

The Orraman

Newburgh bells have a story to tell

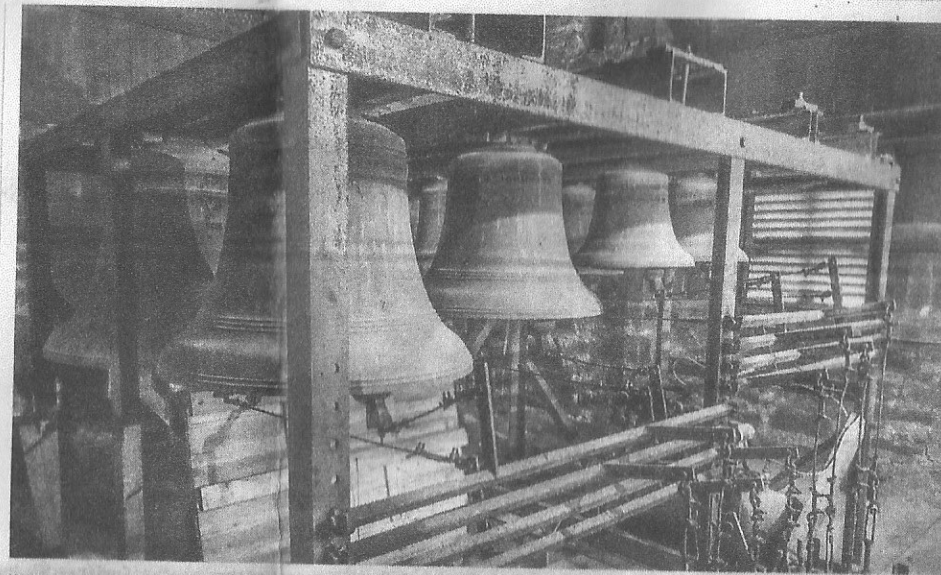
I am hoping my research will assist folk both in Newburgh in Fife and in Kirrie in Angus as well as other readers to understand the significance of this carillon of bells, which I think have a great story to tell.

Armistice offers an opportunity to reflect on our shared experiences as communities, families, nations and global citizens. To mark the 1918 centenary, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra is to engage people throughout Scotland in the composition and performance of a new work exploring themes of celebration, loss, community identity and the legacy of war and will incorporate the sound of bells throughout the land.

On 11 November 2018, 100 years since Armistice, bells will ring out in unison across the country. Despite the silence during current building works Big Ben will also strike at 11am to mark the final year of the First World War centenary commemorations. Church bells across the UK remained restricted throughout the course of the war and only rang freely once Armistice was declared in 1918. A campaign by the Church Bell Ringers called 'Ring Remembers' hopes

to recruit bell ringers who will keep this traditional British art alive in memory of the 1,400 who lost their lives – linking together past, present and future. The campaign will be a fitting end to the many events that have marked anniversary of the First World War and a tribute to the heroic men and women who sacrificed so much for the freedoms we enjoy today. The priority now must be to make sure we continue to keep the history of the First World War alive for generations to come, even as it falls out of living memory.

On 11 November 1918 the ringing of church bells erupted spontaneously across the country, as an outpouring of relief that four years of war had come to an end and 100 years later, the day will begin at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery near Mons, Belgium where the war began in 1914, where the war's first and last casualties lie as it offers a fitting place to reflect on the cost of the war. So it is that a carillon of eight bells, cast in 1921, that reside now in Kirriemuir have a poignant tale to tell and they will ring out along with others throughout the country on that day. This carillon was originally in a church in Fife



The eight Newburgh War Memorial bells now in St Mary's bell tower in Kirriemuir.

and was a memorial to their dead of WW1. One bell has the names of Thomas Stalker Greig and Hugh Young Arnot cast on it.

Having written to the makers of the bells, "Gillett and Johnston" and researched the history of the bells via the Croydon Library, I can now confirm that the war memorial peal of bells was gifted to Newburgh Parish Church by Mr T.S. Greig, of Newburgh in Fife, and was reported in the Glasgow Herald (in March 1922)

as follows: "The war memorial peal of bells gifted to Newburgh Parish Church by Mr T.S. Greig, Newburgh, were rung for the first time yesterday after the service conducted by the Rev. Dr John Smith, Partick, at which a mural tablet containing the names of 11 men of the parish who fell in war was unveiled."

So this peal of bells was a memorial to the dead of Newburgh in WW1. But why are they now in Kirriemuir? Newburgh in Fife became a parish in 1622, and the parish

church was built in 1876. But this Fife church was demolished in 1967, (the site is now occupied by St. Katherine's Court, a modern residential development), but the bells were recovered and moved to St Mary's in Kirriemuir, which never had any bells. We know this, as the church records show the bells were re-dedicated in Kirriemuir by Rev. Michael Hare-Duke in 1970. The Friends of the Laing museum in Newburgh visited St Mary's in Kirrie to see 'their'

bells two years ago. The statistics of the former Newburgh bells that were moved to St Mary's in Kirriemuir in 1970 are below: Bell Number 8, Size 36", Note A; No7, 32", B; No6, 29", C#; No5, 27", D; No4, 24.5", E; No3, 22", F#; No2, 20", G#; No1, 19", A.

According to Gillett & Johnstone (Croydon) Ltd. many memorial bells were cast and we know carillons of bells were sent to Canada and New Zealand as memorials of the war.

One carillon of 49 bells made by Gillett & Johnstone arrived in New Zealand in January 1931. The bells ranged from one weighing a shade more than 4 kg, up to one weighing 5 tonnes and measuring 2m by 1.6 m. Their total weight was more than 30 tonnes and they cost £11,000. However the biggest carillon Gillett's ever made was in 1931 and was destined for Riverside Church in New York which was 72 bells. The 20-ton 'Bourdon' bell is the largest turned bell in the world. So as we arrive at the 100th anniversary of Armistice, I hope you will listen out for the bells as this will remind us of this important story and share our local connections to the First and Second World Wars.