

The Service Bell

This large bell is rung from the ground floor of the church, by pulling the bell-rope to the right of the main doors as you enter. Its purpose is to announce the start of a service, and it acts as a call to prayer.



The bell dates from 1734, and at 286 years old is well over a century older than the building itself. It was removed from a church in Kenilworth and 'recycled' here by Taylors of Loughborough.. It weighs in at 56st. The inscription reads:

MR. WILLIAM BEST VICAR
JOHN PARKER AND THOMAS GARLICK
CHURCHWARDENS 1734



The old 1734 service bell



The 'new' 1734 service bell!
Note the new deadstock (wooden support)

The service bell was restored as part of the Tower & Spire restoration project in 2017-20. It was removed from the belfry, sandblasted, re-tuned, and the wooden frame, which was cracked, was replaced.



The Bells

St Matthew's Church

www.stmatthewskt6.org



StMatthewsChurchSurbiton



LOTTERY FUNDED

The sound of bells ringing is part of British culture and heritage. They provide the grand soundtrack to our historic moments, call out for our celebrations and toll to mark our grief.

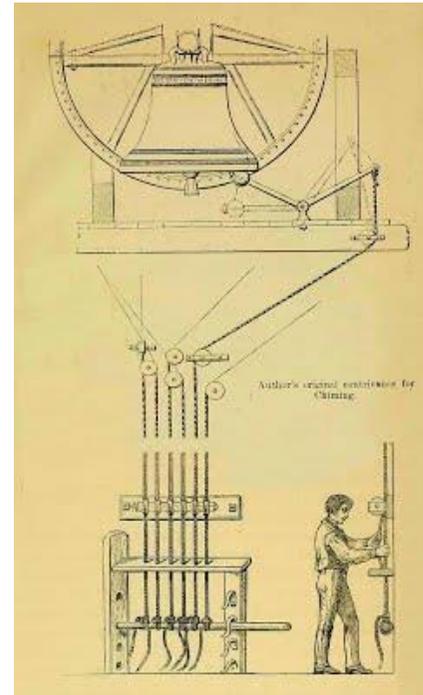
What's inside the tower?

The bells at St Matthews are located in the tower. They are accessed through a small wooden door in the corner of the porch, leading to a steep 38 step spiral staircase, carved in stone. This leads to the ringing platform. A further set of wooden steps (even steeper!) leads to the bells themselves.

When St Matthew's church was built a chime system with a set of eight hemispherical bells was installed (see picture) which enable a single ringer to play a full octave in the key of E flat. The largest bell weighs 4.5 cwt (nearly 230 kilograms). They are hung in a frame on six levels and rung using the Ellacombe chime frame with eight ropes. John Warner of London's Cripplegate supplied the bells, which have been in constant use throughout the life of the church.



This chiming system is relatively unusual, and was designed 200 years ago by the Rev Henry Thomas Ellacombe, from St Mary's Church at Bitton, near Bristol. The apparatus, now used in bell towers across the world, enables one trusted person to ring the bells instead of six or eight bell ringers. Ellacombe originally made the invention to dispense with 'wayward' bell ringers.



In 2017 significant deterioration of the tower was discovered. The stonework was severely damaged, particularly the window mullions in the belfry. A major restoration project was undertaken and completed in 2020.

During the restoration, the entire bell installation was overhauled by Taylors of Loughborough, one of the last remaining foundries capable of such work. The eight hemispheres and the 1734 service bell (see back page) were removed for restoration and reinstalled in the closing weeks of the project. They once again ring out every Sunday.

St Matthew's is keen for the restored system to be fully appreciated, and has installed CCTV to help to engage the community to see the system at work. This increases accessibility as the steps up the tower are incredibly steep! A replica bell frame has been constructed to explain the mechanism of the Ellacombe system, and enable youngsters to try chime ringing at ground level.

