

# The Fifth Bell in St Dunstan's Tower



**The oldest full-circle ringing church bell in Kent still used today is at St Dunstan's. The fifth bell in the ring sounds a G note.**



**Cast in c.1325 by William le Belyetere (William the Bell Hanger), the bell weighs 10 cwt 1 qtr and 22lbs (531kg). The inscription on the band at the top of the bell reads 'AVE:MARIA:GRACIA.PLENA:DNS:TECÚ (Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you).**

Before the Reformation it would have rung three times a day for prayer, in honour of the incarnation of God, and after the Reformation it would have rung for the Lord's Prayer during a service. The bell was rung for normal church services and special occasions: weddings, Easter, Christmas and royal celebrations such as a coronation. It was rung for impending death and known as the Passing Bell. After a parishioner's death, the bell tolled the Death Knell, and lastly for the funeral procession rung as the Lych Bell, which is still used today.



Parish records note that the 5<sup>th</sup> bell was called 'The Great Bell' and it was regularly cared for:



in 1490 ixd (9d) was '...payde to Ingram for a newe rope to the gret bell...',  
in 1500 Roger Hart was paid xvjd (16d) '...for mendyng of the gret bell whele...',  
vijd (7d) was paid to John Hochyn and vjd (6d) to Larans Houton to mend the great bell in 1532-3 plus jd (1d) for '...brods and naylls to ye gret bell...',  
in 1568 Tymothy Taylor was paid ijs and viijd (2s 8d) for '...a newe rope for the greate belle...',  
Wyllyan Baker was paid iiijd (4d) for '...mendeynge of the baderecke for the great belle...' in 1569.

The fifth bell predates the fifteenth-century church tower and may have been housed outside the church within a timber frame or located in the church. Instead of a full-circle ring, the bell may have been struck by manually moving the clapper within the bell.