The Reformation of the Bells in Early Modern England

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explains the significance of an important episode of aural history in early modern English society. Between 1530 and 1640, England, like many other nations in Europe, experienced profound religious change. Not least of these were fundamental changes to the soundscape as parish bell ringing in England was transformed during the years of the long Reformation. Bells, once believed to hold power and efficacy, became the objects of new restrictions and changing attitudes. Although these reforms sought to distance bell ringing from the doctrines and ceremonies of the Catholic Church in Rome, the prohibitions against the bells in England were not as restrictive as those advocated in Zurich. Yet the argument that English bellringing was nationalised and secularised fails to convince, for the bells tolled and pealed in Elizabethan and Stuart parishes retained their ability to communicate solemnity and to remind parishioners of life, death, and the power of prayer.

Keywords: Reformation, Bellringing, Soundscapes, Aural History, Early Modern England
Dedication

For Lisa, Joe, and Clara
Acknowledgements

I am profoundly grateful to those who helped me with the research and writing of this dissertation. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor Dr. John Craig whose wisdom, clarity, and limitless knowledge of this period have guided me throughout this process. Over the years that we have worked together, John and I have been separated on numerous occasions by oceans, continents, and the duties and opportunities of life. Yet I am thankful for his enduring enthusiasm for this project. A special word of thanks goes to Dr. Hilmar Pabel who kindly served on my supervisory committee and read an early draft with great care and attention. His comments, criticisms, and suggestions were invaluable. I owe a debt of gratitude to the remaining members of my examining committee. The chair of my defence was Dr. Andrea Geiger, my internal examiner was Dr. Paul Budra, and my external examiner was Dr. John Money from the University of Victoria. I am grateful to each of them for their insights and constructive criticisms, and particularly to Dr. John Money who was willing to make the journey to the mainland and join us on the mountain for the defence.

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I deeply appreciate all of the assistance that was given to me by the staff at the Simon Fraser University Library. The folks working in the Interlibrary Loans division were particularly patient and helpful as they tracked down my many requests. They went above and beyond the call of duty when they very selflessly allowed me to use their own desks and computers for days on end as I searched through texts too valuable to be borrowed.

Finally, on a personal note, I would like to thank my family. I am profoundly grateful for their love and encouragement. I dedicate this work with love to my dearest Lisa and my darling Joe and Clara, and I owe a debt of gratitude to the unfailing love of my parents who forever encouraged me to think.
Note on the Text

In the text, original spelling and punctuation from manuscripts and printed works has been retained. All abbreviations and contractions have been silently expanded. All dates have been retained as found, however the year has been taken to start on January 1st.

Table of Contents

Approval…ii

Abstract…iii

Dedication…iv

Acknowledgments…v

Notes on the Text…vi

Table of Contents…vii

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INTRODUCTION
Ringing the Bells in Reformation England
-1-

CHAPTER ONE
Listening to Bells
-7-

CHAPTER TWO
Believing in Bells
-46-

CHAPTER THREE
Reforming the Bells
-91-

CHAPTER FOUR
Pealing the Bells
-170-

CONCLUSION
Persistence of Bells
-221-

WORKS CITED
-231-
Introduction

Ringing the Bells in Reformation England

The parishioners of St. Botolph’s Bishopsgate in Elizabethan London were jealous of their parish bells.¹ In 1587 the old sacring or sermon bell of this parish was taken down to carry out some minor repairs to the wheel at a cost of 16d.² While removed from its frame, the bell was stolen. A beadle was paid a shilling to search without success for the missing bell, and within six months the parish purchased a new sermon/sacring bell at a cost of 26s. A new baldric and rope were purchased, and the frame was duly repaired. An additional 3s. was then spent to repair a lock, a door, and a key, all of which presumably had been compromised during the theft. In a curious twist, the following year the stolen bell was found, and despite the significant cost of the newly purchased bell, the parish spent an additional 11s. 2d. to return the old bell to its rightful place. We lose sight of this tale in 1589 when the clerk was paid 2s. “for recognizance against him that stole the bell”, and an additional 2s. “for entering the action against him (the thief) in the mayor’s house and for the precepts”.³

The theft, replacement and recovery of the sacring bell are intriguing for a number of reasons. Although it is clear that bells were worth stealing, the motive for this theft remains

¹ London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Bishopsgate, MS 4524/1, fol. 67r.
² In the pre-Reformation years the saunce, sanctus, or sacring bell would have been rung at the elevation of the Host during the celebration of the eucharist. By 1587 it would have been commonly rung to announce the sermon. There were 12d. (pence) in 1s. (shilling) and 20s. in 1l. (pound): d=denarius, s=solidus, l=libra.
³ London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Bishopsgate, MS 4524/1, fol. 73r.
unclear. Since the thief was apprehended nearly a year after the event, and since the stolen bell was successfully recovered, it is probable that the bell was still in the possession of the thief almost a year after the event. As the bell had been neither sold nor destroyed for profit, it was clearly no easy matter to fence a church bell in late sixteenth-century London. Nevertheless it is hard to believe there was little or no demand for bells or bell metal in London. No doubt the thief feared that his identity would be discovered should he place a bell, which most likely bore an inscription, onto the market. Assuming that the bell was serving as the sermon bell, was the bell stolen to disrupt the announcement of sermons in this parish? The repair of the door and lock suggest that the theft was not opportunistic. While much is obscured, what emerges most clearly is the attachment on the part of the parish authorities in St. Botolph’s Bishopsgate to their old sacring bell. Not only was the bell being used, there must have been something about the sound of this bell that was vitally important to this parish. Did the old bell have a purer, clearer, more distinctive sound than the new? Or did the parish have ties to this old bell that transcended monetary value or particularity of sound? Despite being left to speculate about the motives of both parish and thief, the tale demonstrates the significance of two bells to the parish. The prompt replacement of the old sacring bell demonstrates the continuing functional importance of such a bell to the parish, while the re-replacement demonstrates the importance and attachment to the old bell itself.

While the parishioners of St. Botolph’s were fortunate in recovering their old sermon bell, a few decades later another parish community was busily acquiring new bells. In 1623 the churchwardens of the parish of Paston in Norfolk signed an agreement, on behalf of their parishioners, with a bell-founder named William Brend.4 The agreement determined that

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4 Norfolk Record Office, PD 264/21.
William Brend would take the existing four bells that had been hanging in the steeple of the parish and recast them into five “sufficient, tunable, and soundable bells”. The agreement specified that the new bells were to be similar in size to the five bells that were in the parish of St. George Tombland in Norwich, and that the quality of the new bells cast would be examined by “men of judgement in music”. But William Brend’s obligations did not end there. He was also responsible for taking down the old bells and hanging the new bells (requiring the construction of frames and stocks), and the maintenance of these bells for the next seven years. Finally, the agreement was careful to specify that the new bells should weigh the same as the old bells, thus ensuring that no metal was lost, or stolen, in the recasting.

The parish in Paston clearly had its eye on other churches in the region. Her parishioners knew that St. George’s Tombland had more bells in their tower than were found in Paston, and perhaps they were also aware that there was a growing trend in England to decrease the size of parish bells and increase their number. The churchwardens were clear about what they wanted in their parish bells: bells that could be heard and bells that were correctly tuned. But the size of the bell and the volume of its sound was being sacrificed for the quality of sound and an increased ability to produce ‘music’ or combinations of sound that resulted from an increased number of bells. Paston wanted bells that could be heard, enjoyed, and rung by an increasing number of ringers. It was a very large project, but it was evidently a project that the parishioners of Paston believed was important enough to support with their time, effort, and money.

Both cases demonstrate that church bells remained important in the parish churches of England in the 16th and 17th centuries. They suggest that bells were important in the life of a parish, and that their sound was meaningful. This had been true for centuries. Both cases also reflect changes in bell ringing, suggesting that how people used, heard, and interpreted their
sounds had changed, but that the people still viewed their bells as objects and sounds of significance in the life of a parish. Neither account suggests that the change was absolute or sudden, or that bells were now heard as either strictly sacred or strictly profane sounds. With these stories in mind, this dissertation examines the process of change by asking how England’s long Reformation altered the way bells were rung, heard, and interpreted by parish communities in England between 1530 to 1640. During this time period, parish bells, once believed to hold power and efficacy, became the objects of new restrictions and changing attitudes. I will argue that although these reforms sought to distance bell ringing from the doctrines and ceremonies of the Catholic Church in Rome, the prohibitions against the bells in England were not as restrictive as they might have been. But the bells were not merely nationalized and secularized, for the bells tolled and pealed in Elizabethan and Stuart parishes retained their ability to communicate worship, solemnity, and joy.

Chapter 1 begins by discussing the value of the history of the senses, and determining what can be gained by examining aural history. It explores the observations of a number of historians who have pursued this general field of study before turning our attention to the seminal work of Alain Corbin and Richard Hernandez, both of whom have observed what has happened when bells as sacred sounds and objects encounter secular challenges and contexts, when bells become the tools to achieve secular political goals. With a focus on the specific debate over bells in England during this period of religious reform, this chapter considers the arguments put forth by David Cressy that bells became the patriotic sounds in the new Protestant order. It also examines the ideas of several other historians who have studied the development of change ringing and the evolution of bells as sounds of entertainment. This chapter concludes by outlining the central thesis of this dissertation, namely that throughout this period English bell
ruling produced sounds intimately linked with worship, liturgy, and prayer, and only gradually and incompletely did this evolve into sounds of secular entertainment, sport, and good cheer.

Chapter 2 examines how bells were heard in pre-Reformation England. It asks when the bells were rung and how the people interpreted these peals in the pre-Reformation parish. Bells were popularly believed to possess power especially in relation to the dead and dying. Analysis of churchwardens’ accounts for the parishes of Bassingbourn in Cambridgeshire and St. Mary at Hill and St. Andrew Hubbard in London reveal popular attitudes towards parish bells, and attest to the fact that English men and women were prepared to invest significantly in the use and maintenance of their bells.

The reformation of bell ringing is the subject of Chapter 3. English reformers attacked the bells fundamentally because they believed that their function was being abused. These reformers attacked the popular belief that bells possessed spiritual power. The position of Heinrich Bullinger, the influential Swiss reformer, is central to an understanding of the reformation of bell ringing in England. Bullinger was on excellent terms with many English reformers, and they must have been aware of his attitude toward bell ringing. It is significant therefore that the English reformers ultimately did not attempt to enforce the type of restrictive prohibitions advocated by Bullinger against the bells in England. This chapter explores through a close examination of the relevant royal and ecclesiastical injunctions, how and why the crown and its ecclesiastical officers attempted to control the ringing of parish bells.

Injunctions are but one side of the story. How did reformed parishes ring their bells? How did they maintain their bells? How much were they willing to spend on their bells? In what sense were the bells still important? To answer these questions Chapter 4 analyzes the churchwardens’ accounts of a number of parishes within the city of London during this period.
This reveals that these parishes were more inclined than ever before to view their bell ringing as an emerging form of entertainment and sport, and to interpret their tolling as the sounds of secular good cheer, yet the bells continued to be heard as solemn sounds that called parishioners to worship, and as constant reminders of life, death, and the power of prayer.

This dissertation concludes by asserting that attitudes towards parish bells and the use of these bells clearly changed throughout this period of reform. However, the change was gradual and incomplete, and the bells nevertheless remained an important sound and object of the late Elizabethan and early Stuart parish. The English reformed church was still willing to maintain the sonorous link between bell ringing and prayer, sermons, and death, clearly convinced that the senses could be prompted in a reformed way to worship and prayer. It proved willing to endure these audible remnants of a superstitious past, as long as their peals were ordered, restricted, and contained.
Chapter One

Listening to Bells

Throughout history church bells have been rung to be heard. They have been used because they produce sound that is both enormously loud and aesthetically pleasing. They are rung because they are capable of transcending the noise of a community and uniting their collective attention. Bell ringing is a supremely public sound, and therefore the interpretations of the listeners are of great significance. While it may prove to be an elusive task, historians must attempt to hear these ancient sounds, and determine what they meant. Parish bells in England were rung frequently and with great enthusiasm, and they dominated the soundscape of a community when they pealed. Parishioners had little choice but to listen, and if historians desire to understand the past, we need to hear these ancient sounds and determine what they meant.

Corbin’s Model

This dissertation is not the first attempt to comprehend and analyze past sounds. Alain Corbin’s thought provoking work, Village Bells, calls his readers to listen to the parish bells of France, and to hear the political, cultural, and social history of her 19th century. In expressed agreement with the Romantics, the likes of “Schiller, Chateaubriand, and Lamartine”, Corbin would have his audience acknowledge “the intense power of the bell to evoke, to impart a feeling of time passing, foster reminiscence, recover things forgotten, and to consolidate an individual’s
identification with a primordial auditory site.”¹ Corbin intends to convince us that bells and sixteenth-century bell ringing in England are without doubt a legitimate subject of historical investigation, fully capable of offering “privileged access to the world we have lost”.² This analysis of the role played by the parish bell in determining power structures and identity in nineteenth-century France unconsciously alerts his readers that a similarly focused study might enormously enrich our understanding of Reformation England. The questions Corbin raises, the observations he makes, and the analysis he offers, all urge a parallel study of the parish bells of early modern England. Since bells were undeniably one of the most fundamental shapers of the “auditory landscape” of both 19th century France and 16th century England, we should be well served by agreeing with Corbin’s essential claim that “a history of representations of space and of the social imagination can no longer afford to neglect materials pertaining to auditory perception”.³

Corbin begins by suggesting that “through bells individuals could identify their community, identify themselves in time and space, identify their place in that community, and identify the power of the constituted authorities.”⁴ His study of post-revolutionary rural France describes a time and place in which a struggle over the control of bells is clearly evident; both because this struggle over bells was so explicit and so physically tangible – so explicit in fact that Corbin dedicates the contents of his second chapter to an examination of the “abductors of bells”.⁵ Corbin had ready access to documents that tell tales of stolen bells, hidden bells, bells that are locked away, bells that had been despoiled and profaned, and disputes over access to bell

¹ Alain Corbin, Village Bells (London: Papermac, 1999), x.
² Ibid., ix.
³ Ibid., xii.
⁴ Ibid., 147-169.
⁵ Ibid., 45-70.
towers. In these cases the historian is able to identify the meaning and significance of a parish bell due to the existence of documents which record this contest over bell ownership and control.

The discernible parallels between nineteenth-century France and sixteenth-century England are constantly evident. In both societies the ringing of the parish bells transmitted knowledge about others in their community, both the living and the dead. In Corbin’s words, bells provided an “auditory certification” of the major events of one’s private life through a “solemnizing” of the rites of passage. A subtle “auditory rhetoric” is evident in both societies, and this can easily be seen through a recognition that different types of peals in a variety of frequencies announced or acknowledged a diversity of events. With the passage of time, this rhetoric did not retain its meaning. The bells did not communicate the same meaning and significance to the French villager of the early twentieth century as it did to the generation of villagers one hundred years earlier.

The meaning of the parish bells in England was certainly different for the village parishioner of England in the 1530s than it was for that generation of parishioners, in the not so distant future, during the early seventeenth century. Yet I would also assert that even through those years of religious reform under the Tudors, much of the meaning did indeed remain the same. Theology, public worship, and ecclesiastical authority all undoubtedly underwent significant change, but the parish bells continued to be heard as sacred sounds of prayer, capable of bringing a human community closer to God and of reminding mortal souls of the inevitable journey to the after-life.

In some sense it is correct to suggest that this is an attempt to study what Corbin refers to as the “genesis of meaninglessness.” It is this reference that encourages us to ask whether the

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6 Ibid., x-xi.
7 Ibid., xviii.
continued pealing of bells in England throughout the seventeenth century did in fact come to lose their original meaning and significance. The development of change ringing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century involved a funneling of some of the pre-existent passions and meaning into forms or modes that were far more culturally and religiously acceptable; yet traces of the original meaning are indeed still discernible to the historian. Whether these remnants were consciously detected or intentionally maintained by late Elizabethan parishioners is an entirely different matter. It is undoubtedly true that from the perspective of the twenty-first century, the parish bells of ages past were “once the occasion of so many obscure and forgotten passions”. It is the task of the historian to bring these obscurities into focus, and these passions to the fore.

Like nineteenth-century France, sixteenth-century England experienced a shift in “the modes of relating between individuals and between the living and the dead”. The age of religious reform in England revealed a struggle for supremacy between local communities and the nation. English men and women were engaged in an unconscious struggle; would their identity be linked with his local parish community or would it be bound up with his national government and the countless branches of secular authority? Part of this contest is revealed in the wrangling over control of the ringing of the parish bells, and these will be addressed later through analysis of visitation articles, royal injunctions, and churchwardens’ accounts.

Disputes over bells were essentially disputes over symbolic attachment. And once again, Corbin’s analysis proves helpful. He notes that the struggle for control of the bells in nineteenth-century France was fundamentally an attempt to subordinate bells to the nation, and wrest control from the grasp of the local community, and to insert them into a framework of

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8 Ibid., xix.
9 Ibid., xix.
citizenship. It was an “attempt to alter the prevailing pattern of the culture of the senses”.\textsuperscript{10} The quest for a uniformity of religion was constant throughout the English Reformation. There appears to have been an effort by royal and ecclesiastical authorities to establish national consistency so that the unique modes of sacred self-expression of a local community might disappear. Identity would therefore lie with the nation rather than with the parish. This trend is evident in some of the other religious reforms that took place throughout the sixteenth century: the abolition of the private mass, the introduction of an ordered and nationally uniform book of communally recited prayers, the discouragement of private confession, and the acknowledgement that all parishioners should receive both the wine and the bread in the celebration of Holy Communion. All of these reforms supported a shift towards uniformity and consistency where public sacred space took prominence over private sacred space, and where one’s identity became intricately linked to the nation rather than to the local parish community.

Corbin argues that “the desire for bells seems to reflect a wish to reclaim the space of the village rather than a bid to restore the authority of the priesthood”.\textsuperscript{11} This is also a fitting statement in the development of change ringing. The sound of pealing bells certainly would have carried reminders of that which was sacred, but there is no explicit indication that the change ringing movement was motivated by deep religious convictions. In fact, change ringing seems to have developed as a secular sport and not as a form of sacred worship. Was this the end result of an unconscious negotiation and compromise between the local community and the state? Was the disorderly, impromptu, customary ringing of the pre-reformation community evolving into a well ordered and restrained sport which still echoed sounds pleasing to the ears of the local community, ringer and listener alike? A certain degree of local space had been

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 30.
retained, but with the consent of the state. According to Corbin, the secular state feared sacred sounds that could stir emotions beyond the control of the state. The development of change ringing perhaps served to quell this fear, for collective expression had been well contained.

Of course, it was not this simple. There is no evidence to suggest that change ringing replaced or even supplanted the more traditional ringing of the parish bell. The visitation articles and injunctions during the reign of Elizabeth sought to reduce the frequency and significance of bell ringing, yet church architecture during her reign reinforced the Gothic style and the prominence of the bell tower. Horton Davies asserts that a total of nineteen English churches were either built or rebuilt during the reign of Elizabeth. St. Peter’s, Brooke, Rutlandshire (1579), St Nicholas, Bedfordshire (1579), St. Wilfred, Standish, Lancashire (1582-84), and St. Michael, Woodham Walter (1563-64) were all newly built churches in the traditional Gothic style, with the remaining construction during this period witnessed renovations or rebuilding that entailed “Gothic being added to Gothic”.12 Horton Davies notes, “It is most significant that the Gothic survived longer in England, and was less altered than its medieval precedents, than among Lutherans of Germany or Sweden,” and this he asserts was “a deliberate attempt to maintain the continuity of the medieval with the reformed Church of England”.13 Davies goes on to emphasize that the decision to retain the Gothic style in church architecture was indeed intentional, for there is no doubt that the architectural style of tombs dramatically alters during this time period to reflect a more humanist philosophy.14 Churchwardens’ accounts also reveal efforts to maintain and protect bell towers themselves, and thereby a desire to retain the significance and prominence of the bell in the community. In Corbin’s own study he notices a

13 Ibid., 358.
14 Ibid., 372, 373.
distinct ‘desire for verticality’ amongst French villagers in the years 1850-1880, a desire he sees reflected in their efforts to ensure the survival of the bell towers.\textsuperscript{15} While there was admittedly little new construction in England during the reign of Elizabeth, there was a clear desire to maintain the Gothic style in projects and repairs that were undertaken during the Tudor period, as Davies explains:

It could, of course, be argued that in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in England, no style other than Gothic was possible for the buildings of the Church of England. Had the Church of England so wished, however, it could have followed the Renaissance styles already being used in secular architecture in order to indicate its break with the older religion of Roman Catholicism. Anglican church-building could even have followed the example of the French Calvinists, the Huguenots, with their plans for single roomed structures shaped as squares, circles, polygons, and ovals, and built in the classical style. That this possibility was not taken seems a proof that the national church sought to affirm continuity rather than discontinuity in its architecture.\textsuperscript{16}

The parishes of Tudor England may not have been explicitly protecting the verticality of their towers, yet there seems to be evidence to suggest that they were at least trying to ensure some sense of continuity with the traditional worship experiences of previous generations.

Until the sixteenth century in England, the tolling of the parish bell had perhaps the most profound symbolic attachment to the sacred customs attached to dying or the dead. The tolling of a bell had a variety of functions in this regard: calling the members of a community to pray for the soul of one of its members about to pass into the next life; warding off the evil spirits waiting to claim the soul of one about to die; prompting a community to pray for the soul of a deceased neighbour on the anniversary of their death; reminding every man, woman, and child of their own mortality and the brevity of life, yet simultaneously reassuring them that they too would be remembered in the future. Local communities included not just the living, but the dead. The past, present, and future were intimately linked, and the bells played a central role in establishing

\textsuperscript{15} Corbin, \textit{Village Bells}, 30-54.
\textsuperscript{16} Davies, \textit{Worship and Theology in England}, 358.
and maintaining this continuity. Ecclesiastical visitation articles and injunctions seem to suggest that the bells be rung before and after burial, and those rung on the evening of All Saints Day were those that were most likely to be rung excessively. The saints, especially local saints, were significant members of a given community of the dead, but so too were Christian souls in purgatory that were remembered the next day on All Souls Day. It goes without saying that if the ringing of the bells was specifically restricted to the remembrance of the dead, then the ability of the living community to maintain its link with its dead was being challenged. According to Corbin, “Suppression of bell ringing holds potential to obliterate the independence of the dialogue between a community and its dead”.  

Corbin thus sets himself apart from campanologists and bell historians whose primary focus has traditionally been upon bells as objects, or upon bell founders, methods for ringing, bell technology, and bell ringers. Corbin is fundamentally interested in examining what was heard and how this sound was interpreted by its hearers. How did this sound affect their political behavior, and how did the political world in which they lived filter what they heard? Corbin is asserting that if we are to comprehend more fully the listeners of nineteenth-century France, then we must be willing to become more explicitly engaged with the history of the senses and aural history. Indeed, in his earlier book, *Time, Desire and Horror*, Corbin implies that he is seeking to carry out, and clarify, the task set out by Lucien Febvre in the middle of the twentieth century when he called for a “history of the sensibilities”. Corbin asks, “Is it possible to discern retrospectively the nature of the presence in the world of people in the past through an analysis

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17Ibid., 54.
of the hierarchy of the senses and the balance established between them at a particular moment in history and within a given society?"  

**Soundscapes and Aural History**

A number of historians have at least acknowledged that aural history is relevant to our understanding of the past. Pre-dating the call of Lucien Febvre, J. Huizinga, in the opening pages of his highly celebrated work, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, not only encourages a greater appreciation of the soundscape of the late medieval period, but specifically directs the ears of his reader towards the sound of the parish bell:

One sound rose ceaselessly above the noises of busy life and lifted all things unto a sphere of order and serenity: the sound of bells. The bells were in daily life like good spirits, which by their familiar voices, now called upon the citizens to mourn and now to rejoice, now warned them of danger, now exhorted them to piety. They were known by their names: big Jacqueline, or the bell Roland. Everyone knew the difference in meaning of the various ways of ringing. However continuous the ringing of the bells, people would seem not to have become blunted to the effect of their sound… What intoxication the pealing of the bells of all the churches, and of all the monasteries of Paris, must have produced, sounding from morning till evening, and even during the night, when a peace was concluded or a pope elected.  

In his study of the soundscape of nineteenth-century America, Mark Smith argues that “how and what people heard demand careful consideration in order to understand the emotional and ideological value ante-bellum Americans invested in their heard environments”. What they heard was “highly situated and utterly historical”. Because “hearing is an active sense, one that is fundamentally historical in cognition; the present gets meaning from preceding and succeeding sounds”. The study of the aural past is indeed worth the attention of the historian. If we are to gain a more complete image of the identity of an inhabitant of sixteenth-century England, then

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19 Ibid., 182.
by necessity we will need to consider their soundscape. Furthermore, “perceptions of noise and sound are precisely that - attitudinal, situational, and contextual”.  

Murray Schafer, an ethnomusicologist, has reflected upon the relationship between man and the sounds of his environment, and what happens when those sounds change. He asserts that any ethnomusicologist will agree that sound and music in particular “is an indicator of an age, revealing for those who know how to read its symptomatic messages, a means of fixing social and even political events”. Schafer notes that changes in sound are often heard to reflect changes in the way in which a community imagines God; a change most evident during the Renaissance as God becomes increasingly reflected in portraiture and less imagined as a sound or vibration. In fact, Schafer notes that even subtle changes in the soundscape, such as an increased preference for sounds at higher frequencies over sounds at lower frequencies, can reveal a great deal to the historian about larger cultural changes that were taking place in a given community. If the historian is able to observe that a community did in fact come to prefer one frequency over another, it would suggest that this community has participated in a process that has attempted to distinguish between what is music and what is merely noise.

Therefore, an examination of changing soundscapes might not only reveal how a community is reinterpreting its relationship to God, but also how power and control are understood and practised within that community. According to Jacques Attal, “with noise is born disorder and its opposite; the world. With music is born power and its opposite; subversion…all music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for creation or consolidation of

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22 Ibid., 267.
24 Ibid., 6.
25 Ibid., 8.
26 Ibid., 9.
a community.” 27 Music is ordered or codified sound, and noise is its opposite. These definitions are useful to the historian who is then left to determine how and why some members of society were able to order and codify certain sounds, and how and why some sounds were used by other members of society to create subversive noise in their “quest for autonomy”. 28

In a similar vein Hillel Schwartz claims, “by its very definition noise is an issue less of tone or decibel than of social temperament, class backing and cultural desire, all historically conditioned”. 29 Or as Peter Bailey put it, “noise is sound out of place”. 30 Therefore when the historian is able to detect that the definition of noise has changed, then it should be possible to conclude that there has been a shift in social temperament, class backing, or cultural desire. It should then be asked for what purpose and to whose benefit has noise been redefined? For this particular study it will be worth noting that religious reform in sixteenth-century England did not silence the bells. Parish bells continue to ring, especially as prayerful tolls for the dead and dying. Although theology underwent dramatic revisions, bell ringing did not become noise.

If we are to appreciate fully the significance of any historical soundscape, we need to recognize that hearing is an utterly unique experience. Bruce Smith discusses this idea in his study of The Acoustic World of Early Modern England. 31 Sound, he suggests, possesses both a quality of “hereness” and one of “thereness”. 32 Not only does the hearer internalize and process the heard sound, but usually upon hearing the sound the hearer demands a knowledge of the source of that sound. When we hear a sound we almost immediately want to know, “what made

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28 Ibid., 13.
30 Emily Cockayne, Hubbub (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 113.
32 Ibid., 7.
that sound?” However, when we see a thing we rarely ask, “what sound does that thing make?”

Smith develops the argument that unlike our other senses, there is a sharp distinction between our physical and psychological experience of sound; hearing is merely physical, but listening necessitates the involvement of our psychology.\footnote{Ibid., 8.} Therefore the phenomenology of listening involves both biological constants and cultural variables.\footnote{Ibid., 9.} Sight is an outward experience, whereas the interpretive experience of listening makes it an inward experience, or as Smith prefers: sight is centrifugal while listening is centripetal.\footnote{Ibid., 10.} Smith argues that listening does not allow for detachment the way that sight does. Listening therefore implies that the listener is interpreting sound. Hence, the willingness of a parish community to endure the remarkably penetrating sound of the parish bell very frequently throughout their day suggests that this was a sound that was not only heard, but listened to. Therefore these parish communities were regularly and actively interpreting these sounds; and these interpretations must not escape the attention of the historian.

Smith’s specific focus on early modern England is obviously of great interest to this present study. Many have tried to detect a paradigm shift during the early modern era: was there a cultural shift from the eye to the ear, or was it in fact just the opposite? These types of cultural labels may indeed be thoroughly thought-provoking, but they appeal to our desire for soundbites and are not entirely accurate descriptors of reality.\footnote{To get a sense for some of the remarkably useful insights of historians who have considered the changing function of seeing and hearing during the early modern period, see for example: Stuart Clark, Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); Patrick Collinson, “England”, in The Reformation in National Context, eds. Robert Scribner & Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 89, 90; Margaret Aston, England’s Iconoclasts: Laws Against Images (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). By no means does this intend to suggest that these historians are merely engaged in the propagation of “soundbites”.} For it would be difficult to assert that any
age, past or present, has ever proclaimed any one sense to be dominant over the others, and we would thus be well advised to heed Smith's warning that we should not be so quick to place orality and literacy at polar opposites. 37 Attitudes towards certain senses, and the function of these senses, do experience change at various points in history, and the historian must be attentive to these cultural shifts. Smith is convinced that, “by and large the artifacts that survive from early modern England ask to be heard, not seen”.38 From popular ballads sold on the street corner, to the works of Shakespeare, to the sermons of preachers, all were meant to be heard, and this, Smith notes, is very different from the preceding era of Renaissance England.39 If Smith is correct, then the sound of parish bells become all the more significant.

Corbin acknowledges that the attempt to uncover the history of the senses is not without challenges. The historian must overcome the obstacle presented by “the transience of the evidence”.40 He states:

It is true that knowledge of techniques and tools, of the structure of the landscape and of dietary habits or hygienic practices makes it possible to reconstitute the sensory environment, at least approximately. The transience of the evidence concerns rather the use of the senses, their lived hierarchy and their perceived significance.41

While Corbin’s Village Bells finds a way to tackle directly the challenge presented by the transience of sensory evidence by examining the struggle over the bells in nineteenth-century France, Richard Hernandez and the exhaustive research of David Cressy demonstrate how to find and interpret the historical evidence that is relevant in the quest to confirm that the history of

38 Ibid., 13.
39 Ibid., 13.
40 Corbin, Time, Desire and Horror, 184.
41 Ibid., 184, 185.
bells is indeed capable of providing historians with that “privileged access to the world we have lost”.42

Hernandez argues that in an attempt to reveal and interpret the religious and political commitments of village communities in Stalinist Russia, the historian is well served to consider church bells as central objects and symbols in the struggle between these communities and the Bolshevik regime. He observes that control of parish bells was often at the center of the struggle between local participants and national regimes. The bells of the parish tangibly and audibly represented traditional religion and the “Old Way of Life”, and therefore were seen by the ruling hierarchy as an obstacle to modernity, progress, and the “New Way of Life”.43 Hernandez states that there were three basic interrelated elements of village life: sacred liturgy, defense of the community, and symbolism, all of which were united in the physical entity and sound of the parish bell.44 All three of these elements were also present in parishes of Western Europe, but Hernandez is right to argue that the parish bells of Russia had much greater significance, reflected in their immense physical size and weight, than those church bells found further west. This would suggest that bells were of far greater importance as physical objects and tangible symbols in Russia than in Western Europe. That even to this day many of the largest bells in the world are still to be found in Russia effectively supports this conclusion. By highlighting the significance of bells as physical objects, we recognize the significance of asking how the size of a bell, the inscriptions on a bell, and the number of bells in a bell tower corresponded to the meaning and significance of the sound of a bell’s ring.

42 Alain Corbin, Village Bells, ix.
44 Ibid., 1478, 1479.
Finally, Hernandez warns that the sacred and the secular are not easy to separate in radically modernizing regimes which are intent upon attacking local culture.\textsuperscript{45} Essentially these regimes are engaged in a process that seeks to nationalize or centralize local culture and customs. They seek to transform or co-opt local loyalties towards a broader nationalist agenda. Although it is misguided to liken the Tudor and Stuart monarchs to ‘radically modernizing regimes’, there is little doubt that they both sought to link local parish communities much more intimately and permanently with the state itself. Much like the research of Corbin and Hernandez, this present examination of parish bells enriches our understanding of the struggle between local and national cultures during England’s years of religious reform. Although the theft and forcible removal of bells from bell towers were far more exceptional events in England than those described by both Corbin and Hernandez, this study will describe local and national tensions over the control of the sound of a ringing bell.

Corbin, Hernandez, Smith, and others have alerted us to the importance of examining the history of soundscapes and the relationship of sacred sounds with secular contexts. They have specifically revealed how investigations of the conflicts and debates over church bells can enrich our understanding of religious, cultural, and political change. Although the history of parish bells has largely been neglected by scholars working specifically in the field of early modern England, a number of historians, who will be discussed below, have nevertheless made several valuable observations on parish bells in the midst of their discussions on the Reformation themes of continuity, change, compliance, dissent, and appropriation.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 1503.
The Bells of Early Modern England

Most of the research that has specifically examined parish bell ringing in early modern England falls into one of two categories. Some, like David Cressy, argue that the story of parish bell ringing during this period involves traditional or customary parish ringing, that had been intimately linked to the annual celebratory life of the parish community, evolving into secular sounds and being co-opted by the new political order to support and give legitimacy to the state. And second, others like William T. Cook and H.B. Walters, simply seek to observe and describe that this period witnesses these traditional sounds of the parish evolving into the sounds of recreation and sport for a number of ringers and ringing societies within the parish community. Both these approaches deepen our knowledge of the period and the history of the parish bells, but another argument must be made. The parish bells of early modern England produced sounds that were intimately tied to worship, the liturgy, and prayer, even in the face of dramatic religious reform, and that the loosening of these ties occurred only very gradually, and incompletely during this period.

To begin our examination of those who have paid special attention to the history of parish bells in early modern England, it is useful first to mention that several scholars have noted the great significance in the relationship between bell ringing and funeral rites.\(^46\) That bell ringing was so consistently associated with the rituals of death throughout the early modern period will make it possible to compare the funeral ceremonies of the pre- and post-reformation years and note the changing functions and attitudes towards the ‘passing bell’ and ‘death knell’ throughout

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this period of reform.\textsuperscript{47} Churchwardens’ accounts are an enormously valuable source of information in this regard. Many accounts consistently recorded the number of knells purchased each year, the price of a knell, the names of the parishioners for whom the knell was purchased, and some even indicate the length of time the bells pealed at the death of a parishioner.

I will therefore seek to observe and interpret the willingness and enthusiasm of parishioners to spend money on the use, upkeep, and purchase of parish bells and bell towers.\textsuperscript{48} Should we see this expenditure during the years of reform as an indication of resistance to ecclesiastical change or as a sign of liturgical continuity?\textsuperscript{49} To what extent were bells negatively associated with traditional religion and to what extent were they viewed as a useful and meaningful sacred sound of the reformed Church of England? Bells should not be interpreted solely in the context of the break with Rome. Horton Davies describes the effort to shape and define worship in the midst of the struggle between the Church of England and the emerging Puritans.\textsuperscript{50} Was it due to the growing strength of the Puritan movement that the attack by the Church of England upon traditional ceremonies, including the use of bells, became increasingly

\textsuperscript{47} David Underdown, \textit{Fire From Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 218. Underdown notes that in spite of making use of a Presbyterian service book, an All Saints parish meeting in 1649 ordered that the churchwardens pay the ringers no more money, and yet knells continued to ring out for the deceased before burials, and money continued to be spent on repairing bells and bell-ropes.


\textsuperscript{49} J. Scarisbrick, \textit{The Reformation and the English People} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 45. Scarisbrick alludes to a very different aspect of parish bells, yet one that should not be taken too lightly. He notes that while the bells did indeed summon, warn, tell the time, give “dreadful majesty” to death and celebrated marriage joy, they also provided the churchwardens with incessant business (i.e. taking down, putting back, greasing, mending clappers, renewing ropes, baldrics, and shafts). Indeed a cursory glance of nearly any churchwardens’ account reveals the significant economic commitment that a parish made to the installation, upkeep, and ringing of its bells. Not only does this point to the notion that the bells were an integral part in the functioning of the parish, but would also seem to imply that a fair number of parishioners must have economically benefited from the very same installation, upkeep, and ringing of its bells. One wonders what degree of lay economic interest was being threatened by the possibility that the bells might no longer play an active role in life of a parish.

\textsuperscript{50} Horton Davies, \textit{Worship and Theology in England}.  

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moderate? Elizabeth’s ultimate goal was uniformity, not the obliteration of ceremony. Davies suggests that the Church of England did not seek to distance the minister and the church hierarchy from the laity, as is evidenced by the ‘common’ nature of prayers set forth by Book of Common Prayer.\textsuperscript{51} It is perhaps within this context that we should examine the role and function of the parish bells in Elizabethan England.

The significance of the bells in this story of religious reform and cultural change has often been overlooked. In 1965, Wilfrid G. Wilson, Vice-President of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers, published \textit{Change Ringing: The Art and Science of Change Ringing on Church and Hand Bells}. His introduction allots a paragraph of three sentences to bells and bell-ring during the sixteenth century, but boldly asserts, “One of the lesser of the changes in Church and State brought about by the Reformation in England and the simplification of public worship was the almost complete secularization of ringing.”\textsuperscript{52} He proceeds to lay ultimate blame for this secularizing process squarely on the shoulders of seventeenth-century Puritans.\textsuperscript{53} By doing so he not only implies that the Puritan movement marks the end of the Reformation, but offers a misleading impression of public parish worship during the latter half of the sixteenth century. The royal injunctions, visitation articles, and churchwardens’ accounts do not seem to support this sort of narrative.

The scholarship of David Cressy has certainly proven to be a corrective to this oversimplified version of history. Cressy has suggested that there is evidence of the continuity

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 225. But perhaps he is rather unfair in his suggestion that the Anglican “dialogue between priest and people, an ongoing liturgical conversation,” should be contrasted with “the tyranny of the ministerial voice in Reformed worship”.


\footnotesize\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 2,3.
of certain basic attitudes towards soundscape between pre- and post-reformation England.\textsuperscript{54} There is every indication that Elizabeth and her advisors recognized the powerful symbolism of the ringing of the parish bells. By the middle of Elizabeth’s reign, bells were by no means merely rung for purposes of sport and civic utility; otherwise there would have been much less royally sanctioned effort to harness the tolls of the parish bells for reasons of state. Despite some of the best efforts of the reformers, the sacred, worshipful, and miraculous qualities of the bells clearly persisted into the beginning of the seventeenth century, and these sentiments were no doubt consciously exploited during the reign of Elizabeth by the state’s creation of nationally observed events deemed worthy of bell ringing.\textsuperscript{55} Cressy’s focus is on the evolution of the Protestant calendar of ‘festivals’, yet he very acutely draws our attention to the significance of parish bells of late Tudor and Stuart England; and for this reason it is necessary to spend some time outlining his central arguments and discussing the shortcomings and limits of his study.

Cressy first establishes that the pre-Reformation church year was intimately linked with the events of the agricultural calendar.\textsuperscript{56} English religious reform, extending well into the seventeenth century, witnessed a struggle for the construction and control of this calendar and consequently altered the manner in which parish communities marked the passage of time. Communities became less organized around local agricultural events and more defined by the political fate of the nation, and as such the liturgical calendar came to feature those events most suited to this growing sense of national identity. This was a process that witnessed the Protestant politicization of a traditionally Roman Catholic agrarian calendar. At the heart of this revised set of festive occasions stood the celebrations commemorating Elizabeth I’s Accession Day on

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 67-92.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 13-33.
November 17th and the deliverance from the Gunpowder Plot on November 5th. These and other celebrations served multiple political agendas from Elizabeth through to the late Stuarts. Cressy emphasizes that parishes were required to observe these occasions by royal command, but he is also very eager to point out that there is often evidence that parishes did so very willingly and with great fervour. Although these festivities were required by the state, they clearly enjoyed popular appeal and seemed to have been very relevant to English parish communities. And it is here that the political and social histories of early modern England engage one another. These newly developed national days of celebration could not claim the power or legitimacy of longstanding usage, and yet in spite of their novelty they appeared to provide English parishioners with occasions for merrymaking, bell ringing, and the burning of bonfires, thereby satisfying their yearning for communal celebrations.

As I will discuss later, these newly established celebratory occasions were often situated in close proximity on the calendar with more traditional days of feasting. Accession Day on November 17th replaced the celebration of St. Hugh’s Day, and Gunpowder Treason Day (Guy Fawkes Day) on November 5th sat remarkably close to that great occasion for feasting and bell ringing on All Souls’ Eve. Whether this proximity was accidental or intentional is perhaps debatable, but it is certain that interpretations of feasting, bell ringing, and bonfires on this new calendar could be potentially ambiguous. Indeed Cressy is aware that the celebrations that took place on Guy Fawkes Day could very easily have been seen to replace something even more foundational than All Souls’ Day. He acknowledges that All Souls’ Day involved a process by

57 Ibid., 50-66, 141-155.
58 Ibid., 90-92. Cressy very usefully provides “A Compendious Chronology of Joyful Occasions” covering the years 1558-1702.
59 Ibid., 50-91, 171-189. There is ample evidence to suggest that parishes throughout England eagerly entered into celebrations for Elizabeth, yet there are examples in which celebrations for some of the Stuart monarchs appear to have been less than enthusiastic, and severely restrained.
60 Ibid.
which the medieval Church co-opted ancient Celtic and Nordic fire festivals marking the end of summer.\(^6\) Folklorists might be tempted to interpret Guy Fawkes Day as a continuation of these ancient celebrations, but Cressy encourages us to remember that November 5\(^{th}\) celebrated a very real deliverance from a very real plot whose date was determined by the scheduled opening of parliament and not its proximity to an ancient ritual that marked the waning power of the sun.\(^6\)

His attempts to affirm the novelty of these early modern Protestant holidays may not be conclusive, yet Cressy very successfully demonstrates how an examination of holidays and the “vocabulary of celebration” is entirely capable of reflecting the changing political and religious moods in Tudor and Stuart England.\(^6\)

Cressy argues that this examination of the “vocabulary of celebration” and those episodes that helped give shape to a newly politicized and Protestant understanding of public memory can teach us how the English viewed themselves and their history, and about the “forces of social and cultural cohesion”.\(^6\) This argument supports his fundamental objective of demonstrating how and why the Protestant calendar developed under the late Tudor and early Stuart monarchs. In keeping with the methods he establishes in his introductory remarks, he explains these revisions to the liturgical calendar by “studying social activity on the major public occasions, patriotic festivals, homecomings, deliverances, and anniversaries of early modern England”.\(^6\)

He acknowledges that bell ringing was one of the most fundamental, ubiquitous, and dominant forms of celebration and therefore determines that we must decipher what early modern bell ringing meant, and for whom.\(^6\) For this reason Cressy is primarily interested in the politics of

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\(^6\) Ibid., 82.  
\(^6\) Ibid., 82.  
\(^6\) Ibid., 68.  
\(^6\) Ibid., xiii.  
\(^6\) Ibid., xiii, xiv.  
\(^6\) Ibid., 68.
bell ringing. Who determined the occasions for ringing? Who ordered their rings? How did parishes interpret these orders? How did parish ringing reflect assent or dissent to these changes to the celebratory calendar?

Perhaps Cressy’s study falls short of its goal by limiting itself to the examination of the occasions for celebration. If we desire to determine more fully how bell ringing revealed the way in which early modern English men and women viewed themselves, then we first need to determine what they in fact heard when the bells were rung. If we can discover what they heard then we can begin to uncover why bell ringing was such a vital component of celebration. But to do so we must consider the role and function of parish bells in public worship and liturgy and not simply their function in establishing a “vocabulary of celebration”. The bells were powerful celebratory sounds because they were fundamentally heard as sacred sounds, intimately connected with the liturgical life of the parish; an important suggestion that will receive much fuller treatment and support in Chapter 2. Cressy’s willingness to separate the celebratory function of bells from their role in public worship - which would include communal prayers, the liturgy, sermons, the celebration of Holy Communion, and the rites of birth marriage, death, and dying - neglects to resolve what in fact the listeners heard when the bells pealed. Indeed he neglects to address what aspect of ringing brought the bells to the attention of the English reformers in the first place. What did these evangelicals understand the parishioners heard when the bells were rung, what did they not want them to hear, and how was this reflected in the ecclesiastical injunctions from the 1530s until the early Stuarts? This line of enquiry will enrich our awareness of the context in which Cressy’s “vocabulary of celebration” was co-opted and manipulated by later monarchs.
Therefore it is clear that the parish bells were not only being appropriated by the state to
solemnize and legitimize the rule of the monarch, but they were also being used by ecclesiastical
authorities in order to reorient the focal point of public worship within the walls of the parish
itself. Christopher Marsh observes that by the end of Edward VI’s reign, the ringing of the
sacring bell had been prohibited by ecclesiastical injunction.\textsuperscript{67} The sacring bell had traditionally
announced the moment of transubstantiation during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.
Because the reformed Church of England sought to purge the belief in transubstantiation from
the doctrine of the Church, it was deemed necessary to silence the ringing that had become so
intimately associated with this belief. However, Marsh goes on to note that the ringing of a bell
prior to the giving of the sermon would be permitted. The replacement of the sacring bell with
the ringing of the sermon bell (usually the very same bell) also raises some interesting questions.
Were bells so powerful as to be capable of giving legitimacy to the reformed liturgy? Were
parishioners unwilling to allow the sound of bells to be removed from their sacred soundscape?
Churchwardens’ accounts record that sacring bells continued to be purchased, and continued to
be referred to as ‘sacring bells’, throughout the years of reform. This suggests that parishioners
may have been willing to accept a dramatic revision of theology, but they were far less willing to
accept the silencing of their bells, particularly that ringing that marked the sacred climax of
public worship.

This notion of continuity is also apparent as we consider the history and development of
change ringing during the first half of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. Much has been written about its rules and
method, but little or no mention has been made of the effect the Reformation had upon its
development. Few scholars seem to have paid attention to this rather subtle, yet enormously

\textsuperscript{67} Christopher Marsh, \textit{The Family of Love in English Society: 1560-1630} (New York: Cambridge
University Press, 1994), 34.
telling evolution taking place during the latter years of the sixteenth century: bells once rung for the enjoyment or instruction of the hearer, were now rung primarily for the pleasure of the ringer. The leisure and recreation of the ringer does indeed appear to have been one of the fundamental concerns of change ringing, but public nature of the sport most certainly needed the assent of the listeners. William Cook briefly mentions the fact that the English Reformation served to bring about the development of change ringing, but dedicates very little of his work to explaining how or why this development occurred. He is however convinced that bells survived the Reformation simply because they had been secularized and essentially detached from the liturgy of worship. He assumes that parishioners had a “love of the sound of bells”, but asserts that the sound was by no means sacred. To prove the increased secularization of bell ringing, Cook notes the increased frequency of ringing on November 17th, Elizabeth’s Accession Day, and later on November 5th. However, there is little doubt that these can be viewed as secular ringing only if these two dates are understood as primarily secular occasions; which they certainly were not. Cook later claims that “it was not until the nineteenth century that reformers began to harness the art (of change ringing) to the services of the Church”. This assessment of nineteenth-century developments is not entirely inaccurate; however it does not adequately acknowledge the sacred role and function of parish bells during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. H.B. Walters, a distinguished antiquarian of the 20th century, dedicated a portion of his research on bells towards providing some narrative description of the

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70 Ibid., 35.
71 Ibid., 36.
72 Ibid., 39.
changes that bells and bell ringing underwent during the English Reformation; however he too was not interested in analyzing how or why the sacred soundscape of England was being perceived or expressed differently by parishioners during these years of religious change.  

Victorian Campanology

Victorian campanologists are partly responsible for the fact that there has been an inadequate assessment of parish bells and bell ringing during the English Reformation. The work of both Cook and Walters reflect the type of research undertaken in the field of campanology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For theirs was a fundamentally antiquarian approach – an approach that was not concerned with the wider historical context or with the theology of bells or the occasions for bell ringing. Indeed it is perhaps not an exaggeration to claim that the nineteenth century witnessed a renaissance of sorts in both the field of campanology and the practice of bell ringing itself. We remain almost wholly dependent upon the findings of several of these nineteenth-century antiquarian campanologists for providing us with a detailed knowledge of the Tudor and Stuart bells of England: their weights, inscriptions, numbers, dates, founders, and lore. The enormous physical effort undertaken by these enthusiastic Victorians proved indispensable to recording a lost world, and this should not be overlooked. Their determination to scour the counties of England, risking life and limb climbing countless architecturally compromised bell towers, has provided subsequent generations with a comprehensive knowledge of the bells of England, from the medieval period through until the twentieth century. Eight of these campanologists working in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Thomas North, H.T. Ellacombe, J.J. Raven, John Charles Lett

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Stahlschmidt, W.C. Lukis, William Henry Hope, Alfred Heneage Cocks, and Edwin Hadlow Wise Dunkin) have left us with detailed information of the bells in eighteen different counties (Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Radnorshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Rutland, Lincoln, Devon, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Cambridgeshire, Kent, Surrey, London, Wiltshire, Derby, Buckinghamshire, and Cornwall), to say nothing of their efforts to provide general surveys of the bells of England or to detail the collections of bells held by individual churches and cathedrals. Subsequent campanologists of later decades made successful efforts either to address lacunae in these regional studies or to update or complete the surveys of the Victorians: scholars such as Frederick Sharpe (Berkshire, Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Herefordshire, Oxfordshire, Radnorshire), C. Deedes (Essex), H.B. Walters (London, Worcestershire), and Geoffrey Dodds (Hertfordshire) to name but a few.74

To understand fully the work of these nineteenth-century campanologists and to determine their relevance to this present study it is important to view their accomplishments within a broader historical context. Philippa Levine’s work is particularly helpful. Levine describes the establishment, function, and purpose of a number of amateur Victorian antiquarian, archaeological, and history societies and associations during the latter half of the nineteenth century. She begins:

Paradox lay at the heart of Victorian culture and nowhere was it more apparent than in their simultaneous adulation of their own age and their reverent fascination for the past. The coalescence of past, present and future, so common in Victorian writings, lends peculiar significance to the intellectual developments taking place in historical scholarship during the course of the nineteenth century.75

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74 Geoffrey Dodds, The Church Bells of Hertfordshire (Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire: Hertford County Association of Change-Ringers, 1994), i, ii. Geoffrey Dodds for example states that his 1994 publication was the first attempt at updating the 1886 edition of Thomas North and J.C.L. Stahlschmidt. Dodds work examined the bells of 315 churches compared to the 178 of North and Stahlschmidt. He also included an examination of the bells acquired by 6 Roman Catholic Churches since the 1886 survey.

Levine goes on to argue that the phenomenon of the late-nineteenth century amateur antiquarian was a by-product of the cultural, philosophical, and theological trends of the Victorian age. Many of the aforementioned nineteenth-century campanologists can easily be linked with the formation of several societies and associations that arose as a result of this peculiar Victorian interest in the past. Thomas North did research for the Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society; H.T. Ellacombe for the British Architectural Society; W.C. Lukis for the Society of Antiquaries; and William Henry Hope for the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. Given that our contemporary knowledge of the bells of England is so firmly rooted in their research, how are we to understand the possible motives of these Victorian campanologists?

Levine suggests that the “Victorian fascination with the past was peculiarly preoccupied with posterity”, and this resulted in a “strongly teleological approach to history”. She therefore claims that a number of Victorians were attracted to history for its seeming ability to provide a framework for justified belief; the action of selective memory governed the historical topics most appropriate to the institutions and ideals dominant in Victorian England.” The Victorians were not unique in this teleological approach to history, and most assuredly they will not be the last to use interpretations of the past to defend either present behavior or future ambitions. But Levine is probably correct to suggest that the Victorians were experiencing an age in which certain advances in both science and history were challenging some of the fundamental beliefs and assumptions upon which their culture stood firm:

This was the Victorian dilemma; history throughout the century was the standard-bearer of an ultimately fixed universe governed by good Providence, but the seeds of doubt sown in the first instance by science were further questioned by the direction of the new historical disciplines. Most significantly, the archaeological discoveries which

76 Ibid., 4.
challenged received theories of the age of the earth, and the new higher criticism which sought to distinguish myth from inspiration and looked for historical verification of the life of Jesus, bespoke the collapse of this fixed and timeless code.\textsuperscript{78} In order to prevent this sort of collapse, new lines of inquiry would have to be pursued and new topics of history would have to be explored in order to protect and defend those ideals and institutions most dear to the Victorian age. It is therefore important to ask two fundamental questions: what Victorian ideal was perceived to be under the greatest threat, and how did the late-Victorian antiquarian campanologist seek to defend it?

Nearly all members of these antiquarian, archaeological, or history societies were members of the Church of England. Levine points out: “No Jews, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists…were to found among their number.”\textsuperscript{79} Yet not only was their membership predominantly Anglican, but as antiquarians they “formed the spearhead of the ecclesiological movement”\textsuperscript{80} For example, the antiquarian H.T. Ellacombe, whose work included studies of the bells of Devon, Gloucestershire, and Somerset, was associated with both the British Architectural Society and “The Ecclesiologist”, a publication of the Cambridge Camden Society whose purpose was to further the goals of the ecclesiological movement. It was the goal of this movement to affirm and rejuvenate the Anglican Church by initiating an institutional renaissance within its ranks. This rebirth modeled itself upon an idealized interpretation of medieval of Christianity, and sought to return the existing ecclesiastical institution to its supposedly purer and more godly Gothic roots. Proper aesthetic expression was thus part of the manifestation of this spiritual pedigree. The history of England was thus asserted to be the history of the Anglican Church. William Stubbs offered more specific veneration for the Gothic period when he claimed that the Gothic, medieval church in England “successfully

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 10, n.13.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 12.
resisted all attempts by the medieval papacy to encroach upon its primitive and native authority.”

81 The Gothic period was therefore perceived to express the organic purity of Christianity in England. Convinced that this was indeed the case, William Stubbs confidently proclaimed: “I do not believe that a Dissenter could write a History of England”. 82 Levine links these nineteenth-century antiquarians quite closely with this movement throughout her work. It is apparent that most of these antiquarians preferred to view all parish bells in England simply as a direct inheritance of this medieval gothic period, rather than examining and interpreting what the bells meant, why they were rung, and how they were heard at different points in England’s past.

One of the consequences of the ecclesiological movement entailed a parallel program dedicated to repairing and restoring bell towers throughout England. A reviewer writing for the Ecclesiologist in 1846 declared:

The abuse of Church bells in England is indeed a sad spectacle. It is really a melancholy contrast to reflect that with us they are too often devoted to celebrate steeple-chases, and contested elections, and political triumphs, while in another portion of the universal fold they are solemnly dedicated and reserved. 83

Although this writer does not specify what parts of the “fold” are in fact to be admired, we should not be surprised to expect that his eye is upon Catholic Europe. Such a perspective would certainly warrant an effort to rediscover England’s pre-Reformation customs and traditions. Again we find the antiquarian and rector of Clyst St. George in Devon, H.T. Ellacombe, closely associated with this movement. For Ellacombe, belfry reform required not only that scientific change ringing be encouraged, but that the rules and discipline of the ringers be clearly

81 Ibid., 85.
82 Ibid., 37.
established and strictly enforced. Such thinking lay behind the establishment of numerous ringing societies beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century and continuing well into the twentieth (virtually all of the ringing societies that still exist today). William T. Cook credits the belfry reform movement for being the impetus behind the formation of the Oxford University Society in 1871 and the subsequent formation of the Cambridge University Guild of Change Ringers in 1879. The goal of these societies according to Ron Johnston was to “incorporate them (ringers) within the church organization and to end the separation of activities in the tower from those in the rest of the church”.

Since this movement sought to restore the link between the Victorian Church of England and its Gothic past, there was an enormous effort to restore, refurbish, and recreate the most tangible architectural elements of this medieval period. According to Levine, “the society (Cambridge Camden Society) promulgated a devotion to the architecture of the English Middle Ages as representing the truest expression of the Christian religion and an embodiment of the virtues promoted”. In an address to the Leicester Architectural and Archaeological Society, James Thompson claimed:

The…Society has…exercised a wholesome influence in the formation of a correct taste…If the medieval spirit, as embodied in the stone walls, and towers, and details of its cathedrals, its churches, its castles, and its home was one that spurned deceit and enkindled self-sacrifice…then let us thank that spirit.

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87 See Mark Chatfield, *Churches the Victorians Forgot* (Derbyshire: Moorland Publishing, 1979). Chatfield notes the extent of this restoration project, but then highlights fifty English parish churches that had been ‘forgotten’ by the Victorians. Because these fifty churches were spared from restoration during the Victorian period, they have fewer gothic features than most English parish churches.
89 Ibid., 47.
Since Gothic architecture was thought to be ideally suited in communicating the spirit of Christianity that should be reflected in the Victorian Anglican Church, then such architecture should be preserved, studied, catalogued, and quite possibly reproduced. So specific was the focus of these antiquarians that they received a degree of criticism from other history societies for their neglect of the Roman, Saxon, and Reformation periods of English history. For our present purpose it is worth reiterating this lack of antiquarian interest in the Reformation period. Their agenda was not served by the suggestion that the Church of England began under the leadership of the Tudors during the course of the sixteenth century. Instead, they believed that the spiritual purity of the Anglican Church could best be reclaimed by demonstrating its continuity with an idealized medieval church. This underlying distaste for the Reformation period is revealed in Thomas North’s description of the ornamentation and inscriptions found on the bells of Bedfordshire:

The decay of Gothic art, followed by the Reformation, produced many changes in connection with bells, as with other ornaments of the church. The stately Gothic capital and the quaint small “black letter,” gradually gave place to clumsy Roman letters for the inscriptions…Ancient inscriptions were sometimes erased, and the old forms dropped, at first to give place to mottoes of a reverent character, which soon, however, drifted, in many instances, into doggerel rhyme – stupid, frivolous, and thoroughly out of place, or into a bare list of names of vicar and churchwardens. Dates, in Arabic numerals, now appear on every bell, and founders’ names abound.

Given these motives it seems likely that the Victorian campanologists were less eager to discover the sacred sounds of bells during the Reformation, and much more enthusiastic to link their bell ringing traditions with those of the medieval church, and with the seventeenth century development of change ringing, which might easily have been interpreted as a renewed interest in the medieval parish bells. Although the Tudor Reformation could too easily be interpreted as the death knell of the English parish bell, the development of change ringing during the Stuart

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90 Ibid., 68.
years could just as easily be viewed as the salvific moment in the history of English campanology. Victorian bell-ringers would surely have been much more inclined to have seen their Gothic inheritance passing through the Stuarts than through the Tudors. However, such a perspective would have predictably resulted in a misrepresentation of sacred bell ringing in Tudor England, and misunderstanding of the roots of seventeenth-century change ringing.

Writing in 1906, J.J. Raven criticized J.A. Froude’s suggestion that during the Reformation “bells, rich in silver, still hung silent in remote church towers, or were buried in the vaults…some few peals of bells were spared for a time, but only under conditions of silence”. Although he doubts both the secrecy and the silence, Raven suggests that there was indeed “a general stagnation” of English bells. He defends this view by noting the lack of evidence for activity amongst English bell founders during this period; and on this point he refers to the work of the late nineteenth-century antiquarian campanologist, J.C.L. Stahlschmidt. Using the very same sort of evidence he suggests a revival in bell production beginning in about 1570, and lists several bell-founders who spring into action, including one of the more notable names in the history of bell casting, Robert Mot, founder of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, which even today refers to itself as “the world’s most famous bell foundry”. Nevertheless, a perfectly good explanation for this apparent stagnation in bell production may very well lie a few pages earlier in Raven’s own work. He sensibly observes that the dissolution of the monasteries saw a number of bells come onto the market and that at least some evidence that parishes did indeed purchase these bells. It is entirely plausible that these monastic bells did in fact swamp the market and that this would account for the decline of newly cast bells and inactivity of bell

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93 Ibid., 195.
94 Having cast both “Big Ben” and “The Liberty Bell”, it is perhaps a well-deserved title.
95 Ibid., 194.
founders during this period. But Raven was content with the limited evidence provided by casting dates and information detailing the activities of founders. He does little to describe the function of the parish bell and the attitudes of the parishioners towards its rings from the 1540s to the 1570s. He does not attempt to explain how this period of apparent stagnation might have led to a revival of ringing during the latter half of Elizabeth’s reign, why the state would have been so interested in co-opting bell ringing to support a national agenda, why Protestants were so eager to ring the bells in support of their new calendar, nor why change ringing began to flourish during the first half of the seventeenth century.

Recent Historiography

Paul Cattermole’s study of bells and bell ringing in Norfolk offers a more sophisticated and scholarly examination of this very same narrative. He too acknowledges that several parishes did indeed acquire the bells of the dismantled monastic houses following the dissolution, although he does not attempt to suggest why these parishes sought to make such acquisitions. His work suggests a sense of continuity rather than a decisive break from the past:

At places such as Bunwell, however, life went on as usual after the first contact with the ‘visitors’ (for the Inventory) on 3 April, 1552. The wheel of the great bell was mended in May, and two clappers were refurbished in July of the same year, just a month before the inventory was delivered at Norwich; so we may assume that bell-ring continued as it always had done.

96 Paul Cattermole, Church Bells and Bell-Ringing: A Norfolk Profile (Woodbridge: The Boydell Presss, 1990).
97 Ibid., 13, 156. Cattermole later notes that there is evidence that a number of bell founders migrated from London to the provinces around the time of the dissolution, Thomas Lawrence among their numbers. One would suspect the London parishes would have had the most convenient access to the bells of dissolved religious houses, thus resulting in a lack of employment for founders.
98 Ibid., 15.
This conclusion highlights a single moment in the reign of Edward VI, yet Cattermole implies that bell ringing had not undergone any significant or noticeable changes in recent memory prior to 1553. But perhaps the suggestion that “bell ringing continued as it always had done” lacks vital interpretive qualities; for much had indeed changed in the period between the dissolution of the monasteries and the final year of Edward VI’s reign. Even if bell ringing largely continued as it always had, the conditions under which it took place had been transformed, and therefore the meaning and purpose of those bells in the life of the parish need to be reconsidered and explained. Cattermole concludes: “there is no doubt that bell ringing continued to be a popular pastime, although there were few dramatic developments in the provision of new and augmented rings of bells in Norfolk before about 1600.” Such a conclusion does not seem to consider the possibility that bell ringing may have indeed been a vibrant and meaningful sacred sound during the latter half of the sixteenth century, nor does it acknowledge that the vigour of sacred bell ringing may have been the impetus for these ‘new and augmented’ rings at the turn of the century.

Cattermole suggests that since there is evidence that the bells were well maintained at the expense of the parish, and because there were nevertheless very few payments to ringers recorded in the churchwardens’ accounts, that most ringing, other than ringing on special occasions, was secular and performed by ringers not directly associated with the parish. However such a conclusion is not supported by the fact that numerous injunctions and visitation articles of the latter half of the sixteenth century tirelessly campaigned against excessive or unacceptable ringing associated with a variety of liturgical or worship related experiences. Such a conclusion also overlooks the vast amount of money spent throughout these very same decades

99 Ibid., 17.
100 Ibid., 13-18.
for ringing associated with burials and funerals. It would be difficult to develop a complete picture of the function of parish bell ringing if we relied only on those churchwardens’ accounts that specifically mentioned payments to ringers.

Ian Green’s work on bell ringing during the Reformation presents a number of enormously useful categories around which a framework may be constructed and interpretation facilitated. Green begins with the assumption that bell ringing was indeed “threatened with extinction” during the middle years of the sixteenth century but concludes that this “crisis” was averted and the transition to change ringing was successfully “negotiated”. He sets out to challenge the notion that argues, or at least implies, that all pre-Reformation bell ringing was sacred, and that the rise of secular bell ringing was a late-seventeenth century phenomenon. He argues that this “misleading” and overly “simplified” perspective is a result of focusing too closely on the activities of the “top levels of ringers” and “the most advanced forms of change ringing”. In an attempt to transcend efforts to label bell ringing as either ‘sacred’ or ‘secular’, Green proposes a new set of descriptive categories for early modern parish bell ringing. He asserts that while most ringing on the eve of the Reformation was ‘liturgical’ (calling people to prayer, to services, funerals, etc.), it is very easy to detect four other categories of ringing: ‘ceremonial’ (the ringing of bells, with the active approval of the church authorities, at a one-off public event), ‘customary’ (ritual occasions for regular ringing that had been devised by the ringer, but tolerated by authorities), ‘communal’ or ‘civic’ (ringing intent upon making practical

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101 I am enormously grateful to Ian Green for sending me a copy of an unpublished paper he presented at a colloquium held at Queen’s Belfast in 2005 entitled, “Sacred and Secular in Parish Music: Bells and Bell-Ringing in England c.1500-1700”.
102 Ibid., 2.
103 Ibid., 3.
and audible parish or community announcements or warnings), and ‘recreational’ (ringing for pleasure or sport).\textsuperscript{104}

Green rightly notes that most ringing that occurred prior to the 1540s was largely liturgical in nature, while recreational ringing during this period would have been least recognizable, largely due to the technological restraints that prevented full-wheel ringing on a set of bells tuned to a diatonic scale. On this point Green assumes that the development of the full wheel came late in the sixteenth century. This issue is contested both by Paul Cattermole, who disagrees with this rather late dating, and by Andrew Woodger, who disagrees with the idea that a full wheel was in fact required to perform permutations on bells.\textsuperscript{105} Furthermore, Green notes that bell ringers would likely have taken some pleasure in festival ringing (‘customary’ or ‘ceremonial’), but he does not acknowledge the pleasure the non-ringing parishioners might have taken from all categories of ringing, including ‘liturgical’. It is clear that Green defines recreational bell ringing exclusively from the standpoint of the ringer. Indeed, most campanologists and bell historians concentrate their attention upon the pleasure and leisure of the ringers and not upon the hearers or listeners of bells. On this point it must surely be acknowledged that the success and continuity of bell ringing in England cannot have been dependent upon the satisfaction of the ringers but upon those upon those who listened. Given the enormously public, if not intrusive, nature of bell ringing, its continuity most certainly depended on popular assent. Therefore, it is misguided to concentrate too much attention on ringers and their attraction to bell ringing as a leisure activity. It seems far more likely to conclude that bells were rung, and indeed continued to ring, because people wanted to hear them, rather than

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 3, 4.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 7.
because people wanted to ring them; and this should direct our attention toward the listener rather than the ringer.  

Green argues that during the reign of the Tudors bells were “threatened with almost complete extinction”.  Although some of their initial injunctions may indeed suggest that extinction was a very real possibility, it is very difficult to conclude that this threat was in fact as real as it may appear.  Green notes that the inventories taken in 1549 and 1552 recorded the number of bells housed in all the parishes of the realm and suggests that this was done with an eye towards destruction or removal, a fate avoided as a result of Edward’s premature death. However, it could just as easily be argued that these inventories tried to ascertain whether certain church goods were indeed being destroyed and eliminated, but it is very likely that they also sought to prevent the loss or destruction of other such items at the hands of the parish, and to prevent parochial attempts at profit making for the sale of all church goods.  In any case, it will be important to determine whether the churchwardens’ accounts, the royal injunctions, or even the attitudes of the reformers did indeed threaten parish bells with extinction.

Green notes that some examples of ‘customary’ or ‘ceremonial’ ringing might often overlap with ‘liturgical’ ringing due to the spiritual or theological significance of the occasion.  For example the tolling that became customary and ubiquitous on November 17th had obvious theological overtones in spite of such ringing having the secular purpose of honouring Queen Elizabeth’s accession day.  I would argue, however that this blurring of categories was the norm.

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\[106\] It is worth observing that almost all the more prominent campanologists and bell historians have been active bell ringers.  I am not surprised that ringers would be enormously interested in the science and history of their art, however there is something inordinate about this representation, perhaps revealing a biased interest in the ringers and not the listeners.

\[107\] Ibid., 7.
rather than the exception, and thereby contend that bell ringing throughout the Tudor dynasty remained an inherently sacred sound.\textsuperscript{108}

It is clear that there are a good number of questions that have gone unanswered regarding the function and meaning of bell ringing in Tudor England. There is ample opportunity to expand upon the work of David Cressy and to enrich the context of his conclusions. To grasp the significance of celebratory bell ringing we must further explore what the parish community heard when the bells pealed and why these peals were powerful and worth harnessing by the state. To what extent were parish bells heard as sacred sounds during these years of religious reform? How effective were the attempts to separate their rings from public worship and silence their liturgical function? To what extent were bells really threatened with extinction? Why did the performance of bell ringing receive public assent from the non-ringing community? What role did late Tudor bell ringing play in the development of seventeenth-century change ringing? To date, these questions have not been adequately addressed. Rejecting the view that the bells tolled in Reformation England were stagnant, dying, or rapidly evolving into strictly secular sound, my dissertation argues that we need to begin by interpreting the manner in which the bells were in fact heard, and thereby conclude that bells remained closely associated with the worship, liturgy, and prayer of the parish community.

These questions will then permit us to consider the extent to which the traditional meaning of the bells had been maintained throughout these years of religious reform. Can we really detect the “genesis of meaninglessness”?\textsuperscript{109} Was there in fact a steady evolution towards bell ringing becoming a strictly secular sound? To what extent had their original liturgical or spiritual meaning been lost by the end of the reign of Elizabeth I? We are hereby encouraged to

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{109} Alain Corbin, \textit{Village Bells}, xviii.
determine whether the unique identity of a given community in sixteenth-century England was in fact being challenged by the enforcement of restrictions on their ability to define their own sacred space. Did sacred sound in fact have a legitimate and acknowledged role in the reformed Church of England? An examination of these sorts of questions will permit us to consider how Elizabethan bell ringing provided the context for the subsequent development of change ringing in the seventeenth century.
Chapter Two

Believing in Bells

English parishioners believed in bell ringing. They consistently supported their parish bells with time, money, and effort, and were thoroughly convinced of their power and efficacy. According to Nigel Thrift, “It is important to stress that in medieval times these bells were not just time signals. There was a moral-psychological dimension to their existence.”¹ If we are to recognize the significance of the changes to the soundscape of early modern England, then we must first give a brief account of the occasions for parish bell ringing and the meaning of their sound in the years leading up to the religious, cultural, and political changes of the English Reformation. To begin, I will describe and interpret the occasions upon which the parish bells were sounded on the eve of the Reformation. What might their rings have meant? What might it have meant if certain rings were changed or lost?

The task of cataloguing the traditional uses of parish bell ringing has been done many times over by a good number of antiquarians and bell historians, and they should be credited with diligently collecting and publishing a vast amount of campanological material.² More important to this present purpose however, they have provided us with very useful accounts of

the traditional uses and purposes of parish bell ringing throughout the centuries in England. But unlike antiquarians and bell historians, our purpose is to focus fundamentally upon the listeners and to establish the soundscape of bells they would frequently hear within their community. How did they interpret these rings in late medieval England?

**Ringing for Services**

Many inhabitants of late medieval England would have heard a good number of rings throughout the day announcing the canonical hours of prayer and the commencement of a variety of church services, particularly if he lived in close proximity to a monastic house. We cannot expect that all parishes were diligent enough to ring for all the hours, all the time in the years leading up to the Reformation, but we can be fairly certain that there was a degree of consistency throughout England to ring for at least Matins and Vespers. It is possible that the bells for Matins and Vespers may have occasionally served a dual purpose; the Matins bell often simultaneously indicated the opening of the markets, while Vesper bells were rung to announce curfew. Midday peals were heard in some parishes, and these would announce to parishioners that afternoon or evening services would take place later on that day. The “morrow mass bell” would be rung on Saturday evening to announce that there would be an early morning mass the next day, and regularly scheduled Sunday services would be announced with ringing as they still are today. The “pancake bell” was not rung to announce a service as such, but rather to warn

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5 Ibid., 137.
parishioners that it was their last opportunity to be ‘shriven’ before the season of Lent was upon them.  

Parishioners would certainly have heard bells tolling that were not specifically directed towards them. The monasteries of England left their imprint upon the soundscape of late medieval England; calling the monks together for prayer and for a multitude of other occasions. The “priest’s bell”, sometimes referred to as “St. Anthony’s bell” would have been rung to call the priest back to the parish should he happen to be absent and required to return. The “mote bell” called certain parishioners to gather for parochial meetings, but the degree to which these attendees were representative of the entire community probably varied from parish to parish. The mote bell did not however always refer to the parish bell, for there was often also a bell housed in a town’s guildhall, and its function was probably more often civic than parochial. And as North reminds his readers, sixteenth-century Europeans could easily distinguish between civic and sacred ringing, for “even Bucer,” the celebrated Strasbourg reformer and eventual Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, “who strongly objected to much ringing, was willing to allow – as a common and necessary thing – the ring of a bell to call the people to come to public meeting for the affairs of the commonwealth”.

That bells announced times of prayer, worship services, and other parochial gatherings indicates that ringing marked a common community schedule, a schedule solemnized by a variety of spiritually focused activities. Although it is impossible to imagine that every parishioner participated in all the prayers of the canonical hours, the persistent sound of bells echoing throughout the parish would have offered the assurance that at least some members of a

\[\text{Ibid., 142.}\]
\[\text{Raven, The Bells of England, 67-69.}\]
\[\text{Walters, Church Bells of England, 120.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 165.}\]
\[\text{Thomas North, English Bells and Bell Lore (Leek, 1888), 98.}\]
parish community were religiously engaged. Such ringing revealed when and where a community was gathering, and permitted the possibility of participation. Indeed, participation could be frequent, and weekly attendance and participation at mass was not uncommon.\textsuperscript{11} The autobiography of the fifteenth-century Englishwoman and mystic, Margery Kempe, reveals that when “there was time and place convenient thereto”, she was “houselled each Sunday”.\textsuperscript{12} Although it appears to have been neither the norm nor the expectation, the opportunity for participation seems to have been frequent, especially for those living near larger urban centres. Many of these bells did not tell parishioners where to go, but rather when to give private or public assent to something. The bells did not necessarily demand attendance, but rather reminded the listener to participate; and this participation could even be accomplished from an introspective distance. As Walters notes, the Sanctus bell was rung to acknowledge the truth of the Trinity, and to remind those not at church to “bow their heads”.\textsuperscript{13} In some sense these bells were less about physically uniting people as they were about establishing a common spiritual schedule for the parish, whether the parishioners were in the church or not. The spiritual unity of the parish was therefore made audible, and parishioners could participate in corporate worship even from a distance. The parish bells thus expanded the sacred space of the community.

Marica Tacconi’s extensive descriptions of cathedral ritual in late medieval Florence vividly illustrates how bells played a prominent role in the complex cathedral processionals held on a number of feast days in the city, a role most certainly mimicked in English cathedral

\textsuperscript{12} Margery Kempe, \textit{The Book of Margery Kempe} (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1944), 50.
\textsuperscript{13} Walters, \textit{Church Bells of England}, 123. However Walters does not indicate whether he is referring to any historical evidence which specifically required the “bowing of heads”. Walters might simply be suggesting that this would have been interpreted as a thoroughly solemn ringing occasion.
processions.\textsuperscript{14} Her translation of the prescribed ritual for Easter Monday taken from a thirteenth-century ordinal, 	extit{Mores et consuetudines cononice florentine}, demonstrates that the use of bells in public ceremony was both important enough to warrant detailed description, and an essential sound of the ritual life of a cathedral:

\begin{quote}
[f. 4r-v:] On the Monday after Easter we ring at Vespers and Matins as on Easter Day and after celebrating the \textit{Missa populi} in the church of San Giovanni Battista we ring the large bell and celebrate another mass at the altar of St. Reparata. Then we ring all the bells at length, one [first] time to convene in the cathedral church all the clergy and populace. Then, after an interval, we ring all the bells for a second time. In the meantime, the cross and the chest with the vestments ought to be prepared, and then, after another interval of time, we ring for a third time all the bells at length. After this and with the clergy and populace together, the cantor intones the antiphon \textit{Stetit angelus}, at the beginning of which we begin our walk, heading toward the church of San Pier Maggiore, and here we celebrate Terce, the High Mass and Sext. In these processions and in all the others we do throughout the year and in the litanies when we sing throughout the streets, the bells of each church by which we transit must be rung.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Tacconi is probably correct in her suggestion that the bell ringing and the procession itself were directed toward the common people.\textsuperscript{16} The route of the procession would have visibly joined the surrounding community with the rather elite spiritual function of the cathedral, but the bells would have served audibly to include the laity in the spiritual spectacle. This was public worship indeed; the louder it was, the more inclusive it became.

\textbf{Marking Time and Status}

But even bell ringing that had no apparent link with public worship at all could be assimilated into the sacred soundscape. The use of the curfew bell is generally considered to date back to the time of William the Conqueror. Originating from the French \textit{couvre-feu}, the curfew bell served a secular purpose and addressed a most legitimate civic concern. The bell

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Marica Tacconi, \textit{Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 99-100.
\item Ibid., 99.
\item Ibid., 100.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
reminded the inhabitants of a community to cover or extinguish their fires for the evening, an obvious attempt to prevent the potential destruction of fire at night. (There is probably good reason to believe that by extinguishing light, the authorities were probably also attempting to prevent any nocturnal gatherings that might be conspiring against the current regime; a particular concern of William the Conqueror and William Rufus.)\(^{17}\) The legal requirement to ring the curfew bell seems to have faded over time, even though the tradition of ringing this evening bell was reinforced by another intersecting purpose.

In the fourteenth century Pope John XXII ordered that the evening “Hail Mary” was to be said upon the ringing of the curfew bell.\(^{18}\) In 1399 Archbishop Arundel ordered an Ave to be said in the province of Canterbury in the morning and in the evening, and this became known as the ringing of the Angelus, Ave-bell, or Gabriel-bell. Early printed primers provided prayers to be said at the tolling of this bell, intent upon remembering the passion and death of Christ.\(^{19}\) The ecclesiastical initiative ensured that in time the curfew bell and the Ave bell became one and the same bell. This intersection of function would also explain why “Gabriel bells” were so often inscribed like that of S. Alban Wood Street in London which bore the instruction, “to be struck every night at the time of curfew”.\(^{20}\) It is not difficult to detect how the symbolism of both rings would have intuitively paralleled each other. The order, safety and protection symbolized by the curfew bell would have neatly corresponded to the intercessory and salvific elements of the Ave prayers. Just as the curfew bells could help save a community from the flames of physical destruction, the Ave bell could help save souls from the purifying flames of purgatory.

\(^{17}\) Thomas North, *English Bells and Bell Lore*, 98.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 99.
\(^{20}\) Thomas North, *English Bells and Bell Lore* 99.
The Ave bells could have been heard as the sounds of protection and salvation, while other ringing would have been heard as reminders of order and stability. In this regard there were a number of occasions for bell ringing that celebrated or acknowledged the existing hierarchy or authority, both secular and ecclesiastical. Occasions pertaining to the rule of English sovereigns (births, marriages, coronations, deaths) do not appear to have commonly warranted the ringing of parish bells prior to the reign of Elizabeth. Thus the ringing of the parish bell rarely symbolized anything remotely resembling nationalistic fervor. Pre-Reformation bells did not indicate or promote a sense of national unity, let alone a sense of unity even with those outside the boundaries of one’s own parish.

Bells were rung to greet a succeeding abbot, at the presentation of a new abbot at the altar, and at the visitation of the archbishop of Canterbury.\(^{21}\) Although John Foxe is hardly a neutral observer, he bemusedly described what took place during a visit to London by Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury in 1397 and then again from 1399-1414 (exiled, 1398):

> So, what greater shewe of arrogance & pryde could there be, then in this: who I haue oft named before, Thomas Arundell, Archb. of Cant. who passing by the high streat of London, did not only loke & waite for the ringing of the belles, for a triumph of his coming, but toke great snoffe & did suspend, all such churches in Lond (not only with the steple & bells, but also with the organes) so many as dyd not receaue hys comminge with the noyse of belles.\(^{22}\)

Foxe thus reveals that bells were indeed expected to have been rung for a visiting archbishop, and that the visitations of ecclesiastical dignitaries were normally celebrated with ringing. Foxe was obviously critical of such a clerical expectation, and even more alarmed that the archbishop could so arrogantly claim the authority to impose a punishment of suspension upon the churches of London in retaliation for his having been personally offended by the silence of the bells.

Foxe’s bias aside, the account is significant because it suggests an expectation that authority would be acknowledged with ringing.

That bells could be rung to confirm authority, or silenced to refute it, should alert us to those occasions when bells were rung to acknowledge existing hierarchies within the parish community. The death of a man was usually indicated by three sets of three rings and the death of woman was announced by three sets of two rings.\(^{23}\) The deaths of children were also signaled by fewer rings than adults, and the death of female children were indicated by fewer rings than male children. Burial ringing, obit ringing, and trental ringing all served to increase the number of bells rung after death, and these were largely dependent upon the economic status of the deceased and type of memorial ringing they were able to afford. There are records of some peals being extended for a full trental; that is, a full thirty days of ringing. Obviously the extent to which bells were rung during trental, if at all, and the number of obit rings purchased, if any, depended on the wealth of the deceased. Bells reinforced hierarchy and rank, reinforced with such audible force that it would be very difficult to ignore. Whether this audible reinforcement brought to the listener a sense of reassurance or a sense of rejection and annoyance is not entirely clear. Whatever the case might be, such evidence reveals something of the late medieval obsession with rank, degree and status. This also begins to address how people were able to distinguish or decipher different ringing and understand the language of the bells.

The role bells played in the reaffirmation of the importance of hierarchy extended even to the domain of the saints and the celebration of feast days. Bells were regularly rung to announce the commencement of the feast days of saints; however not all saints were audibly recognized in

\(^{23}\) Raven, *The Bells of England*, 111, 112 & Walters, *Church Bells of England*, 155-160. Both Raven and Walters remind us that this is the origin of the expression, ‘nine tailors make a man’. The 3 by 3 ring came at the end or ‘tail’ of the death knell, therefore these 9 ‘tail-ers’ indicated that the deceased was in fact a man.
the same way. If a parish had more than one bell, only those saints recognized as deserving of a “great double feast” would receive the ring of the great bell. “Middle double feast” saints would receive rings from the bell of the next order of magnitude, while all other “double feast” saints would receive rings from the bell of the third order of magnitude. The criteria for ranking these feasts had much to do with the relation of the feast to its relevance to the mysteries of Christian faith, proximity to the life of Christ (e.g. apostles), and relevance to the Universal Church (e.g. locally vs. universally celebrated saint or event). The bells very audibly confirmed those most essential mysteries, occasions, and people of the Christian faith. Obviously the great bell would have had the most thunderous resonance, and therefore it seems to have been the intuitive choice for the celebration of the greatest saints. This was a world in which the greatness of the noise was expected to match the greatness of the occasion, and that nothing could compete with the ‘great’ bell’s ability to affirm significance and importance.

This sonorous power of the great bell is a reminder that of all the countless other occasions and causes for bell ringing in late medieval England, perhaps the most notable were peals against plagues and storms. Since evil spirits were most commonly believed to have been the cause of both disease and thunder, bells were not surprisingly trusted to combat these invisible demons. The ability of bells to produce sound that could transcend this world made them viable tools in the struggle against the spiritual realm. Once again, this authority would have depended upon the enormity of the sound produced and the fact that the bell had been christened.

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The symbolic power of bells is also evident in their role in excommunications and interdicts.\textsuperscript{26} Bells were often tolled in a ceremony designed to announce a major excommunication.\textsuperscript{27} The effect was two-fold: mimicking the death knell of the excommunicated parishioner and simultaneously announcing the excommunication. Interdicts, on the other hand, silenced the bells. By depriving a community of a sacred sound and stripping away its defenses, this silence imparted spiritual punishment upon the parishioners. That such silence could communicate this sort of communal reprimand reveals the powerful sacred function of the parish bells in public worship.

Finally, there were more mundane uses of bell ringing as markers of time and status. The “leaving-off bell” (also referred to as “pudding bell”, “potato bell”, “oven bell”, and “dinner bell”) was rung at the end of a service and gave notice to the domestic workers that the masters of the house were on their way home, and that the appropriate culinary preparations should begin.\textsuperscript{28} Undoubtedly this was not the original function of this ring that followed the Sunday service; its original function was most probably meant to announce an afternoon or evening service taking place later on that same day. Parishioners themselves ultimately came to determine, the practical meaning and significance of this bell, regardless of the primary ecclesiastical intention. Finally, the “gleaning bell” was rung to signal the moment at which the gleaning was to begin and end each day.\textsuperscript{29} By establishing a fixed schedule for gleaning, the community sought to ensure that the fit and the strong did not monopolize the agricultural spoils by starting too soon or by continuing their collection long into the night. The bell was therefore a symbol of fairness, and the sound of protection for the more feeble bodied parishioners. And

\textsuperscript{26} Raven, \textit{The Bells of England}, 67,68.
\textsuperscript{27} As is indicated in the expression “bell, book, and candle”.
\textsuperscript{28} Walters, \textit{Church Bells of England}, 136. Here Walters describes bell ringing occasions prior to the suppression of the monasteries beginning in 1536.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 167.
this seems to have been an appropriate duty for a bell, its rings did not favour rich or poor, man or woman, adult or child.

Their impartiality needs to be reconciled with their ability to affirm social distinctions within a parish community: rich above poor and men above women. How could the bells simultaneously have been a sound of protection for the feeble-bodied and impoverished members of the community and a sound that affirmed the existing social hierarchies? Perhaps what in fact we are hearing is a late medieval definition of a well-ordered society. The bells affirmed that hierarchal divisions were worth acknowledging, if not useful for the effective functioning of a well ordered community, but they also conceded that the parish shares some sense of responsibility for the least of its members.

**Assisting the Dead and Dying**

Perhaps the most notable ringing in Western Europe took place on behalf of the sick, the dying, and the dead. Death knells and passing-bells have reminded English men and women of their own mortality for centuries. Raven reminds us that when priests visited those too ill to receive communion in church, they would ring a houseling bell along their way to announce their purpose of administering the holy sacrament to an invalid.30 Surely the purpose of this was two-fold: to give audible solemnity to the sacrament, as well as to invoke the community to pray for the sick individual. We might even wonder, in an era horrified by the ravages of plague, if the bell communicated the existence and location of disease and sickness that ought to be sensibly avoided. This reference to a houseling bell refers to a small hand-bell, but it still suggests that without warning the faint rings of sickness could very quickly become the thunderous toks of

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30 Ibid., 95-97.
death. The houling bell was significant enough to require reform in 1549 when the Draft for Visitation Articles of 1549 forbade its use: “Item. That going with the Sacrament to the sick, the minister have not with him either light or bells”.  

But a new occasion for ringing would arise if death should come to the sick parishioner, ringing which would have all too frequently shrouded the parish soundscape with sounds of mourning and remembrance. A significant number of medieval English bells were dedicated to St. Michael, and this dedication reveals one of the most significant functions of parish bells. St. Michael was considered the guardian of the soul after the body dies. When a parishioner was near death the tolling of bells would extol the community to pray for the soul of the deceased as it journeyed from this life to its transcendent existence. This was the “passing bell” or “soul bell”, and obviously a belief in the existence in purgatory would have made the need for these prayers far more compelling and relevant. The passing bell was carefully used and confined to ring only at that precise moment before death. Churchwardens’ accounts support this notion by noting that a passing bell rung during the night would cost more than one rung during the day, revealing that the passing bell was to be rung when it was most required, regardless of the hour of day. The death knell should not be confused with the passing knell, although sometimes the death knell was referred to as the second passing bell. The passing bell was rung at the moment just prior to death while the death knell was rung after the parishioner had already died. The interpretation of the passing bell became a matter of great interest and significance during the years of reform, a subject to which we will return.

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33 Walters, Church Bells of England, 116.
Bells were also rung at funerals and at obits, the annual remembrance of a parishioner’s death. On both occasions it is clear that the fundamental function of the bell was to remind parishioners to pray for the soul of the deceased.\textsuperscript{34} As mentioned earlier, such rings also reinforced hierarchy and social distinctions; the money paid to ensure the remembrance of the obit was less expensive than the construction of a chantry chapel, but payment for more ringing on a greater bell could still ensure that the obit highlighted the economic and social standing of the deceased parishioner. Yet it would appear from later churchwardens’ accounts that a death knell or funeral knell could be freely given to people from all walks of life, rich and poor alike.\textsuperscript{35} The frequency of such ringing at funerals and burials would have been a remarkably regular occurrence in the life of a parish community. In 1339 Bishop Grandison of Exeter complained of the excessive ringing that took place during funerals, from the lych bells that accompanied the procession of the corpse, to the parish bells that sounded the burial: “doing no good to the departed, annoying the living, and injurious to the fabric of the bells”.\textsuperscript{36} But, we must assume that all of this ringing was significant in one other regard. The ringing of the parish bell at death supplied very powerful audible recognition for each individual in the community. If only for a moment, everyone within ear-shot of the parish bell would be made aware of the existence of the deceased.

The ringing of obits certainly confirmed rank and hierarchy, but as will be revealed below, in the accounts of Bassingbourn for example, they perhaps more importantly audibly linked the dead with the living and ensured that the dead would not be forgotten. This was so important that many saw fit to ensure that bells would be well maintained after their death. For

\textsuperscript{34} Peter Marshall, \textit{Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18,19.

\textsuperscript{35} For example, see the discussion below of Sir John Plommer’s bell at the parish of St. Mary at Hill.

\textsuperscript{36} Walters, \textit{Church Bells of England}, 161.
example, Roger Borton of Hackney Middlesex bequeathed 20 d. in 1434 to the parish church of St. Austin’s Hackney for the “reparation of the bells”, the very same amount he left for the high altar.37 Mr. Borton seems to have believed that the condition of his soul in death was perhaps as dependent upon the prayers said at the high altar as it was upon the prayerful peals of the parish bells. Unless the living heard such ringing as vibrant, effective, and comforting sounds of prayers, they would not have been inclined to have bequeathed their money to the parish bells. Like Mr. Borton, most English parishioners would have linked bell ringing with the good maintenance of their souls after death.38

Bells further served to bind this earthly, mortal existence more closely with the heavenly realm through the celebratory ringing for numerous religious festivals in late medieval England. As mentioned above, the feast days of various saints were audibly commemorated with bell ringing. Unique ringing routines were also observed as a means of distinguishing each commemoration from the other. For example in the diocese of Exeter in 1339, the mass of the Virgin was announced by eight to ten strokes of the bell, followed by a short interval, then five hundred strokes, a pause, followed by a series of shorter or quicker rings until the congregation had fully assembled, at which point the mass would begin.39

38 Katherine L. French, *The People of the Parish: community life in a late medieval English diocese* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 102. The dead could also be remembered through the reading of the bede-rolls. The bede-rolls included the names of those, living or dead, who had made a contribution to the parish and could therefore be named as benefactors. According to Katherine French, the bede-roll would have been read four times annually, with possibly an abbreviated version read each Sunday. This link between the living parish and the contributions of the dead would have been evident once again. However, since the bede-roll would likely not have been read on the anniversary of the contributor’s death, the reading would have served to highlight their contribution rather than the memory of their life.
But of all the feasts, the night of All Saints heard the bells rung with special vigor and enthusiasm, and it was the ringing on this night of November 1st that later proved to be one of the most problematic ringing occasions for the reformers of the sixteenth century to repress.\textsuperscript{40} According to Ronald Hutton, the customs associated with the celebration of All Saints Day were nationally recognized.\textsuperscript{41} As the feast marked the beginning of winter, the seasonal theme of death gave pause to remember the human dead.\textsuperscript{42} Bell ringing thus became the fundamental feature of All Saints night; in fact no other feast was more closely associated with bells. The extent to which they were rung on this occasion should tell us that Hutton is correct when he claims that the ringing of the bells was intended to give comfort to those souls enduring the torments of purgatory.\textsuperscript{43} But this desire to bring comfort to the dead should not overshadow the likelihood that this bell ringing was at least partly motivated by fear and a desperate attempt to keep dead souls at bay.\textsuperscript{44} There was certainly a desire to penetrate into the realm of the dead, but the prevalence of the fear of ghosts indicates that there were limits to how close the living wanted this link to be. This was far more than a simple reminder to pray for the dead souls, for if the bells were indeed ringing for hours on end, a reverential silence for the uplifting of prayer was hardly the focus of the day.

But perhaps the bells themselves were praying for the souls of the dead. Pre-Reformation bell inscriptions frequently reveal a supplication to a saint to \textit{ora pro nobis}. Such an inscription would intuitively suggest that the ringing of a bell might have been heard as a manifestation of the intercessory prayers to a saint. In this sense the bells were not merely producing sounds of comfort to the realm of the departed; in fact they were offering up the very prayers of

\textsuperscript{40} Ronald Hutton, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Merry England} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 106.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{44} Marshall, \textit{Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England}, 15.
intercession for dead souls. Rather than proclaiming the commencement of a feast, the bells on All Saints night were the very essence of the feast. The bells were rung for the comfort and salvation of the dead. Yet, they also provided a good deal of reassurance to the living. As Duffy notes:

For medieval people, as for us, to die meant to enter a great silence, and the fear of being forgotten in that silence was as real to them as to any of the generations that followed. But for them that silence was not absolute and could be breached.45

Bells were thus considered loud enough to be heard by the dead, holy enough to penetrate purgatory, and pleasing enough to offer comfort to a soul in torment. Parishioners deemed the bell to be the most appropriate sound to dominate the soundscape on All Saints night, and perhaps the qualities that made it such an appropriate sound for this occasion effectively summarize the meaning and significance of bells on the eve of the Reformation.

What were these qualities that made the ringing of bells such an appropriate sound? What qualities made the sound of a bell unique and particularly suited for the production of sacred sound? Most bells of auditory significance in late medieval Europe were housed in the church itself, or at least immediately adjacent to the church. The physical association of the bell with the building would have been therefore explicit. If the church building itself was sacred space, then the bell was the voice of this sacred space, and this voice very audibly connected the surrounding community with this space. The bell would thus have spoken with sacred authority, yet this authority did not depend solely upon physical location. Bells could produce louder sounds than any musical instrument in the late medieval world. The size and shape of the bell determined the greatness of its ring; quite simply, the bigger the bell, the bigger the sound. Bells were the most authoritative sound on the late medieval soundscape.

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A great deal of a bell’s authority was a result of its physical location and aural supremacy, but Heinrich Bullinger, a Swiss reformer to whom we will later return, would argue that a good deal of a bell’s sacred authority depended upon the fact that it had been “christened by a bishop”. He stated:

About the bell there is a wonderful superstition. They are christened by bishops; and it is thought that they have power to put away any great tempest. In the old time men were stirred up to prayer by the ringing of them, what time any sore tempest did rise; but now the very ringing of bells, by reason of their consecration, seemeth to have a peculiar kind of virtue in it. Who can but marvel and be astonished at this extreme blindness? Moreover, they use bells to bewail the dead. All which things are superstitious, and utterly to be condemned.⁴⁶

The ubiquity and extensiveness of bell ringing for the dead lend support to Peter Marshall’s observation that the parishioners of late medieval England revealed their apprehensions about the afterlife through their anxious commemoration of their dead, fearful both of omitting proper piety as well as provoking the wrath of the dead.⁴⁷ This anxiety predicted a willingness to alter commemoration, but it also helped to produce a conservatism that ensured that the alterations would not completely destroy commemoration. Thus, as Marshall suggests, these concerns regarding the manner in which the dead would be remembered served both as a “powerful motor” and “brake” for the Reformation of the sixteenth century.⁴⁸

**Celebrating the Mass**

The ringing of the Sanctus and sacring bells mark two occasions upon which a bell was rung in association with the celebration of the mass. The Sanctus bell was rung to announce the saying of the Sanctus, or Eucharistic prayer which preceded the canon of the mass, while the

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⁴⁸ Ibid., 316.
sacring bell was rung to announce the moment of the elevation of the Host during the mass, the
day at which the elements of wine and bread became the blood and body of Christ. In some
parishes the same bell was rung to signify both events. If the sacring bell was indeed its own
bell, then it was usually very small, and meant to be audible to those parishioners only inside the
church. But in other parishes, especially those too poor to possess more than one bell or those
which did not have a sacring bell separate from the Sanctus bell, both rings would have certainly
been audible outside the walls of the church. North records several ecclesiastical orders prior
to the Reformation which suggest that bells of all sizes were required to ring at the elevation
of the Host. In post-Reformation England the Sanctus and sacring bells were often converted into
sermon bells. There is some evidence of sermon bells being rung in pre-Reformation England,
but there is no indication that they were common or consistently rung for this reason.

Both the Sanctus and sacring bells would have been rung with two purposes in mind.
First, they would have attempted to draw the attention of the parishioners towards the focal point
of the entire service, the moment of transubstantiation during the celebration of the Eucharist.
Given that the Royal Injunctions of Edward VI in 1547 stipulated that only one bell should be
rung before the sermon, it is possible to speculate that there had been some precedent for
excessive ringing for the Eucharist in late medieval England. Second, since transubstantiation
was the most solemn and holy of moments in the medieval Eucharist, the accompanying bell was
chosen because it too conveyed holiness and was capable of warning listeners of the approach of

49 Walters, Church Bells of England, 123.
50 North, English Bells and Bell Lore, 86. North cites Peckham’s Constitutions at Lambeth, 1281, Bishop
of Lichfield, 1237, Bishop of Hereford, 1240, and MS. Ashm. 1519 fo. 946, 1491.
51 Walters, Church Bells of England, 119.
52 Church of England, “Iniuncions geue[n] by the moste excellent prince, Edward the sixte”, 1547,
EEBO, STC 10089, Image 9.
an instant of great reverence. The poet and monk, John Lydgate, writing in the fifteenth century, advised parishioners:

And whan the preste rynget the belle,  
Loke thou hold thy tone style.  
His wordis are of Swyche degree,  
There fallythe no man to speke but he.\(^{53}\)

The bell was a demand for silence, but a silence that would ensure the audible clarity of the voice of the priest. The bell thus helped create the sacred soundscape and further solemnized an already supremely sacred event.

But the elevation of the Host was fundamentally about salvation, salvation through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. The ringing of the bell at the elevation would have made audible this supernatural victory over death. This particular function of the bell seems to have been very consciously manipulated by a late medieval service book from Munich that gave instructions for the celebration of the elevation of the Cross on Easter morning in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. The drama of this essential event was to conclude with the ringing of bells in a manner described as terrore, defined by Karl Young as a “somewhat complicated and animated ringing of church bells”, and is evidence of the use of bells for dramatic effect.\(^{54}\) The salvific mystery of this event was therefore punctuated by a ‘terrible’ ringing of the bells. The bells produced a sound that audibly communicated the power of God, a power so terrible that it could conquer death itself.

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Invoking Mary and the Saints

Indeed a well-ordered medieval community would have placed the parish itself under the power and protection of divinely appointed authority, and the bells reflected this. Almost all bells cast in medieval England were dedicated to a saint. However it is instructive that only a minority of parishes dedicated their bells to the patron saint of their church. According to Walter’s approximate count of over 7700 churches in medieval England there were 1148 churches dedicated to All Saints that still contained a medieval bell, but only 35 of these bells were themselves dedicated to All Saints. Similarly of 414 churches dedicated to St. James, only 23 had bells dedicated to this particular saint. On the other hand, certain saints were disproportionately popular in bell dedications. For example, in all of England only 62 churches were dedicated to St. Catherine, but there were as many as 167 bells dedicated in her honour. Likewise, only 6 churches were dedicated to St. Gabriel, but 152 bells were dedicated in his name. There were four times as many bells dedicated to the Virgin Mary (900 of the 2120 churches) as there were to the second most represented saint (St. John). 55

Given the prominence of the Virgin Mary in the life of the medieval church and her importance as intercessor and protector, the vast number of bells dedicated to Mary should make a good deal of intuitive sense. Yet the disproportionate number dedicated to Gabriel and Catherine might be initially surprising. Gabriel’s close association with bells is easily explained by his biblical role as the announcer, messenger, and trumpeter of the Last Judgment. 56 His function as an angelic herald was easily paralleled by the function of the bell itself. Catherine’s association to bells began when bells come to be attached to bell wheels, which appears to have been common practice by the late fourteenth century. Since the wheel is Catherine’s most

55 Ibid., 266.
56 Gabriel as the angelic herald of the annunciation who greeted the Virgin Mary with an “Ave”. 65
recognizable attribute, her association with bells is hardly surprising. Walters suggested that her popularity as a dedicatory saint of bells was also because the bell founders in and around London felt a particular affinity for Catherine and submitted themselves to her protection. This would suggest that it was the bell founder, and not the parish, who chose the saint for the bell’s dedicatory inscription. More convincing evidence of this comes from East Anglia where a disproportionately large number of medieval bells were dedicated to St. Barbara. Walters notes that this region was served by founders who were also responsible for founding cannons, and since Barbara is the patron saint of gunsmiths, we are able to apprehend why East Anglian founders were eager to dedicate bells to her honour.

It is not clear whether all founders throughout England were given this same responsibility and freedom to choose the dedicatory saint and inscription, but this does help to explain the lack of correspondence between the dedications for churches and the dedications for bells.

All of this would seem to suggest that the parish community had a great respect for the spiritual discernment of the bell-founders. Their willingness to invoke, if not venerate, a saint chosen for them by a bell-founder, who might not even be a member of their parish, is revealing. This appears to be remarkably submissive, and might either suggest that the founder himself was considered to play a vocational role in the intercessory process, or a belief that saints chose their parishes and not the other way around. For a good number of parishes then, the bell could have been viewed as something of a divine gift, rather than a human creation or parish project. That the purchase of a bell was such an enormous expense for a parish makes this passivity even more remarkable. As we observe that the custom of dedicating bells to saints very quickly disappears

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57 Ibid., 268.
58 Ibid., 269.
during the Reformation, we should consider how this might have changed how the parish interpreted the ownership of its bells.

The process of dedicating a bell to a particular saint was intimately linked to the ceremony of ‘baptizing’ or ‘christening’ the bells of a parish for their use in the church. Indeed it was this christening ceremony that seems to have particularly angered future evangelicals, causing many from their ranks to include bells in their lists of superstitious church goods. According to Bullinger the superstitious qualities of a bell were born out of this christening. The ritual of baptizing a bell may only have been meant to superficially resemble the ceremony of human baptism, yet is not difficult to imagine how the strictly metaphorical qualities of this ‘baptism’ could very easily be lost. Herbert Thurston provided a very detailed description of this ritual which began with the bishop and clergy reciting psalms and prayers to God. The bishop then mixed salt with water while he recited prayers of exorcism which contained special references to the bell, alluding to its power over phantoms, storms, and lightening. The bishop and his attendants then washed the bell with this water, inside and out, and dried it with towels. Appropriate songs were sung and then the bell was anointed with oil and more prayers of protection were prayed over the bell. Finally a thurible with incense was placed under the bell and as smoke filled the cavity of the bell, the last prayers were said, and a passage from the Gospels was read. According to Thurston, this ritual was performed as early as the Carolingian period, and probably as early as the pontificate of Egbert of York during the mid-eighth century. This ceremony undoubtedly differed in significant detail from the ceremony of infant

59 See H.B. Walters, The Church Bells of England, 256-280. Here Walters refers to a number of medieval sources which describe the practice of christening or baptizing the bells, including an 11th century manuscript of the Pontifical of Egbert, Archbishop of York.
baptism, but there is little doubt that the christening of the bells would have had a profound impact on establishing parish bells as sacred objects. While most medieval English men and women would have witnessed the baptism of an infant, very few would have witnessed the christening of their own parish bells given that it was an enormously infrequent event. There may have been careful and thoughtful efforts to distinguish the christening of bells from the baptism of infants, but those differences would very easily have been lost on those countless parishioners who had never witnessed the ‘baptism’ of bells. The mere knowledge that bishops, prayers, water, and salt were involved might easily have been enough to convince many parishioners of the sacramental nature of the event, and the eminently sacred status of their parish bell. These were hallowed sounds indeed, able to still storms, penetrate death, confer legitimacy to kings, bestow divine blessing, and make manifest the prayers of the saints on behalf of the people. These rings had been consecrated, and therefore there was surely supernatural power in their sound.

Analyzing the Parochial Evidence

Since churchwardens’ accounts are one of the most useful sources for gleaning information regarding the daily, monthly, and annual rhythms of a parish community, it is important to examine more closely a few of these pre-Reformation accounts in an attempt to more accurately analyze pre-Reformation attitudes of listeners and ringers towards the parish bells. We know that that parish bells throughout England were indeed rung for each of the stated purposes outlined in the preceding section; however it is not likely that each parish in England observed all of these ringing occasions, and we can be certain that the frequency and consistency with which these occasions were observed varied greatly throughout the country.
Churchwardens’ accounts do not generally record payments for specific rings, especially for those rings which were brief and might have been heard daily or weekly. They were more likely to record ringing for less frequent celebrations or observances like feast days, funerals, obits, and visits by various secular or ecclesiastical dignitaries. Even these types of ringing occasions are not always dependably identified. Instead it was far more common for the wardens, sextons, or other individuals to simply be paid for their rather ambiguously described ‘attention’ to the bells of the parish.

What can these pre-Reformation churchwardens’ accounts tell us about the actual function and role of bells in the life of a parish? What can they reveal of the frequency, cost, and enthusiasm of parish ringing? Is it possible to detect something of Nigel Thrift’s “moral-psychological dimension” within the entries of pre-Reformation churchwardens’ accounts?62

I will consider the accounts of three English parishes: Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire, St. Mary at Hill, London, and St. Andrew Hubbard, London. I chose these accounts for several very practical reasons. First, the accounts of these three parishes have all been very conveniently published in easily accessible print editions. Second, each set of accounts addresses the realities of the life of a parish on the eve of the Reformation by providing entries from the last decades of the fifteenth century and the first few decades of the sixteenth century. Finally, each set presents a good run of complete accounts from this period, rather than fragments of minimal detail. In a subsequent chapter I shall compare and contrast these findings with the observations gleaned from later sixteenth-century churchwardens’ accounts from a number of parishes in London.

Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire

The parish of Bassingbourn is situated in the southwestern corner of Cambridgeshire, approximately twelve miles south of the city of Cambridge. The churchwardens’ accounts for this parish, covering the years 1496-c.1540, have been transcribed and edited by David Dymond, and offer a very rich collection of pre-Reformation churchwardens’ accounts. Bassingbourn was predominantly an agricultural community comprised of approximately 120 families and totaling about 500 individuals during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This medieval benefice was a relatively prosperous one; at the end of the thirteenth century its annual value ranked third in the diocese of Ely.

By 1500, the tower of the parish housed four larger bells and one smaller Sanctus bell. In fact, it appears quite possible that the very existence of this particular set of churchwardens’ accounts owed its existence to the bells of the parish. In 1497 the accounts record the purchase of a book for the sum of 9d. “to write in our accounts and the church ornaments”. Since there is no evidence of churchwardens’ accounts having been kept in this parish prior to this date, Dymond very plausibly argues that this “may mark a deliberate change in policy” in terms of parish administration. Indeed it would seem as though the motivation for beginning a more systematic and permanent system of administration and record keeping could be attributed to the commencement of “an expensive new project to renew its bells”. Since this project would entail large sums of money, it would therefore necessitate the development of an organized format in which payments and payees could be accurately tallied and recorded. The employment

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64 Ibid., xx.
65 Ibid., 33.
66 Ibid., xxiv.
of churchwardens’ accounts would have provided a suitable method to facilitate these very needs.

Between 1497 and 1502 the parish undertook three campanological projects. In 1497 the parish purchased a new treble bell at the cost of £14 7s. 5 ½d. The total expenditure for that particular 22 month period amounted to £27 3½d., and therefore the purchase of the treble bell accounted for just over half of all the costs incurred over this nearly two year period. Only two years later the parish had its existing third bell recast in London, a process which required an enormous amount of time, effort, and travel, although less money than was spent on having a brand new treble made in 1497 (approximately £5). Hindsight would suggest that it might have been much simpler for the parish to have had an entirely new bell cast in the first place, for this recast third bell proved to be the source of much ongoing trouble for the parish. Only a short time after having been recast, this bell was found to be inadequate, either due to faulty craftsmanship, or an unspecified accident, for it was returned to London to be ‘changed’. On the return trip from London the cart upon which it was carried overturned, damaging the bell. It returned to London a third time, this time for repairs, only to experience further damage while it was being hung in the tower upon its return to Bassingbourn. Parts of this bell faced other significant repairs over the years. The repairs prompted the parish to sign a seven-year contract in 1507 with one “Ward of Asshewell”. It assigned him specifically to attend to “all manner of reparation of that said 3rd bell clapper”. But the problems were not yet at an end, for this very

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67 Ibid., 34.  
68 Ibid., 34.  
69 Ibid., 37.  
70 Ibid., 39.  
71 Ibid., 39, 40.  
72 Ibid., 45, 54.
same bell would need to be changed one additional time in 1534. In the meantime the parish had undertaken its final major campanological renewal project in 1502 and set about to have the ‘great’ bell ‘changed’. Surely to the relief of the parishioners, the great bell seems not to have caused the same problems as the third bell, for little more is said of this particular project.

The churchwardens’ accounts are accompanied by two lists recording the specific contributions made by individual parishioners for two of these bell projects. In 1499, parishioners contributed a total of £5, 12s., 2d. towards the costs incurred by changing the third bell. No fewer than 85 parishioners contributed to this project, and though we cannot be entirely certain how voluntary was the contribution, it is important to recognize that it was not based upon a church rate. The second sum of money was in fact collected about two years earlier (between 1496 and 1497) and raised the much larger sum of £13, 10s., 7 ½d. towards the purchase of a new treble bell. Contributors to this much greater project totaled 112 individuals in addition to the combined contributions of “the wives and maidens” of the parish community. Both lists reveal that all levels of the social strata contributed to these projects as revealed by the inclusion of several occupational titles in the lists (“priest”, “corser”, “sexten”, “clerk”, “tailor”, “carpenter”, “servant”). These parishioners endured the costs of three significantly expensive projects within the span of only about five years (to say nothing of the major repairs that followed). We cannot be certain that all donated with happy hearts, but we can be sure that there is no indication whatsoever that this parish had any trouble raising the necessary funds for these projects, or for the unexpected repairs, as evident from the consistently balanced books of the parish (from 1496-1540, only two years saw deficits; both less than 12s.).

73 Ibid., 141-143.
74 Ibid., 43, 44.
Given such efforts and expenditures it is clear that the bells of this parish were of great significance to this community on the eve of the Reformation. The vigor and determination with which these parishioners renewed and replaced their bells, combined with the tacit lay support for these projects, suggest that the bells were a vital part of parish life. This fact alone does not reveal anything of the moral-psychological impact of these bells. There is little doubt that these bells were indeed being rung; regular repairs to baldrics, clappers, frames, and wheels, the replacement of ropes, and the turning of clappers, all indicate that ringing was both regular and frequent. However the acknowledgement of regular and frequent ringing does not in itself divulge what the listeners were in fact hearing. Why were these rings important, and what did they signify? Any attempt to answer these questions must consider the evidence of when the bells rang.

It is possible to detect two examples of ceremonial ringing in the years covered by these accounts. There are three years that refer to ringing on ‘Hallowmass’: 1507/08, 1510/12, and 1514/15, and there is one year that records ringing on ‘Christemass’. There is little doubt that these two occasions fit neatly into Green’s “ceremonial” category, yet it is difficult to argue that this type of ringing was not also “liturgical” and therefore an expression of communal public worship. We can however be sure that the ringing was passionate. Prior to the ‘Hallowmass’ ringing of 1507/08 the baldrics of the bells were repaired. In spite of this evidence for preventative maintenance on the bells in the days preceding significant ringing occasions, we learn that the “Hallowmass” ringing of 1510/12 was so vigorous that the wheel of the third bell was broken as a result. Was this ringing then an example of Green’s “customary” ringing; devised by the ringers but tolerated by the authorities? The reality probably requires a blurring

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75 Ibid., 63, 81, 93.
76 Ibid., 63.
of categories; the ringers were ringing with passionate enthusiasm, while the church authorities actively approved of such vigor by preparing the bells for this display of physical and audible passion. The broken wheel of the third bell could have been the result of shoddy workmanship.

There were two types of occasions that may best be described as examples of “communal” or “civic” ringing. On three occasions (1507/08, 1508/09, 1509/10) the bells were rung for the “coming by” of the Bishop of Ely.\(^77\) It is likely that this occasion celebrated nothing more than a “coming by” for there does not appear to be any further expenses that could be associated with any sort of an extended visit. It is probable that the bells were rung as the bishop merely passed by on the road that led from Ely to London. It is impossible to know whether these bells were rung out of a sense of obligation, loyalty, respect, or a result of the Tudor obsession with rank, order and degree, but most likely they were a very real expression of each of these. The only other example of “communal” or “civic” ringing clearly mentioned in the accounts, and the only other ringing recorded for a visiting dignitary, occurred in 1502/03 at the visit of “the lady off the towne”, a reference to Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VII, and the Lady of Bassingbourn’s principal manor.\(^78\) Only 1d. and 2d. were paid for ringing expenses associated with the passing by of the Bishop of Ely, but 6d. was paid for the ringing expenses associated with the visit of Lady Margaret Beaufort.\(^79\) It could have been that her visit was more extensive than the Bishop; however the accounts would suggest that she too simply passed through the town. Nevertheless, the purchase of bread, ale, pepper, and saffron, at the ringing of the Lady Margaret would certainly suggest a far more festive occasion. Were Lady Margaret’s rings a sign of respect? Were they rung out of obligation? Was there a measure of divine thanksgiving for the benefits she had bestowed upon the town? The extent to which these

\(^77\) Ibid., 64, 66, 70.
\(^78\) Ibid., 44, lxv.
\(^79\) Ibid., 44.
were strictly civil sounds should by no means be overstated; in other words it would be mistaken to suggest that civil rings were heard as strictly secular sounds.

However the most frequent mention of bells in the Bassingbourn accounts is found in their relationship to obits. Information from the churchwardens’ accounts alone gives details for fifteen separate obits. More obits likely existed but are not mentioned in these accounts. Six of these obits specifically set aside provisions for expenses related to the bells. Five obits only vaguely indicate payments made for the costs of keeping the obit, and these almost certainly included the ringing of the bells, while the remaining four offer very few details indeed. Of the six obits that specifically mention the bells, four of these specifically set aside funds for bell repairs. Funeral bells and passing bells are noticeably absent from expenses, although we should assume that they were being rung, for the obits reveal that the parishioners were deeply concerned that the bells continued to ring even after their departure from this mortal realm. In preparing their wills and contemplating death, parishioners thought of bells; when death was imminent, the passing bell would have tolled; at funerals, the bells would have sounded; at the anniversary of death, bells would have been rung in memory of the deceased. The intimacy of this association would suggest that the sound of a bell, any bell, rung at any time, would have created a psychological link with death and the community of the dead. And here we should be reminded of the vigor that broke the bell wheel during the ringing of ‘Hallowmass’ in 1510/12, a mass to remember and pray for the souls of the dead.
St. Mary at Hill

According to the Chantry Certificates drawn up in 1548, St. Mary at Hill was an urban London parish comprised of 400 communicants. This parish offers the opportunity to examine churchwardens’ accounts that pre-date the Reformation by over a century and to examine parish bell ringing in fifteenth century urban context. Henry Littlehales transcribed and edited the accounts of St. Mary from 1420-1559 and had them published in a printed volume in 1905. Although he admits to abridging the accounts from about 1495 onwards, he asserts that the omitted content was “repetition of items already set down.” Unfortunately the accounts for some of the more interesting years, 1540-1547, have been lost, and so it is impossible to glean anything of the changes that were beginning to occur in Henry VIII’s final years on the throne. Nevertheless these accounts do provide a great deal of information about the bells on the eve of the Reformation.

The accounts for much of the fifteenth century appear to be complete and rich in detail, however the evidence for repairs and maintenance on the bells appears is limited. There are occasional references to ropes being replaced, baldrics being repaired, and wheels being mended; however such repairs do not appear to have been consistently recorded. The apparent lack of maintenance might be attributed to their bells having been kept in good repair and rung with moderation and care. The occasional references to work done on baldrics, wheels, and ropes

80 ‘Chantry Certificate, 1548: City of London’, London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548: London Record Society 16 (1980), pp. 1-60. URL: http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=64523&strquery=all hallows chantry certificates. Accessed, February 12, 2009. According to the editor of these certificates, C.J. Kitching, the Chantry Certificates were the reports of the royal commissioners that were appointed in 1546 and 1548 to survey colleges, chantries and kindred endowments form one class of the records of the Exchequer Augmentation Office at the Public Record Office, collectively known as Certificates of Colleges and Chantries. According to these certificates the total population of London would have been between 50,000-80,000.


82 Ibid., 217.
perhaps indicates a perfectly adequate level of maintenance. However, the accounts for 1510/11 are a remarkable exception to this conclusion.\textsuperscript{83} The story begins to unfold when we learn that the reeve had been summoned to listen to the ringing of St. Mary’s fourth bell and asked to determine whether or not it was in tune. The bell-founder, William Smith, had been arrested the previous year and presumably charged for not having satisfactorily performed his contracted labours (tuning, as suggested by the accounts) on the fourth bell in particular.\textsuperscript{84} The reeve had therefore arrived to determine the extent to which this bell had been damaged by Mr. Smith. The reeve appears to have sided with the parish and found the tune of the bell to be unsatisfactory, for there were subsequent payments for expenses incurred by four members of the parish and the clerks of St. Anthony’s whose task was to determine whether or not the bells were indeed “tuneable or not”.\textsuperscript{85} This process entailed the lowering of three of the bells to the ground, and the subsequent carriage of two of these bells to the founder’s for repairs or recasting. All of this either demanded or proved to be an opportunity for a great deal of expenditure on the bell fittings: ropes were replaced, frames were remade, wheels were refitted, iron bolsters were installed, buckles for the baldrics were replaced, and new iron for the gudgeons was provided.\textsuperscript{86} William Smith, the bell founder, did not remain under arrest for long. In fact, we learn that he was once again hired to perform significant repairs, or entirely to recast, the fourth bell using 166 pounds of “new metal”.\textsuperscript{87} One entry in 1510 for “dressing of five stays for the bell wheels” suggests that full wheel ringing, or at least three quarter wheel ringing, was taking place in this

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 273-275.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 270.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 274.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 274.
\textsuperscript{87} Henry Littlehales, \textit{Medieval Records of a London City Church}, 275.
parish much earlier than some have supposed. Such a suggestion implies that these parishioners had likely expressed a desire for the bells to be held, at least briefly, in an upright position so that a degree of changing could in fact take place. This, combined with their very clear desire for their bells to be well tuned, would suggest that this was a community which heard the bells’ rings as structured and musical sounds. While they were surely rung to signify liturgical, ceremonial, and civil events, they were also meant to produce sounds that were pleasing to the ear.

William Smith was paid an additional 13s. 4d. for inscribing “scripture about the bell”. Although this type of Biblical inscription might have pleased later reformers, it reminds us that the previous inscription on this bell would likely have been lost; unless it too was re-inscribed upon the bells without mention. We are fortunate enough to know that the original fourth bell had been the gift of John Duklyng, fishmonger and parishioner of St. Mary at Hill until his death in 1508. A 1496/97 inventory of church goods reveals that the inscription upon the fourth bell bore witness of this “gift of John Duklyng, fishmonger”. There is some indication that this was in fact how the bell was popularly referred, for the knell at the burial of John Redye, parish priest, was rung on “Mr. Dokelynges Belle”. That this bell was the gift of a fishmonger, and named as such, might challenge any suggestion that medieval parish bells were strictly viewed as transcendent and mystical objects. This reference to “Mr. Dokelynges Bell” might in fact imply that the sacred function of this bell was indeed intimately linked with the practical day-to-day

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88 Ibid., 274. And this would appear to support Cattermole’s assertion in Paul Cattermole, *Church Bells and Bell-Ringing: A Norfolk Profile*, 99, 100.

89 Unfortunately all of these bells were destroyed, along with the church itself, in the fire of 1666. St. Mary at Hill was eventually rebuilt according to the designs of Wren.


91 Ibid., 33.
life of the parish community. It also suggests that the listeners would have been able to
distinguish the sound of “Mr Dokelynges Bell” from the sound of the other bells of the parish.

The accounts of St. Mary at Hill also permit a deeper understanding of the nature of
burial ringing. A good number of knells were specified to have lasted for an hour in length, but
it was not uncommon for knells to have been rung for “half a day”. The accounts for 1499/1500
indicate that of the eight knells recorded for that year, five lasted for “half a day”. The
accounts for 1532/33 suggest that “half a day” might in fact refer to six hours of ringing. If we
stop to consider that St. Mary at Hill was an urban parish and that other parishes in relative
proximity would also have been ringing six hour knells throughout the year, we must conclude
that the London soundscape would have been regularly dominated by ringing bells. If we
consider that these burial knells would have been joined by regular obit ringing and given final
exclamation by the ringing at night on All Hallows’ Day, then we must conclude that the ringing
for death would have thoroughly permeated this urban environment. What was the
psychological effect of such ringing? Did it perhaps serve to depress, create anxiety, and
increase fear and a looming sense of dread? Or did the ubiquity of death related ringing offer
comfort to the living? Did they assure the living that the dead were not forgotten; that their
union with the living would not be negated; that death was not oblivion?

We can begin to acquire a sense of moral-psychological effect of such ringing from a
number of texts from this period. For example, in William Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis we
read of the anxiety of a hare being hunted by dogs as he stopped to listen for his approaching
predators:

By this, poor Wat, far off upon a hill,
Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear,

92 Ibid., 236, 237.
To hearken if his foes pursue him still:
Anon their loud alarums he doth hear;
And now his grief may be compared well
To one sore sick that hears the passing bell.  

This verse would have been relevant to an audience who associated the ringing of the passing bell with the grief experienced by the dying. The bell was loud and could be fully heard by the sick person for whom it was rung. In 1604 the poet Thomas Andrewe alluded to the melancholic nature of the passing bell:

A woeful tale thou urgest me to tell,
Whose heavy accents like the passing bell,
Such melancholy music forth will sound,
As thy attending ears will deeply wound:
Nay, if my sorrows give me leave to speak
Unto the end, tears cannot choose but break
From out thine eyes that formerly restrained,
Longer in limits will not be contained.

The passing bell was heard as a deeply emotional sound, wounding and sorrowful. In 1600 the Elizabethan anthologist John Bodenham gave a fuller and richer sense of how this passing bell may have been heard:

A present death exceeds a lingering life.
Life leads to care, death to the scale of heaven.
*The dying man, whose eyes are sunk and dim,*
Thinks every passing bell rings out for him.
To die in life, is but a living death.
Good death, not lofty life, is most renown.

The passing bell may well have been heard with a sense of anxiety and sorrow, but it could also communicate a sense of hope to one who was suffering and dying. The passing ball may have been heard as a sound of freedom from the dim and sunken suffering of this life and the beginning of new heavenly existence.

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The ability of burial ringing to distinguish between the rich and the poor was given a vivid portrayal in an interesting memorandum produced by the churchwardens of St. Mary at Hill in 1502/03. It stated:

That it is agreed before Mr. William Wylde, parson, Mr. William Remyngton, alderman, with all other of the parishioners afore, that Sir John Plommer's bell shall serve for all poor people of this parish, and for none other, paying 1d. for the ringing. And it shall be judged by the said Sir John Plommer, he that desireth the bell whether that he be a poor man or not: And after his decease by the advice of the Seniors of the parish.96

Sir John Plommer was a chantry priest at St. Mary at Hill, and sometimes morrow-mass priest. We learn that like John Duklyng, John Plommer was also associated with one of the parish bells; whether he paid for it or had his name inscribed upon it is unclear. While the memorandum reveals something of parish hierarchy, its purpose appears to have been two-fold. First, it guaranteed that even some of the poorest members of the parish had a bell rung at their death. Second, it ensured that the middling sort did not take advantage of this gracious provision, and Sir John Plommer’s task was to ensure that they did not. The memorandum therefore reveals not only the belief that every parishioner deserves a knell, but the confidence that most parishioners would want one. Ringing and death could not, and should not, be separated. It also reveals that knells were indeed being rung at burials even if they were not being specifically identified in the accounts.

On this point it is instructive to acknowledge that there is no recorded payment for ringing on All Hallows’ night throughout these accounts. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that this meant that no ringing took place on this occasion. We must then conclude that specific payments for the ringers were not always included in the churchwardens’ accounts. Were they paid by a separate fraternity or guild? Were their fees included in another payment?

Is there any likelihood that such ringing was done voluntarily? One entry of 1524 recorded the payment of 12 d. “for the ringers and the clerks at divers times at high feasts”.\footnote{Ibid., 327.} Given the number of feasts this might include in an annual cycle, the cost of ringing per feast would have been rather small. Therefore it is likely that these fees were normally included in other payments to the clerks, who would themselves have been responsible for paying ringers if the need arose.

There are four recorded payments to ringers on Lady Day on March 25\textsuperscript{th} (1523, 1525, 1529, and 1539), but all of these types of payments only make their appearance by the third decade of the sixteenth century. Was bell ringing becoming more specialized, requiring greater skill and demanding practice (as the stays and wheels might very well attest)? Did the parish require that its ringers be better trained in order to prevent damage to the bells? The accounts for 1477-81 indicate that most ringing was performed by the clerks and priests, yet by 1489/90 a separate and distinct group of ringers appears to have been slowly emerging.\footnote{Ibid., 153.}

Four occasions might be categorized as royal ringing in the St. Mary accounts in the years prior to 1547. In 1503 3d. was paid for the bells to be rung “when the kyng came from Baynard’s Castle to ‘powelles’ (St. Paul’s Cathedral)”. It is impossible to know if this ringing should be linked to the death of Henry’s wife Elizabeth, for whom six poor torchbearers were paid 12d. when her body was carried past Fenchurch street on its way to Westminster.\footnote{Ibid., 247.} Were these rings meant to honor the king’s sorrow, or simply the occasion of his passing by? One might suspect the former given that no payments for ringing on his behalf had been acknowledged prior to this date. Only a few years later, the bells were rung in honour of Henry VIII’s coronation at Westminster. For this, seven men were paid 1s. 2d. Since only 12d. had been set aside to ring for all the annual high feast days, we should conclude that this ringing for...
Henry was indeed rather extensive. In 1525 a very interesting set of rings was heard, by order of the mayor. The parish spent the notably smaller sum of 8d. to ring in celebration of “the taking of the French king” by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. The churchwardens were keen to specify that this ringing occurred by order of the mayor and this suggests that there may have been little local desire to ring for such an occasion, and the small sum suggests that the ringing was far from passionate. More interestingly, this action suggests that the mayor, and those who provided him with the orders, saw the bells either as powerful sounds of political legitimation, or as thoroughly convincing sounds of propaganda. It remains relatively unclear whether the parishioners in fact thought favorably of these anti-French and pro-Hapsburg royal foreign policies.

But the most significant occasion for royal ringing appears to have taken place at the birth of the future king, Edward VI. The substantial sum of 2s. 6d. was paid for “ringing of the great bell vi hours for Queen Jane, and for ringing of the bells divers peals to the same.” The entry is interesting for several reasons. First, this sum was more than twice the amount spent on Henry VIII’s coronation. This was almost certainly not due to inflation, for a comparison of burial costs for these two years reveals that prices had remained remarkably constant. Since neither ringing occasion appears to have been ordered by either state or ecclesiastical authority, it is probably safe to assume that both rings were voluntarily undertaken by the parish. The celebratory nature of the entry for 1537 suggests that the future political stability, seemingly assured by the birth of Edward, was greater cause for audible celebration than the political stability assured by the coronation of Henry. The birth of Edward would conceivably have been interpreted as a more obvious example of divine intervention, and thus more easily viewed as a

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100 Ibid., 373.
sacred event. Had the political reforms of the previous five years received sacred legitimacy? Did they thus warrant greater audible approval? The entry is also notable because it mentions two types of ringing: ringing on the great bell for six hours, in addition to the ringing of “diverse” peals. What is meant by “diverse” is unclear, but it may suggest that there was more than one way to ring a peal. Given the existence of stays and wheels, it is possible that some degree of change ringing was already being practiced at this early date.

**St. Andrew Hubbard**

In very close proximity to the parish of St. Mary at Hill was the parish of St. Andrew Hubbard. The chantry certificates of 1548 indicate that St. Andrew had a total of 282 communicants, slightly lower than the London mean of 310.\(^\text{101}\) Not only was it the smaller of the two urban parishes (compared to St. Mary at Hill’s 400 communicants), but the 1541 subsidy returns clearly indicate that it was also significantly poorer as well; St Andrew was assessed at £30 11s. 4d., while St. Mary at Hill stood at £64 19s. 8d.\(^\text{102}\) The Great Fire of 1666 witnessed the destruction of St. Andrew’s, and although the church was never rebuilt, its parishioners were eventually absorbed by the parish of its wealthier neighbors at St. Mary at Hill.

It may indeed have been the poorer of the two parishes, but the accounts of St. Andrew’s would suggest that it paid more attention to the repair and maintenance of its bells than did its richer neighbor to the south. In addition to the frequent mention of minor expenditures on the bells throughout the accounts, there are numerous and regularly occurring examples of significant repairs and wholesale replacements of baldrics, clappers, ropes, and wheels from the 1460s through until the 1540s, highlighted by the payment of £5 6s. 8d. “for the bell frame” in

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102 Ibid., x.
1522. It is important to remember that greater expenditures may simply reflect the need to replace or correct poor quality construction.

Aside from those entries that refer to bells in the context of repairs and maintenance, the accounts of St. Andrew’s most frequently mention bells in the context of death and burials. Month-mind ringing and burial knells are mentioned several times throughout the accounts, but in this regard the parish of St. Andrew’s does not appear unique. The accounts however provide a rather useful and explicit outline of the fee schedule for ringing costs at burials. In 1527 the churchwardens, auditors, and assessors determined the following:

- A knell on the great bell cost 6s. 8d. for those buried in the choir
- A knell on the fourth bell cost 3s. 4d. for those buried in the choir
- A knell on the great bell cost 3s. 4d. for those buried in the body of the church
- A knell on the first bell be free for poor people
- A knell on the second bell (and a pit) cost 8d. for a child
- A knell on the second bell (and a pit) cost 10d. for a houseling body
- The same on the third bell cost 14d.
- The same on the fourth bell, for one hour, cost 20d.
- A four hour knell from 8 o’clock to 12 o’clock (not including the pit) cost 20d.

Nearly twenty years later, on the eve of Edward’s ascent to the throne, these fees were slightly revised:

- A knell on any of the bells cost 6s. 8d. for those buried in the choir.
- A knell on the first bell (and a pit) cost 8d. for a child.
- The same cost 10d. for a housed person.
- A knell on the second bell (and a pit) cost 14d. for any person.
- The same on the third bell cost 20d.
- A solemn peal (4 hours?) cost 16d.
- The small bell would be rung for charity for all “who were impoverished”.

The cost for having the great bell rung for those buried in the choir was not changed at all, however the cost for having the fourth bell rung for this particular burial location was doubled.

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103 Ibid., 111.
104 Ibid., 122.
105 Ibid., 159.
Such a revision was obviously meant to increase the overall cost for being buried in the choir, surely prompted by the need to conserve burial space in this rather limited area of the church. The cost for having a bell rung at the burial of a child did not change; however the sum paid in 1527 for a knell on the second bell would only pay for a knell on the first bell in 1546. More than a reflection of inflation, this increase in fees suggests an increased willingness of parishioners to pay for a greater ring at the death of their children, perhaps motivated by a desire to ensure that the knells for their children were not confused with the knells of an impoverished parishioner on the first bell. Indeed the fees for 1546 clearly indicate that parishioners were inclined to pay for ringing on the largest bell that they were able to afford; otherwise these price increases would most certainly have been fruitless and misguided policy changes. Ringing at death was no mere custom, for the tone and volume of the sound indeed mattered.

Both sets of rates established that all parishioners, regardless of wealth, would be assured of ringing on their behalf at death. This provision appears even more generous than that offered by St. Mary at Hill. Thus, although burial knells were certainly capable of reflecting the social status of the deceased and were assuredly purchased with that purpose in mind, this parish determined that bells, or at least one bell, should be rung for every parishioner. For at least a moment, the sensory world of the greatest would be invaded by the death of the least - a remarkable principle which knows no modern equivalent. We should not be inclined to overstate the leveling impact of this sort of audible intrusion, but we would be equally misguided to ignore the effects that this practice might have had upon the community. Invasive public sound of this nature would surely have made it much more difficult for either end of the social spectrum to completely detach itself from the other, and the social, religious, and political consequences of this are at least worth contemplating.
In time, the accounts of St. Andrew’s bore witness to the great changes undertaken during the reign of Edward that dramatically altered the experience of public worship throughout England. Church goods were sold, altars removed, books purchased, and the churchwardens of St. Andrew’s faithfully recorded the upheaval and the great cost incurred as a result of these changes. Many of these alterations were reversed under Queen Mary, and then again under Elizabeth. There is some rather remarkable evidence in these accounts that the parishioners of St. Andrew’s embraced many of these reforms with a certain degree of enthusiasm, and rejected the conservative policies of Mary’s administration.

During the first year of Elizabeth’s reign the accounts suggest a rather festive iconoclastic event taking place within the walls of St. Andrew’s, obviously with official approval. We learn that sometime during the administrative year of 1559/60 2d. was spent on drink that was consumed at the defacing of the roodloft. This convivial iconoclasm is all the more remarkable since the very next entry records that 6d. was paid to have the roodloft completely removed. The parish paid for the festivities that intended to vandalize what was perhaps the most obvious visible reminder of traditional religion, in spite of the fact that it was about to be taken down anyway. This communal act of iconoclasm was not meant to leave a permanent record; rather it was meant to be a shared experience of the community, an expression of their theological posture on recent religious disputes.

Thus we may conclude that this was likely a parish of some reforming zeal, and this should instruct the manner in which we interpret an entry that appears only a few short years later in the accounts of 1563/64. It is here we learn that the parish of St. Andrew’s was required

106 Ibid., 185.
107 Ibid., 185.
to pay 4d. to the summoner who warned them “to ring no bells”.\textsuperscript{108} Without context, it might be tempting to infer that this parish was guilty of ringing its bells in a manner that resembled an observance of traditional religion. But the manner in which the roodloft was defaced and removed would not support such an interpretation. Instead it is more probable to conclude that even a parish that appeared actively sympathetic towards religious reform was not ready to give up its bells and deny the significance and appropriateness of their sacred sounds. This invites us to wonder whether the parish bells of England were in fact really ever seriously threatened at all.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The analysis of these three sets of pre-Reformation churchwardens’ accounts discloses a number of salient features concerning the importance, meaning, and significance of parish bell ringing on the eve of the Reformation. Simply put, the bells of each of these parishes were a vital component of the life of a church and its community. The accounts of Bassingbourne reveal the enormous amount of time and effort the bells could consume for the church leadership, but in spite of these inconveniences the bells continued to be the chief focus of a good number of parish projects. St. Mary at Hill seems also to have endured the struggle required to ensure that its bells were rung in tune, and appears to have been willing to bear the cost of construction that would permit the practice of some degree of advanced ringing techniques. Meanwhile even the poorer parish of St. Andrew’s reveals its own material commitment to its bells through its detailed recording of regular attention to repair and maintenance. Each of the accounts suggests that the bells were worthy of practical attention, financial sacrifice, and administrative endurance during those decades preceding the Reformation.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 197.
This passion and enthusiasm for the bells is also evident in the apparent vigor with which the bells were rung at Hallowmass at Bassingbourne; a vigor that required preventative maintenance on the bells in the days preceding the festivities. At St. Mary, the attention to tuning, desire for effective ringing, and the hiring of ‘ringers’ all seems to suggest a demand that the bells not only be rung, but that they be rung well and in a manner that is pleasing to the ears. Even the parish of St. Andrew’s, with all of its apparent zeal for reform and the undoing of traditional religion, was guilty of too much ringing, apparently unable or unwilling to harness its fervor for the sound of her bells. The rather lifeless entries of the churchwardens’ accounts reveal a glimmer of the passion with which these parishes heard the ringing in their towers.

But the accounts also go a long way to reveal the occasions for which the bells were in fact rung. They were rung to greet ecclesiastical authority, to honor patrons, to celebrate coronations and royal births, to support political propaganda, and to reinforce royal legitimacy. The sacred and the profane were thus audibly acknowledged with the same sound, and therefore the boundary between the two surely was blurred. Authority and rank became audible as bishops, ladies, the wealthy, the poor, and even fishmongers were identified in life and in death by the sounds of the bells. The bells helped to confirm and legitimize the social order of the parish community.

The bells of death surely rang the clearest of all. The souls of the dead were audibly present at Hallowmass and obits, while the souls of the dying and recently departed constantly occupied the parochial soundscape. Bell ringing at death was a fundamental ceremony, so vital in fact that provisions were made to ensure that all parishioners could afford to have at least one bell rung in their honor at death. These were the sounds of impermanence and eternity, of dread and comfort, of the realm of the dead and the living. The interpretation of these rings might
remain somewhat ambiguous, nevertheless the evidence shows that death knells were ubiquitous and that the people believed in the power of the bells.
Chapter Three

Reforming the Bells

Between 1538 and 1640, the doctrine of royal supremacy in the Church was upheld by five of the six successive English monarchs, each professing and promoting their regime’s interpretation of orthodoxy, public worship, and the role and function of the parish church. During this century of rule these kings and queens appointed countless bishops to apply the royal will to the Church, and each of these bishops themselves had a personal hand in shaping and reshaping the sacred landscape in accordance with their own personal theological framework.

What were the official ecclesiastical attitudes towards the bells and bell ringing, and how did these attitudes change over time? An examination of surviving visitation articles and ecclesiastical injunctions over this period can both describe these attitudes and highlight these changes. Bishops were responsible for overseeing and ordering the religious practices and beliefs within their diocese. In an effort to gain an awareness of the religious life of the parishes in their dioceses, the bishops would commonly undertake a visitation of these churches early on in their ecclesiastical rule. These visitations were preceded by a set of inquiries which the parishes were required to answer; these inquiries were known as visitation articles.¹ These articles of inquiry were interested in discovering what ceremonies, behaviors, and customs were

being observed by the parishes, and are therefore able to give a sense of the past and current
practices within those churches. If a set of articles asked whether a certain activity was indeed
taking place but should not be, this would likely be indicative that such an activity either used to
occur, or that there remained some suspicion that it continued to take place. The visitation
articles looked back and were concerned with practices of the past, while the ecclesiastical
injunctions looked forward and were determined to outline those practices that would be required
in the future. The injunctions therefore set forth those requirements which the parishes were
expected to meet and obey from that point onwards.

Ecclesiastical articles and injunctions can therefore reveal a great deal about the changing
towards parish bells and bell ringing. Not only can the articles describe past occasions for bell
ringing and the manner in which the bells had been rung, but they might also expose those
practices which ecclesiastical authority was hard pressed to prohibit, or chose not to examine too
closely. While the injunctions reveal the ecclesiastical policies of the bishops, they might also
suggest a willingness to engage in compromise with the parishes or a desire to alter the
requirements of their predecessors. We should be aware that both the articles and injunctions
were indeed personal and regionally specific. These documents can disclose a great deal about
the theological and political ideology of individual bishops, and they can also describe the
theological and political realities of individual provinces and diocese.

It is clear that the changing ecclesiastical attitudes towards bells were fundamentally
motivated by two larger issues. First, the changing attitudes towards bells reflect the attempts by
the reformed English church to transform the parish worship experience and alter the ceremonies
associated with public worship, reorder services, and recreate the religious calendar. Second, the
central focus of this transformation concerned the redefinition of the relationship between the
living and the dead, and the possibility for intercession and communication between these two realms.

**The Reformation Attack**

During the three decades leading up to the reign of Mary (1553-1558) a number of theologians began to question the sacred status that had been attributed to bells and undertook to number them among those “superstitious” practices associated with the Church of Rome. As early as 1528, William Tyndale the biblical translator, criticized the reverence accorded to “hallowed bells” and links them with superstitious beliefs:

> What reverence geve we unto holy water/holy fyre, holy bred/holy salt/hallowed belles/holy wayx/holy bowes/ holy candels and holy asshes…Thou wilt saye do not soch thinges bringe the holy goost and put awaye synne and dryve awaye sprites...when we cast holy water at the devell or ringe the belles/he fleeth/as men doo from younge children/and moketh with us/to bringe us from the true faith that is in Gods worde unto a superstitious and a false belefe of our own imaginacion.²

In 1547 John Hooper, the future bishop of Gloucester and proponent of a Swiss-styled religious Reformation in England, lamented how the interpretation of the sound of bells had been altered:

> the ringing of the belles, was institutid to convocat and call together the congregacion of the church at a certayneoure to hyre the worde of god and to use the holy sacramentes. Or else to shew when there shuld be ony consultacion an assemblayncce for maters touchyng the commune wealthe. The thyng is now come to that poynte, that people thynke God to be hyghly honoryd by the sound of the Belles some thynke that the sournde hathe pourid in the soule of man the ring so diligently for the dead that the breake the Ropes to pull the soules out of purgatorie. they say that the sound candryue [can drive] away the deuyll, and Cease all Tempestes. othere say that the sournde mouythe and storyth unto deuocion, doubtles thei iudge amyssse, if deuocion cum whyle the bell Ryngith, it commyth not there by, but by Godes sprit, for it is not the nature of the sound

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to yeue it, it may be asigne of deuocion, as the comete or blasyng starre, may be callid a
signe of godes ire or angre, though the starre of is nature is not to be feryd.  

This passage is of interest for two reasons. First, Hooper has effectively summarized the
symbolism and significance of bell ringing on the eve of the Reformation: a sacred sound,
pleasing to God, able to penetrate into the realm of purgatory, and feared by the devil himself.
Second, Hooper has given a brief introduction to the potentially ambiguous belief in “signs”.
Hooper was not condemning bells outright, for he attributes neither their sound nor their physical
material as being inherently superstitious. Indeed his reasoning helps explain why bells survived
the iconoclastic destruction of the Reformation relatively unscathed. He rejected a willingness to
accept bells as tools which God might use to reveal or inspire devotion, and instead asserted that
this inspiration came directly from God. Their sound should not be regarded as inherently
miraculous, nor inherently sacred. But the potential for ambiguity and confusion is not difficult
to notice, for if an object or a sound was to be frequently used to call the congregation to gather
together for supremely sacred purposes, the hearing of the “word of God” and to “use the holy
sacraments”, then it should not be surprising if that same object or sound came to be considered
sacred in and of itself. Hooper thereby provides us with some explanation both for why bell
ringing continued to be associated with the spiritual life and traditions of the parish, and why the
spiritual significance of bell ringing remained relatively ambiguous through to the middle of the
seventeenth century.

Much of the reformers’ distaste for bells was because the bells had been “christened” in
elaborate consecration ceremonies. In his 1548 treatise “on things abused in the Popish Church”,
popular evangelical poet Peter Moone (d. 1601) noted that, “We haue had belles christened,
vestimentes consecrated Chalices anointed, high altares washed and halowed Images

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3 John Hooper, An Answer Unto My Lord of Winchester... (Zurich: Augustyne Fries, 1547), EEBO, STC 13741, Images 58,59.
tabernacled, dead mens bones shryned Coniured Crosses censed, spittled and spattled”.\textsuperscript{4} Hugh Latimer mockingly defined the role of a “popysh suffragan” as one who hallows or christens bells.\textsuperscript{5} The act of christening was itself ambiguous. Was it a ceremony which imbued an object with divine or miraculous power, or was it simply a process which dedicated an object (be it a building or a bell) to be used to bring honour and glorify to God? The distinction was important. The act of christening or consecrating bells remained throughout the Reformation and beyond, but the interpretation of the act varied widely. What did not vary was the perceived need to christen or consecrate the bells in the first place.

Moone went on to describe the soundscape of holy days:

\begin{quote}
Upon the high holy euennes, as they do them call,  
They range all the belles a solempne noys to heare  
There had we euensong: complyne, & salue with all  
Of it was song or sayd, them selues were neuer the nere  
For it was in a foren tonge, as it doth well apere Nother to them nor vs, was there edification  
For it was all lippe labor, song they neuer so cleare  
Syldome preache they christ, to be the light of our saluation.\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

Although Moone did not deny the solemnizing effect of the ringing bells, he does question whether or not there was in fact anything worth solemnizing. For Moone, the rest of the service amounted to noise. In this polemical context, we can detect an early attempt to define noise as that which is aurally meaningless or irrelevant. “Songs” in a foreign language, like prayers and services in Latin, did not offer edifying sound, but only mere “lip labour”, and therefore had little

\textsuperscript{4} Peter Moone, \textit{A Short Treatise of Certain Thinges Abused in the Popish Church…} (Ipswich: John Oswen, 1548), EEBO, STC 18055, Image 3.  
\textsuperscript{5} Hugh Latimer, \textit{The Seventh Sermon of Master Hugh Latimer…} (London: John Day, 1549), EEBO, STC 15274.7, Image 114.  
\textsuperscript{6} Peter Moone, EEBO, STC 18055, Image 2,3.

Clarity of sound was thus coming to be associated with the intelligibility of language and words, and this would lead to genuine understanding. The sound of English preaching could edify and promote understanding, while Latin songs, at least for many, could not. This emphasis upon intelligibility and understanding was therefore leading towards a new definition of worship, and it would demand that the bells themselves be intelligible and free from ambiguous interpretation.

At least some of this potential ambiguity arose from the traditional belief that bells possessed power against storms. In the preface of his chronicles recording his expedition into Scotland in 1548, William Patten gave thanks for his sovereign King Edward VI and for deliverance from the authority of the pope who is guilty of numerous transgressions including encouraging:

> setting vp candels too saincts in euery corner, & knak kynge of beadstones in euery pewe, tollyng of belles against tempestes\footnote{William Patten, *The Expedition into Scotland of the Most Worthily Fortunate Prince Edward...* (London: Richard Grafton, 1548), EEBO, STC 19476.5, Image 28,29.}

Since the “knak kynge” of prayer beads served no intelligible purpose, it was a disruptive or fraudulent sound. Equally disruptive were the tolls of bells against tempests. This was not the solemn ringing to which Moone had been referring; for the author, this was superstition not edification. Some lamented that bells were being used to “seduce” God and not as a sacred sound meant to inspire worship of God.\footnote{Ibid., Image 29.} The reformers thus criticized unintelligible ringing that
did nothing to bring edification to public worship, but they did not proclaim that the ringing of the parish bell was inherently profane or superstitious.

**Heinrich Bullinger’s Attack**

The attack on bells by the English reformers was a part of their more general critique of the abuses in the Church. There was no systematic English analysis or critique of bells specifically. Therefore it will be useful to depart briefly from our consideration of the injunctions and visitation articles in order to examine a short but targeted critique of bells published by Heinrich Bullinger in 1571. This is no great departure, for not only was Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) one of the most formative of Protestant theologians on the continent, but he also had a profound and direct influence on an entire generation of English reformers. The full title of the treatise is “About the ringing of bells and also about the habits and matters that affect the people for the old rights of the believing people against the new papal and superstitious ringing. A short report pulled together out of the biblical writings and old histories”. Although Bullinger’s treatise did not address matters pertaining to bells and bell ringing in England, there are two fairly convincing reasons why it should be discussed within the context of this present study. First it is the only treatise, to this author’s knowledge, written by a leading mid-sixteenth-century evangelical that examines, as its primary subject, the topic of parish bells and their place in the Protestant church. And second, although there is no indication that this document had in fact been read by any of the leading English reformers, Bullinger’s close contact with

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10 Heinrich Bullinger, “Das Glockenläuten, 1571” In *Heinrich Bullinger, Schriften*, ed. Emidio Campi, Detlef Roth, and Peter Stotz (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2006) 462-481. I am enormously grateful to Professor Hilmar Pabel for bringing this text to my attention and to Mr. Dick Derksen for his willingness to translate this document into English for me. This of course was a translation of a translation, since Schifferle had already translated Bullinger’s original treatise from Swiss German to High German. There does not appear to be any other existing English translation of this document.
evangelicals across the channel, and widely acknowledged influence upon English Protestantism, would suggest that there was a good chance that many of his opinions about bells would have been familiar to the authors of the English injunctions and visitation articles. The publication date for this work is 1571, but it is likely that much of the content had already been discussed in Zurich and England during the previous two decades. We know, for example, that Bullinger gave explicit voice to his condemnation of bells in the tenth sermon of his *Fifth Decade*, published originally in Latin in 1551 and in English in 1566.\(^{11}\)

F.W. Maitland claimed that “a better example of a purely spiritual power could hardly be found than the influence that was exercised in England by Zwingli’s successor Heinrich Bullinger. Bishops and Puritans argued their causes before him as if he were the judge.”\(^ {12}\) Bullinger’s active interest in the English Reformation is indeed readily apparent as early as 1536. Diarmaid MacCulloch provides a convincing image of Bullinger eagerly seeking to establish a productive relationship with the newly installed Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. Already possessing a reputation for his energetic correspondence with several evangelicals throughout Europe, he was keen to ask the German theologian Simon Grynaeus to send a letter of introduction to England on his behalf.\(^ {13}\) Bullinger and Cranmer quickly established a relationship, for we soon learn that Cranmer was sending a number of his protégés to Zürich in an effort to become more familiar with the reformed churches in Switzerland.\(^ {14}\) Cranmer had obviously come to value the opinions of his colleagues in Zürich, for he expressed some

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\(^{14}\) Ibid., 176, 177.
disappointment in a 1537 letter that Bullinger had not written about his own reactions to the Pilgrimage of Grace.\textsuperscript{15}

Carrie Euler has remarked that most historians have focused on the relationship between England and two of the leading minds of continental Reformation thought, Vermigli and Bucer, yet the writings of Heinrich Bullinger were in fact translated into English more frequently than either of these reformers, and subsequently reached a much wider English audience.\textsuperscript{16} Euler also reveals that among Bullinger’s earliest English audience were Thomas Cromwell and King Henry VIII, both of whom seem to have approved of Bullinger’s thoughts on the authority of the scriptures and bishops.\textsuperscript{17} Bullinger’s influence in shaping the ceremony and theology of Edwardian England can be detected in several letters to Bullinger from Richard Cox, Edward’s tutor, in which Cox thanks Bullinger for sending him copies of his books and inquires of his thoughts on the process for administering the Eucharist to the sick who were unable to attend public worship.\textsuperscript{18} Euler in fact goes so far as to claim that Bishop John Hooper, one of the most prominent and outspoken of reformers during the reign of Edward, could be described as a “disciple” of Bullinger, and that he and other English evangelicals were actively seeking out Bullinger’s advice on matters pertaining to marriage.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, she convincingly argues that there is evidence to suggest that Bullinger’s advice was indeed followed and practically applied in England.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 178.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 385.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 385.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 386, 387.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 387. 388.
A number of historians have maintained that Bullinger’s influence upon religious affairs in England did not wane during the reign of Elizabeth. Perhaps the most explicit claim in this regard comes from David Keep who argued that Bullinger’s “Confutation of the Pope’s Bull” (1571), reveals that his thought expressed “the Anglican view of the church, as the later adoption of his Decades as a textbook in Lincoln and Canterbury was to show”.  

Bullinger began his treatise on bells by asserting that they were not biblical examples of audible signal devices. He claimed that trumpets and horns were the ancient instruments of choice to call together the people of God, or to prepare them for war or attack. He went on to assert that bells were first poured in Italy (in Campania) for secular purposes, only later to be adopted by the church in 606 under the authority of Pope Sabinus. Therefore Bullinger concluded (was this disappointment or reassurance?) that “because the ringing was discovered by others and Pope Sabinus introduced it again, we cannot depict it as popish itself”. Hereby Bullinger implied that a thing could belong to one of three categories: 1) it could be Christian and good 2) it could be secular and potentially indifferent 3) it could be ‘popish’ and explicitly opposed to God. He therefore spared bells his utter condemnation due to their secular origins.

Bullinger argued that there were two reasons why bells might be rung during the day: “to differentiate the time and to announce to the people their obligations”. In the effort to differentiate time, a bell was rung at three separate times during the day in an effort to mark

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22 Heinrich Bullinger, “About the Ringing of Bells”. Bullinger makes no mention of Exodus 28:33-35 in which instructions are given for the making of Aaron’s robe that was to be worn when he entered into the ‘Holy Place’. Bells were to line the hem of this robe. Although this certainly does not refer to large parish bells, many writers, both before and during the Reformation, referred to this passage in discussions pertaining to the origins of the association of bells with the Christian church.  
23 Ibid., 470.  
24 Ibid., 470.  
25 Ibid., 470.
morning, midday, and night. Bullinger found each of these occasions for bell ringing to be perfectly acceptable, if not necessary, even going so far as to suggest that because the gospels themselves observe that Jesus walked upon the water during the “fourth watch of the night”, the marking of daily divisions of time was not only important, but biblical.\textsuperscript{26} In the second category, Bullinger acknowledged nine instances in which bell ringing was used to announce the obligations of the people; each of which, he concluded, were “important signal ringings that have been necessary since old times, that are without superstition and not against God, but serve to keep upright the public order”.\textsuperscript{27} To paraphrase, these nine types of rings were:

1. Ringing to announce preaching, thus preparing the people for church. Once the congregation had gathered an additional ring would signal the beginning of the service.
2. Ringing to summon the councillors to the town hall.
3. Ringing to call the public to hear the verdict and witness the execution of criminals condemned to die.
4. Ringing to call the teacher and students together for instruction.
5. Ringing to indicate the end of the workday.
6. Ringing for the fire bell, after the night bell had been rung, warned the people to be careful of their fires.
7. Ringing at 9 o’clock in the summer, 8 o’clock in the winter, summoned the watchmen to their watch. This bell could also call the council to its meeting.
8. Ringing to signal the closure of the wine houses.
9. Ringing to call the citizens together to swear allegiance to the mayor or the council.\textsuperscript{28}

However, Bullinger objected that other types of ringing had gradually been added to this list, and that the original function of many of these rings had been changed by “papal followers”.\textsuperscript{29} The first set of these additional rings that Bullinger found objectionable were the rings for the seven canonical hours, and the ringing that accompanied the celebration of the

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 470. See Matthew 14:25.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 472.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 471, 472.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 472.
mass, highlighted by ringing at the elevation of the Host. Bullinger protested against what he interpreted as the “papal” suggestion that authentic worship by the true Church could only occur during the mass or during the observance of the canonical orders at specified times of the day, concluding that the evangelical Church, on the other hand, was in fact willing to detect authentic worship whenever the reading, teaching, and preaching of scriptures occurred. Bullinger believed that “the papal church” was rooted in the tendency to link worship with obligatory acts and observances, exemplified by too intimately attaching prayer and the remembrance of Christ to specific hours of the day and artificially sanctified moments. Since bells brought audible order to these obligations, Bullinger considered them to be the potential harbingers of superstition. The church’s efforts to order and control sacred time through bell ringing reminded Bullinger of Daniel’s prophecy of the coming of the fourth beast who will speak against God and seek to change and control the division of time.

Bullinger went on to condemn the consecration, dedication, or baptism of bells, bell ringing in the evening before and on holy days, and the superstitious efforts to ring bells in hopes of calming stormy weather. Then, he turned his attention to bell ringing associated with death and dying, acknowledging that the papal church permitted ringing at the moment of death, at the funeral, and “afterward”. According to Bullinger, Christians do not believe in ringing for the dead, an assertion he rooted firmly on biblical interpretation. He argued that although ringing

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30 Ibid., 472.
31 Ibid., 472.
32 Ibid., 474. See Daniel 7:25.
33 Ibid., 475. He concludes that by baptizing, consecrating, or dedicating the bell, one is “ascribing to the bell what belongs only to the Holy Spirit”, that “through the ringing for the church service the sound of the bells will allow faith and love to grown in the hearers”. On the matter of pacifying storms Bullinger appears willing to accept that there is a link between storms and the work of the devil, however to “ascribe such power to bell ringing” would be “an abomination to God”.
34 Ibid., 475.
35 Ibid., 475.
for the dead did not have biblical precedent due to the absence of large parish bells, pipe and flute playing for the dead during the time of the gospels played an equivalent role to late medieval death knells. To that end he directed his reader to Matthew 9:23-25 and noted that when Jesus discovered the flute players in the house of the ruler whose young daughter had died, “he sent them away, in the same way as he drove the traders out of the temple”.\textsuperscript{36} It is curious to note that Bullinger neglected to mention that Jesus justified his dismissal of the flutists on the grounds that the girl had not yet died, but was merely asleep, suggesting that the flutists should have remained if she were in fact dead. Nevertheless, Bullinger complained that the clergy of the “papal” Church had made a business of the dead and had thereby established on the Church’s best sources of revenue.\textsuperscript{37}

Bullinger permitted one exception to his prohibition against ringing for the dead. He was willing to accept that the bells could be rung in isolated villages when someone had died in order to summon those who could help carry out the body for burial.\textsuperscript{38} Bell ringing associated with death should only be used for strictly utilitarian purposes, and only on those rare occasions in which there was nobody on hand to transport the body to its place of burial, and even then only with specific permission. Thus for Bullinger, every conceivable effort should be made to disassociate the sound of the parish bell with the process of death and dying.

Bullinger next criticized the midday ringing as a call to the \textit{none} prayers (so-called because they originally occurred at the ninth [\textit{none}] hour of the divine offices around 3pm). In Bullinger’s Zurich this midday bell or \textit{none}-bell was rung at the eleventh hour. At this time the citizens were expected to remove their hats and pray the appropriate prayers. Bullinger objected

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 475.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 475.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 475.
to this practice for two reasons. First, he regarded this custom to be a product of an erroneous reading of the Bible. He noted that the *none* prayers were meant to commemorate the death of Jesus at the ninth hour, hence the removal of the hat in acknowledgment of the “suffering of Christ”. However, the biblical ninth hour did not correspond to the eleventh hour of the morning in Zurich, but to the third hour of the afternoon, and therefore it was a vain attempt at commemoration. Second, he considered the objection of one who might ask him whether it is not good to remember the suffering of Christ by means of this bell and prayer, even if the practice and custom were indeed something “popish”. He responded by arguing that the remembrance of Christ’s sufferings was not wrong, but that such devout recollection should be so intimately bound to strictly scheduled daily prayers announced by the ringing of bells was pharisaical and challenged the essence of Christian freedom. Therefore the bell was objectionable as an audible symbol and determiner of scheduled worship. Bullinger denied that bells pronounced sacred sound, for he could not hear their rings as representative of anything other than the tools of an institutionalized religion that produced nothing more than habitual religious ceremony.

It is not surprising that Bullinger would likewise not tolerate the evening bell to signal the commencement of the Ave prayers. Such ringing he considered a “new and godless ringing, which since our Reformation can no longer be tolerated”. He rejected the notion that the custom of ringing for the Aves had any biblical justification and argued that although the gospel of Luke contained the foundation for the Ave prayers, it said nothing about ringing, kneeling and

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39 Ibid., 476. The taking off of the hat appears to be unique to the prayers of the “ninth-hour” or evening prayer. A practice that was still common in the canton of Zurich well into the 20th century (Cf. 18, 476).
40 Ibid., 476.
41 Ibid., 476, 477.
42 Ibid., 478.
praying. He went on to explain why such prayers to Mary were both idolatrous and non-Biblical. In like manner he related how the ringing of the “fire-bell” had come to be rung in commemoration of Mary’s death, and for this development he blames the clergy for implementing a custom “that would otherwise never have been thought of”.

He concluded his treatise by asserting the foolishness of those who overestimate the importance of bell ringing. Lamenting that the piety of prayer seems to be contingent on whether or not the bells are rung at their utterance, Bullinger instead declared that “praying is good at anytime”. He feared that prayer regulated and dictated by the ringing of bells challenged the very act of praying with sincere “reflection and faith”.

Perhaps Bullinger’s fears reveal the challenge that Protestants across Europe believed they faced: to develop a version of Christianity that promoted a heartfelt faith, free of institutional and hierarchical coercion and regulation. Bullinger therefore left little doubt that he was convinced that parish bells were more often than not the tools of coercion and obstacles to “true” faith. In spite of Bullinger’s history of influence upon reformed English theology and his long held position of esteem in the eyes of English evangelicals, the Church of England, proved itself to be vastly more willing to accept the rings of the parish bells as permissible and functional sacred sounds. This attitude of the Church of England towards bells and bell ringing was clearly reflected in the injunctions issued over this period of religious reform.

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44 Ibid., 480.
45 Ibid., 481.
46 Ibid., 481.
Ringing the Aves

A case can be made that the explicit attack on parish bell ringing did not begin until 1547 with the promulgation of the royal injunctions in that year. Yet the final decade of the reign of Henry VIII witnessed a creeping restriction of bell ringing that flowed from the break with papal authority and the attack on the cult of saints. The celebration of saints’ days was curtailed by the royal injunctions of 1536 that abolished all holy days, with the exception of the major feasts and the feasts of the Apostles, the Virgin, St. George, the Ascension, the Nativity of St John the Baptist, All Saints, and Candlemas.\(^47\) The practical consequence of this piece of royal policy was the silencing of the bells on these days, and the Crown took pains to punish those who maintained the old customs. For example, in Hertfordshire the curates and sextons “made default” by defiantly ringing their bells on Holy Rood Day on September 14\(^{th}\), and in St. Nicholas in Warwick where the curate, John Wetwood, found himself in jail for disobediently ringing the parish bells on the feast of St. Lawrence on August 8\(^{th}\).\(^48\) Though Henry VIII was motivated by a desire to reform a liturgical calendar dictated by Rome, his proved the first step in the reformation of the sacred soundscape of early modern England.

Henry VIII’s injunctions of 1538 firmly established the foundation for the more radical Protestant reform that was to come during the reign of Edward. At this relatively early stage of reform, Henry’s ecclesiastical requirements were as concerned with matters of order and loyalty as they were with questions of theology. Order was fundamentally rooted in obedience to all the laws and statutes of the realm “made for the abolyshynge and extirpation of the bysshop of

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 56.
Romes pretensed and usurped power and jurisdiction within this realme.”⁴⁹ Superstition was implicitly defined as behavior or belief that appeared to acknowledge an allegiance to the church of Rome and thereby contradicted that which had been ordered in the articles “put forth by the auctorite of the kinges maiestie”.⁵⁰ In an attempt to abolish pilgrimages, the injunctions linked theological justifications with the more practical interests of a well ordered realm: “they shall please god more by the true exercising of their bodily labour, travail, or occupation, and providing for their families, than if they went about to the said pilgrimages”.⁵¹ Fathers, mothers, and governors were encouraged to educate the youth of the realm in an English knowledge of the Lord’s Prayer, articles of faith, and the Ten Commandments. The intended outcome of such obedience was not to establish right theology or ensure salvation. The injunctions hoped that by encouraging English parents to participate in the religious education of their own children, English society would be spared a great variety of social ills including begging, stealing, sloth, idleness, theft, murder, and “unthriftynes”.⁵²

The sole mention of bell ringing in the injunctions of 1538 concerned the ringing of the Aves and stated:

that the knollynge of the Aves, after servyce and certain other times, which hath ben brought in and begon by the pretence of the byshop of Romes pardon, henceforth be lefte and omitted lest the people do hereafter truste to have pardon for the sayng of their Aves betwene the sayde knollyng, as they have done in tymes past.⁵³

The wording of this particular item suggests that the ringing of the Aves was to be omitted not only because they encouraged bad theology (papal power to forgive sins), but also, and perhaps more importantly, because they signified the intrusion of Rome into the life of the parish. There

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⁴⁹ Church of England, *Injunctions Given by the Authority of the King’s Highness...* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1538), EEBO, STC 10085, Image 1.
⁵⁰ Ibid., Image 2.
⁵¹ Ibid., Image 2.
⁵² Ibid., Image 2.
⁵³ Church of England, EEBO, STC 10087, Image 3.
had obviously been a prevailing conviction that the sound of the bells themselves offered the forgiveness of sins, for it was not the Ave prayers that were being outlawed, but the ringing of the bells. These bells did not simply call the parishioners to repent, for they were understood to be the actual sounds of forgiveness itself, thereby challenging the essential Protestant assertion that humans are justified by faith alone. The year before he resigned his see over his opposition to the Six Articles of 1539, Bishop Shaxton issued his injunctions for the diocese of Salisbury and provided an even more specific prohibition of the Ave bell:

Item, that the bell called the Pardon or Ave Bell, which of long time hath been used to be tolled three times after or before divine service, be not hereafter in any part of my diocese any more tolled.\textsuperscript{54}

The sound of forgiveness was here specifically identified as three tolls on a particular bell, and it was this unique and recognizable set of tolls which Shaxton wanted eliminated. According to the Catholic liturgical scholar Herbert Thurston, these three tolls (or sets of tolls) would have been separated by enough time during which parishioners could have said the Lord’s Prayer and the Ave Maria, both prayers that emphasized the need for forgiveness and intercession.\textsuperscript{55} Given Shaxton’s reputation as one of most zealous and uncompromising of the reforming bishops in Henry’s church, it is not surprising that his injunctions would seek more explicitly to expose the function and purpose of the Ave bells.\textsuperscript{56} In this instance the sound of the bells would certainly have been associated with the notion of forgiveness and the saying of prayers, and we must assume that the ringing of parish bells at this hour of the day would have been the sound of

\textsuperscript{54} Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation, ii. 60.
mercy and intercession for at least a number of parishioners.\textsuperscript{57} We should therefore not be surprised to discover that such a self-affirming sound was not given up so easily.

Perhaps the most significant article decreed by the injunctions of 1538 was the requirement that every parish ought to provide an English Bible “for every man that wyll, to loke and rede theron, and shal discourge no man from the reding of any part of the Bible”.\textsuperscript{58} Such a provision would have made the parishioners less dependent on the interpretive capacities of a spiritual institution whose language and loyalties were increasingly viewed to be rooted outside the realm by those close to Henry. It further demonstrates that the injunctions of 1538 established articles that might more effectively ensure a well-ordered church whose loyalty and authority remained within the realm of England. But these restrictions on ringing the Aves reflect more than a desire for a well-ordered Church. The attack on Ave ringing was an attack upon any papal claim to hold the power of forgiveness. Yet these injunctions of 1538 remained silent on the relationship between bells and burials.

The corresponding visitation articles to the injunctions of 1547 reveal that the injunctions of 1538 needed to be restated nine years later. These articles inquired “Whether the knollynge at the Aves be used,” implying that the practice of knolling the Aves continued with enough frequency to warrant the repetition of the restriction against its ringing.\textsuperscript{59} The language had been simplified and no reference to the “pretense of the bishop of Rome” had been made. And thus the item was less concerned with divided loyalties than it was with bad theology. The item did not ban the saying of the Aves, but the knolling of the Aves, thereby reinforcing the idea that

\textsuperscript{57} See for example Thomas Gascoigne, \textit{Here After Folowith the Boke Callyd the Myrroure of Oure Lady...} (London : Richarde Fawkes, 1530), EEBO, STC 17542, Images 45-61.
\textsuperscript{58} Church of England, 1538, EEBO, STC 10085, Image 3.
\textsuperscript{59} Henry VIII, 1547, EEBO, STC 10115.5, Image 5.
it was the sound of the bell which was associated with forgiveness and not the saying of the prayer itself.

The Sacring Bell

The injunctions of 1538 discussed only the prohibition of the ringing of the Aves, but the Edwardian injunctions of 1547 sought to enforce even broader restrictions upon the parish bells. The twenty-third item stated:

And in the tyme of Letanye, of the high Masse, of the Sermon, and when the priest readeth the scripture to the parishyoners, no maner of persone, without a iuste and urgent cause, shall departe out of the Churche: and all ringynge and knowlynge of Belles, shalbe utterly forborne for that tyme, excepte one Belle, in convenient tyme to be rong or knowled before the sermon.60

This injunction most likely referred to the custom of ringing bells at the Sanctus and at the elevation of the Host, but it likely also referred to other customary occasions for ringing during the service. It is difficult to read this particular injunction without getting a sense that parishes had become accustomed to the frequent ringing of bells at various points in the service. It suggests that the bells were simply being rung too much, and consequently this injunction should be interpreted as a strong and explicit demand for silence and order. The demand for silence during the celebration of “high Masse” should be interpreted as an attack on the doctrine of transubstantiation, for it was at the moment of the elevation of the Host that the sacring bell had traditionally been rung. To silence this bell was therefore an attempt to silence this doctrine. The celebration of the Eucharist was not specifically referred to in this injunction; however we should hear this demand for silence as a fairly targeted attack upon the doctrine of transubstantiation, for it was this doctrine that was being highlighted at the moment of the

elevation. This would in fact be consistent with the broader agenda of the 1547 Injunctions which sought to radically redefine the sacraments of the Church in England. The bell itself was not however the object of criticism. The sound of a ringing bell was acknowledged to be a solemnizing and alerting sound, and was given permission to announce the most solemn and significant event of the reformed service, the sermon. By having made this the primary function of the bell during the service, the sermon thus replaced the elevation of the Host as the climax of public worship. The act of hearing the sermon thereby took precedence over the act of seeing the Host. The paradigm shift should not be overstated, yet the bells were not silenced, but restricted, and restricted with an eye towards establishing audible clarity and solemnizing the oral act of preaching. Sermons were therefore not only meant to be preached, they were meant to be heard. Thus, although this injunction was intent upon ordering and restricting ceremony, it simultaneously acknowledged the solemnizing effectiveness of ceremony. Indeed the ceremonial nature of the sermon bell should be highlighted. The sermon bell was not meant to gather the congregation and begin the worship service, for the bell appears to have been rung after the service had begun, and, as the order seems to suggest, as the only permissible sound in an otherwise silent context. The bell does not appear to have been rung out of necessity but out of ceremonial preference.

The desire to ensure quiet and clarity appears even earlier in the twenty-third item of this set of injunctions; it began by stating:

Also, to avoyde all contencion and strife, whiche heretofore have risen, emong the kynges Maiesties subiectes in sondrye places of hys Realmes and dominions by reason of sonde courtesye, and chalengyng of places in procession, and also that they maye the more quietlye heare that whiche is saied or song, to their edefiyng: they shall not from hensefurthe, in any parishe churche, at any tyme use any procession about the Churche or Churche yarde or other place but immediatly before high Masse, the priests with others, of the queire, shall kneele in the middes of the Churche, and syngeing or saye, plainly
and distinctly, the Letany, which is set furthe in Englishe, with all the suffrages following.\(^6\)

One of the stated arguments for eliminating procession was thus to ensure that hearing might be less inhibited by the commotion of the procession itself. Hearing was hereby acknowledged as the more effective path to edification than physical participation in a visible ceremony. But this item contained not only a mandate for quiet, but also a requirement for clarity, for the litany must be said “plainly and distinctly”. We are thus able to detect a shift in the way sound was interpreted. Sound was no longer intended only to be heard; it must be distinct enough, and the environment quiet enough, to be plainly understood. This demand for aural clarity is very clearly expressed in Bishop Thomas Bentham’s 1565 Injunctions for the parishes in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield:

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\text{Item, that you do say your Divine Service on the Holy days distinctly with an audible voice, that the people may understand you, and especially when you read the Homilies, the Epistle or Gospel, and all manner of prayers said at the Holy Communion, and not to mumble nor tumble all things without devotion, as you did at such time you had the service in Latin tongue.}\(^6\)
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The desire to guarantee the clear and intelligible communication of reformed religion may have been particularly acute for Bentham who struggled with widespread recusancy within his diocese.\(^6\) The act of listening required freedom from distraction and this was supported by the corresponding visitation articles of 1547. One of the inquiries of these articles examined, “Whether any doo vse to common, langle or talke in the Churche, at the tyme of the diuine seruice, Preachyng, Readyng, or declaryng the worde of God”.\(^6\) The reformers were thus not

\[^6\]Ibid., Image 9.
\[^6\]Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy \textit{Visitation Articles and Injunctions}, iii. 166.
\[^6\]Henry VIII, \textit{Articles to be Enquired of, in the King’s Majesty’s Visitation} (London: Richard Grafton, 1547), EEBO, STC 10115.5, Image 6.
specifically concerned with the distraction of ringing bells, but with the more general problem of distracting noise. Whether it came from the superfluous ringing of a bell or disruptive conversation, the effect was the same and needed to be addressed.

**Superstition, Defacement, and Protection**

The injunctions of 1547 issued a further word of caution against the use of bells. The twenty-seventh article warned against ringing bells or using candles in an effort to “discharge of the burden of synne, or to drive awaye Devilles, or to put awaye phanttasies, or in puttinge truste and confidence of healthe and salvacion in the same Ceremonies”65 Despite this warning, this very same item contained the justification for the use of ceremony within the church. Ceremonial objects were “ordeyned, instituted, and made, to put us in remembrance of the benefites, whiche wee have receyved by Chryste. And if he use them for any other purpose, he grevously offendeth God.”66 In fact the very next article required the destruction of those objects most guilty of promoting offensive ceremony: shrines, coverings of shrines, tables, candlesticks, wax pictures, paintings, and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry, and superstition.67 Bells, however, were notably absent from this list, but the evidence would suggest that the degree to which bells were considered holy or blessed objects was debatable from the late 1530s through until the death of Henry VIII in 1547.

In 1536 William Senes of Rotherham had been indicted for having shown Thomas Holden, the chantry priest of St. Katharine’s in the church of All Saints in Rotheram, “some printed ballads against the prayers of the church used in the hallowing of water, the blessing of

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65 Church of England, 1547, EEBO, STC 10089, Image 11.
66 Ibid., Image 11.
67 Ibid., Image 11.
bread and of bells, and touching purgatory”. Thomas Holden responded by asserting that this printed material had not been approved by parliament. But this reply was entirely unconvincing to Senes who proclaimed that the clergy received their books from “heretics”. This attack on the holy reputation of bells was repeated by Mr. Scory of Kent whose deposition was heard by a commission led by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1537. From this we learn that Scory was being accused of having questioned the power of the bells during a thunderstorm. The commission heard that Scory had said:

…superstitions were used in the church as making of crosses upon Palm Sunday, setting up of them and blessing them with the holy candle, ringing of bells in the thunder. For, think you, said he, that the Devil will be afraid or flee away cross making, hurling of holy water, ringing of bells and such other ceremonies when he was not afraid to take Christ himself and cast him on his back and set him on a pinnacle?69

Throughout the hearings Cranmer’s marginal notes regarding the testimony of Scory reveal that the Archbishop felt as though Scory was “slanderous”, “seditious”, and “guilty of much error”. The power and holiness of bells was still a hotly contested issue, an issue upon which Cranmer himself would ultimately change his mind.

And it is here worth remembering that the medieval bells of England remained relatively unscathed during this period of religious upheaval, in spite of their inscriptions that unambiguously promoted the theology of the Church in Rome. There does not appear to have been any governmental or ecclesiastical order to deface or remove the inscriptions on bells even though such medieval inscriptions usually invoked one of the saints to pray for the parishioners. Even a cursory glance at the compilations made by a number of nineteenth- and early twentieth-

68 National Archives of the UK, SP 1/123 f. 201. (SP = State Papers Domestic)
The dissolution did however witness the removal of many bells from monasteries throughout England. Many of these bells were eventually sold to other churches, and a good number were even sold to buyers on the continent. A 1540 letter written to Sir Ralph Fane of Kent, eventual supporter of the Duke of Somerset during the reign of Edward VI, tells of a Spanish priest who discovered that an English merchant was selling English bells from a warehouse in Spain. Upon discovering that Henry VIII had ordered the removal of these bells from monasteries in England, the priest was alarmed and replied, “What a good Christian is your King of England to put down the monasteries and to take away the bells!” He went on to declare that the king was a heretic, for by putting down the monasteries and selling the bells he was behaving as though he were the “pope within his realm”. This account not only attests that the bells from monasteries were sold as a result of the dissolution, but it suggests that the market for bells might have been glutted in England. As a result, there would have been very little demand for the founding of new bells in the decades following the dissolution.

We can only assume therefore that bells were not commonly considered to be objects too closely associated with idolatry or superstition, in spite of their inscriptions which ran counter to the agenda of the reformers. The injunctions themselves provide us with a clue as to why bells as physical objects were not overtly threatening to reform. The stated reason for the destruction of

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70 John Blatchly, “In search of Bells: Iconoclasm in Norfolk, 1644”, in Trevor Cooper, The Journal of William Dowsing (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 107-122. Blatchly’s study perhaps implies that the vandalism of bells was infrequent indeed, for the particular case of the iconoclasm that Blatchly discovers is not only very limited, but it is intricately linked to the activities and inspiration of one man. Furthermore, this iconoclasm occurred at the remarkably late date of 1644, thus its interest lies in its exceptional qualities and not in its depiction of a larger reforming precedent.

of offensive objects was “so that there remayn no memory of the same [idolatry and superstition] in walles, glasses, windowes, or els where, within their churches or houses.” The reformers obviously did not consider parish bells to be effective preservers of memory. These inscriptions may have threatened the evangelical program; however these inscriptions could not be seen. Indeed given the evidence that suggests that the founders and not the parish determined the inscriptions of pre-Reformation bells, one wonders how familiar the average parishioner would have been with the inscription on his own parish bell. More importantly, we are faced with the suggestion that early modern England did not view sound as an effective means of conveying memory. That the reformers wished to stamp out superstition and idolatry, but were not keen on the idea of completely stifling the sound of bells, implies that the these same reformers believed that the symbolism and meaning conveyed by sound was more easily manipulated and altered than were the visible objects of ceremony. Bells as objects were not a threat to the agenda of English reformers.

From 1560 to 1565 a number of injunctions and articles addressed the destruction or disappearance of bells in the previous years. Matthew Parker’s Articles for the province of Canterbury inquired whether any bells had been sold. However it is unlikely that he was referring to large parish bells, for there is no indication that these were being sold off as a result of any of the religious upheaval of the previous decades. He was probably referring to the sale of smaller sacring bells, and the purpose of the inquiry was likely to ensure that parishes were properly reporting the profits gained from such sales. Indeed, in Parker’s Injunctions for Ely

72 Church of England, 1547, EEBO, STC 10089, Image 11.
73 Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, Visitation Articles and Injunction, iii. 77.
Cathedral of 1563 his intent was far more explicit when he specifically revealed his interest in the “price of the bells” and the whereabouts of the profit.\textsuperscript{74}

A Royal Order, dated 1561, specifically mandated:

that there be no destruction or alienation of the bells, steeple, or porch belonging to any parish church by the private authority of any person or persons without sufficient matter shown to the archbishop of the province, of is and their doings, and by them allowed: except it be for the cause of repairing\textsuperscript{75}

The popular notion that this was a dismal period in history of English bells should probably be disregarded. This particular order reveals the royal intent to prevent both the destruction and disregard of church property, including the parish bells. The order suggests that perhaps there were cases whereby destruction or alienation had indeed occurred, but it makes clear that the reformed Church of England believed that the upkeep of sacred space, specifically the steeple and bells, was to be maintained. Archbishop Parker’s Diocesan Articles of 1563 similarly sought to ensure that the bells had not been “plucked down”, but additionally inquired “whether the font be standing and kept decently in the place used”.\textsuperscript{76} This concern for the maintenance of the font shows further regard for those structures traditionally associated with sacred space and public worship. Parker’s very practical concern for the whereabouts and condition of the bells is perhaps indicative that he did indeed view the English church settlement as a “starting point, not a terminus”.\textsuperscript{77} It was a process of restoration, and this restoration needed to make some very practical inquiries regarding church goods and maintenance.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., iii. 144.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., iii. 109.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., iii. 140.
As the newly installed Archbishop of York, Edmund Grindal began his visitation for his diocese in 1571. Protestant ideas had taken little hold of this part of England, and it is Grindal who is often credited with making the first real Protestant inroads in this region, even at this late date. Perhaps this helps explain his very explicit demand in his injunctions for that year that all hand-bells and sacring bells were to be “utterly defaced, broken and destroyed”. We are reminded that the real target of the reformers’ restrictions on bell ringing was the mass, and the ceremonies and that were so intricately linked to its celebration. No injunction required any defacement or destruction of those parish bells whose inscriptions so plainly advocated the intercessory prayers of the saints. Those remnants of the “old religion” survived the Reformation, and many endure to this day, nevertheless a good number of sacring bells were indeed destroyed as ordered.

Several years later Tobie Matthew issued his own set of articles in the year following his appointment to the Archbishopric of York in 1606. Here Matthew revealed a fairly persistent inquiry of the early Stuart senior clergy, intent upon ensuring the proper maintenance and preservation of the parish architecture, including the bells and steeples. Article twenty-six reads:

Whether the body of your church or chapel, with the chancel be well and sufficiently repaired, and kept without prophanation or abuse in any way. And if decaide or prophaned through whose default: and whether your bels and stals in the same be wel maintained.

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79 Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, Visitation Articles and Injunction, iii. 285.
80 Kenneth Fincham, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, i. 58. There are several other articles which contain inquiries into the general maintenance, upkeep, and preservation of parish bells including: Bishop Chaderton’s articles of diocese of Lincoln of 1607, Ibid., i. 76; Archdeacon Robert Johnson’s articles for the archdeaconry of Leicester of 1613, Ibid., 128; Archdeacon Samuel Burton’s articles for the archdeaconry of Gloucester of 1618, Ibid., i. 49; Bishop Lancelot Andrewes’ articles for diocese of Winchester of 1619, Ibid., i. 178; Bishop John Howard’s articles for the diocese of Oxford of 1619, Ibid., i. 191; Bishop Theophilus Field’s articles for the diocese of Llandaff of 1621, Ibid., i. 200; Bishop Miles Smith’s articles for the diocese of Gloucester of 1622, Ibid., i. 206; Bishop William Laud’s articles for the
In the same year Bishop Chaderton more specifically inquired of the parishes in the diocese of Lincoln:

> Whether have you all such bells, ornaments and other utensells as have auntiently belonged to your church…Whether have any churchwardens lost, sold, or detained any goods, ornaments, bels, rents, or implements of the church.\(^{81}\)

And twelve years later Bishop John Overall asked the parishes in the diocese of Norwich whether:

> your church, chancel, and chapel decently and comely kept, as well within as without, and the seats well maintained, the steeple and bells preserved, the windows well glazed,…\(^{82}\)

The existence of several inquiries of this nature throughout the early Stuart years would certainly suggest that some parishes were negligent in their maintenance of bells, and therefore it is reasonable to speculate that some of these same parishes were more inclined to make bell ringing a peripheral activity. This might only have been a due to the high cost of maintaining bells, for there is still evidence of the enthusiasm for bell ringing during the early years of the reign of James I. For example, the enjoyment of bell ringing can be detected in Bedfordshire in 1605.

Thankful for a message from the King to Lord Mordant, the inhabitants of the town of Turvey...
rang their bells “for gladness” all day long, “to the admiring of many in the country
thereabouts”. 83

In 1624 Bishop Richard Neile included the following inquiry in his articles for the
diocese of Durham:

Whether your church, chappell, and chauncell be well, and sufficiently repaired in the
walles, and rooffe, the seates convenient, the floore paved, the windowes glazed, your
bells in tune, and all these cleanly kept,… 84

This particular item was copied from Chaderton’s articles of 1607, but contained one significant
revision; Neile added the phrase “your bells in tune”. It is a notable addition, for it was in fact
the first time reference was made to the tune of bell in any article or injunction from 1536
onward. Up until this point bells were sounds, rings, tolls, and peals, but not tunes. That is not
to say that tunes were not heard, however they were never specifically acknowledged as
significant in the articles and injunctions. But Neile was consciously augmenting Chaderton’s
inquiry, and suggesting that the proper maintenance of a bell included attention and correction to
the tonal qualities of the bell. Certainly the tune of a bell was relative to the tune of other bells,
and the importance of its tonal qualities would have become more audibly apparent if it was
being rung in sequence with other bells. Neile’s demand coincided very nicely with the
maturation, if not the development, of change ringing during the first few decades of the
seventeenth century. It is well worth noting that Neile had been explicitly identified as the “great
patron of the Arminian faction” during the 1620s, and he initiated efforts to adorn and beautify
much of the architecture within his diocese. 85 These beautification projects extended into the

83 M.S. Guiseppi, ed., Calendar of the manuscripts of the most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury, Vol. 17:
1605 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1938), 528.
84 Kenneth Fincham, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, i. 85.
G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008,
realm of church music as is evident by his construction of a new Dallam organ for the cathedral in Durham.\textsuperscript{86} His views on the aesthetics of public worship can also be detected in this very brief inquiry of the bells. We are able to observe how early modern English bell ringing began to move slowly away from symbolic sounds of announcement, prayer, death, and celebration, and over the threshold into the realm of music.

**Disruption, Order and Excess**

Ringing a bell was understood as a way to gather an assembly. The sound of a bell brought monks into their chapter houses or layfolk to church.\textsuperscript{87} But bells might also be used to sound rebellion. Shortly after the introduction of the first English Book of Common Prayer, defenders of traditional religion began to rise up against the crown. Economic conditions and religious change inspired rebellion in Devon and Cornwall, forcing the Duke of Somerset to take action on behalf of the young King Edward VI. In 1549 the crown issued a monetary reward for those who could “apprehend or report any who by ringing bells, striking drums, proclaiming bills or letters or otherwise stir the people to the danger of the king and the slander of the council.”\textsuperscript{88}

Twenty years later, Elizabeth I confronted a similar crisis. Hoping to depose Elizabeth and place Mary, Queen of Scots upon the throne, the earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland instigated the so-called Revolt of the Northern Earls in 1569. In order to communicate with his fellow rebels and issue the call for revolt, the Earl of Northumberland had the bells rung

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} National Archives of the UK, SP 1/85 f.50. in 1534 Gabriel Peacock, the warden of the friars of Southampton, wrote a letter to Thomas Cromwell describing how a representative of Cromwell’s commission during the dissolution took the keys from the porter and rang the bells to assemble the friars in the chapter house, presumably to announce the purpose and function of his visitation. By controlling the bells and ringing a call to assemble Cromwell’s commission was able to announce to the royal will and begin to re-order this religious community.
\textsuperscript{88} National Archives of the UK, SP 10/9, f.70.
“backwards” near Topcliff Bridge over the river Swale. The “backward” ringing of bells had certainly been heard before. During the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 “traitors” in Lincoln had rung the bells backwards “three days after the justices had prohibited it”. Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth I had all experienced these rings of disorder and dissent, disruptive rings that challenged both the crown and the Protestant religion they required. Clearly not all ringing inspired the degree of spiritual introspection associated with the Ave bells.

The bells of the cathedrals and collegiate churches were used frequently enough to continue to employ bell-ringers well after Cromwell’s commission had completed its work, as attested by the Royal Injunctions of 1547 for Canterbury Cathedral:

Item, that at the sermon time one or two bellringers shall be appointed by course to keep the chapter house door to the intent that the noise of the people disturb not the preacher of the word of God. In this case the bell-ringrs themselves were portrayed as the keepers of silence and order. It would seem that one of the duties of the bell-ringer was to ensure that the preacher was not disturbed, and therefore heard. This order was meant specifically for a cathedral and not a parish church, and in the cathedral the role of the bell-ringer would have been much more specialized than it would have been elsewhere. This order implies that preaching was in fact taking place in the chapter house and that the audience of this sermon would likely have been almost entirely members of the clergy. Why “the people” would have been milling about in proximity to the

89 National Archives of the UK, SP 15/15, f.38.
91 National Archives of the UK, SP 1/111, f. 217. This manuscript details some of the events related to the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 and suggests that the ringing of bells “awkward” might also serve to warn or communicate military instructions.
92 Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, ii. 145.
doors of the chapter house in the first place is unclear. The doors of the chapter house at Canterbury open up onto the cloisters, and prior to the dissolution parishioners would not likely have occupied this part of the cathedral. It would seem that the bell-ringers had a relatively new responsibility added to their job description, and that the Reformation had created a new source of noise in and around the chapter house. This symbolic association between bells, silence, and order should not be overstated from this single example, nevertheless it is intriguing that the bell-ringer was chosen for this particular duty. Was this article a means to ensure the fulfillment of those articles which sought to prohibit the ringing of bells during the sermon? Was the role of the bell-ringer being consciously redefined?

Silence could not only highlight the centrality of the sermon, but it could also help change doctrine. One of the central concerns of the reformers was to dramatically change the way people understood the sacraments, especially the celebration of the Eucharist. In 1549 a draft for a set of Visitation Articles was written by an unknown author for an unidentified diocese. There is some speculation that it was meant to accompany the first Book of Common Prayer of 1549, and that in fact in many cases it did; however this does not appear certain. The document seems to have been composed as a commentary on the first prayer book, addressing or clarifying those issues that had been left in need of further comment. It does seem likely that reformers such as Hooper and Ridley were familiar with the document, for they included some of its substance in their later injunctions.

This draft of 1549 went further to explicitly stamp out the practice of ringing the sacring bells. It stated:

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93 See Patrick Collinson, Nigel Ramsay, and Margaret Sparks, A History of Canterbury Cathedral (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 179. According to the authors, this could be due to the fact that there were in fact more people outside the Church than inside listening to the sermon.
94 Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, ii. 145.
Item, for an uniformity that no minister do counterfeit the popish mass…, showing the Sacrament openly before the distribution of the Communion, ringing of the sacring bells; or setting any light upon the Lord’s board at any time.  

Here the reformers clearly laid out their motivation. Their reforming agenda was fundamentally driven by a desire to eliminate any conceivable interpretation of worship ceremonies that reflected Catholic theology or suggested agreement with the Church of Rome. No doubt, the reformers were specifically interested in opposing popular beliefs about transubstantiation; however it is difficult to determine if this particular order was designed to prevent defiant priests from physically engaging in the theology of transubstantiation, or whether it was to prevent the parishioners from misinterpreting the actions, the sounds, and the sights of a reformed communion to be a continuation of the Roman rite. The Reformers believed that these particular ceremonies offered the minister the tools by which he could ‘counterfeit’ the popish mass if he was inclined to do so, motivated either by conviction or a willingness to compromise with the demands of the parishioners. The reformers obviously feared that a theologically astute priest would be equipped to hide his non-conformity behind a veil of ambiguous ceremony. Uniformity must be clearly seen and heard; therefore visual and audible breaks from the past were necessary, and thus potentially ambiguous sights and sounds were prohibited.

The agenda of the reformers gained clear expression in the Diocesan Injunctions, those injunctions issued by the Bishops to their diocese. The works of Heinrich Bullinger had been instrumental in John Hooper’s so-called conversion experience sometime during the late 1530s. As a result of Hooper’s new-found zeal for reform, he found himself involved in much conflict and dispute with more conservative theologians during the early 1540s. Consequently, Hooper left England and moved to Zurich in 1546 where he worked and studied at the side of his mentor

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95 Ibid., ii. 191-193.
until 1549. The coronation of Edward VI made it possible for him to return to England, and he was offered the bishopric of Gloucester in 1550. In order to inspire some reforming vigor in the diocese of Gloucester, Hooper implemented an extensive program of reform. As a close friend of Bullinger we should expect that Hooper’s attitude towards bells would have been profoundly shaped by leading the evangelical in Zurich, and it is therefore not surprising that his 1551 injunctions and interrogatories for the dioceses of Gloucester and Worcester paid a good deal of attention to bells and bell ringing. Hooper’s quest to bring reform and order to the protocol and procedures for parish bells came in article 19 of the injunctions:

Item that from henceforth in no parish in the diocese shall the bells be rung to noon upon the Saturdays or other holy-days even, nor at evening to curfew (as it was called) nor yet in the time of service in the church for the oppressing of the sound of the minister that readeth the word of God; but before service, as well in the morning as at even, to warn the people by as many peals or ringings as they think good; and in case there be any pause between the Morning Prayer and the Communion, then, to advertise and signify unto the people of the ministration of the Holy Sacrament, to toll one bell, such as the parish shall think most meet and convenient.

It is clear that Hooper had prohibited a good number of rings, most interestingly the curfew bell. We have already suggested that the curfew bell and the Ave bells had often become one and the same bell, and this article appears to supply evidence for such a claim. The Ave bells had already been proscribed by earlier royal injunctions, but Hooper saw the need to specifically name and ban the ringing of the curfew. We can only assume that the curfew bell was no longer serving any useful secular function, otherwise it would be difficult to imagine a desire to eliminate an effective tool of civic order. The curfew bell was in fact still being used as an Ave bell, yet still being euphemistically referred to as the ‘curfew’ bell. We cannot help but be

97 Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, ii. 286.
98 See page 47 for example.
reminded of the ‘counterfeited’ popish masses suspected by the reformers in previous injunctions. Perhaps we are also detecting the existence of conscious non-compliance at the parish level; continuing to ring the Aves under the guise of the curfew.

Hooper repeated the demand for quiet in order to prevent “oppressing of the sound of the minister that readeth the word of God”. Bells were obviously considered guilty of creating a certain degree of disturbance and of drowning out the voice of the minister. This problem was evidently both real and common enough to warrant an injunction, and was witness to a rather curious situation. The suggestion here was that in at least some parishes, bells were in fact being rung while the minister was attempting to preach. Either the bells were being rung, or ordered to be rung, by someone who did not wish the minister to be heard; or else the minister himself had sanctioned the ringing of the bells at the time of his preaching in order that his message be made inaudible. Both scenarios suggest a degree of dissent and a willful desire to make preaching ineffective. We are faced with our first glimpse of bells as the tools of non-compliance - no longer used to ring out solemnizing peals of worship or announcement, but now used to produce loud and disruptive noise. It is possible to suggest that these bells were rung mistakenly as a result of a lack of familiarity with the newly ordered services; however it is unlikely that the formal power of an injunction would have been required to address this type of situation.

The second half of this article described the acceptable use of bells, and within the stated parameters there was a certain degree of freedom. Bells were viewed as a perfectly acceptable and useful means to announce service times, and the parish was given license to ring the bells with as many peals as they thought necessary. To what degree this parochial freedom was ‘abused’ is unclear. It is clear however that this freedom of discretion was qualified when it came to ringing to announce the sacrament. The ringing to announce the service specifically
permitted the use of either “peals or ringing”, and therefore permitted the ringing of more than
one bell and thus the sounding of multiple notes, depending on the number of bells a parish had
in its steeple. However, the ringing that was to advertise the Holy Sacrament specified that only
one bell was to be tolled, thereby evoking a far more structured and solemnizing sound. This
single article therefore acknowledges the multiple soundscapes that the parish bell was capable
of creating disruptive noise, peals of utility, and tolls of solemnity. The reformers were not
intent upon eliminating bells from either the sacred or secular soundscape, but of co-opting these
sounds for the evangelical agenda.

But this agenda came to an abrupt halt with the death of Edward, the coronation of Mary,
and the installation of a very different set of bishops. A year after having been formally restored
to the bishopric of London in 1553, almost immediately following the death of Edward VI,
Edmund Bonner undertook an extensive year-long visitation of his diocese. To coincide with
this visitation, Bonner issued his Injunctions for the Diocese of London in 1554 and continued
the plea for quiet as expressed in the Edwardian injunctions. Bonner asked whether any within
the parishes of London “hath made noyse, iangled, talked, or played the foole in the Churche in
the tyme of diuine seruice or preaching, to lette or disturbe the same in any wise.”

Thus the desire for quiet and order continued. The use of bells as a tool of disruption is evident in Richard
Cloughs 1566 letter to Sir Thomas Gresham. Writing from the city of Antwerp, Clough
explained that the “Papists” in the city had been “ringing the bells all day” in celebration of the
unexpected death of Sulieman the Magnificent, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, just prior to a
battle between the Ottomans and the forces of Emperor Maximillian II. This ringing resulted

99 Church of England, Diocese of London, Articles to Be Enquired of in the General Visitation of Edmond
100 National Archives of the UK, SP 70/87 f.33.
in the Protestants of the city being “unable to hear their preachers”, and consequently “six or seven were hurt” in the resulting skirmishes between Protestants and Catholics.

It is entirely likely that a good deal of the audible disruption during the reigns of both Edward and Mary were motivated by dissent and a desire to contest the content of the services. Like the Edwardian reformers, Bonner agreed that the sermon must be heard, and that hearing required a certain degree of silence. There was no link whatsoever between quiet and bell ringing as was evident in the injunctions of 1547. Thereby Bonner was not explicitly linking bell ringing to noise.

By the time we arrive at the final visitation articles of the reign of Mary in 1558 we find a variation on this same theme which did indeed include a reference to bells:

Item…whither have you yet to the best and uttermoste of your power endevowred your selfe to let such ringinge, playeng, cryeng, and noyse, that the said Preacher might the better doo his duty, and the audience be the better instructed and edified.101

Some Marian clergy obviously faced some of the same disruptive bell ringing as the preachers of 1547. If it was a means of expressing dissent in 1547, was it also a declaration of objection in 1558? Were the disruptive rings of 1558 in the same parishes of 1547? If so, were these in fact rings of dissent, or were the bells simply the sounds that most parishioners associated with worship in certain parish communities? Were parishioners in fact ringing these bells of their own accord, or with the consent of the minister? Did parishioners simply prefer to hear the ringing of bells over the preaching of the sermon, regardless of the theological content? We cannot be certain of the answers to these questions, for indeed they surely varied from county to county and from parish to parish. But we can be certain that disruptive rings took place under the watchful eyes of both the reforming church of Edward and the Catholic church of Mary. We

can at least be sure that the act of bell ringing was intimately bound up with worship and sacred space, and that the effort to give it structure and to guarantee its meaning and function was no simple task.

A desire to limit and control parish ringing by Elizabeth’s bishops is clearly evident early in her reign. John Parkhurst, a member of the Marian exiles, returned to England in 1559 to take up the bishopric of Norwich in 1560 at the invitation of Elizabeth. Parkhurst spent his exile in the reformed city of Zurich and viewed its experiences as a model for England. In 1561 he issued his interrogatory and revealed a desire at least to reduce the ringing taking place within his diocese by limiting the extravagant ringing on “festival days in ringing none or curfew”. Again, we must imagine communities for whom the sound of a bell was enormously significant, not simply because of its ability to create powerful sound, but because of its ability to create wonderfully prolonged sound. Parkhurst was not trying to reduce the occasions for bell ringing, but to reduce the extent to which they were in fact rung. His reasons for doing this are not entirely clear, as no theological justification is given. There is no evidence within the injunctions themselves of an effort to link excessive ringing with superstitious or “popish” behavior. The only hint of a defense offered by Parkhurst for such limitations comes when he wished to omit “unnecessary ringings”; not superstitious, not popish, but unnecessary. Perhaps Parkhurst’s delicate approach to bell ringing within his diocese is consistent with Houlbrooke’s assessment that he was in fact “unequal to the challenges he met in his huge diocese, where religious nonconformity was widespread”.

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103 Ibid.
Grindal’s 1571 Injunctions for the Province of York further revealed the role the parish bell should play in the reforming of public worship by restricting its use during service times:

Item, that the churchwardens shall not suffer any ringing or tolling of bells to be on Sundays or Holy Days used between the Morning Prayer, Litany and Communion, nor in any other time of Common Prayer, reading of the Homilies, or preaching, except it be one bell in convenient time to be rung or knolled before a sermon; \(^{104}\)

As Frere and Kennedy are keen to note, the Edwardian Church ensured that for the first time the Matins, Litany, and Holy Communion would be formed into an unbroken service. \(^{105}\) Prayers, readings, responses, and the celebration of communion were finally to be seen as a unified whole. The traditional custom of separating celebration of Eucharist from the rest of the service would have had the effect of establishing the ceremony of communion as distinct, separate, and more significant than the liturgical process which led up to it. By eliminating the ringing of the sacring bell, the celebration of communion would have become less climactic and less distinct from the prayers, readings, and responses that preceded it. Therefore the service would not have appeared as a set of preparatory steps leading toward a culminating act, but rather as a harmonious and unbroken process of worship, without a distinct climax. But perhaps a new climax was now being acknowledged by the ringing of the sermon bell.

Silencing the bells may have had a neutralizing effect upon communion, but the ringing of the sermon bell would have given a new place of prominence to the act of preaching. As stated earlier, sermon bells were probably rung prior to the Reformation, however with the silencing of the sacring bells, the sermon was accorded a unique and separate role within the context of public worship. The parish bell would now have acted to distinguish the sermon from

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\(^{104}\) Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions.*, iii. 286.  
\(^{105}\) Ibid., iii. 286.
the rest of the service, and because this was the only bell permitted to ring in the midst of a worship service, it would have appeared as the most distinct event of public worship.\textsuperscript{106}

It is instructive to contrast Edmund Freake’s Articles of 1572 for the Diocese of Rochester with Parker’s Articles of 1575 for the Diocese of Winchester. The earlier set appeared to have recognized the influential sound of the parish bells and was keen that they were maintained:

\begin{quote}
Item whether your minister…do say service daily and giveth notice unto his parishioners thereof by tolling or ringing some bell, that they hearing the sound thereof may resort to prayer.\textsuperscript{107}
\end{quote}

His confidence that hearing the sound of a bell would prompt prayer reveals the well-established association of bells with prayer in early modern England. However the later set of articles could not help but restate the usual suspicion of parish bells when he inquired:

\begin{quote}
whether any superstitious and superfluous ringing at burials, Saints’ evens, or festival days be suffered. Whether any Lords of Misrule, Summer Lords or Ladies, disguised persons come unreverently into the church, and especially in the service-time to play any games, who they be that commit such disorders, or accompany and maintain them.\textsuperscript{108}
\end{quote}

The association of bell ringing with disorder, superstition, and excess had by now become well established. Bells had undoubtedly been explicitly recognized as sacred sound: acceptable audible expressions associated with death, burial, prayers, and sermons. They were neither completely prohibited, nor excessively silenced, in spite of the opportunity and theological justification reformers would have had to do either. They also produced enormously challenging sounds: sounds of Rome, superstition, excess, disorder, and disruption. The resulting ambiguity of many of the injunctions revealed these tensions through their demands for indeterminate

\textsuperscript{106} The sermon bell is also referred to in Guest’s Injunctions of 1565 for Rochester Cathedral. Article #6 requires, “that they use to have a bell tolled or rung in the said church at the beginning of all service and sermons there had to give warning to the people to come to the same.” Visitation Articles and Injunctions, iii. 153.

\textsuperscript{107} Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, iii. 340,341.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., iii. 382,383.
“short peals” and the requirement to avoid enigmatic “superfluous and unnecessary” ringing. It is evident that while the ringing of parish bells was far too powerfully symbolic and meaningful to prohibit conclusively, it was simultaneously too threatening to the reforming agenda comprehensively to condone.

The reissued articles of Archbishop Matthew in 1622/23 contain one other additional item of interest that what was not included in his articles of 1607. He inquired:

Whether there be any within your parish of turbulent conversation behaving themselves rudely or disorderly in your church or chapel, or which by untimely ringing of bells, by walking, talking, or otherwise have hindered the minister or preacher.\textsuperscript{109}

This demand for quiet and order has already been seen in earlier articles and injunctions, but it is the first time bells were mentioned in the articles and injunctions of the early Stuarts as a device of interruption or hindrance during the service. It is perhaps even more interesting that Matthew did not feel the need to make this particular inquiry in his articles of 1607. We do know that Matthew was presented with a two-fold problem in the northern provinces when he was enthroned as the archbishop of York in 1606: not only the constant problem of northern recusancy, but also the rather less expected problem of separatism.\textsuperscript{110} No doubt disorder and disruptive behavior during services existed within a number of parishes, but it is extremely difficult to know whether the parishioners were consciously seeking to voice dissent through their misbehavior. “Untimely ringing” could of course simply refer to bells that were rung on occasions when parishioners might have expected ringing (e.g. a dying parishioner), but which, according to church authorities, should not be rung if a service was taking place or a sermon was being preached. Sermons and services therefore took clear priority over occasions for ringing.

\textsuperscript{109} Kenneth Fincham, \textit{Visitation Articles and Injunctions}, i. 67.
The dissent might not have been explicit. However, Bishop Valentine Carey’s 1625 articles for the diocese of Exeter do suggest that “untimely ringing” should at least be mentioned in the same article that addresses discontented parishioners:

Whether any have used untimely ringing of bels, and whether any strangers being not contented with the divine service used in their own parish church, in disobedience to law, and in contempt of their minister, or for any other cause or respect, doe gad from church to church, or come often and commonly out of other parishes to your church, and there abide at service time, keeping your parishioners from their seates, and what bee their names?\textsuperscript{111}

The “untimely” ringing of bells was here being linked with very conscious and active “contempt of their minister”. This would correspond neatly with Carey’s reputation as a fervent opponent of puritan preaching; noted for once having taken advantage of an outbreak of the plague as an opportunity for prohibiting attendance at sermons, and thereby “permitting only divine services which they (puritans) have no fervent desire to frequent”.\textsuperscript{112} Carey provides us with the most explicit association of bells with dissent evident in the articles from 1536 onward, and gives cause to suggest the possibility that other references to bells in relationship to disruption may also reveal conscious objection to the content of public worship. David Cressy observes that some parishioners had become accustomed to ringing the church bells on the morning of Shrove Tuesday, sometimes in blatant defiance of a strict reforming minister.\textsuperscript{113} Surely this too was an act of dissent; however it was less consciously directed against the theological inclinations of the minister and more against his efforts to restrict the boisterous festivities associated with Shrove Tuesday.

\textsuperscript{111} Kenneth Fincham, \textit{Visitation Articles and Injunctions}, ii. 5.
\textsuperscript{113} Cressy, \textit{Bonfires & Bells}, 18.
The reforming bishops were not only inclined to hear disruption and excess in bell ringing, for they were perfectly willing to acknowledge that bells could bring a sense of order to the life of parish community. Carey’s injunctions of 1625 for Exeter Cathedral indicated a desire to maintain the schedule for public worship that had been previously established. Since the bell had been accustomed to ring at six o’clock in the morning for morning mass, the injunctions acknowledged that there would be no need to change either the schedule, or the familiar ring of the bell at this hour. The morning mass would be replaced by a service wholly dependent upon the Book of Common Prayer, but the bells and liturgical schedule could easily be co-opted towards a new purpose and a new theology. Bells could still be used to order public worship.

Parkhurst’s injunctions of 1561 suggested that religious education was also important for a well-ordered parish, and for this the bells could also be employed:

> that they warn the parents and masters to cause their children to learn the Catechism, either in schools or else at home, so as they may be examined by the minister every Sunday and Holy day, that they may make answer to the ministers standing in the pulpit demanding questions of them, and this shall be done immediately after the last peal to Evening Prayer.

One can imagine that the sound of the bell for at least a number of anxious youth was associated with the dread of an impending examination. Or perhaps, more positively, the bell was heard as a reminder of the intimate, shepherding relationship the minister had with the youngest of his flock. But likely the symbolism was somewhere in between. If indeed the children of each parish were examined by the minister every Sunday, however unlikely that ideal may seem, there is no doubt that the bell would have been closely associated with religious education, and the process of learning and memorizing the catechism. Bentham’s Injunctions of 1565 for Coventry

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114 Kenneth Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, iii. 41.
115 Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, iii. 99.
and Lichfield tell us that the bells would also be rung to call the youth for the teaching of the catechism on Sundays and Holy Days before evensong:

Item, that you observe diligently the Queen’s Majesty’s Injunctions, and namely the Injunction of teaching the children the Catechism on the Sundays and Holy days from the first peal to evensong until they ring all in, for the space of an hour; and if you cannot bring the youth of the parish to church before Evensong then see that you cause two children to rehearse the same every Sunday immediately after the first lesson, straitly charging all people to give diligent attendance unto the same.116

It is remarkable that the bells would have been rung for the span of an entire hour, in an attempt to “bring the youth of the parish to church”. For one hour every Sunday the soundscape of a parish community would have promoted order and discipline for the religious education of the youth of the parish. The need to ring the bells of the parish for an entire hour is difficult to fathom. Perhaps it reveals the great distance over which the bells were heard, calling in the youth living up to one hour’s travel distance from the church. Perhaps, more cynically, it reveals how persistent the bells needed to be in order to convince the youth to attend catechism.

In 1565 Bentham was equally concerned that the office holders in each parish were fulfilling their duties. The third item in this set of injunctions required:

that you daily resort unto your church, and devoutly say such Divine Service, as is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer, both at evening and morning: and that you knoll a bell before you go unto it.117

Since the parson or curate was required to hold divine services twice daily, it would have been likely that at times his congregation would have been sparse or even entirely absent. Therefore, the requirement to ring the bell would have stood as a public reminder that services and prayers were indeed taking place, giving public recognition and assent to what could very well have been an essentially private service. In some sense the ringing of the bell would have served to

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116 Ibid., iii. 166.
117 Ibid., iii. 165.
transform private worship into public worship, thereby invoking a perceived safeguard to the uniformity of worship.

Like those of the Tudors, the early Stuart articles and injunctions continued to require that bells be used to call parishioners to service, or to at least give warning that a service will be taking place. In 1619 Bishop Lancelot Andrewes issued the fairly standard inquiry:

> Whether doeth your minister on Wednesdays and Fridayes, not being holy dayes, at the accustomed houres of service resort to the church, and say the letanie prescribed, and doeth your clearke or sexton give warning before by tolling of a bell on those dayes?118

As suggested earlier, such bell ringing would have served to establish uniformity of worship and, perhaps more importantly, ensured the public nature of the service itself. This desire to prevent the parish from being used as a site of private ceremony is more explicitly evident in Bishop Matthew Wren’s articles for the diocese of Norwich of 1635 as he inquired:

> Or hath any marriage (that you know or have heard of) bin made at any time, by license or without, but between the houres of eight and twelve in the morning? Or was not the divine service then openly and duly said, the assembly being called together by the tolling or ringing of the bels, as is at other times used? Or hath the minister solemnized any marriage (without banes published) by virtue of any license granted by the arch-deacon or his official,…119

The bells were here being rung to ensure that the marriage ceremonies remained publically announced events. Thereby the bells produced a democratic sound, for the bells were meant to be heard by all, and invite all to assemble. The egalitarian quality of a ringing bell must not be overlooked. It was a sound directed at all the inhabitants of a parish, an unqualified invitation

118 Kenneth Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions* i. 179. There are several other articles which contain inquiries that require the ringing of bells for the purpose of announcing services, including: Bishop William Chaderton’s articles for the diocese of Lincoln of 1607, Ibid., i. 71; Bishop John Bridgeman’s articles for Chester Cathedral of 1619, Ibid., i. 155; Bishop Matthew Wren’s articles for the diocese of Norwich of 1635, Ibid., ii. 146; Bishop Matthew Wren’s articles for the diocese of Norwich of 1636, Ibid., ii. 159; Bishop Richard Montagu’s articles for the diocese of Norwich of 1638, Ibid., ii. 207; Archdeacon Ewers Gowers’ articles for the archdeaconry of Northumberland of 1639, Ibid., ii. 212; Bishop John Tower’s Orders for Brackley Combination Lecture of 1639, Ibid., 216; Bishop William Juxon’s articles for the diocese of London of 1640, Ibid., 227, 228.

119 Ibid., ii. 147.
for all to pray, to attend, or to remember. A ringing bell was protection against private worship and elitism and ensured the public acknowledgement of, and participation in, occasions of parochial ceremony.

Ringing on Holy Days

In 1536 the curate of St. Nicholas church in Warwick, Mr. John Watwode, was imprisoned for defying the orders of Thomas Cromwell by ringing the bells in the Collegiate Church of Warwick on St. Lawrence’s Day (August 10th). The following year, the mayor of Rye wrote a letter to Cromwell complaining that their curate was also guilty of disobedience for having “solemnly” rung the bells on the feast days of St. Anne (July 26th), the Transfiguration (August 6th), and the Name of Jesus (January 1st or August 7th). Finally, in 1538 Robert Brown, a girdler in Lothbury, testified before the mayor of London, Sir Richard Gresham, that the parson of St. Margaret’s, John Forde, “caused the bells to be tolled solemnly on St. Margaret's even (July 19th) and day last, contrary to the King's ordinance.”

Archbishop Grindal issued his Articles for the Province of Canterbury in 1577, just as his theological differences with Elizabeth were coming to a head over the issue of ‘prophesying’ during latter years of the 1570s. These articles made several references to the use of bells, and while they repeated many of the requirements from previous years, they permitted even greater insight into the motivating impulses of the era. Grindal’s eighth article inquired:

Whyther any holydayes or fasting daies heretofore abrogated, or not appointed to be vsed as holy dayes, or fasting dayes by the newe Kalender of the booke of Common prayer, be

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120 National Archives of the UK, SP 1/106, f.153.
121 National Archives of the UK, SP 1/124, f.21.
either proclaymed and bidden by your Person, Uicar, or Curate, or be supersticiously observed by any of your parish, and what be their names that so doe observe the same? and whether there be any ringing or tolling of Belles to call the people togerther vsed in any of those dayes, more or otherwise, than commonly is vsed vpon other dayes that be kept as workedayes.\textsuperscript{123}

There was obviously the concern that pre-Reformation feast days were being revived and that the leadership of local parishes were in fact guilty of proclaiming and permitting, if not encouraging, the observance of such traditional holy days. Grindal’s sympathy for the ‘exercises of prophesying’ was motivated by a desire to more effectively spread the Protestant message throughout the provinces, and this same motivating force is evident in his desire to silence any bell ringing that might remotely challenge the protestant agenda.\textsuperscript{124} It is clear that Grindal was struggling to require the uniform observance of the new Protestant calendar. For Grindal no day should be considered holier than another. While he is keen to stamp out the observance of these abrogated feast days, he was particularly eager to ensure that the bells did not audibly acknowledge these days to be holier than any other. Grindal appears convinced that to silence the bells was to take significant steps towards preventing the observation of superstitious feasts.

In the year following his confirmation as Whitgift’s successor, Archbishop Bancroft carried out a visitation of ten dioceses and issued a set of corresponding articles. Article fifty-one inquired:

Whether have you or your predecessors church-wardens there suffered since the last pardon, any plaies, feasts, banquets, churche ales, drinkinges, or any other profane usages to be kept in your church, chappell or church-yarde, or belles to be rung superstitiously upon hollidayes or daies abrogated by law.\textsuperscript{125}

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\textsuperscript{125} Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church, ed. Kenneth Fincham, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), i. 11. This article is essentially repeated by Bishop Richard Vaughan in his articles for the diocese of London in 1605, Ibid., i. 35. An even more complete list of ‘profane’ activities is given by Bishop William Chaderton in his Articles for Lincoln Diocese of 1607, “fighting, chiding, brawling or
The obvious intent of this article was to stamp out the profane use of the physical space of the parish. Bell ringing upon abrogated holy-days was certainly being linked to other occasions of social and leisure festivities. It is difficult to ascertain whether this sort of bell ringing would have been heard as a sacred or a festive sound to the parish community. It would be misguided to suggest that the sacred and the festive were separate and distinct notions for the early-modern villager, yet this article seems to indicate that bell ringing on holy days was more intimately connected with social custom than it was with religious ceremony.

Instead of ringing the bells on traditional Holy Days, parishes were required to ring their bells in celebration of those days highlighted by the new Protestant calendar. Bishop Matthew Wren’s 1638 articles for the diocese of Ely inquired:

Is the fifth day of November observed and kept in your Parish, with Prayer and Thanksgiving unto God, in such forme, as is by publike Authority appointed for the day. Is the 27th day of March also well and duly observed? Are Bels usually rung in ioy of those days? Do any in you parish take upon them (in such publike manner) to observe any other dayes in the yeere but these two?126

This is the only evidence in Elizabethan or Stuart articles of an attempt to inquire whether ringing was in fact taking place in solemn celebration of royal occasions; in this case, the safe deliverance from the Gunpowder Plot and the coronation of Charles I. It is well known that the ringing of the parish bells in celebration of royal events dated back to the reign of Elizabeth and the audible national solemnization of her coronation day of November 17th. Therefore, it is revealing that Wren needed to inquire of this. It attests to the reality that at least a number of

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126 Church of England, Diocese of Ely, Articles to Be Inquired of Within the Diocese of Ely... (London: Richard Badger, 1638), EEBO, STC 10197, Image 9.
parishes were not giving proper and acceptable observation to these two days. Wren specifically inquired whether the bells “are usually rung in joy of those days”, thereby suggesting that it was possible to observe the demand to ring without necessarily communicating a sense of jubilation for the occasion. Wren therefore implied that not only were the bells to be rung, but that they were to be rung in a manner that evoked a particular emotion. This inquiry surely suggests that bells could be used to communicate dissent either through their silence or through their unwillingness to convey emotions of assent.

Bells for the Living and the Dead

The explicit strictness of Heinrich Bullinger on the matter of ringing for the dead or dying is not evident in any of the English injunctions or articles. Indeed in 1566 puritan clergyman Percival Wiburn was eager to describe the shortcomings of the English church to Bullinger in Zurich and Theodore Beza. He observed thirty-one problems within the English church. Item twenty-one stated:

Many festivals are retained there, consecrated in the name of saints, with their vigils, as formerly; perambulations on rogation-days; singing in parts in the churches, and with organs; the tolling of bells at funerals and on the vigils of saints; and especially on that of the feast of All Saints, when it continues during the whole night.

By 1566, Wiburn was already aware that Bullinger would not have approved of this type of bell ringing. To the disappointment of Wiburn, the Reformation in England, including the reformation of bell ringing, did not reflect the degree of reform that had taken place in Zurich. It is clear that English Protestants, either because they did not wish to silence the bells associated

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with death, or because they were unable to do so, or because they were convinced that any such effort would most certainly have been fruitless, largely left the issue alone. In any case, like Wiburn, they must have been aware that Bullinger would not have approved of funeral ringing. Yet it will become evident that the English reformers were far less inclined than Bullinger to prohibit a relationship between parish bells and death.

According to Diarmaid MacCulloch, by the early part of 1546, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer was excitedly expecting the aging king to order significant reforms of various ceremonies of the Church, specifically those involving the adoration of images and crucifixes as well as the banning of bell ringing on the night of All Saints’ Day. Later that same year Henry met with Claude d’Annebaut, the Admiral of France and special ambassador to England, and suggested that more radical proposals were on the horizon. After Henry’s death, Cranmer told Ralph Morice that in his discussion with the French envoy, Henry intimated that he was proposing changes which far exceeded “the pulling down of roods, and suppressing the ringing of bells”.

The prohibition of bell ringing on the night of All Hallows’ Day (the eve of All Soul’s Day) was clearly regarded as one of the first and most basic changes to ceremony that the evangelicals needed to make. The significance of the night of All Hallows’ Day depended upon a belief in purgatory, and this was viewed by the evangelicals as the theological basis for many of the more detestable rituals and institutions of the Roman Church. As Duffy notes:

> Purgatory featured only in passing in the Church’s ministrations at the deathbed, and implicitly in the practice of praying for the dead. It loomed large, however, in lay awareness, and provided the rationale underlying the immense elaboration of the late medieval cult of intercession for the dead.

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130 Ibid., 357.
For Henry and Cranmer the sound of bells on the night of All Hallows’ Day, and the call to pray for all the souls of the dead, was the sound of the Roman doctrine of purgatory, and symbolized the spiritual power and authority of Church of Rome.

Although Henry was eager to abolish this spiritual authority of Rome within his realm, he was much more hesitant to abolish the doctrine of purgatory and to eliminate bell ringing as a call to prayer for the souls of the dead. His reluctance is evident in a letter written to Cranmer in 1546. In it Henry states:

…that the vigil and ringing of bells upon All Hallow Day at night, and the covering of images in Lent, with the lifting up of the veil that covers the cross on Palm Sunday, with kneeling to the cross, might be abolished. All other vigils have been virtually for years abolished throughout Christendom, the name alone remaining in the Calendar, except All Hallows day at night. And forasmuch as this vigil is abused as others were, the King’s pleasure is, as you request, that it also should be abolished, and that there be no more watching and ringing except as on other holidays at night saving that, before Dirige be begun, one peal shall be rung to give every man warning to pray for all Christian souls departed;\textsuperscript{132} (italics mine).

It is significant that Henry ultimately chose to strike out this final phrase (italicized), but it reveals his reluctance to relinquish a belief in purgatory and deny that the ringing of parish bells could remind parishioners of their duties to the dead.

The reformers were in fact remarkably successful in their attempt to remove purgatory from parish worship. Claire Gittings, in her examination of the attitudes towards death in early modern Europe, observes that parishioners, during these years of religious reformation, steadily became less concerned with observing ceremonies geared towards giving assistance to dead souls, and far more concerned with performing rituals designed to console the bereaved.\textsuperscript{133} Funerals became much more elaborate and expensive. Although the immediate memory of the deceased might have been powerful and rich, the ties between the living dead were being cut

\textsuperscript{132} SP 1/213 f.144
short. Death was fast becoming the mark of separation between the individual and the parish. The fundamental focus shifted from the dying soul to the community in mourning. We should therefore expect that attitudes towards the function of bell ringing for the dying and dead would also change in the midst of such dramatic cultural and religious change.

The attack on purgatory was well advanced by the summer of 1536 when one of Thomas Cromwell’s associates, Dr. John London attempted to defend himself against the charge that he had spoken in favour of the ringing of the bells for the dead. In an anxious letter to Cromwell dated July 18, 1536, London claimed merely to have countered the more radical views uttered by a woman in St. Alban’s who had asserted “she was as good as our Lady and would have no ringing of bells for dead men”. London had countered this by stating that “the ring of bells served to put people in remembrance of the departed,” without explicitly defending purgatory or overstating the power of bells. London’s conservative alignment following Cromwell’s execution in 1540 casts some doubt on his account, but the exchange clearly demonstrates that, as early as the 1530s, the relation of purgatory, death, and bell ringing was discussed and debated at both popular and learned levels.

The 1549 draft for a set of visitation articles indirectly addressed the relationship between bells and dying parishioners. Although it did not refer those larger parish bells housed in towers, it is significant nevertheless. It stated: “Item, that going with the sacrament to the sick the minister have not with him either light or bells.” The item was certainly meant to reverse one of the articles found in Winchelsey’s Constitutions of 1305 which required that “a hand bell be carried before the body of Christ in the visitation of the sick”.

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134 National Archives of the UK, SP 1/240, f.19.
135 Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, ii. 196.
136 Ibid., ii. 196. This set of constitutions issued by Robert Winchelsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1294-1313, set out to regulate the manner in which the clergy celebrated services.
offer directions as to how the sacraments were to be brought to a sick person, nor instructions for the ceremony that was to accompany their administration. This 1549 draft appears to treat the hand-bells of the priest as though they were sacring bells, and therefore it would have been logically consistent for the reformers to have prohibited them during the administering of the sacraments to persons at home. However, it is probably more likely that the bell was meant to be rung by the priest en route to the house of the sick in an effort to remind the surrounding community to pray for either the healing or comfort of the invalid, and in an effort to create a soundscape of reverence towards the Eucharistic elements. This seems supported by wording of the article of Winchelsey’s Constitutions which implied that the bell is to be ‘carried before’ the sacraments, thereby implying ringing during the act of transportation. Given that the sacrament would have been administered in privacy, it would have been superfluous to have used the bell as a sacring bell. The point should not be overstated, for this does not indicate that the bell was not in fact used as a sacring bell; however it does suggest that it was not the originally stated intent.

Not only were the reformers armed to abolish the mass, they were also attempting to prohibit the practice of private ceremony. That the first prayer book omitted procedures for the administering of the sacrament to the sick exhibited a degree of uncertainty about how they ought to proceed. Up until 1549 the reforming agenda sought public conformity to a nationally instituted order for worship, since worship would reveal and promote undivided loyalty to the realm. Private ceremony seemed necessarily to challenge these notions of unity and conformity. The lights and the bell used by the priest in his administering of the sacrament to the sick probably did not necessarily symbolize or resemble ‘popish’ or theologically unacceptable ceremony, but they certainly would have symbolized private ceremony, and would have
presented an obvious challenge to conformity. Bells were solemnizing a private act of worship and thereby challenged the ever growing emphasis on conformity and public worship. While privacy did not necessarily violate conformity, it certainly would have been recognized as being a far more difficult practice to police.

In his injunctions of 1551, Hooper confirmed that it was one of the clerk’s paid duties to ring the bells, as they did in times of “papistry and superstition”, but his requirement subsequent to this is of particular interest to this present study. It stated:

Item, that from henceforth there be no knells or forthfares rung for the death of any man; but in case they be sick or in danger, or any of their friends will demand to have the bell toll while the sick is in extremes, to admonish the people of their danger, and by that means to solicitate the hearers of the same to pray for the sick person they may use it. And then if the person die for whom the bell tolled, and to give warning of his death, to ring out with one bell it may be sufficient.

This is our first injunction to explicitly address the relationship between bell ringing and death and dying. The injunction suggests an implicit desire to dispel the association of bell ringing at death with the traditional passing-bell. Bells that were rung prior to death were to be rung with the explicit purpose of admonishing the parishioners to pray for the sick person. Bells that were rung after death were to be limited to the ring of one bell and for the sole purpose of announcement. The injunction indicates that although the reformers were by no means interested in completely disassociating the sound of bells with death, they were interested in stamping out the practice of excessive ringing for the dying. These traditional rings were excessive because they were not the peals of mere announcement; they were sounds bound up with the passing of the soul and the invoking of the protection of St. Michael during this critical journey into the realm of the dead. This injunction specifically opposed the idea that bells could penetrate into the world of the dead and that their sound could assist or bring comfort to souls after death. The

137 Ibid., ii. 287.
138 Ibid., ii. 287.
reformers were not explicitly challenging the notion that the bells could be heard in the
transcendent realms, but only claiming that the bells had no impact on the condition of the souls
of the dead.

Therefore, it is perhaps surprising that the injunctions and articles during the reign of
Mary made so few references to bells. In December 1555, Cardinal Pole was confirmed as the
successor to Thomas Cranmer, and in March 1556, he took full possession of the office of
archbishop. Although he was probably most interested in matters related to church property, his
Articles for the diocese of Canterbury in 1556 do address matters of ceremony, including one
particular matter concerning the use of bells. Here Pole returned to the familiar issue of the
administration of the sacraments to the sick. In article forty-two he re-affirmed that “a little bell”
and lights will indeed accompany the sacraments as they are carried to the sick. His
injunctions of 1557 for Cambridge University likewise sought to establish the ceremony
pertaining to the act of transporting the Eucharist to the sick. Such a procession should be
attended by “a light in an appropriate lantern” and an appropriately attired priest, while the
sacrament should be carried respectfully before the priest’s chest, accompanied by a “large
ringing bell”. It would seem as though the bell was primarily linked to the act of procession,
not only to announce the presence of the sacred elements and thereby encourage the public to
genuflect in adoration, but surely also to evoke prayers for the bed-ridden recipient of the
sacraments. However, in 1557 Pole issued another set of articles for the diocese of Canterbury,
and in the fortieth article he inquired: “Item, whether the sacrament be carried devoutly to them
that fall sick, with light, and with a little sacring bell.” This continued to offer a specific

139 Ibid., ii. 389.
140 Ibid., ii. 416. I am grateful to Dr. Luke Clossey for his translation from the Latin.
141 Ibid., ii. 425.
visits to the sick to administer the sacraments, but it also appeared to deviate slightly from Pole’s aforementioned requirements. Pole did in fact explicitly refer to this bell as a sacring bell, even though that did not appear to have been the intended purpose of this bell prior to the Reformation (e.g. Winchelsey’s Constitutions of 1305), nor was its function as a sacring bell specifically noted in his own articles of 1556, nor in his 1557 injunctions for Cambridge. Pole was thus either acknowledging the reality of this bell’s function, or asserting that this was in fact how the bell should now be used. Regardless, Pole felt that the bell played such a significant role in this sacramental ceremony that it warranted considerable attention and demanded explicit requirements that it be brought back into use. No doubt he felt as though the act needed to be re-solemnized, and the bell was obviously seen as a sound sacred enough to do this. But perhaps what is most curious about this set of injunctions is that there was no requirement that the sacring bell for congregational mass be reinstated. If the sacring bell for private mass was important enough to be required, would it not have been equally essential to the ceremony of the public mass within the parish itself? It is conceivable that Pole omitted any reference to the public sacring bell due to the possibility that the ringing of this bell in fact never stopped. Perhaps the tradition of the sacring bell held so firmly that there was indeed no reason to require it. If in fact the sacring bell was never successfully prohibited, we are faced with a very powerful and enormously meaningful sound; a sound which the parishioners themselves were not inclined to give up. It is also possible that the ringing of the sacring bell had become so closely associated with the consecration of the elements, that Pole did not deem it necessary to spell it out separately; however given that many parishes had sold their sacring bells during the reign of Edward, we would expect that Pole would have needed to have more explicit in this regard if indeed parishes had not been quick to replace these bells of their own volition.
But Pole’s authority was brief. The Elizabethan injunctions of 1559 were eager to return to a familiar topic and carefully establish the parameters of the bell ringing associated with death and dying under the new regime. These required:

that when any Christian body is in passing, that the bell be tolled, and that the curate be specially called for to comfort the sick person. And after the time of his passing, to ring no more but one short peal, and one before the burial, and another short peal after the burial.¹⁴²

Four rings were therefore made permissible: a bell to call people to prayer, a bell to announce the death, a bell to announce the burial, and a bell to indicate that the burial had taken place. The bell before death was limited to a toll, and was to be rung with the intention of calling the living to pray for the dying in hopes of bringing a sense of “comfort”. Surely if this bell had been heard by the sick person it could easily have been an audible source of both anxiety in the face of imminent death, and comfort in the assurance that the parish community was praying on behalf of the soul. The other three bells were peals, not tolls, and were thereby necessarily longer and could include several bells. This distinction between knells and peals are clearly distinguished in some sets of churchwardens’ accounts; revealing that some parishioners separately purchased these two distinct types of rings. There is little doubt parishioners could hear the difference between the tolls of approaching death and the peals of burial. In 1624 John Donne famously wrote:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Ibid., iii. 62.
¹⁴³ In Brendan Simms, Three Victories and a Defeat (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 9.
Donne was confident that his reader could indeed hear the difference, for the question that he meant to prompt was “who is dying?” and not “who has died?” In this sense, the passing toll was no mere announcement but a call to act - a call to pray - and there is every reason to believe that the dying would have taken some comfort and hope from this interpretation.

The stipulation that these peals be kept short is indeed rather ambiguous, and perhaps intentionally so. Although the single toll of a bell was easily measured and finite, a ‘short peal’ was surely left up to interpretation. This article could easily have established more definitive restrictions by always requiring a specified number of tolls on a single bell instead of permitting these more ambiguous ‘short peals’; but it did not. By restricting the bell at “passing” only to the toll of a single bell, the Elizabethan authorities showed that they were particularly interested in insuring that the “passing-bell” of days gone by was not being mimicked by excessive peals. Otherwise the article was not eager to place heavy-handed restrictions on bell ringing associated with death. Peals were permissible, and the length of such peals was open to some interpretation.

Having spent a portion of Mary’s reign in exile on the continent, Thomas Bentham returned to England in 1558 and took up the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield a year after Elizabeth’s coronation. In his injunctions of 1565, Bentham attempted to offer more definitive parameters on the issue of bell ringing for the dead than those set forth in 1560 by stating:

Item, that you suffer no ringing of bells for the dead, but only to knoll a bell at the hour of death for the space of half an hour and ring one short peal a little before the burial.

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144 Ibid., 9,10. According to Brendan Simms, Donne’s words need to be interpreted in light of Sir Edward Sackville’s statement given in the House of Commons in regards to English inaction in the Thirty Years War in Germany and the fall of the Palatinate to the Catholics. In 1621 Sackville stated, “the passing bell now tolleth for religion and the state of the Palatinate, it is not dead, but dying”. Donne therefore wants his English readers to be aware that a Catholic victory on the continent would have a direct bearing upon their own “English liberties”, and that the tolls were for the English as much as for their Protestant brothers and sisters in German lands. The passing toll was a call to act, a call to change foreign policy.

145 Ibid., iii. 170.
The requirement to limit ringing to “only” one half of an hour was obviously meant to be restrictive, implying that there was a good deal of ringing in parishes “at the hour of death” which far exceeded this newly implemented time limit. Bentham did not explain why there might be any theological justification for permitting even one half hours’ worth of ringing, and thus such an allowance was probably motivated by the realities of parish customs. We are left to imagine that to permit less than a half an hour would have been unacceptable to many parishioners of the diocese, and thereby extremely difficult to implement. This would seem to suggest that the ecclesiastical authorities and the parishioners were willing to compromise on this particular issue.146

We can detect Parkhurst’s awareness of some of the ambiguities pertaining to ringing for the dead in his interrogatories and injunctions of 1561. He stated:

that they see unto their clerks and sextons, if they do ring at the burial of the dead, noon or curfew, they ring but one peal, and that very short, omitting all other unnecessary ringings as it is prescribed by order taken herein.147

He further inquired: “Whether they use to ring oft or long peals at the burial of the dead, or use much jangling in festival days in ringing none or curfew.”148 In the midst of much wrangling over the issue of vestments, Archbishop Parker issued “The Advertisements” of 1566 in an

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146 See David Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Here Cressy examines the manner in which English men and women attempted to reconcile various stages and events in their life-cycles with local customs, authorities, and religious requirements. Cressy observes that while most parishioners were willing to practice adaptation on a number of fronts, most church authorities were willing to practice a good deal of tolerance. These negotiations could certainly be contentious, however there is the sense that the desire to avoid discord was perhaps stronger than either the desire to practice dissent or the refusal to exercise flexibility. Bentham’s injunctions are perhaps indicative of this. These negotiations appear to break down during the Laudian regime.

147 Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, iii. 98.

148 Ibid., iii. 105.
an attempt to establish uniformity on several issues. In them he repeated Parkhurst’s requirements of 1561 which pertained to bell ringing for the dying and the dead:

Item, that when any Christian body is in passing, that the bell be tolled, and that the curate be specially called for to comfort the sick person, and after the time of his passing to ring no more but one short peal, and one before the burial, and another short peal after the burial.\textsuperscript{149}

A number of parishes within Norwich and elsewhere were obviously guilty of ringing excessively at burials. By 1561, therefore, a number of parishioners still associated the sound of a bell with death and burials. But Parkhurst’s central concern was the practice of ringing many bells for an extended period of time. These were sounds which would have dominated the soundscape of a community for considerable lengths of time. In 1592 the churchwardens’ accounts of St. Alban Wood Street in London specifically indicate the purchase of death knells of one hour’s length for burials of individual parishioners.\textsuperscript{150} These were not merely the rings of simple announcement; they were far too substantial and pervasive than this. Were these the sounds of mourning? Or had the notion of purgatory and the penetrating effect of bells into the world of the hereafter endured and remained relevant to Elizabethan parishioners?

But Parkhurst’s requirement still remained ambiguous. It more explicitly limited rings at burials to one peal, but it still required it to remain short.\textsuperscript{151} The implication is that “one peal” was not to be understood as a finite ring; otherwise the demand that it remain short would have

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., iii. 176. Repeated in Sandy’s Articles of 1571 for the Diocese of London iii. 309. However, article 2.5 in a document entitled General Note of Matters to Be Moved by the Clergy, 1563, which reads, “That the use of organs and curious singing be removed, and that superfluous ringing of bells, and namely at All Hallowtide (1 November) and on All Souls’ day (2 November), may be prohibited, and that no peal after death of any person be above the space of one hour, and at the interment above half an hour.” In The Anglican Canons, 1529-1947, ed. Gerald Bray, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 729.

\textsuperscript{150} London Church Records, St Alban Wood Street 1584-1639, MS 7673/1, fol. 18r.

\textsuperscript{151} Article 44 found in a set of Visitation Articles (1560) of an unknown ordinary states, “Whether they use to ring oft and long peals at the burial of the dead, or useth much jangling in festival days, in ringing noon or curfew, or no?” This set was found by Strype bound up with the Royal Articles of 1559, but belong to 1560 according to Frere and Kennedy. Visitation Articles and Injunctions, iii. 91.
been superfluous. Although he might have required a single toll of a single bell which would not have required any qualification of length, he did not. Either he or his parishioners, or perhaps both, recognized that a single toll of a single bell would not be sufficient to create the soundscape appropriate for the occasion. Supporting Parker’s quest for uniformity in the midst of vestment debates, Edmund Guest, Bishop of Rochester issued his injunctions of 1565 for his diocese. It is difficult to determine whether the third article of these injunctions is expressing a more or less restrictive tone than Parkhurst: “Item, that no bells be rung in the time of Divine Service nor at burial during the time of prayers appointed for the same.”\textsuperscript{152} The complete prohibition of bells during divine services appeared explicit, however his order concerning burials repudiated bell ringing during the time of prayers. Was this a concession? Was the prohibition of bell ringing at funerals a fruitless enterprise? Was he only left with the option of forbidding bells during the actual prayers themselves? Like Parkhurst, Guest could have outlined these requirements much more clearly, and therefore they would have been less ambiguous and closed to interpretation. For example, Guest could have ordered that only one toll be rung before burial and only one toll after burial. Instead he limited his restriction to the forbidding of ringing at burials only “during prayers”. Did Guest simply believe that parishioners would not accept anything more prohibitive than this? These injunctions might have been far more restrictive on the issue of bell ringing upon the occasions of death and burial, but again, they were not; most probably because they could not be. There would have been little Protestant theological justification for maintaining any bell ringing whatsoever at funerals, yet there was no attempt to ban such ringing. We are left to conclude that burial rings continued because they were still seen as an intricate part of the sacred soundscape by the parishioners, the church hierarchy, or both.

\textsuperscript{152} Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, \textit{Visitation Articles and Injunctions}, iii. 159.
Archbishop Grindal’s ninth item of his Articles for the Province of York went on to provide a rather substantial inquiry into the use of bells in this diocese:

Whether, when any man or woman is in passing out of this life, the bell be tolled to move the people to pray for the sick person, especially in all places where the sick person dwelleth near unto the church, and whether after the time of his or her passing out of this world there be any more ringing but one short peal before the burial and another short peal after the burial, without any other superfluous and superstitious ringing. And whether on All Saints’ Day after Evening Prayer, there be any ringing at all, or any other superstitious ceremony used, tending to the maintenance of popish purgatory, or of prayer for the dead, and who they be that use the same. And whether there be any ringing or knolling of bells on Sundays or Holy days between Morning Prayer and the Litany, or in any time of the Common Prayer, reading of the Homilies, or of preaching, except one bell in convenient time to be rung or tolled before the sermon, or any other ringing used upon saints’ eves or festival days, saving to Common Prayer, and that without excess, and who doth ring or knoll otherwise?  

While most of the restrictions and prohibitions in this inquiry have already been referred to, by 1571 there was still the need to address the link between bells, superstition, and popish ideas.

The earlier injunctions and articles from the first decade of Elizabeth’s reign do not seem overtly motivated by a desire to stifle superstition or allegiance to the Church of Rome, but Grindal’s article appears to be using rhetoric more in accordance with the injunctions and articles of 1538, 1547, and the reign of Edward. Here Grindal explicitly associated superfluous ringing with superstition and a belief in purgatory. We should not be surprised by these anti-Catholic sentiments given the excommunication of Elizabeth by Pope Pius V in 1570 and a renewed awareness and examination of the Catholic presence in England in those subsequent years. We should also remind ourselves that this northern province of York was by no means a region

153 Ibid., iii. 257. References to prohibition on All Saints Day also in Sandy’s Articles of 1571 for the Diocese of London iii. 309, Guest’s Articles of 1571 for the Diocese of Rochester iii. 334, and Freke’s Articles of 1572 for Rochester Diocese iii. 344.
154 See Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). We might be inclined to wonder whether Houlbrooke’s assertion that the rejection of purgatory had no significant psychological impact upon English parishioners if in 1571 Grindal is still campaigning against methods of bell ringing that appear unwilling to repudiate these “popish” beliefs.
bursting with Protestant enthusiasm. This article was very explicit about its desire to eliminate entirely all ringing associated with the night of All Saints’ Day. It made clear the association between bell ringing on this feast day and the maintenance of a belief in purgatory, and determined that the bells must be silenced on the night of All Saints Day if a belief in purgatory was to be stifled. Ronald Hutton noted that in 1548 the ringing for the dead on the evening of the feast of All Saints vanished virtually from all the parishes in which it had been recorded in the churchwardens’ accounts up until that point, yet these 1571 injunctions of Grindal clearly indicate that the practice itself had either not yet ceased, or had been revived, under Elizabeth.  

Grindal’s 1577 Articles for the Province of Canterbury give clear evidence that the Elizabethan church urged parishes to toll the passing bell for the sick:

> Whether, when any man or woman is in passing out of this lyfe, the Bell be tolled, to move the people to praye for the sicke person, especially in all places, where the sicke person dwelleth neere unto the Church? and whether after the time of his or hir passing out of this world, there be any more ringing but one short peale before the buriall, and another short peale after the buriall, without any other superfluous or supersticious ringing?

Grindal regarded the parish bell as a practical tool for inspiring prayers for the sick, and believed that it was even more relevant for those who lived near the church. Not only would it have been considered more relevant, but it would also have served to confirm and recognize the jurisdiction of the parish and the membership of the parish community. This article therefore

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155 Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, 84.
157 Church of England. Archdeaconry of Middlesex, *Articles to Be Enquired of, by the Church Wardens and Swornemen within the Archdeaconrie of Middlesex*… (London: John Wolfe, 1582), EEBO, STC 10275, Image 8. Archdeacon Squier of Middlesex formulates this same article in a similar manner. See item #33 of his articles of inquiry of 1582.
required that certain ringing must indeed take place, and therefore the bell remained an audible symbol of prayer well into the reign of Elizabeth.158

Bishop Westfaling of Hereford essentially repeated this article of Grindal, but in a slightly altered form:

Whether when any man or woman is passing out of this life, the bell be tolled to move the people to pray for the sick person, and whether there be any ringing for any that died out of the Parish, and whether for any dying within the parish there be any more ringing than one short peale before, & another after the burial.159

Westfaling further recognized that the bell could serve to legitimize and reflect parochial boundaries and membership. The bell was permitted to ring for those within the parish, but not for those dying outside the parish. A ringing bell was therefore being explicitly acknowledged as a tool that helped to define a community, by giving audible recognition of its members.

In 1583 Bishop Marmaduke Middleton issued his Injunctions for the diocese of St. David’s in Wales. He confidently claimed that “there is used in most parts of my dioces an infinite number of Popishe Ceremonies and other thynges, contrarie to the Lawes of God, and the Quenes maisties moste godlie proceedynges”, yet he himself eventually came under the suspicion of both church and state authorities for a number of suspected offenses.160

158 Church of England. Province of York, Articles to Be Enquired of, Within the Province of York... (London: William Seres, 1577), EEBO, STC 10376, Image 4. The visitation articles of Archbishop Sandys for the province of York (1577) are even more specific on this point by placing an even greater responsibility upon those parishes in larger urban communities. Article #11 inquires, “whether when any christian body is in passing, the Bell be tolled, to move the people to pray for the sick person, especially in the greater towns, where the sick person dwelleth near unto the church?”.

159 Church of England, Diocese of Hereford, Articles Ecclesiastical to be Inquired of by the Churchwardens and the Sworn-Men within the Diocese of Hereford... (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1592), EEBO, STC 10215.5, Image 6.

Nevertheless, he appeared eager to condemn and eliminate a particular pre-burial practice evidently taking place within his diocese:

Item, that the Clark nor his deputie do carie about the Towne, a little bell called the Sainctes bell before the Buriall, after the use of Popishe Superstition.  

Since the Sanctus bell was generally linked with the celebration of mass, and therefore it is difficult to know why this bell would have been rung in connection with burials. Nor is it clear why this bell would have been outside the church and carried “about the town”. It is evident that the reformers were eager to silence the bell that had accompanied the priest when he brought the Eucharist to the sick, but we have yet to encounter the Sanctus bell being rung about the town before a burial. Was this practice only now being identified as a form of “popish superstition”? Or was Marmaduke in fact describing the traditional sacring bell that accompanied the Eucharist to the homes of the sick, and thus very broadly describing ringing “before the burial”? Either way, it is clear that by as late as 1583 the Sanctus bell was still being rung in manner and for a purpose that could be readily interpreted as “popish”.

There are only two other items that appear to describe any further attempts to regulate the use of bells during the latter years of Elizabeth’s reign. The first comes from a general set of visitation articles issued in 1597 in which the thirtieth article inquired:

Whether when any Christian bodie is in passing, the bell be orderly tolled, so that the people may be moved thereby to praye for the sicke person: and whether there be any other vaine ringing but one small short peale before the burial, and another after.

This particular item does not appear unique in its essence, but it does notably break from earlier articles that addressed the very same issue. For instead of attributing excessive ringing to superstition or to papal loyalties, it ascribed such ringing to vanity. Consequently we are left

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\(^{161}\) Ibid., Image 3.  
\(^{162}\) Church of England, Articles to Be Enquired of by the Churchwardens and Swornmen… (London: Felix Kingston, 1597), EEBO, STC 10133.7, Image 5.
with the impression that by as late as 1597 excessive ringing at burials was still relatively common, and yet royal and ecclesiastical authorities were less inclined to suggest that erroneous theology was to blame. Excessive ringing was to be prohibited due to its potential association with ostentatious behavior and therefore it must have remained objectionable from both a civic and ecclesiastical perspective.

Bishop William Chaderton’s articles for the diocese of Lincoln in 1607 reveal even further efforts to regulate ringing at death. He inquired:

Whether doth your Clarke or sexton, when any is passing out of this life, neglect to tole a bell having notice thereof: or the partie being dead; doth he suffer any more ringing than one short peale, and before his burial one, and after the same another?¹⁶³

This problem was not new, but it is here most explicitly described. Chaderton and his colleagues were faced with two apparently contradicting problems. On the one hand there was the problem of neglecting to toll the bell before death, but on the other hand there was the problem of ringing it far too much after death. No injunctions ever suggested that there was ever too little ringing after death or, more interestingly, too much before. Therefore we should assume that the ecclesiastical authorities demanded conformity to the ringing that occurred at passing, but were merely tolerant of the ringing that took place upon burial. Ringing at passing was ordered from above, while ringing at burials was demanded from below. Bishop Miles Smith’s articles of 1622 clearly stated the intended purpose for ringing before death by inquiring:

Whether when any man or woman, is passing out of this life, the bell be tolled, to give warning to the people to pray for the sicke person: if not, in whose default, and whether at the death or burial of any person, there be anie more ringing of bels, then one peale

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¹⁶³ Kenneth Fincham, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, i. 76. There are several other articles which contain inquiries into the neglect of ringing for the sick or dying and excessive ringing at burials, including: Archbishop George Abbot’s articles for the diocese of Gloucester of 1612, Ibid., i. 104; Bishop Henry Cotton’s articles for the diocese of Salisbury of 1614, Ibid., i. 17; Archdeacon Edward Layfield’s articles for the archdeaconry of Essex of 1637, Ibid., i. 47; Archbishop William Laud’s articles for the diocese of Lincoln of 1634, Ibid., ii. 90; Bishop Matthew Wren’s articles for the diocese of Hereford of 1635, Ibid., ii. 132.
before the burial, and another after, or anie ringing at all in time of common praier, preaching, or reading of homilies.\textsuperscript{164}

Bell ringing was acceptable if it provoked prayers for the recovery of the sick or for the soul of the dying, but not as a call for intercessory prayer for the soul after death; such intercessory prayers were no longer permitted in reformed England. There was certainly a theological point to be made, but there were also parochial customs and duties to fulfill. The reformed Church of England was intent upon establishing the relevance of prayer to the affairs of this worldly existence, but a number of parishes were obviously eager to retain the remnants of communion between the living and the dead.

Bishop Lancelot Andrewes essentially reissued Bishop Chaderton’s articles of 1607, for the diocese of Lincoln, for his own diocese of Ely in 1610, with only slight modifications. One of these changes served to more explicitly establish the duties of the minister to the sick and the deceased, he added:

\begin{quote}
Whether doth your minister having notice given him, diligently visite the sicke (the disease not being infectious), doth he instruct and comfort them, doth he then move them to make their testaments, and remember the poore, and other works of charitie, and the passing bell tolling, doth he then neglect his last dutie?\textsuperscript{165}
\end{quote}

To ensure the tolling of the passing bell was thus the responsibility of the minister; part of his final act of ministry in the life of one of his parishioners. Thus it was the two-fold duty of the minister to order the ringing of passing bell, but also to control or restrict the ringing of the burial bell. Andrewes was even more revealing on this matter in his articles for the diocese Winchester issued in 1619 when he inquired:

\begin{quote}
Whether doeth your clerke or sexton when one is passing out of this life, neglect to toll a bell having notice thereof: or the partie being dead, doeth he suffer any more than one short peale, and before his burial one, and after the same another?\textsuperscript{166}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., ii. 207.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., i. 84,85.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., i. 182.
Parish officials were thus commanded positively to assert ceremonial conformity by ringing the passing bell, and to do their utmost to manage the ceremonial demands of their parishioners. The minister’s engagement in the lives of his parishioners was expected to end at their death, yet the reality of excessive ringing after death reveals a parochial desire to maintain a sense of union with the deceased long after the passing bell had rung. It suggests that some parishioners desired extensive bell ringing after death, and that the reformers’ attempts to preach the irrelevance, if not the superstitious nature of such ringing had not yet achieved the success that they had envisioned.

The unique quality of funeral ringing was explicitly recognized by Bishop Matthew Wren in his 1636 articles for the diocese of Norwich. He ordered:

That there bee the same manner of ringing and tollinge of bells to church on holy dayes, which is used on Sundayes. And that there bee no difference of ringinge to church, when there is a sermon, more than when there is none, excepting the knells for funeralls.\footnote{Ibid., ii. 159.}

Wren was willing to permit the distinctive aural experience associated with funerals. Although it is perhaps most interesting that he was also trying to stifle the practice of audibly distinguishing between a service with a sermon, and one without, this order would certainly seem to suggest that the bells were being used to give positive audible notice of preaching, certainly with the purpose of encouraging more parishioners to attend service; for it is highly doubtful that the intention was to drive them away. This would seem to suggest at least that preaching was in fact popular, and that a service with preaching would have attracted more parishioners than a service without a sermon. As a noted ceremonialist and Laudian, Wren would have objected to
promoting the sermon at the expense of the liturgy.\textsuperscript{168} It implies that the bell evoked a sound of popular invitation and assent, rather than sounds the parishioners might have more closely associated with objectionable authority or odious demands.

There are three other noteworthy early Stuart references to the requirement to ring the passing bell, and each reveals something of the intended result of the ring. The articles of 1597 required that the passing bell be rung so that the parishioners would be prompted to “pray for the sick person”. However, this did not specify what sort of prayers these should be. Were the parishioners to pray for healing, comfort, or the salvation of the soul? Wren’s articles for the diocese of Ely in 1638/39 revealed what he believed was the intent of the passing bell when he inquired:

\begin{quote}
When he is departed, doth the bell ring out his knell, that others may take notice, and thank God for his deliverance out of this vale of misery? Both which tolling and ringing out, be in many places neglected.\textsuperscript{169}
\end{quote}

He thereby acknowledged that the passing bell was not being rung in a number of parishes, and that the passing bell should in fact inspire prayers of thanksgiving from the parishioners. Wren reveals his theological interpretation of the passing bell. His article assumed that the dying parishioner was indeed regenerate and would therefore be delivered by God “from this vale of misery”; but this would have taken no account of the damned, and would therefore have been read as controversial remark by his Puritan counterparts. For Wren the bell was simply meant to evoke praise to God, and it was less a duty to the dying parishioner and more a fulfillment of responsibility to God himself.


\textsuperscript{169} Kenneth Fincham, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, ii. 203.
Bishop William Juxon appears to go even further and sounds remarkably reminiscent of the tradition and ceremonies of the pre-Reformation parish in England when he inquired in 1640:

Doth your sexten or your parish Clarke (if there be no sexton) when, and as often as any person is passing out of this life, cause a bell to be tolled, that so his neighbours may be warned to recommend his soule to the grace of God? And after the said parties death (if it so fall out) doth he ring or cause one short peale to be rung, that so his neighbours may have notice that he is departed.\(^{170}\)

It is here that Juxon finally spelled out how the English Protestant Church was to understand the passing bell. It was to remind the parishioners to pray for the soul, and not the body, of the dying parishioner, and to “recommend his soul to the grace of God”. Thus ecclesiastical authority was seemingly acknowledging that bell was an audible reminder of the link between the living and the souls of the dying, not the dead. Finally, Bishop John Williams inquired of the sextons in 1641: “doth he (when any is weak and assured to him to be passing out of this life) neglect to toll a bell, to give notice thereof to all devout Christians?”\(^{171}\) He did not specify what all devout Christians should do upon receiving such notification, however he was clear that the bell was not meant to evoke prayers of healing or even comfort to the dying. The bell was to be rung only when the sexton was assured of the imminence of death, and therefore we can at least conclude that the sound of the bell was much more intimately linked with the soul of the dying than with the body.

There is little doubt that the passing bell remained a significant audible symbol throughout these years of religious reform. Something of its profound emotional and psychological meaning can be gleaned from a very small sampling of poetry and prose from the period. The prefatory lines to one of George Gascoigne’s sonnets published in 1587 reveals the emotions evoked by knolling of the passing bell:

\(^{170}\) Ibid., ii. 236.
\(^{171}\) Ibid., ii. 104.
Alas, loe now I heare the passing bell,
Which care appoynteth carefully to knowle,
And in my brest I feele my heart now swell
To breake the stringes which joynd it to my soul.¹⁷²

Some years later, in 1630, the ringing of the passing bell conjured up darker and more sinister images in Thomas Heywood’s *Rape of Lucrece*:

Come list and harke, the bell doth towle,
For some but now departing soule.
And was not that some ominous fowle,
The batt, the night-crow, or screech-owle,
To these I heare the wild woolfe howle,
In this black night that seems to skowle.
All these my black booke shall in-rowle;
For hark, still, still, the bell doth towle
For some but now departing sowle.”.¹⁷³

Finally, William Andrews referred to a very brief anecdote found in a 1614 edition of Anthony Copley’s *Wits, Fits, and Fancies*: “A gentleman who lay upon a severe sick bed, heard a passing bell ring out, and thereupon asked his physician: “Tell me, master Doctor, is yonder music for my dancing?”¹⁷⁴ All three of these references suggest that the early modern English soundscape was regularly punctuated by the rings of the passing bell. The people knew its meaning without being told, and thus this bell most certainly had a particular tone or cadence easily identifiable by the parishioners. And thus, the solemnity of the event could be conveniently and immediately communicated to the community at large.

It is very instructive to conclude this section on death and dying by comparing Archbishop Tobie Matthew’s thirty-ninth article for York province in 1607 with his revision of the very same article published in his articles for the York diocese of 1622/23. In 1607 he inquired:

¹⁷³ Ibid., 213.
¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 213.
Whether be there any within your parish or chappellry that use to ring the bells superstitiously upon any abrocated holidays or the eavens thereof: and whether is the passing bell tolled when any Christian body is sicke and like to dye, as it ought to be. And after the death of any whether there be any superfluous ringing, superstitious burning of candles over the corse in the day time, after it bee light. Or praying for the dead at crosses or places where crosses have beene, in the way to the church, or any other superstitious use of crosses with towels, palmes, met-wands, or other memories of idolatry at burials.  

His revision of 1622/23 inquired:

Whether be there any within your parish or chappellry that use to ring the bells superstitiously upon any abrocated holidays or the eavens thereof: and whether is the passing bell tolled when any Christian body is sicke and like to dye, as it ought to be. And after the death of any whether there be any superstitious ringing, superstitious burning of candles over the corse in the day time, after it bee light. Or praying for the dead at crosses or places where crosses have beene, in the way to the church, or any other superstitious use of crosses with towels, palmes, met-wands, or other memories of idolatry at burials.

The change is minor yet enormously significant. What Matthew perceived as “superfluous” rings in 1607, he came to see as “superstitious” rings in 1622. It is worth recalling the visitation articles of 1597 which innovatively referred to excessive ringing at burials as ‘vain’ rather than resorting to the other pejorative descriptors more traditionally favoured by reforming ecclesiastics. But Matthew consciously chose to return to such descriptors, and implicitly asserted that this sort of bell ringing was not simply vain or superfluous; it was in fact superstitious, and to resort to other euphemistic adjectives either missed the point, or was ineffective.

**Bells for the Rogation Procession**

Elizabeth’s injunctions of 1559 did not legislate anything radically different regarding the bells from those injunctions issued during the reign of Edward. The eighteenth article of the

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175 Kenneth Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunction*, i. 59.
176 Ibid., i. 66.
twenty-third article of the injunctions of 1547 was essentially repeated in the eighteenth article of the 1559 injunctions, forbidding the ringing of bells during the litany and mass and permitting one bell to be rung before the sermon. The injunctions of 1559 do however seek to retain the perambulation “of the circuits of parishes” during the rogation procession, a requirement that was tagged onto the eighteenth article, immediately following the order to ring a single sermon bell.\(^{177}\) Significantly the Edwardian injunctions made no reference to the rogation processions, occasions that had been traditionally associated with parish bell ringing.

These processions were fundamentally interested in defining the community by demarcating the physical boundaries of a parish. As members of the parish walked around the boundaries of the parish they would say prayers asking God for his mercy and blessing upon the parish community. This process therefore helped give public confirmation of membership in the parish community. Grindal’s thirty-eighth item of his articles of 1577 sought to structure and control the ceremony that was to accompany these annual processions in each parish:

> Whether for the retayning of the perambulation of the circuite of your parish, the person, vicar, or curate, churchwardens and certayne of the substantiall men of the parish, in the dayes of the Rogations, commonly called the gang dayes, walke the accustomed boundes of your parishe, and whether in the same perambulation and going about, the curate doe use any other rite or ceremonie, than to say or sing in English, the two Psalmes beginning *Benedic anima mea domino*, that is to say, the Ciii. psalm, and the Ciiii.psalme, and such sentences of Scripture, as be appointed by the Queenes Maiesties Injunctions, with the Letany and suffrages following the same, and reading one Homelie alredie deuised and set forth for that purpose, without wearing any surplesses, carying of banners, or handbelles, or staying at Crosses or any such like popish ceremonies.\(^{178}\)

Obviously there was no desire whatsoever to prohibit the processions, for it would have served a very important and increasingly necessary purpose.

\(^{177}\) Walter Howard Frere and William McClure Kennedy, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, iii. 14,15.
On this point Michael Berlin offers an enormously useful discussion on the significance of the processions in the latter half of Elizabeth’s reign.\textsuperscript{179} He suggests that by the late sixteenth century the parish unit was increasingly functioning as unit of local government. In particular, the central government had come to depend upon this local administrative body for the effective management of poor relief. The need for more formalized units of local government also grew out of “increased acquisitive aspirations” in members of the parish community, aspirations that were born of the increased amount of property made available through the dissolutions of the 1540s.\textsuperscript{180} As a result, parishes were being invested with a greater power over the parochial community, and therefore it was in the interest of the parish hierarchy to ensure order, efficiency, and good government. The processions became the means through which jurisdiction was established and tax assessment and poor relief were determined. These tasks and responsibilities became even more critical in an urban environment where the boundaries of one parish could border the jurisdiction of several other parishes. Given the growing realities of these expectations and powers, it is not surprising that these processions should have evolved from a communal ritual to a ceremony of hierarchy.\textsuperscript{181}

Grindal’s thirty-eighth article seems to reflect many of these changes that Berlin describes. The participants in the processions described by Grindal were expected to be church

\textsuperscript{181} See Steve Hindle, “Beating the Bounds of the Parish: Order, Memory, and Identity in the English Local Community, c. 1500-1700” in Defining Community in Early Modern Europe, editted by Michael J. Halverson and Karen E. Spierling (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008). Hindle highlights that after 1559 Rogationtide processions became increasingly exclusive. The procession became the exclusive domain of wealthy older males of noted social status; pre-reformation processions were far more inclusive of the entire parish community. It would not be surprising that these events would become quieter and therefore far less public. Although every effort would have been made to make this event appear less “popish”, the silencing of the bells would certainly have helped make this a far less inclusive event.
office holders and other “substantial” men of the parish. By prohibiting the use of hand bells during processions, he was seeking to establish this as a private ceremony with a utilitarian function, not a public ritual that sought to give sacred legitimacy to parochial bonds. Silence was therefore indirectly linked to order and efficiency, and parish ritual was forced to adapt to the new demands of civic stability. When Bishop Westfaling’s article prohibits the ringing of a bell for those dying outside the parish (as mentioned above), he was in effect reinforcing the durability of the parish community.\footnote{According to Berlin, we are witnessing “a gradual shift away from annual outdoor celebrations involving mixed groups of parishioners to socially restricted forms of ceremony, circumscribed by a reformed liturgy and centred around new commitments of parish government.”\footnote{Berlin, “Reordering Rituals,” 48.}}

From 1575 until the end of Elizabeth’s reign there was a continuous effort to restrict ringing at burials and feast days, particularly on All Saints Day, and therefore the essence of Grindal's Articles of 1577 are essentially repeated throughout this time period.\footnote{During these same twenty-eight years there are only three demands that hand-bells and sacring bells be “utterly defaced, broken, and destroyed”, yet none of these appear after 1580.\footnote{Archbishop Grindal’s prohibition from 1577 of the use of hand-bells during the Rogation processions was also repeated}}

\footnote{There is only one reference in the early Stuart articles and injunctions that stipulates that perambulation should be done without the use of handbells. This is found in Bishop Miles Smith’s articles for the diocese of Gloucester of 1622, Visitation Articles and Injunctions, i. 209.}

\footnote{Because footnotes #185-188 are only attempting to demonstrate frequency, only the EEBO Short Title Catalogue number and image number have been included in the citations.):  Archbishop Sandys’ Articles of 1577, EEBO, STC 10376, Image 4; Bishop Aylmer’s Articles of 1577, EEBO, STC 10251, Image 3; Bishop Chaderton’s Articles of 1580, EEBO, STC 10174.5, Image 6; Bishop Cooper’s Articles of 1580, EEBO, STC 10230.5, Image 4; Bishop Wykeham’s Articles of 1585, EEBO 10231, Image 5; Bishop Howland’s Articles of 1594, EEBO, STC 10314, Image 4; Bishop Chaderton’s of 1598, STC 10235, Image 8; Bishop Watson’s Articles of 1600, EEBO, STC 10180, Image 5; Bishop Chaderton’s Articles of 1601, STC 10235.5, Image 9.}

\footnote{Archbishop Grindal’s Articles of 1577, EEBO, STC 10155.3, Image 3; Bishop Aylmer’s Articles of 1577, EEBO, STC 10251, Image 3; Archbishop Grindal’s Articles of 1580, EEBO, STC 10155.7, Image 3; Bishop Chaderton’s Articles of 1580, EEBO, STC 10174.5, Image 2.}
on several occasions throughout this same time period.\textsuperscript{186} Although other sets of articles specified the type of ceremony that was to take place during the perambulation, they neglected to make any mention of the prohibition for the use of bells.\textsuperscript{187}

**Conclusion**

The English reformers began to attack parish bells because they believed that their use was another example of abuse within the Church. By asserting royal and ecclesiastical authority they made a significant effort to reform and control the ringing of the bells by prohibiting excessive ringing and to disassociate ringing from Catholic doctrine. The reformers were most eager to ensure that the parish bells could not be interpreted in a manner that would give assent to papal authority over the forgiveness sins or the Catholic doctrines of transubstantiation and purgatory. Heinrich Bullinger’s scathing attack on bells reveals the degree to which Protestant reformers were capable of criticizing parish bells, and suggests that English reformers were well aware of the type of attack that they could have leveled against the English bells.

The royal injunctions and visitation articles of this period reveal a concerted effort to regulate parish bell ringing and correct abuses; they did not conclude that Bullinger’s strictly utilitarian approach to parish bells needed to be adopted. It is enormously difficult to conclude that the ringing of the parish bells, for the purposes of public worship, was ever really seriously threatened by these requirements. There is little doubt that these orders were not as strict and repressive as they might have been.

\textsuperscript{186} Bishop Aylmer’s Articles of 1577, EEBO, STC 10251, Image 6; Archbishop Grindal’s Articles of 1580, EEBO, STC 10155.7, Image 7; Archdeacon Squier’s Articles of 1582, EEBO, STC 10251.5, Image 6; Bishop Westfaling’s Articles of 1592, EEBO, STC 10215.5, Image 4; Bishop Chaderton’s Articles of 1598, EEBO, STC 10235, Image 7; Bishop Chaderton’s Articles of 1601, EEBO, STC 10235.5, Image 8.

\textsuperscript{187} Bishop Bancroft’s Articles of 1598, EEBO, STC 10253, Image 3; Archdeacon King’s Articles of 1599, EEBO, STC 10304, Image 4; Bishop Cotton’s Articles of 1599, EEBO, STC 10327.5, Image 4.
The attack upon the ringing of the Aves suggests that there was a clear desire to silence to the notion that the papacy played and intercessory role in the lives of English parishioners, and explicitly questioned the notion that the Catholic church possessed the powers to bind and loose on earth and in heaven. The silencing of the sacring bell was a direct challenge to the doctrine of transubstantiation; a challenge that fundamentally questioned both the interpretation of the sacraments and the spiritual authority of clergy of the Catholic Church. The attack upon ringing on All Hallows’ night continued this criticism of Roman doctrine by challenging the notion of purgatory and criticizing the suggestion that the prayers of the parish had any impact upon the souls of the dead. When it came to prohibiting ringing related to death and burials, the reformers opted for order and conformity, but not silence. Ringing was permitted to maintain its link with prayer; prayers for the dead soul were condemned, but prayers for the dying soul were condoned. Burial ringing was too ubiquitous to eliminate. It was a powerfully evocative sound that the reformers sought to order and limit, but never to silence. Both the passing bell and burial ringing survive the Reformation intact, reflecting the continued link between the parish bells and prayer, memory, and human mortality.

These injunctions and articles were evidently willing to acknowledge that the parish bells did indeed play a significant audible role in a number of different capacities related to public worship and the liturgy. At no point did these royal orders attempt to separate the sound of the bell from the celebration of the sacred; at no point did there appear to have been a conscious effort to ensure that bell ringing be considered a strictly secular sound. There were efforts to prevent excessive ringing, and to stifle ringing associated with ‘superstitious’ theology, but there was no attempt to silence bells associated with death, preaching, or prayer. Indeed silence seems not to have been an option, for the repetition of certain orders reveals the enormity of the
challenge that lay behind the simple task of merely reducing the number of rings. And thus, the moderate nature of these restrictions surely reveals a measure of compromise between parish and state.

The sacred and solemnizing power of the parish bells appears to have been unanimously acknowledged. The evangelical movement was not singularly interested in sound reduction, for the reformers were also keenly interested in pursuing the possibility that these very sounds could be co-opted to suit their agenda; and thus bells were encouraged to ring out in celebration of the sermon and the reign of their very Protestant Queen. But it would be naïve to suggest that these evangelicals were motivated solely by political convenience; for perhaps, just perhaps, they too heard the sacred and solemnizing sounds of the parish bells.
Chapter Four

Pealing the Bells

In 1666 John Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, was published in London. Written while being held in a Bedford prison for unlicensed preaching, Bunyan described his tortured spiritual awakening that made him conscious of his salvation by the grace of God. As a young man, Bunyan had enjoyed the sport of bell ringing and, in a famous passage, described how an increasingly scrupulous attitude towards “vain practices” eventually drove him from the bells. He wrote:

Now you must know, that before this I had taken much delight in ringing, but my conscience beginning to be tender, I thought such practice was but vain, and therefore forced myself to leave it; yet my mind hankered – wherefore I would go to the steeple-house, and look on, though I durst not ring: but I thought this did not become religion neither; yet I forced myself, and would look on still. But quickly after, I began to think, “How if one of the bells should fall?” Then I chose to stand under a main-beam that lay overthwart the steeple, from side to side, thinking here I might stand sure: but then I thought again, should the bell fall with a swing, it might first hit the wall, and then rebounding upon me, might kill me for all this beam. This made me stand in the steeple-door, and now, thought I, I am safe enough; for if a bell should fall, I can slip out behind these thick walls, and so be preserved notwithstanding. So after this I would yet go to see them ring but would not go any farther than the steeple-door; but then it came into my head, “How if the steeple itself should fall?” And this thought (it may, for aught I know, when I stood and looked on) did continually so shake my mind, that I durst not stand at the steeple-door any longer, but was forced to flee, for fear the steeple should fall upon my head.

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1 John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London: George Larkin, 1666), EEBO, Wing/B5523, Image 12.
It matters that Bunyan places this tale of his grudging flight from the steeple bells within his description of a moralistic stage of his experience of conversion. For Bunyan, bell ringing had become a “vain” pursuit, which had grown unbecoming to “religion”. The “delight” he taken from ringing made it difficult for him to stay away from the ringers in the tower as they carried on with their activities. Eventually his conscience caused him to even feel compelled to “flee” from the place where the ringing took place. It was not the sound of the bell he was desperate to avoid, but the activity of ringing. Subsequent to Bunyan’s critique of his own participation in bell ringing, he attacked his enjoyment of dancing, suggesting that both bell ringing and dancing were comparable social activities by the mid-17th century. For all of Bunyan’s scruples, no other contemporary account captures, admittedly in a perverse way, the “delight” that was found in ringing for sport, or change ringing.

**Developing Change Ringing**

Parish bell ringing had indeed undergone significant change since the early 16th century. Technological and architectural innovations combined with new attitudes about the bells to develop the sport of change ringing. But I contend that although these changes should be acknowledged and examined, we should not therefore conclude that this period witnessed the complete transformation of parish bells from objects and sounds that were integral to public worship within the parish community to profane and secular sounds strictly associated with sport and leisure. Such a conclusion prevents the establishment of a more complete understanding of the function and interpretation of parish bell ringing in the late Tudor and early Stuart parishes; an understanding that enriches our very interpretation of the nature of public worship during this period. I argue that the parish bells of this period were not only heard as sounds of entertainment
but also as expressions of Protestant celebration and good cheer and as the solemn tones of prayer and mortality. It is therefore important to consider the development of change ringing and the possibility that it was emerging earlier than the first few decades of the seventeenth century, for this would suggest that bells were vibrant and meaningful sounds for listeners in sixteenth-century English parishes.

In terms of examining the increasing tendency to view bells as sounds and objects of sport and leisure, it is generally stated that the English art of change ringing began in the third or fourth decades of the seventeenth century. Some may be willing to acknowledge its origins a few years earlier that this, yet there appears to be general agreement that the development of change ringing was a post-Elizabethan phenomenon. The North American Guild of Change Ringers explains:

Chiming bells (swinging them through a short arc using a rope and a lever) goes well back into the Middle Ages, but it was not until the seventeenth century that ringers developed the full wheel which allowed enough control for orderly ringing. In 1668 Fabian Stedman published *Tintinnalogia* - or the *Art of Change Ringing*, containing all the available information on systematic ringing. The theory of change ringing set forth by Stedman has been refined in later years but remains essentially unchanged today.²

This generally accepted summation is not entirely incorrect, but it can certainly be misleading. There is little doubt that change ringing underwent significant and sophisticated development during the seventeenth century. The establishment of the ringing society known as Ancient Society of College Youths in 1637 (still enormously popular to this day) and the publication of Stedman’s *Tintinnalogia* in 1668, probably the most famous treatise, if not one of the earliest, on the art and method of change ringing, are often considered to be two of the most significant dates in the origins of this uniquely English art. However an oversimplification of the origins of change ringing inevitably fails to acknowledge its earlier though less explicit beginnings in the

midst of the Elizabethan Reformation. As a result, change ringing has become too intimately identified as a seventeenth-century leisure activity, thereby overlooking the context in which it first took root: a world that enjoyed and valued bell ringing because it signified both solemnity and celebration.

There can be little doubt that the methods and techniques described by Stedman’s treatise are indeed remarkably complex, and highly structured. His bell ringing was dictated by mathematics and could only have been practiced by reasonably well trained bell ringers working together as a highly disciplined, well-orchestrated group of musicians. The image of a sexton or a clerk running up the steps of a bell tower to give boisterous and relatively impromptu audible recognition of death, marriage, or feast days does not easily parallel Stedman’s vision of bell ringing. It is equally difficult to imagine that secular, structured, and sporting bell ringing arose up overnight as a uniquely English phenomenon. The English Reformation did not kill sacred bell ringing, and the rise of change ringing did not represent a secular reinvention of a traditional sound. The Reformation in fact never sought to separate bell ringing from sacred sound, and the development of change ringing was far more gradual than is commonly implied. Arguably the roots of change ringing can be detected in the churchwardens’ accounts of Elizabethan parishes. The bells of a parish had produced sacred sounds in England for centuries prior to the seventeenth century; therefore to insinuate that they became secular sounds overnight is both counter-intuitive and dismissive of the realities of the Elizabethan parish.

According to Ron Johnston, “the English art of change ringing involves performances on a number of bells – usually five or more – tuned to a diatonic scale”.³ There is much evidence to support that from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century the average

number of bells per parish was increasing throughout England. A survey of church furnishings in 1553 showed that in Buckinghamshire, for example, of 135 towers, 24 had only one or two bells (18%), 57 had three (42%), 41 had four (30%), and 13 had five (10%). In 1638 a further survey of this county showed that of 131 towers, 20 had either one or two bells (15%), 44 had three (34%), 31 had four (24%), 34 had five (26%), and 2 had six (1.5%). This general trend would be repeated in other parts of England, though it was certainly more pronounced in those richer parishes able to set aside funds for the purchase of new bells, and therefore was more prominent in the south than the north. These numbers are consistent with the development of change ringing, however they are not enough to suggest any evidence of a trend in the Elizabethan church in particular.

A variety of technical, mechanical, and structural adaptations needed to have been made if a parish were to successfully employ the fundamentals of change ringing. For centuries the most common method for ringing bells involved swinging a hanging bell a few degrees from its vertical position so that it struck the free hanging clapper attached by a staple to the centre post of the interior of its crown. In order to swing even these few degrees from the vertical position, the bell needed to be attached to a wooden headstock. Leather baldrics looped themselves through the cast cannons at the top of the bell’s crown and were attached to the wooden headstock. The headstock was able to swing on a solid frame constructed of timbers by means of gudgeons, or metal pins, placed inside a set of bearings. Ropes were then attached to a lever, or to a quarter-wheel, and pulled by the ringer standing at the base of the tower, thus permitting him to swing the bell. This method afforded the ringer very little control over the bell, for indeed the ringer was essentially at the mercy of the bell’s weight and momentum. Therefore to ring a set

4 Ibid., 18.
of bells with any more than a very basic sense of control and rhythm would have required either
great physical effort, or a good number of ringers controlling a single rope.

Ringers soon discovered that the wider the angle of swing, the greater the impact of the
clapper on the bell; and of course, the greater the impact, the louder the sound and the further it
carried.\textsuperscript{5} As Johnston points out:

Over time ‘experiments’ involving the bell swinging through ever wider arcs showed that
the greatest volume of sound was produced if the bell rotated through the full 360
degrees, beginning and ending with its mouth upwards. Furthermore, when a bell is rung
in that way it is possible to determine the exact moment when the clapper hits the bell –
on its upward trajectory the 270 degree point – which meant that the timing of the ringing
could be controlled and, with more than one bell, the exact sequence of notes could be
coordinated.\textsuperscript{6}

Therefore, unless a bell could be rung so that its mouth began and ended in the upward position,
and in a manner which permitted the bell to be stopped in this upward position, the methods of
change ringing would be impossible to employ. Change ringing required not only that a set of
bells be rung in orderly succession, but that this order of ringing could be permutated.
Permutation thus necessitated an ability to hold a bell in the mouth-upward position.

The development of the three-quarter or full wheel eventually rendered this sort of
ringing possible. A rope attached to a full wheel, aided by stays and sliders, enabled a single
ringer to hold a bell in the mouth-upward position, pull the rope and swing the bell 360 degrees
and then stop the bell once again in the mouth-upward position; all without wrapping the rope
around the either the headstock or the wheel itself. However if these technical changes are made,
and this method of ringing is thereby employed, then a new set of mechanical challenges will
begin to emerge, or as Johnston states, “ringing in this fashion sets up major impulsive forces”.\textsuperscript{7}

The bell tower, the frame, and the fittings of the bell itself will all predictably experience much

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 18, 19.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 19.
greater levels of stress and strain than ever before. For example, when the bell is in full swing and in the mouth-down position there will be a downward force equivalent to 4.25 times the weight of the bell, and when the bell is at either of the right angle positions there will be a horizontal force equivalent to 2.5 times the weight of the bell.\(^8\) These forces would obviously be multiplied according to the number of bells housed in a given tower (to say nothing of the twisting effect that would occur if bells were being swung in various directions). This would result in increased stresses and strains on the bell fittings, especially the wooden headstock, baldrics, gudgeons, and bearings, as well as upon the wooden frames and the towers themselves.

Any early modern parish that was beginning to employ the methods of change ringing had to reflect at least some of the following changes in their churchwardens’ accounts: greater attention and expenditure upon bell wheels, gudgeons, baldrics, and stocks; the purchase (or recasting) of slightly smaller bells with purer tones; the securing of existing bells by way of new and improved hangings; the addition of bells to the tower; and the reinforcement of bell towers and bell frames.\(^9\) At this point it seems reasonably safe to conclude that at least part of the stimulation for the development of change ringing came from improved technology and methods of construction. It is doubtful that these technical innovations and methods would ever have been applied to bells and bell towers had not religious and cultural factors demanded them. It is far more likely that change ringing developed in a context in which bells were enormously popular and meaningful, rather than in a context in which their rings were fading into silence; otherwise we would have to question the demands for technical innovation and the willingness of parishioners to take on greater expenditures related to bells. Nor would it be reasonable to argue that change ringing sprung up at the urging of the ringers themselves and their desire to pursue

\(^8\) Ibid., 19.
\(^9\) Ibid., 19.
more sophisticated opportunities for sport and leisure. Given the intrusive nature of bell ringing, we should be more inclined to consider the attitudes and desires of the listener rather than those of the performer. The more explicit origins of change ringing must therefore be found within the Elizabethan parish church and not in the ringing societies of the early Stuart England.

The architectural historian Doreen Yarwood observes that:

After the Dissolution, ecclesiastical building virtually ceased, and in the days of Elizabeth all building activity was concentrated on the domestic spheres…Very little activity existed in this sphere before 1660; under James I there was virtually none. Between 1625 and 1640 an impetus was given to building, repair and rehabilitation of churches by William Laud.¹⁰

But this perspective does not allow for the possibility that any significant structural repair or alteration of bell towers had been undertaken by English parishes before the reign of Charles I, and therefore it questions the possibility that change ringing was beginning to be implemented by Elizabethan parishes. Indeed such a view effectively portrays the Elizabethan parish as physically stagnant, if not rather dilapidated. We would intuitively conclude that if the physical structures were in such decay, the spiritual vigor within their walls must surely have been vastly wanting. But neither appears to have been the case either in the Elizabethan parish or in the churches during the more radical Edwardian reforms. Caroline Litzenberger notes of the late

¹⁰ Andrew Woodger, “Post-Reformation Mixed Gothic in Huntingdonshire Towers and the Camponological Associations,” *The Archaeological Journal* 141 (1984): 270; G.W. Bernard, “The Dating of Church Towers: Huntingdonshire Re-examined,” *The Archaeological Journal* 149 (1992): 344-350; Diarmaid MacCulloch, “Myth of the Reformation,” *Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991): 1-19; Christopher Haigh, “The Taming of Reformation,” *Journal of the Historical Association* 85/280 (2000): 572-588. Bernard challenges several of Woodger’s architectural proofs but he does not deny that change ringing was possible with the three-quarters wheel, nor the suggestion that the three-quarters wheel was being implemented by the 1570s. Bernard claims that Woodger has “influenced” Diarmaid MacCulloch, however there is no indication that MacCulloch is solely relying on Woodger’s article to make the claim that there was a “building revolution…an heroic effort to reequip Catholic worship spaces for Protestant use” (13). Neither do Bernard’s challenges discourage Haigh from agreeing with Woodger by claiming, “From the late 1580s...The Introduction of three-quarter bell-wheels made elaborate change ringing possible, and seems to have led to the strengthening of towers and the casting of new bells” (586). Paul Cattermole is also certain that a number of parishes possessed the technological capabilities to engage in full circle ringing; Paul Cattermole, *Church Bells and Bell-Ringing: A Norfolk Profile*, 17.
1540s that “most parishes continued conscientiously to perform the regular maintenance of their buildings and other possessions, including laying new tiles, and repairing church pews, bells and the clock.”

Andrew Woodger argues not only against the opinion that the Elizabethan parishes fell into disrepair, but also against the notion that there was little significant architectural construction done upon such parishes during this period. He claims that there is some confusion on this topic because a good number of the architectural repairs, alterations, and rehabilitations have been incorrectly dated as ‘medieval’ construction projects, when in fact they were indeed undertaken during the reigns of the late Tudors in a style Woodger refers to as mixed-gothic.

He seems justified in concluding that it would have been in nobody’s best interest, whether priest, parishioner, or churchwarden, to have permitted late Tudor churches to have been reduced to a state of disrepair. Woodger argues that there is both convincing architectural and circumstantial evidence that supports the notion that a significant number of church towers and bell-cotes in Huntingdonshire were either rebuilt or significantly repaired between the years 1550-1640 and not during the latter half of the fourteenth century as previously imagined.

Woodger estimates that the half wheel was developed and implemented sometime around the middle of the fifteenth century. Since the bell would now be able to swing to a much greater height, structural changes to the headstock, cannons, and waist of the bell needed to be made in order to adjust to the changing characteristics of balance. Bells swung by a lever or quarter wheel were certainly capable of ringing in some form of harmony and rounds, but the

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12 Andrew Woodger, “Post-Reformation Mixed Gothic in Huntingdonshire Towers and the Campanological Associations,” 270.
13 Ibid., 271-273.
14 Ibid., 279.
half wheel allowed for a much higher swing, permitting the ringer to very briefly suspend the
swing and cause the order of a set of ringing bells to be altered by one position (though the bell
could only be held upright on every other stroke). That the tune of a set of bells had been
highly valued for many years prior to the Reformation was suggested in John Stow’s description
of St. Bartholomew’s Church in Smithfield which was partially deconstructed during the
dissolution, “This church having in the bell Tower sixe Belles in a tune, these bels were sold to
the parish of Saint Sepulchre.”

Based on the results of King Edward’s survey of church goods throughout England,
conducted in Huntingdonshire between 1549 and 1552, Woodger proposes a number of
conclusions. First, he argues that given that most churches in Huntingdonshire, even the small
ones, possessed on average three to five bells in their towers, the practice of ringing bells had
obviously established itself as a vastly popular pursuit well before the reign of Elizabeth.
Second, very few of these bells from the 1552 survey have survived, most having been recast
from the late sixteenth-century onwards. Third, since this process of recasting began in earnest
in the late sixteenth century, some great changes must have taken place in the world of
campanology between c. 1550 and c.1580. Finally, most of the bells from the survey of 1552
were unsuitable for change ringing (too big and too long-waisted) and therefore needed to be
recast.

Woodger suggests that this fundamental change in campanology between 1552 and 1580
was the development of the three-quarter wheel. This notion would contradict the idea that it

15 Ibid., 279 & 281. When the order of the bells had been altered by one ring, then a “change” had
occurred.
17 Andrew Woodger, “Post-Reformation Mixed Gothic in Huntingdonshire Towers and the
Camponological Associations,” 282.
18 Ibid., 282.
was in fact the invention of the full-wheel sometime in the mid-seventeenth century that revolutionized bell ringing and introduced the art of change ringing. Woodger convincingly argues that the three-quarter wheel was perfectly capable of permitting the ringer to balance the bell in the upright position at either end of the stroke, thus making an infinite number of changes possible and thereby setting the stage for Stedman’s treatise on change ringing. He contends that the development of the full-wheel only marginally improved balance and prevented warping, asserting that “even today the fourth quarter is technically superfluous as it is never touched by the bell rope”. Paul Cattermole agrees with this conclusion and refers to the example of the bells at Horham, Suffolk as proof that indeed ‘scientific’ change ringing was entirely possible prior to the development of the whole wheel. Woodger dates the adoption of the three-quarter wheel at 1570, a date which also seems to correspond almost precisely to the beginning of the recasting trend in Huntingdonshire.

All of this clearly reveals a vibrant passion for bell ringing, and this passion seems rooted in the early Elizabethan church and not the Laudian church of the Stuarts. As Cattermole rightly suggests, “three-quarter wheels would not have come into fashion unless ringers had wished to swing the bells well above the horizontal; and they would have soon discovered that it was quite possible to overturn a bell by pulling too hard at the wrong moment”. The development of the full wheel and the necessarily related technological developments, were prompted by an already existing passion for ringing, little dampened by religious life under the Tudors prior to 1570. The desire to hold the bell in a vertical position was most certainly motivated by a desire to

19 Ibid., 282.
20 Ibid., 282.
21 Paul Cattermole, *Church Bells and Bell-Ringing: A Norfolk Profile*, 96.
22 Andrew Woodger, “Post-Reformation Mixed Gothic in Huntingdonshire Towers and the Camponological Associations,” 282.
23 Paul Cattermole, *Church Bells and Bell-Ringing: A Norfolk Profile*, 97.
‘change’ or permutate rings. We should be inclined to suspect that bell ringing had indeed flourished as a parish activity during the middle decades of the sixteenth century. Cattermole in fact presents evidence to suggest that ‘full circle ringing’ was already taking place at East Dereham by the last decades of the fifteenth century. He argues that the references to the ‘wheels’ and ‘stays’ from entries in the churchwardens’ accounts from 1486 and 1491 suggest that this church was indeed capable of performing full circle ringing by this very early date.\textsuperscript{24} Ronald Hutton’s observations also suggest an increased passion for ringing in those years preceding the Reformation. He notes that payments for bell ringing appear only by the middle of the fifteenth century, and then only become common by the end of that century; thereby suggesting an increased frequency and desire for ringing.\textsuperscript{25} New developments in bell technology did not create a passion for bells, rather the technology seems to have responded to an already existing passion. This passion is also evident by the large number of bells towers held by 1552 and by the ongoing struggle to control bell ringing as revealed in the royal and ecclesiastical injunctions and visitation articles (see Chapter 3).

The injunctions and articles reflect how parishes were instructed to use their bells, while the development of change ringing indicates that the sound of bells continued to dominate the English soundscape during the first half of the seventeenth century. But neither the requirements of the injunctions and articles, nor the birth of change ringing satisfactorily reveal the role of bells in the life of English parishes during this period of religious change. In order to more fully understand the importance, function, and meaning of the parish bells to the English parishes during the Reformation I have analyzed several sets of churchwardens’ accounts from the city of London. These rich records of parish life provide a great a deal of evidence for when the bells

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 99, 100.
\textsuperscript{25} Hutton, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Merry England}, 52.
were rung, how often they were rung, how frequently they were maintained, and how much money was spent on the bells.

The decision to examine the churchwardens’ accounts of several London parishes is not only because these accounts have proven to be easily accessible for this particular study, but also because many sets of accounts from London are relatively complete. This study has been keenly interested in determining whether or not the Reformation in England changed the way in which parishes heard and used their bells. Therefore, since the city of London was notably receptive to Protestant ideas from a relatively early date, we should expect that if these new religious ideas had any significant impact on the bells, this impact should be evident in the city of London. My research has examined all of the churchwardens’ accounts for the city of London which are currently held by the Simon Fraser University Library. Although some of these accounts are incomplete and several reveal only summary descriptions of parish expenditures, the accounts from the following London parishes were examined in detail: All Hallows the Great (1616-1642), All Hallows Staining (1557-1573), St. Andrew by the Wardrobe (1570-1603), St. Anne and St. Agnes (1636-1642), St. Botolph’s Bishopsgate (1567-1603), St. Katherine Coleman (1610-1642), St. James Garlickhithe (1555-1603), St. Margaret Moses (1547-1597), St. Margaret New Fish (1576-1642), St. Mary Aldermary (1597-1642). The accounts for three London parishes, All Hallows London Wall (1566-1642), St. Botolph’s Aldgate (1547-1625), and St. Alban Wood Street (1584-1639), are both exceptionally complete and remarkably detailed. Since the evidence in the accounts of these three parishes appears to reflect the evidence found in the other London parishes, they will be analyzed in greater detail than the other London accounts.
Maintaining the Bells

According to the Chantry Certificates of 1548, All Hallows London Wall was a parish comprised of 217 communicants; a relatively small parish by London standards.\(^{26}\) At the time of the inventories taken in 1552, during the reign of King Edward VI, this parish was in possession of four “large bells and one small bell”, and all five of these bells were housed in the steeple.\(^{27}\) It is likely that this small bell was in fact a sacring bell. There is no indication that any of these bells were sold at the time of these inventories, and therefore despite a gap of fourteen years between the inventories and the churchwardens’ accounts, it is also likely that there were still four large bells in the steeple in 1566. The most frequently mentioned occasions for ringing were for burials (94 entries), in celebration of Elizabeth’s accession day on November 17\(^{th}\) (33 entries), in celebration of Elizabeth’s birthday on September 7\(^{th}\) (19 entries), in celebration of James’ accession day on March 24\(^{th}\) (9 entries), and in celebration of the foiled Gunpowder Plot on November 5\(^{th}\) (8 entries).\(^ {28}\) Not all ringing at burials was specifically recorded. On a number of occasions the churchwardens simply indicated that a fee was paid for the knells of a given year, but the precise number of burials for which the knells were rung was not always given. Likewise, many entries indicated that while the ringers were indeed paid for ringing, but they do not always describe what the ringing was for. Therefore it would be misguided to assume that ringing for a particular royal event did not take place (coronation days, royal birthdays, or gunpowder day) simply because it was not specifically identified during a particular year.


\(^{28}\) London Church Records, All Hallows London Wall 1566-1681, MS 5090/2, fol. 1-239.
Like many set of accounts, those of All Hallows offer a consistent record of the costs incurred related to the maintenance and repair of her bells. Payment that was specifically designated for ringers was almost always associated with those ringing occasions already mentioned. Many entries consolidated the payment to ringers by including separate occasions for ringing into a single entry. There are several entries that indicate payment “for bells” but do not specify the nature of the work done. There are 77 distinct entries that mention payment to ringers, 42 indicating payment for variety of repairs of the bells (including wheels, frames, ropes, baldrics, etc.), 33 for the purchase of new rope for the bells, 21 for the purchase of assorted hardware for the bells (bolts, pins, clasps, etc.), and 15 for the purchase of new baldrics for the bells. The type and frequency of these payments reveal that the bells were both regularly used and actively maintained throughout this period.

It is enormously difficult to discern any identifiable trend in these expenditures. There is nothing that would suggest that any more money was spent on the bells in the late 1560s than in the first few decades of the seventeenth century, or vice versa. Indeed bell expenditure appears relatively consistent throughout these eight decades, and this would imply that the bells themselves were rung with relative regularity. There appears to have been a fairly regular need to purchase new rope and baldrics throughout these years, and I would suggest that these two items would have been the most prone to replacement if the bells were being regularly rung. Perhaps the only discernable trend pertains to the mending of bell wheels, since five of the seven entries appear between 1611 and 1617 with no more than one reference in any year. One cannot help but suspect that this attention paid to bell wheels in the early decades of the seventeenth century was associated with the concomitant development of change ringing.
Indeed there is evidence that might lend further support to this speculation. In 1613/14 we read the first entry to make reference to the purchase of oil for the bells, closely followed by similar references in the accounts for each of the four subsequent years. That there is no mention of the purchase of oil for the bells in any of the accounts prior to 1613 does not necessarily indicate that it was not used or purchased, however, it would suggest that by 1613 it was being purchased in large enough quantities to warrant inclusion in the accounts, ranging in price from 7d. to 12d. If in fact the bell wheels were being used more frequently, and more completely, this would probably account for the increased demand for oil for the bells.

Furthermore, the accounts for the year 1618/19 indicate that the belfry was repaired at the cost of £5 10s. (though it is difficult to determine how this amount was specifically dispersed in this project). The accounts for this same year reveal an inordinate amount of other construction-related payments that were most likely relevant to the work on the belfry, but this is only speculation. In addition to this work done in 1618/19, there is further evidence of work done on the steeple in the entries for the year 1623/24. The work on the belfry and steeple would also have been consistent with the development of change ringing. This innovative method of bell ringing would have radically increased the frequency of the force brought to bear on the bell tower, thereby necessitating either the reinforcement or the reconstruction of the structure. Finally, an entry for the accounts of 1621/22 reads, “Item for the change of our bell…vi li, viii s.” This does not specify that a new bell was purchased, but that a bell was changed; and the cost would suggest that the change was indeed significant. This change probably entailed the recasting of the bell into a smaller bell, or perhaps into a bell with an

29 Ibid., fol. 191r.-201r.
30 Ibid., fol. 202r.-204r.
31 Ibid., fol. 214r.-214v.
32 Ibid., fol. 210v.
Either change would have been consistent with the requirements demanded by the techniques and methods of change ringing. This revision would have been remarkably in agreement with some of the other trends and changes already noted. It was not likely a simple coincidence that the mending of several wheels, the purchase of bell oil, the repair of the belfry and steeple, and the “changing” of a bell were all accomplished within a twelve year time span early in the seventeenth century. It is more than likely that these projects and purchases were undertaken for the purposes of participating in the newly emerging practice of change ringing. If this were indeed the case, it reflects the effort and expense a parish was willing to undertake in order to fully engage in this newly developing technique.

Just a little to the south of London Wall comparable attention was paid to the bells at the Church of All Hallows the Great. Beginning in 1616 her parishioners undertook a number of substantial and costly projects related to their bells. The great bell and the fourth bell were newly cast, forty-five pounds of new rope were purchased, the treble bell was recast in 1618/19, and a good deal of work was done on the frames, the clappers, and the baldrics. Indeed, the accounts of 1616/1617 reveal that nearly one third of all parish expenses that year were related to payment for labour and services associated with the parish bells. Only twenty years later the parish had more bells recast, although we cannot be sure how many or which ones. Perhaps these were the remaining bells that had not been recast in 1616/17, or perhaps this job had in fact been shoddily done and was in need of repair. Whatever the case, we are informed that 2s. 9d. was spent on a meeting between Mr. Gray (the founder) and “the ancients”, during which time the newly cast bells were viewed upon their return to the parish. This viewing was not a public

33 Christopher Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630*, 232. Marsh provides a nice example of the church at Balsham recasting two of the old bells into four new ones.
34 London Church Records, All Hallows The Great, MS/818/1, fol. 1r.-16r.
35 Ibid., 1635/36 (foliation not legible).
event, but restricted to select long-standing members from the parish community. Their status as “ancients” would have reflected their link with the past, and their approval and affirmation of the newly cast bells would have signified a sense of continuity. These new bells would therefore serve to link the present and future parish community with that of previous generations.

It would be careless to conclude that the impetus for these campanological changes was strictly rooted in the early decades of the seventeenth century. On June 26th, 1580 the parishioners of All Hallows the Great “agreed that the Steeple of this parish church of Great All Hallows be repaired”.

Although the churchwardens’ accounts do not offer any evidence to support this claim, it is nevertheless worth speculating that the need to repair this particular steeple was a result of the “Dover Straits Earthquake” of April 6th, 1580. It is estimated that this earthquake, with a magnitude in the range of 6.2-6.9 on the Richter scale, was felt as far north as London and as far south as northern France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. It does not appear to have been excessively destructive or deadly, yet it is entirely possible that its impact was significant enough to cause enough structural damage to church steeples in the region that repairs or reconstruction would have been required. This incentive may in turn have prompted a number of parishes to repair, reconstruct, or reinforce their belfries and recast their bells in ways that would take advantage of new bell technology. The earthquake may have hastened a number of the campanological changes of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

The accounts of All Hallows London Wall make regular reference to a group of “ringers” who are responsible for ringing the bells on certain occasions. The task of ringing was not the duty of priest, sexton, clerk, or churchwarden during these specific events. These ringers are

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36 London Church Records, All Hallows the Great, MS 76, 209.
38 London Church Records, All Hallows London Wall, MS 5090/2, fol. 10r.
identified as early as 1570, and appear throughout the accounts. Obviously ringers would have been required when more than one bell was rung for an extended period of time, but one entry in particular would lead us to believe that these ringers were not ignorant pullers of rope without training or knowledge of the bells. The Memorandum Accounts for St. Botolph’s clearly indicate that while the sexton often rang burial knells, even for several hours, ringers were generally hired to ring burial peals, and occasionally, the knells themselves.\textsuperscript{39} Sometime during the reporting period of 1578/79 at All Hallows we learn that 6d. was “paid unto one of the ringers for mending one of the Bells wich was reddy to fall”.\textsuperscript{40} Clearly this ringer had some knowledge of the bells, and was familiar enough to set about repairing it. That he was paid for his efforts might also suggest that his efforts were satisfactory enough to receive compensation. As early as the 1570s the bells of All Hallows were important enough and rung frequently enough to require the attention of a group of reasonably knowledgeable ringers.

The relationship between death, bells, and the duties of the sexton are vividly apparent in an entry from the Memorandum Accounts for St. Botolph’s Aldgate in 1588. Here the warden has recorded the burial of the sexton, and beside this entry he has carefully drawn a very small picture of a bell. This type of sketch does not appear beside any other burial entry in these accounts, nor do any other doodles appear in the margins of the accounts. This thoroughly unique illustration might either serve to give special commemoration to the death of the sexton by illustrating an object that was intimately associated with death, or to illustrate that the duties of the sexton were intimately associated with the bells of the parish.\textsuperscript{41} In an entry only four years previous, we learn that the sexton received three concurrent payments for the christening of an infant, for the churching of the infant’s mother, and for one hours ringing of the very same

\textsuperscript{39} London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Aldgate, 1583-1588, MS 9234/ 1, fol. 62v.
\textsuperscript{40} London Church Records, All Hallows London Wall, MS 5090/2, fol. 38v.
\textsuperscript{41} London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Aldgate, 1583-1588, MS 9234/ 1, fol. 95r.
mother’s burial knell, having died “in childbed”. The duties of the sexton thus very neatly linked life, death, and the bells.

Keeping these more general observations in mind, there are a number of other entries worthy of careful attention in the accounts of All Hallows London Wall. For the years 1587/88 and 1590/91 there are entries that recorded the purchase of a rope for the “Sanctus” bell, while an entry for 1595/96 registered the purchase of a rope for the “Sance” bell; each of these three ropes cost 6d.. It is most likely that all three of these references are referring to the same bell. Although none of the references indicate that this bell was in fact being rung, it was obviously rung frequently enough to warrant the purchase of three ropes in less than ten years. Evidently most ringing was not in fact recorded in the account. It is also probable that other ropes were purchased for this particular bell during the time period under consideration since most entries did not indicate the bell for which the rope was being purchased. In 1561 at the parish of All Hallows Staining in London, 6d. was spent to purchase rope for the saunce bell, and only 4 years later a further 10d. was spent to purchase more rope for the very same bell: evidence to suggest that the sanctus or saunce bells were indeed being rung with reasonable frequency early in Elizabeth’s reign. It is highly unlikely that this bell continued to be rung in association with the celebration of communion, however this possibility cannot be entirely dismissed. It is most probable that the Sanctus bell was rung before sermons, as has already been suggested. These entries provide conclusive proof that the Sanctus bell had indeed been co-opted by the Protestant agenda, and acknowledged as a sound of enough significant symbolic power not to be abandoned. The churchwardens continued to refer to the bell as the “sanctus” or “sance” bell and not as the “sermon” bell.

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42 Ibid., fol. 99v.
43 London Church Records, All Hallows London Wall, MS 5090/2, fol. 83r.-129r.
44 London Church Records, All Hallows Staining, MS 4958/1, fol. 124r., 133r.
If the purchase of bell rope is any indication of frequency of ringing then we should be attentive to the accounts of the parish of St. Botolph’s Aldgate in London. The Chantry Certificates of 1548 reveal that this was indeed a very large urban parish, serving nearly 1,130 communicants. In the midst of the Edwardian reforms, and some of the most concentrated efforts to destroy those objects associated with traditional religious ceremony, St. Botolph’s parish purchased 30 pounds of bell rope at a cost of 4s. 6d. Only five years later, 3s. 6d. was spent to purchase a new rope for the Great Bell, while an additional 6s. was spent for two more bell ropes. Without doubt there was far more attention paid to the maintenance of bells during Mary’s reign than during Edward’s, for there was a dramatic increase in expenditure on bell repair from 1553 onwards. The evidence suggests that the maintenance of bells was a low priority at St. Botolph’s from 1547-1552. But from the end of Mary’s reign and into the first decade of Elizabeth’s reign expenditure on the bells is relatively constant: baldrics were repaired, ropes were purchased, staples and clappers were replaced, and regular maintenance occurred. If one were to consider the frequency with which the bells were maintained and new bell ropes purchased, there would be nothing to suggest that the bells of St. Botolph’s were being rung with any more or less frequency from the reign of Mary to Elizabeth. There is admittedly some silence regarding the repair of bells during the reign of Edward, but there is no indication that burial ringing was any less frequent or extensive than during the reign of Mary. These burial

46 London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Aldgate, MS 9235/1-1, fol. 18v.
47 Ibid., fol. 42v.
48 Ibid., fol. 28r.– 63r.
49 Ibid., fol.28r. – 100r.
rings combined with the purchase of bell rope would suggest that even during the reforming reign of Edward, the bells of St. Botolph’s were far from silent.

Like All Hallows London Wall, the churchwardens’ accounts for St. Alban Wood Street reveal relatively consistent levels of spending and maintenance on their bells from the middle of Elizabeth’s reign up to 1639. The Chantry Certificates of 1548 reveal that St Alban Wood Street served a slightly larger congregation than All Hallows London Wall. Yet even though it boasted 300 communicants, 83 more than All Hallows, this was still a very moderately sized parish community by London standards. Nevertheless, William Catericke, the rector, received an annual salary nearly twice that of John Robardes, rector at All Hallows. There is further evidence that St. Alban was indeed a slightly wealthier parish in the inventories of 1552. Here we learn that at the time of King Edward’s investigations, the parish of St. Alban possessed a chime, a clock, five bells, and a sanctus bell. This was indeed a substantial collection, considering that St. Paul’s Cathedral, London’s largest church, also possessed five bells, and no London church boasted more than six. The purchase and repair of baldrics, ropes, and clappers are the most frequently mentioned expenditures related to bells, and appear rather regularly throughout this set of accounts.

However there do appear to be several significant and noteworthy projects and expenditures undertaken at St. Alban’s during the fifteen years beginning in 1588. The accounts for this year reveal the following two entries:

ffor exchange of 2 Bells…vi li

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51 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 46.
ffor the carriage of them and for Baldrics and repairing the 3 and 4 Bell…xx s.\textsuperscript{54}

Again, we are left to speculate regarding the manner in which these two bells were “exchanged”, but amendments to both their size and tune would not have been unlikely. The cost of these modifications indicates that these were indeed major renovations and could well have included the recasting of the bells. These changes in and of themselves were consistent with the requirements of change ringing, however more evidence should be sought before any speculative conclusions are made.

And in fact more evidence is readily apparent. In 1593 the accounts make their first mention of bell wheels. During this year the sum of 41s. 2d. was paid “for wheles and other raparacions done about the the bells this year now past”.\textsuperscript{55} An entry from 1596 indicates that 8s. and 8d. were paid “ffor a wheele and mending of the wheeles and stayes”.\textsuperscript{56} This would seem to suggest that a good deal of ringing had taken place between 1593 and 1596; either the wheels from 1593 were already in need of repair, or that which was in need of repair in 1596 did not require maintenance three years earlier. The mending of wheels and stays, vital for the ringing techniques employed by change ringing, indicates that such technology was already being used earlier than 1596. The 1593 accounts also record that 25s. 6d. were paid “to Robinson the Smith for work done about the bells as by his bill thereof appeareth”.\textsuperscript{57} It is not likely that the smith was engaged in regular repairs to bells, for there had been no previous mention of payment for his services, and his expertise was not required again until 1605 when he undertook some very minor repairs costing only 2s.

\textsuperscript{54}London Church Records, St. Alban Wood Street, MS 7673/1, fol. 11r.
\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., fol. 20v.
\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., fol. 26v.
\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., fol. 21r.
The accounts for St. Botolph’s reveal an interest in tuning as early as 1567/68. Here we learn that the bell founder, Robert Dodde is summoned “for trimming the bells” at a cost of 10s. Presumably this entailed cutting away bits of metal from the base of the bell in order to attain a more desirable tune. There is a subsequent entry that records the payment of an additional 17s. 6d. for the “taking up of the bell which was fallen downe and tuning of them”.

In very short time there was attention to the tuning of more than one bell, and we are left with the clear impression that during the first decade of Elizabeth’s reign it was not enough for a bell to be merely in tune with itself. Indeed there was a fairly substantial sum of money being paid to ensure that the bells could be pealed together and produce an aesthetically acceptable sound, which is significant given that most of the bell ringing explicitly recorded by these accounts is for burial ringing on a single bell. We must therefore conclude that even by the 1560s the bells of St. Botolph’s were pealed together frequently enough to warrant significant attention to their tune and that such ringing was not always recorded in the accounts.

While the entries for 1595 at St. Alban reveal a fair list of other rather standard repairs and expenditures on bells, the accounts for 1596 indicate the purchase of a new wheel and the “hoisting up of the Great Bell”. The purpose for hoisting the great bell is not indicated, and it was accomplished at very little expense. Indeed the significance of the event becomes evident when we learn that a parish collection was taken for a new casting of the great bell during the following year of 1597. This collection raised £12 18s. of which £8 14s. 8d. were specifically paid for the casting itself. Entries for this year reveal that the rest of the collection went towards a variety of payments for costs incurred related to the new casting and hanging of the great bell;

58 London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Aldgate, MS 9235/1-1, fol. 91v.
59 Ibid.
60 London Church Records, St. Alban Wood Street, MS 7673/1, fol. 26v.
61 Ibid., fol. 28r.-30r.
including the process of taking it down and having it weighed. This set of expenditures is subsequently followed by a page-long list of repairs made to the fourth, second, and “saunce” bells at the substantial rate of £13 5s., a sum which included the cost for newly casting the great bell. In 1599 one of the bells was newly hung at a cost of 6s., and an entry from the following year suggests that more than one bell was newly hung while the floor of the steeple was simultaneously mended. The “little bell” was then newly hung in 1601, and three more bells were newly hung in 1603, in addition to some construction work undertaken in the belfry. With the exception of a new hanging of the “santes” bell in 1611, there is no further mention of hangings until 1631 even though the accounts continue to keep detailed records of expenditures related to bell maintenance. Thus, beginning in 1588 there is ample evidence to suggest that repairs, construction, and modifications were undertaken in a manner that might suggest the implementation of the bell ringing techniques associated with change ringing. These renovations roughly mirror those undertaken at All Hallows London Wall, though they were initiated approximately fifteen years earlier at St. Alban’s.

Such evidence is also vividly apparent at St. Botolph’s during the final decade of the sixteenth century. In 1590 the parish paid the celebrated bell founder, Robert Mott, the substantial sum of £10 13s. 6d. for “changing the 2nd bell”. The very next year the parish agreed to pay Robert Mott the immense sum of £23 12s. 6d. “for the change of the great bell”. The decision to purchase these bells was made by the parish vestry, and although there is evidence that there was some disagreement about the changing of the bells, the essence of the dispute is not elaborated upon. Only a few years later in 1599, the 5th bell (tenor) was weighed

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., fol. 30r.-31r.
64 Ibid., years: 1601, 1603 (foliation unclear).
65 London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Aldgate, MS 9234/2, fol. 44r.
66 Ibid., fol. 3r.
and recast; however it was declared “untunable” and was sent back to be recast once again.\textsuperscript{67} The parish was clearly willing to incur enormous costs to overhaul its bells during the 1590s. Unless all three of these bells had been damaged, which was not likely the case, we should assume that recasting was motivated by new ringing techniques that required changes to weight (lighter) and tune.

The accounts from St. Margaret New Street also reveal an interest in recasting and changing the parish bells, at an even earlier date than those projects undertaken at St. Botolph’s. In 1577/78 we learn that £2, 8d. was paid to have the second bell recast, and only a decade later another of the parish bells (though the accounts do not indicate which bell) is sent to the founder’s for recasting at a cost of £2 2s. 6d. An additional charge of £1 7s. 6d. for “more metal” that was added to this bell at the recasting.\textsuperscript{68} This second recasting was probably prompted by the casting of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} bell in 1577/1578. The recasting of this other bell relatively soon after the recasting of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} bell suggests that it was recast for the purpose of improving its tune relative to the second bell. That additional metal was added to its recasting indicates that it was not simply recast because it had been damaged, but rather because its ring needed to be adjusted. During the very same year that the 2\textsuperscript{nd} bell was recast, the parish of St. Margaret also deemed it necessary to purchase a saunce bell, a clapper, and frame for this bell. They hired the services of a carpenter to hang this saunce bell in “the chapel”.\textsuperscript{69} Although this saunce bell was obviously kept separate from this rest of the parish bells, it was deemed necessary to newly purchase this type of bell in 1577/78. This particular saunce bell was big enough to require its

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., MS 9234/ 5, fol. 177r.
\textsuperscript{68} London Church Records, St. Margaret New Fish Street, MS 1176/1, years: 1577/78, 1588/89 (foliation not legible).
\textsuperscript{69} St. Margaret New Fish Street, MS 1176/1, years: 1577/78 (foliation not legible).
own set of wheels, as indicated by later repairs in 1596. Thus by the middle of Elizabeth’s reign, the parish of St. Margaret New Fish attended to two very different types of bells and rings: to the well-tuned external peals of the bells housed in her steeple, and to the solitary tolls of the saunce bell housed within her chapel.

**Tolling for the Dead and Dying**

The repair and maintenance of the bells ensured that they were ready and able to ring at the death and burial of parishioners. We can be sure that payments for ringing at death and burials were not always recorded, but we can also assume that not all parishioners requested ringing at death. The entries for 1576/77 at All Hallows London Wall indicate that while some parishioners specifically paid for a knell at burial, some entries seem to imply that payment was only received for “the breaking of ground”. This indicates that bell ringing at a burial was not always considered a necessary expense, and therefore those who opted not to have the bell rung in their memory could have chosen for a variety of reasons. Perhaps it was too expensive or perhaps it was objectionable for religious reasons. There is no evidence to suggest conclusively that the practice of ringing at funerals steadily rose or declined throughout these years. Most years indicate that some paid only for burial and some also paid for a knell, whereas other years appear anomalous. For example, records for 1606/1607 reveal that only a small minority of those who paid for burials also paid for knells, and yet ten years later most burial entries include a payment for such burial rings. The entries for the year 1616/17 would also seem to suggest that in some cases payment was made only for the knell and not the “ground”. Whether “ground” refers to the plot itself or the actual digging of the grave is unclear. It is possible that

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70 Ibid., years: 1596/97 (foliation not legible).
71 London Church Records, All Hallows London Wall, MS 5090/2, fol. 24r.
72 Ibid., fol. 170r., 198r.
that these parishioners were buried elsewhere, but this would make it difficult to understand why
the knell was rung by this particular parish. It is also possible that the digging of the grave was
undertaken by someone outside the employment of the parish, perhaps by the kin or friends of
the deceased. It is however unlikely that the churchwarden simply neglected to include this
reference to the “ground”, for the payment for these entries is noticeably less than those which
included “ground” and is therefore consistent with the notion that “ground” was in fact not
purchased. We can also be sure that ringing was often granted free of charge for a good number
of poor parishioners throughout England.

The entries for 1616/17 also reveal that some parishioners paid more for a knell than
others. During that year two parishioners paid 3s. 4d. for a knell, but a third parishioner paid 6s.
8d. for a knell, exactly twice as much.\textsuperscript{73} The larger payment must either have resulted in more
ringing, or in ringing on a more prestigious bell. The latter was almost certainly the case, for in
the entries for the year 1609/10 we learn that a ring on “the bell” cost 3s. 4d., while ringing on
the “great bell” did in fact cost precisely twice as much.\textsuperscript{74} The great bell was so named for both
its physical size and the size of its corresponding sound. The magnitude of its sound thus
became a reflection of the magnitude of those who could afford to have it rung in their memory.
The sound of the bell likely confirmed, if not gave legitimacy to, the realities of the existing
social structures of the parish community. The articles and injunctions showed no interest
whatsoever in stifling such social differentiation, for although there was every opportunity to
demand that the same bell be rung for every funeral, the issue was simply never addressed. The
articles and injunctions reveal the desire for religious conformity and the avoidance of excess,
however they were perfectly willing to permit the public and audible acknowledgement of the

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., fol. 179r.
realities of parochial social status. Indeed a short anecdote from the pages of Copley’s *Wits, Fits, and Fancies* (1614), as retold by William Andrews, vividly reveals how funeral ringing was purchased as a means of confirming the social and economic status of the deceased; although in this case not without some rather humorous confusion:

A rich miser and a beggar were buried in the same churchyard at the same time, “and the belles rung out amaine” for the rich man. The son of the former, fearing the tolling might be thought to be for the beggar instead of his father, hired a trumpeter to stand “all the ringing-while” in the belfry and proclaim between every peal, “Sirres, this next peale is not for R., but for Maister N.,” his father.75

David Cressy confirms that elaborate funeral rituals survived the Reformation, “not because they found justification in Protestant theology but because they served deep-rooted social and familial needs”.76 These needs revolved around the desire to confirm the established social order within a given community. The funeral was essentially a ritual concerned with asserting the realities of life in the face of death by “reaffirming secular and spiritual order by means of a corpse”.77 Cressy suggests that Protestant theology should have reduced funerals to rather “mundane” events, and yet in reality they continued to be highly complex social performances, that reflected the continuity of Catholic beliefs and traditions.78 He remarks that even in Essex and Kent, two regions at the forefront of the Protestant movement in England, funeral ritual reflected this continuity.

The concern with confirming and reaffirming the existing social order is evident in the practice of wearing black to the funeral. To be clothed in black was “a mark of dependency as well as respect”.79 The deceased often provided for large quantities of black cloth to be issued to

77 Ibid., 99.
78 Ibid., 100
79 Ibid., 107.
his dependents, both family and servants, so that that their proper relationship to him might be affirmed. The pall bearers too were chosen for their inferior social status, and were often paid for their labors of carrying both the cloth and the coffin. Thus these bearers reflected their dependency upon the charity of the deceased. “Carrying the coffin was here a menial task to be performed for pay rather than a mark of honourable fellowship and peer respect.”

Another social performance associated with the funerals of those who could afford it was the practice of distributing dole to the poor. According to Cressy this dole usually came in the form of money, food, and beer and normally satisfied seventy to eighty applicants, while some records indicate that the testator had left enough to satisfy up to 1200 of the parish poor. Cressy explains, “the poor defined themselves by their willingness to accept it. It was perhaps an act of deference to take the dead man’s money. Providing this money was a last deed of charity, a final and dramatic demonstration of the ability to distribute alms.” Not surprisingly the dole had the effect of attracting large numbers of people to a funeral, and the bell surely acted as the “summons to dinner at the cost of watching a stranger buried”. Thus the funeral bell would have had a very satisfactory effect upon both ends of the social continuum. The poor would surely have relished the opportunity to receive free food, beer, and perhaps even some money to fill their pockets, while the well-placed in the community would bear witness to realities of dependency within the parish. In effect the funeral bell indicated great feasting, a reaffirmation of life in the midst of death, or as Cressy states:

The funeral feast was an opportunity to discharge the tension of solemnity and reassert warm-blooded vitality. Conviviality, a coming together of the living, marked the conclusion of the ritual and a return to normal life.

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80 Ibid., 107.
81 Ibid., 108.
82 Ibid., 108.
83 Ibid., 109.
84 Ibid., 109.
The bell undoubtedly announced great communal feasting, but it also had the effect of symbolically assuring differentiation. Although the bells had been consciously disassociated with the more socially egalitarian feast days of traditional religion, funeral ringing had been maintained as a means of audibly separating the ruling classes from their social inferiors.\textsuperscript{85}

Some parishioners of St. Alban Wood Street desired that their knells be rung on a specific bell. In 1584 all burials payments included payment for a knell, but the records for 1585 indicated that some parishioners chose to pay a greater sum if their knell was rung on the great bell instead of the fourth bell.\textsuperscript{86} The burial entries between 1584 and 1587 are detailed enough to provide the burial location of each parishioner. We are also able to determine that all of the parishioners who were buried in the more prestigious location of the chancel received their knell only on the great bell, while the fourth bell was knelled for some who were merely buried in the body of the church. Therefore, at the very least, we can conclude that those parishioners buried in the most prestigious locations always had their status confirmed by the greatest of the bells. The entries between 1584 and 1587 also indicate that both children and women were eligible to receive their knells on the great bell.\textsuperscript{87}

Of the six burial entries for 1584/85 only one did not pay to receive a knell. This parishioner was the only child mentioned in the burial entries for that year. The amount paid would almost certainly indicate that this child was buried in the body of the church at a price of 6s. 8d. Two other parishioners were buried in the body of the church that year at the cost of 8s. 4d., but this price included a knell on the fourth bell. Later in the accounts we learn that the clerk or sexton received the same payment for each of these three burials, and each payment included a fee for the ringing of a knell. Did the child receive a free knell because

\textsuperscript{86} London Church Records, St Alban Wood Street, MS 7673/1, fol. 2r.-5r.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
he/she was a child? Were knells rung for all burials regardless of whether they were purchased or not? Were the parents too poor to pay? Or was this an error on the part of the churchwarden? A later entry from the Memorandum Accounts of St. Botolph’s suggests that it was considered the obligation of the parish to ring for all burials in their parish, when a stranger “was brought to our parish in the night and we received for the dutie of a knell with the great bell and the hearse cloth for the parishes use.”88 Whether the deceased was a member of the parish or not, and whether he had paid for a knell or not, it was the duty of the parish to commemorate this body with ringing.

The entries at St. Albans for 1585 also permit the historian to establish the profit that the parish stood to gain from the purchase of a knell. The records show that for a knell purchased at the rate of 18s., the clerk or sexton was to be paid 2s. 8d.89 Thus the parish stood to profit 15s 4d. During this same year the church received from parishioners the sum of £3 17s. 4d. for all services related to burials (specifically “pits” and knells). This amount represented fourteen percent of the total parish income for that year. In contrast, the parish paid out a sum total of 22s. for all expenses related to burials (to the clerk, sexton, and mason, for ringing and work related to the graves). This amount represented only six percent of the total parish expenditures for that year. Since this appears to have been a fairly standard year in terms of the number of burials, we should conclude that knells and burials could have provided a reasonably reliable source of income to the early modern parish. Thus, from a strictly financial perspective, there would have been very little reason to discourage bell ringing at burials and funerals.

It is difficult to understand why the churchwardens have omitted the inclusion of payments for burial knells. For example, the accounts for the year 1590 omit any reference to

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88 London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Aldgate, MS 9234/8, fol. 44r.
89 London Church Records, St. Alban Wood Street, MS 7673/1, fol. 4v.
the purchase of knells for all of the burial entries.\textsuperscript{90} This might suggest that no knells were in fact purchased that year, whereas the burial entries for the following year specifically indicate that knells were indeed purchased for every burial entry.\textsuperscript{91} Although it is certainly possible that no parishioner purchased a knell in 1590, the historian cannot make this denial with any certitude. The entries for 1590 indicate that it was perhaps a rather anomalous year. Only three burials are recorded, two for a child and the third for a wife.\textsuperscript{92} There is certainly evidence that both women and children did indeed receive knells, including knells upon the great bell, however these entries perhaps give cause for further investigation.

The accounts for St. Alban Wood Street occasionally offer vivid description of the length of the knells rung at burials. In 1592 three burial entries specifically indicate that knells of one hour in length were purchased.\textsuperscript{93} The extent of this ringing appears startling at first, although the cost of these three rings was certainly comparable to the knells purchased for the other burials which do not indicate the duration of ringing. Six burials were recorded for this year, and all six received knells. Three of these entries paid 10s. for a “pit” and “one hours knell”. Two of these other entries record higher payments, but do not indicate the ringing of knells for one hour (one of which was for the burial of a child). The sixth entry also makes no mention of knells for one hour, and paid 8d., but this did not include a “pit”. Thus there is no reason to suggest that an entry that specified a knell of one hour in length was any more expensive than those that did not. In fact, given the price comparison, there is reason to speculate that the other four burials were receiving knells of equal, or possibly even greater length. But the burial ringing at St. Botolph’s far exceeded even these one-hour tolls. As early as 1565/66 we begin to see entries that record

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., fol. 14r.-15r.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., fol. 18r.
knells of three hours in length, and by the 1580’s, two-hour knells appear to be quite common.\(^9^4\) While it may not match the six hours of ringing recorded in the preceding decades at St. Mary at Hill, there is no indication the demands of the injunctions, which required “short” rings or ringing without excess, were being met.

We also learn from the accounts from St. Botolph’s that it was also very common for parishioners to purchase passing bells and peals in addition to burial knells. There are records of parishioners purchasing anywhere from one to four passing bells, at a cost of 4d. for each bell. The purchase of peals were purchased at a consistent cost of 2s.\(^9^5\) Parishioners at St. Botolph’s quite commonly had three separate rings acknowledging their death: passing bells rung at the moment of death, one to three hours of knelling on one specified bell, and then an unspecified period of pealing accomplished on an unspecified number of bells. The peals would have obviously required payment for more than one ringer, they could have been at least as extensive as the knells, for although a two-hour knell on the third bell cost 8d., the purchase of a peal cost three times as much.

The payment for burial ringing in 1595 was referred to as “knell with the great bell and peales”.\(^9^6\) This is the first evidence of an attempt to acknowledge a difference between knells and peals in the St. Alban accounts. This reference to peals comes a year after a significant amount of money was spent on the construction and repair about the wheels, and in the midst of the aforementioned evidence for the development of change ringing. That hour-long tolls or peals were taking place at burials questions the extent to which this parish was obediently interpreting the repeated requirement that ringing before and after burial should be limited to “one short peal”. On the other hand, perhaps it would be more accurate to assume, unless there

\(^{9^4}\) London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Aldgate, MS 9235/1-1, fol. 83r.; MS 9234/1, fol. 3 v.
\(^{9^5}\) Ibid., MS 9234/1, fol. 3v. – 27v.
\(^{9^6}\) London Church Records, St. Alban Wood Street, MS 7673/1, fol. 24r.
is evidence to suggest the contrary, that a knell of one hour was in fact not only the norm, but well within the parameters of what was permissible.  

**Pealing for Protestantism**

Death and burial ringing acknowledged and commemorated the members of the parish, while royal ringing honoured the life of the sovereign. Ringing for Elizabeth celebrated her reign, her person, her interaction with the local community, and served as an aural reminder of God’s providence. I can add little to Cressy’s authoritative analysis of the development of the Protestant calendar of celebration that began with the national festivities and ringing associated with November 17th. The celebrations of Elizabeth’s coronation day represent the first annual concert of bells not tied to the Christian year. The bells that had been most closely associated with the festivities of All Souls’ Day were silenced but then reapplied to commemorate a wholly Protestant and wholly national event. These sounds of memory and celebration (including prayers and sermons) that had been most closely associated with the remembrance of the souls of the dead had been co-opted and applied to the ceremonies of commemoration for a Protestant sovereign. Ringing on November 17th would have had religious overtones, and thus the reign of Elizabeth would have received its share of sacred legitimacy. Indeed these overtones had the potential to result in outright ambiguity, for November 17th had been more traditionally

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97 The burial entries for 1616 appear to lend further support to the notion that peals, and not simply knells, were the norm at burials. Of thirteen entries listed only one specifically mentions payment for “knells and peals”. However this entry is also the least expensive of the 13 entries at a cost of 9 s. and 6 d.. The remaining 12 entries range in price from 14 s. and 6 d. to 20 s. and 4 d.. That the remaining 12 entries were significantly more expensive suggests that the knells and peals were implied, yet it is likely that this anomalous entry only included payment for knells and peals. Furthermore the two most expensive entries (20 s. 4 d. and 19 s.) were specified as payments for individuals who were “no parishioners”. This explains why they may have had to pay a higher rate, yet it remains probable that they were still eligible to receive knells and peals.

recognized as the popular feast of St. Hugh’s Day, and a number of parishes continued to record the date of their payments for ringing on Elizabeth’s coronation day as “St. Hugh’s Day”. In fact in one of his entries of 1575, the churchwarden at Bishop’s Stortford in Hertfordshire reveals the possibility that these two occasions were celebrated in rather effortless harmony: “bred, drinck, and cheese for Ringing on St. Hewes daye in reioysing of the queens prosperous Ragne”. The emergence of ringing for Elizabeth on November 17th was slowest in many of the northern dioceses, regions that were far more hesitant to lend their unwavering support to the Protestant cause. This reluctant evolution reinforces the symbolic power of the bells and their ability to lend audible legitimacy to a people’s convictions. The reformed Church of England was therefore not trying to change how bells were heard, but was in fact seeking to co-opt their enormously powerful audible symbolism for the benefit of conformity, Protestantism, and national loyalty. This act of co-opting may have in fact been far more conscious than one might initially suppose. An anonymous contemporary described November 17th as “a holiday which passed all the pope’s holidays”, thereby suggesting that there was indeed a conscious attempt to compare the customs and practices of Catholic religious festivities with a very Protestant, if not secular, celebration.

The addition of Elizabeth’s birthday to the Protestant calendar of celebration has also received its share of attention. This celebration would have had very obvious associations with the feast day of the nativity of the Virgin Mary. Elizabeth’s birthday happened to fall on September 7th, upon the eve of the nativity of the Virgin, a fact likely not lost on the early modern parishioner. More than one English Catholic expressed outrage at what they felt was a

99 Ibid., 51.
101 Ibid., 91.
102 Ibid., 87.
deliberate attempt to show contempt for the Virgin, and likened the ringing and festivities for Elizabeth to the idolatrous celebrations of antiquity.\textsuperscript{103} Whether the ringing on this day was deliberately anti-Catholic or not, it would have reflected a celebration of the very person of Elizabeth rather than her reign and her position of head of church and state. The sacralizing effect of the bells would certainly have lent her person even greater spiritual legitimacy, and would have consciously and unconsciously linked her even more closely with the mother of Christ. All of this would have been of even greater significance in the wake of the Northern Rebellion of 1569 and Elizabeth’s excommunication by Pope Pius V in 1570.

At St. Botolph’s the first payment for bell ringing in honour of Elizabeth is recorded in the accounts for 1560/61, at which time 20d. was paid “for ringing at 2 times when the Queen’s majesty came by”, presumably at the cost of 10d for each separate occasion.\textsuperscript{104} Elizabeth represented the restoration of the Protestant Church in England, yet only five years earlier St. Botolph’s had spent 16d. for “ringing of the Bells at the dirge and mass for the pope”; though it is unclear whether this would have been in honour of Pope Julius III or Marcellus II. Indeed the ringing for Elizabeth in 1560/61 does not appear much more enthusiastic than the ringing which took place in 1556/57 “at the coming of the king from beyond the Seas” at the cost of 8d. for the commemoration of a very Catholic and thoroughly foreign Philip II of Spain.\textsuperscript{105} However, the sum “paid for ringing of the bells when the Queen came in” recorded in the accounts of 1557/58 is remarkably low at 4d. and might reflect her decreasing popularity.\textsuperscript{106} But we should not assume that all the ringing for Elizabeth during the early years of her reign was accomplished with passionate enthusiasm, for we learn in the accounts of 1562/63 that 12d. was rung “when
the Queen went from Greenwich”, yet the parish was in fact fined 7s. 8d. for having neglected to ring in her honour on the return journey.\textsuperscript{107} There is some indication to believe that this early royal ringing for Elizabeth was not entirely voluntary. It also reveals a very early effort on the part of the Elizabethan administration to co-opt the power of the bells in an attempt to give sacred legitimacy to her reign. But such an effort would only have taken place in a context in which the bells were viewed as a powerful and convincing sacred sound in the first place.

The Church of St. Margaret New Fish Street gave very audible support for Elizabeth on June 16, 1586 when the bells of the church were rung “when the traitors were taken” in celebration of the foiling of the Babington Plot.\textsuperscript{108} The parish of St. Botolph’s perhaps celebrated this event even more explicitly on February 9\textsuperscript{th} of 1587. Here the churchwardens record “ringing for joy that the Queen of Scotland was beheaded.”\textsuperscript{109} The warden appears very conscious of the legacy he was leaving with his written record. In an attempt to preempt any misinterpretation, he was careful to state that these were not passing bells or funeral knells: these were not the sounds of mourning. The warden wanted to be certain that posterity would interpret the ephemeral sounds of these bells for what they really were, and how they were really heard: as the sounds of joy and celebration. Surely such joyous ringing would have been thoroughly displeasing to Elizabeth who by no means celebrated the death of Mary, and therefore were clearly unauthorized rings. The bells dictated that this was an occasion for joy, not mourning, lest any parishioner be uncertain how to interpret her execution. It is also very clear that the manner in which the bells were rung would have left very little doubt regarding purpose or intent of their rings. The same cannot be said for the parish of St. Andrew by the Wardrobe, whose

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., fol. 75v.
\textsuperscript{108} London Church Records, St. Margaret New Fish Street, MS 1176/1, years: 1586/87 (foliation not legible).
\textsuperscript{109} London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Aldgate, MS 9234/1, fol. 31v.
churchwarden simply recorded the payment of 12d. “to the ringers for Queen of Scots”\textsuperscript{110}. The manner in which this entry is recorded combined with the rather insignificant amount spent on ringing would not suggest that these were the rings of celebration. Instead we should be inclined to conclude that this ringing was meant as a small audible gesture of respect to the dead Queen, and surely more acceptable to Elizabeth.

In 1571 an entry from the accounts of All Hallows London Wall reveals that ringing took place to celebrate the “victory against the Turks”\textsuperscript{111}. This was obviously a reference to the naval victory of the Holy League against the Ottomans off the west coast of Greece in the Gulf of Patras. Even though the Holy League was essentially a Catholic force, its victory was deemed worthy of celebration by a Protestant parish in London, whose monarch had been excommunicated by the Pope only one year earlier. This ringing was therefore neither patriotic nor royal. The entry specifically stated that the ringing on this occasion was “for giving thanks unto god for the victory had against the Turk”\textsuperscript{112}.

The accounts of All Hallows London Wall contain one apparently anomalous reference to “ringing at festival tymes” for the year of 1610/11\textsuperscript{113}. There is no reference to ringing at festival times either before or after these dates. It is possible that this descriptor may have meant to include the ringing that took place on March 24\textsuperscript{th} in celebration of James I’s coronation day and on November 5\textsuperscript{th} in celebration of deliverance from the gunpowder plot, especially since there was no other reference to these events in the entries for this year. Prior to the reign of James I, the evening of March 24\textsuperscript{th} was more commonly recognized as the eve of Lady Day, the day which marked the turning of the annual business cycles in most parishes. Cressy observes that a

\textsuperscript{110} London Church Records, St. Andrew by the Wardrobe, MS 2088/1, year: 1586 (foliation not legible).
\textsuperscript{111} London Church Records, All Hallows London Wall, MS 5090/2, fol. 13r.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., fol. 182r.
number of parish entries which recorded ringing for the coronation day of James, indicate that
the payment was to the ringers “on our Lady Day even”.\textsuperscript{114} Perhaps the festivals of old had
indeed left their mark.\textsuperscript{115} However none of the entries from the preceding four years make
reference either to the two royal celebrations or to ringing on festival days. Furthermore, most of
the accounts for the years subsequent to this particular entry make explicit reference to ringing
on March 24\textsuperscript{th} and November 5\textsuperscript{th}, and indicate that ringers were always paid a total of 4s. 5d. for
both rings. However the ringers were paid the larger sum of 8s. 2d. was for “ringing at festival
times”. Therefore even if these rings did indeed include ringing for March 24\textsuperscript{th} and November
5\textsuperscript{th}, they most likely included ringing for another unnamed festival as well. It is perhaps just as
likely that the entire amount of this 8s. 2d. went towards the celebration of unidentified festivals.
Whatever the case may have been, it at least reveals the likelihood that bells were rung in a
celebratory manner for events and festivities that are not always readily apparent to the early
modern historian.

Just as Elizabeth was accorded her two days of royal celebration, James was granted his.
Although bells rang out in celebration of the coronation day of each of these monarchs, only
Elizabeth heard peals on her birthday. Instead the bells of November 5\textsuperscript{th} celebrated the safe
deliverance of the king and government from the gunpowder plot, and, perhaps more
symbolically, the safe deliverance of a Protestant nation from the threat of Catholicism. Bells
were used to celebrate national events and would therefore have had the effect of drawing the
attention of parishioners away from the local concerns and customs of the parish and focusing it

\textsuperscript{114} David Cressy, \textit{Bonfires and Bells}, 20.
\textsuperscript{115} Cressy shares the following anecdote which further reveals the potential ambiguity of ringing: “In
1570, it is said, some pro-Catholic members of Lincoln College rang the bells of All Hallows’, and were
rebuked by the mayor for ringing a dirge for Queen Mary on the anniversary of her death. When told
that, to the contrary, the ringing represented joy at the present queen’s accession the mayor ordered bells
throughout the city to be rung in the queen’s honour.” \textit{Bonfires and Bells}, 51.
upon the affairs and well-being of the realm. As already stated, there had been no example of national, secular ringing until the celebrations associated with Elizabeth’s coronation. The celebration of the deliverance from the gunpowder plot surely intended to link even more intimately the fate of the king with the fate of the nation, thereby reinforcing the vitality of national loyalties.

The accounts from All Hallows London Wall do not indicate that any ringing took place to celebrate any royal occasion linked with Charles I, however the entries for the last two decades before the civil war in the accounts of All Hallows London Wall are not rich in detail. There are records of payments for ringing during these years, but no indication what this ringing was for. The entries for the 1628/29 the churchwardens were specific enough to record the purchase of a monument for Elizabeth for a fairly substantial sum of £11. Certainly the significance of this amount would have prompted the churchwardens to give it detailed mention in the accounts, and yet Elizabeth is the only royal figure mentioned in the accounts during the reign of Charles:

Paid to the ryngers on the Quenes birth daie…xii d

Paid for a rope for the third bell against the Same daie…xviiid”\(^{116}\)

These entries explicitly indicate that both the purpose and bell for which the rope was purchased. This permits a more vivid re-creation of the parish soundscape of September 7\(^{th}\), 1588. Since the rope was purchased for the third bell, it is almost certain that the ringing of September 7\(^{th}\) consisted of the peals of more than one bell (in this case, likely at least three) and not merely the tolling of one bell, for it is difficult to imagine that the “Great” bell would not also have been

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\(^{116}\) London Church Records, All Hallows London Wall, MS 5090/2, fol. 90v.
rung in commemoration of the Queen. This entry also suggests that the peals would have been extensive enough to have warranted the purchase of a new rope for the occasion. Yet as extensive as these rings may have been, the ringers were only paid 12d for ringing on September 7th, compared with the vastly larger sum of 3s. 4d. for ringing on November 17th.117 Thus there is some indication that this ringing for the Queen did not take place grudgingly or without enthusiasm, and suggests that this particular parish was not ringing simply because it was ordered to, but because it was more than willing to give audible assent to her monarch.

The vigour with which the bells were rung on November 17th is given more explicit evidence in the accounts of St. Margaret New Fish Street, and at a much earlier date than those mentioned for All Hallows London Wall. On November 13, 1577 the parish began preparing for the ringing by purchasing new rope for 1s., 6d. Only two days later it undertook further preparation by purchasing a new baldric for the great bell at a cost of 2s., 1d.118 That these dates are even mentioned at all is significant. No other entries for bell-related costs for 1577 year or the next several years indicate the day or month for which bell-related costs were incurred until 1582 when it is once again clear that repairs were undertaken in order to prepare for ringing on November 17th. Did the wardens wish to preserve a permanent record of the enthusiasm with which the bells were rung for the Queen? Whatever his motives, he clearly wished to explain that these expenses were justified.

Ringing for Elizabeth’s accession day of November 17th did not find its origins in government legislation. Although some parishes appear to have begun ringing on this occasion

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117 David Cressy reveals that ringers at St. Edmunds’s in Salisbury were paid 4d. or 6d. for ringing at Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Whitsunday, compared with the 5s. they earned for ringing on September 7th and the 8s. on November 17th. The audible significance of these days should not be understated. Bonfires and Bells, 55.

118 London Church Records, St. Margaret New Fish Street MS 1176/1, years: 1577-1583 (foliation not legible).
as early as 1567 others did not begin until the decade following the defeat of the Spanish Armada.\textsuperscript{119} It was therefore the parish itself that determined whether or not it was going to ring on this day, and how extensive this ringing would be. The local sympathies and loyalties of the parish community inevitably determined the vigor of this ringing, and thus it is remarkable that, for the most part, ringing on November 17\textsuperscript{th} was both ubiquitous and fervent. Thus there is every indication that this ringing for the Queen did not take place grudgingly and suggests that these parishes, like most others, were not simply ringing because it was ordered to, but because it was more than willing to give her audible assent to the Queen. Indeed the enthusiasm for this day is also vividly evident in the accounts for St. Botolph’s Bishopsgate, where in 1577 the rather substantial sum of 6s. 8d. was spent on bread, meat, and drink for the ringers on November 17\textsuperscript{th}, doubling the amount spent on the ringers on coronation day the previous year.\textsuperscript{120} This larger new amount was continued in subsequent years.

Although ringing for the celebration of Elizabeth’s coronation day is evident as early as 1584, the accounts of St. Alban Wood Street for 1597 record the first mention for ringing on the Queen’s birthday.\textsuperscript{121} Although it is a relatively minor difference, the ringers were paid 3s. for ringing on coronation day, but only 2s. 6d. for the birthday celebrations. We can only conclude that the ringers either spent less time ringing or were responsible for fewer rings for the celebrations of September 7\textsuperscript{th}. And though the variance is small indeed, it does suggest that the festivities for the coronation exceeded those for the birthday. This appears to have been a conscious effort to establish the primacy of November 17th, for up until 1597 ringing for coronation day cost only 2s. 6d.. For the rest of Elizabeth’s reign the cost for ringing on

\textsuperscript{120} London Church Records, St. Botolph’s Bishopsgate, MS 4524/1, fol. 31v., 35r.
\textsuperscript{121} London Church Records, St. Alban Wood Street, MS 7673/1, 1597 (foliation not clear).
coronation day was 3s. while the amount paid for ringing on her birthday was set at 2s. 6d..\textsuperscript{122} Since there did not appear to have been any ecclesiastical or state orders that stipulated the amount of ringing that was to take place on these two days, we should assume it was the parish itself that determined that one celebration warranted more ringing than the other. Consequently, we might also conclude that the coronation held more symbolic relevance for the parishioners than did the birthday of the Virgin Queen.

In 1602 the wardens at All Hallows London Wall recorded the last ringing for Elizabeth during her lifetime. The next payments for ringers come in 1603, and these were to celebrate the king’s coming to London and his coronation day. The coronation day referenced in the accounts of 1603 was almost certainly July 25\textsuperscript{th}, and not the coronation date of March 24\textsuperscript{th} celebrated in subsequent years, which was in fact more properly the king’s accession day.\textsuperscript{123} July 25\textsuperscript{th} was indeed intentionally chosen for the coronation day, for it was traditionally recognized as St. James day. While it certainly would have lent force and legitimacy to the new king’s reign, that some churches continued to ring their bells on this date in later years suggests the possibility that these subsequent rings were interpreted in a variety of ways by different parishioners.\textsuperscript{124} The amount paid to the ringer on the occasion of the coronation day of the king was 2s. 6d., and this remained the standard fee paid for this service throughout his reign. The last time this fee was paid for ringing on the anniversary of Elizabeth’s coronation day was 1595, since that date 3s. had become the standard fee. Was the king’s ringing therefore less extensive or less fervent?

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 1601-1602 (foliation not clear). Entries for 1601 and 1602 combine payments for these two occasions in a single entry.

\textsuperscript{123} This seems supported by the entries for 1603 which place the record for payment for ringing to celebrate James’ arrival to London before the record for payment for ringing on the coronation day. It should also be noted that there was, however, no recorded payment for ringing at the death of Elizabeth.

\textsuperscript{124} Cressy, Bonfires and Bells, 28.
The significance of this fact should probably not be exaggerated due to the slim monetary difference, and yet we should not ignore it completely.

In 1613 the bells of St. Alban rang out in celebration of the marriage of James’ eldest daughter Elizabeth to Frederick V, the Elector of the Palatinate. These bells gave audible assent to a royal marriage, but they were also heard as distinctly Protestant sounds. After all, Elizabeth’s marriage was not only to a foreigner, but to one of the leading Protestant princes on the continent. The marriage was designed to more closely align James with the Evangelical Union on the eve of the Thirty Years’ War, and set him in opposition to the Holy Roman Empire. The bells would have announced and confirmed this very Protestant union, and therefore should be heard as the sounds of politics and religion, and not merely rings of royal matrimony.

The fee for ringing on Elizabeth’s wedding was only 1s., well below the standard amount paid for ringing on her father’s coronation day. The wedding was at least audibly acknowledged, however it was certainly not celebrated with exuberance. The same cannot be said for the ringing that took place in celebration of the return of Prince Charles from Spain in 1623, safe and bride-less. A fee of 2s. 6d. was paid for ringing upon this day, equal to the amount spent in celebration of James’ coronation day, and 1s. 6d. more than the cost for ringing on Elizabeth’s wedding day. Certainly the extent of such ringing reflects the very real fear for both the safety of Charles and the threat of another potential marital union with Spain, though he eventually married the Catholic Henrietta Maria of France. It may also indicate that anti-Catholic sentiment could arouse the passions of the parishioners far more easily and effectively than pro-Protestant unions. These rings not only celebrated the person of Charles as rightful heir to the throne, but

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125 London Church Records, St. Alban Wood Street, MS 7673/1, fol. 59r.
126 Ibid., fol. 80v.
also powerfully symbolized the anti-Catholic, anti-Spanish sentiment that flourished in England at the time.

The coronation of King Charles I in 1624 begins a rather busy decade for royal ringing at St. Alban:127

- Last ringing for March 24th, 1624 (2s. 6d.)
- Ringing for the proclamation of Charles, 1624 (2s. 6d.).
- Ringing for the solemnization of the Charles’ marriage, 1625 (2s.).
- Ringing for the coming of the king and queen to Whitehall, 1625 (2s.).
- Annual ringing for the king’s coronation day (2s. 6d.).
- Ringing for birthday of Prince Charles, 1630 (2s. 6d.).128
- Ringing for christening day of Prince Charles, 1630 (2s. 6d.).
- “Ringers on the Kings and queens and the Lady Mary’s birthdays and the Kings coronation day”, 1631 (4s. 6d.)
- Ringing on the duke’s birthday, 1633 (4s., combined with payment for ringing on coronation day).
- Ringing on the queen’s birthday and November 5th, 1634 (4s. 2d., combined with payment for ringing on coronation day).

It is true that many of these occasions for royal ringing do not appear in any of the previous accounts, but these very same royal events had not occurred for more than seventy years; no marriage of a monarch had been solemnized since the reign of Mary and no royal birth or christening had occurred since the reign of Henry VIII.129 There are a number of other rings that do appear novel, relative to the accounts of St. Alban and All Hallows London Wall. In 1531 we learn that there was ringing for four separate royal occasions. Ringing in celebration of a monarch’s birthday, coronation day, and the birth of a royal heir all had precedent, but ringing to celebrate the birthday of the queen consort did not. The payment for ringing for these four events is notably low. If we assume that ringing for the king’s coronation day remained at the

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127 Ibid., fol. 82r.- 107r.
128 Ibid., fol. 100r. The entry for 1630 combines payment for coronation day ringing for the king, the birthday of prince, and the christening day of prince. The total paid for ringing was 7s. 6d.. Since the standard rate for ringing on coronation day was 2s. 6d., it is logical to conclude that the remaining 5s. was divided equally for ringing for the prince.
129 The children of James I had all been born before his coronation in 1603.
standard rate of 2s. 6d., then only 2s. remained to be divided amongst the remaining three rings. We are able at least to conclude that ringing for the king’s birthday most certainly cost less than 2s., and thus the audible celebrations of his birthday would have paled in comparison with the 2s. 6d. worth of ringing for Elizabeth’s birthday more than thirty years ago. If we assume that the majority of these 2s. were spent for ringing on the king’s birthday, then ringing for the queen and his newborn daughter would have been extremely minor celebratory affairs indeed. If these payments were relatively equal, then the audible festivities for the king would have been remarkably undistinguished.

Charles’ birthday fell on November 19th, while the celebrations for Henrietta Maria’s birthday fell on November 16th and therefore these festivities surely found themselves in rather uncomfortable proximity to November 17th. Cressy observes that the 1620s witnessed the revival of the cult of Elizabeth I, and this included renewed ringing of the bells on November 17th. In order to prevent the birthdays of Charles and Henrietta Maria from being overshadowed by Elizabethan fervor, parishes were commanded to ring specifically for the birthdays of the current royal couple. The accounts of St. Alban do not indicate that this parish rang for Elizabeth on November 17th of 1631, however they do suggest that it carried out very muted ringing for Charles and Henrietta Maria. These rather minimal payments indicate that these rings were not only less than enthusiastic, but also easily interpreted as very grudgingly given assent to the Stuart regime. Therefore, even though royal authority could command the bells to be rung for the purposes of reinforcing and legitimizing their reign, the parish maintained enough autonomy over the bells to ensure that even obligatory ringing could

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130 Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, 137. Cressy provides a full discussion on royal occasions for ringing during the reigns of Elizabeth and the early Stuarts as revealed by the churchwardens’ accounts, 50-65. 131 Ibid., 137.
be potentially manipulated to serve and express the interests of the parishioners over those of the
monarchy.

Entries for 1633 and 1634 also draw our attention to a decrease in payments for ringing. If payment for ringing on coronation day in 1633 was still at the standard rate of 2s. 6d., then only 6d. was paid for ringing on the duke’s birthday. If this were indeed the case, then we should be alarmed by this remarkably low sum; if it were not, then we should acknowledge that the ringing for the king was less vigorous than it had been during the reign of Elizabeth. In either case, a political statement seems to be evident. The entries for 1634 also suggest a decrease in payment for royal ringing. There was a payment made for ringing on the queen’s birthday, but there was no mention of ringing on the king’s birthday. It would be difficult to believe that this escaped the notice of the churchwarden, and it is equally difficult to understand why this parish would have chosen to ring for Henrietta Maria but not for her husband. There is reason to speculate that the rings of 1634 for the queen’s birthday and those for coronation day were not meant to celebrate either Henrietta Maria or Charles I, but instead to commemorate Elizabeth. There are certainly several reasons to suggest that this may have been the case. First we have already observed a steady decline in payments made to ringers in celebration of the reign of the Stuarts, thereby suggesting the absence of parochial enthusiasm for the reigning monarchs. Second, we have already indicated that there had been precedent for ringing for Elizabeth’s coronation since the 1620s. Third, such an explanation would more convincingly explain why the churchwarden included payment for the queen’s birthday but not the king’s. And finally, only this explanation would put the churchwarden’s listing of these three events into chronological order: September 7th (birthday), November 5th (gunpowder day), November 17th (coronation day) vs. March 27th (coronation day), November 16th (birthday), November 5th
(gunpowder day). If this were the case, it could give very convincing evidence for the use of bells as the very public and enormously powerful voice of parish dissent. We should approach this conclusion with caution, for this need not be read as explicit dissent. Royal ringing for the Stuarts may have lacked vigor, or may have been completely neglected, but this may not necessarily reveal overt anti-Stuart sentiments amongst the parish community. In fact it may simply reveal that the royal ringing for the Stuarts was void of the religious symbolism so intimately linked with those royal rings of Elizabeth’s reign. The occasion of her birth and coronation had become explicitly Protestant occasions, while the royal anniversaries of the Stuarts struggled to symbolize anything beyond secular authority. Religion stirred passions, and the bells had been the audible expression of these sacred passions for centuries. The reign of Elizabeth had been invested with sacred significance, but the reign of the Stuarts, with the exception of their deliverance from the gunpowder plot, remained uncomfortably secular as a result of their suspected intimacy with Catholicism. Royal ringing for the Stuarts had become a far less relevant tool of audible affirmation. The process of detaching bell ringing from its sacred symbolism and its associated passions would have inevitably altered the traditional function and significance of bell ringing. For it was in this context that bell ringing as a secular leisure activity, manifest as change ringing, became possible.

Conclusion

Christopher Marsh maintained: “The concept of sacred space survives the Reformation.”132 In his study of the function and location of the pew in Reformation churches, Marsh concludes that the worship experience of early modern parishioners, within the walls of

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their parish, was profoundly significant on multiple levels. Marsh does not deny that worship experiences could do much to legitimize the secular social realities and hierarchy within a particular community, but he is eager to affirm the enormously symbolic power and influence of sacred space. Sacred space mattered.

It is hardly surprising that the pew should come to take a more prominent place within the church as hearing becomes the dominant act of protestant worship (e.g. listening to sermons, bible readings, and prayers). Parishioners sat so that they could hear. Within this context the bells continued to ring, of that there is no doubt. Indeed they were still sacred sounds, and their sacredness was rooted in the customs and traditions of traditional religion. They were no longer rung in association with the celebration of the saints, holy hours, prayers for the dead, and the elevation of the host, yet bells were still inexplicably linked with worship, sermons, death, and dying, in ways that protestant theology itself could not even fully justify.

This sample of churchwardens’ accounts reveals that the parish bells played a central role in the life of the parish throughout the reign of Elizabeth and into the rule of the Stuart kings. The accounts clearly indicate that the Elizabethan parish was eager to meet the cost of maintaining the parish bells and willing to implement new bell ringing technology. This enthusiasm was not rooted in the ringers or ringing societies but in the hearts and ears of parishioners themselves. There is every indication that this enthusiasm was stimulated by the desire to maintain the association between bell ringing and death. The Elizabethan accounts demonstrate a continued demand that the bells remember the souls of dead and dying parishioners, and that this process of remembrance could simultaneously and powerfully

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133 See John Craig, “Psalms, groans and dogwhippers: the soundscape of worship in the English parish church, 1547-1642” in Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, eds., Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 104. Craig argues that, “if sacred space existed for English Protestants, it was found pre-eminently in the place and sounds of worship…”.
acknowledge the realities of the existing social order. The accounts also demonstrate that this power was vividly understood by those officials who sought to use the parish bells to audibly acknowledge the supremacy of the crown, and most certainly to express this political power with a sound traditionally linked with spiritual authority.
Conclusion

Persistence of Bells

There is little doubt that the printed text was gaining a prominent and powerful place within early modern English culture, but it would be wrong to suggest that the age of the ear had passed. The introduction of the sermon bell, the demands for silence during services, the ringing of bells for various royal occasions, and the frequent ringing of bells associated with death and dying, all reveal a world that was significantly defined by its soundscape. This was undoubtedly an age of hearing and listening. For this reason evangelicals tried to order what the laypeople heard, parishes placed great value in their bells and rang them with enthusiasm, and the state attempted to co-opt parish ringing to inspire the loyalty of a nation to royal government. The prominence of bell ringing during this period of religious, political, and cultural change has allowed us to examine the function of these bells, and the attitudes towards them. This in turn has helped us make a number of observations and conclusions regarding the extent to which England maintained her ties with traditional religion during this period of reform.

Pre-Reformation bell ringing was heard as a sound that linked the members of a parish with their local community. Whether by announcing service times at the parish church, by linking her parishioners with the souls of the departed, or by audibly uniting the members of her parish in the celebration of feast days of the saints, the bells would have been heard as parochial sounds. The Reformation tried to change the way these sounds were heard. A good deal of
evidence suggests that later Tudor bell ringing could be heard to acknowledge and celebrate a national political and religious community over a strictly local one. Royal and ecclesiastical attempts to use the bells helped enforce uniformity of religion throughout the realm. Such attempts can be heard in the ringing of the sermon bell, the restrictions on bell ringing at funerals, the silencing of bell ringing on the night of All Hallows’ Day, and the effort to encourage the ringing of the parish bells in honour of the Protestant rule of Elizabeth and her early Stuart successors. We begin to hear bells that were struggling to inspire a greater sense of loyalty both to a fledgling national church and to the royal rule that stood at her head.

The bells were indeed beginning to be heard as a celebration of the state, and of one’s participation in a rapidly expanding community, yet there is little doubt that late Tudor and early Stuart bells were still heard as local sounds. Perhaps no other sound better acknowledged one’s membership in a finite local community than funeral ringing and those bells associated with death and dying. These bells defined the parish and identified her parishioners, and they celebrated the life and death of local individuals regardless of their social standing. These were certainly not the sounds of national uniformity or national identity. The funeral bells would have been heard as reminders of the imminent mortality of the very people you argued with, laboured for, laughed at, and drank with; of neighbours, kin, and self. These were not the sounds of untouchable kings and queens, of distant bishops, or of abstract notions of national loyalty. These were tangible and imminently relevant sounds. And so, as much as some evangelicals detested these audible reminders, and as seemingly little biblical justification there was for ringing them, the bells would not be silenced.

The injunctions and visitation articles clearly reveal the ecclesiastical effort to order and restrict parish bell ringing. However, they also demonstrate that they were never entirely
successful in their quest to instil uniformity, prevent excess, and stamp out perceived superstition. This failure to create an ideal Protestant soundscape is evident both because many of the requirements on bell ringing were repeated many times in several dioceses throughout this period, and since the churchwardens’ accounts do not indicate that burial ringing was really being significantly discouraged. If the hotter evangelicals were in fact successfully limiting the ringing of parish bells and reducing the role of these bells in the life of a parish, then we should expect to detect a diminished sense of obligation to the bells, and that this would be reflected in the churchwardens’ accounts. This is not the case. Instead, these accounts confirm that the bells continued to be rung, ringers continued to be hired, and parishes continued to make significant financial commitments to the maintenance and purchase of bells.

There is definitely evidence to suggest that the injunctions and visitation articles did have an important impact on bell ringing; for they undeniably changed, silenced, or limited certain rings. The sermon bell replaced the ringing of the sacring bell at the elevation of the Host, bell ringing on All Hallows’ night effectively disappeared, ringing for the Aves was either silenced or reinterpreted, ringing in celebration of a national Protestant faith was newly instituted. Although burial ringing still appeared to continue with great regularity and fervour, the days of six hour ringing at a funeral had essentially come to an end. Parishes kept ringing their bells in ways that would have displeased the ears of many evangelicals, and yet there is little doubt that these very same evangelicals did enjoy some degree of success in their effort to change the sacred soundscape and the way the bells were heard.

The still remarkable burial ringing of one, two, or even three hours in length would continue to dominate the parish soundscape during the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, but we should still be aware that a compromise had been forged and that these rings had in fact been
reduced. But the link between death and bell ringing most certainly remained. Although there was little state or ecclesiastical effort to sever this link, there were certainly attempts to order and restrict this particular type of ringing. The reformed Church of England undoubtedly experienced a good deal of success in its effort to eliminate a belief in purgatory and destroy the infrastructure that sustained it. Bell ringing associated with death and dying could no longer be permitted to be heard as sounds that linked the world of the living with the world inhabited by the souls of the dead. To achieve this goal reformers were willing to allow ringing to take place as long it would only be interpreted as a reminder to pray for the dying parishioner, as an announcement of death, or as a sound of commemoration and mourning. This was more easily said than done. The injunctions and articles appear to tread cautiously on this matter: eager to prevent excessive ringing, but careful not to impose restrictions that would not be obeyed.

As displeasing as these sounds may have been to the hotter sort of Protestants, they were not eager to explicitly decree that the bells were inherently wicked objects which deserved to be defaced or destroyed. They were however fundamentally concerned that the bells were not being rung in a manner that was excessive, that was guilty of unintelligibility, that encouraged superstition and inspired disorder - all fundamental threats to the evangelical agenda. Although these English Reformers could have easily reiterated Bullinger’s vehement opposition to parish bell ringing, they seem to have consciously shied away from such an extreme position. For indeed, a number of these evangelicals appear to have actually seen the bells as useful and beneficial sounds. The act of hearing was one of the essential concerns of these Reformers. Hearing the gospel read and preached took far greater priority than the visual wonders traditionally associated with the celebration of the Eucharist. In this context, the bells were both a potential threat to the sacred soundscape, but also as enormously useful tools in the
evangelicals’ quest to bring order and unity to a sacred soundscape that was constantly threatened by distracting noise.

The evangelical agenda was therefore willing to continue to link the bells with prayer and the announcement of public worship services. The bells of the parish would have been particularly attractive for the extremely public nature of the sound they produced. It would have been very difficult to hear the resounding and penetrating sounds of the great parish bells as the sounds of elitism, separatism, or private religion. A sacred soundscape dominated by the sound of parish bells would undoubtedly have been consistent with the goal of national uniformity of religion. The Church of England may have been interested in using the bells to promote prayers for the sick and to remind parishioners of their own mortality, however it would have been very difficult to discourage both ringing for the souls of the dying and in remembrance of the dead. In 1638/1639 Wren reminded us that the battle was not only against the superstition and excess associated with the Church of Rome, but also against the non-conformity and anti-episcopal notions of an increasing number of Puritans. But there is evidence to suggest that this was a fine balance that could simply not be maintained. Wren objected to those Puritans who neglected to toll at death because they feared expressing thanksgiving for a reprobate soul, yet he would have to endure what appeared to be a renewed enthusiasm for burial ringing, and more frequent demonstrations of what the Reformers had come to describe as superstitious ringing.

The visitation articles and injunctions provide us with a number of clues that suggest that Elizabethan and early Stuart parishes continued to demonstrate a particular enthusiasm for bell ringing. We have seen how this very same enthusiasm is also neatly corroborated by the churchwardens’ accounts of a number of London parishes during this same period. These

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1 Kenneth Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, ii. 203.
accounts reflect that the bells were maintained at significant cost to the parishioners throughout the reign of Elizabeth and the early Stuarts. During this period, a number of London parishes not only continued to dedicate funds for the proper functioning of the bells, but also made significant financial commitments to several restoration projects related to the bells. These parishes further demonstrated their enthusiasm for their bells and the sound they produced through their attention to tuning and their effort to hire groups of specialized ringers to sound forth their peals.

Many of these London accounts support Cressy’s conclusion that funerals did not become mundane events during this period of reform. While there is no longer evidence of funeral ringing for half a day, there is little evidence to suggest that the parishes were eager to limit their burial or funeral ringing according to the terms set forth by the injunctions. Therefore these audible funeral performances revealed continuity with those traditional customs and sounds associated with death. Not only would this reformed burial ringing have evoked a memory of the traditional relationship between the living and the dead, but it also would have continued to reinforce the existing social hierarchy within the parish community.

The Elizabethan and early Stuart soundscape was infused with the sound of bells. Throughout this period the visitation articles and injunctions reveal the persistent link between bell ringing and death, worship services, and prayer, while the churchwardens’ accounts highlight the unremitting commitment of the parishes to the ringing, maintenance, and rejuvenation of the bells. We are left to conclude that most parishioners of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth wanted the bells of their parish to be rung. The emergence of Protestant royal ringing during the latter half of Elizabeth’s reign should indicate that there had been no real effort to change how bells were heard, for this new royal ringing was merely taking advantage of the meaning and power that the bells were already capable of expressing, and taking advantage
of the sacred and commemorative qualities that parishioners already ascribed to the sound of the bells. This enthusiasm required ecclesiastical authority to implement sanctions or restrictions on bell ringing while still keeping a sympathetic ear attuned to the popular sounds of the parish. And it is here that the historian can hear the echoes of continuity and consensus: the willingness of an ecclesiastical hierarchy to exploit and accommodate parochial soundscapes.² Although this reforming Church of England was undoubtedly motivated by Protestant theology, it was perhaps equally determined to formalize the customs and practices of the parish in the name of uniformity.³ And this determination permitted a good deal of accommodation. Compromise undoubtedly had its risks for the Reformers – excess and superstition loomed around every corner – but there was the eternal hope that a uniform, national, Protestant identity could yet be constructed.

There has been a great debate over the questions of whether the Reformation in England was ‘fast’ or ‘slow’, and whether it was instigated from ‘above’ or ‘below’, however it is clear that none of these conclusions give an accurate account of the realities of the period. A closer look reveals that the process of reform was often complicated and inconsistent, not always cooperating with our efforts to neatly identify and label observations and conclusions. There were times when the ecclesiastical hierarchy appeared rigid and heavy-handed in its requirements of parochial worship and customs, and yet we are often surprised by their rather moderate demands and apparent accommodations. There were times when London can be described as the hotbed of Protestant thought and theology, and her parishes as models of the Protestant ideal; and yet we are often surprised by the willingness of these same parishes to continue some of those practices and customs most associated with traditional religion. We can

³ See David Cressy, Bonfires and Bells and Birth, Marriage, and Death.
sympathize with Ethan Shagan’s general conclusion that the English people were not passive bystanders in the process of religious reform, but we can also detect their enthusiasm for parochial religious life.\textsuperscript{4} Parishioners did at times act to slow the pace of reform and temper its outcomes, but they also found many of these changes to be attractive and worth embracing. London parishes did not ring enthusiastically for Elizabeth because they had confusedly concluded that she had replaced the Virgin Mary; they did so because they approved of her Protestant rule and the bells were the most powerful way of expressing this approval. Likewise, they did not continue to ring their bells at funerals because they were defiant Catholics, but because they felt that powerful, audible sounds at death needed to be retained, and that strict Protestant interpretations of bell ringing (e.g. Bullinger) were either not necessary or incorrect.

Some things changed, and some things remained the same. Reformers infiltrated the ranks of ecclesiastical authority and attempted to order and direct parish worship and customs, while the parishioners helped shape and direct the priorities of these reformers.\textsuperscript{5} This process may indeed reflect that bishops of all theological stripes, including the hotter sorts of Protestants, tended to conclude that order, discipline, and uniformity were more essential and useful than strict obedience to an unwavering precept or practice.\textsuperscript{6} This sort of engagement between church authorities and the laity that might also have helped produce a cultural climate that forced a good deal of thoughtfulness about faith.\textsuperscript{7}

But how does all of this enrich our understanding of the history of the senses during the English Reformation. It is tempting to assume that most Protestant movements of the sixteenth century sought to reduce or eliminate the link between faith or salvation and the external experiences of the senses. Protestants wanted to emphasize a deep, personal, and introspective relationship with God, built upon the foundations of grace and faith. Yet most medieval and Reformed religious thinkers were in fact in agreement on one fundamental point: that the misuse of the senses could be detrimental to worship, while the proper use of the senses could be beneficial.\(^8\) The English reformers may have idealized what was right and godly worship, but they were not so inflexible as to deny that well-ordered and uniform sensory experiences were capable of achieving godly worship. The idealism of the reformers did not necessarily blind them to the realities of worship.

It is important to ask whether or not sixteenth-century Protestant reformers were interested in controlling and limiting the role of the senses in worship because they believed that God could not be sensed, or if they simply feared that the senses were dangerously capable of confusing the process of salvation, and the role humanity played in this process.\(^9\) Certainly the Reformers believed that God’s truth could be heard through sermons; for indeed a godly sermon was nothing but extremely well ordered and intelligible sound. They also believed that something of the truth of God could be tasted through the Eucharist, but only if the administration of this sacrament was radically reconstructed. There was a constant danger that the bells would be rung superstitiously and excessively, but also the potential for them to rung in a godly, intelligible manner, a manner through which the truth of God could indeed be sensed. But as the prohibition of ringing on All Hallows’ night suggests, reformers believed that some

\(^9\) Ibid., Chapter II.
sensory experiences were simply beyond reinvention, and needed to be set aside. It was not that these reformers believed that God could not be experienced by human senses, but rather that humans were hypersensitive and incapable of rightly deciphering the true and eternal meaning of all that they sensed. Moreover, these evangelicals were convinced that human senses were not able, in and of themselves, to provide an adequate foundation for true belief. They believed that one of the essential flaws of traditional religion was that it had grown incapable of properly governing or controlling the senses. Nevertheless, Matt Milner points out that even Cranmer was willing to acknowledge that Thomas, the disciple of Jesus, was able to discern the truth of Christ through the application of his senses. We are reminded that even Bullinger only wished to eliminate the link between bell ringing and prayer because he had become convinced that these types of prayers had become incomprehensible and insincere. The English reformers, on the other hand, were still willing to maintain this link between bell ringing and prayer; clearly convinced that the senses could still inspire sincere, conscious, and worshipful prayer. They were still willing to endure these audible remnants of a Roman past, as long as their peals were ordered, restricted, and contained. And with that, the bells continued to ring.

10 Ibid., 38. Matt Milner very interestingly argues that the Renaissance movement essentially asserts the same conclusion by acknowledging that the senses could in fact act as obstacles to the intellect. Renaissance artists spent a good deal of time rationalizing the act of seeing through their emphasis on visual perspective. And so, perhaps the Reformers simply prove themselves to be good Renaissance men through their own acknowledgement that the senses needed to be reordered, controlled, and guided if they were ever to be expected to be used to discern truth.
11 Ibid., 152.
12 Ibid., 219.
13 Milner implies that pre-Reformation bell ringing was primarily apotropaic in nature. He then goes on to conclude that Reformation “bells were reduced to notifying parishioners of events, rather than acting as a protection against evil” (Ibid., 301). However, neither of these descriptions adequately depict the function or interpretation of bell ringing in either period.
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