

Worle
History
Society

A Walk Around St. Martin's Church



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An excerpt from the Weston Mercury, September 2012

St Martin's Church will be sending its six bells off for re-tuning in January 2013 and there will also be work done to the tower at the Church Road site.

So far the fund-raising has reached £17,519, so there is some way to go.

The oldest of the St Martin's bells dates back to 1683 and the last time any of them were re-tuned was 1908.

They have rung across the centuries around the village, calling people to Sunday worship, weddings and other celebrations.

The bells will be transported to a bell foundry in London in January, and Nicholas Engineering, a company of bell hangers and iron smiths, will refurbish the tower in the meantime.

The bells will be dismantled early in the new year over three days and will be returned and re-installed in early March, 2013.

It will take up to a week to put them back, in time for Easter services.

This little book is Worle History Society's effort to contribute to the cost of re-tuning the bells.

This walk around and about St. Martin's Church, Worle, travels in time, and takes the reader on a journey through many decades of images of our lovely old Church.

Some of the pictures are of the building in all its recognizable glory, but the surroundings change and remind us of the many generations who have worshipped within its walls, married at the altar and brought precious offspring to the ancient font for baptism.

Even the non-believers amongst us cannot help but appreciate the beauty and calm of St. Martin's or the joy of the pealing bells.

So, take a gentle stroll back in time. Look at the Church again, through fresh eyes and maybe you will be tempted to get out your camera or your sketch pad to record it again.

Raye Green



Our walk is beginning in modern times. It is November 11th, 2010 and the village has gathered at the war memorial. The clock shows the time as 10 minutes to 11. This neat little stone building with its clock tower was built from public subscription following World War 1. There is a photograph of the 1922 opening ceremony on page 20 of the 'A Walk along Worle High Street' book. And still, almost, people make their way along the High Street to say a prayer for the departed at 11 a.m. on Remembrance Sunday.

The War Memorial, apart from its obvious function, also forms a kind of gateway to the Churchyard and the path up to St Martin's Church. The tower of St. Martin's can be seen in the background of the photograph to the right of the clock tower.

The memorial was originally surrounded by an orchard on the left, where the Health Centre now stands, and further up the hill, by fields and gardens. Nowadays it has been squashed in by ugly modern buildings, telegraph poles, wires and a bolisha beacon. However, the spirit of the place remains the same. The gates may be locked for most of the year, but on Remembrance Sunday, they are opened and the people go inside to sit on the little corner benches, lay their poppies and contemplate the reasons for the building's existence.

Photograph given by Raye Green



Now we have another glimpse of colour from this snapshot given by Peter Snook, who still prepares the War Memorial for the Remembrance Day service each year. We have walked a little way up the hill to the right of the war memorial. The buildings and telegraph wires have melted away to be replaced by fields where animals were often grazed, and an odd little fence of randomly selected poles and chicken wire.

It is winter time. The deciduous trees at the top of the hill are bare and the convolvulus that grows over the wire fence in summer is absent. Despite the time of year, the sun is shining and the evergreen trees give the scene a cheerful look. The old stone wall on the right has sadly disappeared, now, but the old path still winds its way towards its destination, up the steps to the south door of the ancient Church.

The kissing gate, beloved of generations of youngsters is just visible at the spot where the path bends gently to the left. I think the old white nanny goat, which lived just beyond the gate, tethered on a generous length of rope, has moved on to pastures new by this time. And we shall move on, up the path and back, back, back in time.

Photograph given by Peter Snook



We have walked further up the path, closer to the steps and the vegetation around the Church seems to have been attacked with some venom. The scene of devastation has attracted someone with an eye for a picture. There are identifiable graves in evidence, the latest of which is the resting place of Mary Putt dated 24th April, 1906, so Edward VII was on the throne, and Reverend A.C. Harman, known as Cecil, was Vicar of Worle. The first grave on the left of the picture has an impressive Celtic cross, and is in memory of Francis Eric Greenwood, aged 39. The stone is dated 3rd December 1902. Francis Greenwood and his wife ran the bakery in Lower Street [now High Street] on the corner of Greenwood Road, named for the family. The bakery was taken over by George Parker and later still by the Vowles family.

The sad aspect of the trees in the photo reflects the story told by the family grave of the Sperrings, dated 1895. In that year Stephen and Hannah Sperring lost four children: George, Marian, Mary and Harry. Maybe they had tuberculosis. T.B. raged through many households at around that time. Worle History Society carried out a research project on this picture in 2012 and succeeded in identifying all but two of the visible graves.

As in other photographs from this time, the Church Tower is clothed in ivy for about half its height. The tower we see was built in the 15th Century on the base of the original Norman tower, and it houses six bells, which are still rung regularly for services and special occasions. The earliest bell is dated 1683, so would have been in situ to witness the events in the Monmouth Rebellion. This picture also gives a good view of the octagonal turret which affords access to the bells via the stone spiral steps.

The picture looks solemn, which is appropriate considering the number of deaths amongst the youth of the village.

Photograph given by Aubrey Sperring



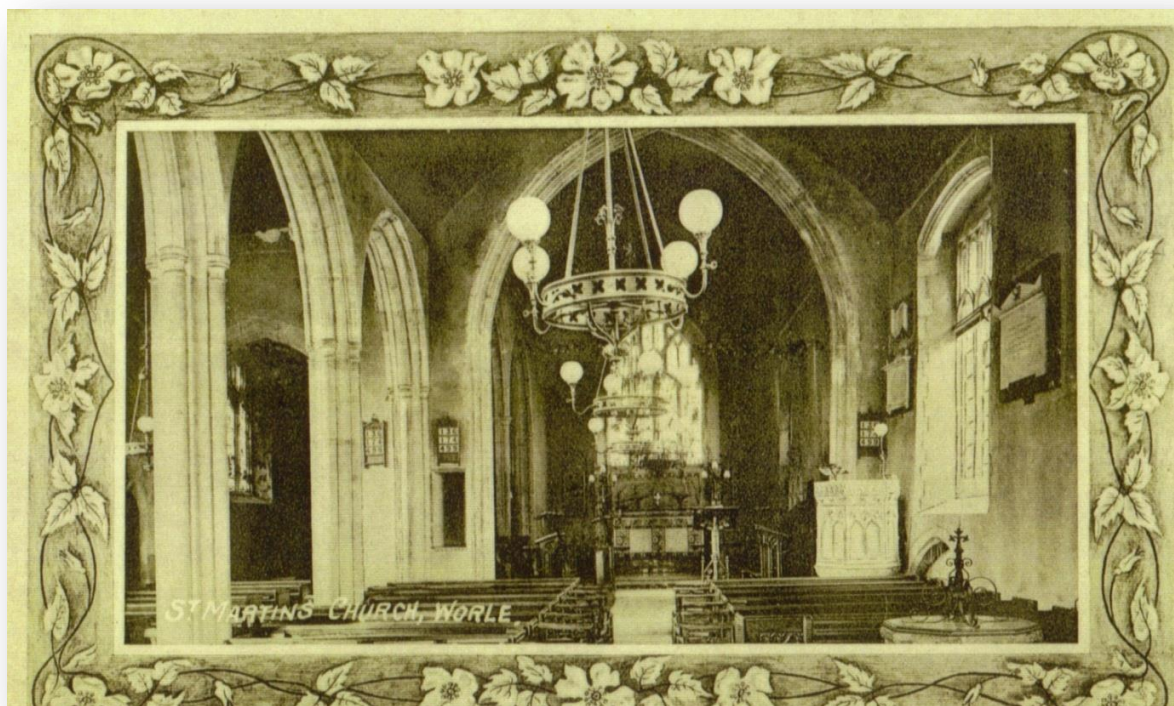
This is second oldest of the photographs of St. Martin's Church I have been able to find. The latest grave in the photograph is that of Henry Theo Phippen, 23rd March, 1910, which roughly dates the picture. The poor old trees have had 4 years since the last picture to recover, and are looking better. There were only 31 memorial crosses marking the graves at the bottom of the steps, plus some graves that have flat stones. The original Church was built between 1125 and 1150 and only the south wall and the Norman arch which forms the inner door provide some clues as to how it would have looked. This view of the south side of the building is a popular one, photographed and drawn or painted down through the years.

The bottom of the churchyard is fenced off from the pasture land in the foreground and from the orchard which is out of shot behind the camera. The fence is surprisingly high, taller than the two lads posing for posterity. It is still possible to see where the fence ran by the 'natural path' between the grave stones. The steps up to the top of the churchyard look tidy and in good condition and the slope, to the left of the steps, is well cared for.

On the far left we can just see, among the trees, some small buildings which are long gone. The homes in Hill Road, built mainly in the 1930s, now occupy the space where Backwell Orchard once stood. Arthur Bishop owned the orchard and several other large plots of pasture and arable land in the mid 20th century.

Behind the Church, peeping out on the left, is Hillside House, which we shall have a close look at later, and on the top of Worlebury Hill we can faintly see the building now known as The Observatory, but once Worle's Windmill.

Photograph given by Mary Pinn



Take a first peep inside our lovely old Church. There is no definitive date for this delightful photograph, but 1905 has been suggested. The photographer has come in via the Norman south door. He [I assume it was a male] had walked past the font which had been in use since 1150 and is octagonal so may well have inspired the design of the turret. Turning to the right, camera in hand, he took this picture which provides us with the view of the east window, the gas lights, the arches, all in a golden glow. Electric lighting came to St. Martins in 1950, by which time my family had also arrived in Worle.

This picture suggests that the Church was well used. The pews are still in place, but are augmented by chairs at either side of the aisle to provide extra seating. Incidentally, I blew up a section of the picture to discover that the hymns chosen for this day were numbers 134, 174 and 499, presumably from Ancient and Modern, in which case they started the service with '*Jesus Christ is Risen Today*', continued with '*We saw thee not when thou didst come to this poor world of sin and death*' and finished off with '*On the resurrection morning soul and body meet again. No more sorrow, no more weeping, no more pain*'. The Church was obviously prepared for the Easter services, which were not sounding as cheerful as one would hope. I suppose the flowery fringe gave the picture a spring like feeling.

Jenny and Stanley Thompson's beautiful book, '900 Years of Power and Glory' has a range of excellent photographs and a detailed history of St Martin's. I have deliberately not used any of the same photographs, but it is well worth obtaining a copy from the Church or the Parish Office at St. Marks on the Queensway.

Photograph is from St. Martin's Church archives



Now we've climbed the steps to the top of the Churchyard and emerged on the path to the South Door.

Along to the east of the Church stands a group of men, in their Sunday best. We must be good – the vicar is looking stern, which was not usual for Reverend Eric Vallance Cook, 3rd from the left. Five out of six men have their hands clasped in front of them as if in prayer. The exception is Reg Barr, on the far left, who is in charge of the incense. I wonder if Reg was playing the organ that day. Perhaps there is a special service, for Easter or the Coronation or the special Latin Eucharist in October 1953. We don't have the answer, but if Vallance Cook is there it is sometime between 1949 and 1963. This picture gives a good idea of the garments worn by Church officials in the mid 20th century. It is a shame that we have no hint of the colours, but some research suggests that the most commonly used hues were white, gold and red. Maybe the Parish Office would be able to help.

Two of the other chaps are Royston Kingsbury [second from the left] and Raymond Hancock [fourth from the left]. Who are the others? Soon they will process into the Church for the service where they, too, will turn right by the font and see the view we have just enjoyed. Probably the lighting system will have been changed.

Given by Reg Barr



This school building started life as a Rectorial or Monastic barn, thought to be associated with Woodspring Priory and referred to as a 'relic of monkish times' and as 'the holy fathers' victualing depot'.

In 1865 it was adapted for use as an Elementary School and as such served the children of Worle for many years. When Worle Infants' School in Mendip Avenue was opened around 1901, the old elementary school became Worle Voluntary Controlled Church of England Junior School in accordance with the Act of Parliament of 1897. This photograph was taken during this period and shows groups of children, with girls in smocks, taking an interest in the camera.

In the mid twentieth century the ties with St. Martin's Church were strong. The Vicar of St. Martin's visited the school and spoke to the children regularly; he was chairman of the School Managers; he encouraged the school to hold suitable services in the Church, which was but a stone's throw across Hill Road. The children walked down through the Churchyard to the Church Hall each day for lunch. The house on the right of the picture became the home of a senior teacher at the school, often the Head Teacher. During the Second World War the premises doubled up as a meeting place for Worle's ARP Wardens.

Later, the Church Junior School moved to premises in Spring Hill and the strong links with St. Martin's church moved with it. The old buildings became Hillside First School and later Worle Village Primary School.

St Martin's School archives.



This picture will be familiar to many of you. The invisible camera person is standing in the middle of Church Road. We can see the curved wall taking the eye down Hill Road, and Church Road itself potters along into the distance, all stone walls and trees. It is possible to see an opening on the left which leads up a lane past Hillside House, the subject of our next picture. From there, the lane wanders up to the top of the hill via some very dodgy steps and emerges close to the Observatory. Lovely views, well worth the pain.

This Church looks cosy and reassuring. The trees are in full leaf, which always softens the world. On the left there are blackberry brambles which will soon bear sweet ebony fruit. The gas lamps are still in place and all the man-made elements of the scene are constructed from limestone. Pavements have not yet been found necessary. Perfection.

The sun seems to be high in the sky, casting very little shadow, except along the base of the wall around the Church. Telegraph poles have arrived in force and we can see the wires passing over the spire. Are they carrying messages to and fro? [Only four digit numbers were used in those days, accessed by a human operator, one of whom was Mervyn Jones, my Dad.] Or are they electricity wires? I'm afraid I've never been sure what does which!!

Whatever the rights and wrongs, this is the Church Road of my childhood, and therefore the best.

This postcard was in common circulation



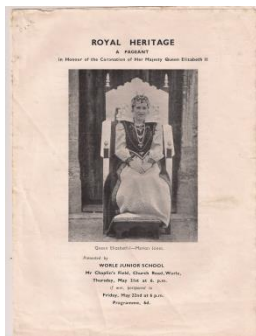
Sadly, Hillside House, pictured here in 1886, was demolished for the land to be redeveloped in the 1960s. The house was on the left hand side of the lane that went up the hill opposite St. Martin's Church, and ultimately led to Balaam steps and the Observatory.

Captain Walter Ernest Sax Battiscombe of the 53rd Shropshire Regiment lived in the house with his wife Agnes and I assume that it is they who grace the picture. The house faced south to optimise the light and the views across to the Mendip Hills. The Battiscombes were pillars of the community in the Village and the Church, following the tradition of 'noblesse oblige'. They obviously took great care of their home. The trees are sympathetically pruned and the lawns are carefully trimmed. The newly planted tree at the corner of the lawn is being admired by a small child.

When Captain Battiscombe died on 22nd August 1902 at the age of 61 he was laid to rest close to the north wall of St. Martin's church and his memorial was added to that of his father on the middle layer of the family cross, also pictured. The members of Worle Club [later the Century Club] sent a letter of sympathy to Agnes Battiscombe. She replied immediately, expressing her sorrow, and her gratitude for their letter. Later she presented the village with a framed picture of her late husband, which once hung in the Century Club. Members of the club, together with the Cricket club and the Football Club all contributed to the cost of a brass plaque which adorned the frame. Real community spirit.

Old picture given by Mike Rice

Picture of grave taken by Raye Green



This picture emphasises the strong connection between Church, School and Village life. It was taken in Chaplin's Field on 21st August, 1953 and features the Royal Heritage Pageant, produced by Worle Voluntary Controlled Church of England Junior School, to celebrate the approaching coronation of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II.

The Pageant was an over-whelming feature of the school year and was overseen by Leslie Bull, the extremely patriotic Headmaster. It told the story of England from Roman times to Charles Dickens, tracing the monarchy through the entire 2,000 years. Every one of the 120 or so children in the school took part, either taking a leading role or as a member of the supporting cast. All wore costumes, some of the children performed the traditional maypole dances. The weather smiled upon the entire venture and the programmes sold well at 6d each. Parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and interested parties turned up in their hundreds to witness the spectacle and to admire the magnificent hardboard castle, the colour and the music. The dress of the audience reflects the times, with hats much more prevalent than today. The children were welcomed to Hillside House by the Stephens family, then in situ, who allowed several rooms to be used for dressing and changing.

There is a tiny glimpse of the Mendip Hills in the distance, the 'white oak' is in full leaf and the windows of the dear old Church building can just peep over the safety fence to keep an eye on proceedings and give its benison to the day by ringing its bells in conclusion. A great example of togetherness.

Given by St. Martin's School archive



Years spent at Worle Junior School in the middle of the 20th century were always overseen by a benevolent Church. The Vicar and the Headmaster were in accord and each supported the activities of the other, and the buildings themselves were, and remain complementary.

This picture was taken in the 1950s in the concrete playground, where the games of line-to-line touch happened every day, where conkers, marbles and skipping ropes were to be seen in their seasons. On this day sixty-five children and three teachers, Mr Bull, Mrs Tripp and Miss Fountain, lined up for the traditional group picture. The children have evidently been warned about the event: they are all very well groomed and wearing full school uniform. Every boy is wearing his cap. The church is also dressed for the occasion, with its surrounding greenery in full leaf.

At the approach of Christmas the children in the 'top class' would each have a chance to visit the Church with their teacher and go up into the pulpit. They would read five verses each from Luke, chapter 2. When my turn came I read verses 15 to 20. The two children who were judged to read the best were chosen to do the reading at the United School Christmas Service in the church of St. John the Baptist in Weston-super-Mare, and so the links were strengthened.

Almost all the children had a copy of this photograph



St Martins Church, partly because of its beauty, has become a popular venue for weddings. It is impossible to find a place that will give the bride and groom a greater sense of permanence than a nine hundred year old building. It would be good to find out how many weddings have been conducted in its walls, but for this purpose, I have chosen to include just one such celebration.

Kaye Lovell and her family lived in the cottage next door to the school. Her father, Frank was a market gardener. On 6th August 1969 she married John Gunningham, whose family farmed at Manor Farm on the borders of Kewstoke and Worle. Interestingly, Kaye and John celebrated their wedding anniversary, mistakenly, on August 5th for many years, before realising their error. In explanation of this Kaye said, 'Well, you know you're married, and that's that'.

Apart from the bride and groom and their respective parents, the photograph shows Mike King, the best man and five bridesmaids – Betty Gunningham, Penny Bartlett, Zoe Farley, Sarah Jeffree and Rosalind Thomas.

The bells were pealing as this picture was taken, and it is good to know that the bride's sister, Barbara, is still a bell ringer at the Church in 2012.

Given by Kaye and John



This amazing picture is a complete mystery. It was found on the internet a few years since, but there is no evidence about who took it or how they managed it. I have tried to trace its rightful owner without success, and hope that they will forgive the liberty of using it without permission. It would be good to find out whether it was taken from a very low flying craft of some sort, or whether an extremely strong paparazzi lens was used from a considerable distance. Speculation on a postcard, please.

It shows St. Martin's Church surrounded by trees and backed by the homes that shelter its parishioners, with the wooded hillside behind. The houses are mostly those built in the 1960s in the roads named Pilgrims Way, Friar Avenue and Tormynton Road, all of which have strong Christian connections. Peter Tormynton was Prior of Woodspring in 1536 when Henry VIII suppressed the Priory, along with many other monasteries in the country.

The leaves are turning, ready to provide a blaze of colour for autumn. The Church is very much at the heart of the community here, and we must extend our thanks to the inventive photographer.



It is surprising how often it is possible to catch a glimpse of the Church tower and its slightly bendy spire. This old picture was taken from the area then known as Manchester Square. The first thing that attracts the eye is the row of varied cottages: some are tall and imposing, like the old Valiant Soldier in the middle of the shot, then there are a couple with a much lower aspect, snuggling into the hill. The white one still has its thatched roof intact and we can see one of its casement windows wide open to air the bedroom.

Next the eye is drawn to Maywood House and the group of children in front of it, following the camera man around the village, I suspect. Poor old Maywood and its owners had no idea of the troubles that lay ahead for it when it lay empty for years, saw an untimely death and was then threatened with being demolished to allow road widening. Still, it won the day and is still guarding that end of Church Road.

It is only when we have observed all this that we notice that St. Martin's is sitting quietly in the background, peeping around the trees to keep an eye on matters. I dare say the old place was enjoying the peace, but not for long. A century later things had changed.

From the Century Club collection



Darkness has long since fallen when this picture was taken in 2009. The street lights are on and the spot lights, illuminating the Church, are doing their job. They are so bright that the spire shines white. It is winter time, the trees are bare and rush hour is evident. No hope that the Church can slumber and enjoy the peace now. Bright lights, the noise, rush and fumes of the traffic have all been captured here. Church Road has been widened to accommodate the cars; pavements have been put in for the people, who no longer rule.

But the long exposure, the happy mixture of ancient and modern, make a beautiful scene, comforting, and welcoming the commuters home to Worle after a long day. The church, that has done its job for almost 900 years, is still standing firm and seems to be shining out its own light. You can't help hoping that this was taken on a Thursday, when the bell ringers were on duty as usual, practicing their peals and ringing their changes. No amount of change ringing can compete with the changes this wonderful place has shared with the village. Every village lucky enough to have a peal of bells recognizes their sound. The bells are to be loved and treasured and rung regularly by those with the skill [harder than it looks; I tried and failed].

Taken and donated by Nick Smart



BATH & WELLS
DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION
OF CHANGE RINGERS

St. Martin's Worle

A PEAL OF 5040 DOUBLES
Rung On 20th November 1997
in 2 hours 41 minutes
Tenor 13 cwt.

42 Methods

1 John Parsons Christopher A Swatton 4
2 John G Cook Denis Hawkings 5
3 John S Boorman James F S Lambard 6

Conducted by
Denis Hawkings

For the golden wedding anniversary of
H M Queen Elizabeth
& H R H Prince Philip.

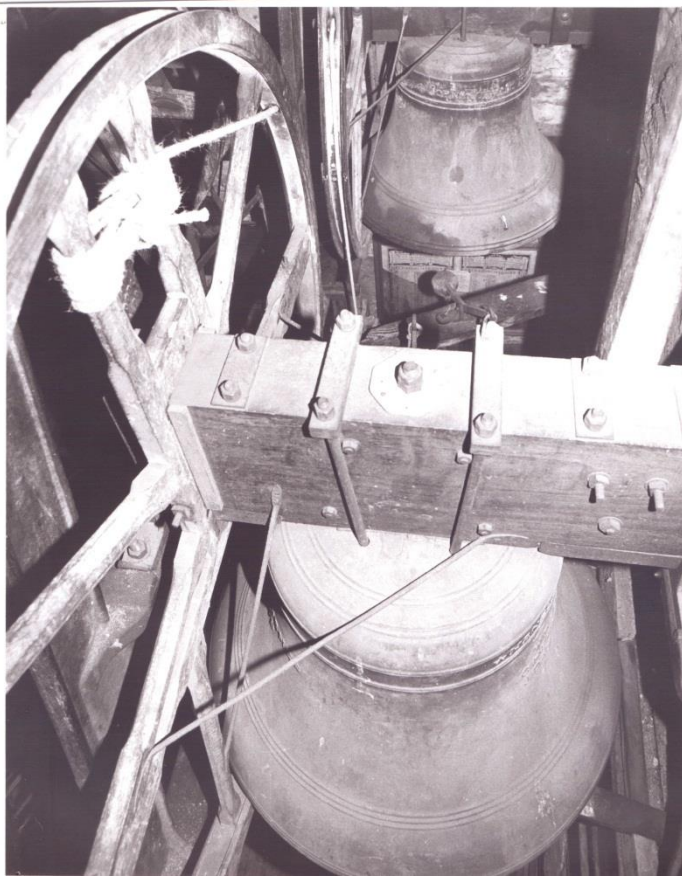
First Peal for J Parsons & most methods
for all.

On Thursday 5th May, 2011 the bell ringers of St. Martin's welcomed the members of Worle History Society to the Church. The Church Choir generously cancelled their scheduled practice to allow the visit to happen.

The village turned out in force and John Boorman told everyone about the bells and their ringers. The original minutes of Ringer's Meetings for well over a century were available, together with typed up versions to facilitate matters. The audience was full of questions, answered willingly by the experts in our midst.

The undoubted highlights of the evening came when we were accompanied up the tower to visit the bells themselves. The picture on page 38 may remind some of you of the experience. When we were all safely back on the ground, the ringers raised the six bells and rang for us.

It has to be said that to the amateur ear they sounded perfectly in tune, but now, a year or so later those folk with perfect pitch assure the rest of us that tuning the bells is long overdue.



And so in early January, 2013 the six old friends were lowered, put on a gigantic conveyance and transported to the Capital to be sorted out.

Children from Worle Village School, members of the congregation of St. Martin's, folk from Worle History Society and interested bystanders all turned up to say farewell.

We wish them Bon Voyage, and look forward to their return in early March, when the village will come together once again for the Hallowing Service and to hear their clear resonance restored to perfect pitch.

Picture given by Jenny Thompson



The bells
lined up and
ready to
travel.

Photo:
Raye Green, 9th
January, 2013

Bell	Detail
Treble 1	Cast by William Cockey of Frome in 1731 Diameter 29" Estimated weight 5.75 cwt
2	Cast by Edward Bilbie of Chewstoke in 1723 Diameter 29" Estimated weight 5.75 cwt Inscription: Ed. Bilbie cast me. Dan Starr Ch.W.
3	Cast by Thomas Bilbie in 1745 Diameter 31.5" Estimated weight 7 cwt
4	Cast by Roger Purdue of Salisbury in 1683 Diameter 32" Estimated weight 7.5 cwt Inscription: Richard Shephard and Peter Day Ch.W.
5	Cast by John Rudhall of Gloucester in 1820 Diameter 35.5" Estimated weight 9.5 cwt Inscription: John Rudhall Fect. Isaac Printer Ch.W.
Tenor 6	Cast by Thomas Bilbie in 1745 Re-cast by Llewellyn and James of Bristol in 1878 The Bristol City Crest is cast on the waist Diameter 40" Estimated weight 13 cwt Inscription Mr John Waters Ch.W.