

## **The story of the bells at St. Peter's, Cradley**

*By Chris Pickford*

Originally in the parish of Halesowen, Cradley developed as a separate settlement noted for its chain-making industry in the eighteenth century. Places of worship of various denominations were established to meet the needs of the growing population and the present parish church had its origins in two of these. The first building on the site was a Methodist chapel built in 1768 which was later acquired in 1786 by the adherents of George Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon as a meeting house with school adjoining for the Countess of Huntingdon's connexion. The Countess of Huntingdon's chapel was built in 1789, and later taken over for use by the Church of England in 1798.

The chapel and chapelyard were consecrated by the Bishop of Worcester on 12 September 1798 – then as a chapel in the parish of Halesowen. The architect was “Mark Jones, who died 4th August 1833, aged 85 years, Architect of this chapel when erected in 1789”, whose tombstone was near the top entrance gates to the church. The building was originally “somewhat round in design, surmounted by a bell tower” and seems to have had an octagonal turret on the roof – possibly with a clock dial. As now, the altar stood at the geographical west end, and the main entrance was at the east owing to the nature and location of the site.



The original Cradley Chapel showing turret on the roof containing one bell.

A separate parish of Cradley was created out of Halesowen, by order in Council dated 11 August 1841. Among the improvements carried out after the chapel became a parish church was the addition of a chancel and tower in 1874-5. John Cotton of Birmingham was the architect, the builder was William Nelson of Dudley (£1400) and the rest of the work being done by Isaac P. Bloomer of Cradley (£1700). The church was reopened on 13 October 1875. The additions were executed in red brick with dressings of Grinshill stone. The church was dedicated to St. Peter on 29 June 1898, on the centenary of its consecration.



The new tower of 1875 with "Pepper pot" turret on the tower roof.

Substantial work was required in 1933 to strengthen the tower which had been damaged as a result of subsidence caused by mining operations in the area. It was found to be 16 inches out of plumb from top to bottom. The work involved underpinning the foundations with a bed of concrete, the erection of large buttresses inside the church and the removal of the spirelet or lantern (pepper pot) from the top of the tower at a total cost of £4000. Meredith & Hingley of Cradley, were the builders and Webb & Gray of Dudley were the architects.

Access to the belfry is by spiral stair with an external entrance in the south-west angle between the tower and the body of the church. The stair leads to the bell chamber, from where there is an iron ladder to the roof.

## The present bells

There is a ring of eight bells in the key of G (766.5Hz), as follows:

### Bell

### Inscription

1. WILLIAM BLEWS AND SONS FOUNDERS BRIMINGHAM 1873.  
Waist: AVE SANCTA TRINITAS
2. WILLIAM BLEWS AND SONS FOUNDERS BRIMINGHAM 1873.  
Waist: AVE REGNANS SINE FINE
3. WILLIAM BLEWS AND SONS FOUNDERS BRIMINGHAM 1873.  
Waist: AVE SIMPLEX ET TRINE
4. WILLIAM BLEWS AND SONS FOUNDERS BRIMINGHAM 1873.  
Waist: AVE PAX ET CHARITAS
5. WILLIAM BLEWS AND SONS FOUNDERS BRIMINGHAM 1873.  
Waist: AVE FILI LUX SALVATOR
6. WILLIAM BLEWS AND SONS FOUNDERS BRIMINGHAM 1873.  
Waist: AVE PATER REX CREATOR
7. WILLIAM BLEWS AND SONS FOUNDERS BRIMINGHAM 1873.  
Waist: SANCTA TRINITAS UNUS DEUS / MISERERE NOBIS
8. WILLIAM BLEWS AND SONS FOUNDERS BRIMINGHAM 1873.  
Waist: GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO

Bell	Founder and date	Diameter	Nominal	Mouldings	Cwt.	Qrs.	Lbs.
1.	William Blews, 1873	26 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>8</sub>	1534	2:2-1:3:2	4	2	4
2.	William Blews, 1873	26 <sup>7</sup> / <sub>8</sub>	1446	2:2-1:3:2	4	1	21
3.	William Blews, 1873	28 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	1288	2:2-1:3:2	4	3	13
4.	William Blews, 1873	29 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	1148	2:2-1:3:2	4	3	9
5.	William Blews, 1873	31 <sup>7</sup> / <sub>8</sub>	1020	2:2-1:3:2	5	3	25
6.	William Blews, 1873	32 <sup>7</sup> / <sub>8</sub>	964	2:2-1:3:2	6	1	24
7.	William Blews, 1873	35 <sup>5</sup> / <sub>8</sub>	860	2:2-1:3:2	7	3	19
8.	William Blews, 1873	39	766.5	2:2-1:3:2	10	0	11

The canons were removed from all the bells in 1949. At that time the six largest bells were quarter turned, but bells 1 and 2 were left un-turned. The bells were also retuned by Taylors in 1949. The bells are all inscribed in Victorian gothic lettering. Walters notes that the Latin inscriptions are in the wrong order and should be reversed, and that the 3rd should have AVE TRINE (instead of ET TRINE). Translations of the Latin phrases are as follows:

1. Ave Sancta Trinitas – Hail, Holy Trinity
2. Ave Regnans sine fine – Hail, King Eternal
3. Ave simplex et trine – Hail, One and Three
4. Ave Pax et Charitas – Hail, Peace and Charity
5. Ave Fili Lux Salvator – Hail, Son, Light and Saviour
6. Ave Pater Rex Creator – Hail, Father, King, Creator
7. Sancta Trinitas Unus Deus / Miserere Nobis - Holy Trinity, One God, Have mercy on us
8. Gloria in Excelsis Deo – Glory to God in the Highest

The bells hang in their original wooden frame of 1875. The frame layout is of standard eight-bell plan (*Bellframes* 8.3) with four bells (8, 1, 4 and 5) in parallel pits across the middle with pairs of bells (2 and 3 on one side and 6 and 7 on the other) on either side in transverse pits and swinging mouth-to-mouth. The frame construction is of standard type (*Bellframes* 6.A) but without tenoned joints, rigidity being achieved with the use of vertical and horizontal iron tie-bars and angle-plates.

The fittings were supplied by John Taylor & Co and (apart from the wheel-centres) date from 1949. They include cast iron stocks, ball bearings and traditional stays and sliders.

### **History**

The catalogue published in 1804 by John Rudhall of Gloucester indicates that his firm supplied a bell for Cradley. There is no mention of Cradley in the previous catalogue of 1788. The bell was probably supplied at about the time of the consecration of the chapel in 1798 and it seems to have weighed about 5 cwt. This bell hung in the old octagonal turret on the roof and remained in use until it was sold for £25 in 1874-5.

When the new tower was added to the church in 1874-5, Mrs. James Wood Aston of The Elms, Cradley, gave a new peal of bells. The bells – cast by Blews of Birmingham in 1873 – had been exhibited as a show peal at the Vienna Universal Exhibition where they had been awarded a prize. Afterwards they were on display at the firm's works in New Bartholomew Street in Birmingham and available for purchase until Mrs. Aston bought them for Cradley for £610 in 1875. The official catalogue of the British Section of the Vienna exhibition includes the following description of the bells:

Group XV. Musical Instruments.

BLEWS, William, & Sons, New Bartholomew Street, Birmingham. – Peal of eight Church Bells arranged for ringing on the English system, weight 55 cwt. Set of Hand Bells for time ringing [*recte* tune ringing]

Blews also exhibited other wares at the Vienna exhibition including "Chandeliers in metal and glass; Gas, Steam and Water Fittings; Hydrants; Iron and Brass Tubes and Fittings; Weights of various standards. Water Closets and Fittings, &c". It is interesting to note that the Cradley church improvement accounts for 1874-5 show a payment to William Blews & Sons for "Gas Fitting and Lamps £37.8.0.", indicating that Blews supplied the light fittings for the church as well as the bells.

Sadly, the donor never lived to hear the sound of her bells, as she died at the age of 42 on 24 March 1875, and the bells were not rung until the reopening of the church on Wednesday 13 October 1875 when the ringers from St.Martin's church, Birmingham, attended for the purpose. In June 1876 a set of handbells, also by Blews, was purchased for the ringers at a cost, with the cupboard, of £8.6.0.

The bells were rehung by James E. Groves of Birmingham in 1921. The work was mentioned in a list of the bellhanger's recent work in the *Ringling World* on 6 January 1922. The rehanging is also recorded on a stone tablet in the ringing room inscribed:

A.D.M.G. / THE BELLS IN THIS TOWER WERE RE-HUNG AND THE / BELFRY  
RENOVATED MARCH 1921 AT A COST OF / £150 RAISED BY PUBLIC  
SUBSCRIPTION / RE-OPENED EASTER EVE 26 MARCH 1921 / R.A. NORRIS M.A.  
HON. C.F. VICAR / A. POWELL } / A.H. MEREDITH } CHURCHWARDENS /  
RINGERS / A.H. MEREDITH (LEADER), A. WILLIAMS, / A. WYRE (SECRETARY), J.  
BLOOMER, / T. EDMONDS, A. BEASLEY, / G. DUKES, S. HEAD, / H. ROBINSON,  
H. SHUCK, / J. COX, A. GROVE, / H. WYRE, E. FORREST.

The work carried out by Groves evidently involved repairs to the existing fittings and improvements to the bearings. A later inspection report of 1936 indicates that Groves had fitted new plain bearings and a supplied a new headstock with plate gudgeons for the tenor, but most of the fittings – including stocks with hooped ends (i.e. strap gudgeons and stock hoops) on the front seven bells – were largely original. By 1949 further work was needed and in that year John Taylor & Co retuned the bells and rehung them in the existing frame with all new fittings.

There is no clock but there is a circular stone moulding on the east face of the tower designed to take a clock dial.



The tower today with pepper pot removed. Note space for clock dial below bell openings.

Researched and written by Chris Pickford.