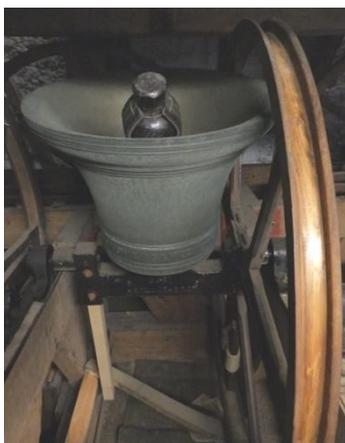




Bell Ringing at St Nicholas' Thames Ditton

The tradition of bell ringing at St Nicholas' Thames Ditton dates back to at least 1552, when the first mention of bells was written in an inventory of church goods. However the current tower and steeple with 6 bells dates back to 1753. Apart from being recast in 1962, and then rehung in new frames in 1981, the bells are as they have been for over 260 years with a history of calling worshipers to church, tolling monarchs' deaths and celebrating weddings, coronations and military victories etc.

That tradition is now under threat through a lack of ringers in the parish. Currently the bells are only rung with the support of ringers from other parishes. Ringers are now spread so thinly that we can no longer be sure to be able to ring for weddings etc, especially if other churches need ringers at the same time. The only way to be sure to continue the tradition is to recruit enough new ringers from within the parish. In the hope of attracting some interest, the following is a description of bell ringing.

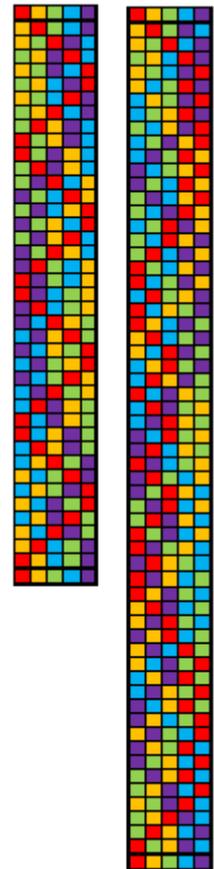


The way our bells are rung, full circle, is uniquely British, and is only found outside the UK in a few other churches with British colonial history. Elsewhere bells are rung in a cacophony of sound, as bells of different sizes ring at different speeds. The full circle method allows control over the speed and timing of ringing, within limits. Bells are rung full circle from the up position (shown in the picture), bringing it to the balance, and then back the other way and up to balance again. By bringing a bell to balance, the ringer can change the speed of ringing, allowing the order that the bells are rung to be changed.

Bell ringing is a skill and requires ringers to work together as a team. Each ringer controls one bell. Initially the bells are rung in 'rounds', when the bells are rung in order of increasing size with precise timing to give a regular interval between strikes. Good ringing should follow the pattern: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, [pause], 1, 2... The first 6 strikes are the 'hand stroke' strikes and the second 6 strikes are the 'back stroke' strikes. A pause of the length of one strike is necessary to maintain rhythm, especially when the order in which the bells are rung changes. When rung like this, the speed and separation between bells is

constant, and the same bell rings every sixth strike. To change the order, two bells will swap places, so the bell moving towards the front will ring exactly 5/6 of the time interval between strikes, and the bell moving backwards will ring exactly 7/6 of the time interval between strikes. When rung well, the order of the bells will change but the timing between any two strikes should remain constant.

There are a number of ‘methods’ that can be learnt which define the pattern of ‘changes’ to mix the bells up and bring them back in order again. This is called ‘change ringing’ (not campanology, which relates to hand bells). Each ringer will learn the pattern and adjust the timing of their ringing to follow the pattern. Nicely struck ringing can be a joy to listen to. The coloured patterns to the right represent two different 5-bell methods: ‘St Nicholas’ on the left and ‘Stedman’ on the right. Each colour represents a bell, red to purple as bells 1 to 5, and you can see that the patterns start and finish in rounds. You can also see that bells only ever change one place at a time, which is the limit of what is possible. Most methods have the ‘treble’ (bell #1) following a regular course (eg the red bell in the St Nicholas method), and this bell is used by the other ringers to keep track of where they are in the method. The position when you ‘pass the treble’ is the pointer. In some methods eg Stedman, all bells follow the same pattern (albeit from different starting positions), and this is called a ‘principle’.



Ringers control their timing in a number of ways eg listening, rope sight, counting places, depending on the ringer. At the end of ringing, the bells are generally rung down, for safety, as this is when the bell is stable.

We are hoping to be able to run some training in ringing soon, so if you would be interested in learning how to ring, please contact Giles André via the St Nicholas Parish Office. Ringers need to be sufficiently tall and heavy to handle a bell, and follow safety instructions, so as a general rule, age 11 is about the youngest suitable age for a ringer.

Bell Details			
#1	2' 0½"	3cwt 1qtr 0lbs	(165kg)
#2	2' 1½"	3cwt 1qtr 6lbs	(168kg)
#3	2' 3½"	4cwt 0qtr 5lbs	(206kg)
#4	2' 5"	4cwt 3qtr 3lbs	(243kg)
#5	2' 7¾"	5cwt 3qtr 19lbs	(301kg)
#6	2' 11½"	8cwt 0qtr 2lbs	(408kg)

