

## Rudhall Bells

Bell founding has been a Gloucester industry for at least seven hundred years. The earliest reference is to a burgess called 'Hugh the Bellfounder' in about 1270.

One of the leading foundries was run by the Gloucester family of Rudhall who, between 1684 and 1835 produced over 5000 bells in the city, which were dispatched all over the UK and abroad. The oldest peal of bells in the USA, at Christ Church Boston, was cast by Rudhall's of Gloucester in 1774.

The foundry was started by Abraham Rudhall (1657-1736), a carpenter of Quaker parentage probably born in Upton St. Leonards. The earliest known examples of his work are a peal of five bells at Oddington, dated 1684, though there are references to his tuning bells as early as 1680. Bells were usually inscribed, often with a phrase like "PROSPERITY TO THIS PARISH" together with the date, the founder's initials and a decorative border. Usually Rudhall's initials were separated by a little bell. As far as is known Abraham Senior's foundry was on the corner of Archdeacon Street and Westgate Street.

Abraham Rudhall's son was also called Abraham (c.1680-1735). He obtained the freedom of Gloucester in 1704, which enabled him to work as a fully qualified bell founder. By 1722 he was casting bells on his own account, and he had his foundry in King's Square. His son, Abel, carried on the foundry until his death in 1760. Abel Rudhall was succeeded by his younger sons Thomas (1744-1783) and Charles (1747-1815). Charles lived in Brighton and left his half-brother John (1759-1835) to run the foundry.

In St Mary de Crypt, the Richard Manchester ring of bells was recast and rehung, unsatisfactorily, several times prior to 1710, when Rudhall was commissioned to recast and rehang them. To the five bells of 1710, two Trebles were added in 1749 and the Tenor Bell (14cwt) was added in 1772. The 7th was recast in 1864 by Mears. In 1907 they were rehung on a steel frame with plain bearings. They are regularly rung by Members of the Ancient Society of Crypt Youths, founded in 1710.