

Bells and Bell Ringing at Crick

A Short History

St Margaret of Antioch, Crick, Northamptonshire
August 2026

*An accessible article based strictly on the evidence assembled for
A Complete History of Bells and Bell Ringing at Crick.*

Four centuries still hanging in one tower

Crick's bells are unusual because much of their history is still physically present. The modern ring at St Margaret of Antioch has eight bells, but three of them are more than four hundred years old: an Edward Newcombe bell of 1601 and two bells cast by Hugh II Watts in 1614 and 1616. Above the ringing eight hangs another survivor, Thomas Russell's bell of 1720, now used by the clock. [1][3][4]

Those four old bells were once the whole principal ring. A fifth, much smaller priest's or saint's bell also appears in the historical record, although it had disappeared by the later nineteenth century. The tower we hear today is therefore both a modern eight and a remarkably intact fragment of Crick's earlier soundscape. [1][2]

The early bells

The oldest surviving Crick bell is dated 1601 and bears the plain injunction 'PRAISE THE LORDE'. It is now the seventh of the eight. The present tenor followed in 1614 and another Hugh Watts bell in 1616; both carry a Latin inscription asking that the bell's sound be pleasing to Christ, King of Heaven. [3]

Thomas North's 1878 history preserves evidence for two bells that have not survived. A second bell by Bryan Eldridge was dated 1656. North says this was the predecessor of the later second. He also records, from the Bridges manuscripts, a priest's bell marked I.K. 1632 which by 1878 was 'now gone'. A modern suggestion that I.K. might refer to James Keene is just that - a suggestion - and should not be treated as a proven founder attribution. [1][16]

In 1720 Thomas Russell of Wootton cast a replacement second. Its inscription survives: 'THOMAS RVSELL OF WOOTTON MADE ME 1720'. That bell would later leave the full-circle ring, but it never left Crick: it is today's separate clock bell. [3]

Four bells - and another small bell

An independent description from 1828 is wonderfully concise. Thomas Deacon wrote that St Margaret's had 'four bells, and a saint's bell'. Fifty years later Thomas North visited the tower and again found four principal bells, identifying them as the 1616 Watts, 1720 Russell, 1601 Newcombe and 1614 Watts tenor. [1][2]

Old position	Bell
1	Hugh II Watts, 1616
2	Thomas Russell, 1720
3	Edward Newcombe, 1601
4 / tenor	Hugh II Watts, 1614

We cannot prove from the accessible sources that Deacon's 1828 'saint's bell' was the same object as the 1632 priest's bell recorded by North from Bridges. It may have been, but a careful history must leave the identification open. [1][2]

What the bells did in Victorian Crick

North's greatest contribution is not just the list of bells but his record of how Crick used them in 1878. A bell rang every day at noon. At 11 a.m. on Shrove Tuesday there was a Pancake Bell. Deaths were signalled differently for men and women: thrice three tolls for a male and thrice two for a female. On Sundays the first bell sounded at 8 a.m.; for Divine Service the first three were chimed and the tenor 'rung in', followed by a Sermon Bell and then a Parson's Bell. [1]

This was a community signalling system as much as a musical instrument. Before watches, telephones and electronic media became universal, bells marked time, worship, death and customary days in a way that reached across the whole village.

North also wrote down a tradition that before the Battle of Naseby Crick had possessed only one bell. He himself warned that the inscriptions did not support the story. The bells dated 1601, 1614 and 1616 all pre-date the battle of 1645, so the tradition belongs to local folklore, not to the factual chronology. [1]

The great restoration and augmentation

By the late twentieth century the old four had fallen silent. A modern church source says that before 1996 the tower housed only four bells, that they had not rung for many years, and that the frame and fittings needed renovation. A restoration fund was active by 1995. In 1996 the Crick Church Bells Restoration Fund received a £7,000 heritage award; interestingly, the Heritage Fund and Hansard give different official dates for that award, so both are preserved in the full research report. [6][7][8][13]

The work was staged. Three new Whitechapel bells are dated 1996. The three oldest full-circle bells - 1601, 1614 and 1616 - were retained, while the 1720 Russell bell was kept separately for the clock. Together, the evidence reconstructs a first-stage six. Dove then gives the decisive second stage: in 1997 the ring was augmented from six bells to eight, with two further Whitechapel trebles. Peterborough Guild later described the wider restoration and augmentation as work of 1996-8. [3][5][9][12][13]

Present bell	Date / founder
1	Whitechapel, 1997
2	Whitechapel, 1997
3	Whitechapel, 1996
4	Whitechapel, 1996
5	Hugh II Watts, 1616
6	Whitechapel, 1996
7	Edward Newcombe, 1601
8 / tenor	Hugh II Watts, 1614
Clock bell	Thomas Russell, 1720

The restoration was therefore not a replacement of old by new. It was an integration of old and new, leaving all four members of the pre-project ring in the tower: three still swing full circle, and the Russell bell strikes the clock. [3]

A ringing tower again

The new eight quickly became a change-ringing tower. Complib records the first peal of Crick Surprise Major on the tower bells on 30 December 1998. Crec Surprise Major followed with a first peal on tower bells at Crick in 2000, and on 31 December 2002 a Peterborough Diocesan Guild band rang the first tower-bell peal of Crick Hybrid Major, now known as Crick Major. [18][19][20]

There was another interruption while the church tower underwent building work. A 2011 Peterborough Guild newsletter said work on the tower was in full swing and that the bells would soon be ringing again. Practice was reintroduced in 2014, and that April Crick hosted the Guild's six-bell striking competition on the back six. [9][11][13]

Today the bells are again part of village life. The church advertises Sunday ringing and Saturday learner sessions, with additional simulator practice. BellBoard records ringing for worship, family occasions and public events - including tolling after the Notre-Dame fire, ringing for the Coronation of Charles III, D-Day 80 and VE Day commemorations. [12][21][22][25]

People behind the bells

Bells do not restore or maintain themselves. Peterborough Guild records identify Geoff Brown as one of the original team who orchestrated refurbishment of the old four and their eventual augmentation. In 2017 the PCC appointed Rob Palmer as steeple-keeper; the same report names Nick Hiams as tower captain and says Geoff Brown remained responsible for the clock. Current sources continue to identify Nick Hiams with the tower and its training programme. [3][10][12]

The Crick bell chronology at a glance

Date	Event
1601	Edward Newcombe bell - survives as 7th.
1614	Hugh II Watts tenor - still the tenor.
1616	Hugh II Watts bell - survives as 5th.
1632	Lost priest's bell I.K. recorded in manuscript evidence.
1656	Bryan Eldridge second, later replaced.
1720	Thomas Russell second; now clock bell.
1828	Four bells and a saint's bell recorded.
1878	North surveys four and records local bell customs.
1995-98	Restoration fund, staged restoration and augmentation.
1997	Dove: six bells augmented to eight.
2011-14	Tower work followed by renewed ringing.
2026	Active eight-bell tower with learner training.

Sources and a note on accuracy

This short article is distilled from the separately supplied academic report, which contains the full source discussion, conflicts and unresolved questions. No unsupported story has been inserted to bridge documentary gaps. The most important sources are listed below; the long report gives the complete reference set.

- [1] Thomas North, *The Church Bells of Northamptonshire* (1878), Crick entry, pp. 237-238. North records four bells, their inscriptions and diameters, the earlier 1656 second, the lost 1632 priest's bell, and contemporary ringing customs; his note on the lost bells cites Bridges MSS, Bodleian Library, EE.i, 197. <https://www.whittingsociety.org.uk/old-ringing-books/north-northamptonshire-05.pdf>
- [2] Thomas Deacon, *The History of the Village of Willoughby in the County of Warwick ... with an abridged description of the most interesting places in the neighbourhood* (London: W. Clark, 1828), p. 41: Crick is described as having four bells and a saint's bell. <https://willoughbyweb.net/ws/archives/material/books/Deacon%201828%20Willoughby%20Book%20Digitised.pdf>
- [3] Peterborough Diocesan Guild, Guilsborough Branch, 'Crick' tower page (accessed 25 August 2026): current bell dates/weights, clock bell, inscriptions, old-bell identities and current ringing arrangements. <https://guilsboroughbranchbells.wordpress.com/crick/>
- [5] Dove's Guide, historical project entry for 1997: Crick, St Margaret - 'The ring was augmented from six bells to eight.' https://dove.cccbr.org.uk/projects?contractor=250&order=year&order_dir=asc%20not%20null&page=4
- [6] The National Lottery Heritage Fund, 'St Margaret of Antioch, Crick - bells restoration': applicant Crick Church Bells Restoration Fund; award £7,000; project page gives date awarded 10 January 1996. <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/projects/st-margaret-antioch-crick-bells-restoration>
- [7] Hansard, 21 January 1997, table of Northamptonshire lottery awards: Heritage award to Crick Church Bells Restoration Fund, £7,000, with award date 14 February 1996. This differs from the Heritage Fund project page date and is preserved as a separate source statement. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1997-01-21/debates/a0b0c6ed-07dd-444b-ab51-f8aed164a648/Nelson>

- [8] The Ringing World, Consolidated Index 1911-2004, Crick, Northamptonshire: restoration fund 1995/161; augmentation 1996/582; first peal on the bell 1996/660; Crick 1997/504 and 1998/836; first peal since augmentation 1998/134, 277-8. https://www.ringingworld.co.uk/indexes/RW-index_1911-2004.pdf
- [9] Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, September 2014, Spring Festival report: 6-bell striking competition at Crick on 26 April; competition on the back six of bells 'restored and augmented in 1996-8'. https://www.pdg.org.uk/newsletters/newsletter_201409.pdf
- [10] Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, March 2017, Guilsborough Branch: Rob Palmer appointed steeple-keeper; Nick Hiams tower captain; Geoff Brown described as one of the original team who orchestrated refurbishment of the original four bells and augmentation to eight in the mid-1990s. https://www.pdg.org.uk/newsletters/newsletter_201703.pdf
- [11] Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, September 2011, Guilsborough Branch: 'Work on Crick tower is now in full swing and soon the bells will be ringing'; Geoff Brown named in relation to the local band. https://www.pdg.org.uk/newsletters/newsletter_201109.pdf
- [12] St Margaret of Antioch, Crick, parish website, 'Bell Ringers': eight bells rehung in a new frame in the mid-1990s; three bells from the original ring of four; local and wider community support; contemporary training and service ringing. <https://www.stmargaretschurchcrick.org.uk/bell-ringers>
- [13] A Church Near You, St Margaret of Antioch, Crick: prior to 1996 the tower housed only four bells, which had not rung for many years; frame and fittings required renovation; practice reintroduced in 2014. Current pages also document contemporary practices. <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/16405/find-us/>
- [14] Crick History Society, website and Digital Archive catalogue: identifies holdings including 'St Margarets Church, Bells and Rectors', John Bridges 1721 material, directory entries, newspaper cuttings and local historians' archives; many underlying items are not publicly exposed online. <https://www.crickhistory.org/crick-digital-archive-1>
- [18] Complib, 'Crick Surprise Major': records the first peal of the method on tower bells at Crick on 30 December 1998. <https://complib.org/method/16828>
- [19] Complib, 'Crick Major' (formerly Crick Hybrid Major): records first peal on tower bells, 5,056 Crick Hybrid Major, at St Margaret of Antioch, Crick, on 31 December 2002, conducted by Paul M. Mason. <https://complib.org/method/27802>
- [20] Complib, 'Crec Surprise Major': records a first peal on tower bells of 5,152 Crec Surprise Major at St Margaret, Crick, on 23 September 2000, conducted by Murray A. Coleman. <https://complib.org/>
- [21] BellBoard / The Ringing World performance database, selected Crick records, including Peterborough Diocesan Guild quarter peals and peals. Individual examples are cited in the text where used. <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/>