

# ***The Bells of***

## ***St James, Bermondsey***



## St James bells ring out

The sound of bells ringing is deeply rooted in British culture. Bells provide the grand soundtrack to our historic moments, they rejoice when we celebrate and toll in empathy with our grief. Bells ring for weddings, funerals, festivals, anniversaries - personal, local and national - and a host of other special occasions, and have done so for hundreds of years. St James has been ringing out since the time of George IV.



## The Old Bells

Ten bells were cast for Bermondsey in 1828 at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. Rumour has it that the metal came from cannon fired at the Battle of Waterloo. The bells were rehung in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Over the years the bell fittings deteriorated and by the 1970s it was only possible for the bells to be rung by experts on very special occasions.

## The New Bells

In 1990 extensive works to repair the stonework of the church, funded by the London Docklands Development Corporation, were planned. The tower would have scaffolding up to the bell-chamber. This presented the ideal opportunity to start a project to restore the bells. The free use of scaffolding was important because the organ prevented lowering the bells inside the tower, and everything had to come out and go back in through the louvres.

With help from local bellringing societies and the Diocese of Southwark's bell adviser, it was proposed that the existing ten bells be replaced with a lighter ring of eight, in a new frame.

The old bells were purchased by the Friends of St James Cathedral, Toronto, and were removed in October 1990. They now form part of a ring of twelve bells – the only one in Canada. The proceeds from the sale of the old bells plus grants and fundraising work enabled the work to begin on the new bells.

A new frame was built, and the first three bells were cast at the Whitechapel bell foundry. The frame and bells were then installed and the three new bells were rung for the first time for the 1990 Christmas Carol Service. By the end of January the next three bells had been



hung.

The final two bells were installed in November 1991. The Royal Marine Volunteer Reserve, then based in Old Jamaica Road, raised the funds to sponsor a seventh bell in memory of their former Commanding Officer, Colonel Trevor Farmer, and local hotelier Terence Driscoll came forward as a donor for an eighth bell

## The Bellringers

In February 1991 training a new band of ringers began. The bells were dedicated in June 1991, and were rung by some of the ringers who had been trained that



year. The bells have continued to be regularly rung for services, weddings and other occasions since then .

The tower is also equipped with training bells and computer simulators, which are used to teach and to practice ringing.

Bell ringing is a skill which requires coordination and mental agility, but is something people from all walks of life can learn, and at all ages – child to retiree.

When you learn you are guided through the steps required to develop the skill of 'handling' a bell – that is how to control the bell to make it sound in its right place amongst the others. After this you learn how to ring call changes (when the bells 'swap' places) and methods ('tunes').

You become part of a team or 'band' which itself is part of a much larger ringing fraternity.

If you are interested in learning to ring please contact the Church Office on 020 3643 2327 or email

[bermondsey@docklandsringers.co.uk](mailto:bermondsey@docklandsringers.co.uk)

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| Bell   | Diameter | Note | Weight  | Inscription                                                                         |
|--------|----------|------|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tenor  | 3'6½"    | F#   | 14.1.15 | This Ring Replaces the Bells<br>Cast by Thomas Mears II in 1829                     |
| 7th    | 3'2"     | G#   | 10.1.25 | In Memory of Margaret Ruth Kendall: 1902-1990                                       |
| 6th    | 2'10"    | A#   | 7.2.11  | In Memory of Peter Minet: 1908-1988                                                 |
| 5th    | 2'8½"    | B    | 6.3.19  | My Mouth Shall Speak the Praise<br>of the Lord<br>The Gift of the Liebenrood Family |
| 4th    | 2'6¼"    | C#   | 5.3.6   | Robert                                                                              |
| 3rd    | 2'4"     | D#   | 4.3.2   | Vera                                                                                |
| 2nd    | 2'2⅝"    | E#   | 4.1.10  | In Memory of Colonel Trevor<br>Farmer RD, ADC, RMR: 1942-1990                       |
| Treble | 2'2"     | F#   | 4.0.7   | Terence Driscoll                                                                    |