



Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch

The Cathedral Bells

Fact sheet

Background

For Bishop John Grimes, a church without bells was unthinkable, so early in 1904 when work on the towers of the new Cathedral began, he placed the matter of the bells in the hands of a Belgian trading firm, Comptoir Commercial Anversois, who in turn commissioned Monsieur A. Causard in Tellin to cast them. The firm recommended that the bells be mobile in order to obtain the full vibrations. However, the Cathedral architect, Francis William Petre, was not happy with this suggestion so the decision was taken that the bells should be fixed to a framework. The framework, constructed of New Zealand wood, was made to specifications sent from the foundry.

The bells were dispatched to Lyttelton on the S.S. Greisenau on the 6th November 1904 and arrived just in time to be ready for the grand opening of the completed Cathedral on the 12th February 1905. The Weekly Press of 15th February 1905 carried a photograph of the bells on the ground and of the largest of the four being hoisted to the belfry in the northwest tower. The combined weight of the bells is 3660 kgs. The cost, £463NZ, was largely covered by a bequest from Nicholas Quinn of Waimate.

The Cathedral peal comprises the Great Bell, the Gloria Bell, the Altiora Bell and the De Profundis Bell. Re sharp, Sol sharp, La sharp and Do. The combination of the bells give the harmonies of Major 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th, The ringing room, directly below the belfry, has seen faithful service of bell-ringers from the day the bells were first heard.

Few have seen the Cathedral bells, the same is true of the bell-ringers' room below the belfry. It is roomy, but contains little more than a staircase to the bells and a wooden frame jutting from one wall. Tied to the frame are ropes which pass through holes in the roof from the bell clappers, to which they are attached. It is at this simple console that the bell ringers make music. They follow a set of numbers on a board below them.

On the walls hang relics from the past – e.g. framed Blessings granted to the bellringers society by Pope Pius XII, and a record of bellringers, most notably their early leader, Father Ignatius Gottfried.

Media contacts

John Durning 0274 373 286 (Catholic Diocese)
Karen Wrigglesworth 027 453 0456 (Opus)