

CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL

COLYFORD

REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF THE BELL AND FITTINGS

Inspection carried out on Tuesday 20th August 2013, on behalf of the Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund, by Ian Smith and Ian Campbell (Trustees of the Fund, and Bells and Belfries Advisors to the Guild of Devonshire Ringers), met and accompanied by Mr Keith Mills.

HISTORICAL

St Michael's Church stands by the former main Exeter to Dorchester road some quarter of a mile west of the bridge over the River Coly. The church was built in 1888-9 as a private chapel with the intention that it would later serve as a parish church. It now serves as a Chapel-of-ease to the Parish Church of Colyton, having been handed over to the Vicar and consecrated in 1903. In 1933 the single bell was supplied by Gillett & Johnston of Croydon, Surrey, though alterations in the stonework of the bell turret indicate that it may have replaced a former bell.

BUILDING

The church has a flint exterior, the internal walls being of yellow and buff brickwork. Over the west gable is a stone bell turret surrounded by small pinnacles and surmounted by a spirelet. The west wall below is supported by three pointed arches with a two-light window above. The barrel-shaped Nave ceiling is wood-boarded internally, the apex being approximately 27 feet above floor level. There is an access trap to the roof space at the west end of the ceiling just south of the apex. We were not able to investigate this at the time of our visit. The bell-rope descends from the bell through a hole in the ceiling approximately 1 foot from the west wall and 1 foot north of the apex. The rope within the church is in good condition.

Externally a ladder of some 38 rungs is required in order to reach the bell turret. The bell opening in the turret measures 1 foot 7 inches wide by approximately 3 feet high. The bell is pivoted approximately 34 feet above ground level. The masonry of the turret is generally sound though some weathering has taken place, a small piece of stone coming away during our inspection.

BELL AND FITTINGS

The **Bell** measures 16 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches in diameter, weighs 1 cwt and 10 pounds (according to the foundry records) and sounds the note C. It does not appear to have any cracks and is of good tone. Interestingly the inscriptions are incised into the bell, rather than being in relief, indicating that it was probably a stock bell and not cast specifically for Colyford.

The **Headstock** from which the bell hangs by means of two bolts is of iron and is of typical “school bell” design. Other than requiring rubbing down and painting it is in good order. A third bolt, passing through the headstock and the crown of the bell supports the independent **Crown Staple** from which the clapper hangs.

The **Clapper** is of wrought iron and is of relatively modern design with octagonal shaft and flight and a slightly ovoid ball. It has a round head through which passes the steel hinge pin of the crown staple. The clapper exhibits side-to-side play of approximately half an inch and negligible up-and-down play, indicating that very little wear has taken place over the years.

The **Gudgeon** pins are attached to each end of the headstock. These rotate in the **Bell-Bearings** which are now in need of lubricating. A little ‘WD40’ was applied at the time of inspection which reduced the ‘squeak’ somewhat, though ideally the grease nipple on each bearing housing needs to be cleared such that fresh grease can be inserted into the bearings.

The bearings are supported on two brackets, each of which is affixed to the masonry of the turret by means of four ragbolts. The brackets appear in good condition, though, as with all the metal fittings, would benefit from rubbing down and painting.

Bolted to the N end of the headstock and extending eastwards is a lever, attached to the end of which is a chain, approximately 6 feet in length, which passes into the roof space through a metal tube, the top of which is open to the elements. Within the roof space the bell-rope is attached to the chain by means of a metal eye, the rope being looped over the eye and spliced back into itself. The chain is now very rusty and needs brushing down and painting to prevent further corrosion. The top of the rope is in fair condition, although where it passes over the metal eye it is showing signs of being affected by damp.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Generally the condition of the bell installation gives little cause for concern, only “house-keeping” measures being required to ensure the bell’s use well into the future. Having said that, if the opportunity arises over the next few years to carry out a few remedial tasks – say if scaffolding is erected for any work on the roof such that a temporary working platform could be built around the bell turret – it would be worth attending to the following items. Some could possibly be performed from a ladder but this is not to be recommended.

1. Remove the tops of the bearing housings such that the bearings can be cleaned out; or at least clear the grease nipples and recharge with clean grease.
2. Lubricate the clapper suspension.
3. Rub down, clean and paint all metalwork (but not the bell itself), including the headstock and lever, bearing housings, bearing support brackets, bell-bolts and clapper.
4. Inspect the chain and renew if necessary; otherwise rub down and paint.
5. Check the condition of the top end of the rope, especially where it is attached to the chain.
6. Generally inspect the condition of the stonework of the bell turret.

We append to this report a list of the major UK bell-hanging companies, and also a diagram of a turret bell with fittings.

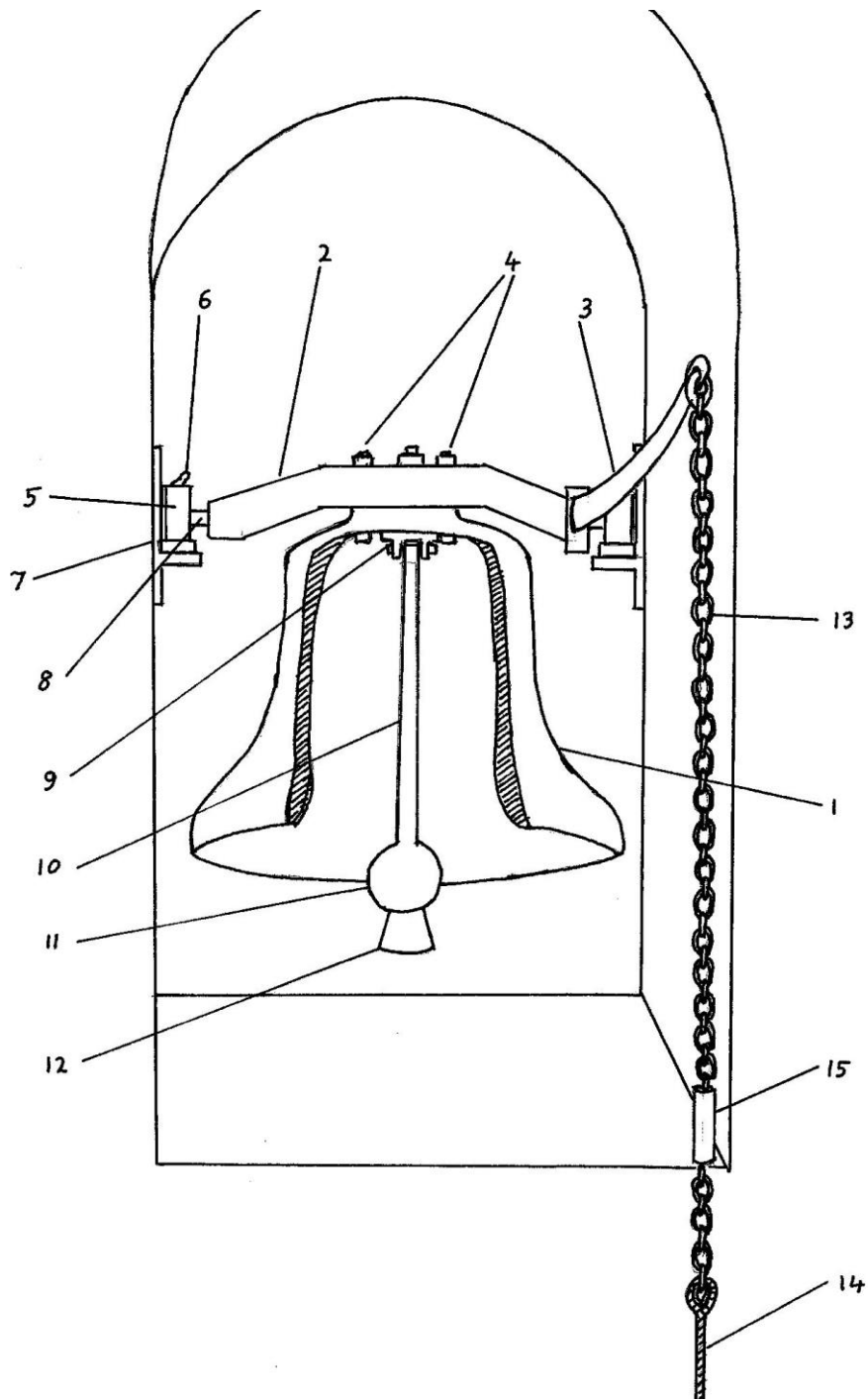
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August 2013

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A TURRET BELL CHIMED BY LEVER AND CHAIN



1	Bell	6	Grease Nipple	11	Clapper Ball
2	Headstock	7	Support Bracket	12	Clapper Flight
3	Lever	8	Gudgeon Pin	13	Chain
4	Bell Bolts	9	Crown Staple	14	Rope
5	Bearing	10	Clapper Shaft	15	Tube