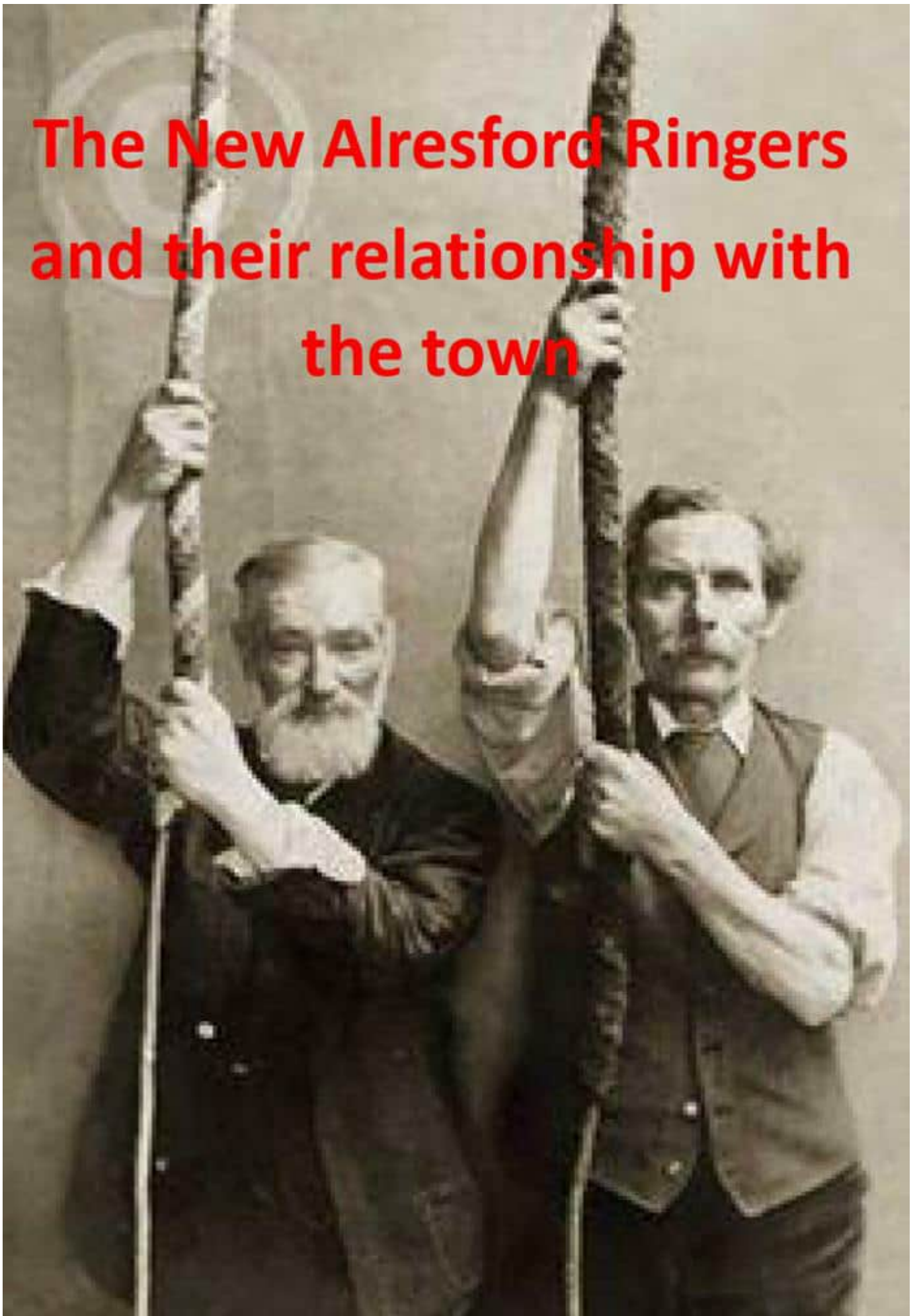


**The New Alresford Ringers
and their relationship with
the town**



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Preface

This booklet has been produced as part of a project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to research the history of bells and bellringing along the line of the Pilgrims Way between Ropley and Winchester, so that we may engage new audiences with the heritage of bells and bellringing.

We thank the Alresford Historical and Literary Society for permission to use the photograph on the front cover and acknowledge the input of Elizabeth Johnson for her research through the archives in the Hampshire Record Office and the tower, and Gareth Davies for his research on the development of change-ringing and the activities of early ringers.



Background – Henry VIII and the reformation

In the 15th and 16th centuries there was a protestant reformation in parts of Europe. In England, starting in 1534, Henry VIII broke from the authority of the Pope and the church of Rome. The dissolution of the monasteries commenced in 1536. In 1539 William Tyndale translated the Bible into English and Latin was no longer used in services

Between 1553 and 1558 Mary I, a devout Catholic became Queen and reversed some of these reforms. However, upon Mary's death Elizabeth I, a protestant, took the throne and reversed the changes again.

Under the Elizabethan settlement, Catholic mass was forbidden and by law everyone needed to attend church. She was also concerned that traditional superstitions went hand in glove with Popish observances. She prohibited the use of the passing bell, channelling bellringing into celebratory secular occasions.

Many pre-reformation bells were named after saints, so in an increasingly puritan England, from 1643 bellringers were constrained by an Act of Parliament from ringing all their bells on Sundays, and only a solitary bell was permitted to call the faithful to worship. This continued till the Victorian period, when the Oxford Movement introduced high church Anglo-Catholicism.

Pleasure ringing and the development of change ringing

One impact of this was that the ringing of bells was taken up as a pleasurable form of physical exercise for young men. There was also competition between various groups of ringers to practice changing the sequence that the bells rang in, rather than simply ringing them down the musical scale. From the early 1600's traditional patterns of changes emerged, in a similar way to folk dancing. These patterns or 'methods' became increasingly complex and often had local names, depending on where they were rung.

There was much rivalry to be the first to ring all the possible changes on seven bells – 5,040 different permutations. The first band known to achieve this feat or 'Peal' were the band at St Peter Mancroft in Norwich on May 2nd 1715. Other bands may have achieved this feat earlier, but there are no surviving records.

In the eighteenth century, bell ringing had spread quite widely and there was considerable rivalry between town and village bands. Many bell ringing competitions were also held, with prizes such as hats and scarves donated by the local publicans or squires. Advertisements for these competitions were usually published in local newspapers. We know of competitions held nearby at Odiham, Barton Stacey and Basingstoke, and the Alresford men may have participated in them, although we know of no competitions held at New Alresford itself.

Paid ringing

Throughout the 18th century and the much of the 19th century bellringers played an important part in civic life. Only one bell might be rung before services, but all the bells in the tower would be rung for a manner of civic and secular purposes, and the ringers were paid to do this. Gareth Davies has conducted extensive research into the roles that bellringers played in Cambridge during this period and there is an interesting podcast interview with him about his research¹.

¹ [Remarkable PHD study of Cambridge bellringers' pay and habits | Fun with Bells - a podcast about bell ringing](#)

As Gareth explains in his book ‘Foolish Youths and Substantial Rewards’², payments to the ringers may have come from the church itself, but the Cambridge ringers were also paid, for example, by members of the public to celebrate their weddings (marriages were different then), by candidates in elections (elections were also very different), by winning syndicates in lotteries, and by the railway company to celebrate the opening of the railway. Similar things were probably happening all over the country. As Gareth explains, although small by today’s values, at the time they were significant sums of money.

Payments to New Alresford bellringers

At New Alresford from about 1768 there are comprehensive records in the churchwarden’s accounts showing there must have been an active band of ringers with entries for five ringing days, one for £1/17s/6d occurring annually for the ringers, and for entries such as mending belfry door key 6d.

In 1783-4 there are entries of cash paid to:

Stephen Fowler	One ringing day	7/6d
Richard Freeman	One ringing day	7/6d
Tho Taylor	One ringing day	7/6d
Tho Weston	One ringing day	7/6d
Widow Curtis	One ringing day	7/6d

In 1784-5 there are entries of cash paid to:

Peter Loft	One ringing day	7/6d
F Houghton	One ringing day	7/6d
Tho Taylor	One ringing day	7/6d
Jno Beazley	One ringing day	7/6d
Richard Boxall	One ringing day	7/6d

7s 6d was about the same as a labourer’s weekly wage in the 1780’s³, so it appears that the Alresford men, like the Cambridge ringers, were also well rewarded.

An entry for 23rd March 1789 states the bells rang for the whole day to celebrate King George III’s late happy recovery. Furthermore in 1803 7/6d was paid for one ringing day when the King passed through the town. However, by 1808-9 the Churchwardens accounts show payment for the five ringing days for the last time. Perhaps the six bells were becoming unringable. At a vestry meeting on the 20th of November 1810 it was decided to take down the six old bells and recast them to make a ring of eight and to install a clock. This was financed by public subscription.

When the new bells were put in, payments for ringing increased considerably to £5 per annum. In 1818 it was resolved that ringers would be paid 10/6d per ringing day.

Whilst the ringers were being paid, the cost of the new ring had not been met fully. The vestry meeting of 30th of April 1820 had to consider the best method of liquidating the debt, of £150 with five years interest thereon, from the parish to James Redmond and William Keen churchwardens. ‘It was resolved that the said debt shall be liquidated and paid by the present church wardens and their successors out of the rates to be made and collected on the parish by instalments of £50 every successive year until the whole sum was discharged.

In 1821 J Pewsey was paid £5/11/0d for ringing days. W Pewsey and J Harvey where both ringers and churchwardens.

² [Foolish Youths and Substantial Rewards](#)

³ [Wages and Prices | A Family Story](#)

The opening of the new ring of eight bells at New Alresford in 1811

An account of the opening of the new bells by a band of specially selected ringers was published in the Hampshire Chronicle:

NEW ALRESFORD — HANTS. RINGING.

NOTICE is hereby given, a new PEAL of EIGHT BELLS, Cast by Mr. THOMAS MEARS, of London, will be opened with a Peal of BOB MAJORS, on Monday the 25th of March, 1811, by a select Set of Ringers, chosen for that purpose, precisely at ten o'clock in the forenoon.

WILLIAM KEENE, / JAMES REDMAN, } Churchwardens.

(Advert in Hampshire Telegraph & Sussex Chronicle, Mon. 25 March 1811; similar advert in Salisbury and Winchester Journal, Mons. 18 & 25 March 1811. Another version in Hampshire Chronicle, Mon. 25 March 1811, with, curiously, 'Cingers' vice 'Ringers'.)

On Monday a fine new peal of eight bells, belonging to the church of New Alresford, in this county, cast by Mr. Thomas Mears, of London, was opened with a peal of tripples, by the following select set of change ringers:—

1. Mr. Simmonds, Leatherhead.
2. Mr. Bartell, College Youth.
3. Mr. Joseph Rayner, Newport, Isle of Wight.
4. Mr. Wm. Webb, Newport, Isle of Wight.
5. Mr. Holdsworth, College Youth.
6. Mr. Toddy, Winchester.
7. Mr. Stephens, Newport, Isle of Wight.
9. Mr. Dyer, Alton.

Weight of Tenor 17 cwt.

(Hampshire Chronicle, Mon. 1 April 1811; from the lack of detail, it is unlikely that a full peal of 5,040 changes was successfully rung on this occasion. The Union Society of Newport Isle of Wight records it in their peal book as a quarter peal).

The Alresford ringers ring their own peal.

The New Alresford men who had previously only had a ring of six bells, evidently set about learning to ring changes on their new ring of eight bells. Within less than fourteen years, they successfully completed a peal of their own on 26th December 1824.

This was a magnificent achievement, as any ringer today will testify, especially as so many people were doing it together for the first time. At this point in history, only a few dozen peals were being rung each year across the whole country, so the New Alresford men had become quite proficient, quite quickly, and a board hangs in the tower recording this achievement:

Society of Alresford Youths

New Alresford, Hampshire

St John the Baptist

Sunday, 26 December 1824 in 2h 57 (17)

5040 Grandsire Triples

Composed by John Holt (Ten part)

- 1 Stephen Holt
- 2 James Harvey (Conductor)
- 3 William Pewsey
- 4 William Smith
- 5 T (Philip?) Phillips
- 6 William Wise
- 7 T (John?) Loader
- 8 William Rutter

Churchwardens

Mr Peter Houghton

Mr John Loader



Peal board hanging in St John's ringing chamber recording the 1824 peal

Thirteen years later some of the original band, plus some other local men rang another peal on the bells:

The Lovers of Ringing
New Alresford, Hampshire
St John the Baptist
Sunday, 31 December 1837 in 2h 47 (17)

5040 Grandsire Triples

1	William Smith
2	James Harvey (Conductor)
3	Henry Atkins
4	William Smith Junior
5	Thomas Atkins
6	John Baker
7	George Smith
8	Benjamin Collyer

Churchwardens
Mr William Pewsey
Mr James Harvey



Peal board hanging in St John's ringing chamber recording the 1837 peal.

Who were the local ringers in the 1824 and 1837 peals?

The men who rang in these two peals were all local men, mainly tradesmen active in the town. Details of them have been obtained from the 1841 census and other information on Ancestry.co.uk

Thomas Atkins 1772 - 1851

Rang in 1837 peal.

Lived in the Dean in the 1841 Census

Tailor

Henry Atkins 1813 -

Rang in 1837 peal.

Son of Thomas Atkins

Lived in the Dean in the 1841 Census

Tailor

John Baker 1811-

Rang in 1837 peal.

Lived at 39 West Street in the 1851 Census.

Drapers Assistant

Benjamin Collyer 1807-

Rang in 1837 peal.

Lived at 77 East Street in the 1851 Census.

Appears in 1828 and 1839 trade directories as a pattern maker.

James Harvey 1792 - 1883

Rang in and conducted 1824 and 1837 peals.

Churchwarden in 1837.

Lived at 118 Broad Street in 1851 Census and described as Builder employing 6 men.

Appears in 1828 and 1839 trade directories as a builder and bricklayer.

Stephen Holt 1774 - 1843

Rang in 1824 peal.

Lived in the Soke in the 1841 Census.

Appears in 1839 trade directory as a carpenter

John Loader (Churchwarden) 1787 – 1846

Appears in 1828 and 1839 trade directories as saddler and harness maker.

T Loader

Rang in 1824 peal.

(Possibly a typo for John Loader the Churchwarden?)

William Pewsey 1796-

Rang in 1824 peal.

Lived at 126 Broad Street in the 1851 Census and described as carpenter master employing three men. Pewsey and Marshall appear in 1839 trade directory carpenters and builders in Broad Street.

Wiliam Rutter 1790 -1852

Rang in 1824 peal.

Appears in 1839 trade directory at the White Hart.

Lived in West Street in the 1841 Census and described as a bricklayer.

Lived at 96 West Street in the 1851 Census and described as a bricklayer.

T Phillips

Rang in 1824 peal.

(Could this be Philip Phillips the ratcatcher who lived in the Soke in the 1841 census?)

William Smith 1766 - 1848

Rang in 1824 and 1837 peals.

In the 1841 census this William Smith is living in the Dean, age 75 as a pauper.

William Smith Junior

Rang in 1837 peal.

There were many Smiths living in Alresford around the time, so it is difficult to separate the families. One William Smith, born is 1797 lived at 153 Little Weir in 1851 and at 164 Little Weir in 1861, age 63. He is described as a lawyer. However, according to the Census and other records this William Smith was born in Portsea, the son of John Smith and Ann Halliday. This William Smith married Jane Gilbert in Portsea, Hampshire, on 25 April 1852 when he was 55 years old and she was 28 years old. They had a son William, but he was not born until 1846.

There is also a record of a William Smith living at Little Weir in the 1841 census age 45, with sons John age 15, Mary age 13, Harriett age 9 and Susannah age 6. This could be the same William Smith and his children from an earlier marriage. There could have also been an older son, who was no longer living with them in 1841.

George Smith

Rang in 1837 peal.

Appears in 1839 trade directories as a baker in West Street.

Appears in 1841 census as a publican at Tichborne Down, age 25.

Appears in 1851 census as a farmer at 6 Tichborne Down, employing 3 men/boys on 130 acres.

William Wise

Rang in 1824 peal.

Appears in 1828 and 1839 trade directories as boot and shoemaker.

Appears in the 1841 census age 65 living in West Street.

Appears in the 1851 census living at 49 West Street, occupation shoemaker.

mere village, though in ecclesiastical jurisdiction the superior; and in conjunction with New Alresford and Medstead, (a curacy 6 miles N.E., having a church dedicated to St. Andrew) is a rectory, the bishop's peculiar, and in his gift; the present incumbent being the Earl of Guildford. The united population as returned in 1831, is 2314. The parsonage house is commodious, and the church neat, dedicated to the Holy Virgin. The house at Old Alresford Park was built by the celebrated naval commander, Lord Rodney. Northington Grange, or Grange Park, about 2 miles N.W., originally constructed from the designs of Inigo Jones, and pronounced by Horace Walpole, one of the best of his works, presented a face of five stories: these have been reduced to two, the whole exterior greatly improved, and a portico added upon the exact proportions of the pantheon at Athens, under the tasteful direction of Lord Ashburton; who has also laid out the grounds with much judgment, in accordance with the style of architecture displayed in the several sides of the building.

Name, Residence & Profession.

See also CLASSIFICATION of TRADES, next column.

Aldridge Wm. *Bishops Sutton*...Ship, & Coachmaker
 Aylward Thomas, *West st.*..... Running Horse
 Baker Mary, *East st.*..... Straw Hat Manufacturer
 Bailey H. *Broad st.*.....Straw Hat Maker
 Bailey John, *ditto*..... Horse Doctor
 Bailey Wm. *ditto*..... Shoemaker
 Barnes Robert, *West st.*..... Baker
 Barnes Robert, *ditto*..... Shopkeeper
 Beaumont J. *Bishops Sutton*...Coach & Harness Mkr
 Bell James, *East st.*.....Bricklayers Arms
 Bowran Charles, *West st.*..... Tailor
 Bryant H. & E. *East st.*.....Dress Makers
 Bulpett, Mulcock, & Dunn.....Bankers
 Birmingham Fred. *Broad st.*..... Carrier
 Butler Charles, *ditto*..... Horse & Groom
 Cannons James, *The Stoke*..... Globe
 Carter Mary, *East st.*.....Milliner & Dress Maker
 Chammon Mary A. *Bishops Sutton*, Baker & Grocer
 Cole Thomas. *Broad st.*..... Baker
 Collyer Benjamin, *West st.*.....Patten Maker
 Collyer George.....Parish Clerk
 Collyer George, *West st.*..... Patten Maker
 Covey John, *ditto*.....Surgeon
 Crook Thomas, *ditto*..... Baker
 Calvert James, *Broad st.*..... Linen Draper
 Camis John, *West st.*..... Hat Maker
 Dule Thos. Carlton, *Broad st.*..... Linen Draper
 Dauncaster H. *West st.*...Auctioneer, Cabinet Maker
 & Upholsterer
 Dolton Charles, *ditto*..... Watch & Clock Maker
 Dunn & Hopkins, *East st.*.....Solicitors
 Dykes Wm. *Broad st.*.....Tailor
 Eames Henry, *East st.*..... Watch & Clock Maker
 Ellyet J. & J. *Broad st.*...Bakers, Mealmen & Grocers
 Figg William, *West st.*.....Shoemaker
 Fowler Francis, *ditto*.....Stay Maker
 Fowler Robert, *East st.*..... Shoemaker
 Fowler Wm. *West st.*..... Carpenter
 Francis James, *The Dean*.....Plumber & Glazier
 Freeman Richard, *ditto*..... Butcher
 Freeman Richd. *West st.*, Licensed to let Post Horses
 Freeman Richard, *ditto*..... Wheelwright
 Freeman Thomas, *East st.*..... Butcher
 Freeman Wm. *Titchborne down*... Cricketers Arms
 Gammon Thomas, *Broad st.*..... Baker
 Godwin Benjamin, *West st.*..... Grocer
 Grant William, *East st.*..... Tailor
 Gregory Hannah, *West st.*..... Dealer in Shoes

Gunner George, *Broad st.*..... Chemist & Druggist
 Gunner Isaac, *West st.*... Carpenter & Wheelwright
 Gunner Isaac, *ditto*..... Wheelwright
 Hall Sarah, *The Dean*..... Gardener & Tea Dealer
 Hall Wm. *Broad st.*..... Millar
 Harvey James, *ditto*..... Bricklayer
 Hasted Henry, *ditto*.....Butcher
 Hasted Wm. *West st.*..... Butcher
 Hayles George, *ditto*..... Surgeon
 Heath Joseph, *ditto*..... Fox
 Hoad Francis, *Broad st.*..... Blacksmith
 Holland Henry. *West st* Smith & Farrier
 Holt Stephen, *The Stoke*..... Carpenter
 Howe John, *The Dean*..... Maltster
 Hunt J. & E. *West st.*... Brewers, Spirit Merchants
 & Coopers
 Hunt Edward, *West st.*..... Surveyor
 Hunt James, *Bishops Sutton*..... Wheelwright
 Hunt W. *West st.*...Linen Draper & Haberdasher
 Ibbis Miss, *Broad st.*..... Ladies Boarding School
 Laine Frances, *West st.*..... Swan, Posting, & Commercial Inn, & Excise office
 Lapham Joshua, *West st.*..... Fishmonger
 Lipscomb J. K. *East st.*..... Surgeon
 Lipscomb L. *West st.*...Solicitor & Clerk to the Trustees of the Winchester & Petersfield Turnpike Rds
 Loader John, *Broad st.*... Saddler & Harness Maker
 Maynard Henry, *West st.*..... The Bell
 Maynard Jane, *East st.*..... Milliner & Dress Maker
 Meachem P. *West st.*..... Dolphin & Basket Maker
 Merritt Stephen, *Broad st* Fruiters
 Miles W. *The Stoke* ... Brazier & Tin Plate Worker
 Miller C. *Broad st* George Commercial Inn
 Moody J. B. *East st.*... Actnr & Apprsr, Bksllr, &c.
 North Francis, *West st.*..... Plumber & Glazier
 Oakshott James, *Bishops Sutton* Miller
 Payne George, *West st.*..... Boot & Shoemaker
 Penton H. *East st* Shopkeeper & Brush Maker
 Pease George, *Broad st* Plumber & Glazier
 Pewsey & Marshall, *Broad st.*... Carpenters & Bldrs
 Pewsey John, *West st.*.....Plumber & Glazier
 Pike William, *Bishops Sutton* Shopkeeper
 Privett Edward, *West st.*..... Hair Dresser
 Privett John, *West st.*..... Baker
 Rampton William, *Old Alresford*..... Blacksmith
 Rooke J. *East st* Saddler & Harness Maker
 Ruffell Stephen, *West st*Bricklayer
 Rutter Henry, *Bishops Sutton* Parish Clerk
 Rutter William, *West st.*..... White Hart
 Scowrey Henry, *West st* Blacksmith & Farrier
 Sensier David, *Broad st.*..... Grocer
 Smith George, *West st* Baker
 Spary William, *East st* The Sun
 Spiers H. *Broad st.*..... Tanner & Fellmonger
 Taylor John, *East st.*..... Boot & Shoemaker
 Thorp Thomas, *Old Alresford*..... Miller & Maltster
 Trewin Henry, *East st* Hair Dresser
 Vincent David, *East st.*.....Carpenter
 Wedge George, *Broad st.*.....Butcher
 Wedge James, *Broad st.*... Maltster & Corn Dealer
 Whitehead John, *East st.*..... Boys Day School
 Wickham S. & J. *Broad st.*..... Grocers
 Wise William, *East st.*..... Boot & Shoemaker

Classification of Trades.

Auctioneers & Appraisers.—Doncaster, H. *West st*
 Moody James, *East st*
Bakers.—Barnes Robert, *West st*
 Chammon Mary Ann, *Bishops Sutton*
 Cole Thomas, *Broad st*
 Crook Thomas, *West st*
 Ellyett Joseph & James, *Broad st*
 Gammon Thomas, *Broad st*

The relationship with the Corporation and Town Trustees

The ringers were therefore a group of respectable local people including churchwardens, the town clerk and tradesmen carrying out business in the town.

In 1836 the Corporation [later to be the Bailiff and Burgesses and then the Town Trustees] gave the ringers a dinner at the Horse and Groom and a voluntary contribution. This dinner and contribution continued to be an annual event.

In 1886 the bells were reported to go 'in an unsatisfactory manner'. However, the bells obviously continued to be rung and there are records of payments of 10/6 to the bellringers, and the Town Trustees continued to host an annual dinner and gave a contribution for ringing for public occasions.

The Town Trustees had a meeting in October 1893 which noted that the bell ringers had formerly been supported by an annual contribution from the funds of the late corporation, and they had since 1824 held an annual dinner at the Horse and Groom. It was felt that lack of support might result in a reduction in the number of ringers. It was decided to make payment for ringing on public occasions, and for the maintenance and hoisting of the town flag on the church tower.

According to a report in the Hants and Berks Gazette, "On January the 9th 1896 the Old Alresford ringers joined in the feast at the Sun and the local bench granted an extension of time until 1:00am. This was remarked upon by the teetotal neighbours". (It should be noted that the Temperance movement was becoming quite active at this point in time).

Alresford: Our Ringers: Under the chairmanship of Mr F. C. Batchelor the ringers of our musical peal in the tower of St John the Baptist and St Mary held their annual feast at The Sun Inn, on the 1st instant. In response to an application from Host Spary, our local bench granted an extension of time until one am - an incident that doubtless our teetotal neighbours will not be slow to utilise as illustrative of their allegation re the ideal association of "Church and Beer". Well, let it be so; and may the difference of opinion never alter friendship. The time was ample, the supper did the landlord and landlady credit; the room was full, the best of orders was preserved, and the occasion altogether a most jolly one.

Song, sentiment, and sobriety, were the prevailing trinity. A few toasts were drunk, viz. "The Old Alresford and the New Alresford ringers; may the bells never be silent for the want of men to pull the ropes;" "The health of the landlord and his wife," who were praised for their endeavors to gratify their guests. The chairman's complimentary motion was acknowledged and replied to by the landlord. "The health of the chairman" was received in the way so characteristic of such "jolly dogs" and the sentiment was reciprocated by the chairman. As is customary here and at Old Alresford, a muffled peal was rung as the old year departed, and its successor was welcomed by "the sweet music of the bells".

From the Hants and Berks Gazette – January 9th 1896

Ringling in the new year

One of the paid ringing days would have been for ringing in the new year. From 1837 to 1906 James Sait and William Hall rang a midnight peal each January the first. This is commemorated on a board in the church porch. There are records that James Sait was still ringing in 1913, also that in 1889 J Sait was paid a year's salary of £6/0/0d.



The inhabitants of Alresford placed this record here to commemorate the fact that their fellow townsmen William Hall and James Sait did, in this belfry, ring in 50 consecutive New Year midnight Peals, from 1857 to 1906, in recognition of which a testimonial was presented to them by public subscription. March 1907.

James Sait 1831- 1918

Lived at 130 Broad Street in the 1881 census.

Occupation bootmaker.

Also listed as Parish Clerk in an 1878 trade directory.

His wife was Eliza Jane Salt They had eleven children, seven of whom were still alive in 1911.

William Hall 1839 - 1909

Born in Privet and lived with his father William, a blacksmith at 124 Broad Street in 1851 census,

Listed at 78 The Dean in the 1881 Census, with his wife Elizabeth, who was born in New Alresford.

Occupation blacksmith/farrier, like his father.

Also at 97 West Street in the 1891 census, and 62 West Street in the 1901 census.

Victorian reforms

The Victorian period was a time of great social reform. The Oxford Movement gave rise to the 'Belfry Reform' movement, led by a group of Clergy who wished to take back control of their belfries, in some cases taking back the keys and locking the ringers out of their towers.

There were strong links between the Oxford Movement and the Temperance Movement which was in ascendancy at this time. It is also not generally realised that the first ever national lottery was held by Queen Elizabeth I in 1566 to pay for harbour repairs. Initially held at irregular intervals, by the 1760's they had become annual events, and the Cambridge ringers, and probably others too, were paid to ring the bells to help winners celebrate. However, due to the changing mood in Victorian England, the final state lottery was held in 1826.

The belfry reformers despised the drinking of alcohol, prize ringing, gambling and other ungodly practices and portrayed the ringers as drunkards who engaged in anti-social activity. They and established Diocesan Ringers Guilds and Associations whose objects were to recognise ringers as church workers, an appreciation of the tower as part of God's house, and the encouragement of ringing for Divine Service. They required the ringers to ring all the bells for Sunday services, and to regularly attend church services.

These changes led to many clashes between the clergy and their ringers.

At this time many churches were also reordered to accommodate changing patterns of worship. West galleries for their choirs were often removed, and organs, previously despised like other musical instruments by the Puritans, were installed. By 1895 the whole church at New Alresford was in need of major repair and the leading Architect Sir Arthur Blomfield was employed to oversee a total rebuild.

The tower remained standing, untouched by the works, although the bells were re hung with new fittings, the frame strengthened, and the bells quarter turned at a cost of £142/10s

The opening peal on the bells was rung on 22nd December 1897. There is a fascinating account of this peal which can be found in the Bell News and Ringers Record of 1st January 1898. The peal was rung in a free-standing tower. The church had been demolished with its walls just six feet high.

At the dinner, held in the Swan that evening, hosted by the Rector, the local ringers were encouraged to join the Winchester Diocesan Guild of ringers, which had recently been established as a result of the Belfry Reform movement.

ALRESFORD, HANTS.

"Can you make one for Treble Bob at Alresford, on December 22nd, to re-open the bells? Rector will entertain at dinner and pay expenses." Thus ran a post-card from friend Whiting of Fareham, and as it seemed a request distinctly out of the usual run of applications at this season of the year, a reply in the affirmative was soon despatched.

The date having duly arrived Alresford Station was reached, and the way to the Church enquired for: "Down there and you will see the tower." This sounded strange, but was soon literally explained, for there was only the tower standing—the church having been pulled down and only advanced 6 or 8 feet in the rebuilding. Shortly after, the rest of the band having arrived, a move was made to the isolated tower, and, after a trial course, the peal was duly started, and settling down to the tower-man's time successfully brought to a completion. The Rector (Rev. A. A. Headley) was one of the first to congratulate the band, and suggested a wash and brush-up at The Swan, in readiness for dinner. To the surprise and gratification of the visitors they found themselves the guests at a public dinner at which over fifty gentlemen were present. The dinner was a most substantial one, and served in the style for which The Swan is so justly famed.

After the customary loyal toasts had been honoured in the usual hearty manner, the rector spoke on the events of the day, and said that having been curate at Fareham some twelve or fourteen years ago when they had increased their bells, he became acquainted with Mr. Whiting and the other Fareham ringers, and naturally turned to them when it was decided to have a public re-opening of the Alresford bells. Pointing to two large old-fashioned peal-tablets which had been carefully brought from the tower before the work of restoration began, the rev. gentleman remarked that one peal was dated 1824 and the other 1837, and it was felt that it would be very appropriate to finish up their Jubilee rejoicings with another peal, which he was very pleased indeed had been accomplished.

In responding for the visitors, Mr. H. White laid great stress on the work of the Winchester Diocesan Guild, and urged the Alresford men to become members when qualified, and as his remarks were received with much applause, it is hoped that a strong branch of the Guild will be found in Alresford ere long.

As the trains left very early at Alresford station, the rector had provided a pair-horse covered brake for the nine-mile drive to Winchester, which was reached in good time, and the visitors had the additional pleasure of meeting Mr. W. H. George and others of the Cathedral band. The band take this opportunity of recording their thanks to the rector and bell committee for their hearty Hampshire welcome, and one and all of the band expressed their confident opinion that it was the record opening with which they had ever had anything to do. The band comprised representatives from Fareham, Basingstoke, Guildford, Wickham, and Mr. Lawrence, of Messrs. Mears and Stainbank, that firm having made a most satisfactory job, each bell being quarter-turned, and all new fittings supplied. J. J. J.

Published in the Bell News and Ringers Record – January 1st 1898

There is also record in the Bell News and Ringers Record of a quarterly meeting of the Winchester Diocesan Guild at New Alresford on Easter Monday 1898. Many Guilds and Associations were established and led by the clergy. The Master was the Rev R C M Harvey, who presided over the business meeting.

Several other Clergy were also present. The account of the meeting includes a lengthy discussion about differences of opinion between members of certain bands of ringers and their Clergy.

THE WINCHESTER DIOCESAN GUILD.

QUARTERLY MEETING AT ALRESFORD, HANTS.

On Easter Monday the above Society met under favourable circumstances, and were cordially welcomed by the Rev. A. A. Headley, Rector of New Alresford. The bells (8) were set going early in the day, and various touches of Treble Bob Major, Stedman and Grandsire Triples were brought round. At 3.30 the Master, the Rev. R. C. M. Harvey, presided over the business meeting, which was held in the board school, some twenty-five members being present, including the veteran Mr. J. Hewett, Rev. F. Whyley (Vicar of Alton), Rev. H. Wheat (Titchfield), the Rector of New Alresford, and the Hon. Secretary, the Rev. C. E. Matthews. The minutes of the last quarterly meeting were read and passed on the proposition of Mr. W. H. George, seconded by Mr. J. W. Whiting. The election of new members then followed; C. E. Radclyffe, Esq., of Little Park, Wickham, life member, and twenty performing members being added to the list. These latter belong to the following bands: Portsea, Capel, Oakley, York Town, Farnham, Hawley and Christchurch.

The Hon. Secretary then mentioned a difference which had occurred between the ringers of a certain band affiliated to the Guild and their Vicar. He desired to test the feeling of the meeting on the point, as two or three other similar cases had occurred in recent years, and he did not wish to feel that he was solely responsible for their settlement. It was a difficult matter always, and he had written to advise the ringers to settle their differences as loyally as they could. With one exception they had all returned to their duties. So far as he was aware, the only manner in which conduct of this sort could be dealt with was by placing the names of such ringers upon the unattached list, thereby detaching them from their own tower. He had framed a motion which he would read: but he would leave it entirely in the hands of the meeting to say whether it would be advisable to add it as a new rule or not. The motion was "That the committee have full power to summarily deal with members or band in cases reported from incumbents."

Mr. J. J. Jones (Guildford) said that the rules already provided for such cases, when the emergency arose.

Mr. W. H. George (Winchester) thought it would be unadvisable to have any hard and fast rule on such points.

Mr. E. J. Heathorn (Woolston) said that often these mistakes occurred from misunderstandings on both sides.

Messrs. White (Basingstoke), LeClercq (Farnham), and Whiting (Fareham) also spoke on the subject.

The Master thought it would not do to have a fixed rule on such a subject, but if the Vicar and ringers could not settle their differences, then the committee might be called in to arbitrate if desired to do so.

The Rev. F. Whyley (Alton) said he knew from a long experience that difficulties would arise from time to time. He thought that the Guild should not use any arbitrary power, but rather hear both sides. He knew that parsons made mistakes, and ringers also made mistakes, but he did not think the Guild would do any good by interfering. If a band was to be upset by one or two members, it was far better in the interests of all that such should retire. He always had the greatest respect for ringers as a body.

The Hon. Secretary then replied, and thanked the meeting for their expression of opinion, and the matter then dropped.

Bell News and Ringers Record - April 23rd 1898

Women and two world wars

It was in the late 1800's that women finally started to become bell ringers, slowly at first, but today over half of our band are female.

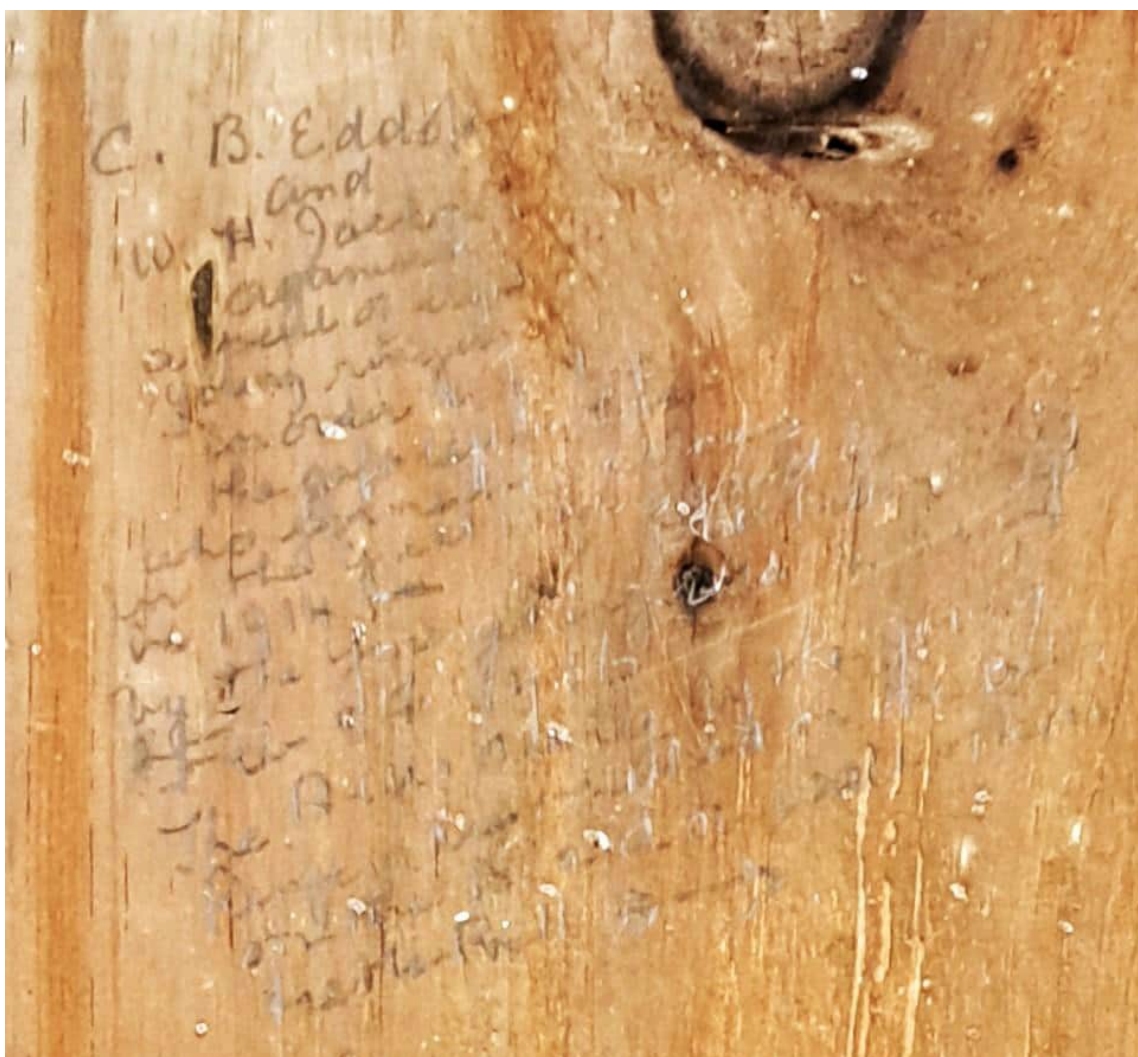
This change was accelerated by the two world wars, when many men were away fighting. There is an interesting piece of graffiti on the clock case in the tower.

C B Eddoll and W H Jackson organised a peal of eight young ringers in order to fill up the gaps let by those who joined the colours in the great war against Germany in 1914-

First peal by the young ringers was on Feb 8th 1916.

The bells rung by the young ringers are marked on the bells on the board on wall near the bell.

It appears that the term 'peal' was being used loosely, as there is no record of a full peal of 5040 changes being rung.



Roger Booth
Tower Captain
19th March 2024

Updated 23rd December 2024