

## The St Peter's Bells

These bells are one of only 3 existing full sets of bells specially made for a parish church in New Zealand, the other sets being in St Matthews in Auckland and in



the Catholic Basilica in Timaru hung after the First World War. (Other sets are a collection from different sources). The ring (the name given to a collection of bells in one place) of 8 bells were installed in 1879 and were the first bells in Wellington and only the second full set of bells in New Zealand. These are the oldest bells in Wellington and this year it will be 142 years since they were first rung. The eight bells weigh a total of 3,337 kg, with the biggest bell weighing 800 kg. The bells cost 2786 pounds sterling

The foundry of John Warner and Sons ceased to cast bells in 1924 and the site and company records were destroyed in the Blitz. The bells were cast before modern technology was available to tune the bells and the scale that was used is an older one that is slightly offset from modern notes in some areas. Because of this some consider one or two of the bells to be poorly tuned. This can only be done if the bells are removed from the tower, something that is close to impossible to do without removing the steeple and part of the roof.

The traditional view of bell ringing is a group of ringers each with their own bell rope pulling on the rope to make the bell ring once by turning the bell in a circle. This ringing technique is called pealing.

Although St Peter's bells were originally intended to be rung this way the parish found that the ringing of the bells on the first Sunday that they were rung this way shook the building so much the congregation were afraid that the gas pipes providing the original lighting system would break, and they sent a small boy running up the tower to tell the bell-ringers to stop. The bells have not been pealed as a group since then. Some repairs have allowed the Peace Bell to be rung full circle but this is rarely done to preserve the old mechanism.



*Bell with the striker for the Ellacombe Board showing. Pulling the rope on the board makes the striker hit the bell and the resulting ring is called a chime.*

Instead we use a system called chiming where 8 ropes, one connected to each bell, are in a small cupboard and all 8 bells can be rung by one person. The system also allows tunes to be played, something which is very difficult with traditional pealing. The system uses an Ellacombe Board, devised by the Rev Henry Thomas Ellacombe, Vicar of Bitton and Gloucestershire UK, who first had such a system installed in 1821. It is believed that he created the system out of frustration at having his traditional bell-ringers arriving drunk on Sunday morning. The system allowed the bells to be rung by one person, although the sound of the bells is not the same as if they are pealed. 60 years after he invented the board, the first board in New Zealand was installed here at St Peter's.

This year was the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first installation of an Ellacombe board in the Bitton parish church and installations around the world rang at midday local time and the bells rang around the world (both ways) and ended in the Bitton parish church. We believe we were the first peal to sound.

Church bells are often cast with sentences from the Bible on the shoulder of the bell. The inscriptions are in the dedication frames around the bell ringing room. The number two bell has the inscription "peace on earth goodwill to men". It is the official peace bell for Wellington and was used for all official and religious duties where a single bell is required for the duration of the hundredth anniversary of the First World War. Given the situation in the world the ringers have continued to use this bell in this way.

The Peace bell was also rung to honour the victims of the mosque massacre and as a memorial in the anniversary of the sinking of the Wahine. It is also used as the summoning bell at the start of each service. We use this bell rather than the big tenor bell as we feel that it gives a message of peace to the city. They say that every time a bell rings an angel gets its wings. We like to make a lot of angels happy.



*St Peters has some amazing wood carvings as well. Take a moment to visit the Church to look at the craftsmanship.*







This shows how the bells can be rung in full peal if the rope wheels and systems were in full working order. The bell is pealed by swinging in a circle around the beam from when it is at the top of the circle all round to the top from the other side. We hope to be able to do this in the future once the tower is strengthened and the bell mechanisms are renovated. Currently the Peace bell can be rung this way, and we hope to get the treble bell (the smallest bell) to ring this way as well this year.



The bells do need some work which is planned for some time soon.

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