

# THE BELLS OF MIDDLESEX

## I

### The Churches in the County of Middlesex

From the unpublished *London Ringers and Ringing*

BY THE LATE J. ARMIGER TROLLOPE

THE County of Middlesex (excluding the Cities of London and Westminster) contains about 60 parishes in which there are churches whose foundation goes back to mediæval times. Almost all of them have been wholly or partially rebuilt, usually several times over, and none is of any outstanding architectural interest.

Notwithstanding its closeness to the metropolis the county was sparsely populated, the villages were small, and there were but two towns, Brentford and Uxbridge, neither of any size. They had grown up where the two main roads from London to the west crossed the rivers Brent and Colne, and each had been at first a hamlet in another parish, Brentford in Hanwell, and Uxbridge in Hillingdon.

At the end of the fifteenth century and beginning of the sixteenth there was a great increase in the national wealth, mainly among the new middle classes, due to the rise of trade and manufacture. This led to the building of those magnificent Perpendicular churches which still stand, the glory of towns and villages in many parts of the country and especially in East Anglia; but Middlesex was almost entirely unaffected. There the small and humble churches of earlier years still remained and they continued, altered and patched up from time to time, until in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries most of them became dilapidated or inadequate and were rebuilt.

The great parish of Stebenhithe, which occupied most of the eastern end of the county, had a large church and tower, which still survive though much altered and restored and there, after the dissolution of the monasteries, was one of the heaviest rings of bells in England.

Several of the churches in the Thames valley had fourteenth or early fifteenth century towers of no great size, but sufficient to carry a ring of bells, and in several cases these towers still

stand, though the bodies of the churches have been rebuilt more than once. Such are Fulham, Chiswick, Brentford, Isleworth, Twickenham and Heston, with Richmond just across the river in Surrey. At Kensington and Ealing, too, the mediæval towers stood long after the naves and chancels had been replaced, but now they have been rebuilt.

At Ickenham, Cowley, Perivale, Greenford and Northolt the old buildings remain; restored and altered in many of their details, but giving a good idea of what the smaller Middlesex churches were like. The towers were little more than bell turrets, often of wood and surmounted by low spires. It is in such places that ancient bells and those by the rarer makers are usually found.

Middlesex is not very rich in old bells, but in that respect is better off than London City. In all it possesses 10 pre-Reformation bells, two of them being the clock bells at Hampton Court Palace. The oldest are the treble at Kingsbury old church, cast about 1350 by Peter de Weston, and the undated bell at Greenford. Cranford has a late fourteenth century bell, and another which came from Hatford in Berkshire is at St. Paul's, Finchley. The third at Brentford and the third at Greenford are by William Culverden, the tenor at Ickenham is by Thomas Bullesden, and the sixth at Twickenham is said to be by J. Saunders of Reading. All date from the early sixteenth century. The larger of the two Hampton Court bells is by Thomas Harrys of London, cast about 1480; the other is by William Culverden.

A large proportion of the seventeenth century bells in the western part of the county were founded at Chertsey by one or other member of the Eldridge family, or by the Knights of Reading.

The towers which figure most in the history of ringing are those within walking distance of London, such as Fulham, St. Giles-in-the-Fields, Hackney and Bethnal Green, where the members of the metropolitan societies could meet without much difficulty. There were also good local companies in early times at Hillingdon and Twickenham. Later in the eighteenth century the bands at Kensington and Isleworth supplied much of the peal-ringing energy of the college youths. On the north and east outskirts of the City a number of churches were built and furnished with bells, and these though actually in Middlesex can be reckoned among the metropolitan towers. Such are