

Heritage Open Day 2018

The World War I Memorial Bells and Remarkable Women

1. Introduction

The Cathedral bells are part of the heritage of Bradford and their call is a constant reminder that a Christian presence has existed here for about 1,300 years. The ten World War I Memorial Bells attest to the impact of the First World War on people locally, nationally and internationally. Their very existence is a lasting testimony to the tenacity of Bradford's people, from all walks of life, men and women, young and old, rich and poor. These people came together to raise money for the Memorial Bells to be cast, in order to ensure that those who gave their lives for others in the Great War were remembered whenever the bells rang out:

"..... over the valley, to those at football matches, at work, at their business, in mills and at home."

1. Bells in the Cathedral

The Cathedral is the oldest surviving building in the centre of Bradford and its heritage reflects the growth and experiences of the City and the roles its people have played in national and international events. Church bells are the largest and loudest musical instrument; they could be described as the sound of Christians in the community. They have rung out across Bradford for centuries, calling people to prayer, heralding special occasions in the City's story and marking national events.

The first Christian priests would have used hand bells to call people to worship. By the 8th century, a single Sanctus bell would have hung somewhere in the building, possibly in a bell cot. The Church of St Peter's first peal (group) of four bells was installed in the tower in 1666. By 1735 there were eight bells. These were recast and made into ten bells in 1846. In 1919 (the year after the end of the First World War and the year in which the Parish Church of St Peter became a Cathedral) both the tower and the bells were in a poor condition. In 1921 new bells were cast in memory of those who fought and died in the First World War and to give thanks for victory, freedom and peace. An additional two bells were gifted to the Cathedral by St John's Church Great Horton in 1975.

First cast and dedicated in 1921, the World War I Memorial Bells were refurbished and re-dedicated in 2018, with the help of a Heritage Lottery Fund Grant. This means that this important part of the Cathedral's heritage has been preserved and that they will continue to ring out across the City (along with the two St John Bells), well into the Cathedral's second century.

3. A Bell Ringer's Tale

There is little doubt that without one particular man there would be no World War I Memorial Bells. Joe Hardcastle was instrumental in ensuring that the Cathedral's bell ringing tradition was not lost and that new bells were commissioned and cast in memory of those who fought and died in the First World War. He was a foundry worker, but also an accomplished bell ringer. His career at the Cathedral spanned some 63 years! You can read his 'bell ringer's tale' in the World War I Memorial Bells booklet and also on the exhibition banners. The first female bell ringer at the Cathedral is recorded as being Mrs James Cotterell (Emily), she joined the band of bell ringers in 1916.

4. Bradford Women and World War I

Often when we think of World War I we think of men, particularly those who fought and died and sometimes of those who refused to fight. It is less common to focus on women and their stories, however women played a huge part in the War, both in places of conflict and on the home front; like men not all women saw the war as justifiable. Female opinions on the War varied greatly, even the Suffragette movement was divided between those who saw the War as being necessary and a patriotic struggle and those who campaigned for peace and thought the suffering and loss of life were unacceptable.

Whatever their opinion, women fulfilled important roles during the war years. In Bradford (and on the front line) they became nurses. At home many were tram drivers or post women; they worked in factories and on the land. For some women, working was doing their bit to help the war effort, for others it remained a matter

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of necessity as it always had been. For others it was a chance to seize new opportunities and experiences. Many of these women were the mothers of the men and boys who were fighting, others of course were their sisters, wives or girlfriends. There is little doubt that the majority of women were touched in some way by the War.

5. Bradford Women's Humanity League

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was established in 1915 and met initially in The Hague. The Bradford Women's Humanity League evolved from this movement. It was formed ten days after conscription was introduced in 1916 (although the campaign for peace did not meet with universal approval) and held many anti-war meetings. In September 1917, 3,000 women took part in an anti-war demonstration, marching across the City from the Textile Hall on Westgate and ending near Bradford College, where local activists made anti-war speeches. The protesters were accompanied by a marching band and carried banners bearing slogans such as: "*The Boys in the Trenches want Peace*" and "*I want my Daddy.*"

6. Remarkable Women and the World War I Memorial Bells

Women were at the forefront of attempts to make sure that those who died in the First World War were not forgotten. The red remembrance poppy was the result of the American Moina Mitchell's efforts to raise money for veterans. The idea was developed by Anna Guirin in France and adopted by General Haig in 1921 (the year in which the Memorial Bells first rang out across Bradford). The Women's Co-Operative Guild campaigned for the word peace to be inscribed in the centre of the poppy. They were unsuccessful and so introduced their own white peace poppy in 1926.

In Bradford women were successfully involved in raising money for many World War I memorials and symbols of remembrance. This is evident from their efforts to raise money for the Cathedral's Memorial Bells; Lady Mary Elizabeth Godwin, widow of the first Lord Mayor of Bradford, Sir John Arthur Godwin, donated a bell; Elizabeth Mitchell a local woman of independent financial means, gave money for a bell in memory of a relative, Edward Alexander Shepherd. Sarah Bilson donated money for a bell in memory of her husband.

Obviously these were all 'women of means', but a huge amount of money for the bells was raised by ordinary women, who remain anonymous. Money was collected for a bell by the Cathedral's predominantly female Sunday school teachers and one bell was provided as a result of donations from the mothers of Bradford. Twenty four women are listed as 'key collectors of pledges' for the bells in the Parochial Church Council Minute Book for 1921 and several held prominent roles on the council and World War I Memorial Committee.

7. Bradford's Khaki Club

The Khaki Club was an organisation for servicemen returning from the War, particularly those who were injured or suffering from shell shock. Established by women in 1918, the Khaki Club had a restaurant, games room and library. It was run mainly by the Bradford Women's Police Patrol, which had been set up to ensure women mill workers could return home safely at night. Women volunteers encouraged recovering servicemen to participate in handicrafts. Louisa Pesel was a leading light, she believed in using arts and crafts as an aid to rehabilitation. Born and brought up in Bradford, she helped recovering servicemen to learn new crafts and skills. As a result they embroidered the 'Khaki Altar Cloth'. This is now kept on display in the Chapter House in the Cathedral. Lady Elizabeth Mary Godwin who donated one of the Memorial Bells was also a patron of the Khaki Club.

8. Postscript

As you walk around the building and interact with the World War I Memorial Bells exhibition, please also look for evidence of the many remarkable women who have had an impact on the City of Bradford, its people and the life and heritage of this wonderful building (some of whom are mentioned above). Look out for artefacts, objects, plaques and windows that testify to their impact and contribution. Bradford's women are and always have been remarkable and it is important to remember that 'her-story' is just as important as 'his-story'.