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**The Last Years of John Rudhall, Bellfounder of Gloucester, 1828-
35**

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The Last Years of John Rudhall, Bellfounder of Gloucester, 1828–35

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Introduction

The Rudhall family's bell foundry in Gloucester was established in the later 17th century by Abraham Rudhall. His first known bells were a ring of five supplied to St. Nicholas's church in Oddington in 1684 and one of them still remains in the church's tower and is rung regularly. Abraham rapidly gained credence as a founder and some twenty years later, in an advertisement which appeared in *The London Postman* in 1705, he announced that since the first year of the reign of James II he had cast 1 ring of ten bells, 10 of eight, 32 of six, and 25 of five, which together with bells for other peals numbered 547 besides others which he could not remember. He had cast bells for 7 cities, 36 market towns, 4 colleges and 162 parishes in thirteen counties, not to mention bells for gentlemen's seats, chapels and shops. At the time of his death he was referred to as 'The Prince of English Bellfounders'.

Abraham's son Abraham (II) was apprenticed as a bellfounder to him and his wife Elizabeth on 1 August 1694. On the completion of his apprenticeship in 1701 the younger Abraham became a freeman of the city of Gloucester on 14 August of that year. A bell at the church of St. John the Baptist, Tredington, bears the inscription ABRA RVDHALL IVNIOR 1700 and could well be his apprenticeship piece.

Abraham II is thought to have taken over the foundry from his father *c.* 1718. Certainly in 1722 Thomas Taylor, the son of Francis Taylor, a Cheltenham mould maker, was apprenticed as a bellfounder to the younger Abraham and his wife Eleanor. Both Abrahams died in 1735 and the foundry was carried on by the younger Abraham's son Abel, who had become a freeman of Gloucester in the same year as his father died. Abel produced some excellent bells; the ring of six at St. Michael's church, Withington, illustrates his skill as a founder. When Abel died at the early age of 46 in 1760 his property and business were left to the three sons of his first marriage, Abraham (III), Thomas and Charles, all of whom were teenagers. John, the son of his second marriage, was an infant. Abraham III was a mercer and played no active part in the bellfounding business. Thomas carried on the business, but owing to his youth and inexperience the foundry was to all intents and purposes managed by Francis Tyler, who may have been a cousin. The bells at Mitcheldean bearing the date 1760 but no founder's name were said in the *Gloucester Journal* of 12 January 1762 to have been cast by Messrs Tyler and Rudhall. Thomas's name seems not to have appeared on bells until 1762 and the earliest Gloucestershire bell to bear his name, at Stonehouse, is dated 1763.

Thomas died in 1783 and bequeathed his share in the property and business to his brothers

Abraham and Charles. On 1 November of that year Abraham relinquished his interest in the business to his half-brother John in return for an annuity of £30. Charles and John continued in partnership until 1787 when Charles retired and John agreed to pay both Abraham and Charles an annuity of £20 as long as he should continue the business. They agreed not to cast bells elsewhere, although Charles retained the right to cast bells not exceeding 12 pounds in weight at Brighton (*Brightelmstone*). The Gloucester property remained in the possession of Abraham.

John, the son of Abel and Eleanor Rudhall was baptised at the church of St. John the Baptist in Gloucester on 27 December 1759. He was therefore a comparatively young man when he took over the foundry in 1783. He married Frances Arnold, the daughter of the Revd. John Arnold, rector of Dowdeswell and of Coberley, and on 1 June 1789 their daughter Frances Catherine was baptised in St. Michael's church in Gloucester. Frances Catherine married Francis Grevill Prideaux, of St. Michael's parish in Bristol, in St. Michael's church in Gloucester on 5 November 1813 and it is among the Prideaux papers in the Bristol Record Office that much of the detail about the last years of John Rudhall, bellfounder, can be found.¹

John, as previously stated, took over the foundry in 1783 and there is no doubt that he was the least able of this renowned family of bellfounders and not a great businessman either. He continued to cast bells for a wide area, including America, but his surviving bells in no way match in quality those cast by his father. Admittedly he was trading in difficult times. The Napoleonic wars and the generally unsettled state of the country did not allow him to transact the same amount of business as his forebears. It was not always easy for him to obtain money that was owed him as the protracted correspondence with the parish of Newnham from 1809 to 1812 shows. In December 1813 James ('Jemmy') Wood, the noted Gloucester banker, suspended payment to him, but the business recovered and John continued to trade until 1829 when the business was sold to Thomas Mears of Whitechapel. Mears rented the foundry premises from Mary and Caroline, granddaughters of Abraham III. The Whitechapel Bell Foundry has no documents relating to that transaction, but at this time Mears was buying up small foundries all over the country and most of them were closed within a short time. It appears that Mears was not so much interested in acquiring property as in preventing others from trading in competition with him. Gloucester seems to have been different for not only did casting continue there but the bells continued to bear John Rudhall's name. It is not certain if John was a paid employee or a manager, or had some other capacity, although the first seems unlikely as after his death outstanding moneys were paid to Mrs. Rudhall. It is just surmise that as John was around seventy years of age Mears may have thought that in the normal course of event he would not continue for long.

In the Prideaux papers there is a little notebook evidently kept by John Rudhall from the time of Mears's acquisition of the business until his own death in 1835.² Only two surviving Gloucestershire bells are recorded as having been cast by Mears in London during this period, while some sixteen bells and another seventeen that have since been recast were cast in Gloucester bearing Rudhall's name. As far as can be ascertained during the previous seven years Rudhall cast thirty-three bells for Gloucestershire churches, but these figures do not give any accurate picture of the success or otherwise of the Gloucester foundry.

The entries in the notebook show that John Rudhall received enquiries from a wide area, mostly within the western half of the country, extending northwards to Oldham and Manchester, southwards to St. Columb, Padstow and Mawgan in Cornwall, and westwards to Pembroke and across the sea to the Isle of Man and Ireland. Most of the bells were destined for churches, particularly new churches in Cheltenham, Bristol and the north of England. Some enquiries were about substantial projects — for example twelve bells for a rebuilt church in Oldham, the tenor to weigh about 32 cwt and the whole ring not to exceed 7 tons but heavier than any of the rings of twelve in Gloucester diocese. Rudhall also corresponded with Worcester Cathedral, for which

he cast a bell in 1830. Other bells were for commercial and industrial premises such as the gas-works in Cheltenham and the Eagle Foundry and the brass foundry of J.W. Timmings, both in Birmingham. It is particularly interesting that several bells were supplied to the firm of Wasborough Hale, which was casting in Bristol in the early 19th century and that Peter Llewelin, a Bristol brassfounder, was among those making enquiries. There are records too of bells being sent to private houses; Rudhall supplied a 15-inch bell for Charles Greenaway of Barrington Park (*Barrington Grove*) and sent house bells to Carmarthen.

The notebook gives some detailed measurements of church bells surviving at that time. Rudhall rarely mentions the names of their founders, an exception being at Hampnett where he records the bell as being by Edward Neale in 1677. He gives estimates for supplying new bells and clappers, giving a price for the new bell with an allowance for any old metal which he received as part payment. In the case of Dymock he deducted from the allowance 7 lb for the staple and dirt! Although he sometimes included a figure for a new bellframe, most often that work was undertaken by a local builder. On occasions he mentions John Jacques who in the early 19th century produced many bellframes of very fine quality, such as the one at Rendcomb which is still in an excellent condition. Rudhall noted the details of new bells he supplied, their cost and the means of transporting them to their destinations, this last information being of particular value to anyone interested in forms of transport in the early 19th century. Most bells for more distant places were sent by water — the barge of Brown and Sons of Evesham is mentioned and the trow of G. Amis carried bells to Bristol — whilst bells travelling overland went by various carts or wagons.

It is not surprising that Rudhall does not appear to have visited church towers himself during the period 1828–35. He was in his seventies and climbing into belfries was a hazardous occupation at that time, as indeed in a great many churches it still is. He notes sending others to record measurements and pitches of bells.

For me the notebook's entries about church bells in Gloucester diocese are of particular interest as I have personal knowledge of the bells of the diocese's churches. Some entries are much fuller than others and can be married up with churchwardens' accounts and correspondence. In some instances it would appear that no contract was agreed and no work was undertaken. The two trebles at Bisley that Rudhall quoted for were not cast, that task being carried out in 1864 by John Warner & Sons of London. For this address I have chosen to concentrate on the entries relating to a handful of towers for which the evidence from the notebook can be supplemented by other records such as churchwardens' accounts and correspondence.

Church Honeybourne, St. Ecgwin

On 2 October 1828 Rudhall noted that he had quoted to supply new bells to Church Honeybourne near Evesham at 14*d.* per pound of new metal with an allowance of 11*d.* per pound of old. The cost of stocks and wheels for two bells and hanging and delivery would be £12 or £13. There were evidently five bells in the tower and on 1 January 1829 Rudhall received the three largest. He gave the measurements of each bell, i.e. the diameter of the mouth, the thickness of the soundbow and the height. The 5th or tenor was said to have a mouth diameter of $40\frac{7}{8}$ inches, a soundbow thickness of $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches and a height of $30\frac{3}{8}$ inches. It weighed 11 cwt 2 qr 18 lb and the total weight of the three bells was 28 cwt 1 qr. The note of the 4th was given as A pipe. The note recorded is what we now call the strike note. In fact five notes are normally tuned in bells, the highest and the lowest being an octave apart, and it is the combination of those notes which is heard. The modern method of tuning bells was not introduced generally until the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Dr. Helene de la Rue, curator of the Bate Collection of musical instruments

and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, says that the pipe would have undoubtedly been a square wooden pipe on which lines indicating notes were marked. By means of a slider it would have been possible to ascertain the pitch of a note. Where Rudhall records that it was quarter above A he meant that it was a quarter of a tone above A. Before the advent of organs tuning pipes were commonly used in churches to pitch the notes for hymn singing.

The Honeybourne bells were delivered to Gloucester from Evesham on the barge of Brown and Sons. Two days later Rudhall wrote an estimate for taking down the five old bells and recasting them with additional metal as a ring of six:

... tenor about 11 cwt, new Clap', Stocks, Wheels & Brasses, new oak Timber, making Frames and hanging six bells for £230 and old Brasses, Clap' other Ironwork or into 6 with a tenor not less than 10 cwt with everything as above £205...

Both figures included carriage between Evesham and Gloucester but was exclusive of taking down and replacing the frame and repairing floors. On 9 April 1829 Rudhall made a note about recasting the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th as five bells to make with the 4th, remaining as the tenor, a musical peal of six at a cost of £180 'including new Oak Frames and hanging them...and the old Brasses



Fig. 1. The 5th bell at Maisemore, St. Giles, cast by John Rudhall in 1826 (photograph by the late Frederick Sharpe).

and Clap', but exclusive of new Floor or repairing old ones'. The 4th, which is still in the tower, was cast in 1665 by Henry Bagley of Chacombe (Northants.). It has been said that the antiquary Peter Prattinton found the 3rd and tenor to be cracked in 1820.³ In his notes Rudhall does not record that the bells were damaged and it is questionable whether he could have accurately pitched the note of a cracked bell.

For some reason neither scheme for installing six bells was implemented. Instead Rudhall's original plan to recast the 3rd and tenor bells was carried out and on 4 September 1830 the two new bells were dispatched to Honeybourne. The 3rd was half an inch less in diameter than its predecessor, was slightly thicker in the soundbow and was two and a half inches shorter. The new tenor had a larger mouth diameter, $41\frac{1}{8}$ inches compared with $40\frac{7}{8}$ inches, and was a quarter of an inch thicker in the soundbow and almost two inches shorter. John Rudhall's bells can be distinguished from those of his forebears by their more squat appearance (cf. Fig. 1). The tenor weighed 12 cwt 1 qr and was G pipe. It was inscribed CAST AT GLOUCESTER BY JOHN RUDHALL 1830 / THE REVD W B BONAKER VICAR WM HALE & WM BENNETT CHURCHWARDENS.

The bells remain as they were left in 1830 when they were hung in a new bellframe, most probably by Jacques. They have been unringable for many years but there are now moves afoot to restore them. They are very cramped in the tower and one idea put forward is to remodel them as a lighter ring of six with the Bagley (4th) bell, which is scheduled for preservation in lists prepared by the Council for the Care of Churches, remaining as the tenor. Was John Rudhall really that forward looking? Time will tell if his similar scheme will be implemented more than 170 years after he first mooted it.

Cheltenham, St. Mary

In 1823 John Rudhall recast the ring of eight bells at St. Mary's church. There had been much debate as to whether the ring should be increased to ten or twelve, no doubt occasioned by comparatively recent augmentations of the ring at Stroud to ten and that at Painswick from ten to twelve. Ten years later the matter was raised again at Cheltenham.

On 2 November 1831 Rudhall gave a quotation to R.E. Marshall for

Peals of Bells 13' a lb new and for old not exceeding new in weight 8 & half d a lb. Balance paid when work is completed. 2 & hal per cent Comm on balance receive and deliver to Cheltenham. Stocks, wheels etc from £4 10[s.] to £7 per bell Single bells tuned to old charged more

The quotation appears to be for St. Mary's church but it may have been for Leckhampton. Rudhall's notebook lists it merely as for Cheltenham. By 3 April 1833 Rudhall's terms seem to have changed for he informed Joseph Riley that the cost of supplying two trebles, together weighing 12 cwt, to make ten at Cheltenham would be twelve and a half pence a pound with six months credit or twelve pence for ready money in cash paid within five or six weeks. On 2 May Rudhall informed William Forty, the sexton, that he would supply two trebles for twelve and a half pence a pound and clappers and brasses for £2 10s., one half to be paid when work was completed and the remainder in instalments of six, nine and twelve months.

The written agreement between Rudhall and Cheltenham in 1823 stretches to seven pages and Rudhall had been required to provide sureties. His son-in-law Francis Grevill Prideaux had been one of the latter. The 1833 agreement is very much shorter and more direct.

Memorandum of an Agreement made this Seventeenth day of May in the Year of Our Lord Eighteen Hundred and Thirty Three between Thomas Forty, Builder, William Forty, Sexton, and Richard Hague, Painter, all of Cheltenham on the one part and John Rudhall of the City of Gloucester, Bellfounder, on the other as follows

The said John Rudhall agrees to cast two Treble Bells that shall be tunable to the present Peal of eight bells in the Tower of the Parish Church of Cheltenham aforesaid so as to make a musical peal of Ten Bells and also furnish two Clappers and two pairs of Brasses for the same two Treble Bells and the said Thomas Forty, William Forty and Richard Hague agree to pay the said John Rudhall at and after the rate of twelve pence halfpenny a pound for the said two bells and also agree to pay Two Pounds Ten Shillings for the two new Clappers and two pairs of Brasses and also agree to pay the amount of all the articles aforesaid in the manner and form following that is to say one half of the amount immediately after the said Bells are hung in the Tower aforesaid and the remainder by instalments in six, nine and twelve months afterwards.

In full consent to the above agreement the parties have set their hands as under.

John Rudhall, Thomas Forty, Wm Forty, Rd Hague

On 10 June 1833 the two trebles were dispatched on Wasley's wagon. The smaller bell had a mouth diameter of $28\frac{1}{8}$ inches, a soundbow thickness of $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches and a height of $21\frac{3}{8}$ inches. It weighed 6 cwt 19 lb. The 2nd was $28\frac{1}{4}$ inches across the mouth, had a soundbow thickness of $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches and was $20\frac{7}{8}$ inches tall. It weighed 5 cwt 2 qr 3lb. The clappers weighed $20\frac{1}{4}$ and $19\frac{1}{4}$ lb respectively. One would normally expect these measurements and weights to be in reverse order, i.e. the 2nd being larger and heavier than the 1st. Throughout his notebook Rudhall lists the bells with the highest pitch first. As the 2nd was recast in 1883 it is not easy to verify the comparative size and weight of Rudhall's two bells, although Ellacombe recorded the treble as measuring $27\frac{1}{4}$ inches across the mouth and the 2nd $28\frac{1}{4}$ inches.⁴ The late Frederick Sharpe's notes of 1974 record the treble as being 28 inches.

The inauguration of the new ring was reported in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* of 26 September.

A short time since, the ringers of this town, by their exertion, purchased two additional bells, which have been placed in the steeple, free of any expense to the parish, making a peal of ten, which is, we understand, pronounced by judges to be inferior to few in the kingdom. On Monday last [23 September] the new peal was opened with a scientific specimen of change ringing, performed by a company of the Cheltenham and Birmingham ringers who rang a peal of new treble bob royals, comprising 6000 changes, in three hours and forty-three minutes.

The ringers may have been happy with the bells but it appears that John Rudhall had cause to be unhappy with the rate of payment, The total bill was £70 14s. 0d. A scrap of paper among the parish records lists the payments made to him.⁵ The first payment, £28, was made on 23 August and the second, £7 7s., on 23 September, the day of the opening and celebratory peal. Presumably Rudhall had journeyed to Cheltenham for the occasion. Thus the amount owed on completion, half the total, was paid reasonably quickly. The next instalment should have been paid in March but nothing was paid until 14 June, when £5, about a quarter of the amount due by that time, was tendered. Nothing more was paid until 15 October by which time the final payment was overdue. The sum of £10 was sent but it is obvious that Rudhall was losing patience. On 17 December 1834 and eighteen months after the bells had been dispatched from the foundry — the hanging of the bells was not part of the contract — he wrote to the sexton, William Forty,

Sir, I have again taken the liberty of troubling you to request that you will remit within a few days £20 7s. 0d. the balance due for the Bells for I assure you that had it been settled a twelvemonth ago I should have gained nothing by it therefore I have been losing money ever since. Trusting to your compliance and with kind regards to all friends.
I remain Sir Truly Yrs John Rudhall.

Evidently it was not the first time he had so written. A month later, on 20 January 1835, the sum of £7 7s. was eventually paid to Mr. Rudhall at Gloucester.

Blaisdon, St. Michael and All Angels

In their accounts the Blaisdon churchwardens paid 6s. on 18 October 1827 for taking the 4th bell to Gloucester and 1s. the following year to William Coleman for breaking and pulling it down.⁶ On 10 February 1829 Rudhall noted in his book details of the bells making up the church's old peal of five, the actual measurements having been taken by E. Churchill. The churchwardens were John Hart and Samuel Sterry. The 4th, which was to be recast, weighed 5 cwt 3 qr 18 lb and had a mouth diameter of 2 feet 7 inches and a soundbow thickness of $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. The note of the tenor was said to be flatter than B.

On 17 April 1830 Rudhall recorded that the new 4th had been sent to Blaisdon. Its mouth diameter was 2 feet $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch more than its predecessor) and the soundbow was $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches thick and the bell 1 foot $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches tall. At 5 cwt 3 qr 26 lb it was just 8 lb heavier than the one it replaced. It bore the inscription I HART & S STERRY CHURCHWARDENS 1829 I RUDHALL FECIT.⁷ The churchwardens' accounts confirm the evidence of the notebook. On 17 April 1830 they paid £15 4s. to Rudhall for recasting the bell and made payments of 6s. for hauling the bell back from Gloucester and £1 4s. 9d. to William Harper for work including repairs to the bellframe.⁸ The bell's inscription was reproduced in 1912 when all five bells were recast by Mears and Stainbank and a new treble was added to the peal.

Longhope, All Saints

On 10 February 1829, the same day as Churchill visited Blaisdon, Rudhall also noted the details of the five bells at Longhope, the measurements again being taken by Churchill. Evidently the treble was to be recast probably because it was cracked. The notes of the other bells were recorded, the 2nd being almost a quarter above D, the 3rd C#, the 4th more than one quarter below B and the tenor as one quarter below A pipe. It is not usual to find the notes of all the bells in a ring in Rudhall's book. The treble was said to weigh 5 cwt and 21 lb and the tenor was a bell of 40 inches in diameter which means it would weigh about 12 cwt.

The new treble was $27\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter with a soundbow thickness of $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. It had been 'trewed very much' and weighed 4 cwt 3 qr 21 lb. Its note just covered the mark above E pipe. The bell, which was dispatched on Terry's wagon, is still in the tower but it was tuned in 1985 when the ring was increased to eight. It now weighs only 4 cwt 1 qr 10 lb, a loss of 66 lb which illustrates why conservationists are loathe to tune bells. Metal removed in the tuning process cannot be replaced. The process is irreversible.

Little Barrington, St. Peter

It has always been the tendency of churchwardens and ringers to overestimate the weight of their bells. Consequently founders and bellhangers have often been accused of 'stealing' metal from them when they have been removed from the tower, especially for tuning. There well may have been an overestimate when George Ward, the churchwarden at Little Barrington, obtained an estimate from Rudhall in 1831. On 23 July that year Rudhall quoted to supply a bell of 8 or 9 cwt and tunable to the others at 14d. a pound for new metal and $8\frac{1}{2}d.$ for old. If no particular note was required he would allow 9d. a pound for old metal.

When the bells' details were recorded on 2 November it was noted that the treble was 25 inches in diameter and that the tenor was 'broke' and weighed only 5 cwt. In February the following year Rudhall supplied a bell $30\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter and 5 cwt 1 qr 1 lb in weight, rather

less than the bell for which George Ward had requested an estimate. Its note was said to be very little flatter than C# pipe.

Leckhampton, St. Peter

Rudhall's notebook states that on 12 May 1832 he received Leckhampton's 5th bell in six, broken in pieces, for recasting at a price of 15*d.* a pound for new and 10*d.* a pound for old metal. The bell weighed 6 cwt 3 qr 21 lb. The notebook also recorded that Leckhampton's churchwardens were Thomas Pates and John French and its rector Charles Brandon Trye. On 30 May Rudhall wrote to R.E. Marshall, a Cheltenham ironmonger.⁹

Sir, In reply to your favour of yesterday the weight of the Leckhampton old 5th Bell which I received broken in pieces was 6 – 3 – 1 and I agreed with the churchwardens to allow for the old metal 10*d.* a lb and charge the new 15*d.* a lb and if the old bell was in tune with the rest of the Peal and none of the metal has been wasted shall endeavour to cast another nearly the same weight, but when you determine about it I shall send a person to take the dimensions of the Bells and the note of the Tenor and shall then know whether any addition to the weight will be required.

Leckhampton must have agreed to have the bell recast. An entry in Rudhall's notebook some time in 1833 gives the details of the other five bells in the ring, namely mouth diameters (in feet, inches, and eighths of an inch), soundbow thicknesses, and heights. The note of the tenor is recorded as A pipe.

Leckhampton peal of 6			
1	2.3.0	2.2tr	1.8.4
2	2.4.3	2.1tr	1.10.6
3	2.6.0	2.1tr	1.10.2
4	2.7.4	2.1	2.0.0
5			
6	3.1.6	2.3	2.4.0

An undated letter from Thomas Forty, the Cheltenham builder, to one of the churchwardens, (? R.E.) Marshall, takes up the story.¹⁰ It provides a vivid picture of the difficulties of hanging bells in the early 19th century.

Sir, By your request I whent yesterday to Leckhampton Church to inspect the state and situation for new hanging the 5th bell of the peal in the tower. I have examined the bells and frame before more than once for I am very well aware as who ever might have the job will have some thing to do. I assisted in the getting the bells down at the time as it was taken away we was obliged to break it smaller or else it could not be got out of the tower as the first and second bells have been put up since the other four. There is no way the bell can be got up without moving the frame and bells or part of the frame, which will be attended with a great deal of trouble etc. and by doing so the stocks and wheels of them two bells are in such a bad state as I am afraid they will not do again. The others are in very bad repair especially the tenor. She wants new stocking and wheel etc. etc. Altogether the other two might be timbered up as might serve for some time. The frames of all the bells are very bad. In some places there wants false beams as there is no other way of fastening the Brasses as the timbers are decayed and they have been moov'd some time on that account. In short the whole is in a bad state. I can say only that it is one of the worst places to do anything as ever I was in and I have been up as many of the sort as most people either to work or some thing or other else. I never saw before but what there was some sort of floor between the bells in case of falling or danger but here is nothing so that you must hang yourself up some way or other

to work. Here is no steps only one bad short ladder. There is another thing which is all against the workman. It is so dark on a fine day as they must be obliged to work by candle nearly all day or must keep a light burning. Now I do not know what else I can say about the matter. I would have come over to your meeting tomorrow and point out to you and your partner what is necessary to be done but I cannot come either on Monday or Tuesday as I am engaged both them days. Any other day I am at your service. Please to let me know a few hours before if I should be required.

On 7 June 1833 Forty agreed to hang the new 5th bell for not more than £10 if the bell were delivered to the church. He wrote the 'calculation included everything to the bell new. The clapper I expect will be sent with the bell which is always the case'.¹¹ On 15 February 1834 the new bell, 33½ inches in diameter and 7 cwt 1 qr 6 lb in weight and with a note B on pipe, was dispatched, together with its clapper weighing 20 lb, to Leckhampton on Trye's wagon. The following August Forty sent his estimate for hanging the new bell, recasting all the brasses and gudgeons, rehangng the five other bells, and undertaking much of the other work which he had said should be done. The total cost would be £31 10s. He was obviously proud of his reputation for he concluded 'Gentlemen If I dow the job you may have some Competent Judge to examine it when finished'.¹²

The details of Rudhall's bell were recorded by Frederick Sharpe in 1970. They accord roughly with Rudhall's notes. When the bell was recast by Taylors of Loughborough in 1972 the Rudhall inscription was reproduced on the new bell.

Haresfield, St. Peter

The accounts of the Haresfield churchwardens show that in 1827 their tenor bell was mended at the cost of 2s. 9d.¹³ It is not possible to know what the repair may have been, but on 14 May 1831 Rudhall dispatched a new tenor bell to Haresfield on Dowdeswell's cart. It was 41⅞ inches in diameter and 13 cwt 1 qr 21 lb in weight with a clapper weighing 25 lb. Its note was noted to be more than a quarter above G. On 3 July the churchwardens paid Rudhall's bill of £32 3s. 1d.¹⁴ However the new bell was evidently not satisfactory for long as in 1842, just over eleven years later, it was recast by Thomas Mears.¹⁵

Badgeworth, Holy Trinity

On 1 April 1830 Rudhall received the tenor bell from Badgeworth church's ring of six. It was a sizeable tenor for a peal of that number; it had a mouth diameter of 43 inches and it weighed 14 cwt 24 lb. Rudhall noted that it had been 'much trewed', meaning that metal had been removed from the lip or soundbow to improve its musical qualities. That he did not record its note may well indicate that it was cracked. Its clapper weighed 29 lb. On 23 August he wrote down the measurements of all six bells and the notes of the 4th and 5th, the 4th being almost a quarter below B and the 5th similarly below A.

Rudhall rendered his account for a new tenor bell to the churchwardens on 16 December. The new bell at 14 cwt 3 qr 6 lb was slightly heavier but it had the same mouth diameter and soundbow thickness and was 3 inches less in height. It was another example of the more squat bells that Rudhall was wont to cast. Its final cost, at 15d. a pound and allowing £66 6s. 8d. for the old bell, was £37 5s. 10d. The new bell was sent to Badgeworth two days later. It was inscribed THE REVD THOS HILL VICAR GEORGE CHANDLER & JOSEPH SADLER CHURCHWARDENS 1830 I RUDHALL FECIT and, according to Ellacombe, it was cracked in the early 1880s.¹⁶ It was recast by John Warner in 1884.

St. Briavels, St. Mary

St. Briavels's medieval parish church had a central tower which held a ring of six bells cast by William Evans of Chepstow in 1764. In 1829 the tower was deemed to be unsafe and on 8 December in that year it was resolved to take it down and rebuild it. After some controversy over the siting of the new tower it was decided to build it against the church's south aisle with a porch at its base. The chosen builder was William Allen and the agreement for the rebuilding is dated 6 July 1830. The foundation stone was laid on 29 July.¹⁷

As part of the rebuilding the old bells were installed in the new tower and John Rudhall was engaged to provide two new bells to augment the ring to eight. Thus on 26 May 1831 Rudhall recorded the order, from Lawrence Peel, for two new trebles at 15*d.* a pound with clappers and brasses, the bells together to weigh about 10 cwt. He also noted the inscriptions, or mottoes as he called them, to be put on the bells. The treble was to be inscribed 'To form a compleat Peal of Eight Bells this additional new one was given in 1831 by Lawrence eldest son of [*sic*] Willm Heny Peel Esq. Aylsmore House by whose assistance and that of others this tower was built in 1830 Laus Deo' and the 2nd 'This bell was cast by voluntary subscription J Bullock Churchwarden 1831'. It is unusual to find inscriptions recorded in Rudhall's notebook. His bells generally bear very short inscriptions, just his name and sometimes those of the incumbent and/or the churchwardens. Perhaps on this occasion as the inscriptions were very much longer he felt the need to write them down for reference.

The bells were sent from Gloucester on 28 July 1831. The treble had a mouth diameter of 27½ inches and weighed 5 cwt 2 qr 3 lb and the 2nd a mouth diameter of 27⅝ inches and weighed 5 cwt 1 qr 27 lb. There are several examples in Rudhall's notebook of bells lower in the scale weighing less than the treble in the same rings. At St. Briavels this is explained by the 2nd having a soundbow thickness ⅛ inch less than that of the treble. I am assured that such a difference in bells of similar dimensions can mean a whole tone difference in their note. The bells' clappers weighed 21 and 20 lb respectively.

As the bells were paid for by a donor and voluntary subscription their acquisition does not figure in the churchwardens' accounts. The accounts do record the payments in instalments to William Allen, the builder, and John Briggs, the architect, of the new tower.¹⁸ Ellacombe's record of the inscriptions on the new bells does not entirely accord with that noted by Rudhall and in addition he gives the treble and 2nd in reverse order. The treble's inscription was virtually the same as noted by Rudhall, apart from variation in its word order, and the 2nd's omitted the name of the churchwarden. I RUDHALL FECIT had been added to both inscriptions.¹⁹ The 2nd remains in the tower, although its canons have been removed. The treble was recast by Mears & Stainbank, and its inscription very much truncated, in 1905.

Saintbury, St. Nicholas

The last known bell in the diocese to bear Rudhall's name is the present 3rd of the ring of eight at Saintbury. The churchwardens' accounts show that Thomas Stanley was paid 5*s.* 6*d.* on 21 January 1834 for taking the bell down and William Nightingale, a relative of one of the churchwardens, received £1 on 18 April 1835 for taking it to Gloucester.²⁰ The following day, 19 April, Rudhall noted that he had received the bell, its weight being 4 cwt 3 qr 3 lb, and made an offer to the churchwardens to cast a new bell for 15*d.* a pound and allow 9*d.* for each pound of the old metal.

There is no record in Rudhall's notebook of the bell's return and indeed it is clear that it was not returned to Saintbury until after his death. The churchwardens' accounts record payments on

6 June 1835 of £11 6s. 10d. to Mrs. Rudhall for casting the bell and £1, probably to Nightingale, for fetching it from Gloucester.²¹ The latter payment seems to be quite generous when one compares it with other payments for transporting bells similar distances. The bell bears the inscription RUDHALL ME FECIT 1835 CANTATE DOMINUM CANTICUM.

Conclusion

John Rudhall seems to have taken an active interest in the life of Gloucester. In 1798 he had been appointed a second lieutenant in the Royal Gloucester Volunteers, but he was not expected to assume that rank unless the corps was called out on active service. For many years he had been a member of the Crypt Youths, a society of bellringers started at St. Mary de Crypt church in 1710 when the church's six bells were recast by Abraham Rudhall, and in 1791 he had been its master.²² Whether he was or was not a bellringer himself I do not know. There were many societies of ringers calling themselves 'Youths' — the Ancient Society of College Youths is still very active in London — and in many cases, for example the Ancient Society of St. Stephen's Youths in Bristol, their members were not necessarily bellringers.

Rudhall seems also to have been very much a family man. Two long letters in the Prideaux papers imply that he had a close relationship with his daughters. One from him to his daughter Fanny is dated from Lynmouth on 'Aug 21 I believe [but] Saturday at all events', the year not being written.²³ The letter talks of the weather, the fact that he was relaxing and his journey on horseback to Youlston Park near Barnstaple to see his daughter Eleanor, who was in service in an old fashioned mansion. The house was presumably the home of the 'Sir Arthur' whose ale he drank. Rudhall also writes that he would 'return to Bristol by the Torridge Steamer and get in about six o'clock'. He had considered returning across the Bristol Channel to Wales but there was 'no conveyance this week without hiring a skiff and that would be more expensive than going to Bristol and taking a packet from there'. He adds that he was getting used to doing nothing and was spending his time walking and riding.

He had presumably gone to Lynmouth for the sake of his health and the letter may well have been written in the August of 1834. The other letter, dated 23 September 1834, was to Eleanor and was addressed to her at the home of Archdeacon Charles Thorpe in Ryton (Co. Durham).²⁴ The first part of the letter concerns the death of Elizabeth 'poor dear child', presumably a relative. Rudhall goes on to write about the political situation in Gloucester.

Tories gained a most compleat victory in our County over the reformers who of course are very angry and tomorrow a meeting of them to take place here to form a Club on liberal principles to oppose as they are pleased to express themselves the domineering tyrannical influence of the friends of the church and of [the] King. But however they may attempt to disguise it there is certainly a change in the opinion of great numbers respecting their universal panacea reform. I am sorry to say that Mr. Philpotts has again identified himself with the radical party in this City & county although he has been so scorned and abused by them. Therefore he must take his chance with them.

Rudhall also mentioned that his health had much improved in the last few days but at the bottom of the letter Eleanor wrote 'The last letter my dear kind father wrote to me'.

Rudhall died on 14 February 1835. The *Gloucester Journal* published an obituary notice for him a week later.

Died, on Saturday last, universally loved and respected, Mr. John Rudhall, bellfounder of this city aged 75. He was descended from an ancient and respectable family who have carried on bell-founding in this city for the last 150 years, with honour and credit to their profession. Mr. Rudhall

was many years a member of the ancient society of Crypt Youths of which he served as master in the year 1791. On Wednesday he was interred in the family vault in St. John's church, the bells of several churches being tolled on the occasion, and during the day, muffled peals were rung at all the churches within the city as a mark of respect to his memory.

The last entry in the notebook was made on 10 March in a different hand. It confirmed an order from Wellow parish, in Somerset, for recasting a bell of about 12 cwt according to a memorandum supplied by Rudhall the previous 26 November.

Postscript

In 1871 the Revd. H.T. Ellacombe, the compiler of *Church Bells of Gloucestershire* published in 1881, sent a sketch to John Rudhall's son John, asking him if it was anything like the old foundry sign in Bell Lane.²⁵ He received a reply from T.G. Prideaux stating that the younger John, his uncle, had died. In response Ellacombe wrote that he remembered the younger John saying that as a boy he had used to play with the old sign. Ellacombe also wrote that if there were any old scraps about bells among John Rudhall's papers that the family did not require he would like to have them.²⁶ Whether or not this happened I do not know, but an examination of Ellacombe's papers, wherever they might be, may reveal further details.

Notes

1. Bristol Record Office (BRO), 20535.
2. Ibid. 20535/335.
3. H.B. Walters, *Church Bells of Worcestershire* (1930), 149.
4. H.T. Ellacombe, *Church Bells of Gloucestershire* (1881), 41.
5. Gloucestershire Record Office (GRO), P 78/1/CW 4/3/2.
6. Ibid. P 49/CW 2/2.
7. Ellacombe, *Church Bells*, 34.
8. GRO, P 49/CW 2/2.
9. Ibid. P 198/1/CW 3/1.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid. GRO, P 163/CW 2/2
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ellacombe, *Church Bells*, 32.
17. GRO, P 278/CW 2/2; *V.C.H. Glos.* 5, 270.
18. GRO, P 278/CW 2/2; *V.C.H. Glos.* 5, 270.
19. Ellacombe, *Church Bells*, 35, which indicates that William Henry was the son of Lawrence Peel.
20. GRO, P 279/CW 2/2.
21. Ibid.
22. *Gloucester Journal*, 21 February 1835; cf. *V.C.H. Glos.* 4, 302.
23. BRO, 20535/50.
24. Ibid. 49.
25. Ibid. 186.
26. Ibid. 187.