

A COMPLETE HISTORY OF BELLS AND BELL RINGING AT YELVERTOFT

All Saints' Church, Yelvertoft, Northamptonshire

August 2026

An evidence-based study of the 1635 Watts ring, village ringing customs, twentieth-century continuity, augmentation and the modern ringing community

Evidence protocol. This study records only claims supported by sources actually inspected in the research pass. Where a modern local source makes a statement that cannot be independently verified, it is attributed as that source's statement. No undocumented earlier ring is reconstructed by inference. The 1635 date of the Watts ring is used because it is on the bells themselves and in Thomas North's 1878 transcription; the previously discussed 1634 Sidney Madge entry is not used.

Abstract

All Saints' Yelvertoft possesses an unusually coherent bell history. Five bells cast in 1635 by Hugh II Watts of Leicester survived together as a complete five-bell ring into the twentieth century and remain the back five of the present six. Thomas North's direct survey of 1878 documented not only their inscriptions and diameters but the social uses of the bells - noon ringing, the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Bell, differentiated death-knells, Sunday ringing patterns and midnight peals at Christmas and New Year.¹ The installation was rehung and given a new frame in 1959, and in 1989 local ringers added an Eijsbouts treble to create the present six.³

The documentary record also allows the ringing community to be followed through the modern period. The Felstead database records twenty-five valid peals at Yelvertoft between 1926 and 2023.² Ringing World and Guild sources identify local figures including W. John Kinchin, Peter L. Westerman, Robin Wilson, David Westerman and Nick Hiams, while recent performance records show an active six-bell practice and continuing method ringing in the 2020s.¹⁴

1. Scope, method and limits of the evidence

This study is deliberately conservative. It distinguishes (a) physical evidence preserved on the bells, (b) contemporary or near-contemporary printed evidence, and (c) later local historical summaries. A later summary is not silently promoted into a contemporary record.

For the seventeenth-century ring, the strongest evidence is the bells themselves as transcribed by Thomas North in 1878: all five carry the date 1635, and North identified Yelvertoft as a complete ring by Hugh Watts.¹

No verified pre-1635 Yelvertoft ring configuration was located in the accessible evidence used for this report. The existence of a medieval tower does not, by itself, justify inventing a medieval ring. Accordingly, this history begins its bell chronology with the first configuration that can actually be demonstrated: the five of 1635.³

The official church history states that one bell contains coins cast into its rim and says, with the qualification "as far as is known", that the five bells have never been out of the tower since installation. That statement is retained as a parish-history claim; it is not treated here as independently proved for every year since 1635.³

2. The church and the tower before the surviving ring

The parish history places a church on the site by Domesday in 1086 and dates the present tower broadly to the end of the thirteenth century.³ This architectural chronology matters because the tower predates the surviving ring by more than three centuries. What it does not establish is the number, date or identity of any bells that may have preceded the Watts five. No such earlier configuration is reconstructed here.

3. Hugh II Watts and the complete ring of 1635

Thomas North's account of Northamptonshire founders describes Hugh Watts as a Leicester founder who had acquired a high reputation and notes complete rings of his casting surviving at a number of Northamptonshire churches, including Yelvertoft.² At Yelvertoft, the unusually important point is not merely that several Watts bells survive, but that all five bells of the old ring are the original 1635 bells.⁵

The five 1635 bells as documented by North and modern tower records

Old position	Current position	Founder/date	North diameter	Current approximate weight
1	2	Hugh II Watts, 1635	30 in	5½ cwt
2	3	Hugh II Watts, 1635	31½ in	6 cwt
3	4	Hugh II Watts, 1635	33½ in	7 cwt
4	5	Hugh II Watts, 1635	36 in	9¼ cwt
5 / tenor	6 / tenor	Hugh II Watts, 1635	41 in	12 cwt

Sources: North for inscriptions/diameters; Benefice Bells for present position and approximate weights.^{1,4}

3.1 The inscriptions

Bell	Inscription (modern tower transcription)
Old treble / current 2	THOMAS CORNISH AND THOMAS MORETON
Old 2 / current 3	GOD SAVE THE KING
Old 3 / current 4	IH'S : NAZARENVS REX : IVDEORVM FILI : DEI MISERERE : MEI
Old 4 / current 5	IH'S : NAZARENVS REX : IVDEORVM FILI : DEI MISERERE : MEI
Old tenor / current 6	CUM CUM AND PRAIE

The modern tower transcription notes the reversed “S” characteristic in the IHS inscription and translates the Latin as an invocation to Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, Son of God, for mercy.⁵ The old tenor’s “CUM CUM AND PRAIE” wording attracted later attention: Percy Amos called it unique when describing the bells in *The Ringing World* in 1950.⁷

4. Yelvertoft’s ringing customs in 1878

North’s Yelvertoft entry is valuable because it records what the bells did in village life, not simply what they were. In 1878 he noted the following practices:¹

Occasion	North’s recorded practice
Daily noon bell	A bell was rung daily at noon.
Shrove Tuesday	The Pancake Bell was rung.
Death-knell	Twice three tolls for a male; twice two for a female.
Sunday, 9 a.m.	The third and fourth bells were rung.
Divine Service	Tenor for ten minutes; all five chimed for ten minutes; then the first bell for ten minutes.
Christmas/New Year	Midnight peals on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve.

These are observations of nineteenth-century practice. The evidence does not justify assuming that each custom existed unchanged from 1635 or continued unchanged into the twentieth century.

5. From village bells to recorded change ringing: 1926-1950

The earliest valid Yelvertoft peal in the Felstead tower list is dated 6 November 1926.⁷ The contemporary *Ringing World* report records 5,040 Grandsire Doubles in 2 hours 56 minutes, rung by Kenneth Cater, Arthur Marlow, Harry Clark, Rowland Adams and Thomas Wise, conducted by Wise. It notes a first peal and a first peal of Doubles within the band.⁸

The five-bell status is independently visible in inter-war Guild activity. A 1938 *Ringing World* notice advertised a special Guilsborough Branch meeting at “Yelvertoft (5 bells)”.⁹ In 1949, a Peterborough Diocesan Guild band rang 5,040 Doubles in eight methods, conducted by Ernest Morris, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the English Prayer Book.¹⁰

Percy Amos’s 1950 survey described Yelvertoft’s five 1635 Watts bells as “very musical” and among the founder’s best.⁷ That same year Yelvertoft continued to function as a branch meeting tower: *Ringing World* notices record a Guilsborough Branch meeting there on 15 April 1950.¹³

6. The post-war local band and W. John Kinchin

The 1950s sources reveal a local organiser as well as a ringing tower. In January 1955 The Ringing World announced that W. J. Kinchin of Main Street, Yelvertoft, had become secretary of the Guilsborough Branch; later notices in 1956 and 1958 continue to give him as honorary secretary.¹⁴ Meeting notices repeatedly used his Yelvertoft address, demonstrating that branch administration was being carried from the village.¹⁹

Kinchin also rang in the important post-rehanging peal of 4 April 1959, taking the fourth.¹¹ More than sixty years later, a peal on 28 January 2023 was rung to celebrate his life. The Guild record states that he had been born in Yelvertoft and that his ashes were interred in the village cemetery after the peal.²⁰

7. The 1959 rehanging and new frame

The parish history records two connected works in 1959: renewal of the tower castellation and installation of a new bell frame.³ The independent contemporary ringing evidence confirms a rehanging. On 4 April 1959 a Peterborough Diocesan Guild band rang 5,040 Doubles in 2 hours 46 minutes; The Ringing World explicitly described it as the “First peal on the bells since rehanging”.¹¹

The 1959 band was Peter L. Westerman (treble), Dawn V. Elson (2), Robin Wilson (3), W. John Kinchin (4) and Michael F. Amos (tenor), conducted by Amos.¹¹ The peal was associated with the wedding of Rhona Constance Pebody and Richard Samuel Holland, both Guilsborough Branch members, and was also a birthday compliment to Robin Wilson.¹¹

The significance of this report is twofold: it dates a major intervention in the installation and, unusually, supplies names that can be followed through later local ringing history.

8. Continuity through the five-bell era, 1959-1989

Yelvertoft remained a five-bell tower for another thirty years. The Felstead list records Doubles peals in 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985 and 1986, followed by a Grandsire Doubles peal on 24 September 1989.⁹ The 25 April 1986 peal of Stedman Doubles included David P. Westerman and Stephen J. Westerman and was rung as a retirement compliment to Peter L. Westerman after 47 years at G.E.C., Rugby.¹⁰

The 1989 Grandsire Doubles peal should not be treated as a six-bell performance merely because it occurred in the augmentation year: Doubles is a five-working-bell method. The peal record therefore does not, by itself, date the completion or first ringing of the new six.

9. The augmentation of 1989

The parish history states that local ringers added a sixth bell in 1989.³ Dove and the current Benefice record identify the new treble as an Eijsbouts bell of 1989, weighing 5 cwt 0 qtr 10 lb, 30 inches in diameter and sounding D.⁶ Its inscription is AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM.⁵

The new treble was placed ahead of the old five. Consequently the original 1635 bells became the present 2, 3, 4, 5 and tenor, preserving the old ring intact within the enlarged six.⁴

The church’s own history further states that the new bell was designed by a direct descendant of Hugh Watts to match the originals as nearly as possible.³ This report records that statement as parish-history testimony; no independent documentary source for the descent/design claim was located in the accessible sources reviewed.

10. What six bells changed: Minor and a new method-ringing identity

The peal record changes immediately after augmentation. The first Felstead-listed Minor peal at Yelvertoft is 20 October 1990, in seven methods; subsequent peals increasingly explore Surprise Minor and spliced repertoires.⁹

Two performances gave the village name a direct place in method nomenclature. On 3 August 2001, 5,040 Yelvertoft Delight Minor was rung at All Saints, the first peal in the method.¹⁰ On 3 April 2004, 5,040 Yelvertoft Treble Bob Minor was rung, again recorded as the first peal in the method.¹⁰

Between those events, on 7 November 2003, Robin Wilson rang the fourth in a peal of fifteen Surprise Minor methods. The Guild footnote records it as his 500th peal and as the 50th anniversary of his first ringing the bell on which he had been taught

- the fourth.¹⁰ Because that statement is tied to the 2003 performance, it provides unusually precise evidence of Wilson’s association with the Yelvertoft bells extending back to the early 1950s.

11. The ringing floor and the church in 2000

In 2000, a rural churches millennium grant supported alterations in the church. The parish history records that the ringing floor was raised to accommodate a toilet and choir vestry beneath it.³ This changed the physical setting from which the same bells were rung without changing the composition of the ring.

12. Yelvertoft as a local ringing centre in the 2010s

A Peterborough Diocesan Guild newsletter in 2014 called the Yelvertoft band “well established” and recorded its members incorporating Lilbourne into their Friday evening practice late in 2013.¹⁶ The same report records the creation of ringing.yelvertoft.com to communicate activity across Yelvertoft, Crick and Lilbourne and thanks Nick Hiams, described as a returned ringer, for valuable work in setting it up.¹⁶

The 2018 branch maintenance report described the bells as having good tonal qualities, noted that the steel frame required painting and that ropes were due for replacement, and referred to “David” as the current tower captain and Robin as a previous branch steward.¹⁷ Since that source gives only the captain’s first name, this report does not silently expand it to a surname.

The same 2018 newsletter records Lucy Sendall of Yelvertoft ringing her first quarter peal, trebling to Plain Bob Doubles.¹⁷ This is direct evidence that the local organisation was not simply maintaining an inherited band but was still producing new performance milestones.

13. Modern ringers and documented continuity after 1950

Ringer	Documented Yelvertoft / Guild context	Refs
W. John Kinchin	Guildsborough Branch secretary from 1955 in Ringing World notices; fourth in the 1959 post-rehanging peal; born in Yelvertoft according to the 2023 memorial peal record.	14, 11, 20
Peter L. Westerman	Treble in the 1959 post-rehanging peal. A 1986 Yelvertoft peal was rung as a retirement compliment to him after 47 years at G.E.C., Rugby.	11, 10
Robin Wilson	Third in the 1959 peal; the 2003 Yelvertoft peal marked his 500th peal and the 50th anniversary of his first ringing on the bell on which he was taught; described as a previous branch steward in 2018; still ringing at Yelvertoft in 2024.	11, 10, 17, 18
David Westerman	Rang in the 1986 Yelvertoft Stedman Doubles peal and in the 1999 Yelvertoft Surprise Minor peal; elected in 2012 as a Guild representative to the Central Council; appears repeatedly as conductor in recent Yelvertoft performance records.	10, 15, 18
Nick Hiams	Described in 2014 as a returned ringer whose input was valuable in establishing the local ringing website; appears in Yelvertoft performance records in 2024.	16, 18

These are not presented as an exhaustive list of everyone who rang at Yelvertoft. They are the individuals for whom the inspected public sources supply unusually clear evidence of sustained local or organisational significance.

14. Ringing in the 2020s

The current Benefice site lists a Friday practice from 7.30 to 9.00 p.m. (except the last Friday of the month, when practice transfers to Crick) and Sunday service ringing from 10.45 to 11.15 a.m.⁴ It lists the tower captain simply as “David”.⁴

Recent performances show a recognisable local and benefice group. In 2024 Yelvertoft records include Anthea Hiams, Liz or Elizabeth Reading, Nick Hiams, Mike Price, Alistair Donaldson, Kelvin Broad, David Seymour, Robin Wilson and David Westerman among the ringers.¹⁸ A 24 May 2024 touch of Robin Surprise Minor was rung on practice night to welcome Robin Wilson’s great-granddaughter, Robyn Tucker.¹⁸ A 27 June quarter peal was rung in memory of lifelong villager Geoff Heighton.¹⁸

15. The complete peal chronology currently indexed by Felstead

The Felstead Database lists 25 valid tower peals for All Saints, Yelvertoft, from 1926 to 2023. The table below reproduces the date, method description and Ringing World reference exactly enough to locate each record; it does not infer anything beyond the database entry.⁹

Date	Felstead method description	Ringing World ref.
6 Nov 1926	Grandsire Doubles	0816.0709
21 Jun 1949	Doubles (8 methods)	1996.0328
4 Apr 1959	Doubles (5 methods)	2507.0249
4 Jul 1981	Doubles (21 methods)	3667.0693
21 Sep 1982	Stedman Doubles	3732.0927
9 Nov 1984	Doubles (14 methods)	3841.1047
6 Dec 1985	Doubles (11 methods)	3898.0031
25 Apr 1986	Stedman Doubles	3919.0498
24 Sep 1989	Grandsire Doubles	4094.0929
20 Oct 1990	Minor (7 methods)	4154.1171
26 Feb 1993	Surprise Minor (10 methods)	4276.0351
14 Oct 1994	Surprise Minor (13 methods)	4361.1168
4 Apr 1997	Surprise Minor (7 methods)	4489
16 Mar 1999	Surprise Minor (7 methods)	4588
19 Jun 1999	Spliced Surprise Minor (22 methods)	4605
29 Dec 1999	Surprise Minor (7 methods)	4630
3 Oct 2000	Spliced Surprise Minor (41 methods)	4670
3 Aug 2001	Yelvertoft Delight Minor	4713
7 May 2002	Spliced Surprise Minor (41 methods)	4753
31 Oct 2002	Surprise Minor (35 methods)	4778
7 Nov 2003	Surprise Minor (15 methods)	4831.1142
3 Apr 2004	Yelvertoft Treble Bob Minor	4852.0397
16 Nov 2006	Surprise Minor (7 methods)	4989.1174
23 May 2022	Spliced Surprise Minor (41 methods)	5798.0504
28 Jan 2023	Surprise Minor (6 methods)	5835.0170

16. Chronology of the installation and ringing record

Date	Evidence-based event
late 13th century	Parish history dates the tower broadly to this period; no earlier bell configuration is established by the sources used here.
1635	Five bells cast by Hugh II Watts of Leicester; all five survive.
1878	Thomas North publishes a direct description of the five, their inscriptions/diameters and village ringing customs.
1926	Earliest Felstead-listed Yelvertoft peal: 5,040 Grandsire Doubles.
1938	Ringing World advertises Guilsborough Branch special meeting at “Yelvertoft (5 bells)”.
1949	5,040 Doubles in eight methods; 400th anniversary of English Prayer Book.
1950	Percy Amos praises the five Watts bells; branch meeting held at Yelvertoft.
1955	W. J. Kinchin of Yelvertoft announced as Guilsborough Branch secretary.
1959	New bell frame according to parish history; contemporary peal is “first ... since rehanging”.
1989	Eijsbouts treble added by local ringers; ring becomes six.
1990	First Felstead-listed Minor peal after augmentation.
2000	Ringing floor raised during millennium-grant church works.
2001	First peal of Yelvertoft Delight Minor.
2003	Robin Wilson’s 500th peal; 50th anniversary of first ringing on his teaching bell.
2004	First peal of Yelvertoft Treble Bob Minor.
2012	David Westerman of Yelvertoft elected Guild representative to Central Council.
2014	Guild newsletter calls Yelvertoft band well established; Nick Hiams credited with new local ringing website.
2018	Maintenance report records good tonal qualities, frame/rope work, and a first quarter for Lucy Sendall.
2022-24	Peals, quarters and practice-night touches document continuing active method ringing.
2026	Current Benefice information lists six bells, Friday practice and weekly Sunday service ringing.

17. Research gaps and unresolved questions

No accessible source inspected for this report establishes the number or identity of bells at Yelvertoft before 1635. The medieval tower must not be converted into an invented medieval ring.

The precise commissioning, casting, dedication and first-ringing chronology of the 1989 treble has not been located in a contemporary project file during this research pass. The safe statement is that the treble is dated 1989 and the parish history says local ringers added it in that year.

The parish-history statement that the 1989 bell was designed by a direct descendant of Hugh Watts is recorded as that source's statement; independent corroboration was not located.

The 1959 frame is stated by the parish history; the contemporary Ringing World peal independently confirms a rehanging, but the inspected peal report does not name the frame maker.

The current Benefice page names the tower captain only as "David". It would be an inference to expand that to a particular surname without a source that does so explicitly.

The public peal record is not a complete record of ordinary service ringing, practices, weddings, funerals, civic ringing, quarter peals or individual ringers. Absence from Felstead therefore means absence from that peal index, not absence from ringing life.

Conclusion

Yelvertoft's bell history is distinguished by continuity rather than repeated replacement. Five bells cast together in 1635 were still the complete ring recorded by North in 1878, were still the five celebrated by Percy Amos in 1950, survived the major rehanging of 1959, and today remain together as bells 2-6 of the modern six.^{1,7,3}

The human history is equally continuous. Nineteenth-century customary ringing gives way in the surviving record to Guild meetings and peals, then to a post-war local network in which figures such as John Kinchin, Peter Westerman and Robin Wilson are directly visible. The 1989 augmentation widened the musical possibilities of the tower; the peal record thereafter moves decisively into Minor and Surprise Minor, including two methods first pealed under the Yelvertoft name. Modern Guild records show the tower continuing not as a museum installation but as a working part of the Crick-Yelvertoft-Lilbourne ringing community.

References

1. Thomas North, *The Church Bells of Northamptonshire* (Leicester, 1878), Yelvertoft entry, pp. 454-455; digitised transcript, Internet Archive / Whiting Society. North records five bells, their 1635 inscriptions and diameters, and contemporary ringing customs.
2. Thomas North, *The Church Bells of Northamptonshire* (1878), chapter on founders: Hugh Watts II is described as a highly reputed Leicester founder, with a complete ring surviving at Yelvertoft.
3. All Saints' Church, Yelvertoft, "History", official parish website, accessed 25 August 2026. Records the late-13th-century tower; five 1635 Hugh Watts II bells; 1959 castellation renewal and new frame; 1989 sixth bell; Sunday service ringing; and the 2000 raising of the ringing floor.
4. Benefice Bells of Crick, Yelvertoft and Lilbourne, "Yelvertoft", accessed 25 August 2026. Current six-bell data, approximate weights of the five Watts bells, 1989 Eijsbouts treble, practice and service-ringing arrangements.
5. Benefice Bells of Crick, Yelvertoft and Lilbourne, "Inscriptions on the bells at Yelvertoft", accessed 25 August 2026. Transcribes inscriptions of all five 1635 bells and the 1989 treble.
6. Dove's Guide for Church Bell Ringers, bell record for Yelvertoft treble, accessed 25 August 2026: Eijsbouts 1989, 5-0-10, note D, 30.00 inches.
7. The Ringing World, 2 June 1950, Percy Amos, "Bells of Rugby and District". Describes Yelvertoft's five Hugh Watts bells of 1635 as very musical and among his best.
8. The Ringing World, 12 November 1926, p. 709. Peal report: 5,040 Grandsire Doubles at Yelvertoft on 6 November 1926.
9. Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, Felstead Database, Yelvertoft tower peal list, accessed 25 August 2026. Lists 25 valid peals from 1926 to 2023 with Ringing World references.
10. Peterborough Diocesan Guild, "Performances in a Tower: Yelvertoft", accessed 25 August 2026. Detailed peal reports including 1949, 1986, 1994, 1999, 2001-06, 2022 and 2023.
11. The Ringing World, 17 April 1959, p. 249. Peal report for 4 April 1959: 5,040 Doubles; Peter L. Westerman, Dawn V. Elson, Robin Wilson, W. John Kinchin and Michael F. Amos; "First peal on the bells since rehanging."
12. The Ringing World, 25 March 1938, p. 201. Guilsborough Branch notice for a special meeting at "Yelvertoft (5 bells)" on 2 April 1938.
13. The Ringing World, 17 March and 14 April 1950. Guilsborough Branch records scheduling and advertising a meeting at Yelvertoft on 15 April 1950.
14. The Ringing World, 21 January 1955, p. 46, and later notices. W. J. Kinchin of Main Street, Yelvertoft, announced as Guilsborough Branch secretary; 1956 and 1958 notices continue to identify him as Hon. Sec.
15. Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, September 2012, pp. 30-31. David Westerman of Yelvertoft elected as the Guild's fourth representative to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.
16. Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, March 2014, pp. 13-14. Describes the "well established Yelvertoft band" supporting Lilbourne practice and credits returned ringer Nick Hiams with valuable work setting up ringing.yelvertoft.com.
17. Peterborough Diocesan Guild Newsletter, March 2018, p. 13 and p. 15. Yelvertoft maintenance note names "David" as current tower captain and Robin as previous branch steward; records Lucy Sendall (Yelvertoft) ringing her first quarter peal.
18. BellBoard / Peterborough Diocesan Guild 2024 performance reports, accessed 25 August 2026. Yelvertoft performances include Norwich Surprise Minor (26 February), Wells Surprise Minor (27 April), Robin Surprise Minor (24 May) and St Clement's College Bob Minor (27 June).
19. The Ringing World, 30 January 1959 and 22 August 1958, notices for Guilsborough Branch meetings at Yelvertoft, addressed through W. J. Kinchin, Main Street, Yelvertoft.
20. The Ringing World / Peterborough Diocesan Guild record, 28 January 2023: 5,040 Surprise Minor rung to celebrate the life of W. John Kinchin; record states that he was born in Yelvertoft and that his ashes were interred in the cemetery after the peal.