

Centenary for Inveraray's Fyne set of peal bells

By Ewan Halley

It's the tallest building in Inveraray and you've probably passed it numerous times, but you may be unaware that the tower of All Saints Church houses one of the world's most important sets of bells.

They are the second-heaviest ringing peal of 10 bells in the world, after Wells Cathedral in Somerset, as well as the heaviest peal of bells in Scotland.

Commissioned by Niall Campbell, 10th Duke of Argyll, the tower was built as a memorial to soldiers from Clan Campbell who died in the First World War - more than a thousand of them.

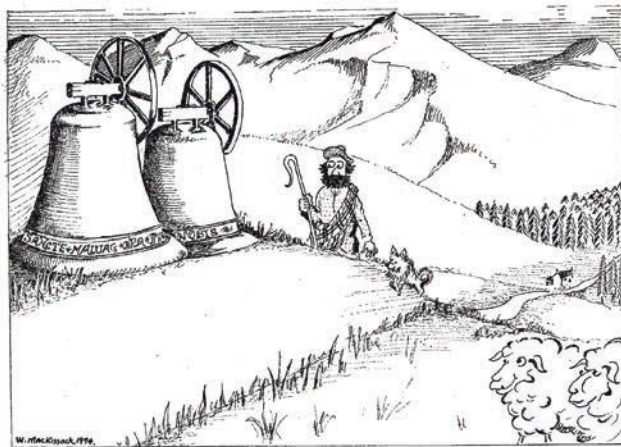
With a combined weight of 8,131 kg (about eight tons), the bells are named after Celtic saints with connections to Argyll.

From lightest to heaviest, these are Saints Maluag, Columba, Mundus, Brendon, Maelrubha, Blaane, Mary, Murdouche, Brigida and Molaise.

This month marks 100 years since the bells arrived in Inveraray.

Their journey in November 1921 from the bell founders John Taylor & Co of Loughborough was dogged with difficulties.

One of the delivery lorries broke down en route south of the border and had to be substituted.



Mo chreach! Noch chunnaic mi riamh an leithid sin. (My grief! I never saw the like.)

A cartoon from a commemorative booklet in the 1970s immortalised the trials and tribulations of getting the bells over the Rest 100 years ago.

Then the steep climb of the Rest and be Thankful proved too much for another lorry and its load of five bells and their supporting ironwork.

The lightest bell - still weighing in at a mighty 311 kg/686 lb - was unloaded, but even that wasn't enough to get the lorry to the summit and a second bell had to be jettisoned.

Having stopped the traffic (road closures are nothing new on that infamous route), the lorry driver was helped by some obliging motorists.

Its cargo thus lightened, the lorry took the remaining bells to their destination and returned next morning to retrieve its jetsam.

A cartoon from a commemorative booklet from the 1970s immortalised this escapade.

The bells were temporarily housed in a wood-slatted shelter, which still stands in the grounds of the church, until the tower was completed in 1931 when they were installed in their final hanging place high up in the belfry.

Nowadays, the bells are pealed regularly by visiting bands of ringers, many of whom come to achieve a full peal.

The 10 bells can be rung in any order, giving a possibility of many thousands of sequences; a full peal comprises more than 5,000 pulls of the bell

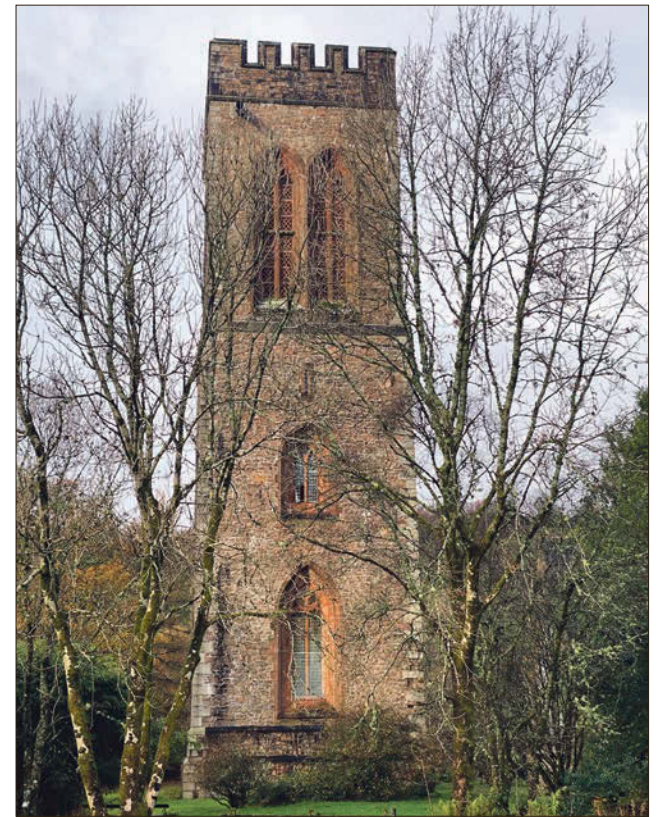
rope ('changes') and takes about three to four hours.

The bells were rung most recently on Remembrance Sunday, when the heaviest bell was chimed before the wreath-laying ceremony at Inveraray war memorial, and on Saturday November 20 a group of ringers from far and wide put the bells through their paces to commemorate the centenary of their arrival.

The next opportunity to hear the bells is the evening of Friday December 17 before the start of the Christmas carol service at 7pm in All Saints Church.

Pandemics permitting, each July sees the Inveraray Ringing Festival, when campanologists

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Above: Inveraray's iconic bell tower, built to house the second-heaviest ringing peal of 10 bells in the world.

from the world over come to the Royal Burgh to ring these celebrated bells.

The tower is also usually open seasonally to the public; as well as the impressive sight of the bells themselves, the battlements give spectacular

views over the town up and down Loch Fyne and beyond.

But like all old buildings, the tower is in need of some maintenance, and a campaign is planned to raise funds to take this Argyll landmark into its next century.



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