

# **Account of Purley on Thames**

## **Ringling in the New Year**

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*An articles by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article19 published in PPN January 1982*

### 19. "Ringling in the New Year"

As the bells ring in the New Year they are continuing an age old custom as bells have been rung since before the time of Christ. With the coming of Christianity, churches have used bells to summon people to worship, and to inform them of events, celebrations and feast days (i.e. Christmas, weddings and so on) also of the passing of the monarch through the parish. They were fined if they failed in this last item. In the days before folk had clocks, the bell was rung to mark the beginning and end of the day. The death bell is said to have been rung to frighten away evil spirits that might haunt the body: The Church rings the bell for "all good Christians".

Crowded into the belfry of St. Mary's Church, Purley, are six bells. When I climbed the steep ladders recently I dared not venture beyond the top rung and felt very pleased that somebody else had clambered around the belfry in the last century and noted the details of the bells as follows:

#### Inscriptions.

Treble - "The gift of John George Liebenrood of the Parish of Purley Esq. John Sherwood, Churchwarden; Thos Janaway Fecit: Anno Domini 1788"

Second - "Prayes Ye the Lord 1635"

Third - "Prayes Ye the Lord 1629"

Fourth - "Prayes the Lord 1627"

Fifth - "This bell was recast Anno Domini 1787

John Sherwood Churchwarden. Thomas Janaway Fecit"

Tenor - "Lord Grandesonn 1629; SR O-S"

Further details are: "treble & second, maiden bells; fourth & tenor, square-shouldered; treble a clean casting and good tone; bad clappers to all." The tenor bell measures 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter and is the heaviest weighing nearly half a ton. Oliver St John, whose coat

of arms are on the south exterior wall of the tower, probably donated this bell.

The four oldest bells were probably cast by the brothers Ellis and Francis Knight, two of a family of bell-founders who worked in Reading from mid-16th century to approx. 1710. Thomas Janaway was a bell-founder of Chelsea, London.

The Churchwardens, John Allen and Edward Sherwood, reported to the Archdeacon in 1731 that "our bell is crakt" (sic). Three years later they were still promising that "our Bell ... shall soon be put in Repaire". This may have been the fifth bell that was re-cast some 50 years later.

The belfry and roof were repaired in 1831 when "a man with three horses and a wagon" received 8/6d (42 $\frac{1}{2}$ p) for "going to Theale with the old lead off the Steeple and returning with new". Thos Draper and Buckeridge did most of the repair work, assisted by a carpenter and two men, and the final bill for materials and labour came to £13.12.3d (£13.62p). At the same time, four new bell ropes were purchased from Jones for £1.12s (£1.60p).

The total weight of Purley's bells is estimated at nearly 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  tons, and it is a sad fact that the ancient structure of the tower is no longer strong enough to allow the bells to be rung. Their song has not been heard for more than half a century.

The inscription notes and details of the bells can be found in Berkshire Arch. Journal, vol.43 (1944). Other sources of information are the Purley Churchwardens' Accounts and Presentments in the Berkshire Record Office

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