Information from Chris Pickford's survey of Worcestershire bells and clocks.

SHRAWLEY   **St.Mary**

Shrawley has a largely Norman church, the chancel of c.1130 and the nave of c.1180. It was restored by G.E. Street in 1862. There is a huge diagonal buttress at the W end of the nave. This may have been built to support the original west tower. The present tower dates from 1705 and it is contemporary with the ring of five bells supplied by Abraham Rudhall I in that year. It has a west window with mullioned Y-tracery and belfry windows in a late C17th style. Access to the belfry is by spiral stair in the South-Eastern corner of the tower to the middle chamber and thence by ladder to the bells and onwards to the roof.

The present bells

There are six bells in the key of G natural (781Hz or G minus 7 cents)

Bell	Inscription

1.   PEACE & GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD (*scroll border*) 1772 T (*bell*) R (*border*)
2.   FEAR GOD HONOUR THE KING (*scroll border*) T (*bell*) R 1772 (*border*)
3.   PROSPERITY TO THIS PARISH (*scroll border*) T (*bell*) R 1772 (*border*)
4.   THOˢ: RUDHALL GLOCESTER FOUNDER (*scroll border*) 1772 (*border*)
5.   497 236 / PEACE AND GOOD NEIGHBOVRHOOD A (*bell*) R 1705
         Waist: 1952 GOD SAVE THE QUEEN 1977
         Opposite: (*Taylor's rectangular mark*) / RECAST 1976
6.   A Rvdhall Bell Fovnder (*scroll border repeated*) (*vine border repeated*) / THO . STONE : THO . MARTIN : CHVRCH WARDENS (*scroll border*) 1705 (*scroll border*) (*double vine border*)

Bell	Founder and date	Diameter	Mouldings	Hz	Note	Cwt.	Qrs.	Lbs.
1.	Thomas Rudhall, 1772	28	2:1-2:3:2	1313	E	4	2	15
2.	Thomas Rudhall, 1772	28	2:1-2:3:2	1169	D	4	0	0
3.	Thomas Rudhall, 1772	30⅜	2:2-2:3:2	1042	C	4	3	27
4.	Thomas Rudhall, 1772	31¼	2:1-3:3:2	981	B	5	1	9
5.	John Taylor & Co. 1976	33⅞	2:2-2:3:2	876	A	7	1	22
6.	Abraham Rudhall I, 1705	38	2:1-1-2:3:2	781	G	9	0	10

The canons of all the old bells have been removed and these bells have been turned. The new fifth was cast with a flat top. The inscription of the old fifth has been reproduced in facsimile on the new bell.

The bells were rehung in a new cast-iron frame in 1976-8. It is a lowside frame with the smaller bells in parallel pits and the tenors swinging mouth-to-mouth along the north wall (*Bellframes* type 8.3.A.h., layout 6.1). The frame is positioned in what was originally the middle chamber, i.e. below the old belfry level. The frame castings were supplied by Taylors (job number 497), but installed on steelwork supplied by John Forster & Co., of Tipton. The actual work of installation was undertaken by David Beacham, John Slater and Jim Wheeler. The fittings were supplied by John Taylor & Co and include cast iron stocks, ball bearings and traditional stays and sliders.

History

There is no record of the number of bells here in 1552. Writing in 1848 John Noake noted "the tower is about 150 years old, the former one having fallen down". As already noted, this rebuilding took place in 1705 when new bells were installed as is shown by the following entries in the Churchwardens' presentments:

     8 May 1705   Our church & steeple are now finished & in good repair except the
                          Battlements wᶜʰ are speedily to be repaired

The first information comes from the Rudhall lists, which show that Abraham Rudhall I cast a ring of five bells between 1704 and 1715. The 1715 catalogue lists "Shrawley 5". These bells, of which the tenor is the sole survivor, were evidently supplied in 1705. The tenor originally weighed 9-2-18. The old fifth, recast in 1976, weighed 6-2-27.

In 1772, the ring was remodelled. They may have simply recast the front three bells and added an extra one a ring of six. Alternatively, they could have taken away the original tenor (say 13 cwt) and used the metal to cast smaller bells. If that is what happened, then it would have been necessary to recast at least one of the two smaller bells of the original five to get the correct note for a lighter ring of six - i.e. to get the present B instead of the original B flat. The new bells were cast by Thomas Rudhall of Gloucester. The 1788 and 1804 Rudhall catalogues list "Shrawley 6". The inscriptions of the six bells – four of 1772 and two of 1705 – are recorded in the Prattinton Mss.

The old bell frame – on the quarter plan (*Bellframes* layout 6.3) - may well have been installed in 1772 too. A sketch plan made by Taylors in 1935 shows that it was arranged with bells 5 and 2 swinging north-south, the others east-west. The fifth was hung to the west of the treble and tenor, the second to the east of the third and fourth. The sanctus bell was hung in the west end of the pit of the fourth. The four east-west base beams of the old frame remain *in situ* above the present frame.

Some of the timber for the bells came from nearby Shrawley Wood which belonged to the Vernon family of Hanbury Hall who were also patrons of the living. The woods were managed by estate woodmen and sales of timber were recorded in their accounts. These include an entry dated 1772, as follows:

> 1772 Deliver's to the Church Wardens of Shrawley 3 Tun & 6 feet of Timber for the
> Hang the Bells   £7 16s. 0d.

Even more interesting are some jottings in the wood account book for 1768. In an empty margin, someone has written out the changes row-by-row for Plain Bob Minor (4½ leads) and "Bobmajor" (a lead and a few rows) with the first three changes of Grandsire Triples struck through. Clearly the woodman or someone associated with the woods was a change-ringer.

Before rehanging in 1976-8 the bells were hung on old fittings, not the work of any recognised late C19 or early C20 bellhanger, and so they may have been kept in ringing order without major repairs for almost two centuries.

As well as the ring, there is a small Sanctus bell. This bell is uninscribed. It is 13¾ inches in diameter. Walters states that it was found on Oliver's Mount near the River Severn. John Noake reported (in 1848) that:

> The tower contains a small bell which was dug up some years back by some men who
> were ploughing in a field adjacent: it is thick and quite plain, affording no clue to its
> history – it may have been rung in the service of a feudal baron, or to summon, as now, the
> assemblage of Christians to the worship of their maker

Two decades earlier, in the 1820s, Dr. Prattinton had recorded a similar tradition. He noted:

> Mr. Moseley told me that the Old Clerk said the small Bell was found on the scite of an
> old Castle, &c belonging to the Mortimers, near the Severn

The bell itself is unmarked, but it has two mouldings on the crown, three below the shoulder, three at the top of the soundbow and three at the lip (i.e 2:3:3:3). It has a full set of six canons. It resembles other uninscribed bells of similar size at other churches in the area (e.g.

Holt, Stanford on Teme) and I think it is possible that these bells were all cast at Worcester in about 1450, at about the time when Richard le Belyetere was founding in the City.

The bell now hangs in a low wooden frame which sits across two of the base beams of the old frame near the western belfry window. This frame is a simple C19 or C20 structure. The fittings include a wooden stock with strap gudgeons and stock hoops, plain bearings, iron chiming lever and clapper. The bell is secured to the stock by traditional straps and argent U-bolt. A false crown staple has been fitted.

There is no *clock*. In the churchyard, however, there is an interesting sundial. It was made by Samuel Thorp (1765-1838) of Abberley. The dial is marked to show the time from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is signed "Sam¹ Thorp ABBERLEY 1819 / Ab Hoc Momento pendit Aeternitus". It sits on top of the base of the C14 or C15 churchyard cross so the south of the nave and east of the path leading to the south porch. Prattinton mentions Thorp's sundial on the shaft of the cross in his notes, dating from the 1820s.