

## Dangers in the Church Tower

With a terrible thunderstorm crashing around the Parish Church while the finale of Berlioz' 'Symphonie Fantastique' thundered within its holy walls, my thoughts turned to what I have recently read in the old *Deanery Magazines*.

'The tower was built in the 17th century, collections having been made in all churches throughout England for it by Letters Patent. The estimate for it was £8,250, including a portion for the nave, damaged by the fall of the spire in March 1694 in the 10th year of the reign of Charles I. In December 1888 the largest of the bells in the tower fell down into the ringing chamber. Mercifully no one was hurt. The expense of raising and rehangng the bell was £6 10s. which was donated by 16 parishioners.' Sadly the alms boxes were no safer from theft then than now. The offender in 1891 was sentenced to six months hard labour (he had committed similar offences in Oxford).

A sad accident occurred on October 8th, 1891: 'George Ell, as he went to chime the bells for Evensong, fell through a trapdoor in the belfry floor, not properly secured, into the church beneath – a distance of some 30 feet. He was dreadfully injured and removed to the Horton Infirmary where he is progressing most favourably.'



In 1893 the tower was restored when some £276 was spent on it. During a terrific storm in June 1910 the south east pinnacle of the tower was struck by lightning and so seriously damaged that it had to be taken down and rebuilt at a cost of over £79 which will be covered by insurance.'

On January 25th, 1896, the Sexton was nearly suffocated by smoke and sulphur from the heating apparatus which, 'owing to the wind being in a particular direction' did not act properly. He was found in the stokehole quite insensible and it was some time before he could be brought round. (Ted Johnson inspected the stokehole for many years when he was churchwarden and churchyard mower. He now wonders whether 'the wind being in a particular direction' has left a lasting effect on him!)

World War II brought a further threat of indignity to our tower. A lady parishioner offered £2 towards the cost of removing or screening the weather vanes which she felt could be seen by enemy planes on moonlit nights. It was agreed to approach the RAF to get their views on the matter ... (no follow-up information is recorded. Maybe someone in Deddington remembers what action was taken?) Since then frequent lightning strikes have damaged the vanes which have all been repaired and the stonework of the tower is regularly inspected and damage made good.



On feast and festival days our proud tower is crowned with the St George flag, hoisted and struck again at sundown by an old soldier all skips like a young'un up and down those 113 steps. The view from the tower is well worth the effort of the climb. In August 1900 '... through the kindness and exertion of Mrs Hodgson a bath chair has been provided for the parish for the use of the sick and infirm who can have it free of charge upon applying to the vicarage where it will be kept.'

(We may no longer have a vicarage but said wood and wickerwork bath chair can still be seen at the back of the choir vestry in the church.)

1999, 2001

## Church Clock



*Clock restoration 2008*

The hand of time is on the move again in Deddington after the church clock's brief summer holiday. While time stood still I had plenty of it to leaf through the *Parish and Deanery Magazines*, a source of an ending fascination, idly looking for inspiration. And there it was – a plea recorded in February 1884:

'Church clock: this very useful article, which was presented some 50 years ago by the expressed wish of Mr William Hudson of this place, after his death, at the cost of £176, and has for some time lately been "double-faced" and guilty of telling many untruths, has at last been put in order at a considerable expense, which the inhabitants must be asked to assist in defraying as there is no special fund for this purpose.'

By Easter 1884, 'a hearty vote of thanks was accorded to Messrs Samman and Hedges for the trouble they had taken in collecting subscriptions.' (The repair cost £12 1s.6d. Fifty-eight parishioners subscribed and all are listed by name.) In March 1887 we read 'the church clock is once again in good working order, for which we think all are thankful. It was thoroughly cleaned by Mr Bryan at the expense of the parishioners whose names appear below' (24 parishioners and the workmen of Mr Franklin's firm are listed).

In the year of King Edward VII's death our clock stopped once again but was put in order by the time his Memorial Service was held in the church on May 20th, 1910.

The clock has no doubt stopped many times over the years so we must never forget the many who kept it going, in particular those dedicated Deddingtonians who wound it up manually week after week up until the 1980s. Did they know, though, that the hands of a church clock that stops should be moved to rest on the 12th hour until it can be repaired? This is to allow the ghosts of the 'town', who habitually dance before the stroke of midnight, to slumber on.

2000

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*The inner workings of the church clock*

During a sermon preached in Deddington Church, our Vicar reminded us of our duty to spread the Christian message 'abroad'. Maybe my husband did his bit one Wednesday morning when a perplexed visitor, staring at the church clock, exclaimed, 'Your clock is going mad! It's 10 o'clock and it has already struck 16 times!' Said Ted, 'Nothing wrong with the clock, sir, that's the bell calling us all to a service.'

2006

*The complete collection of Ruth Johnson's writings, which originally appeared in Deddington News between 1990 and 2010, can be found [here](#)*