

## 6. THE TOWER AND BELLS

The tower is about 4.80m square externally, 2.75m square internally and is 14th-century in date, according to the 1927 RCHME report. Small windows on the west and south sides light the four internal floors. There is no evidence as to whether this is where the bells or bell originally hung, as there could have been a small open bell tower at the west end of the original nave. Access to the ground floor of the tower is now by a small arched doorway near the font. Inside the tower it can be seen that this doorway was originally a much bigger arch which may mark a west window or entrance before the tower was built. There is an old disused doorway to the churchyard on the north. The bell ringers' chamber on the first floor of the tower is now entered via the external staircase, but before 1845 their chamber would have been on the ground floor of the tower.

There are six bells, ranging from No. 1, the treble, which dates from 1927 to the oldest. No. 6, the tenor, which dates from about 1480, and was probably cast at the Bristol foundry. (below right, just visible on left). The legend on it reads 'ave maria + plena 🕌'



No. 4 dates from 1672, when William Bellamy and Thomas Havard were churchwardens, then No. 3 (above left) from 1746 when William Weare and Walter Holms (*alias* Thomas) were churchwardens. However, there are details in the churchwardens' accounts of payments in 1797 and 1802 for bells having been sent to John Rudhall of Gloucester for recasting, so the bell metal itself has been in the church much longer. These are probably the ones dated 1798 (No. 5) and 1801 (No. 2), with the name of Henry Williams who was vicar at the time.

The bells were weighed accurately in 2008 and have a combined weight of about 1,800 kilograms. The largest and oldest (No. 6) weighs 10cwt or 510 kg. It has a diameter of almost exactly one metre. It has the most wonderful sound.

The bells are arranged in two tiers, Nos. 1 and 3 above and the rest below. The tower is so slender that it is difficult to move around them. When the new No. 1 was added in 1927 a new metal frame was built for it, probably by James Groves of Birmingham, who supplied the bell made by Messrs Stainbank of Whitechapel. The old wooden frame is still in the spire, though, as it is useful for lowering the bells when necessary. In 2001 the spire was repaired and new fittings were made and the bells tuned.

The bell frame was found to be unsafe in 2004 and the bells were silent until 2008, when enough money was raised to have the bells repaired and the new frame made by John Taylor's of Loughborough, who service the bells every year.

(More information about the bells can be found in *The Bells of Herefordshire* and online in Dove's Guide. Martin Coleman of Goodrich and John C Eisel of the Woolhope Club helped with information.)