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SOME NOTES ON THE BELLS OF ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, GRAVESEND

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The late fifteenth-century church of St. George, Gravesend, was burnt down on the 24th August, 1727, with a large part of the town.¹ The church was rebuilt by a private act² as one of the fifty churches under the Acts of 1711 and 1712. The architect was Charles Sloane who lived in Gravesend.³ The copy of the building contract, which is in the first Gravesend Vestry Minute Book,⁴ has been printed in Philip's history of the town.⁵

The building contract was dated 22nd July, 1731, and the work was to be finished by the 29th September, 1732. There was apparently some delay because the church does not seem to have been opened until the 11th February, 1832/3, when the Rev. Thomas Harris, the rector, preached a sermon which has been published.⁶

¹ R. Pocock, *The History of the incorporated Towns and Parishes of Gravesend and Milton in the County of Kent*, 1897, 71 and R. Pierce Cruden, *The History of the Town of Gravesend in the County of Kent and the Port of London*, 1843, 398.

² 'An Act for rebuilding the Parish Church of Gravesend in the County of Kent as one of the Fifty New Churches directed to be built by Two Acts of Parliament one made in the Ninth and the other in the Tenth year of the Reign of Her late Majesty Queen Anne' 1732 Anno. 4 Geo. II.

³ For a short biography of Charles Sloane, see F.C. Elliston-Erwood, *Arch. Cant.*, lxx (1956), 209. In 1737, the west end of St. Mary's, Chatham, was rebuilt by Thos. Chambers 'in accordance with the draughts prepared by Mr. Chas. Sloane of Gravesend' (Church Wardens Minutes Chatham 1634-1914, K.A.O. Cat. M.K. P.85 addnl.) not mentioned by Elliston-Erwood.

⁴ Vestry Minutes 1711-1782, K.A.O. Gr/Z PG V 2/1.

⁵ A.J. Philip, *A History of Gravesend and its Surroundings from Prehistoric Times*, 1954, 132. (There are one or two copying errors in the printed version, e.g. 'Anthony Ireland' appears as 'Anthony Treland'.)

⁶ 'A Sermon preached on Sunday February 11 1733 in the Parish Church Gravesend', by Thomas Harris, M.A., rector of the said Church 1733, and see Pocock, *op. cit.*, 75.

Although a 'Good and Sufficient Ringing Loft . . . with Stone steps leading thereto' was provided for in the building agreement there is no mention of bells the provision of which was apparently organised by the Corporation in whose minutes the following items appear:⁷

'5th November, 1735. That in order to promote the subscription for raising a sum of money to purchase a set of bells for the Parish of Gravesend. It is agreed by this court that the Mayor or his Deputy with at least four Jurats and four Common Council men and as many more as please with the Church Wardens of both Parishes [i.e. Milton next Gravesend as well as Gravesend which together made up the old borough] and four of the Principal Watermen do attend on proper notice given by the Mayor to go from house to house to raise a voluntary subscription for carrying on the same.

'16th December, 1735. Ordered that the sum of £50 be paid by the present Chamberlain out of the Corporation money towards a set of Bells for the Parish Church of Gravesend and that the said sum of £50 be allowed him in his accounts.'

There are no further entries relating to the bells for just over a year in the Corporation Minutes but the work went forward as appears from the following minutes:

'21st December, 1736. Ordered that the Deputy Mayor Mr. Hughes and the Chamberlain be and are hereby appointed to settle accounts for the subscription of the bells lately hung in the Parish Church of Gravesend (funds being in the hands of Mr. Ireland). Also that they demand of Mr. Mann the late Mayor the contract with Messrs. Phelps and Applebee and also the Bond given to Mr. Ireland by the late Mayor relating to the Bells and the subscription.

26th April, 1737. Further ordered that Mr. John Hughes do pay into the hands of the Chamberlain sixty seven pounds eight shillings and sixpence being the balance of Mr. Ireland's account and subscription money for the bells and moneys since collected and that the Mayor do make the same sum of one hundred pounds to pay off the principal and interest money now due to Mr. Phelps and Mr. Applebee for the Bells hung in Gravesend Church and that the same be allowed him in his accounts and that the said sum of one hundred pounds be paid on or before the eleventh day of May next.

Man Clerk (*sic*)'

The Chamberlain's Accounts for 1737 record:

'Oct. 1st to Mr. Appleby in full for the bells 127:4:3'⁸ which seems to be the balance for the bells. Previous payments on account may

⁷ Council Minutes, K.A.O. Gr/AC3.

⁸ Chamberlains Accounts, K.A.O. Gr/FAC3

have been made direct by Mr. Ireland who collected the subscriptions.

The following entry appears in the Vestry Minute Book:

'30th May 1736. The Church Wardens were apprehensive that trouble might arise on account of a Peal of eight bells being hung in the Steeple without a faculty. It was ordered and agreed that the said Church Wardens and their successors be indemnified and saved harmless from all suits and suits of law on this account by the Parish upon condition that they did not take any proceedings without first calling a Vestry'.⁹

Owing to recasting the original inscriptions on the first, third and sixth bells have not been preserved but the original inscriptions on the other five seem to have been as follows:

Second: 'R Phelps fecit omn. Several Gentlemen Strangers gave this Bell 1736'

Fourth: 'The Inhabitants of Gravesend gave this Bell. Thos. Harris Rector Wm. Harrison and Henry Wootton Ch. Wardens 1736'

Fifth: 'Jno. Joynes, Wat. Nynn, Wm. Lance, Anth. Ireland, Wm. Myers, Jno. Fox, Jno. Bolger, Jno. Hughes, Ja. Roe, Geo. Clarke Trustees for the subscription money gave this bell 1736 Jno. Applebee and Richard Phelps made these eight Bells.'

Seventh: 'The Jurats gave this Bell, William Haffenden Esq. Deputy Mayor Jno. Joynes Esq. Justice 1736.'

Eighth: 'This Corporation gave £50 towards these Bells. William Man [sic] Esq Major J. Applebee R Phelps made these eight bells'.¹⁰

Although the Corporation made themselves responsible for providing the peal, different local groups as well as 'several gentlemen strangers' provided individual bells.

By 1771, the first, third and sixth bells had cracked and the following appears in the Vestry Minutes:¹¹

'13th October 1771. It was unanimously agreed that the Church Wardens be empowered to contract with Messrs. Swain and Catlin to recast the treble third and sixth bells at the sum of forty two pounds according to the proposals by them delivered in.' This was signed by nine vestrymen and is followed by this agreement:

⁹ Vestry Minutes, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Pocock, *op. cit.*, 78. John Applebee and Richard Phelps had the Whitechapel Foundry, see H.N. Walters, *Church Bells of England*, 217, and J.C.L. Stahlschmidt, *The Church Bells of Kent*, 1887, 109.

¹¹ Vestry Minutes 1753-1759, K.A.O. Gr/Z P Gv 2/3. Catlin and Swain had the Holborn Foundry, see Walters, *op. cit.*, 219; Stahlschmidt, *op. cit.*, 109.



(Photo. Kent Archives Office)
The whole Peal of Bells in the Churchyard at St. George's Church, 1923, before re-hanging (Edward Hadlow in the background).

'In Pursuance of the Order of the Parishioners of the Parish of Gravesend in Vestry Assembled the thirteenth day of October Instant. It is agreed between Robert Catlin of Shoe Lane Holborne and Thomas Swain of Longford in the County of Middlesex Bell-founders of the one part and Gaynham Rackstraw and George Thompson Church Wardens of the said Parish on behalf of themselves and the other Parishioners of the other part as follows:

First The said Robert Catlin and Thomas Swain do hereby covenant promise and agree with the said Gaynham Rackstraw and George Thompson that they the said Robert Catlin and Thomas Swain shall and will with all convenient speed take down new cast and hang up again the treble third and sixth bells belonging to the said Parish Church with new Gudgeons and Brasses to the same and a new Stock to the sixth Bell at and for the price or sum of Forty two pounds to be paid as hereafter mentioned.

Secondly That if upon new casting the said bells any additional new metal shall be found wanting it is agreed between the said Robert Catlin and Thomas Swain and George Thompson and Gaynham Rackstraw that the said George Thompson and Gaynham Rackstraw

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shall and will allow and pay to the said Robert Catlin and Thomas Swain at and after the rate of one shilling and one penny per pound for every weight of new metal that shall be added to the said bells.

Thirdly That if any old metal shall be left more than the bells take up in casting that then they the said Robert Catlin and Thomas Swain shall and will allow and pay to the said Gaynham Rackstraw and George Thompson at and after the rate of ten pence per pound for such metal as shall remain after the said bells are cast.

Fourthly That in order to ascertain the weight of metal that shall be added to or remain after casting the bells the same shall be weighted upon their being taken away and brought back.

Fifthly That the said Robert Catlin and Thomas Swain shall and will with all convenient speed new cast new hang and finish the said bells in a good and workmanlike manner and make then tunable with the rest of the Peal. *In consideration* whereof the said Gaynham Rackstraw and George Thompson do promise and agree to pay the said sum of forty two pounds to the said Robert Catlin and Thomas Swain in manner following one half thereof within one week after the bells are completely hung tried and approved of and the half part within six months afterwards in case the bells stand sound and tunable but if they do not then the said Robert Catlin and Thomas Swain are to repair and put the same in good and proper order without any expense to the said Parish.

Sixthly That the said Robert Catlin and Thomas Swain shall and will repair the wheels of the said three bells and pay and bear all expense of carrying away and bringing back and fixing the same without any expence to the said Parish and for the true Performance of this Agreement every and each of the said Parties bind themselves unto the other and others in Eighty pounds.

Witness their hands the 14th October 1771

Robt. Catlin

Thos. Swain

Witness

Gaynham Rackstraw

Wil. Harrison

Geo. Thompson

G.S. Man'

The following items appear in the Church Wardens Accounts for 1771:¹²

"Taking bells down and putting up again [? beer - : 6 : - money]

¹² Church Wardens Accounts 1771, K.A.O. Gr/ZP GC 1/1.

Paid Messrs. Swain and Catlin Bellfounders for new casting and repairing the bells as per receipt	60 : - : -
Paid Richard Noakes a bill for leather for the bells	- : - : 6
Paid Henry Sole a Bill for ironwork for the bells	2 : 17 : -
R. Noakes a new set of bell ropes	2 : - : -
John Middleton Carpenters work	- : 18 : 3'

No details appear of why a sum of £60 was paid to Messrs. Swain and Catlin instead of £42.

The inscriptions on the three bells recast in 1771 were as follows:¹³

First: 'Is. Wade Esq. Mayor Gm Rackstraw G Thompson Ch. Wardens 1771 Th. Swain Fecit.

Third: 'J. Wade Esq. Mayor Gm. Rackstraw G. Thompson Ch. Wardens 1771'

Sixth: 'James Wade Mayor Esq (sic) Gaynham Rackstraw Geore (sic) Thompson Ch. Wardens 1771 Thos. Swain Fecit.'

The treble bell was defective again in 1777 when the following minute appears:¹⁴

'3rd March 1777. That the Treble Bell be repaired in a workman-like manner by Thos. Coxon at the price of 5gns. and that half the money be paid in three months and the remainder in six months but that the said T. Coxon do sign an undertaking to keep the said bell in repair for six months.'

In the Church Wardens Account for 1777¹⁵ appears a single item, 'For mending the treble bell 5 : 5 : -.'

Nine years later on the 4th July, 1785, 'That the tenor bell be drilled.'

In 1793, the second and eighth bells had to be recast. The only entries relating to this recasting (and also to that of the third in 1813) appear in the accounts:¹⁶

'1793 Sept. 26 Paid Mr. Mears bellfounder	20 : - : -
1794 Mr. Mears Bell Founder	28 : 6 : 2½
Mr. Dalton for bell ropes	2 : 5 : 2½'

The old inscriptions on these two bells were retained with the

¹³ Pocock, *op. cit.*, 78; Stahlshmidt, *op. cit.*, 293. I have relied on Stahlshmidt where he differs from Pocock.

¹⁴ Vestry Minutes, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Church Wardens Accounts, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Church Wardens Accounts 1789-1838, K.A.O. Gr/ZPGc 1/2. Thomas Mears then had the Whitechapel Foundry.

additional words 'Recast at the charge of the parish 1793 John Tucker A.M. Rector Geo. Thompson and James Kirk Ch. Wardens.'¹⁷

The following relate to the third bell:¹⁸

1813-1814

'Waterage Portage etc. of new bell 1 : 1 : -

The ringers after repair of the bells 2 : - : -

1814-1815

Mr. Mears Bell Foundary 29 : 17 : 4

Mr. Wooden Bell hanging 31 : - : -

The inscription on the third bell then read 'Geo. Arnold Esqr. Mayor Thos. Killick John Hales Ch. Wardens T. Mears of London fecit'.¹⁹

In 1871, the fourth bell was recast by Mears and Stainbank at the personal cost of the rector Robert Joynes and the church wardens E.F. Jewell and John Paine. No reference to this appears in the Vestry Minutes, but the following item appears in the Accounts for 1871-1872 'Dec. 5 Carriage of bell - : 4 : 5.' (For the inscription see below.)

In 1879, the sixth bell was recast by Mears and Stainbank at the cost of the Mayor Frederick Beckley Nettleingham (he was also church warden) as appears from the present inscriptions. (See below)

In 1900, the treble was recast and the whole peal rehung by J. Warner and Sons, Spitalfields Foundry. According to the Parish magazine, £140 was spent and £100 was collected, but this does not appear in the accounts.

In 1902, the fifth was recast by J. Warner and Son, but there is no mention of this recasting in the accounts.

In 1923, the whole peal was recast by John Taylor and Co., of Loughborough. An appeal for funds was made, and Edward Hadlow, the Steeple Keeper, collected the subscriptions and has left an account of his activities.²¹

There were 1451 donors with amounts ranging from 2d. upwards. The Mayor and Mayoress, Councillor and Mrs. W.E. Thomas, arranged two flag days in 1922 (£55) and 1923 (£60). The Corporation voted 100 guineas to recast the tenor and there were whist-drives and

¹⁷ Stahlschmidt, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Church Wardens Accounts, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Stahlschmidt, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Church Wardens Accounts 1838-1916, K.A.O. P159/5/9.

²¹ 'Bells Restoration Fund Accounts with some notes on the Bells' by E. Hadlow the Steeple Keeper 1921-1927, K.A.O. P.159/6/10. For Loughborough Foundry see Walters, *op. cit.*, 245.

a concert and dance. Over £500 was collected by Mr. Hadlow personally through an extensive house-to-house collection and details of every subscription are given in his account. The totals are as follows:

'Subscribers	925 : 16 : 11½
Advanced from Church Funds	30 : 1 : -
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	955 : 17 : 11½
Repaid to Church Funds	12 : 10 : 1
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	943 : 17 : 10

The principal accounts were as follows:

Messrs. Taylor and Co. Bell Founders, Loughborough	771 : 17 : 6
Mr. Mannering adjusting Clock and Chimes	25 : - : -
Messrs. W.H. Archer and Son, Builders and masonry a/c	118 : 7 : 9'

The old bells were recast in the presence of Mr. Luff, a sidesman, and Ed. Hadlow on the 4th February, 1923, at the Foundry, Loughborough, Leicester. They were dedicated by the Lord Bishop of Rochester on the 30th May, 1923.

The tower was provided with a new cast-iron frame on six steel girders. Room was left for two more bells to make a peal of ten. An offer to provide these two bells was made after the 1939-45 war but, due to the threatened closure of the church in 1952, it was withdrawn.

The present inscriptions on the bells as recorded by Mr. Hadlow are as follows:

- First* 'Several gentlemen strangers gave this bell 1736. Recast at the charge of the Parish 1793 John Tucker A.M. Rector Geo Thompson and James Kirk Church Wardens Thos. Mears of London fecit Recast 1923.'
- Second* 'Cast by John Warner and Sons Ltd. London 1900. This bell was re-cast and the peal re-hung in 1900 E. Lionel Gedge Rector Wm. Fletcher J.R. Croft Church Wardens Recast 1923'
- Third* Geo. Arnold Esq., Mayor Thos. Killick John Hales Church Wardens T. Mears of London Fecit 1813 Re-cast 1923'
- Fourth* 'Mears and Stainbank Founders London Robt. Joynes Rector E.F. Jewell John Paine Church Wardens 1871.

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- Recast 1923 at the charge of George Sandford Esq. J.P. Ring out sweet memories of the past.'
- Fifth* 'Recast by John Warner and Sons Ltd. London 1902 Jno. Joynes Wat. Nynn Wm. Lance Anth. Ireland Wm. Myers Jno. Fox Jno. Bolger Jno. Hughes Ja. Roe Geo. Clarke Trustees for the subscription money gave this bell 1736 John Applebee and Richard Phelps made these eight bells. In loving memory of William Russell J.P. who died November 28th 1920 aged 78 years for 13 years a Warden of this Church. Also of Jane his Wife who died July 6th 1914 aged 67 years. Recast 1923 at the charge of George Ireland, Gertrude and William Beaumont children of the above.'
- Sixth* James Wade Mayor Esqr. Gaynham Rackstraw George Thompson Church Wardens 1771. Recast 1923 Mrs. W.E. Thomas Mayoress of Gravesend raised one hundred guineas towards this peal. Edward Hadlow a ringer of this tower collected the greater part of the subscription money. Labor omnia vincit.'
- Seventh* 'Mears and Stainbank Founders London Frederick Beckley Nettleingham Mayor gave this Bell 1879. Robert Joynes Rector James Davies James Turner Church Wardens. Recast 1923 in memory of ringers of this Tower who fell in the Great War 1914-1918 Charles Edward Constant, Walter James Crowhurst, Wilfred Randall Clarke.'
- Tenor* 'The Corporation gave £50 towards these bells. William Mann Esq., Mayor 1736. This bell was recast at the charge of the Parish in 1793 John Tucker A.M. Rector Geo. Thompson and James Kirk Church Wardens Thos Mears of London Fecit 1923. This peal was recast and re-hung in a new frame by public contribution. The Town Council subscribed the sum of one hundred guineas. William Evan Thomas Mayor; Edward Lionel Gedge Rector; William Henry Archer, James Everden Church Wardens.'

It would seem that the inscriptions on bells 1 and 2 were transposed in 1923.

It is difficult to understand why so many re-castings were necessary for the Gravesend bells. Milton-next-Gravesend still has five bells which were cast (or re-cast) in 1656.²²

²² See *The Story of Milton Parish Church S.S. Peter and Paul*, 1955, 33, and Stahlschmidt, *op. cit.*, 353.

RINGING THE BELLS

The Kentish Note Book in 1892 gives a list of the inscriptions as then existing and mentions that St. George's, Gravesend, has more peals recorded to its credit than any other church in Kent possibly owing to its being accessible by water at the end of the 'Long ferry'. It gives details of peals rung between 1742 and 1848.²³

The earliest references to ringing the bells which I have come across are in the Corporation Accounts just after the Restoration:

'1660 May 12 payed beare for the Ryngers	0 : 1 : 0
1661 Aug. 5 Pd for Ringers the same day	0 : 5 : 0
1667 Mar 18 Pd Beare for ye Ringers when ye Kings was at ye blockhouse	0 : 6 : 0'

These bells were the ones in the old church of which we have no records.

The Church Wardens Accounts start in 1711, but entries relating to ringing the bells only start in 1733 and thereafter payments for bell-ringing were regularly made out of the church rate, although from time to time special ringing days were paid for by the Corporation.

There were five 'ordinary' ringing days in the year namely, Coronation Day, Gunpowder Plot, King Charles' Restoration, the King's Birthday, and the King's Accession.

The first item that relates to the bells is on the 30th March, 1733:

'Paid Mr. Rugg the bellman	1 : 3 : 9'
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On the 2nd April, 1736, Mr. Cook was paid 5s. for a bell-rope and, in the following year, the first entries for ringing appear as follows:

'1737 Oct. 30th. Paid for ringing	- : 10 : -
Nov. 5th ditto	- : 13 : 4
1738 To the ringers for four days	2 : 15 : -'

In the following year Richard Noakes was paid 2s. 6d. for mending the tenor's stay, William Cook £2 for bell-ropes and a quart of oil for the bells cost 1s. 8d.

In 1740 the ringers were paid 13s. 4d. twice on the 13th May and once on the 11th June each time when the King went and returned from Hanover. In 1743, there is an 'item to six ringing days 4 : - : -,' in 1744 'five ringing days 3 : 6 : 8,' and thereafter this item appears fairly regularly in the church wardens accounts.

²³ (Ed.) George O. Howell *The Kentish Note Book*, 1894, ii, 322-9.

In 1746, the bells were rung on the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie by the Duke of Cumberland at Culloden 'for the Duke after gaining the Victory over the rebels'. The rector was a staunch Hanoverian as appears from a sermon he preached on 25th April, 1749, in which he describes the prince as 'a Popish bigot, an abjured Pretender and an avowed and implacable enemy of our laws and religion.'

In 1748, the bells were rung 'when peace was proclaimed.' This was the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, which brought the War of Austrian Succession to an end. The Seven Years War is represented in 1757 'When Prince Ferdinand beat the French' (Battle of Rossbach). Admiral Boscawen's 'taking of Caybritton' (Cape Breton) and General Wolfe's 'taking of Bourg Louis' (Louisburg, the capital of Cape Breton). A reference to 'a thanksgiving' in 1759 may relate to Wolfe's victory at Quebec. There was also a payment on 16th July, 1784, 'on a general thanksgiving day.'

The Corporation continued to pay for the bells occasionally in 1782 'May 19 Paid the Ringers on Rodney's Victory 15s. 6d.' This was the defeat of the French at St. Lucia when France and Spain were helping the Americans in their war of independence, which ended with the Treaty of Versailles in 1783. The Corporation also paid for the following peals at this period 1783, June 4, 'Pd the Ringers on Prince William Henry Landing 0 : 5 : 0' (but the Vestry paid 5s. on 27th July when 'Prince William Henry went to Hanover') pd 'for Ringing the Bells on the arrival of the Princess of Wales 0 : 10 : 6.' 1795/6 'Ringers on the Duke of York coming to Gravesend 2 : 2 : -' and in 1809 Aug 7th 'the Ringers on the Lord Mayor dining at Gravesend 2 : 2 : -'.

The outbreak of the war against revolutionary France in 1793 provided the Gravesend bell-ringers with a steady flow of 'extraordinary' ringing days paid for by the church wardens out of the church rate. In 1794, 'Lord Howes Victory on the 1st June' (the victory over the French Fleet off Brest on 'the glorious first of June'). 1797 has 'Success of Admiral Jervis' (Cape St. Vincent) and 'Admiral Dunkin's success' (Admiral Duncan-Camperdown). 1798, 'Ringling on the Victory of Admiral Nelson 1 : 14 : 6' (Nile). In 1801, the bells were rung on 'Oct 2nd. Paid for ringling on the news of the preliminaries of peace 1 : 1 : 6' and a similar sum was paid 'Ringers on the Illuminations on the Treaty of Peace being signed'. This was the short-lived Treaty of Amiens. War broke out again in 1803, and on the 7th November, 1805 'Paid the Ringers on the news of Lord Nelson's Victory off Trafalgar and on the illuminations on the same account 2 days 3 : 13 : 6.' This was followed in the accounts on 19th November. 'The like Sir Rd. Strachan's Victory one day 2 : 2 : -' (This was the capture of four French ships of the line which had escaped from

Trafalgar off Cape Finisterre). On the 23rd December, 'A Dumb Peal rung as Lord Nelson's Body passed by water 0 : 0 : 0'. Apparently, the ringers gave their services on this occasion. They had been paid 14s. on the 5th December on a 'Thanksgiving day'.

1806 saw 'Adml. Duckworth's Victory at St. Domingo 1 : 1 : -' (This was the surrender of the French troops to Admiral Duckworth when he was Commander-in-Chief in Jamaica). The following years contain payments to the ringers, but without any indication of what they were for and without dates. The account for 1813-14, however, contains the following items but without dates 'The Ringers on a Great Victory by Lord Wellington 1 : 1 : -'. From the next item in the account which was 'forms of prayer on a thanksgiving for the Victory at Vittoria', it would seem that this was for Vittoria, the last of the Peninsular battles. This is followed by 'Ringers for the return of Louis 18th to France 3 : - : -' 'allowances to Ringers - : 3 : -' (beer money) 'The like arrival of the Duke of Cambridge from Hanover 1 : - : -' 'The like on the arrival of the Allied Sovereigns 1 : 10 : -'. 1814-15 has payments for 'The Ringers on the proclamation of peace 3 : 11 : -' (i.e. the first meeting of the Congress of Vienna). 1815-16 continues with 'Form of Prayer Battle of Waterloo - : 8 : - Ringing for ditto 2 : 2 : -'.

The Napoleonic wars seem to have seen a considerable increase in the cost of ringing on special occasions although the regular five ringing days were still £3 : 6 : 8. and in 1815-16 'Ringing when the Royal Assent was given to the local Act' was only 13s. 6d. (probably an error for 13s. 4d.) At this time, the bells were rung by the Union of Youths, e.g. 1816 'The Union of Youths for five ringing days @ 13s. 4d. 3 : 6 : 8'. They also rang the six bells at Milton at 10s. per ringing day.

The coronation of George IV was rung 1820 'Feb 23rd Pd for Ringing on this day when the accession of his Majesty King George the 4th was proclaimed at different parts of the Corporation by Mr. J.M. Evans Town Clerk attended by J.A. Brett Esq., Mayor The Clergy Members of the Corporation Lord Darnley [he was Hereditary High-Steward of the Corporation under the Charter] Lord Clifton [his son] Officers and privates of the Cobham Yeoman Cavalry several Club Societies and all the boys belonging to the Charity Schools 2 : 12 : 6.'

This did not prevent the church wardens ringing the bells for Queen Caroline:

'1820, May 6th Ringing on the arrival of Queen	1 : 1 : -
Ringing on Qn Caroline Victry	
Ho of Lords	1 : 1 : -

Ditto on illuminations

1 : 1 : -'

Arising out of this the vestry on the 6th September has the following minute: 'Resolved unanimously that the thanks of this meeting be given to the Church Wardens for the very Loyal *affectionate* and due respect *manifest by them* on the death of our *late* injured Queen *and that this* resolution be transcribed and sent to each Church Warden signed by the Vestry Clerk. Will^m Smith Chairman.' (The words in italics are inserted in a different coloured ink in the Rough Minute Book of this year.) This did not prevent the following items appearing. In 1821, '24th Sept. Ringing on his Majesty passing through the Town 2 : 4 : 9'. '14th Dec, Ringing on his Majesty's return 1 : 1 : -' 1822-23, 'Paid for ringing hoisting colours etc. on His Majesty King George passing through the Town by water on his way to Scotland 2 : 14 : 2.' This was when he went to Scotland and Sir Walter Scott acted as Master of Ceremonies and the 'honours of Scotland' were produced.

The ringers were paid £2 2s. for William IV's Coronation in 1830 and 5s. was paid for tolling the bell 'for the late King William' in 1837. In the same year, £3 was paid for 'Extra Ringing the Princess Victoria's birthday etc.' This seems a high figure and may have covered something else. The ringers were paid £2 2s. again for Victoria's coronation and £1 s. on her marriage in 1839. The same amount was paid on the birth of the Princess Royal in 1840 and the Prince of Wales in 1841. Thereafter the births of the royal children appear as 'Ringers on the birth of a Princess 1 : 1 : -' (Alice) 'Ringers on the birth of a Prince 1 : 1 : -' (Alfred).

Local events such as mayor making, Earl of Darnley at church, bishop's confirmation, which took place at Gravesend every few years all called for extra ringing. Milton Parish paid half the cost on confirmations and on one occasion '1805 June 4 Paid the Ringers from Northfleet £1 - 1 - 0 allowances 4s. 2d. 1 : 5 : 2'. Perhaps the Gravesend ringers were on strike, but it seems unlikely! There were peals when the bishop opened the new burial ground, now Woodville Gardens, in 1789 and the present cemetery in 1838.

Opening the new pier in 1834 and the first election under the Municipal Corporation Act 1835 were rung at 13s. 4d. each. 'Ringers for the Bishop consecrating new Church' 21st August, 1845' (Holy Trinity Milton next Gravesend), and 'Ringers for the Bishop consecrating St. James' 11th June, 1852, each cost £1 : 1 : -' as did 'Ringers laying foundation stone at New Church' on 24th July, 1850 (St. James). For some unexplained reason the ringers were paid £1 s. for ringing on Easter Monday in 1849 and again for ringing at Easter in 1850.

After 1850, the payments to the ringers disappear except on isolated occasions. This may have been due to the loss of the church rate. In 1850, an Anti Church Rate Society was formed in Gravesend which printed hand-bills and held meetings and, in 1854, it managed to pack the vestry meeting, which was an open one, and prevented the rate from being levied. The last compulsory rate produced £306 19s. 5d. net in 1853/54. In 1855/56, a voluntary rate only produced £23 and there was a financial crisis in the church whilst it reorganised itself on a voluntary basis. Payments for the bells ceased except on special occasions such as the bishop's confirmations. For a number of years, the bells could not be rung due to lack of ringers. In April 1892, at the request of the rector, the Rev. J.H. Haslem, a Bell Ringers Association was formed to ring the bells on a voluntary basis.

From time to time, the vestry made regulations as to the use of the bells. At a vestry held on 1st February, 1740 '... We do further order and agree that when the Great Bell of this Parish shall be rung for any person to pay for the Ringing of the same sum of Two Shillings and Six Pence to the Church Wardens for the time being exclusive of the Sexton's demands and no other Bell than the small bell to be rung.' Items for 'Bell money' appear regularly in the accounts.

19th April, 1791, 'That the custom which formerly prevailed in the said Parish of paying for the bells upon a funeral (but which has now been for some time discontinued) be now revived. Ordered that from and after Easter no larger bell than the 6th shall be suffered to be tolled on the death or funeral of any person dying within the Parish of Gravesend unless 2s. 6d. be first paid to the Church Wardens (Persons outside the Parish 2s. for the small bells 4s. for either of the larger ones).'

On the 6th January, 1777, Jas. Price was elected sexton - 'Ordered he do ring a Bell at 8 o'clock every evening from Michaelmas to Lady Day and on Sundays and Sermon Days at 8 o'clock in the morning.' Although this seems to have been included as part of his work at a salary of £4 per annum in 1784 there appears 'Paid Price for chiming the bells 9s. 6d.'²⁴

In 1823, on Tuesday the 11th March, Robert Pocock records in his diary 'A man playing or chiming on the bells of Gravesend Church many pleasant tunes as Oh dear what can the matter be &.&.&.' The

²⁴ The items relating to ringing the bells are from chamberlain's accounts of the corporation, the church wardens accounts, and the vestry minutes now all at the K.A.O. and most of which are cited above.

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mode he took was to tie tight all the bell ropes near him in a circle and pushing from the ropes very quickly made the bells strike.'²⁵

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In concluding these notes on the provision and use of the bells at Gravesend, I should like to express my thanks to Mr. Nigel Yates, M.A., F.R.Hist.S., and his staff at the Kent Archives Office where the records are now stored for making them available to me, and to Mr. Peter Willis and the staff at the Kent County Library at Gravesend for material under their control. Also in the past the late Mr. George Tatchel when much of the material was still at the church and he acted as honorary custodian and did much to preserve the records and the church.

²⁵ G.M. Arnold, *Robert Pocock, The Gravesend Historian, Naturalist, Antiquarian, Botanist and Printer*, 1883, 175.

