

GREAT MALVERN Priory)

St.Mary and St.Michael (the Priory Church or Malvern

Malvern owes the survival of the old priory church to the parishioners who bought the building from King Henry VII at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. Originally belonging to the Benedictine priory founded in about 1085, the building became the parish church of in place of the original church of St.Thomas which stood in the north west corner of the churchyard. Thus in 1539-41 the priory became the parish church of Great Malvern.

The building itself is a fine cruciform church with a Norman nave and a fifteenth century chancel, north transept and north aisle. The later work is all in the Perpendicular style. The upper stages of the central tower are also of this period and the work closely resembles that on the tower of Gloucester Cathedral which was completed in 1457. The church is also noted for its fine assembly of fifteenth-century stained glass.

The church underwent a major restoration under George Gilbert Scott (later Sir George Gilbert Scott) from 1854, one of the first tasks being to secure and repair the central tower with further work on the rest of the fabric from 1860. The later nineteenth century saw the introduction of some notable Victorian fittings, and the architect W.D. Caröe was responsible for further additions into the 1930s.

The present bells

Access to the tower is by a wooden stair at the back of St.Anne's chapel on the south side of the chancel, and thence by spiral stair from roof level to the top. The ringing room - with an enclosed area for the clock on the north - is over the crossing and the bells are in the chamber above which is at the level of the louvred belfry window openings. There is a ring of eight bells in the key of midway between E natural and E flat (the nominal of the tenor being 642.5Hz or E natural minus 44 cents) together with a semitone bell, details of which are as follows:

Bell

Inscription

1. [blank]
Waist: THE GIFT OF / EDWARD ARCHER / IN THE JUBILEE YEAR / OF THE GOOD / QUEEN VICTORIA. / 1887.
Opposite: (Taylor's circular mark)
2. PROSPERITY TO ALL OVR BENEFACTORS (*arabesque*) A : R (*bell*) 1707 (*scroll border*)
3. GOD SAVE THE QVEEN & CHVRCH (*arabesque border*) A : R (*bell*) 1706 (*scroll border*) / (*arabesque border all round*)
4. RICHARD LEETH & EDMVND GIFFORD CHVRCHWARDENS 1707 :
- 4b. ✠ V I R G E N I S (*stop*) E G R E G I E (*stop*) V O C O R (*stop*) C A
M P A N A (*stop*) M A R I E
5. J : TAYLOR & C^O.. FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH 1887.
Waist: JUBLIAT ANGLIA. / LUSTRA VICTORIA / PERAGIT AUREA. / SIT DEO GLORIA.
6. + I H (*flower*) E H (*flower*) 1611 (*flower*)
7. + AN (*flower*) SAVEG (*flower*) IOHN (*flower*) SAVEG (*flower*) I H (*flower*) E H 1611
8. IN DEO GLORIAM
Waist: VOX MALVERNIAE JUBILANTIS / DILECTISSIMAM PROPTER REGINAM / MDCCCLXXXVII.
Opposite: (Taylor's circular mark)

Founder and date	Bell	Diameter	Nominal	Mouldings	Cwt.	Qrs.	Lbs.
John Taylor & Co, 1887	1.	27 $\frac{7}{8}$	1297	2:2-2:3:2	5	0	19
Abraham Rudhall I, 1707	2.	28 $\frac{1}{2}$	1205.5	2:2-1:3:2	4	3	22
Abraham Rudhall I, 1706	3.	31	1073	2:2-1-1:3:2	5	2	16
Abraham Rudhall I, 1707	4.	32 $\frac{1}{4}$	971	2:1-2:3:2	6	1	26

John of Gloucester c.1350	4b.	34 ³ / ₄	924	1*1:1*1-1:3:1*	8	0	0*
John Taylor & Co, 1887	5.	37 ¹ / ₂	860	2:2-2:3:2	10	1	11
Unknown, 1611	6.	38 ³ / ₄	806	2:2-2:3:2	10	3	10
Unknown, 1611	7.	43 ³ / ₈	724	2:2-2:3:2	14	0	22
John Taylor & Co, 1887	8.	49 ³ / ₈	642.5	2:2-2:3:2	21	2	20

Augmented to eight in 1887 by the addition of a treble and tenor, the bells incorporate the fourth of the old ring of six (now the flat fourth) which was replaced in the octave by an entirely new bell (the fifth). This arrangement enables the old six (with a tenor of 14-0-22 in F) to be rung as an alternative to the full ring of eight (tenor 21-2-20 in E flat). Although the semitone bell was at first hung for ringing it was not until 1968 that it was repositioned to give a proper rope circle, making it easier for the alternative rings of six and eight to be used.

Of the present ring, the treble, fifth and tenor were cast by John Taylor & Co of Loughborough in 1887 – the treble and fifth having angular canons and tenor being cast with a flat top. The canons of the seventh bell had been removed or broken off before 1887, but the others all retain their canons. The canons of the three Rudhall bells (nos.2 to 4) have cabled mouldings. All the old bells in the ring have been quarter turned.

The flat fourth or semitone is a fine bell from the mediaeval Gloucester foundry. It has a well-formed inscription in neat gothic letters with a simple initial cross and a stop between each word. The letters and marks are all on individual grounds or *paterae*. This bell also has cable-patterned canons and it has been quarter turned. This bell is believed to have been cast in about 1350 by John of Gloucester.

The two remaining bells (the sixth and seventh) were cast in 1611, but the identity of the founder and place of casting (probably Worcester) have yet to be established. They are inscribed in plain Roman lettering and each have a simple initial cross and quatrefoil stop or flower. The letters N and S in the inscription of the seventh bell are reversed. There are bells with similar lettering and marks only at Bransford and Worcester St.Martin, both cast in 1621 – ten years after the two bells at the Priory.

The ringing bells in the main octave hang in a cast iron “A” frame (*Bellframes* type 8.3.C.b) with tall A-shaped castings mounted on and also braced at the top by wooden beams. The frame is supported on a double grillage of wooden beams, the sills resting on four east-west beams which sit on three larger ones spanning the tower from north to south. The frame is on a standard plan (*Bellframes* 8.3) with the tenors swinging mouth-to-mouth on the north side of the tower. Between the treble and fifth bells there is an empty pit in which the semitone bell was originally hung until it was rehung in 1968 in a new cast iron lowside frame (*Bellframes* type 8.3.A.h) mounted on top of the main frame. The bellframe has undergone strengthening at various times as described in more detail below.

The fittings of all nine ringing bells date mainly from 1887, but include ball bearings originally supplied in 1936 and were all overhauled and repaired in 1968. The fittings include elm stocks, plate gudgeons, ball bearings, traditional wheels with iron wheel stays, traditional stays and sliders, and clappers suspended from independent staples. These are mainly the work of John Taylor & Co of Loughborough, although Mears & Stainbank carried out some work in the tower – chiefly on the frame – in 1930 and 1932. There is an Ellacombe chiming apparatus (roped for eight bells only) with a manual on the south wall of the ringing room.

In addition, there is a small sanctus bell with a diameter of 13¹/₂”. It is hung for swing chiming between beams between the top of the frame by the second bell and the east wall of the tower. The fittings include a wooden stock with plate gudgeons, plain beatings and an iron chiming lever with a cranking handle outside the framework. The bell has no inscription or marks, but the dimensions and mouldings are as follows:

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Diameter</i>	<i>Tangent</i>	<i>Shoulder circumference</i>	<i>Mouldings</i>	<i>Nominal</i>	<i>Note</i>
Sanctus	13 ¹ / ₂	10	23 ³ / ₈ ”	0:3:3:1	2224	Db + 5

Its date is uncertain, although it could possibly be the “saunce bell” mentioned in the 1552 inventory. H.B. Walters saw it in 1905 and thought the bell “probably of no great antiquity”

but by the time his account of the bells was published in 1927 there was some doubt in his mind as he mentions “a note from some unknown source that it is mediaeval and has a triple beading round the shoulder resembling an ancient bell at Woolhope in Herefordshire”. Certainly the mouldings are not unlike those to be seen on a number of other bells of similar size and shape surviving at several other churches in the County. These could date from the fifteenth century as they are similar in style and quality to the group of bells thought to have been cast between 1440 and 1470 by Richard le Belyetere of Worcester.

History

There is evidence that the tower contained bells while the church was in monastic use, and the present semitone bell of c.1350 *may* be one of them. When considering the documentary material relating to bells at Great Malvern around the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, however, there is a risk of confusion between the Priory and the original parish church of St. Thomas. There is certainly a belief that the surviving mediaeval bell originally belonged to the old parish church rather than to the Priory.

Although documentary evidence for this crucial period is scarce, there are two informative if confusing references.

First, there is an account of 1541 among the records of Crown revenues from the sale of monastic property referring to the sale of lead, stone and other materials from the old priory church before its sale to the parish. This shows that the bells were among the items removed and the document records the sale of eight bells from the priory to the parish of Watton-at-Stone in Hertfordshire, realising the sum of £72.13.6. for the King.

Second, there is the Edwardian Inventory of church goods taken on 8 August 1552 which shows that there were four bells in the ring, a sanctus bell and two further bells – “iij belles in the Steple, a Saunce bell, a lytle Sacrynge bell [and] A Lyche bell” – at “Moche Malverne”. This was a survey of the goods and valuables in parish churches, but at Malvern there must be some uncertainty as to whether the commissioners were referring to those of the old Priory building or the former parish church of St. Thomas.

It is unclear exactly what happened. The first document clearly relates to the priory in 1541 while the second item refers to whichever building was viewed by the commissioners as “the parish church” in 1552. Interpretation is hampered by the fact that no precise dates are known either for the dissolution of the priory or for the formal adoption of the priory church for parochial use.

It is certainly hard to reconcile the disposal of the bells in 1541 with the fact that by then the old priory church had already passed into the ownership of the parishioners, unless (and this is certainly possible) the accounts drawn up in 1541 relate to a transaction that had taken place immediately after the dissolution and before the sale to the parish had been agreed.

It also seems open to question whether the priory would have had eight bells prior to the dissolution – unless that number included smaller bells such as sanctus and sacring bells (more commonly itemised separately) – since rings of eight were unusual at that time.

Moreover, the evidence from 1552 does little to resolve the question of what happened to the priory bells. It is known that Watton-at-Stone only had “Five bells and a Saunse” when the 1552 inventory was made nine years after the supposed sale. By that date Great Malvern still retained – or had re-acquired – four bells in the tower. These were, perhaps, the basis of the post-mediaeval ring and may have included the present semitone bell and the predecessors of three of the other bells.

The casting of two bells in 1611 represents the next stage in the history of the priory bells. One of these (the present seventh and original tenor) bears the names of Ann Savage – the owner of the former priory estate – and her eldest son John, and both bear the initials IH and EH. The initials may be those of the churchwardens of the time. The Savages must have paid for some of the work, but whether the bells were recast from previous ones or entirely new is not known.

A bond of 13 June 1636 indicates that by then there were five bells in the ring. The document refers to repairs to the fittings, and the contractor was bound to uphold his work by

warranty for a year from the time of the completion. The work undertaken by Richard Hope of Weobley included the provision of five new bell wheels. The document states:

Decimo tertio die Junii Anno RR [Regni Regis] Caroli &c xij^o [13 June 12 Charles 1636]
Whereas I Richard Hope of Webley in the County of Heriford, Carpenter, have the daie
and yeare above written received of John Forse and Thomas Reed Churchwardines of the
parishe of Much Mal[vern] in the Com. [County] of Worcester the some of Fower pounds
of currant money of England for the makeinge of five Bell wheeles for the Bells nowe in
the Steeple of the said Church and other worke in and about the Frame of the said Bells in
the Belfree or loft there, In consideration of the receipt of which the some of fower
pounds I the said Richard Hope doe here by promise agree & undertake to and with the
said John Forse and Tho: Reed as well for them selves as the rest of the parishioners of
the said parishe att my owne proper costs and charges well and sufficiently to uphold
mayntayne and keepe the said wheeles and all other the said tymberworke by mee
undertaken as aforesaid in good and sufficient repaire ... [*word ending unclear*] and
servisable for the said Church & Parishe for the space of one whole yeare next enshuyng
the date [*reading uncertain*] yeare. And soe at thend of the said yeare to yield & deliver
upp the same be sufficiently repayered as aforesaid unto the said Churchwardines or
theire successors churchwardines of the said parishe. In wittnes whereof I have
here[unto] putt my hand and seale the day & yeare first above written

Richard Hope his marke

Sealed & delivered in the presence of

Edmunde Rea Vic[ar], William Reade, John Reade

Were it not for a reference in a manuscript account of the Priory and its monuments written in 1746, it might otherwise seem safe to assume that there were five bells at the Priory from at least 1636 until the number was raised to six in 1707. Doubt is cast on this by the account written by the Rev. William Cole (1714-1782) after his visit to on 23 June 1746, when he wrote "The tower is very beautifull & stands in ye middle of ye Church between ye Nave & Choir & has Bells remaining in it: 3 others, as I was informed by ye Clerk, were sold some 50 or 60 years ago to St.Mary Overy's Church in London".

The church referred to is the building now known as Southwark Cathedral, and Cole's statement (or rather the clerk's) would imply that three bells from Great Malvern were sold to Southwark in the 1680s or 1690s. This doesn't fit at all with what is known of the history of the bells there, which were already a heavy set of eight by 1673 with a tenor weighing almost 47 cwt. They were later recast with additional metal to form the present ring of twelve in 1735, but this is surely too long after the supposed sale of the Priory bells for the Malvern bells to have been acquired with this use in mind.

It is known, however, that the tower underwent repairs in 1674. On 5 October the Churchwardens reported the church itself in good repair, but stated that "the Tower of the said Church is much crack't & rent" and having a fracture in it. Arrangements were in hand to repair it, the parishioners having agreed to contribute to the cost in due proportion. Filed with the presentments is an undated certificate, signed by the Vicar (James Badger) and Churchwardens (Ralph Snelson and John Webb" of Great Malvern reporting that "the said Tower is now by the Care of that Parrish duely repaired, & is presumed to bee well done, that it may continue in safety". There is physical evidence of this work in the tower, where massive wooden supports and iron tie-bars were put up along the east and west walls, an upright in the south east corner of the belfry carrying a carved inscription "R S / I W / 1674" - i.e. the initials of the Churchwardens who were responsible for the work, Ralph Snelson and John Webb.

The Vicar, James Badger, held the living from 1669 to 1691 when he moved to Hanley Castle. He was Vicar of Hanley Castle from 1691 to 1725 and his name as "James Badger : Minister" appears on the inscription of the tenor of the Rudhall six of 1699 there. He is known to have had an interested in changeringing and corresponded with "the Hon. Tho. Coventry" at Croome about ringing in May 1699. Whether he was a ringer when he was at Malvern is uncertain, but it is interesting to note his association with the work done in 1674.

By 1706-7 uncertainty turns to certainty as far as the Priory bells are concerned, for it was at that date that the bells became a ring of six with a tenor weighing 14cwt with three of the bells (the present second, third and fourth) being cast or recast by Abraham Rudhall I of Gloucester. It is probable that the first of these was an addition, while the others were recastings of previous bells from the existing ring of five – although the possibility that a much larger bell was recast to make smaller ones cannot be ruled out. The Rudhall catalogue issued in 1715 has an entry for “Great-Malverne (to make 6) 3” and the same entry is repeated in the later Rudhall catalogues of 1751, 1788 and 1804.

In 1854 the tower was inspected by the local architect G.C. Haddon and found to be unsafe. Haddon was unable to find a builder willing to undertake the repairs and the work was delayed for some years until George Gilbert Scott took the job in hand and engaged S. McCann – a builder from Amesbury, Wiltshire, who afterwards settled in the town – to restore it. This work was completed in November 1854 and included the rebuilding of the parapets and pinnacles and the erection of new gilded copper vanes.

Scott’s restoration of the fabric of the church followed on from the successful completion of the repairs to the tower. In 1868, however, there was an explosion in the vestry and this caused damage to other parts of the church. It was at about this date that John Taylor & Co of Loughborough carried out an inspection of the bells, and a notebook among the foundry archives includes notes from the firm’s visit. Apparently the six bells were hung in two separate frames, all swinging in the same direction in two rows of three separated by a long empty pit.

The bells remained a ring of six until 1887. They must have been in reasonable order as a band of visiting ringers performed an extent of 720 changes of Kent Treble Bob Minor on them on 18 January 1886.

The Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria’s reign in 1887 provided an opportunity for the parish to improve their existing ring. As already noted, they decided to increase the ring from six to eight by adding a treble and a tenor – rather than adding two smaller bells – and to rehang the peal with entirely new frame and fittings. At first it was intended to recast the old fourth, but this met with opposition on account of the age and significance of the bell. It was saved through the efforts of a local antiquarian, James Nott, who raised the sum of £35 to pay for a new bell and thereby avoid the need for recasting the old one. The old bell was retained for chiming. Nott’s actions brought praise in the columns of the *Bell News* from “A.H.C.” – almost certainly A.H. Cocks whose thorough account of the church bells in Buckinghamshire was subsequently published in 1896 – for having saved it.

The work was entrusted to John Taylor & Co of Loughborough who installed one of their cast iron “A” frames – a type of bellframe used from 1882 to 1890 but subsequently discontinued in favour of the more rigid and stable “H” frame – and ringing fittings. The job is marked in the firm’s books as having been completed on 19 July 1887 although the bells had been ready for use just in time to be first rung for Jubilee Day on 21 June.

Of the new bells, the first was given Edward Archer, a Malvern wine merchant and the proprietor of two of the larger hotels in the town. The others were given in memory of James Dyson-Perrins (d.1887), these being the gift of his daughter Ellen who was the wife of Dr. Harry Edward Dixey of Malvern. A few years later the Dyson-Perrins family also gave a peal of eight bells to the new church at Barmouth in North Wales where they had a second home. This is commemorated on a stone tablet on the north-west pillar of the tower in the church, inscribed:

TO THE GLORY OF GOD. / THIS TABLET / COMMEMORATES THE
THANKSGIVINGS OF THE / INHABITANTS AND OTHERS IN THE / JUBILEE
YEAR / OF / QUEEN VICTORIA. / THE BELLS / THE BELFRY THE CLOCK AND
QUARTER-CHIMES / WERE RESTORED / BY THEIR THANKOFFERINGS. / THE
NEW TENOR AND FOURTH BELLS / WERE GIVEN BY / ELLEN MARY DIXEY /
IN MEMORY OF HER FATHER, / JAMES DYSON PERRINS / DAVENHAM BANK,
MALVERN. / THE NEW TREBLE BELL WAS THE GIFT OF / EDWARD ARCHER /
LITTLEFORD LODGE, MALVERN. / AND THIS TABLET WAS GIVEN BY /
WILLIAM HAYES / NEWTOWN HOUSE, MALVERN. / MDCCCLXXXVII

According to a report in the *Bell News* the total cost of the work on the bells, clock and necessary repairs to the tower amounted to £850. The report also gives translations of the Latin inscriptions on the new bells, as follows:

<i>Bell</i>	<i>Inscription</i>
5.	'Tis England's Jubilee, Victoria's reign, a golden sum of lustre doth contain, each golden. Glory unto God be given. (Written by the Rev. C.L. Bathurst)
8.	To the glory of God. The voice of Malvern keeping Jubilee, in honour of our very beloved Queen

Following the completion of the work, the six clappers from the old ring were mounted on an oak board in the porch at the expense of Edward Archer. The board carries the following inscription "BELFRY [*stave of music with six notes in a descending scale ending in F*] OAK 1611 / THE CLAPPERS OF THE OLD RING / --- / OUR DUTY DONE IN BELFRY HIGH, / NOW VOICELESS TONGUES AT REST WE LIE / --- / PRESERVED BY EDWARD ARCHER 1887" with the date marked on the clapper of each bell. A further inscription on a small brass plate commemorated the restoration of the porch, for which Archer was also largely responsible, but this has since been moved to the opposite side of the porch. There is also a wooden seat made from timber from the old bellframe, with "BELFRY OAK 1611" carved on the top.

At first, the parish and the ringers were well pleased with the new bells and visiting bands commented favourably on them. The first full peal was accomplished on 22 October 1887 and by 1889 the local band was making good progress in the art of change-ringing. Several quarter peals were rung, a half peal was accomplished at the Priory in November 1895 and in April 1895 the Malvern ringers scored a full peal – but this was rung at Holme Lacy, near Hereford, and not on their own bells.

Not long afterwards, however, progress was halted by concerns about the safety of the tower, and from about 1895 until 1910 the bells were silent. In the gales of 24 March 1895 which caused damage to several churches in the Midlands the north-east pinnacle of the tower fell through the roof of the nave, smashing several of the stalls in the choir. This seems to have sparked fears for the safety of the structure and led to the bells being declared unringable. In a report of the installation of the new bells at Malvern Link in the *Bell News* of 15 December 1900 it was noted that "after a few years the tower was considered unsafe for ringing purposes" and although "several thousand pounds were spent on the restoration of the grand old tower" the bells had not been rung since. A survey of all the main rings of bells in the country in 1903 reported that the Tower was "reputed too weak for ringing". It was not until after the arrival of a new incumbent in 1910 that the architect – possibly F. Bligh Bond, who was certainly the Priory's consulting architect in the previous year - was persuaded to re-examine the tower with the result that, after some repairs, the bells were first rung again on the day of the funeral of King Edward VII.

Repairs to the frame were carried out by Mears & Stainbank in 1930 and 1932, with the initial outlay of £144 in 1930 being followed in 1932 by further work costing £66. This work was commissioned by W.D. Carøe, the consulting architect to the Priory. The work involved the insertion of four steel X-braces in all the east-west sections of the frame and the addition of flat-steel diagonal bracing below the sills and above the heads of the frame. Just a few years later the bells were rehung on ball bearings by John Taylor & Co in 1936.

Following the completion of the repairs to the frame in 1932 several full peals were rung on the bells between 1932 and 1953, and from 1945 until well into the 1950s the Priory maintained an active band of ringers. In the late 1950s, however, the bells again fell silent owing to renewed concerns about the installation and further problems with the tower.

The bells were made ringable again when John Taylor & Co undertook further work in 1968. It was at this date that the semitone bell was rehung in a separate lowside frame above the other bells.

The *clock* is a large three-train flatbed movement signed on the cast iron frame by "G.F. VALE / MAKER / LONDON". The setting dial is inscribed "THIS CLOCK WAS /

DESIGNED, CONSTRUCTED & MADE / BY / G.F. VALE / LONDON JAN^Y. 1858 / N^O. 3396". Vale's name is also cast on the pendulum bob. The clock has a pinwheel escapement. It has a woode-rod pendulum with a two-second beat. The going train is fitted with Harrison's maintaining power. The three trains are in separate sections, bolted together and mounted side by side - the whole clock being 92" wide, 28" deep and 21½" high to the top of the pendulum crutch. The clock is housed in an enclosed area against the north wall of the ringing room. There are no external dials, but the clock strikes the hours and Westminster quarters with the alternative possibility of sounding the Malvern chimes which were composed by William Haynes, the Priory Organist from 1850 to 1893. The clock was put up in March 1858 as a memorial to Charles Morris (b.1799-d.1856) who gave money for various amenities in the town and left £50 towards a new clock for the Priory. A report in Berrow's *Worcester Journal* of 20 March 1858 indicates that his brother and sister also contributed £100, with the remaining £150 being raised by subscription as a memorial.

This clock would seem to have replaced one supplied only a few decades earlier which is listed in a catalogue published in 1860 by the Bristol firm of Thomas Hale & Sons of Bristol. The list refers to "An eight-day Clock, 4ft. Dial, for the Parish Church of Great Malvern, Worcestershire". As the entries in the catalogue appear to be in no particular area and include clocks by several predecessor firms – notably Wasbrough Hale & Co (1829-1845) and Thomas Hale & Co (1848-1850) – the date and authorship of the Malvern clock are unclear.

Visited: CJP, 26 April 1969, CJP with David Bagley, 20 May 1993 and CJP with Heather Pickford, John Clements and David Hope, 23 August 2008: Thanks to David Hope, John Clements and David Bagley

Further work:

- Inspect the Woolhope sanctus [remove existing quotes from Walters if it is found that they simply mislead and confuse]
- Double-check with Taylor re 1936 rehanging (not sure about it)
- Parish records search for the old "Hale" clock – fine date and maker etc
- TNA – check "8 bells" in the Watton document of 1541
- Record Office – search Churchwardens presentments, check catalogue for other material
- Southwark – check to see if there are any C17th or early C18th accounts (unlikely that anyone will have previously explored this)