

The bells of Saint Martin of Tours, Exminster, Devon

In the tower there are eight bells which are in the key of E flat. The largest bell, the tenor, weighs just over 17 hundredweight, which is roughly the weight of an average family car. Five of the bells, namely the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and tenor were all cast in 1758 by the famous local bellfounder, Thomas Bilbie junior of Cullompton, Devon. In 1855 a further bell (the third in the present peal) was cast by Mears of London, making the ring into a peal of six. In 1877 the fifth bell was removed from the tower, melted down and recast by Blews of Birmingham, presumably as a result of a fault within the original casting.

These six bells were removed from the tower in 1924 and transported to the workshop of John Taylor & Co., the famous bellfounders situated in Loughborough, Leicestershire. There the bells were cleaned, re-tuned and quarter turned. The bells returned to the church with new fittings and were reinstalled in a new cast iron 'H' section frame, where provision had been made for two further bells to be added. The task of removing the bells from the tower and eventual replacement, as well as the work undertaken in the foundry, was entirely carried out by Taylor's workforce. To facilitate removal of the bells from the tower the South window of the Bell-chamber was removed.

In 1948 two new treble bells were added making the peal into a ring of 8. These two bells were donated by Alderman John Baker a local farmer who farmed at the lower end of the village, near the Royal Oak. Inscriptions on the bells convey that they were donated in memory of his parents. The bells were cast and installed by Taylor's of Loughborough and dedicated on 4th June 1948.

Inscriptions on the bells.

Treble

William John Baker 1876-1946
In grateful memory
Taylor Loughborough 1948

Second

Constance Mary Baker 1883-1947
In grateful memory
Taylor Loughborough 1948

Third

C & G Mears, Founders: London. 1855
John Philip Hugo, Vicar
James Baker : John Soper : Churchwardens 1845

Fourth

T.B. Fecit
W : C : H : C : Wardens

Fifth

Recast, William Blews and Sons
Birmingham 1877
Thomas Bilbie Jnr. Cullompton. Cast us all.

Sixth

William Coombes Gent and Henry Chown
Churchwardens
1758

Seventh

Mr. W. M. Churchill, Vicar
William Coombes Gent and Henry Chown Jnr. Churchwardens
Thomas Bilbie Jnr., Fecit 1758

Tenor

The honourable Sir William Courtney Barn.
John Hippisley Cox, Esq., Hugh Downman Esq.
William Coombes Gent and Henry Chown, Churchwardens.
Religion, death and pleasure causes me to ring.
Thomas Bilbie Jnr. Fecit 1758