

Downham Bells and Angels.

A History by Elizabeth Howard.



EDP 1979 - Bell being removed for cleaning and refurbishment . 1979 .

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This is a photograph from Taylors of Loughborough. There are others from Taylors but I am not certain they are all of our bells . It is apparently an almost impossible tower to access all 8 bells and so the bell founders had difficulty .

Pevsner (and Wright) North West and South Norfolk , 2 , Yale Uni 2002.



St Edmund . W Tower , E.E. and high, and a little odd in its combination of paler true carrstone and the darker rougher ferruginous carrstone conglomerate . The bell openings have two lights with a separating round shaft in front of a screen of quatrefoils . A later polygonal stair turret of brick in its upper parts , cuts into the N bell opening .

Downham Market ,, its church and history . By the Rev John Dixon Wortley , MA , 1924.

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The Tower contains eight bells , which were rehung in 1896 , when the tower and spire were restored . The bells bear these inscriptions . :-

I . T Osborn 1787.

II . Cum vogo venite, J Eayre fecit 1771 .

III . Henry Edgar and Richard Carter , Churchwardens – this bell was raised by subscription- 1766.

IV . Osborn and Arnold ,, St Neots Hunts fecit . The gift of the Rev Dr Poynt, Rd Layton and Rogr Powditch , Churchwardens . 1774.

V. Joseph Eayre , St Neots, fecit 1769.

V1. The gift (filed away) Joseph Eayre fecit 1767.

V11. Pack and Chapman of London fecit 1771 .

V111 . Arnold and Osborn St Neots fecit 1773 .

The tenor bell is 40 inches in diameter and weighs 12 cwts . .

(NB Henry Oakes , grocer ,1881 , unmarried ,living with 2 unmarried sisters, Rebecca ,59 and Ann, 51, and 2 male assistants and 2 female servants.)

BELLS



Recently the 8 bells have had an automatic chiming system added to them . This now ensures that the quarters and hours will be rung . It does not preclude the hand ringing of the bells as the new system can be overridden.. The work was done in 2018 and 2019 by Taylors of Loughborough .

The 8 bells are in age starting 1766, no makers name but donated by subscription . Then 1767 , made by Joseph Eayre, fecit , 1767 , the gift of ??? this wording has been filed off at some time in the past . Then 1769 also Joseph Eayre , fecit , St Neots . In 1771 , two bells this year , one made by J Eayre , and the other by Pack and Chapman of London . Then in 1773 , Arnold and Osborn, St Neots and they also made a 1774 bell as Osborn and Arnold , of St Neots , and finally in 1787 the last one is made by T Osborn .

There was a foundry here in Downham from probably after the death of Joseph Eayre in 1772 . Thomas Osborn had been his foreman and worked with Edward Arnold , Joseph Eayre`s nephew , at St Neots after Eayre`s death , until he left to return to his birthplace of Downham Market .

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The earlier foundry was established in 1716 at Kettering by Thomas Eayre and his cousin . Joseph Eayre was bapt as an adult in 1731 and moved to St Neots shortly afterwards His bell foundry was in the grounds of the Priory , a lofty brick built building in the shape of a bell . And the earliest known Joseph Eayre bells are 5 cast for Chatteris , four of which survive today .

It is thought that he cast as many as 182 bells during his working life , from 1735 – 1772 , and his heyday was the 1760s when he cast 71 . There is a list of 44 churches where these bells were installed including Liverpool and Dublin as well as local churches . The logistics of getting completed bells from St Neots to Dublin defies imagination .



By the beginning of the 19th century , the bell foundry was run by William Dobson who was a grandson of Thomas Osborn .

This advertisement was found in the local paper , The Cambridge Chronicle and Journal , " Friday 26th July 1816 . To be sold at auction at the Crown Inn ...the following estate in Downham of Mr Wm Dobson , Bell founder, who has engaged another situation at a distance .

Lot 1 . Capital double roofed brick and tiled messuage , sash fronted , now divided into 2 dwelling houses in the High Street , (but which at trifling expense be converted into one) , comprising three rooms , two kitchens , and a brew house on the ground floor , five chambers , two good cellars , well paved yard, and grass plot situate in High Street, now in the

occupation of Wm Dobson and Mr Isaac Bell . (William Dobson married Martha Bell in Downham in 1807).

Lot 2 . A brick and tiled barn and stable adjoining Mr Gilbert` s premises and abutting onto the Church Hill .

Lot 3 . A most substantial brick and tiled building two stories , 32 x 19 x 22 in height used as a carpenters shop and brass foundry .

Lot 4 . All that very large and extensive brick and tiled building now used as a Bell foundry , with the blacksmiths shop , loam house and yard . As now staked out .

NB The furnace in the bell foundry is to be taken by the proprietor and the brass furnace and the rest of the fixtures by the purchaser ."

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In 1807 Wm Dobson made 5 bells for St Edmunds Emneth . Two engraved with the words, Long live King George the third , and The Lord to praise my voice I will raise . There were apparently 3 bells in Emneth from the time of 6 Edward VI .

William Dobson disappears from the trade directories around 1833.



The 1766 bell with the inscription , partly hidden , starting " Henry Edgar.."

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THE ANGELS AND BOSSES



The first of the identifiable angels is the one above which Wortley says is "Or on a bend azure , three rams heads erased argent attired of the first ." For the Benedictine Abbey at Ramsey .
Next is "Azure three cinquefoils or , Bardolf ."



St George , " Argent a cross gules ."

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Next is "Azure three crowns or , East Anglia".

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The next is the shield of the Passion "three nails, points downwards , the one in pale between two others , the one in bend and the other pointing toward the dexter base point . "



shield of the passion.

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Next is "Three escallops for St James , azure three escallops or . "



St James