

St John's Keynsham Bells - Timeline

- 1489 John Chaunceler leaves in his will the sum of 3s 4d to “the bells of the parish church of Keynsham.”
- 1508 Nicholas Sayntlow leaves in his will the sum of 10 shillings “to the making of the great bell at Keynsham.”
- 1539 Immediately following the dissolution of Keynsham Abbey, on 23rd January everything remaining of value is removed including seven bells from the steeple.
Francis Edwards pays £72 7s 6d for them.
- 1540 A Somerset will leaves “to the bells of Keynsham my best gowne” – this would have been sold and the proceeds used for the bells.
- Circa 1550** The Sanctus bell is cast by the Bristol Foundry. The exact date of its casting is unknown – the idea that its inscription refers to 1531 is most likely wishful thinking.
- 1602** Bell no.7 is cast by one of the Purdue family, either Richard Purdue I of Glastonbury or Roger Purdue I of Bristol.
- 1607** Bell no.6 is cast by Roger Purdue I of Bristol. It bears the arms of King James I who united the Scottish and English crowns.
- 1613** Bell no.4 is cast by Roger Purdue I of Bristol.
- 1632 The spire on the old tower at the north-east corner of the nave is struck by lightning at 6pm on 13th January and falls onto the church. The tower itself – which at this time holds a ring of six bells, plus the Sanctus – is cracked from top to bottom.
The weight of the bells, and perhaps the start of full circle ringing, may have contributed to the weakness of the structure.
- 1638 Construction of the new west tower is sufficiently advanced to allow the bells to be rehung there in a new oak frame.
The old clock is also repaired and reinstalled there.
- 1654** Bell no.3 is recast by Robert Austen II of Compton Dundon in Somerset, at a cost of £19 3s 6d. The old bell this one replaced may have been damaged in 1632 when the old spire fell.
- 1669** Bell no.8 is recast by William Purdue III & Richard Purdue II of Salisbury.

- 1731** Bells no.1 and no.2 are cast by Thomas Bilbie I of Chew Stoke, at about 2pm on 18th August. The casting is witnessed by James Bridges, a Churchwarden of St John's – presumably either William North or Trower whose names are inscribed on the bells – and thirty other parishioners. The oak bell frame of 1638, originally made for six bells (plus the Sanctus), is adapted to fit in these two new additional bells. It is still in use today.
- 1791** Bell no.5 is recast by Thomas Webb Bilbie & James Fear Bilbie of Chew Stoke in July, at a cost of £18, and is rehung by a man named Davis at a cost of £7. An allowance of 10 shillings for “Drink for assisting with the bells” is paid by the Churchwardens.
- 1875 An attempt by the Vicar and Churchwardens to bring order to the bell ringers by negotiating a set of rules ultimately ends in failure. A seemingly impolite letter and an “extortionate” demand for £4 to ring for a wedding result in the Vicar and Churchwardens “refusing to recognize” them any longer as bell ringers at St John's.
- 1880 A new chiming apparatus is installed in the Ringing Room in January. This is a keyboard-based system designed by George Kingman, a bell ringer at Christ Church, Walcot in Bath where the system was first installed in 1873. *Was this intended to replace the bell ringers dismissed in 1875?*
- 1887 The bells and belfry are restored to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.
- 1910 The bells are rehung with new fittings by Llewellyns & James of Castle Green, Bristol. An Ellacombe chiming apparatus is also installed by them in the Ringing Room, replacing the Kingman keyboard apparatus installed only thirty years earlier.
- 1948 The bells are rehung on new bearings by Mears & Stainbank of the Whitechapel Foundry in London.
- 1987 The ring of eight bells is removed on 25th March, retuned at the Whitechapel Foundry in London, and rehung with new fittings (the old wheels being reused) in December by Whites of Appleton in Oxfordshire.
- 2008 The Ellacombe chiming apparatus is restored, and the Sanctus bell is rehung, by Matthew Higby of Chilcompton in Somerset.
- 2021 Following an inspection and service by Whites of Appleton in June, the Tenor clapper was fitted with a timber shaft, and the staple unit modified and rebushed, the 4th staple unit was replaced and clapper rebushed, both gudgeons of the 7th headstock were replaced (one was loose), the areas of rot in the top cills of the frame were cleaned out and filled with resin, plus minor works. These works were completed on 4th November, total cost £7104.00 (excluding VAT).