THE CHURCH OF
ST. GEORGE THE MARTYR
BOROUGH
SOUTHWARK
A LEVEL 3 RECORD OF THE BELL FRAME

Compiled by Dr John C.Eisel FSA.

December 2011
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A Level 3 record of the bell frame

TEXT AND LAYOUT
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December 2011
1. Introduction

In this report is contained a Level 3 record of the bell frame at the church of St. George the Martyr, Borough, Southwark. It was compiled by Dr. J.C. Eisel, after site visits on 7 and 12 May 2010, when he was assisted by Mrs. M. Eisel. Information from the initial appraisal of the bell frame is integrated within this record.

The text in blue is the additional text for Level 3, not included in Level 2.

2. Outline history of the church

Although not mentioned in Domesday book in 1086, by 1122 there was a church on the site, the advowson of which was presented in that year to the Abbey of Bermondsey. It remained in the possession of Bermondsey Abbey until the Reformation, at which time the St. George’s rectory was surrendered to Henry VIII and the presentation to the living has since remained in the gift of the Crown. This early church was rebuilt in the late fourteenth century, but little, if anything survives, of any building earlier than the present, except two inscribed stones in the clock room of the tower, one of which is inscribed ‘Edwardus d[ominus] de Hasting / me fieri fecit / anno dni mil / esimo CCC / XXX – VIII’ i.e. 1438. It is conjectured that this may have come from a chantry chapel, a supposition supported by the inscription on the second stone. Sir Edward Hastings died early in 1438, most of his later years being spent in prison close to this church.

By the early seventeenth century the building was in a poor state. Repairs were carried out to the fabric in 1629, recorded in an inscription in a window listing subscriptions to the repairs to the fabric, which stated that ‘the Church, Steeple and Gallery, was repaired and new pewed and beautified,…’ In 1652 the church was repaved and the windows repaired, and it was again ‘new pewed and beautified’ in 1715 and 1716, as recorded by another inscription over a door under the organ loft. A description of the church was given in Aubrey’s book The Natural History and Antiquities of Surrey, published in 1719, his survey of Surrey, which began in July 1672, being updated and published by the Rev. Dr. Richard Rawlinson:
‘The Pillars, Arches, and Windows are modern Gothick, and the whole Pile is large and spacious, as appears by these Dimensions following: Length to the Rails of the Altar 69 Foot, Breadth 60, Heighth about 35, and the Heighth of the Tower and Turret (in which are eight Bells) is about 98 Foot.’

It is clear that Rawlinson updated Aubrey’s material on St. George’s, as it is stated that the incumbent was then the Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Hough, to whom the living had been presented in 1717, and so cannot be relied on as evidence that there was an earlier ring of eight bells. The inscription recording the work in 1715 and 1716 was also given.

In 1733 a fine oil painting of Southwark Fair in 1732 was created by William Hogarth—now in the Cincinnati Art Museum—and subsequently an engraving was issued that is a mirror image of the original painting. In the background can be seen what is thought to be the tower of St. George the Martyr, Southwark, and this has on the top a cupola—the turret referred to above—containing a single bell with wheel, and on the side of the tower there is a diamond-shaped clock face, with what appears to be a single hand (although this may be a misinterpretation as the clock face is partly obscured).

The engraving entitled Southwark Fair, a mirror image of Hogarth’s painting of 1733.

The work carried out in 1715 and 1716 must have been only superficial, and in 1732, when an Act was applied for to rebuild the church, part of the preamble stated that it was ‘dangerous to the Inhabitants of the Parish to attend the Worship of God therein…’
A grant of £6,000 was made from the funds of the Commissioners for the Building of Fifty New Churches towards rebuilding the church in brick, and the Bill received the Royal Assent on 21 March 1733, reported in the Daily Courant of Thursday 22 March 1733 (issue 5289):

Yesterday his Majesty went with the usual State to the House of Peers, attended by the Right Hon. the Earl of Scarborough, Master of the Horfe, and the Earl of Selkirk, one of the Lords of the Bedchamber in Waiting; his Majesty being drest in his Royal Robes, and seated on the Throne, was pleased to give, the Royal Assent to the following Bills, viz.

A Bill for punishing Mutiny and Defection;
A Bill for granting the Importation and Exportation of Diamonds Duty free.
A Bill for the Inrollment of Deeds and Wills made by Papists.
A Bill for making the River Dun navigable.
A Bill for rebuilding the Parish Church of St. George the Martyr in Southwark.
A Bill for obviating a Doubt in the English Law Bill.
The Oath Bill,
And to several other Private Bills.

This day their Majesties and all the Royal Family, accompanied by several Persons of Distinction, will dine at Richmond, and return to St. James's in the Evening.

The work was the responsibility of trustees, and one notice of their work appeared in the Daily Journal of Saturday 26 May 1733 (issue 3872):
The design for the new church was by John Price, the foundation stone was laid on St. George’s Day, 1734 and the main part of the structure was completed the following year. Because the grant was inadequate to furnish the church as well as build it, a church rate was levied to cover the extra cost, and the new church was opened in 1736.

The position of the church makes it vulnerable to outside factors, and the building of the nearby Tube station, which was opened in 1890, and the increasing
traffic on either side of the church, combined with poor foundations, caused structural problems, and in 1930 repairs were carried out to the tower, spire and crypt. The latter would have been difficult had not some 1,484 coffins been removed from the crypt in 1899 and reinterred elsewhere. The foundations of the south wall, which were giving cause for concern, were strengthened in 1938. Damage was caused during the Second World War, when the building lost all but one of its windows, and in 1951-2 a full restoration was carried out, the church being rededicated on 16 October 1952.

In recent years the foundations of the main body of the church continued to give cause for concern, with further movement taking place. The nave was declared unsafe in 2000 and after a fund raising effort, aided by the National Lottery Fund, restoration began in September 2005 and was completed in March 2007, the first service in the refurbished church being held on Palm Sunday, 1 April 2007. During this work, which cost some £3.6m, the church was underpinned and now rests on a concrete raft, supported on piles. As part of the work the levels within the crypt were lowered and this is now used extensively for community work.

3. History of the Bells

Unfortunately no Edwardian inventories are known to survive for the parish (Daniel-Tyssen, 1869), and the first information available is taken from the earliest volume of churchwardens’ accounts, which covers the years 1621 to 1705, although pages are missing at the beginning and there are no detailed accounts for the last few years covered by the volume. In the accounts for the year 1625/6 one Frances Bennett, carpenter, was paid £1 12s. for hanging the bells. The accounts for this year also record that the structure on top of the tower, where the saints bell was hung, was rebuilt at a cost of £31 16s. 1d.

In the 1633/4 sequence, there is a full set of accounts for the recasting of the five bells by Miles Gray[e], for which he was paid £31. They were increased in size, for 12 cwt. of new metal was added at a cost of £51. This time the bells were hung by a Mr. Norman, who repaired the frame and bell wheels as well, his bill totalling £19 7s. 7d. Together with other incidental work, including renting the house where the bells were cast, the whole business cost £119 14s. 2d. Miles Graye of Colchester was a founder of some celebrity, and his recorded bells at this period were mainly cast for Essex and adjoining counties, so his appearance here is of some interest, and may indicate that he cast other bells in the area which have since been recast.

Graye’s treble bell did not last long, as the accounts for 1643/4 show that it was recast by Mr. [William] Lambert at a cost of £4 5s. 6d. He was a little-known founder, who cast a few bells at this period, the earliest known being one of 1638. His work was not of good quality, and when one of his bells at Richmond, Surrey, was recast in 1680, it was inscribed with the following boastful couplet:
That Lambert’s work was not of good quality is evident from the fact that the accounts at St. George the Martyr for 1645/6 record that the treble bell was again recast, this time at a cost of £3. At the same time repairs were carried out to the bell frame.

At this period the wheels were receiving regular attention, with repairs and also being replaced. In 1652/3 there is a payment to ‘Mr. Hidson the joynor’ and this seems to have been Mr. Hudson—occasionally Hodson—whose name appears in the accounts for 1655/6 when repairs were carried out in the belfry. Timber was bought, payments made for it to be sawn up, and Mr. Hudson and his workman were paid a total of £17 14s. 4d. for work carried out, mostly on the bell frame. In 1661/2 Mr. Hudson was paid £1 10s. for the little bell frame, and ‘Paull’ Rawlinson was paid 5s. 6d. for varnishing it, no doubt for protection. Mr. Hudson’s name occurs quite regularly as doing work about the bells and wheels, and from a payment of £2 7s. recorded in the 1662/3 accounts for work done about the bells, we learn that his first name was John. It is also clear that he was a bell hanger and not the founder John Hodson, the name Hudson being found in subscription lists in the parish. On 1 August 1677 there was a payment of £17 9s. 9d. to a bellfounder, whose name was not given, so no doubt other bells were being recast, but no further details are given. In 1680/1 Edward Hudson was paid £1 17s. 6d. for work that he did about the bells, no doubt another member of the family, and another payment on 22 March 1690 was to ‘M’ Hudson Bell hang”.

No detailed accounts survive from the beginning of the eighteenth century, but a minute book of the vestry for the period 1717 to 1735 survives, which contains information in the bells. A meeting of the vestry on Friday 21 February 1717 (1/18) ordered that the turret on top of the tower be repaired, and that ‘it is also furthered Ordered that all ye Bells be new cast the fframe altered and the Bells new hanged…’, going on to list the names of eleven persons who would form a committee ‘to treat and agree w.th such psion and persons as they or ye major part of them shall think fit for yª performing and doeing thereof.’ No record survives of their deliberations, but the vestry book then records that the bells were recast in 1718 by Abraham Rudhall senior with an addition of just over 4cwt. of metal, listing the weights of the bells. In 1718 Abraham Rudhall junior took over the foundry from his father, evidently after this ring of bells had been cast. (Bliss and Sharpe, 1986, 61). The reason for the lack of accounts for this transaction can possibly be found in a paper on the statistics of the parish of St. George the Martyr, Southwark, by the Rev. George Weight, read to the Statistical Society of London on 20 January 1840, in which he quotes a pamphlet on the charities of the parish, which stated, in indignant terms:

‘At a public vestry, holden about 1776, the following motion was proposed and passed, viz., to sell to Mr. S — C— all the parish papers and documents in a lump, at a rate of three halfpence per pound, he being at the expense of carrying them away.’

When the church was rebuilt in the 1730s the bells were safely stored and after the main structure of the church was completed in 1735 consideration was given to
hanging the bells. A vestry meeting of 16 October 1735 set up a committee to ‘receive Plans & proposals for the making a New Bell Frame and hang the Bells of this Parish.’ This committee first investigated the proper size of timbers to be used and other relevant matters, and sent copies of the specification to persons who proposed to do the work, and then interviewed them before reporting back to the vestry with the committee’s recommendations on 27 October 1735, a mere eleven days later. Proposals had been received from Mr. Boulton and Mr. Savage jointly, for £95 using such materials of the old frame as were suitable, Mr. Catlin proposed to do the work under similar circumstances for £86, Mrs. Cole (whose husband William had dropped dead on 30 September 1735) wanted £90 but this included £6 to hang the saints bell, while Mr. Williams of Aldersgate Street tendered £63 to include fixing the saints bell. Those who tendered were interviewed, and Messers Boulton and Savage dropped their price to £85, Mrs. Cole to £84, Mr. Catlin wasn’t there, and a new person, Mr. Tobias Benton (who subsequently took over William Cole’s business in Fore Street, Cripplegate), tendered £76. However, Mr. John Williams offered to perform the contract with all new ‘stuff’ for £75, for £65 using old materials and finding ropes, and for £63 without ropes. The cheapest tender was accepted and a copy of the agreement and specification was made into the vestry book, Mr. Williams agreeing to complete the work within five months. Thus it must have been completed in good time for the first peal on the new installation, which was one of Plain Bob Major, rung on 25 July 1736 by the Society of Union Scholars.

In 1805 a parishioner referred to ‘the clanking of St. George’s candlesticks’ and suggested that the two treble bells and the great bell be recast to improve the ring. Not long afterwards the bell received attention from a bellhanger. This was John Wooding, of 1 King’s Arms Passage, Whitechapel Road, who succeeded to the bellhanging business of Edward Simmons sometime about the year 1808. Wooding subsequently issued a broadsheet listing churches where he had either rehung or repaired the bells, and ‘St. George’s Southwark’ appeared in the list as one of the churches where he had worked.

In the middle of the nineteenth century St. George’s was one of the few places in London where the curfew was still being rung. (Timbs, 1850)

The bells received major attention at the end of the nineteenth century and the rededication afterwards was reported in Bell News on 9 December 1899.

‘ST. GEORGE-THE-MARTYR, SOUTHWARK.
RESTORATION AND RE-DEDICATION OF BELLS.

For many years the necessity of restoring the ring of eight bells at the above-named church has been felt. A committee, consisting of the Rector (Rev. W.J. Sommerville, B.A.), the Churchwardens, and Messrs. W. Neville, T. Haynes, and R. Fulton, with the Church Council, was formed, and these gentlemen, after due deliberation, gave Messers. Mears and Stainbank instructions to rehang them in entirely new fittings except the frame, which was found to be in excellent condition after being in use for 182 years. The bells were cast by Rudhall, of Gloucester, in 1717, the weight of the tenor being 18 cwt. 3 qr. 3lbs. Several of the bells have been quarter-turned; the go of them all is everything to be desired, and reflects great credit on the Whitechapel Foundry.
The upper section of Wooding's advertising broadsheet. The weight of the tenor at St. George the Martyr, Southwark, is overestimated.
On Sunday morning, November 26th, before and after Divine Service, touches of Grandsire and Stedman Triples were rung by the local society and visitors. The Rev. the Rector of St. Mary, Lambeth, was very eloquent in his sermon upon such an important subject as bells and bell-ringing.

For the re-dedication service, which took place in the evening, at which the Bishop of Southwark officiated, a quarter-peal of Grandsire Triples was rung by five members of the St. George-the-Martyr society, assisted by three members of the Ancient Society of College Youths, Messrs. Springall, Dawe and Truss; conducted by T.H. Taffender.

At a point during the service the Bishop gave a signal for the bells to be rung, during which he was conducted by the Rector and Churchwardens to the pulpit. The ringers were: E. Clements, H. Green, W.H. Smith, T.H. Taffender, C. Deer, F. Clements, W. Humberstone, W. Cobbett. After the service touches were rung, in which Messers. W. and H. Langdon, F. Perrin, T. Gwynn, G. Woodage, and G.E. Symonds took part.

It is to be regretted that not many peals can be attempted on account of the densely-populated neighbourhood, but Thurstans’ one-part peal of Stedman Triples was rung by members of the Ancient Society of College Youths, on the second anniversary of the Rector’s induction, on Thursday, November 30th.’

Less than 40 years later the bells were rehung again, this time by Messrs Taylors of Loughborough. The cost was borne by the Barron Bell Trust and the bells were tuned and rehung on ball bearings. They were reopened during evensong on 26 April 1936, when the opening touch was rung by a band from the Metropolitan Police Guild. A full report of the opening of the bells after restoration appeared in the Ringing World of 8 May 1936.

Although the church was damaged during the second world war, it seems that the bells escaped relatively unscathed and they are now essentially in the same condition as that in which Messers Taylors left them in 1936.

4. The Clock

As part of refitting the church after it was rebuilt and refitted in 1734-6, in 1738 a new clock was provided by George Clarke, of Whitechapel, at a cost of £90. It was specified that it should be painted ‘in as good and handsome manner as the Clock in Greenwich Church’, no doubt a reference to the dials, for which provision had been made in the octagonal stage immediately above the belfry stage. Clarke is known from his work with turret clocks, and is not to be confused with the well-known maker of the same name who worked in Leadenhall Street. There may have been two clockmakers of the same name in Whitechapel as, on 3 December 1722, Edward Clarke, tanner, of Shalford, Essex, made his will, and in it left bequests to (among others) George Clarke sen., clockmaker of Whitechapel, and his son George Clarke jun. Although the trade of the latter was not given, it may well have been that he followed in father’s footsteps. (Essex R.O. D/DU 293/318)
Although the modern description of the church (Ida Darlington, 1955) reads as if Clarke’s clock was then still in existence, this was not so, and it had been replaced by a clock constructed by Thwaites and Reed of Clerkenwell, a clock that was listed in a trade list issued by Thwaites and Reed c.1902. Three of the four dials were almost certainly coeval with this clock, that on the east side being left as it was. However, in its turn this clock has also been replaced, this time by an electric motor, installed in recent years, which drives the motion work to the four dials and also releases the hour strike.

5. The Tower

In 1983 Cherry and Pevsner described the church in the following terms.

‘ST. GEORGE, BOROUGH High Street. 1734-6 by John Price, in replacement of a medieval church. A sound, sturdy church, uncommonly well-sited, so that from N as well as S its tower appears to advantage. Square white W tower, two octagonal upper stages, and octagonal spire, nothing too transparent, all massive and trustworthy. The body of the church red brick; two tiers of windows in composition derived from Wren’s St James, Piccadilly. E window Venetian with cartouche and garlands above. Interior altered by William Hedger, 1807-8. The usual three galleries. Flat plaster ceiling with graceful cherubs designed by Basil Champneys (1897), restored by T.F. Ford after damage in the Second World War.’

The description then goes on to list the internal fittings.

The tower is placed at the west end of the church (Plate 1 & Fig. 1), and is clasped by both the north and south aisles, so that the ends of the aisles and the lower part of the tower form a single composition, with a pillared portico surrounding the west doorway and completed by a balustrade around the tops of the ends of the aisles. Externally the tower, which projects above the façade, is clad in Portland stone, but the core is made of a soft brick, with internal stone dressings at the corners. The square belfry stage is surmounted by two octagonal stages, the lower designed for the clock faces which are visible on each of the four sides, with an octagonal stage above which contains the clock bell, and an octagonal spire above.

Internally the lowest stage of the tower forms an entrance vestibule to the church, through a pair of external doors in the west wall, with a pair of doors in the east wall leading into the main body of the church. There are blind arches in the north wall and the corners of the vestibule are angled off. Access to the upper stages of the tower is via a spiral staircase in the north-west corner of the vestibule, and there is also a spiral stair at the south-east corner, which leads to an upper room in the west end of the south aisle. The spiral in the north-west corner leads in turn to the ringing chamber, intermediate or sound chamber, and the belfry itself. Access to the clock room, which is in the base of the spire, is by means of a ladder from the belfry stage, which rests on the frame heads.
The ringing chamber is immediately above the vestibule, its floor being an estimated 4.6m above that of the vestibule, and the corners of the room are, like those of the vestibule, angled off. Against the south-west angle there is a manual for an Ellacombe chiming apparatus. There are also tall blind arches in the north and east walls, and the room is lighted by a semi-circular window in the west wall, forming part of the composition of the west front. In the centre of the floor is a removable trap for installing the bells and removing them from the tower. Around the walls there is a fine series of peal boards, the earliest of which record a peal of Grandsire Triples rung by the Westminster Youths on 6 September 1805, which was claimed as ‘the greatest performance on these bells for a period of 20 years.’

There is a sound chamber immediately above the ringing chamber, again with the corners angled off, but with no blind arches in the walls. However, there is a small window in the south wall, and in the east wall there is a door which gives access to the space above the ceiling of the church. The floor of the sound chamber is about 5.77m above that of the ringing chamber and 3.14m below that of the belfry above, an ideal arrangement.

The spiral stair terminates at the belfry stage, and a short wooden flight of steps leads on to the frame heads. This is the only corner which is angled off, the angles in the other three corners terminating at the level of the foundation beams. Above the louvred windows there are arches built out from corbels in the corners, which support squinches for the octagonal stage above. (Plate 6)

Access to the clock room in the lower octagonal stage, is, as mentioned above, via a ladder which rests on the frame-heads just inside the entrance to the belfry. (Figs. 1 & 2) In the centre of the floor is a wooden clock case, which now houses only the electric motor which drives the motion work for the hands on the external dials. One clock weight lies on the floor.

Above the clock room is the floor of the octagonal stage beneath the spire, which is lead-lined but with a chute for the clock weights at the south-east corner. Access to the floor is via a wooden ladder, and on the level of the floor are arched openings on four sides of the spire, with only a thin wire mesh to prevent the entry of pigeons. The frame for the clock bell rests on this floor.
6. The Bells and Fittings

6.1 Bells

The tower contains a ring of eight bells, cast by Abraham Rudhall I in 1718, and a clock bell cast by Richard Phelps and Thomas Lester of Whitechapel in 1738.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bell</th>
<th>Inscription</th>
<th>Weight as cast</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Diam. (ins)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cwt. qr. lb.</td>
<td>Cwt. qr. lb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treble</td>
<td>(Scroll border) (Stop) A R (Bell) 1718</td>
<td>5 0 12</td>
<td>4 3 26</td>
<td>27 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PEACE &amp; GOOD NEIGHBOVROOD 1718 (Scroll border) : A R (Bell) (Scroll border) : (Stop)</td>
<td>5 1 4</td>
<td>5 0 9</td>
<td>28 7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(Scroll border) (Crown border) PROSPRITY [sic] TO ALL OUR BENEFACTORS (Scroll border) A R</td>
<td>5 3 24</td>
<td>5 2 26</td>
<td>30 7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(Scroll border) (Stop) GOD PRESERVE THIS CHVRCH (Scroll border) A(Bell) R 1718</td>
<td>7 0 00</td>
<td>6 3 10</td>
<td>32 7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(Scroll border) PROSPERITY TO THIS PLACE (Scroll border) A (Bell) R 1718</td>
<td>8 1 10</td>
<td>7 3 14</td>
<td>35 7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>(Crown border) MR WILLIAM BRIDGER CHVRCHWARDEN 1718 (Crown border) A (Bell) R</td>
<td>10 0 24</td>
<td>9 2 0</td>
<td>36 7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>(Two rows vine leaf border) (Stop) ABR.: RUDHALL OF GLOUCESTER BELLFOVNDER 1718</td>
<td>11 3 04</td>
<td>11 1 1</td>
<td>40 7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>(Stop) THE LIVEING I TO CHVRCH DO CALL &amp; TO THE GRAVE DO SUMON ALL</td>
<td>15 2 0</td>
<td>14 2 24</td>
<td>44 7/8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Diameters and modern weights are taken from the on-line version of Dove’s Guide.]

Each of the bells retains its canons, and the tenor and sixth bells have plain canons. The three smallest bells have cabled canons, while the canons of the fourth, fifth and seventh bells have plait decoration. All of the bells have been quarter-turned, and the fifth, sixth and tenor bells have then been one-eighth turned. (Plate 2)

The clock bell is 28 7/8 inches in diameter and is inscribed:

THE REV\^D J COOKSEY RECTOR W\^M HILL CH WARDEN APRIL 1738 RICHARD PHELPS T LESTER FECIT MY VOICE AT PROPER TIMES I’LE RAISE AND SOUND TO MY SUBSCRIBERS PRAISE

This information has been taken from Stahlschmidt’s account and has not been verified.
6.2 Fittings

The fittings consist of elm stocks, evidently those supplied in 1899, with plate gudgeons and ball bearings. The latter were supplied in 1936, and the hexagonal nuts indicate that the plate gudgeons were replaced at the same time. The bells are generally secured to the stocks with conventional ironwork, but the three bells that have been one-eighth turned are each supported by four bolts through the crown which were fitted in 1936, the marks where the former hanging irons were being carefully filled in. (Plate 2) Independent crown-staples have been fitted, again in 1936, and the stays and sliders are of traditional form, as are the wheels. A set of Ellacombe hammers was fitted by Messers Taylors, chimed from a manual in the ringing chamber.

7. The Bell Frame

7.1 Description of the Frame

This was installed in 1735-6, after the completion of the church, and is of conventional layout (Pickford Type 8.3). Approximately square, because of the angle at the north-west corner where the spiral stair gives access to the belfry, at this corner the frame is also angled. On the west side the treble and second bells swing north-south, mouth to mouth, while on the east side the fifth and sixth bells swing north-south, mouth to mouth. These are separated by four parallel pits, with the bells swinging east-west, containing, in order from the north, the third, fourth, tenor and seventh bells. The rope circle is clockwise. (Fig. 2) In order to improve the rope circle in the ringing chamber there has been a slight amount of drawing of the ropes both in the belfry and in the intermediate chamber, in the ringing chamber, but despite this the rope circle is still not as good as it might be.

For the four parallel pits, each bell hangs at the centre of a truss which is formed by two substantial braces, inclined to the centre, each of which is double jack-braced (Fig. 4). In the frame each main brace has double jack braces. The north-south trusses are of three different types. That on the east side has two pairs of braces, with a bell hung more or less in the centre of each. (Fig. 5) The two trusses that close the four east-west parallel pits have a pair of braces at the south end, but at the north end only a single brace inclined towards the centre of the frame. (Fig. 3) Thus on the west side, bells five and six do not hang at the centre of a pair of braces. On the west side of the frame there is a third type of truss, with only two inclined braces, rather more widely apart. Thus neither the treble nor the second bell hangs at the centre of a pair of braces.

At sill level the frame was formerly closed by a diagonal timber at the north-west corner, which is now missing. (Plate 3) How this was secured at either end is not
obvious. It was lapped over the west sill, but no evidence was found to indicate how
the lap joint was secured.

There are a series of carpenter’s marks on the frame, which were cut with a
one-inch chisel. The full series was not identified as the frame is covered with a thick
layer of London grime and it was felt that to brush this layer away to uncover other of
the marks was inadvisable.

From the jointing of the lower sills the sequence of installing the frame can be
deduced. (Fig. 3) First the sill against the east wall was placed in position, then the
sills against the north and south walls were engaged at the east end at an angle, and
then swung into position. From the lap joint at the south end of the inner truss for the
fifth and sixth bells it is clear that this sill was engaged at the north end and then the
south end lowered into position, the cross-piece in the middle being engaged first.
Next, the internal east-west sills of the four parallel pits were installed, and were
closed at the west end by engaging the closing timber at the south end at an angle, and
then swinging this into position at the north end, the mortice being open at the west
end to enable it to be engaged. Then the sill on the west side of the frame was
engaged at the south end, with the north end raised, and the small cross piece between
the two pits engaged and the sill lowered into position. This would only be possible if
the tenons in the cross piece were short.

Because there is more space between the frame heads and the walls, these
would be much easier to install, with the final closure being at the north-west corner.

There is also the likelihood that a mistake was made in the construction of the
frame. To the north of the cross-piece that separates the pits for the treble and second
bells at frame-head level there are two corresponding tenons in the frame heads,
which have been cut off flush on the inside of the frame heads. (Plate 4 & Fig. 2)
These would have been for a timber which was immediately above the cross-piece in
the sills of the frame, which would have been a more usual position. However,
because the frame was reduced at the north-west corner, this would not leave enough
length in the pit for the second bell to hang, and so the tenons were cut flush and
another timber installed slightly further to the south, to give the pit enough length. It
could be argued that the frame was reused from the previous church, and that this
modification was a result, the previous tower not having an angled corner. However,
this would require the bell to have been hung slightly further to the north than at
present, leaving evidence in the frame heads of redundant bearing indents. However,
there were no such indents, and there is no evidence to suggest that the bell was ever
hung in a position other than where it is now. (Plate 4) Moreover, the documentary
evidence makes it clear that the frame was constructed specifically for this belfry. All
this suggests that the frame was made to a standard pattern, and the angled entrance to
the belfry overlooked, and so had to be modified slightly on installation.
7.2 Later alterations

There have been few alterations to the frame since it was made. Above is noted the alteration in the cross piece in the frame heads between the treble and second pits, which was made as the frame was being installed and so is really part of the primary phase. Subsequently the closing timber in the sills at the north-west corner was removed – if, indeed, this was ever present. (Plate 3) For each bell, where the bearings are secured to the frame heads, a block of timber has been let into the frame head, removing the former bearing indents, although for most cases there is evidence below of where the stock hoops formerly swung close to the frame heads.

Also, in 1936 five tie rods were installed, one at either end of the trusses supporting the tenor bell, and another at the east end of the truss between the third and fourth bells. These tie rods not only tie the trusses together at these points, but were extended so that they go through the supporting timbers and tie the frame to those timbers. Prior to that the frame just rested on the floor laid on the supporting timbers. At the same time, cast iron angle brackets were placed in all internal angles of the frame heads, except for those at the east end of the timber separating the pits for the fifth and sixth bells. These brackets were mostly secured by coach screws, with a limited use of through bolts.

7.3 Use of Secondhand Timber

The frame was constructed using a mixture of new and secondhand timber. Certainly the north and south sills were reused from previous uses. The north sill has a redundant mortice near to its east end, and there may have been another mortice which was reused and hence concealed, as there are four pegs at the bottom of the east brace of the truss supporting the north side of the third bell. Similarly, the south timber has two redundant mortices near to its west end, and there is a notch on the underside beneath the western brace. The layout of these features from former use make it unlikely that these timbers came from a former bell frame. The sill of the south truss of the tenor pit was also reused, with two blind notches on the underside, but again it is impossible to explain these in bell-frame terms.

The braces in the east truss are clearly reused, with redundant mortices, some of which still contain the relevant tenon cut flush. (Plate 5) Three out of the four have redundant mortices on both sides. In view of the width of the braces, and the relative positions of the redundant mortices, these can only be explained as being reused braces from a former frame, as it is most unlikely that timbers from another structure would have this particular form of jointing. The identification as being former braces reused is reinforced by the west brace of the truss between the third and fourth bells, which has a score mark not related to present use, and the brace across the west wend of the seventh bell pit, which as an inverted score mark. (Plate 5) The conclusion is that most of the braces used were second hand, and that some came from a frame with double jack braces. In view of the relative position of the redundant mortices, the frame from which these braces came was rather higher than the present frame, and hence less efficient in resisting the stresses of bells being rung full circle.
This is all consistent with a frame being constructed by John Hudson in 1655/6. There are two braces which do not conform to this pattern, having been cut from a timber through the centre of a mortice, and these are the west brace in the south truss, and the west brace of the north truss.

The jack braces themselves are of very variable size, and several exhibit signs of reuse, although the limited size makes it impossible to say where they had been previously used. One at least is of considerable age, this being the upper jack brace at the west end of truss between the seventh and tenor bells, which has scratch marks about three inches long, perhaps dating from the sixteenth century. (Plate 3 & Fig. 4) Apart from these scratch marks, there are no other signs of reuse in this particular timber.

As far as could be determined, the frame heads were made of new, clean timber.

### 7.4 Frame of the clock bell

The clock bell is accessible from a ladder in the clock room. In view of the relatively exposed position, and open arches to the side of this space, the writer did not venture into the chamber, but from the top of the ladder it could be seen that the single-pit frame in which it hangs is of double jack-braced form, but somewhat slighter in construction than the main bell frame. Its construction was part of the contract entered into by John Williams in 1735.

### 8. The Supporting Timbers

The sills of the frame are all jointed together on the level and as such are designed to sit on a floor. Initially there was no mechanical connection with the floor, and it was not until 1936 that the frame and floor were tied together with tie rods. The floor is integral with the tower and consists of two large north-south timbers, about 30 cm wide by 35 cm deep, dividing the area into uneven thirds, resting on wall plates built into the north and south walls. On the east and west sides there are 11 timbers, each about 15 cm wide by 22 cm deep, spanning from the main timbers to the tower walls, equally spaced, but the outer ones of uneven length because of the angling of the walls in the corners at this level. The outer ends of these timbers also rest on wall plates built into the walls, and the inner ends are double tenoned to the primary timbers, and probably pegged from the top, although this is hidden. Centrally, the middle three corresponding timbers were not installed, the space under the tenor bell being used for a bell hole to raise the bells into the belfry. (Plate 6) In this central space two softwood timbers have been slotted, the rest of the structure being of oak, with a trap above. Outside the central area the timbers are covered with boards laid north-south, tying the whole structure together and effectively making it a diaphragm.

Generally the floor is as it was laid, except that a board has been removed beneath the treble bell, and a similar slot cut along the pit of the third bell. This slot,
which is comparatively recent, cuts across the boards which are laid north-south and thus reduces the efficiency of the floor.

Immediately below the supporting timbers four tie bars have been installed, more or less parallel to the four walls and close to them, and these are designed to tie the corners of the tower together. These were probably installed as part of the work carried out in 1930.

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**9. The context of the bell frame**

John Williams, the maker of the frame at St. George the Martyr, Southwark, is well known as one of the most important bell frame makers of the first half of the eighteenth century. His work has been listed and described by Chris Pickford in a report on the bell frame at Coddenham, Suffolk, and in an article in the *Ringing World* (2002, 813-5). Below is a summary of that research, with added comments.

John and Richard Williams were the sons of Thomas Williams, of King’s Sutton, Northants and have been identified as the persons of those names who were christened at King’s Sutton in 1670 and 1677 respectively. Thomas Williams was a carpenter who also made bell frames, and the brothers followed in his footsteps. The first known example of a bell frame by them was that installed at St. Bride’s, Fleet Street, London, in 1710, working in conjunction with Abraham Rudhall I. In view of the prestigious nature of this contract it is unlikely to have been their first. Contracts were performed in conjunction with a number of founders, and it is evident that their work was held in high regard. In 1727 the brothers were still based in King’s Sutton, as the inscription on the frame at Holy Trinity, Hull, recorded, but subsequently the business moved to London, where it was successful. From some time between 1727 and 1734 John Williams worked on his own: perhaps Richard had died, or followed another career. At the time that John Williams constructed the frame for St. George the Martyr, Southwark, he was living at Aldersgate Street, London and he was in competition for work with, among others, Robert Catlin, the famous bell hanger. Catlin worked with the bell founder Samuel Knight, and in the year that Williams obtained the contract for the bell frame at St. George the Martyr, Knight cast a heavy ring of bells for St. Saviour’s, Southwark, and Catlin made the frame, which still exists. Knight’s death was reported in the *General Evening Post of Thursday, 6 December, 1739*:

‘Yesterday died at this House in Shoe-lane, after a long Illness, Mr. Samuel Knight, Bell-Founder, who cast the fine Peal of Bells at St. Mary Overy’s, and is succeeded in his Business by Mr. Rob. Catlin, who carried on with him for upwards of seven Years.’

John Williams built a frame for Coddenham in 1740, working in conjunction with Thomas Lester of Whitechapel, although this was not mentioned in the advert for the opening of the bells that appeared in the *Ipswich Journal* of Sat. 27 Dec. 1740:
This is to give Notice, that on Wednesday the 31st Instant, the New Peal of Bells at Coddenham, will be fit for Ringing for the first Time: And therefore all Lovers of that Science are desir'd to meet at the Crown Inn in Coddenham to hear them.

Our Subscribers desire the Society of Ipswich will give us the pleasure of their Company early to make a Beginning.

All Gentlemen will be well entertain'd, and meet with a hearty Wellcome [sic], from their humble Servant to Command

George Cooper.

In 1742 Thomas Lester cast a new ring of ten bells for Stonham Aspal, the gift of Theodore Ecclestone, who also gave a new frame. This was constructed by John Williams although there must have been some delay as the new ring of bells was not opened until the following year. This was advertised in the following terms in the *Ipswich Journal*, of Saturday 9 April, repeated until 21 May, 1743:

SAMUEL GRIMWOOD
INN-KEEPER in Stonham-Aspall, gives Notice to LOVERS of RINGING, that on Monday the Twenty-third of May next,
THE NEW PEAL of TEN BELLS, lately cast by Mr. Thomas Lester, of London, and now hanging there by Mr. John Williams, will be RUNG for the First Time by any Company that will do themselves the Pleasure of coming.
The Norwich and Aylsham Ringers have hired Lodgings at Stonham Pye and the neighbouring Houses, intending to be in the Steeple early on the Day above-mention'd.
N.B. Mr. John Williams (who has hung most of the Peals in and about London) hangs Church or Chapel Bells in the best Manner and at the cheapest Rates, and may be spoke with at any time at his House in Stonham Aspall Street.

From this it is evident that Williams had taken up residence in Stonham Aspal. Indeed, when Lester cast a new ring of eight bells for Long Melford in 1744 these were also hung by John Williams, his residence at Stonham Aspal being carefully recorded on the sixth bell of the ring. However, in this case the detail of the frame indicates that it predates Williams’s work in the tower and so he hung the bells but did not make the frame. In the same year he made a frame for a ring of eight bells that was cast for Bradwell-juxta-Mare, Essex, by Robert Catlin. In view of Catlin’s celebrity as a bell hanger, it is surprising that he sub-contracted the frame to another contractor, but perhaps he was too busy to make the frame for Bradwell-juxta-Mare. The opening of this ring of bells was advertised in the *Ipswich Journal* of Saturday 6 Oct. 1744:

THIS is to give Notice to all Lovers of Ringing, that on Tuesday the 9th of this Instant October, the Stonham Society of Ringers will be at Bradwell near the Sea in Essex, where all well Wishers to that Noble Art, may hear good Ringing on the new Peal of Eight Bells, lately cast by Mr. Robert Catling, of London, and hung by Mr. John Williams, of Stonham in Suffolk.
N.B. Mrs. Tinsley, of the Three Rabbits, is desir'd to prepare Beds for the above Society.

Clearly John Williams was still living in Stonham Aspal, but an inscription on the frame, recorded in 1872, still recorded that he was of London. (Deedes and Walters, 1909, 187)
It is likely that John Williams died or retired from business not long after he made the frame for Bradwell-juxta-Mare as he would have been a considerable age for the period, and it is at least possible that there were two successive frame-makers of the same name. Below is a list of frames known to have been constructed by the Williams brothers, although they did carry out other bell work. Also, as research proceeds, other examples of work carried out by the Williams family may well be found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Frame for?</th>
<th>Diagonal?</th>
<th>Who by</th>
<th>Extant?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1710</td>
<td>London, St. Bride</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>John and Richard Williams</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1712</td>
<td>Bletchley, Bucks.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>John and Richard Williams</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1718</td>
<td>Chicheley, Bucks.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>John and Richard Williams</td>
<td>Yes *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1718</td>
<td>Enstone, Oxon</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td>John and Richard Williams</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1720</td>
<td>Pangbourne, Berks.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>John and Richard Williams</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1726</td>
<td>Westminster, St. Martin in the Fields</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>John and Richard Williams</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1727</td>
<td>Holy Trinity, Kingston on Hull, Yorks.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>John and Richard Williams</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1734</td>
<td>Winchester Cathedral</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Modifications by John Williams</td>
<td>Yes *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1735</td>
<td>St. George the Martyr, Southwark</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>John Williams</td>
<td>Yes *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740</td>
<td>Coddenham, Suffolk</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>John Williams</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1742/3</td>
<td>Stonham Aspal, Suffolk</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>John Williams</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1744</td>
<td>Bradwell, Essex</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>John Williams</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes that the bell frame has been seen by the writer.

Another frame which may well be by John Williams is that at St. Giles’-in-the-Fields, Holborn. There the church was rebuilt in 1731-3, and in 1736 the ring was made up from six to eight bells. This ring hangs in a frame which evidently contemporary, with its layout identical to that at St. George the Martyr, Southwark, and with double jack braces to the braces. In the case of St. Giles’-in-the-Fields, the frame was placed diagonally in the tower, but in order to do that the corners of the frame were angled and the ends of the transverse pits were closed with iron straps.
10. Significance of the Bell Frame

From the information given above, John Williams was a well-known craftsman working in the first half of the eighteenth century. A number of his frames have been identified, and of those constructed as eight-bell units, possibly only four survive, with the ten-bell frame at Stonham Aspall. There may be other frames which have not yet been identified, but if so, this is only likely to be a small number.

Thus the frame at St. George the Martyr is one of a limited number surviving by a well-known maker of frames, was built at the same time as the church and is of good and solid construction. It is therefore highly significant and would seem to the writer to be a strong candidate for listing.

11. Illustrations

Plate 1  (Left) A view of St. George the Martyr, taken from the south east on a sunny day.
         (Below) A Massive brace at the east end of the seventh bell pit, with the upper jack brace being clearly seen. The pegs visible on the right secure a halving joint.

Plate 2  (Left) The high crown on the second bell is clearly seen, as is the traditional ironwork securing the bell to its stock.
         ((Below) Hexagonal nuts indicate the work done in 1936, when the tenor bell was eighth turned on the stock.

Plate 3  (Left) Long scratch carpenter’s marks indicate that this piece of timber was first used c.1600.
         (Below) The slot in which the tenon engages to close the sills of the four-bell unit is visible in the centre, behind the conduit.

Plate 4  (Above) Just visible in the frame head are the cut-off tenons where a mistake was made in setting out the frame.
         (Below) Below the present bearing can be seen a clearance mark where, prior to 1899, the stock hoop of the bell cleared the frame head.

Plate 5  (Above) The mark where a bell formerly swung on this brace at the west end of the seventh bell pit indicates that this brace was reused from a former frame.
         (Below) Reuse is also indicated on the northernmost brace of the east truss supporting the sixth bell. The tenon from the former use was left in situ.
Plate 6  (Left) To support the octagonal stage above the belfry, squinches are built out at the four corners.  
(Below) Looking at the timbers supporting the frame towards the south east. In the centre is the end of one of the tie rods that secure the frame to the floor.

Figure 1. Sections of the church, drawn by F.A. Evans in 1951 for the restoration of the church.

Figure 2. Plan of the bell frame at frame-head level, showing relation to the tower walls.

Figure 3. Plan of the sills of the bell frame.

Figure 4. Section A – A, south elevation.

Figure 5. Section B – B, west elevation.

Figure 6. Sketch plan of the timbers of the supporting floor

12. Bibliography and Sources


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To make a New Frame for 8. Bells, the
Middle Timbers in the Top Frames to be
7. by 11. The Wall Timbers to be 5. by 10.
The Middle Timbers in the Bottom Frames
To be 10. by 11. The Wall Timbers 8. by 11.
The Braces under the Middle Timbers
To be 6. by 16. and under the Wall
Timbers 5. by 14. and To use all the
Old Timber that is Sound and Good
To make 3. New Wheels of 2. Inch
Wainscott, and 5 Wheels of One Inch
and halfe Wainscott, All of good Dry
Stuff in the best Manner
To Make 8 New Stocks of good Dry
Elm, and 8 New Rollers with Brass
Collars and Iron Pinns, the Cheeks of
the Rollers of One Inch and halfe
Wainscott and framed into Deal
Roller boards in the best manner at
the Determination of ye undermentioned
Two persons
To make 8 New Clappers and New Iron
worke for the 8 Bells, Strong and Good
All with Nutts and Screws in the best
manner
To New Cast the old Brass s and make them
Good with New Brass
To hang up the 8 Bells in the best manner.
To provide proper materials, A Rope, and
hanging the Saints Bell. and
To performe All the above Worke in a
Compleat and Workmanlike manner, To
be approved off by Two Indifferent Persons
One to be Chosen by the Comm†tee and the other
by the said Williams and if not Agree
the Arbitrators to Choose an Umpire.

For the Sum of £63
All Which We Certifie and Submit to your
Consideration
23⁴ Oct. 1735  [List of 5 names]
I Do agree to Perform the above Worke
According to the particulars abovementioned
For the Sum of Sixty three pounds If this
Comm†tee think Fitting
23⁴ Oct. 1735  John Williams
The Church of St. George the Martyr, Borough, Southwark.

Figure 1. Sections of the church, drawn by F.A. Evans in 1951 for the restoration of the church.
The Church of St. George the Martyr, Borough, Southwark.

Figure 2. Plan of the bell frame at frame-head level, showing relation to the tower walls.

Figure 3. Plan of the sills of the bell frame.
The Church of St. George the Martyr, Borough, Southwark.

Figure 4. Section A – A, south elevation.

Figure 5. Section B – B, west elevation.

Figure 6. Sketch plan of the timbers of the supporting floor