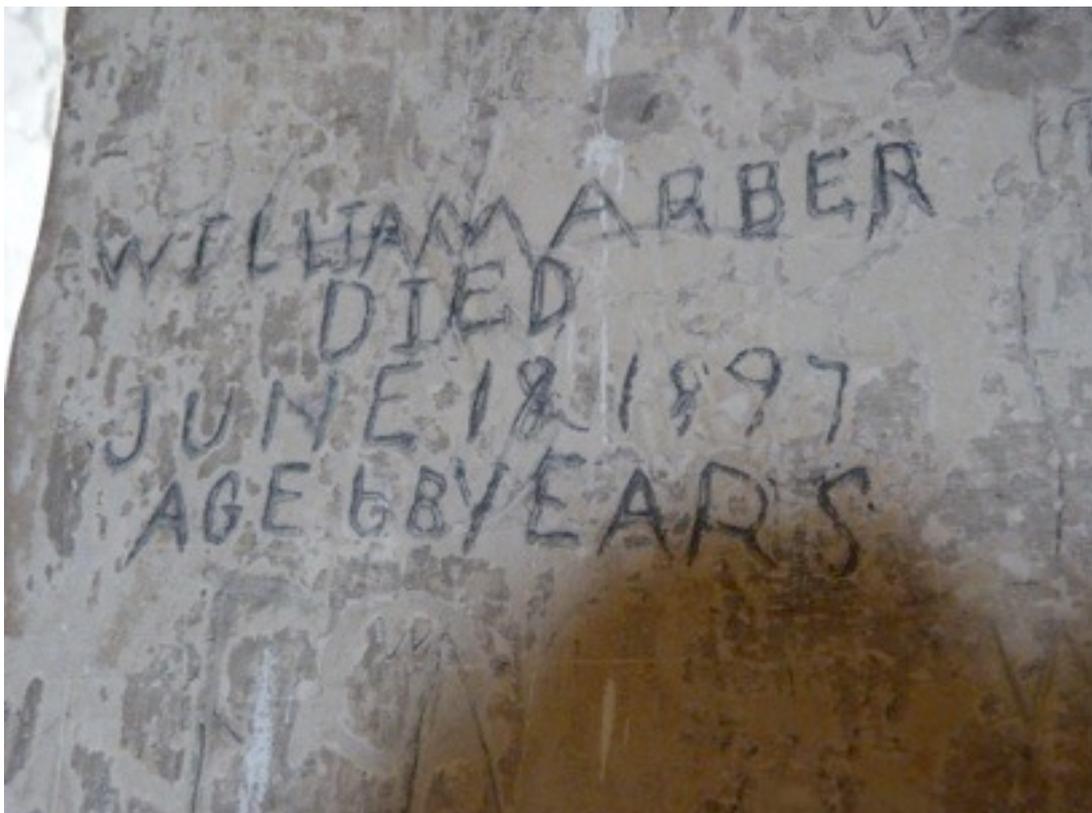
## Edmund Whiting (Eddie)

Eddie Whiting learned to ring at Bottisham in 1931. He rang a peal at Bottisham on the 16th July 1988 which was specially arranged so that he could ring a peal at the tower where he learned to ring.

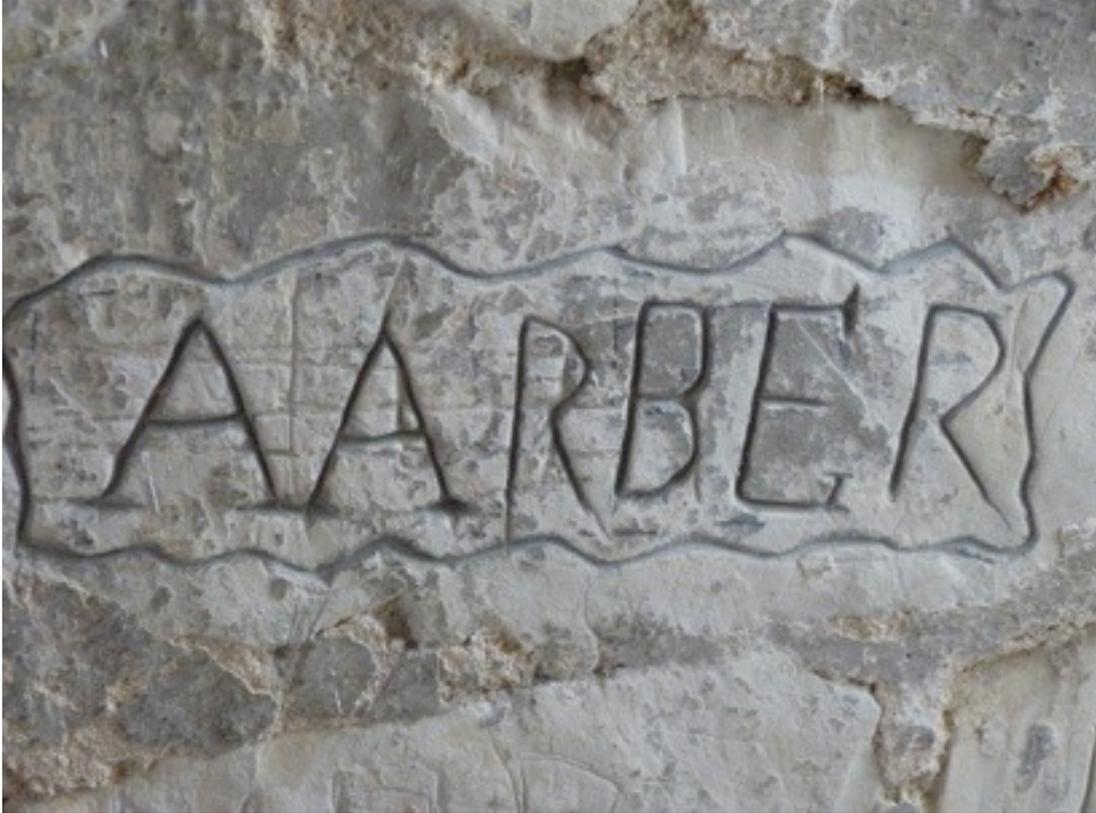


## William Arber

William Arber was born in 1829 and his death in 1897 was recorded in the ringing chamber.



His son Alfred was born in 1877 and is listed as a Bellringer in Parish Magazines of 1904-1912.



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