



The Church Bells of Hurstpierpoint

John Norris

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Introduction

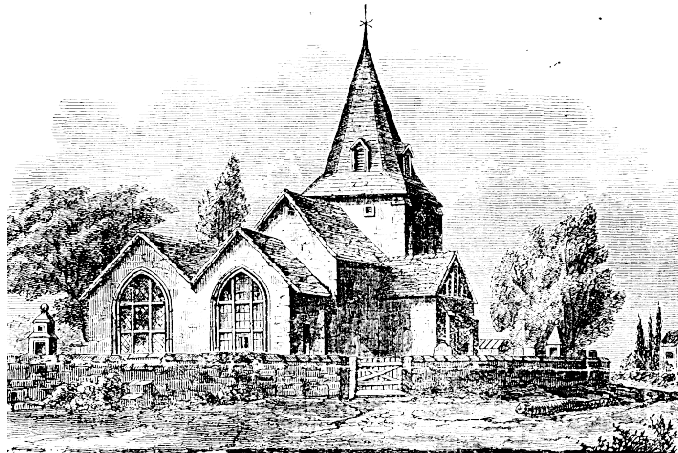
Recorded merely as *Herst* in the Domesday Book, Hurstpierpoint derives its suffix from its Norman ‘lords of the manor’, who also gave their name to Holme Pierrepont in Nottinghamshire. The Domesday account mentions a church. Dedicated to St Lawrence, this was largely rebuilt in the 15th century but razed to the ground in 1843 to be replaced by the present building designed by Mr. (later Sir) Charles Barry and dedicated to the Holy Trinity.

An agreement sanctioning the rebuilding in 1843 was made between the Churchwardens and William John Campion, lord of the manor with proprietorial rights over part of the church, Nathaniel Borrer, patron of the living, and Carey H. Borrer, rector. It provided that Campion and the two Borrers would rebuild the church, using the donations raised by public appeal, plus £1700 raised as a loan on the Church Rate, and they themselves bearing any shortfall on the estimated cost of £7,500. One stipulation was that they “... shall and will take down the Bells and Parish Clock and carefully preserve the same and shall and will replace and properly fix and hang the said Bells and Clock in the new Tower of the said Church so to be erected” In the event, the old clock did not survive and only three of the six bells from the old church became part of the ring of eight in the new church. Two of the old bells survive in the ring to this day.

Hurst also had a second Church of England church. This was built in 1852 by Charles Smith Hannington in the grounds of his house – St George’s, from which it took its name. Originally a private chapel St George’s was licensed for Church of England worship in 1867. C.S. Hannington’s son James ministered here before being called to missionary work in Africa. Consecrated First Bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa in 1884, James was murdered on the shores of Lake Victoria in 1885 on the orders of King Mwanga.

(St George’s church was declared redundant in 2008 and the last service was held there on Sunday 26th October. It is now a private residence)

History



When bells were first hung in the old church of St Lawrence is no longer known. In the surrounding parishes there were pre-Reformation bells at Clayton, Preston and Poynings, and bells of about 1530 at Keymer and Twineham, so it would seem likely that the church of Hurstpierpoint would also have possessed a bell or bells from an early date. However, unlike some parishes, there are no bequests to the church bells of Hurst in the records of Sussex wills up to 1560, which suggests that if there were bells at Hurst at that time they were not held in very high esteem.

The first definite evidence is in 1685. The surviving Churchwardens' Accounts begin in that year and one of the first entries is "For a set of Bell Ropes 19s 6d" (approaching £200 in 2024 values). Another early entry is a payment of 3/- in July 1685 to the ringers for ringing in thanksgiving for the defeat of the Duke of Monmouth at the battle of Sedgemoor. Thereafter, frequent entries for ropes, minor repairs and "oyle for the bels" occur, together with entries for payment for ringing on special occasions such as "Gave ye Ringers on Gunpowder Treson 5s". In 1686 William Nicholas was paid £1.1.0 for "mending ye Bells", which suggests that the bells were far from new in 1685. Nicholas is mentioned several times in the accounts including payment for "winding up the clock and chimes" in 1708 – proof that a clock and chimes were present at that time.

By 1717 more than minor repairs were needed for Thomas Marchant wrote in his diary for March 5th, "I met Mr. Whitpaine at the Church to consult about mending a bell". Evidently this was a fruitless meeting for Bishop Bowyer's Visitation of 1724 records "six bells, one a little cracked". However, periodic entries in the accounts for bell ropes and other ringing items show that ringing continued.

In 1775 six new bells were provided by Messrs. Pack & Chapman of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. The new ring was in the key of A-major, the tenor weighing about 9cwt. The bells were hung by Robert Turner from the foundry, possibly in the existing frame as Pack & Chapman's bill makes no mention of a new frame though £10.0.3 in the accounts paid to local man George Buckwell may be relevant. Two of the new bells, the fifth and tenor, were considered unsatisfactory. There are two references in the bell account to payments of 3d for "a letter from the Bell men" – possibly a payment for drafting letters to be sent to the foundry? – as well as: "Spent on the men from Cuckfeld that come to know the fault of the bells 2s" and "paid Mr. Wilson 19s 6d".

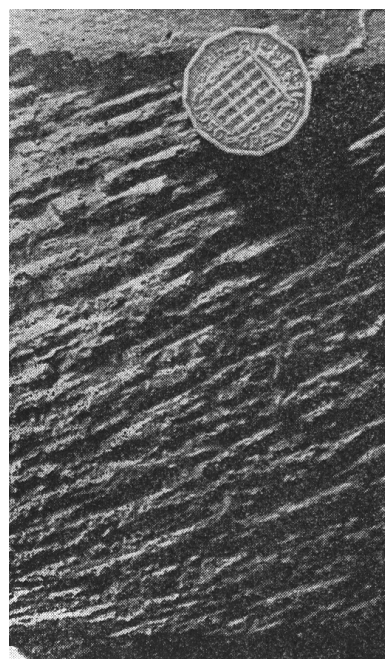
From the surviving letters from Wm. Chapman to Wm. Borrer, Churchwarden, it seems clear that Chapman's intention was, to quote his own words, "to give full satisfaction". However, before the Parish was satisfied, Chapman had to write letters promising to cast two new bells in place of those complained of, to pay for the carriage of the defective bells to the foundry and of the new bells to the parish, and to do the bellhanging, all at his own expense. He also promised to sign a deed guaranteeing his work for a year.

Finally, in 1784 when the two new bells had been cast, Chapman requested the Parish to "appoint some Person to come and try them before they go out of the foundry . . . have no objection to any Person you Please to appoint Except Mr. Willson"! The mysterious Mr. Wilson was probably James Wilson, a Cuckfield ringer of some note, who took part in the 11,088 Plain Bob Major rung at St Nicolas, Brighton in 1799. He had evidently previously visited the foundry on the Parish's behalf, making himself thoroughly objectionable to Mr. Chapman in the process. On his final letter Chapman's signature was very shaky and it is sad to record that he died of consumption only a few months afterwards, aged 52. One hopes his death was not hastened by Mr. Wilson and the demands of the Parish. The new tenor weighed 9cwt 1qr 15lb. (476kg) and the final total cost of the six bells was £110.

In 1843 the church of St Lawrence was demolished. At that time the bells were probably still in use as there was an active band of ringers in 1832 and it was recorded of Stephen Pierce when he died in 1906 that he had rung for the coronations of George IV (1821), William IV (1831) and Victoria (1838). However, the clock and chimes had long been out of order. Horsfield (*History of Sussex*, 1835) wrote "More than 50 years ago, the bells (six in number) were recast, at which period there was a set of chimes

which played well, but getting out of order, and being neglected, they have been for many years silent.” and William Hamper wrote c.1830 “... a substantial tower containing six bells, a clock and a set of chimes (but this last harmonious musician, through age and infirmity, is now silent) ... ”

Of the ring of six bells in the old church, three – the treble, 2nd and 4th, were retained to become the 2nd, 3rd and 5th bells in the ring of eight in the new church. The notes of these bells were originally F#, E and C# and to fit these into the new octave in the key of G it would have been necessary to flatten the C# to C. This would have done by removing metal from inside the bell, using hammer and chisel or a special chisel-headed hammer. This ‘chip-tuning’, now long since superseded by tuning on a vertical lathe, was the normal method of the time and five of the bells still show evidence of its use.



chip tuning around the inside of the 4th bell. ('threepenny bit' dia. is 21mm across the flats.)

Rev ^d C. H. Borrel, Hurstpierpoint					
To ⁴ Church Bells to complete					
2. Peal of 8 - Treble	3. 3. 11	}			
4 th	4. 3. 10				
6 th	6. 2. 10				
x. R. R. 7 th	7. 1. 10				
8 th	8. 0. 2	}			
	13. 0. 2				
2. Pair Bells	20. 1. 5	}	140	~	~
2. Pair Graces					
2. Clappers					
1. Bell in exchange for Old Tenor	8. 3. 17		10	~	~
By Old Tenor	9. 1. 14	}	150	~	~

extract from the Whitechapel Day Book

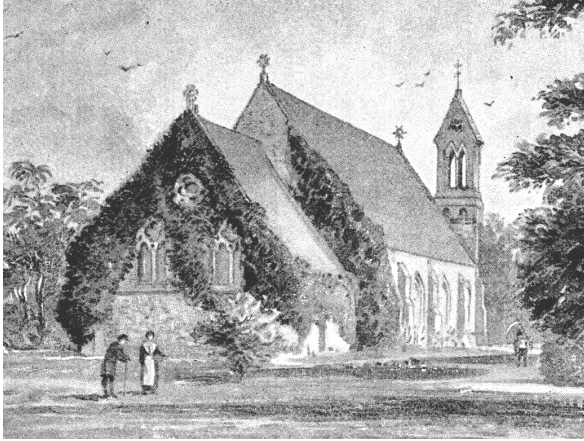
The remaining three bells from the old church were discarded. Nathaniel Borrel noted in his diary that two of these, the 4th and 5th, were cracked and a Vestry Meeting on 25 March 1846 voted £7.10s towards the cost of recasting the 5th. Evidently the cracked bells were scrapped locally rather than being sent back to the foundry for re-casting, or as bell metal in part exchange for new bells, as the Whitechapel Day Book shows that only the old tenor was returned.

To complete the new octave in 1846, five bells were supplied by C. & G. Mears of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, the tenor weighing 13cwt 2lb. Four of these bells, the treble, 4th, 6th and tenor, were cast especially for Hurst with Latin inscriptions chosen by the Rector. The other bell, described by Nathaniel Borrer as “a bad seventh” bore only the founders details and was apparently a stock bell provided in exchange for the tenor from the old ring of six. The invoice for the bells, bearing-brasses, gudgeons and clappers amounted to £150. The foundry neither made the bell-frame nor did any of the hanging. The frame, an oak “brace and double jack brace” W-type, bears the inscription M. Harmes and it is likely that he was responsible for the work. Michael Harmes was, however, one of the local ringers and the inscription, which appears elsewhere in the tower, may have been just exhibitionism.



*Michael Harmes' name,
inscribed on the bell frame.*

Of the new bells the Parish evidently contributed to the tenor at least, since the inscription on it runs, when translated: “The generous people of Hurstpierpoint caused me to be made”. The inscription on the treble bell was “Deo Cari Nihilo Carent” which may be translated: The beloved of God lack nothing. It was possibly the personal motto of the Rector, Carey Hampton Borrer, since it appears on the shield surmounting his memorial in the South Transept. This bell was replaced in 1868 by a new treble cast by Robert Stainbank at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. Possibly the Rector contributed to the cost of the new bell (£31.5s plus £1.1s for the clapper) for it bore his initials C.H.B. It also bore the motto “Robore et Labore” (By strength and endeavour), which appears on the hatchment of his father, Nathaniel Borrer, which hangs over the entrance arch at the west end of the north aisle. The reason for replacing the treble isn’t known but presumably it was out of tune with its neighbours. It was evidently fine as a single bell and, instead of being sent back to the foundry, was transferred to St George’s church, which had no bell. It is an interesting speculation that its removal to St George’s may have been connected with the licensing of St George’s for Church of England worship in 1867 following a reconciliation between Mr. Borrer and Mr. Hannington. Whether the bell was actually hung in the turret at St George’s – which hardly looks fit for the purpose – isn’t known. Certainly the turret was in need of repair by 1928, for it was then “Resolved that the replacement of the bell turret at St George’s be postponed for the present”. It was eventually dismantled c.1952. The bell itself was sent back to Whitechapel as scrap in 1953, the value of £42 being put towards the cost of rehangng the bells at Holy Trinity in that year.



*St George's church c.1870
showing the bell turret*

From 1868 the bells rang merrily on until 1901, when the fifth cracked. This might have been expected since it must have been weakened by the considerable removal of metal necessary when it was tuned down from C# to C. It was recast by Thomas Blackbourn of Salisbury and all the bells rehung. Blackbourn was very critical of the bell frame, writing of it: "This is very lightly constructed and when the whole peal are in

motion must oscillate tremendously, which does incalculable harm to the masonry. It should be well and carefully strengthened by means of long vertical bolts and angle plates. I do not like the principle of construction or the way it is fixed in the tower." He also criticised the main supporting beams but concluded that they could not be altered successfully.

Part of the problem with the frame was that when it was installed in Charles Barry's decidedly mean tower in 1846 the corner joints had to be omitted or cut away. Blackbourn's remedial work with vertical tie bolts and angle plates went a long way to overcome the defects. The other problem – poor support for the frame itself – had to wait another fifty years for correction.



*Blackbourn
tie bolt*



*Blackbourn angle bracket
compensating for missing
corner joint.*

A long period without major problems followed

but in 1944, perhaps because of neglect during the wartime ban on ringing which was finally lifted in that year, a problem with the 'go' of the 7th bell resulted in the headstock being sent to the Whitechapel Foundry for new gudgeons and bearings to be fitted. Reinstallation in the tower was carried out by a local building firm under the direction of the church architect. This work enabled the bells

to be rung for the centenary of the church in 1945. More extensive remedial work was planned, out of funds raised as part of the centenary celebrations, but other work on the church took priority. The 7th subsequently cracked. According to anecdotal evidence, when it was rehung in 1944 the bell was turned so that the clapper struck the inside of the soundbow at the point where the clock hammer had previously struck on the outside.

The impending coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 concentrated minds once more. On 23 March, Messrs. Gillett & Johnston's quotation of £692, less 5% for prompt payment, for recasting the 7th bell and rehanging all the bells with new bearings in the existing frame was accepted. The quotation also included for the installation of two RSJs beneath the bell frame to provide better support. Michael Howard was the founder of the new bell.



*RSJ by Gillett & Johnston.
(Original timber brace
visible left background)*

The following month an appeal was launched by a committee representing almost every interest in the village. (One of the fund-raising events was a concert of church music in the Hurstpierpoint College chapel. The author of this booklet was then a treble in the college choir. Little did he know that this indirect involvement with bell ringing was to be but a prelude to more than sixty years of actual ringing!) By June 2nd the bells had been rehung in time to ring on Coronation Day and by mid July £641 had been raised and the appeal closed. This was a great achievement and was probably the best that could be hoped for at that time of postwar austerity and in the face of many other appeals, both local and national. However, for the record it may be noted that better value for money could have been achieved if more money had been available. For only £315 more than Gillett & Johnston's quotation, John Taylor & Co's bell foundry at Loughborough would have provided a brand new cast iron bell frame. For a further £356 they would have recast the bells into a new peal, of greatly superior tone to the present bells. However, this was not to be and thanks to Thomas Blackburn's tie bolts and angle plates in 1901 and Gillett & Johnston's RSJs in 1953, the frame continues to function satisfactorily, while remaining a cause for future concern.

Whilst the frame has received no significant attention since 1953, other areas have. In 1959 the 'Ellacombe' chiming apparatus by John Warner,

which had been out of action for some years, was overhauled by Taylor's, the work being done by their bell hanger, Arthur Fidler. Later in the year the tenor gudgeon pins were replaced by Taylor's after one of them cracked. This was thought to have been the result of an incident a few months earlier when the clapper had flown out, chipping the rim of the bell and, it was later surmised, briefly jamming and checking the bell in its swing.

In 1964 (5.55a.m.14th October) the tower was struck by lightning. The bells were undamaged but there was considerable masonry damage to the turret enclosing the spiral staircase to the ringing chamber. The new exterior stonework and interior brickwork are still discernible. There was also a little masonry damage in the bell chamber. Ringing was suspended while repairs were carried out and resumed on Christmas Eve.

In 1971 the tenor clapper snapped. It snapped again in 1973 and was repaired by the Whitechapel foundry with a new stem and a resilient bush at the top end. When the clapper failed yet again, in 1976, it was replaced by a new one. Later in the year all the other clappers were fitted with new top ends and 'Tufnol' bushes by Whitechapel.

In 1986 all the bells were rehung on cast iron headstocks by Eayre & Smith Ltd. The canons were removed from the seven bells that had them – conventional canons on all the Whitechapel bells and the short 'Doncaster pattern' on Thomas Blackburn's bell. The new headstocks were equipped with 'twiddle pins' to allow odd-struckness to be corrected. New wheels were provided for the treble and 2nd and new shrouds and soles were fitted to the other wheels. A new clapper and crown staple were provided for the



The 5th bell with new headstock, new stay and modified wheel.

treble. The worn wooden ceiling bosses for the ropes were replaced by new bosses of cast iron. The total cost was £6450. Members of the band reduced this by £2220, by providing accommodation, meals and assistance in the tower, and also raised £1250 towards the remaining cost.

No major work has been required since that time though the influence of modern training aids has seen the introduction of an electronic simulator in 1994, the gift of Raymond Overy, and a dumbbell in 2003, the gift of local retired teacher Joyce Chapman in memory of her friend Irene Gendall 1905-2002, former Headmistress of Morpeth High School. A further dumbbell in

2016, the bequest of former tower captain Dennis Elliott, allows 10 bell ringing to be practised using the simulator

As can be seen, the bells are a rather mixed lot, being the work of five different founders and three different foundries. However, although only mediocre in tone, they fit well together, reminding us of the inscription on the fourth “Ecce Quam Bonum Et Quam Iucundum Habitare Fratres In Unum” (Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity).

The Sanctus Bell

Apart from the ring of eight bells, a sanctus bell hangs in a small bellcote over the east end of the chancel. Lacking any obvious musical merit, this bell bears the inscription.

C & G MEARS FECERUNT LONDONI MDCCCXLIII
OMNIA TEMPUS HABENT
(Everything has its season)

School Bells

Finally for completeness mention may be made of the school bells of Hurstpierpoint, the sounds of which will be familiar to many village residents.

At St Lawrence CE Primary School, the school bell was hung in May 1998 in memory of Stan Brown, for 21 years a Governor of the school. The bell, recycled from the church of the Good Shepherd, Shoreham Beach, was the gift of the Sussex County Association of Change Ringers and money for the bell tower was raised by Sussex ringers.

At St John's College there are two bells. The school bell, in a small turret facing the outer quadrangle, bears the inscription J. WARNER & SONS LONDON 1858. The note is G#. Unusually it is hung for full circle ringing, though it lacks stay and slider. The chapel bell, which hangs dead and is chimed by a levered clapper, is inscribed GILLET & JOHNSTON CROYDON ENGLAND 1933.

THE BELLS OF HURSTPIERPOINT PARISH CHURCH

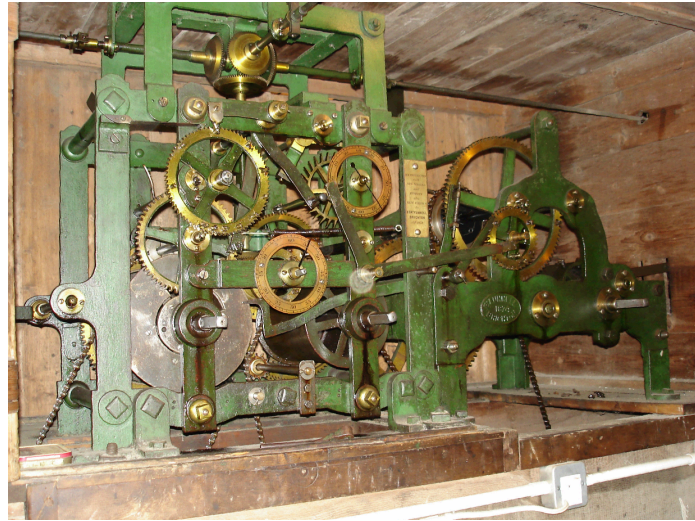
Bell	Note	Inscription	Weight	
			Cwt Qrs Lb	kg
Treble	G	DEO CARI NIHILO CARENT VENITE EXULTEMUS DOMINO GLORIA TIBI TRINITAS C AND G MEARS LONDON 1846 <i>Transferred to St George's church, Hurstpierpoint in 1868</i>	4 (approx.)	
Treble	G	ROBERT STAINBANK FOUNDER, LONDON "ROBORE ET LABORE" C.H.B 1868	4. 1. 6	219
2	F#	I MEAN TO MAKE IT UNDERSTOOD THAT THO' I'M LITTLE YET I'M GOOD PACK & CHAPMAN OF LONDON FECIT 1775	4. 2. 1.	229
3	E	IF YOU HAVE A JUDICIOUS EAR YOU'LL OWN MY VOICE IS SWEET & CLEAR PACK & CHAPMAN OF LONDON FECIT 1775	4. 3. 17	249
4	D	ECCE QUAM BONUM ET QUAM IUCUNDUM HABITARE FRATRES IN UNUM C AND G MEARS LONDON 1846 <i>(Behold how good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity: Psalm 133 v.1)</i>	4. 3. 2	242
5	C	YE PEOPLE ALL WHO HEAR US RING BE FAITHFULL TO YOUR GOD & KING PACK & CHAPMAN OF LONDON FECIT 1775 RECAST BY THOMAS BLACKBOURN SALISBURY AD 1901	5. 2. 12	285

continued:-

Bell	Note	Inscription	Weight	
			Cwt Qrs Lb	kg
6	B	ADHAEREAT LINGUA MEA FAUCIBUS MEIS SI NON MEMINERO TUI C AND G MEARS LONDON 1846 <i>(Let my tongue cling to my throat If I do not remember thee: Psalm 137 v.6)</i>	6. 2. 0	330
7	A	CORONATION 2 JUNE 1953 “LONG LIVE OUR QUEEN” C & G MEARS FOUNDERS LONDON RECAST BY GILLETT & JOHNSTON CROYDON	8. 2. 22	442
Tenor	G	DOMINUS MORTIFICAT ET VIVIFICAT DEDUCIT AD INFERNOS ET REDUCIT <i>(The Lord dispenses life and death He casts down to the depths and raises up again: I Samuel 2, v.6)</i> GENEROSI DE HURSTPIERPOINT ME FIERI FECERUNT C AND G MEARS LONDON 1846 <i>(The generous people of Hurstpierpoint caused me to be made)</i>	12. 3. 6	650

Note: The note of the tenor, nominally G, is actually closer to F#.
(A=440Hz)

The Clock



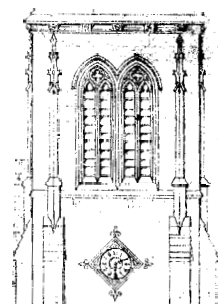
Despite the provision in the rebuilding agreement that the parish clock from the old church should be preserved and installed in the new church it was decided instead to have a new clock. This was made by the eminent London clockmaker B.L. Vulliamy. Employing a movement with a dead beat escapement in a cast iron ‘plate and spacer’ frame, the design was typical of the mid 19th century but if less regard had been paid to fame and more to the mechanism a better clock might have been obtained. As it was, the new clock had no quarter chimes and although it was not a bad timepiece Nathaniel Borrer felt moved to comment in his diary “The clock was made by Vulliamy, a famous man but not a very good clock”.

There were also practical problems with its installation as it was decided that the planned position in the tower was too low. It would actually have made negligible difference to the view from the east, and little from the north, but from the field path to the west the view from a distance would have been obscured by buildings. It is no



as built

doubt only coincidence that this is the path Nathaniel Borrer would have taken if walking across the fields to the church from his home at Pakyns? Vulliamy wrote “I have seen Mr. Barry and he will make a design for the Dials supposing them raised as high as it is practicable to get them ...”. Evidently two attempts were necessary, for the clock room walls have two sets of blocked holes. The plug in the lower



as intended

hole on the north side of the tower is visible from the outside, a few feet below the dial.

The Vestry Minutes reflect both the strength of personality of the Rector and the way in which the decision to rebuild the church had split opinion in the village (Hurst is a very easy village to split). A meeting on 25th March 1847 under the chairmanship of Mr. William Ellis voted 11 to 3 against the proposal to spend up to £20 from the Church Rate towards a new clock. Perhaps the meeting felt 'safe' as the clock had by then already been erected and in use for several months but, barely a fortnight after the first resolution, a meeting on 6th April under the chairmanship of the Rector voted to overturn the rejection and approve the original proposal.

The clock was overhauled in 1874, by or for Edward Funnell of Brighton, and quarter chimes added in a separate frame.

In 1980 the clock was converted to automatic electric winding, on the Huygens endless chain principle. The author of this booklet well remembers the 'good old days' when he stood in for the clockwinder, Mr. Pacey, while the latter took a rare week's holiday in the 1960s.

The clock hammers, cranks and operating wires were overhauled in 1987. The escapement was overhauled in 2023.

***Description of the clock by H. C. Butterfield & Co., Church & Turret
Clockmakers:***

The movement consists of Three Trains, Going, Striking, and Quarters respectively.

The Going train is constructed to drive the hands of 3 Dials 4ft 6 ins approximately in diameter. These Dials are of Slate, with the Chapters in minutes & hours engraved therein, The figure Four is denoted by IV not IIII. The minute hand is 26 inches in length and the hour hand 17½ inches in length. Both are balanced interiorly. The minute hand is held in position with a nut that has a fanciful design representing a laughing Sun, 10½ in diameter. The hands are of an ornamental design and made of Copper, stiffened at the back.

The Going Train has an Escapement known as the Dead Beat and a Two seconds pendulum beating 1800 Vibrations in an hour.

The rod is of well seasoned Wood and has a cast iron lenticular shape Bob, with the words Vulliamy London cast thereon, and comes through the

ceiling of the Ringing room, enclosed in a wooden case. The striking is governed by a Locking plate & strikes the hours on the Tenor Bell, 13 cwt 2 lbs.

The Quarters are struck 4 Blows at the $\frac{1}{4}$ past, 8 Blows at the $\frac{1}{2}$ hour and 12 Blows at the $\frac{1}{4}$ to, 16 Blows at the hour, followed by the releasing of the Striking Train.

An Inscription plate on the clock B.L.Vulliamy Clockmaker to the Queen, London, No. 1492, A.D. 1846. Reconstructed with new wheels and pinions, also new chimes Edward Funnell Brighton A.D. 1874 (Ante). This work may have been done by a Turret clockmaker to Funnell's order.

Benjamin Lewis Vulliamy 68 Pall Mall London an eminent maker 1810-1854 was born in 1780, died January 1854. The Turret Clocks at Windsor Castle, old Post Office, St Martins le Grand, London, Christ Church Oxford, the Queen's stables, Buckingham Palace, St George's Church Ramsgate, St Martin's in the Fields and an extra Dial, hands etc. Hampton Court Palace, are among the public Timekeepers by him.

It was originally intended that the Vulliamy of that period should make the clock for Westminster, but Edmund Becket afterwards Lord Grimthorpe had another maker in view.

Sept. 1943 H.C.Butterfield

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Letters from Wm. Chapman, WSRO 400/4/2-10.

Correspondence re church clock, WSRO 400/4/17-26.

Correspondence with Thomas Blackburn, WSRO 400/4/60.

List of ringers at King Edward VII's funeral, 1910, WSRO 400/7/31.

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Over the Hills and Far Away – a Hurstpierpoint Soldier of Wellington's Army (The story of Richard Davey ...), Peter Berresford Ellis.

The Ringers

In the ringing chamber a small stone tablet in the wall commemorates Thomas Betts, who died 5th October 1829, aged 74. The burial register records that he was buried on the north side of the belfry and it is possible that his memorial is in the belfry just because of the clause in the rebuilding agreement that stipulated that monuments, tombstones, tablets and inscriptions were to be preserved and replaced “in the same relative situation or as near thereto as the alterations ... will permit”. However, similar burials – like Susannah Brown who was buried “a little south of the New Belfrey window” on 9 Jan 1833 – have no tablet in the belfry and it is tempting to think that Thomas Betts was a ringer, the earliest at Hurst we know by name. Certainly there was an active band of ringers a hundred years before Thomas Bett’s time as John Treep in his will, dated 15th May 1729, remembered them:

“I give unto six good ringers belonging to the parish of Hurstpierpoint 10/- for ring a good peall with the bells belonging to the said Parish Church, at least one hour long; so soon as my body is buried in the earth, my will is that the 10/- as soon as the peall is over should be spent on liquor for them to drink together in a good and sober manner.”



By 1832 we have more definite information for in that year Michael Harmes, himself a ringer, painted the rhyme that still hangs in the ringing chamber (at close quarters his signature can just be made out near the right hand corner).

We know a little about one or two of these people. Thomas Rook was a fellmonger (a dealer in skins). Michael and Edward Harmes were sons of James Harmes who farmed at Wanbarrow. Edward was at one time the village postman. Michael was clearly a skilled carpenter and signwriter but this may not have been his main occupation. Nearly a century earlier another Michael Harmes at Bolney had been a generous benefactor of the bells there; perhaps there was a family connection.

The parish registers include many members of the Pierce and Wicks families but it isn't certain which were the ringers, though Henry Pierce may have been the Henry Pierce who married Sarah Bishop in 1826 and John Wicks may have been the John Wicks, lawyer, who died in 1846, aged 69. Thomas Cripps was probably the Thomas Cripps who married Jane Garton in 1804 and George was probably the George Cripps who married Sarah Tully in 1792. Of Richard Davey a great deal is known. Born on 20 November 1799, the eldest son of Richard and Mary Davey, he enlisted at the age of fifteen and from 1811 to 1816 fought in Wellington's army during the Peninsular Campaign. In 1816 Staff Sergeant Davey was discharged from the army with a pension of 2s. a day and returned to his native village to begin a second career as Parish Clerk and Sexton. In due time his grandson William Bartholomew Davey and his great grandson Frank Davey, who founded the undertaking firm that still bears his name, also became ringers. Both were in the band that rang for the funeral of King Edward VII in May 1910. With them was gardener Henry Sayers who had taken part in the first local peal in 1890 and who died in 1912 aged 85, having been a ringer for over 50 years. However his record of service was easily eclipsed by Stephen Pierce. One of the ringers noted in Michael Harmes' rhyme in 1832, Stephen died in 1906 and was buried on 5th January, aged 94. *Bell News* (the ringing newspaper of the time, forerunner to *The Ringing World*) reported on 20th January that "Stephen Pierce, the oldest bellringer in England, has just died at Hurst, Sussex. He rang at the coronations of George IV [1821], William IV [1831], and Queen Victoria [1838]."

Although the first peal on the new bells (Grandsire Triples) was rung in 1848 it wasn't until 1890 that the first peal by the local ringers was rung. This was Grandsire Doubles, presumably with 7,6,8 cover as the peal board shows 8 ringers. Despite Thomas Blackbourn's criticism of the design of the bell frame five peals were rung in 1900, the year before he strengthened the frame and recast the 5th. To date (Feb. 2024) 99 peals have been rung on the bells, including 29 of Stedman Triples, for many years the most popular



Ringers Jolly, c.1900

*Rev. T?, D.Davey, ?, W. Stenning, T. Mansbridge, A. Davey?, H. Richardson, ?, A. Fuller?
W.B. Davey, ?, A. Gander, ? .*

method. Several of the local band were keen peal ringers, at Hurst and elsewhere, in the period up to the second world war. These included William Stenning, Jack Feist, Ernest Bish, George Lucas and Jack Dearlove. Charles Diplock, the local blacksmith, rang just one and so had the edge on his fellow ringer Harry Richardson who rang for over sixty years, until into his 90s, but never scored a peal.

By the mid 1950s the pre-war band was ageing but kept things going with a few newcomers and a succession of intermittent youngsters, some recruited by Guy Saunders, the popular curate. However, the foundations of the modern band were laid by the 'Brown Twins', Harry and Stan, who moved to the village in 1958 and took over as joint captains in 1959. Under them and their successors the band reached ringing heights not seen since the 1930s. The first post-war peal was rung in 1966, and there have been peals in many years since. Local ringers have taken part in many of these.

Hurst was one of the first towers to join the Sussex County Association of Change Ringers when it was founded in 1885. Over the years Hurst has provided a number of association officers including Peter Hurcombe, who was Master in the Association's centenary year, 1985, having previously served as master from 1978 to 1981. Hurst has also numbered amongst its ranks ringers who have been elected to membership of the prestigious ancient societies – The Ancient Society of College Youths (founded 1637)

and the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths (founded 1747). The earliest 'College Youth' in Hurst was the Rev. J.T. Fowler, elected in 1867 when he was chaplain and precentor at Hurstpierpoint College.



1927 – Left to right:

Standing Chas. Diplock, John Feist, Ernest Dancy, Geo. Mansbridge, John Woolgar, Harry Richardson, James Jennings.

Sitting Geo. Masters, Thos. Mansbridge, The Revd. C. R. Harding, William Stenning, Geo. Lucas.

Tower Captains since the war

-1959	George Mansbridge
1959-1969	Harry & Stan Brown (Joint Captains)
1969-1975	John Norris
1975-1977	Harry Brown
1977-1979	Peter Hurcombe
1979-1980	Justin Nelson
1980-1986	Stan Brown
1986-1992	Peter Hurcombe
1992-1994	Dennis Elliott
1994-1995	Frances Gilbert
1995-2001	Dennis Elliott
2001-2005	John Norris
2005-2009	Sue Elrick
2009-2011	Dennis Elliott
2011-2014	Sue Elrick
2014-2019	John Norris
2019-2022	William Stafford
2022-	Sue Elrick & John Norris (Joint Captains)

Peals rung at Hurst

Feb. 3rd 1848	Grandsire Triples	May 24th 1922	Stedman Triples
July 23th 1881	Grandsire Triples	Aug. 16th 1922	Cambridge Surprise Major
Feb. 6th 1884	Grandsire Triples	Sep. 20th 1922	Plain Bob Major
Dec. 20th 1888	Stedman Triples	Jun. 26th 1923	Stedman Triples
Jan. 23rd 1890	Grandsire Doubles	Oct. 17th 1923	Stedman Triples
Nov. 23rd 1894	Superlative S. Major	Aug. 13th 1924	Stedman Triples
Dec. 6th 1898	Norfolk S. Major	Feb. 18th 1925	Superlative Surprise Major
Feb 18th 1899	London S. Major	Aug. 3rd 1927	Stedman Triples
Jan. 27th 1900	Stedman Triples	May 23rd 1928	Stedman Triples
Mar. 17th 1900	Grandsire Triples	Aug. 8th 1928	Stedman Triples
May 5th 1900	London S. Major	Jan. 23rd 1929	Stedman Triples
Dec. 1st 1900	London S. Major	Aug. 7th 1929	Superlative Surprise Major
Dec. 18th 1900	Stedman Triples	Jun. 4th 1930	Stedman Triples
Dec 27th 1901	Superlative S. Major	Nov. 19th 1930	Cambridge Surprise Major
Jan 29th 1903	Grandsire Triples	Aug. 5th 1931	Stedman Triples
Sep. 24th 1903	Stedman Triples	Aug. 22nd 1931	Grandsire Triples
Nov. 9th 1904	London S. Major	Jan. 21st 1948	Cambridge Surprise Major
Oct. 26th 1905	London S. Major	Oct. 20th 1948	Double Norwich C.B. Major
Nov. 15th 1905	Grandsire Triples	Nov. 6th 1966	Plain Bob Major
Mar. 20th 1907	Grandsire Triples	Sep. 27th 1969	Plain Bob Major
Nov. 18th 1907	Grandsire Triples	Nov. 20th 1972	Cambridge Surprise Major
Sep. 5th 1908	Kent Treble Bob Major	Nov. 14th 1973	Yorkshire Surprise Major
May. 15th 1909	Kent Treble Bob Major	Mar. 1st 1975	Yorkshire Surprise Major
May. 19th 1909	Grandsire Triples	Oct. 25th 1975	Plain Bob Major
Aug. 4th 1909	Stedman Triples	May 29th 1976	Plain Bob Triples
Sep. 6th 1909	Stedman Triples	Jun. 7th 1977	Cambridge Surprise Major
Nov. 6th 1909	Double Norwich C.B. Major	Mar. 2nd 1978	Yorkshire Surprise Major
July 16th 1910	Stedman Triples	Sep. 15th 1979	Yorkshire Surprise Major
Aug. 18th 1910	Stedman Triples	Jun. 23rd 1982	Grandsire Triples
Sep. 21st 1910	Stedman Triples	Oct. 29th 1985	Cambridge Surprise Major
May 24th 1911	Grandsire Triples	Dec. 6th 1986	Grandsire Triples
Jun. 5th 1911	Stedman Triples	Aug. 13th 1988	Yorkshire Surprise Major
Nov. 1st 1911	Grandsire Triples	Sep. 11th 1997	Grandsire Triples
Apr. 8th 1912	Grandsire Triples	May. 16th 1998	Holbeach Surprise Major
May 27th 1912	Grandsire Triples	Jun. 19th 1999	Rutland Surprise Major
Jul. 17th 1912	Stedman Triples	Apr. 5th 2001	Superlative Surprise Major
Dec. 18th 1912	Stedman Triples	Mar. 29th 2003	Yorkshire Surprise Major
Mar. 12th 1913	Double Norwich C.B. Major	Apr. 26th 2004	Stedman Triples
Jul. 30th 1913	Stedman Triples	Oct. 21st 2005	Grandsire Triples
May 13th 1914	Superlative S. Major	Jan. 27th 2007	Yorkshire Surprise Major
Aug. 13th 1919	Stedman Triples	Nov. 15th 2009	Spliced Surprise Major (8m)
Nov. 19th 1919	Grandsire Triples	Mar. 31st 2009	Plain Bob Major
May 19th 1920	Plain Bob Major	Oct. 5th 2010	Yass Surprise Major
Jun. 23rd 1920	Stedman Triples	Apr. 27th 2013	Hurstpierpoint Delight Major
Aug. 4th 1920	Superlative S. Major	Jul. 20th 2013	Bognor Beach Sand Castle Delight Major
May 11th 1921	Stedman Triples	May 15th 2015	Plain Bob Triples
Jun. 29th 1921	Cambridge Surprise Major	Nov. 3rd 2017	London Surprise Major
Aug. 3rd 1921	Stedman Triples	Oct. 25th 2018	Plain Bob Major
Sep. 28th 1921	Stedman Triples	Sept. 7th 2019	Yorkshire Surprise Major
Dec. 26th 1921	Stedman Triples		

Note for non-ringers: Broadly speaking a peal comprises 5000 or more changes beginning and ending in 'Rounds' (ringing down the scale) and taking about 3 hours to ring.

Holy Trinity Church, Hurstpierpoint.

🌿 BELFRY RULES. 🌿

1. That this Society be called "The Hurst Branch of the Sussex County Association of Change Ringers," and shall contribute 2s. per Member per year to the said Association from the funds of this Branch.
2. That the Members shall be persons of good moral character, who have been confirmed, who attend the services of the Church, and shall not exceed 14 in number.
3. Probationers shall attend Practices for not less than six months, and shall not be elected Members until they can ring the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th bell through 336 Changes of Triples; ringers who have already qualified as above, may be elected Members after one month's probation.
4. Candidates for election shall be proposed and seconded by two Members, approved by the Rector, and elected by the Members, after their names have been posted for two weeks in the Belfry. Two black balls to exclude.
5. That the Annual Meeting shall be held on the Second Thursday in January, at which the accounts for the past year shall be presented by the Treasurer, and all Subscriptions and Fines shall be divided among the Members; Probationers may receive such amounts as the Members may apportion.
6. That the following officers shall be appointed at the Annual Meeting: Captain, Secretary, Treasurer, and Steeple Keeper. The Rector shall be *ex officio* President.
7. That every Member shall contribute 3d. per week to the Common Fund, a fine of 3d. for absence, and of 1d. for late attendance at practice or ringing, unless prevented by illness or other unavoidable cause.
8. That any Member whose conduct may bring discredit upon the Branch shall cease to be a Member on the decision of the majority of the Members, and may forfeit all claim to any share in the funds.
9. That Practices shall be held every Thursday evening, from October 1st to May 1st, at 7 o'clock; the bells shall be rung on ordinary Sundays for half-an-hour at least before Morning and Evening Service; and on Easter Day, Ascension Day, Whitsun Day, Trinity Sunday, Christmas, and King's Birthday as may be arranged.
10. That every Member shall attend 10 Sunday Ringings and 8 Practices each Quarter, unless prevented by illness, in default of which such Member shall cease to belong to the Branch.
11. That Payments for Weddings, Funerals, and other occasions shall be divided among the Members present on the occasion.
12. That Christmas Boxes shall be collected, the amounts entered in a book, and the total divided among the Members in accordance with Rule 5.
13. That no person shall be admitted to the Belfry, except Members and Probationers, unless by permission of the Captain.
14. That a printed copy of these Rules shall be given to each new Member upon election.
15. That no alteration shall be made in these Rules except at a General Meeting, and after Fourteen Days' written notice of the proposed alteration has been given to the Secretary.

October 1901.

E.S.R.O.
PAR 400/11/4