

THE WOODSTOCK CHIMES

In the seventeenth century there were only five bells in the tower of Woodstock Church and it is probable that they were cast by the Keenes, the Woodstock family of bell founders.

In 1708 William and Henry Bagley recast the five bells into a peal of six and a chiming mechanism was installed which played Purcell's 'Britons Stike Home!' from the opera *Boduca* or the British Heroine, written in 1695. It is said that 'Britons Stike Home' was the password used by Marlborough's Army in the battle of Ramilies.

In the middle of the eighteenth century the old tower was found to be unsafe and was taken down as far as the Chancel in 1774. There was considerable delay in rebuilding the tower, but finally a design by Stephen Townsend of Oxford was accepted and the new tower was completed in 1786.

Two bells by Robert Wells were added in 1785 and in 1792. John Briant of Hertford, a noted clockmaker and bellfounder installed the clock which is still in use, and a chiming mechanism to play a different tune each day at 1.00, 5.00, 9.00, 13.00, 17.00 and 21.00 hours; the mechanism had to be wound twice a day which involved a climb up the Church tower to the clock loft. This continued until 1940 when church bells were silenced to be ready as a warning of enemy invasion.

Mr. Tom Styles, who for over fifty years wound the clock and chimes, was the last burgess to be responsible for this and died in October 1963. After the war it was found that age and disuse had taken their toll of the chiming mechanism but it was decided that the chimes should be restored to commemorate the quincentenary of the granting of the Charter to the Borough, and the Coronation of Her Majesty the Queen, both events taking place in 1953.

Contributions to achieve this were received from the Burgesses of Woodstock, the Marlborough family, Sir Winston Churchill (an honorary freeman of the Borough), and many of the 60 towns and villages named Woodstock throughout the world. In addition to those in the British Isles, there are twelve in Australia, three in Canada, three in New Zealand, one in South Africa and about thirty in the United States.

It was decided to install an electrically driven chiming mechanism made by John Smith of Derby but at the request of certain of the burgesses, the chimes are silent at 1 a.m. and 5 a.m., though great care was taken that the modern mechanism would play the original tunes.

The chimes were restored on Sunday, April 8th, 1956, following a service of thanksgiving at which the Lord Bishop of Oxford, Dr. Henry Carpenter, preached. The commemorative plaque was unveiled by His Grace the Duke of Marlborough and amongst those who attended the ceremony were representatives of the High Commissioners of Australia, New Zealand and Canada and the American Ambassador.

The tunes which the new machine plays are the same as were chosen by the Woodstock Corporation in 1790 for Briant's machine and are as follows:

Sunday - Old Hanover . This tune was composed by William Croft and was first published in 1708 as a new tune to the 104th Psalm. It was called Brunswick by Wesley but after the accession of George III was usually known as Hanover. It is the tune usually sung to the hymn "O Worship the King".

Monday - Marriage Vow. The origin of the tune has not yet been found

Tuesday - Happy Clown. This tune was first published in 1718 and was used in the Beggar's Opera for the song "I'm like a skiff on Ocean tossed". It became extremely popular after Henry Burkhead wrote the song "Happy Clown" set to this air in 1782.

Wednesday - Marlbrooke. The origin of the tune is very obscure but it is generally held that it was sung by a French Soldier at the Battle of Malplaquet in 1709 and preserved by folk tradition until it was sung by a Flemish nurse to Marie Antoinette's son in 1782 and so it became extremely popular in France. It is the same tune as "We won't go home till morning" or "For he's a jolly good fellow".

Thursday - Highland Laddie. This used to be known as "Zinglan Johnie" and was used as the air for Robert Burns's song — "I hae been at Crookieden".

Friday - Marionette. The origin of this tune has not been traced but it is known locally as "I'll tell daddy when he comes home".

Saturday - Haunted Tower. This is a tune from Stephen Storace's Opera "The Haunted Tower" which was first produced in 1789. It is known locally as "Master, Master pay your Men".

It can be seen that the tunes are the equivalent of "popular hits" of the late eighteenth century.

John Briant's mechanism has been preserved in the cellar of Woodstock Town Hall and it is of some interest that the mechanism for changing the tunes is identical with the modern machine.