

HOLY TRINITY, MEOLE BRACE

From a history compiled for Shropshire Association of Church Bell Ringers by Alan Glover



The second church, demolished in 1799

EARLY HISTORY OF CHURCH, TOWER AND BELLS

Meole Brace is unusual in having had four churches on almost the same site. The second church was a plain stone building with a half timbered tower built in the thirteenth century. It is recorded as having 3 small bells in 1553 during the reign of Edward VI and there were certainly three bells of later vintage when the church was demolished in 1799. The Treble was cast by Abel Rudhall and dated 1756 and the two larger bells were cast by William Clibury of Wellington in 1641.

The inscriptions were:

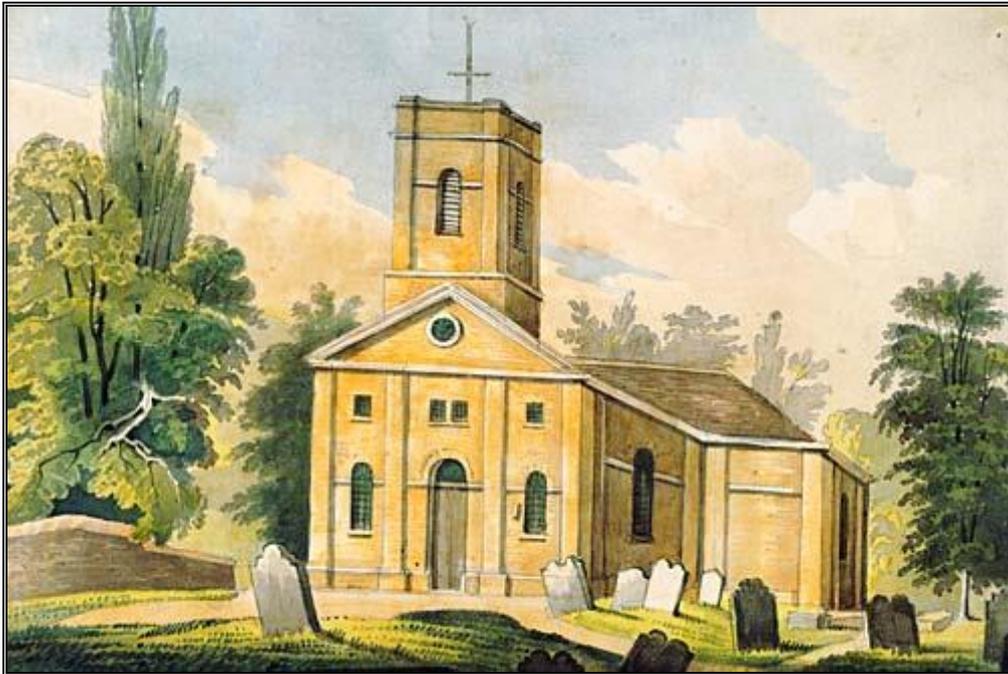
Treble ABEL RUDHALL FOUNDER 1756

2nd GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO 1641

Tenor CANTATE DOMINO CANTICUM NOVUM 1641 W C

There were doubts about the structural safety of the church and following a Parish meeting on February 10th 1799 it was resolved to 'rebuild the Church and Tower entirely.' The plans and an estimate for £800 were adopted on the 27th March, the Faculty was applied for on April 4th and by January 1801 the work had been completed and paid for.

The third church was 'an ugly red-brick structure' and just one bell was deemed sufficient for the puny tower. This was probably the larger Clibury bell, hung in 1800, as a rope for it was bought in that year. Walters states that the third church also had a Thomas Mears bell dated 1825 and weighing about 56 lbs and with a diameter of 13¾ inches for use as a Sanctus bell.



A rather drunken picture of the third church 1799 – 1868

THE ORIGINAL THREE BELLS ~ 1870

The third church was basically “cheap and nasty” and survived less than seventy years. On April 30th 1867 the foundation stone of the latest church was laid on the site of the old vicarage. The tower was started on October 16th 1868, the bells arrived on 25th June 1870 and it was opened on August 11th. There was a peal of three presented by J J Peele, Esq., of Shrewsbury at his sole cost, the largest bell of the old church being taken by Messrs Mears and Stainbank in part payment.

The Day Book at the Whitechapel Foundry records:
J J Peele for Meole Brace Church 23rd June 1870

	cwt	qr	lb
To 3 bells, clappers, stocks, wheels, stays,	5	2	18
sliders, rollers, ropes including frame for 3 bells	5	0	1
but exclusive of fixing or carriage £150.0.0.	4	2	21
	15	1	1

23rd June. Rev. H J Bather, Meole Brace

To additional frame for 6 Bells instead of 3. As ordered by Mr Peele, fixing same and hanging the 3 bells including carriage of bells and framework as per estimate. £40.0.0

All the bells bore the inscription: MEARS AND STAINBANK, FOUNDERS, LONDON, 1870

Treble, (4-2-21, 27 inches, F) THREE ARE OUR VOICES, BUT THEIR CHIME IS ONE,
INVITING ALL, THEIR WORK-DAY LABOUR DONE,
TO WORSHIP GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON,

2nd, (5-0-1, 28¾ inches, E flat) AND GOD THE SPIRIT, THOSE ETERNAL THREE,
WHO YET ARE ONE AND ONE SHALL EVER BE,
CO-EQUAL TRINITY IN UNITY.

3rd, (5-2-18, 31⅛ inches, D flat);
WE GREET THE BRIDAL AND THE BIRTHDAY FEAST,
WE SPEED THE SOUL FROM FLESHLY BONDS RELEASED,
TO THAT LONG HOME WHERE GRIEF AND SIN HAVE CEASED,

They were hung in a six bell frame, with room for three more, larger bells, plans for which are suggested by the comma at the end of the last inscription. The floor bosses in the clock chamber indicate that they were hung in the pits of the current treble, second and fifth with the ropes falling in a straight line across the centre of the ringing room. These would have been the three smallest pits in the six bell frame. The Sanctus bell was finally rehung in a separate frame in the new tower in 1897.

Thomas Sheffield was the key character for Meole Brace bells for the next fifty years. In 1879 he was appointed bellringer and in charge of the water heating system and it was stipulated that the bells were only rung for festive occasions and were otherwise chimed. The vestry minutes for 1881 include payments to Sheffield, who was a carpenter by trade, for 'wood, attending to water supplies and sundries' and also £4 as bellringer. Various graffiti in the ringing chamber suggest that ringing continued at least until the Great War. There was 'a few minutes silence' at the church council meeting on October 26th 1925 'to the memory of the late Thomas Sheffield', and the bells were only rung once thereafter.

On 5th June 1947 a faculty was granted to 'install an Apparatus necessary for Amplifying Recorded Bells according to the Specification and Estimate of H F Pollard, 23 Castle Street, Shrewsbury, the cost of the said work is estimated at £109.17.0 which is to be defrayed by public subscription'. The four loudspeakers are still in position in the belfry. Much later, in 1964, the Vicar reported that 'Mr Eaves had presented the Church with a new recording of Bells.'

THE AUGMENTATION OF 1969

The impetus for resurrecting the three bells and augmenting them came from Reverend Stanley Dakin, who came to the parish as curate in 1964 and later served as vicar from 1968 until 1972. He felt that such an active church deserved something better than a recording and he was supported by Bishop Reeve on one of his visits. As the two walked across from the vicarage prior to a service, the record finished and the loudspeaker produced only a regular whooshing sound. The Bishop earned the gratitude of future ringers with his instruction, 'Dakin, get rid of that monstrosity.' Stanley found willing allies in Major Richard Deedes and his sister Mary.

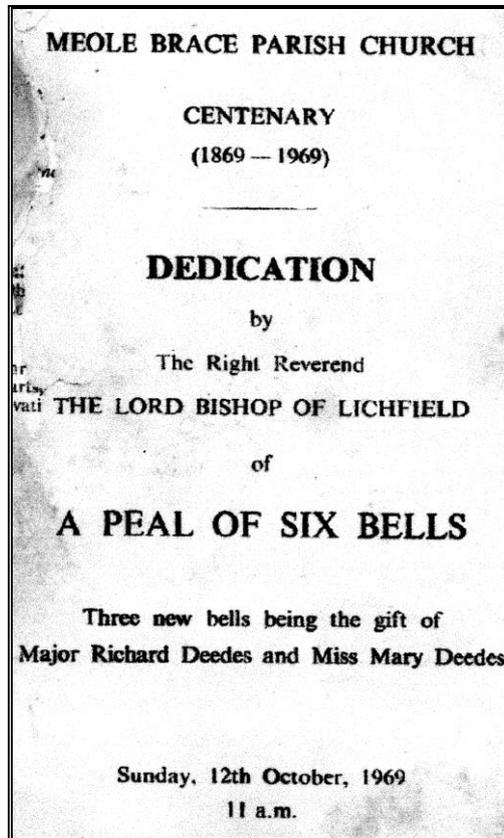
A survey was carried out which disproved the rumours of structural problems with the tower. An inspection was then carried out in April 1969 by the Whitechapel Foundry. They reported that the main oak frame was in good condition but the frame for the Sanctus bell was unserviceable. The bells were sound and their canons intact.

It was considered that completing the original scheme by adding three larger bells would be impossible within the target cost of £2000. An alternative scheme was suggested which involved tuning all the bells, which gave the final scheme of tuning the existing three to C, D and E flat and adding a tenor of B flat and two trebles of F and G. It became a centenary project.

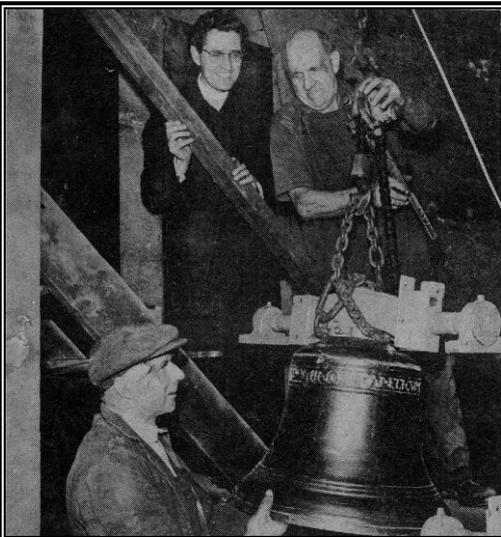
Whitechapel provided an estimate for this work in the same month. 'Dismantle three bells and Sanctus Bell. Cut off canons and remove cast in crown staples. Correct the notes and chief harmonic tones of the three bells. From the metal of the Sanctus Bell and new metal cast three bells and harmonically tune to form Treble, 2nd and Tenor of six. Provide new fitting for the new bells and repair the fittings of the old. The bells to be fitted into the existing six bell frame. Install new steel foundation beams.' These beams were installed E/W under the frame sides 1-2 and 3-4. Iron anchor shoes were also fitted to the ends of the bottom timbers and these were grouted into pockets cut into the walls.

The Parish Magazine reports, 'Craftsmen from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry were here on August 15th and 16th (1969) and the three existing bells in our tower were removed and transported to London for the expert attention they will need before they become part of our new peal of six. It is hoped that the new peal will be installed ready for Dedication by October 12th.' The bells were duly dedicated on

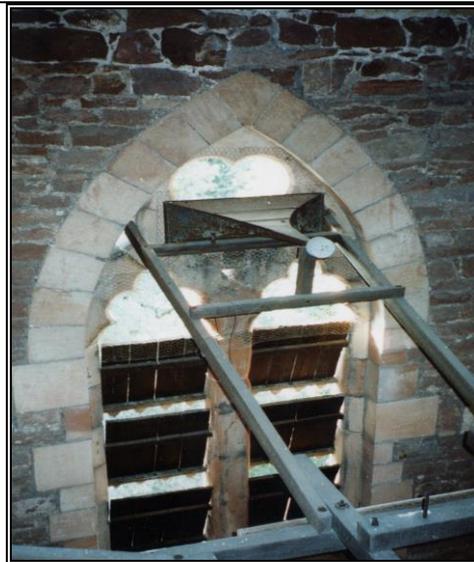
the appointed day by the Bishop of Lichfield. Sunday evening saw the church full to hear the vicar, Rev. S. F. Dakin speak briefly about church bellringing, and the new bells. Fred Sharpe had been involved through the Whitechapel Bellfoundry in the planning of the work. He read the lesson at the dedication service and ‘tapped’ a hymn on the upturned bells during the evening service.



The service sheet for the dedication of the new six. Its distressed condition was caused by its being one item in a time capsule buried in the churchyard in connection with the centenary of the church. The capsule emerged again as planned during the year 2000.



Rev. Stanley Dakin watches Harry Parkes and Arthur Lewry of Whitechapel hanging the treble of the six



One of the loudspeakers installed above the bells and now mercifully unused

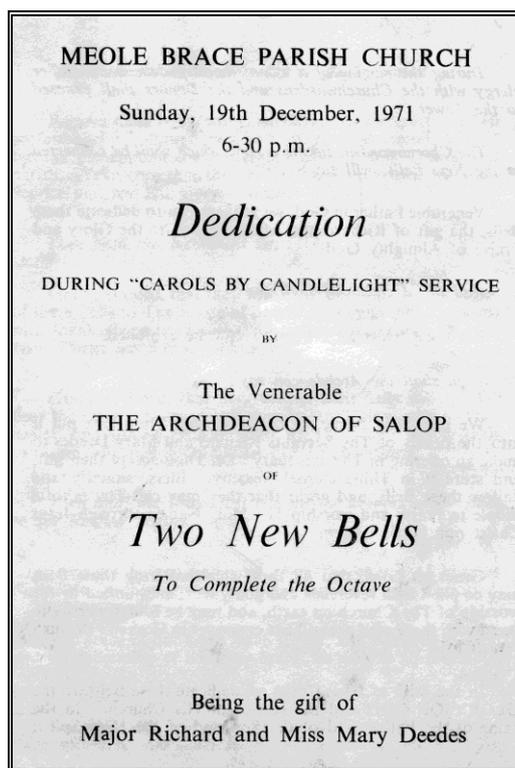
THE FIRST RINGERS

The Shropshire Journal of 24th October 1969 reported the beginnings of the band of ringers. 'Now that Meole Brace has a new peal of six bells in its church, residents have been seriously considering who is to ring them. Last week prospective bell-ringers assembled at the church to learn all about the job. The teacher is Mr H. Bennett of Meole Brace, an experienced bell-ringer and his pupils range from girls of 14 and 15 to middle aged men and women. The bellringers will meet each Wednesday and at present there are 18 members from whom Mr Bennett will select two teams of six.'

It was reported to the PCC on 7th December 1970 that the bellringers had held their first AGM. A small fund was being built up and a set of handbells had been sent to the foundry for refurbishment.

THE AUGMENTATION OF 1971

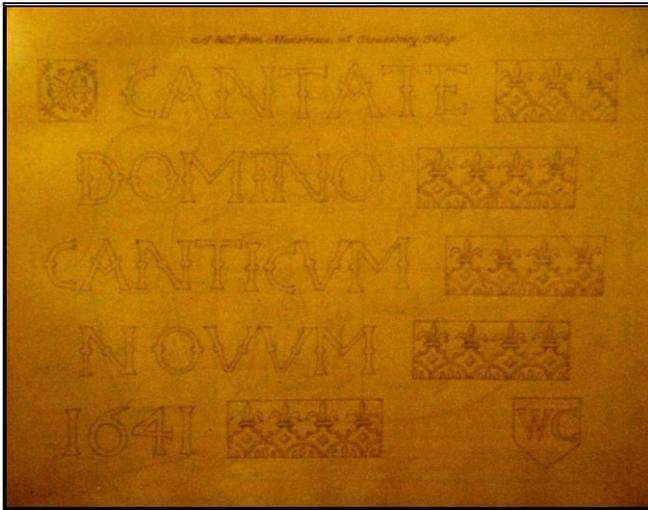
Richard and Mary Deedes visited the ringing chamber with Reverend Stanley Dakin in January 1970. The donors were so pleased with what they saw and heard that it was agreed to further augment the peal to eight. On 3rd May 1971 an estimate from Whitechapel for this work was submitted. This included fitting a long, timber (Jarrah) frameside to the West of the existing frame with three sets of steel cross ties and bracing, and the supply of two new bells and fittings. The former treble and second of the six were to be moved into the new pits and to be replaced by the new treble and second. The estimate was accepted on the 13th May and the two new trebles were due to be dedicated by the Archdeacon of Salop during a 'Carols by Candlelight' service on Sunday, December 19th 1971.



The dedication as planned

In fact the dedication did not take place as planned, probably because the faculty was delayed. F Hector Bennett had been appointed the first ringing instructor at the church. After retirement from his position as Head Brewer at Southam's Brewery in Chester Street, he spent much of his time in a shed at the bottom of his garden, which contained two old printing presses. He produced the service sheets for the dedications in 1969 and (planned) in 1971 and one for the revised service on March 19th 1972 – no longer 'Carols by Candlelight'!

On April 11th 1972 the PCC finally heard from the Vicar, ‘Two additional bells have been installed, completing the octave.’ Major Richard Deedes died on August 28th 1975 and the bells were rung half-muffled for his funeral, and for that of Miss Mary Deedes in 1978.



‘A bell from Meole Brace at Shrewsbury Salop.’ A page from the collection of copies of inscriptions made by William Kimber, head moulder at Whitechapel. This came from the William Clibury Tenor when it was at the foundry in 1870. His enterprise enabled the foundry to reproduce the inscription on the current third bell when it was cast in 1969.

INSCRIPTIONS

Treble and 2nd
(on waist)

WHITECHAPEL

19 71



3rd

*** 1641 WC ***

CANTATE *** DOMINO *** CANTICUM *** NOVUM

(facsimile on shoulder)

(on waist)

WHITECHAPEL

19 69



4th

(on waist)

IN 1969 THREE BELLS
WERE ADDED TO THIS PEAL
THE GIFT OF RICHARD AND MARY DEEDES

(opposite on waist)

WHITECHAPEL

19 69



5th, 6th & 7th see page 2

THREE ARE OUR VOICES, BUT THEIR CHIME IS ONE,
INVITING ALL, THEIR WORK-DAY LABOUR DONE, TO WORSHIP GOD THE FATHER,
GOD THE SON, AND GOD THE SPIRIT, THOSE ETERNAL THREE, WHO YET ARE ONE AND
ONE SHALL EVER BE, CO-EQUAL TRINITY IN UNITY. WE GREET THE BRIDAL AND THE
BIRTHDAY FEAST, WE SPEED THE SOUL FROM FLESHLY BONDS RELEASED, TO THAT
LONG HOME WHERE GRIEF AND SIN HAVE CEASED,

Tenor

S. F. DAKIN, VICAR
C. H. DAVIES,)
B. STOTT,) CHURCHWARDENS, 1969

(on waist)

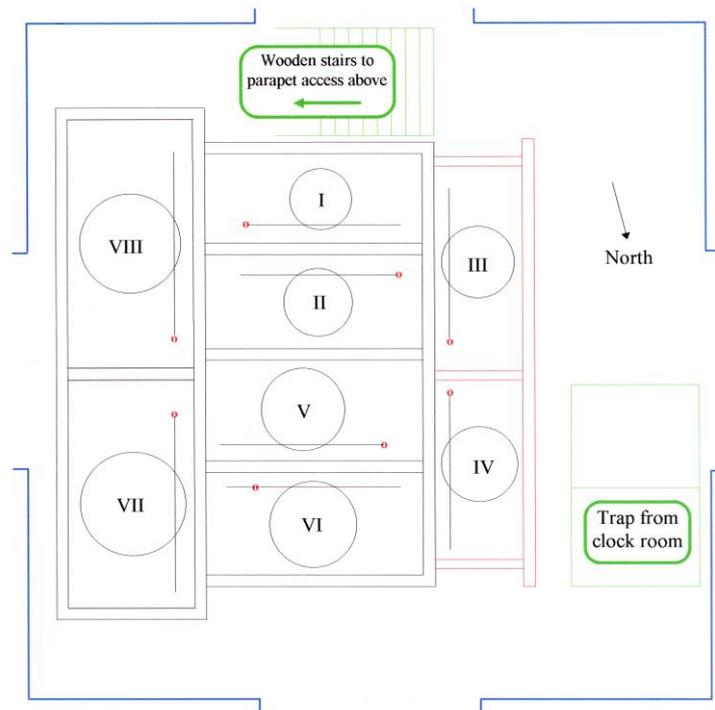
WHITECHAPEL

19

69



FRAME LAYOUT



Several of the churches in Shrewsbury bought bell ropes made by Eldred, Mottram & Co.. These are their premises in Frankwell during one of the regular floods, with a selection of coracles.



RINGING ON THE NEW BELLS

So far this history has been based on material compiled for the Shropshire Association by Alan Glover. The following story of ringing from 1969 to about 2002 relies mainly on two visitor books (now stored in the ringing chamber) and other documents given to Michael Carding by Lewis Roberts at the beginning of 2014, as Michael took over from Lewis as Tower Captain.

Organisation

The Minute Book opens with a report of the “inaugural meeting of the Holy Trinity Meole Brace Parish Church Bellsingers held in the Vicarage on Wednesday 17th December 1970”. The vicar was in the chair and there were 14 others present. The purpose was “to appoint various officers” under the guidance of Mr Bennett, and the following elections are recorded:

Ringling master: Mr John Askey.

Secretary : Mr Davies.

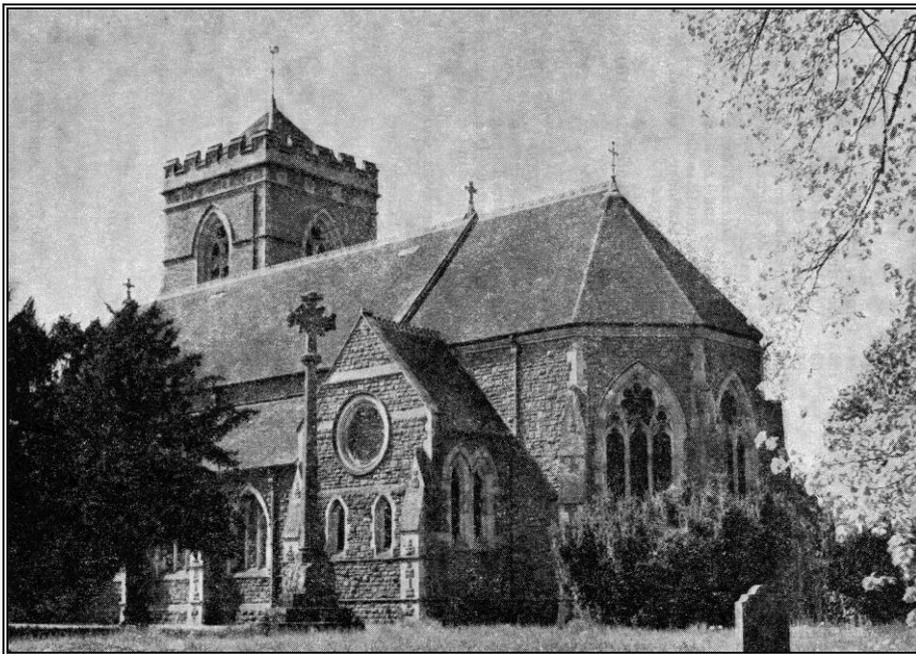
Treasurer : Mr Ralphs.

Steeple keeper : Mr Lear.

Wedding Fees were fixed at £6 with 10/- going to each ringer.

The minute book, which is stored in the ringing chamber, records all the annual meetings from 1970 to 1985. The final minutes record that Lewis Roberts was reluctant to continue as Tower Captain after a decade in charge but agreed to do so for Sunday ringing whilst Mrs Poole led the Wednesday evening practices. For the last few years all the officers had been relations of Lewis except for the Steeple Keeper. Mr Lear had done this throughout the period and (almost the last entry) “the whole bell chamber and clock chamber were thoroughly cleaned of the bird debris etc”

Within the pages there are references to handbells, muffles, ropes, subscriptions, wedding fees, progress and behaviour of younger ringers, annual dinners and outings. Although we *ring the changes* there is an amazing similarity between what happened then and now!



Holy Trinity Meole Brace from the South-East

Ringling and Ringers

Elsewhere there is information about the ringing and the ringers. Much of this is gleaned from the two Visitor Books. Volume one has Rev Stanley Dakin as the first entry in Nov 1969 and volume two finishes with Phil Mickie from Haughton in Staffordshire in August 2011.

The first Peal was rung by a Shropshire Association band on 30th May 1970. It was 5040 changes of Plain Bob Minor and it took 2hours 25 minutes. The ringers were:

Alfred E G Owen 1; Elizabeth Stephens 2; Ernest F Willcox 3;
Reinald H Newton 4; Neville R Holland 5; Richard C Stevens 6 (C).

In January 1971 another Peal of Plain Bob Minor was rung by officers of the association. This was also conducted by Richard C Stevens (Deputy Master) and featured F.Hector Bennett (Trustee) on the third. Hector Bennett was teaching the new Meole recruits at the time.

In July 1972 the regular ringers of Meole Brace rang a final farewell to Rev Stanley Dakin before he left for an appointment in Nairobi. The ringers were J Askey, J Ralphs, B Lear, J Davies, Mr & Mrs K Rainey, Miss J Askey and Miss P Cook. By 1976 there were seventeen ringers on the books and on 1st September the new Tower Captain, Lewis Roberts, conducted his first Quarter Peal. It was Plain Bob Doubles rung half-muffled by a local band in memory of Major Deedes on the first anniversary of his death. Four years later, on 13th July 1980, Lewis conducted a Quarter Peal of Plain Bob Doubles in which all five ringers had the surname Roberts.

There were lots of visiting bands during the seventies and eighties and several Shropshire Association events were hosted at Meole Brace. The Visitor Book tells a story of an active tower with regular practice and worship ringing complemented by visits to and from other towers. Open Tower events and ringing for national events were also part of the programme. In August 1983 a Quarter Peal of Grandsire Triples included John Crum on the tenor.

Towards the Millennium

As mentioned above, the minute book stops in 1985 and Lewis Roberts was ready to hand over his position as Tower Captain. During the next decade it is not clear whether there was an active Meole Brace band or regular Sunday worship ringing. There is no evidence to support or deny this. The tower remained very active but the records are dominated by details of visiting bands. There continue to be plenty of Quarter Peals and Peals and some notable names on the Shropshire circuit feature on a regular basis: Alan & Gill Glover, Brian Kear, Adrian Roberts, Nick Green, John Crum; also it is clear that Lewis Roberts remained an active ringer and was involved in these events.

The first evidence of the next era comes in July 1997 when Andrew Paradise signed the visitor book. His brother Charles rang his first quarter in January 1999 and their mum, Pam, rang hers the following month. About this time Pam became the tower captain although the exact details are elusive. For the millennium, at noon on 1st January, a local band took part in "*Ring in 2000*". The band was Adrian Roberts, Alexis Patterson, Julie Evans, Amanda Anneur, Maureen South and all three members of the Paradise family: Pam, Charles and Andrew.

Regular ringing continued into the new millennium but the Paradise era seems to be a short if active oasis in nearly thirty years of irregular ringing by a local band. The 2002-03-04 report of SACBR lists Lewis Roberts as Tower Contact and eight other ringers, five of these juniors. The report also paints a rather bleak picture of the state of ringing throughout the County with an annual report covering three years and only three bands entering the striking competition.

There were still visiting bands and Peals or Quarter Peals by Shropshire rather than Meole ringers. The last entry specifically for a service at Holy Trinity is for 7th April 2002. It was a Quarter Peal of Norwich Surprise Minor by a band of Shropshire stalwarts. Lewis Roberts had accepted the post of Tower Captain for his second stint but there were no ringers. He agreed to look after the bells, facilitate requests from visiting bands and arrange guest bands to ring for weddings. This remained the position until the end of 2013.



Holy Trinity Meole Brace from the South-East

Peals

Details of all the full peals rung on the Meole Brace bells are on Alan Glover's disc. In total twenty eight peals have been rung since 1970: twenty three major, one triples, three minor and one doubles. The record time for major was set by a Lincoln DG band ringing 5024 changes of Pudsey in 1985. They took 2 hours 27 minutes, half an hour faster than the slowest major peal in 1998 rung by the Cumberland Youths in 2 hours 56 minutes. Just eight of the peals were rung by a Shropshire Association band and the last one was eight spliced surprise rung by a Hereford DG band on 15th September 2010.

