

BELLS AND BELL RINGING AT CRICK

A short history of survival, restoration and revival

St Margaret of Antioch, Crick, Northamptonshire | August 2026

Three of Crick's present ringing bells were cast before the English Civil War. A fourth old bell survives above them as the clock bell. Their story runs from seventeenth-century founders and Victorian village customs, through a long period of silence, to a community-backed restoration and an active modern teaching tower.

Four centuries still hanging in the tower

The oldest bell still ringing at St Margaret's was cast in 1601 by Edward Newcombe. Two further surviving bells were cast by Hugh II Watts in 1614 and 1616. All three remain part of today's ring of eight, so the modern installation contains a continuous physical link with Crick before the Civil War.³

The historical sequence is richer than the surviving bells alone. Thomas North's 1878 survey, drawing in part on the earlier Bridges manuscripts, records a priest's bell dated 1632 that had already disappeared by North's day. He also records that the old second bell had been cast by Bryan Eldridge in 1656. That bell was replaced in 1720 by Thomas Russell of Wootton; Russell's bell survives in the tower today as the separate clock bell.¹³

Four bells - and a smaller bell

An independent published description from 1828 says simply that Crick church had 'four bells, and a saint's bell'. Fifty years later North inspected four principal bells: the 1616 Watts bell, Russell's 1720 bell, Newcombe's 1601 bell and the 1614 Watts tenor.²¹

The 1828 'saint's bell' may have been the lost 1632 priest's bell known to North from Bridges, but the surviving sources do not explicitly prove that identification. It is therefore safer to leave the connection open.¹²

When bells organised village life

North's account is valuable because it records not merely objects but use. In 1878 a bell sounded every day at noon. Crick had a Shrove Tuesday Pancake Bell. Deaths were distinguished by different tolling patterns for men and women. On Sundays the first bell sounded at 8 a.m.; bells were chimed for worship and the tenor was rung in, followed by a Sermon Bell and a Parson's Bell.¹

Those details show the tower as a village communications system as well as a musical instrument: bells marked time,

worship, death and customary days long before electronic communication became universal.

Silence, then transformation

Modern church material says that before 1996 only four bells remained in the ringing installation and that they had not rung for many years. The frame and fittings needed renovation. A Crick Church Bells Restoration Fund was active by 1995 and received a £7,000 heritage award in 1996; two official sources give different award dates, so the full research report retains both rather than choosing between them.⁵⁶⁷

The work was staged. Three Whitechapel bells are dated 1996. The three early seventeenth-century ringing bells were retained, while the 1720 Russell bell was kept separately for the clock. Dove then records a 1997 augmentation from six to eight with two further Whitechapel trebles. Peterborough Diocesan Guild later described the wider work as restoration and augmentation in 1996-98.³⁴⁸

The result was not a new ring replacing an old one. It was a deliberately layered installation: three old full-circle bells, five modern bells and the former 1720 ringing bell still present as the clock bell.

People in the modern story

The post-1950 documentary trail becomes most detailed around the restoration and later revival. Geoff Brown is explicitly identified by the Peterborough Guild as one of the original team who orchestrated refurbishment of the old four and their eventual augmentation to eight in the mid-1990s. After later masonry work, a 2014 Guild report again names Brown, crediting him with a major clean-up as the bells returned to action.⁹¹⁰

Nick Hiams is central to the next phase. A 2014 report described him as a returned ringer whose input helped establish a local ringing website. In May 2015 he took over as tower captain. The Guild then recorded monthly eight-bell practices, weekly Saturday learner sessions, weekly Sunday service ringing and four learners completing Learning the Ropes Level 1 under his tuition.

Current parish material still names him as tower captain and advertises structured learner and simulator sessions.¹⁰¹¹¹²

Rob Palmer was appointed steeple-keeper by the PCC in 2017, at which point the Guild said he was already assisting Hiams with the mechanical aspects of the tower; Geoff Brown continued responsibility for the clock. The same 2017 report also identified Palmer as Guilsborough Branch Steward.⁹

Recent records show that the active modern band is broader than any three names. Anthea Hiams appears repeatedly in Crick performance records and organised a 2024 St Andrew's Day quarter-peal initiative across six branch towers, including Crick. BellBoard records for national occasions also name a substantial mixture of local and visiting ringers.¹³¹⁴

A ringing tower again

The restored eight quickly became a change-ringing tower. Crick Surprise Major was first pealed on the tower bells in 1998; Crec Surprise Major followed in 2000; and in 2002 a Peterborough Diocesan Guild band rang the first tower-bell peal of Crick Hybrid Major, now known as Crick Major.¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷

Later tower masonry caused another interruption, but by 2014 the bells were back in action. Since then Crick has combined service ringing, teaching, quarter peals and visiting bands. BellBoard records ringing for the Coronation of Charles III in 2023, Guild centenary ringing in 2024, VE Day 80 in 2025 and many personal or local occasions.¹⁰¹³¹⁸

The parish now describes a regular Sunday group, Saturday morning learner practice and simulator sessions. That modern training programme is perhaps the most important continuation of all: the bells have survived because successive generations did more than preserve metal and timber - they preserved the skill needed to make the tower speak.¹²

Crick bell chronology - selected dates

Date	Evidence / event
1601	Edward Newcombe bell, still present
1614	Hugh II Watts tenor, still present
1616	Hugh II Watts bell, still present
1632	Lost priest's bell recorded via Bridges/North
1656	Bryan Eldridge second, predecessor of Russell bell
1720	Thomas Russell replacement second; now clock bell
1828	Published description: four bells and a saint's bell
1878	North surveys the four and records ringing customs
1995-98	Restoration and staged augmentation to eight
2014	Bells back after tower masonry; local revival
2015	Nick Hiams becomes tower captain; structured training recorded
2017	Rob Palmer appointed steeple-keeper

Date	Evidence / event
2026	Active service ringing, learners and simulator practice

References

Superscript numbers are deliberately kept unobtrusive for magazine reproduction. The fuller academic report contains the extended evidence discussion, source conflicts and complete bibliography.

1. Thomas North, The Church Bells of Northamptonshire (1878), Crick entry, pp. 237-238; includes inscriptions, dimensions, 1656 and 1632 predecessor evidence, and 1878 ringing customs. [SOURCE](#)
2. Thomas Deacon, The History of the Village of Willoughby ... (1828), p. 41; Crick described as having four bells and a saint's bell. [SOURCE](#)
3. Peterborough Diocesan Guild, Guilsborough Branch, Crick tower page; present bells, inscriptions, clock bell and earlier-bell notes. [SOURCE](#)
4. Dove's Guide for Church Bell Ringers, Crick, St Margaret; current ring and 1997 project entry recording augmentation from six to eight. [SOURCE](#)
5. St Margaret of Antioch, Crick / A Church Near You; pre-1996 four-bell condition and modern ringing information. [SOURCE](#)
6. National Lottery Heritage Fund, St Margaret of Antioch, Crick - bells restoration; £7,000 award, project page dated 10 January 1996. [SOURCE](#)
7. Hansard, 21 January 1997, Northamptonshire awards table; the same £7,000 Crick Church Bells Restoration Fund award is dated 14 February 1996. [SOURCE](#)
8. Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, September 2014; Crick bells described as restored and augmented in 1996-8. [SOURCE](#)
9. Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, March 2017, p. 13; Geoff Brown, Nick Hiams and Rob Palmer roles and restoration history. [SOURCE](#)
10. Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, March 2014, pp. 13-14; bells back after masonry work, Geoff Brown clean-up, Nick Hiams and local revival. [SOURCE](#)
11. Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, September 2015, pp. 16-17; Nick Hiams becomes tower captain, learner training, Sunday ringing and eight-bell practice. [SOURCE](#)
12. St Margaret of Antioch, Crick, 'Bell Ringers'; present Sunday band, Saturday training and simulator practice; Nick Hiams named as tower captain. [SOURCE](#)
13. BellBoard, Crick, 6 May 2023, Coronation ringing; named modern local and visiting ringers. [SOURCE](#)
14. Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, January 2025; Anthea Hiams' St Andrew's Day quarter-peal initiative including Crick. [SOURCE](#)
15. Complib, Crick Surprise Major; first peal of the method on tower bells at Crick, 30 December 1998. [SOURCE](#)
16. Complib, Crec Surprise Major; first peal on tower bells at Crick, 23 September 2000. [SOURCE](#)
17. Complib, Crick Major (formerly Crick Hybrid Major); first tower-bell peal at Crick, 31 December 2002. [SOURCE](#)
18. BellBoard / The Ringing World performance database, selected Crick records, 2019-2025. [SOURCE](#)