

Brilliant bell ringer joins celebration with recital at St Patrick's - Tuesday, 08 September 2009



The bells rang out in celebration from the imposing red sandstone tower of St Patrick's in Dumbarton on Monday evening (Sept 7, 2009) following the annual Mass to mark the consecration of the church in 1950.

The short recital was given by Michael Boyd, secretary of the Carillon Society of Great Britain, and his brilliant demonstration of musical chimes, bell strikes and hymn music was heard across the town.

Canon Gerry Conroy, St Patrick's parish priest, said: "Mr Boyd is a very skilled and accomplished carillonneur and his short concert was much appreciated.

"We are fortunate to have three parishioners, Anne Lusk, John Rainey and Marie Therese Rainey who are building up their own repertoire of music.

"John Rainey has recently built a practice instrument for people to learn how to play the bells, so anyone interested in learning how to play should let me know."

Mr Boyd, who is a lecturer at the University of Birmingham, was in Glasgow on business this week and was invited along to St Patrick's to view the carillon, which was restored last year at a cost of £25,000 paid for from funds raised in the parish.

He said: "The St Patrick's carillon is one of only five in Scotland. So I wanted to see it – and to play it – since it was the first carillon to be built in modern times in Scotland.

"The other four carillons were all installed later. Holy Trinity at St Andrew's only became a carillon in 1962 when six bells were added to it bringing it up to the required number.

"The bells are absolutely wonderful, the carillon is very special indeed and the priests and parishioners of St Patrick's deserve to be congratulated for keeping it in good working order."

He explained that there was a special connection between his own parish of Our Lady of the Rosary and St Theresa of Liseux in Saltley, Birmingham, where he had taken his first steps to becoming a campanologist and carillonneur.

Mr Boyd said that Canon John Power, the parish priest at the founding of St Theresa's, had come from being an assistant priest with Monsignor Hugh Canon Kelly in Dumbarton, and had modelled the architecture and interior design of his new church on St Patrick's – right down to the carillon.

He added: "I grew up with it. The bells were in my local church and I was desperate to learn to play the carillon. You could say that I was self-taught. I didn't graduate to it from

playing the organ or piano or from singing in the choir. It was the bells I wanted to play. I loved them and I was fascinated by them."

The St Patrick's bell tower was completed in 1927 as an addition to the imposing church which was built at the beginning of last century and officially opened in 1903. The bell tower, bells and carillon were added 24 years later.

The carillon includes a ringing bell weighing almost 20 hundredweight, which was placed in the tower on St Patrick's Day in 1927.

A Ting Tang clock and automatic Angelus were installed at Christmas that same year and the chime was increased to a carillon of 23 bells, which was inaugurated on August 19, 1928.

The Latin inscription on the ringing bell reads:

I praise the true God, I call the People, I gather the Clergy, I mourn the Dead, I disperse the Clouds, I adorn Feasts.

Various events were organised last year to raise funds for the carillon and bell tower restoration, including a sponsored walk in the Long Crags and a prize draw.

Parishioners Jim and Dorothy Wallace who won the £1,000 first prize in the draw celebrate their golden wedding this Saturday (September 12).

Canon Conroy said: "Everyone who took part in the prize draw was asked to designate a Sunday of the year on which the bells would be rung after the 12 noon Mass to honour the memory of people they hold dear.

"However, we had more donors than there are Sundays, which meant that the bell tolling has had to take place after the 10am Mass as well."

NOTES ON THE BELLS

There are just five carillons in Scotland. They are at St Nicholas, Aberdeen, St John's in Perth, St Marnock's in Kilmarnock, Holy Trinity in St Andrews and St Patrick's, Dumbarton.

What is a Carillon?

A Carillon is a musical instrument consisting of 23 or more cast bronze, traditionally shaped bells, which have been precisely tuned so that any bell can be sounded together to produce a harmonious effect.

The Bells

Carillon bells are hung stationary; only the clappers move.

The Clavier

The clapper of each bell is connected by wires and other linkage to a playing mechanism called a console. This console contains a double row of rounded levers - called batons - plus a pedal board.

The carillonneur sits on a bench facing the console and plays the instrument by depressing these batons with his hands which are loosely clenched into fists.

The batons are arranged in the same pattern as the keys of a piano. The pedals which are connected to the heavier, brass bells are depressed by the feet.

As with the piano, expressive playing is achieved by variation of touch.

Church bells are rung for many reasons including the signalling of freedom, communication, peace, celebration and mourning.

They call the faithful to prayer each day and are an integral part of the history of the parish.