

Chapter 12

Ringling for Special Occasions

In addition to ringing for church services bells can also often rung to mark special occasions. This is a long standing tradition and in part reflects the secular nature of ringing that was particularly prevalent until the second half of the 19th century, when ringers were rewarded by those requesting the bells.

While Christmas and the New Year are portrayed in a number of historic prints, examples of other occasions can also be found. A few of the prints included under this theme also appear in other chapters but have again been reproduced for completeness.

Weddings

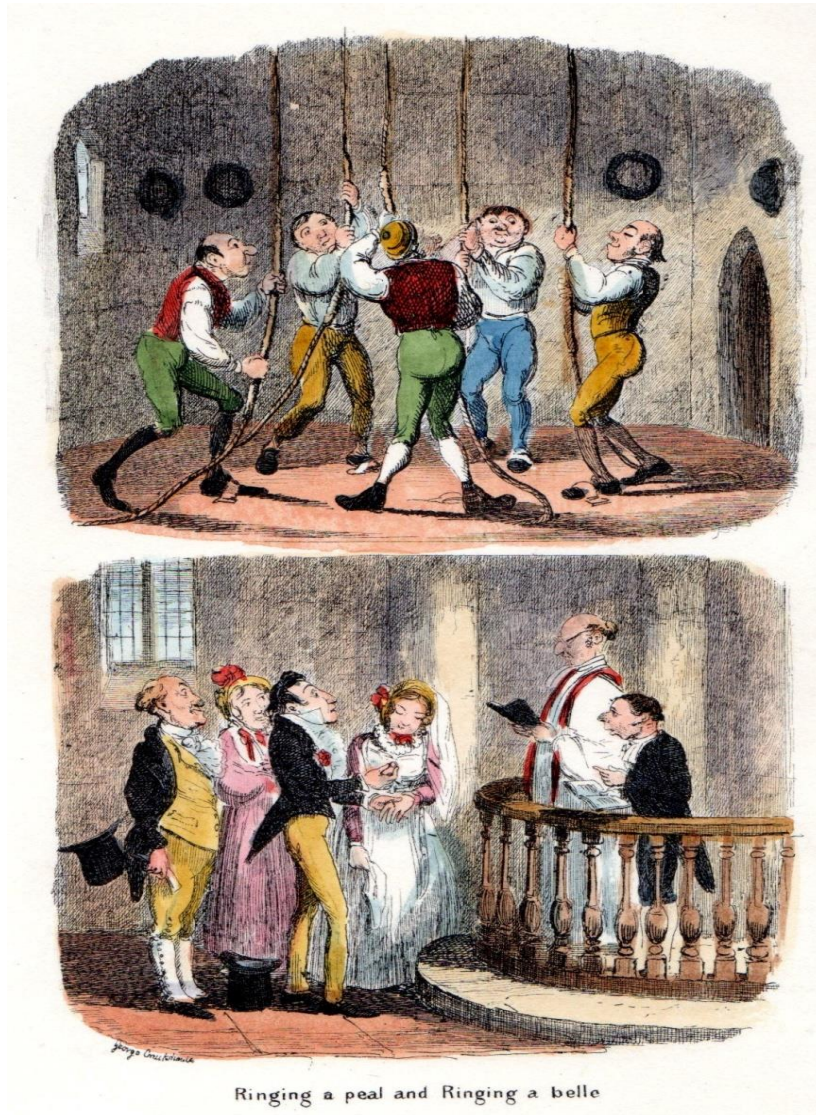
Marriages held in Great Britain and Ireland from the 12th century onwards have been influenced by religious and traditional practices.

The 4th Lateran Council (1215) forbade clandestine marriage, and required marriages to be publicly announced in churches by priests. In the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent legislated more specific requirements, such as the presence of a priest and two witnesses, as well as promulgation of the marriage announcement thirty days prior to the ceremony. These laws did not extend to the regions affected by the Protestant Reformation. In England, clergy performed many clandestine marriages, such as so-called Fleet Marriages, which were held legally valid; and in Scotland un-solemnised common-law marriage was still valid.

From about the 12th to the 17th century, 'handfasting' in England was simply a term for engagement to be married, or a ceremony held on the occasion of such a contract, usually about a month prior to a church wedding, at which the marrying couple formally declared that each accepted the other as spouse. Handfasting was legally binding - as soon as the couple made their vows to each other they were validly married. It was not a temporary arrangement. Just as with church weddings of the period, the union which handfasting created could only be dissolved by death. English legal authorities held the view that even if not followed by intercourse, handfasting was as binding as any vow taken in church before a priest.

During handfasting, the man and woman, in turn, would take the other by the right hand and declare aloud that they accepted each other as husband and wife. Because of this, handfasting was also known in England as 'troth-plight'. Gifts were often exchanged.

Handfasting could take place anywhere, indoors or out. It was frequently in the home of the bride, but according to records handfastings also took place in taverns, in an orchard and even on horseback. The presence of a credible witness or witnesses was usual, rings and a gold coin broken in half between the couple were also common.



Ringing a peal and Ringing a belle

Ringing a Peal and Ringing a Belle, taken from *The Comic Almanack* 1842, page B2 - illustration by George Cruikshank (8.0cm by 13.0cm)

For much of the relevant period, church courts dealt with marital matters. Ecclesiastical law recognised two forms of handfasting, *sponsalia per verba de praesenti* and *sponsalia per verba de futuro*. In *sponsalia de praesenti*, the most usual form, the couple declared they there and then accepted each other as man and wife. The *sponsalia de futuro* form was less binding, as the couple took hands only to declare their intention to marry each other at some future date. The latter was closer to a modern engagement and could, in theory, be ended with the consent of both parties – but only providing intercourse had not occurred. If intercourse did take place, then the *sponsalia de futuro* was automatically converted into *de iure* marriage. Despite the validity of handfasting, it was expected to be solemnised by a

church wedding fairly soon afterwards. Penalties might follow for those who did not comply. Ideally the couple were also supposed to refrain from intercourse until then. Complaints by preachers suggest that they often did not wait, but at least until the early 1600s the common attitude to this kind of anticipatory behaviour seems to have been lenient.

Handfasting remained an acceptable way of marrying in England throughout the Middle Ages but declined in the early modern period. In some circumstances handfasting was open to abuse, with persons who had undergone 'troth-plight' occasionally refusing to proceed to a church wedding, creating ambiguity about their former betrothed's marital status. After the beginning of the 17th century gradual changes in English law meant the presence of an officiating priest or magistrate became necessary for a marriage to be legal. Finally the 1753 Marriage Act, aimed at suppressing clandestine marriages by introducing more stringent conditions for validity, effectively ended the handfasting custom in England.

New Year

This represents the beginning of a new calendar year. It is celebrated by many cultures in some manner and the 1st day of January is often marked as a national holiday in many countries.

In the Gregorian calendar, the most widely used calendar system today, New Year occurs on January 1, commonly known as New Year's Day. This was also the first day of the year in the original Julian calendar and of the Roman calendar (after 153 BC). During the Middle Ages in western Europe, while the Julian calendar was still in use, authorities moved New Year's Day, depending upon the location, to one of several other days, including March 1, March 25, Easter, September 1, and December 25. Beginning in 1582 many countries, especially in the western hemisphere, have adopted the Gregorian calendar fixing the date as 1st January. Other cultures however, continue to observe their traditional or religious New Year's Day according to their own customs, sometimes in addition to a Gregorian or civil calendar. These include the Chinese New Year, Islamic New Year, traditional Japanese New Year and Jewish New Year. India and other countries continue to celebrate New Year on different dates.

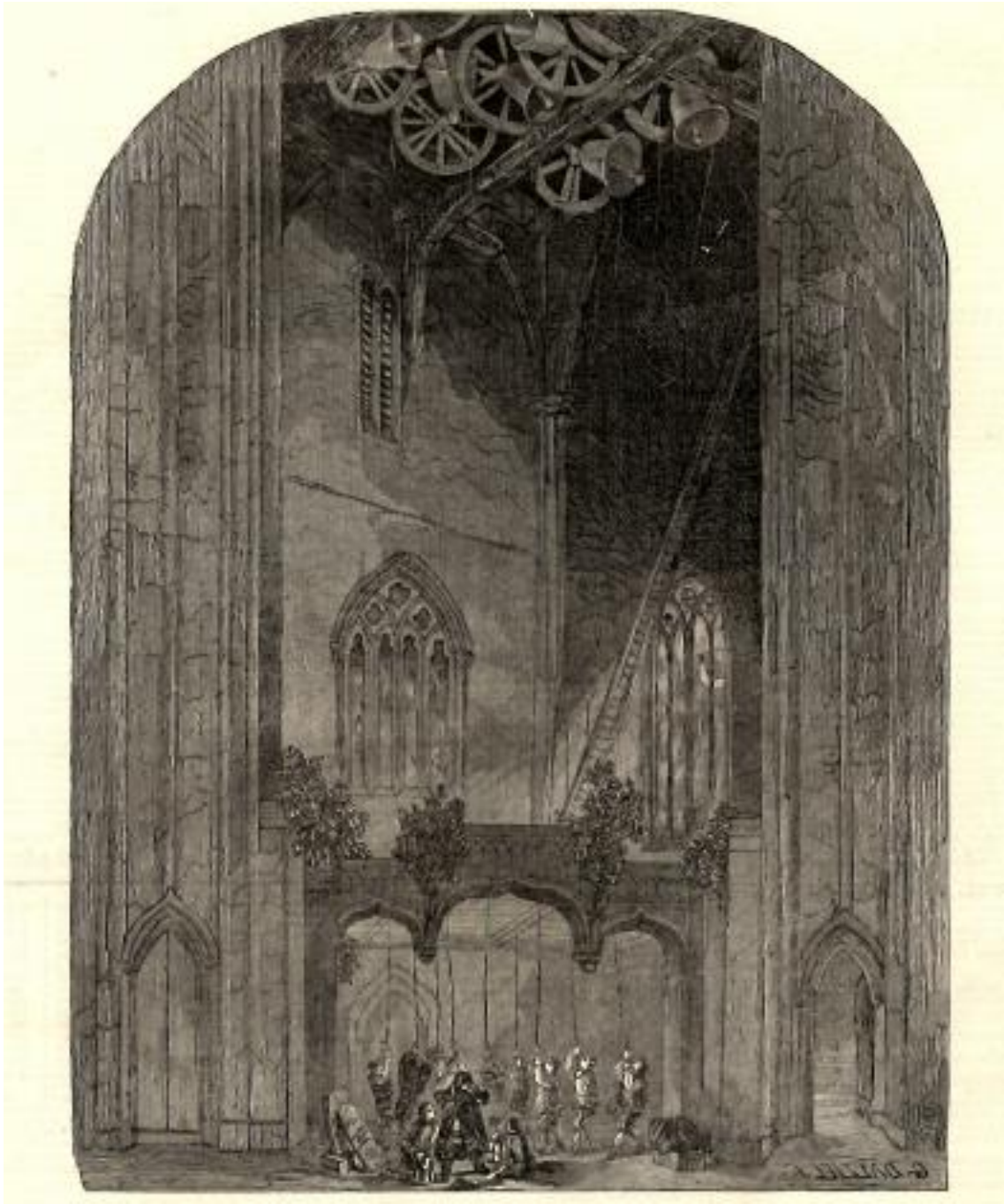
The switch to the Gregorian calendar was initiated by a papal bull issued by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, but was not adopted in the UK until 1752 following the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750. Before 1752, Britain and her Empire followed the Julian calendar, first implemented by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. However this calendar had an inbuilt error of 1 day every 128 years, due to a miscalculation of the solar year by 11 minutes. This affected the date of Easter, traditionally observed on March 21, as it began to move further away from the spring equinox with each passing year.

To get over this problem, the Gregorian calendar was introduced. This is a solar calendar, based on a 365-day year divided into 12 months. Each month consists of either 30 or 31 days with one month, February, consisting of 28 days. A leap year every 4 years adds an extra day to February making it 29 days long.

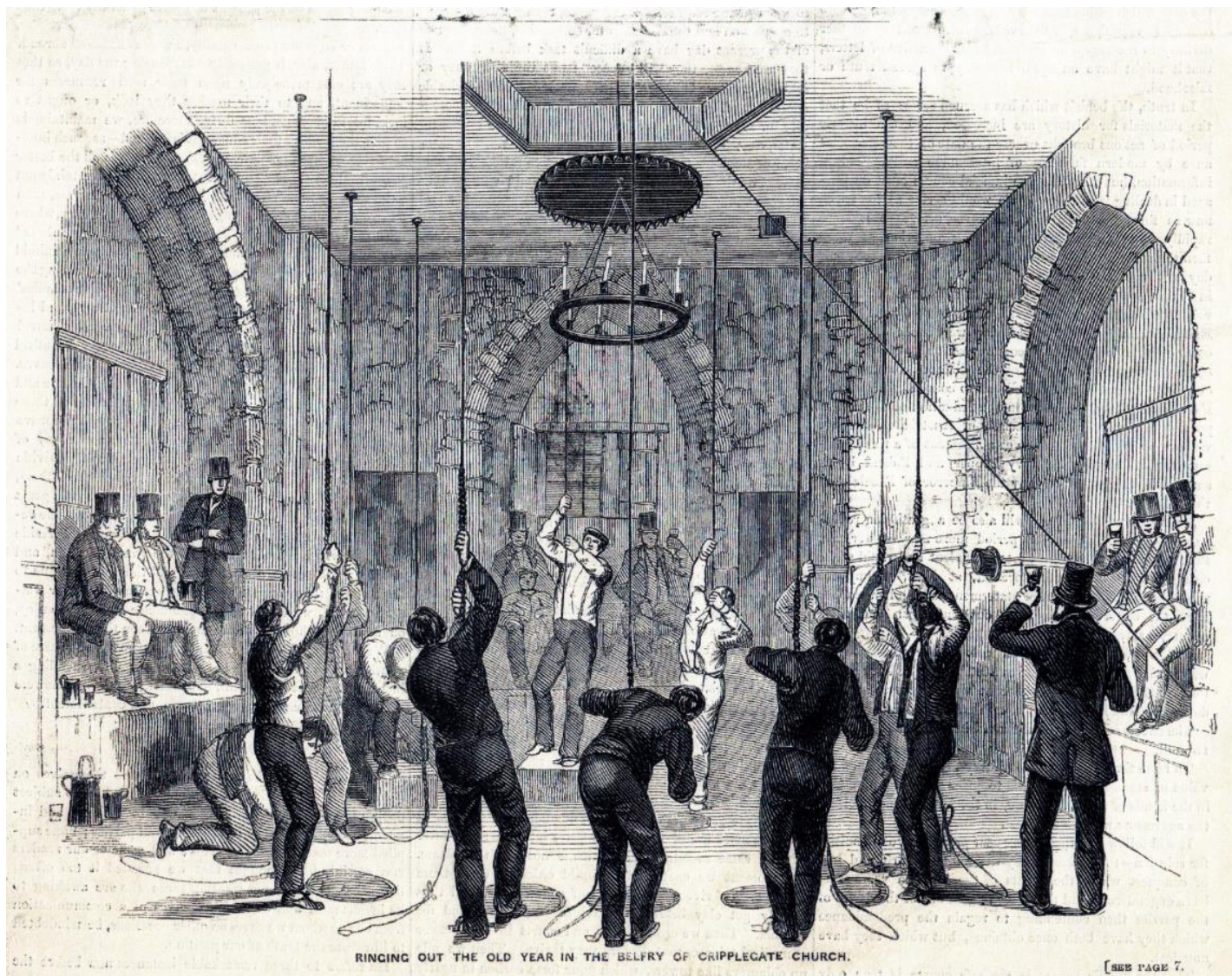
There remained the problem of aligning the calendar in use in England with that in use in Europe. It was necessary to correct it by 11 days: the 'lost days'. It was decided that Wednesday 2nd September 1752 would be followed by Thursday 14th September 1752. Claims of civil unrest and rioters demanding "Give us our eleven days" may have arisen through a misinterpretation of a contemporary painting by William Hogarth. His 1755 painting entitled: 'An Election Entertainment' refers to the elections of 1754 and depicts a tavern dinner organised by Whig candidates. A stolen Tory campaign banner with the slogan, 'Give us our Eleven Days'. It is also true that when the British government decided to alter the calendar and skip these 11 days, many people mistakenly believed that their lives would be shortened by 11 days. People were also unhappy and suspicious at the moving of Saint's Days and Holy Days, including the date of Easter. Many people also objected to the imposition of what they saw as a 'popish' calendar.



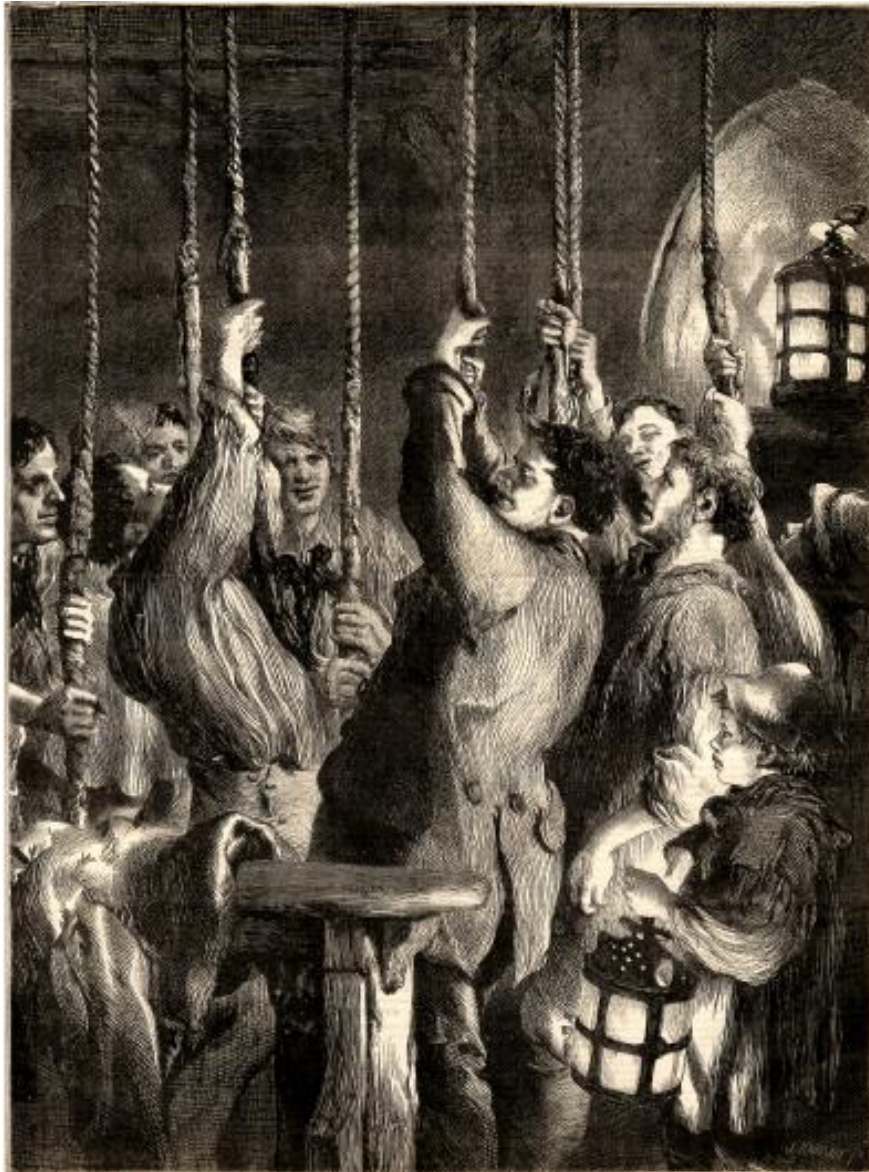
Ring Out the Old, Ring In the New taken from *Black & White*, 4 January 1902, page 9 (21.5cm by 28.0cm)



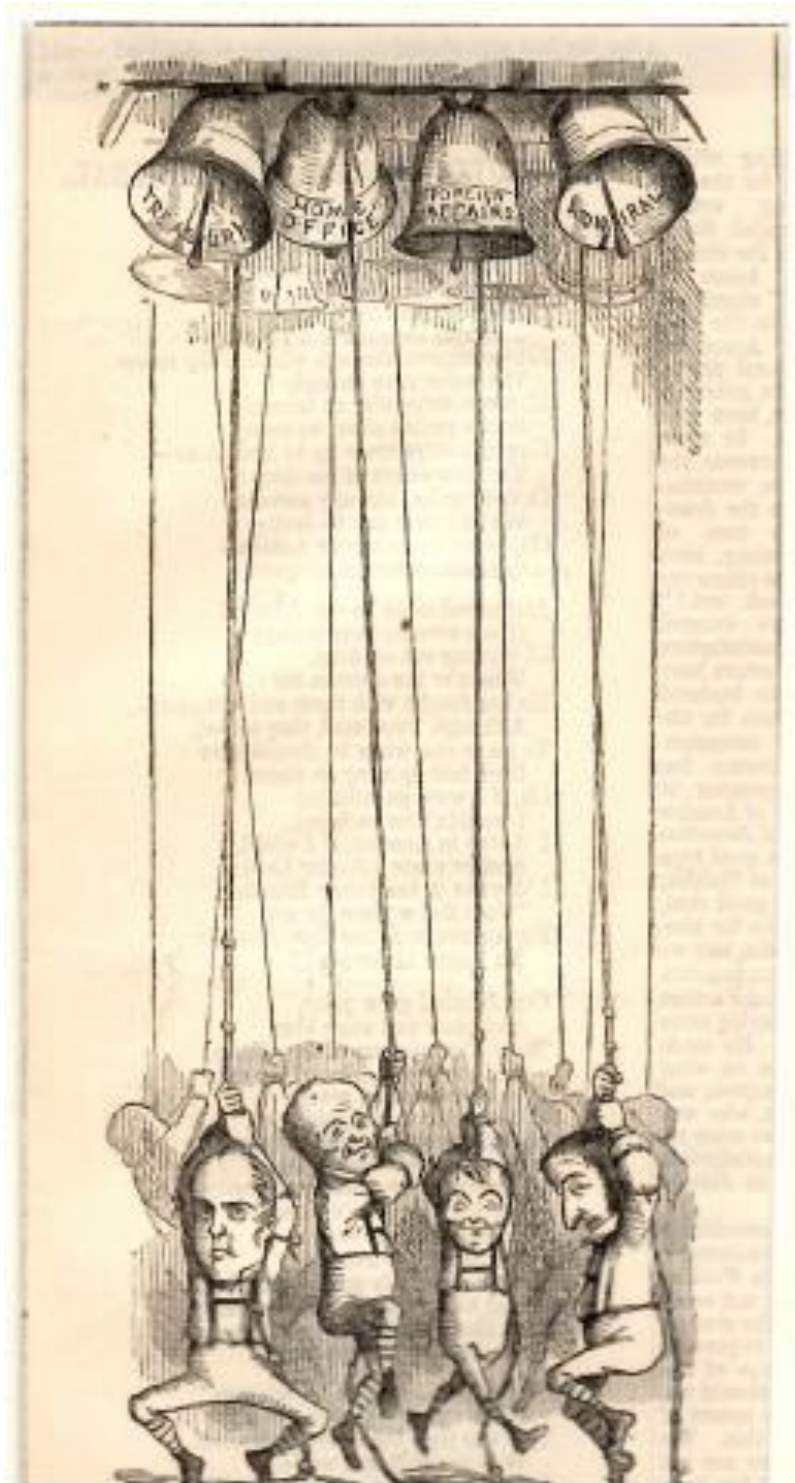
Ringling for Old Year Out and the New One In taken from *The Illustrated London News*, 1 January 1848, page 432 (16.5cm by 22.0cm)



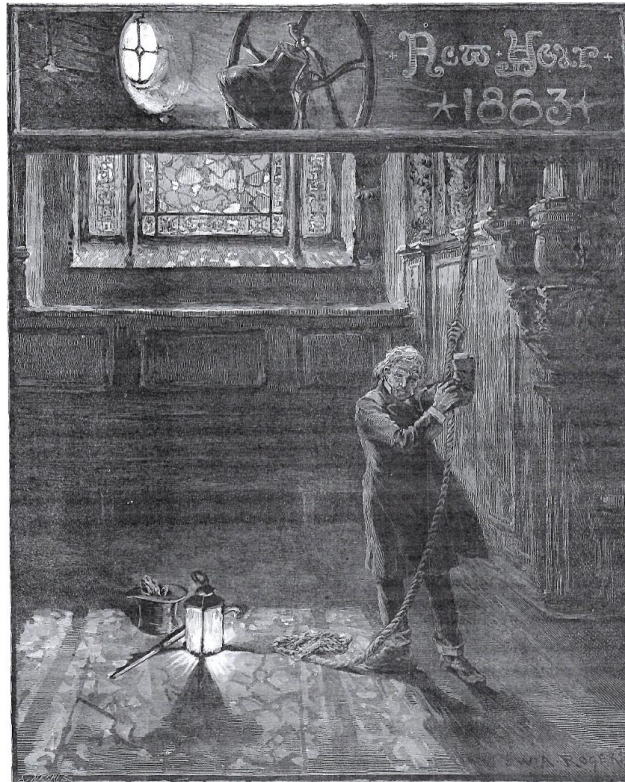
Ringling Out the Old Year in the Belfry of Cripplegate Church, London taken from *The Illustrated Historic Times*, 4 January 1850 p1; also *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 27 March 1858, page 268) (23.0cm by 17.0cm)



Ringing in the New Year, Drawn by John Gilbert taken from *The British Workman*, 1 January 1866, page 49 (28.0cm by 37.5cm)



Ringling the New Year in at St Stephen's, source unknown, but political satire circ 1866 possibly taken from *Punch* (18.0cm by 9.0cm)



New Year 1883 taken from *Harper's Weekly – Journal of Civilization*, 30 December 1882 (23.4cm by 29.0cm)

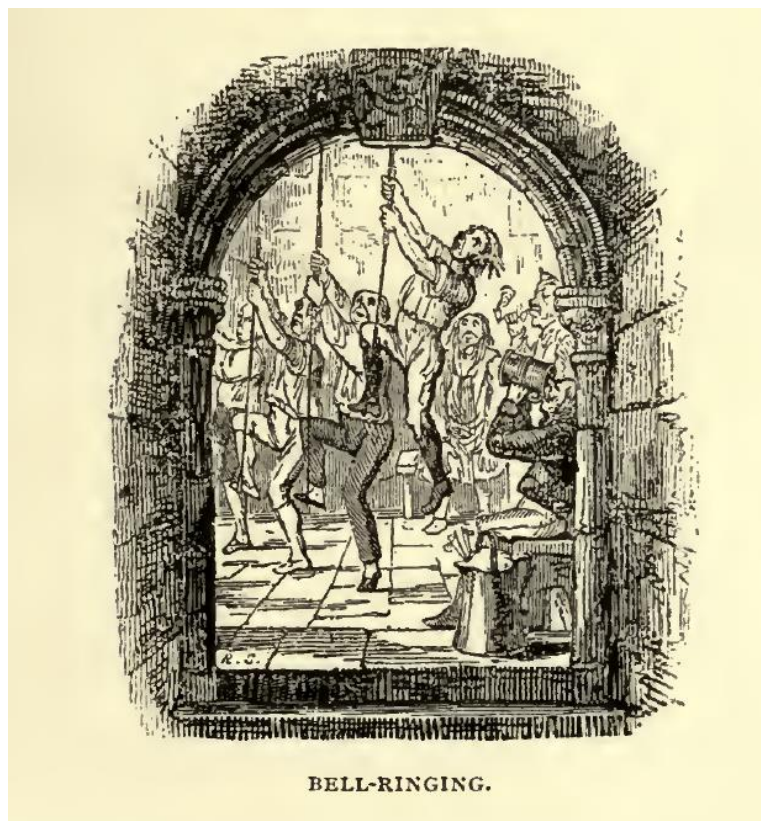


Source not known

Christmas

Christmas (or Feast of the Nativity) is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed primarily on 25 December as a religious and cultural celebration around the world. A feast central to the Christian liturgical year, it is preceded by the season of Advent or the Nativity Fast and initiates the season of Christmastide, which historically in the West lasts twelve days and culminates on Twelfth Night. Christmas Day is a public holiday in many of the world's nations and is celebrated religiously by a majority of Christians, as well as culturally by many non-Christians.

Although the month and date of Jesus' birth are unknown, the church in the early fourth century fixed the date as December 25. This corresponds to the date of the winter solstice in the Roman calendar. However, in some parts of the East, Christian Churches celebrate Christmas on the older Julian calendar, which currently corresponds to January 7 in the Gregorian calendar. For Christians, believing that God came into the world in the form of man to atone for the sins of humanity, rather than knowing Jesus' exact birth date, is considered to be the primary purpose in celebrating Christmas.



Bell Ringing taken from *The Book of Christmas* by Thomas K Hervey with illustration by R Seymour (First edition 1836 page 219; later editions 1845, 1852, 1880 and 1888 with illustration on page 125 in latter). Precise size of original prints is not known but circ. 4.0cm by 5.5cm

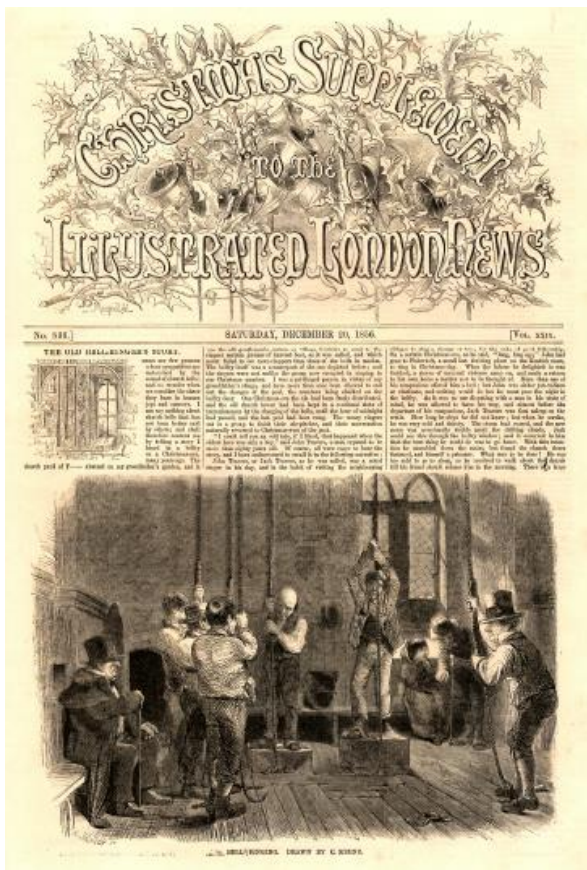
The celebratory customs associated in various countries with Christmas have a mix of pre-Christian, Christian, and secular themes and origins. Popular modern customs of the holiday include gift giving; completing an Advent calendar or Advent wreath; Christmas carols; viewing a Nativity play; an exchange of Christmas cards; church services; a special meal; and the display of various Christmas decorations, including Christmas trees, mistletoe, and holly. In addition, several closely related and often interchangeable figures, known as Santa Claus, Father Christmas and Saint Nicholas are associated with bringing gifts to children during the Christmas season and have their own body of traditions. Because gift-giving and many other aspects of the Christmas festival involve heightened economic activity, the holiday has become a significant event and a key sales period for retailers and businesses. The economic impact of Christmas has grown steadily over the past few centuries in many regions of the world.



Bell Ringing taken from *The Illustrated London News – Christmas Supplement*, 20 December 1856, page 623 drawn by C Keene (23.0cm by 13.5cm)



Bell Ringing taken from *The Illustrated London News – Christmas Supplement*, 20 December 1856, page 623; also *The Illustrated London News – Jubilee Supplement* 1892, page ii. Drawn by C Keene (23.0cm by 16.0cm)



The last two examples are taken from a single page which is reproduced here.

The Illustrated London News – Christmas Supplement, 20 December 1856, page 623 (size: 25.0cm by 36.5cm)

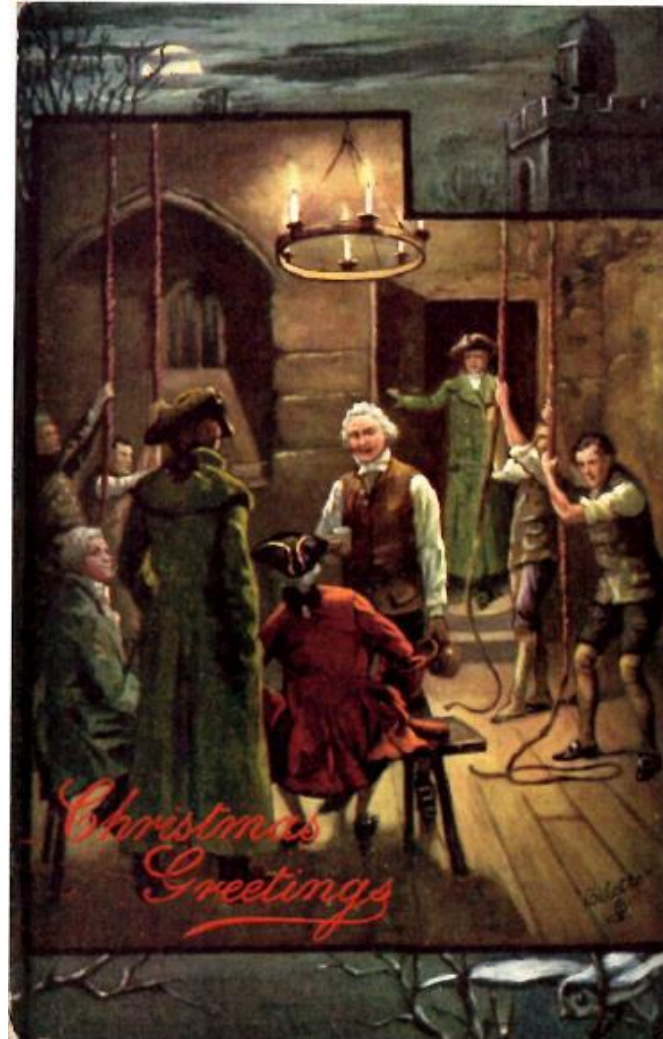


CHRISTMAS BELLS: INTERIOR OF THE BELFRY OF CRIPPLEGATE CHURCH.—(DRAWN BY J. PALMER.)

Christmas Bells: Interior of the Belfry of Cripplegate Church by John Palmer. Source unknown



Christmas Bell-Ringers taken from *The Illustrated London News: Christmas Number 1883*, page 5 (21.0cm by 28.5cm)



Reproduced as a post card (used version 1906 seen) (8.8cm by 13.8cm)

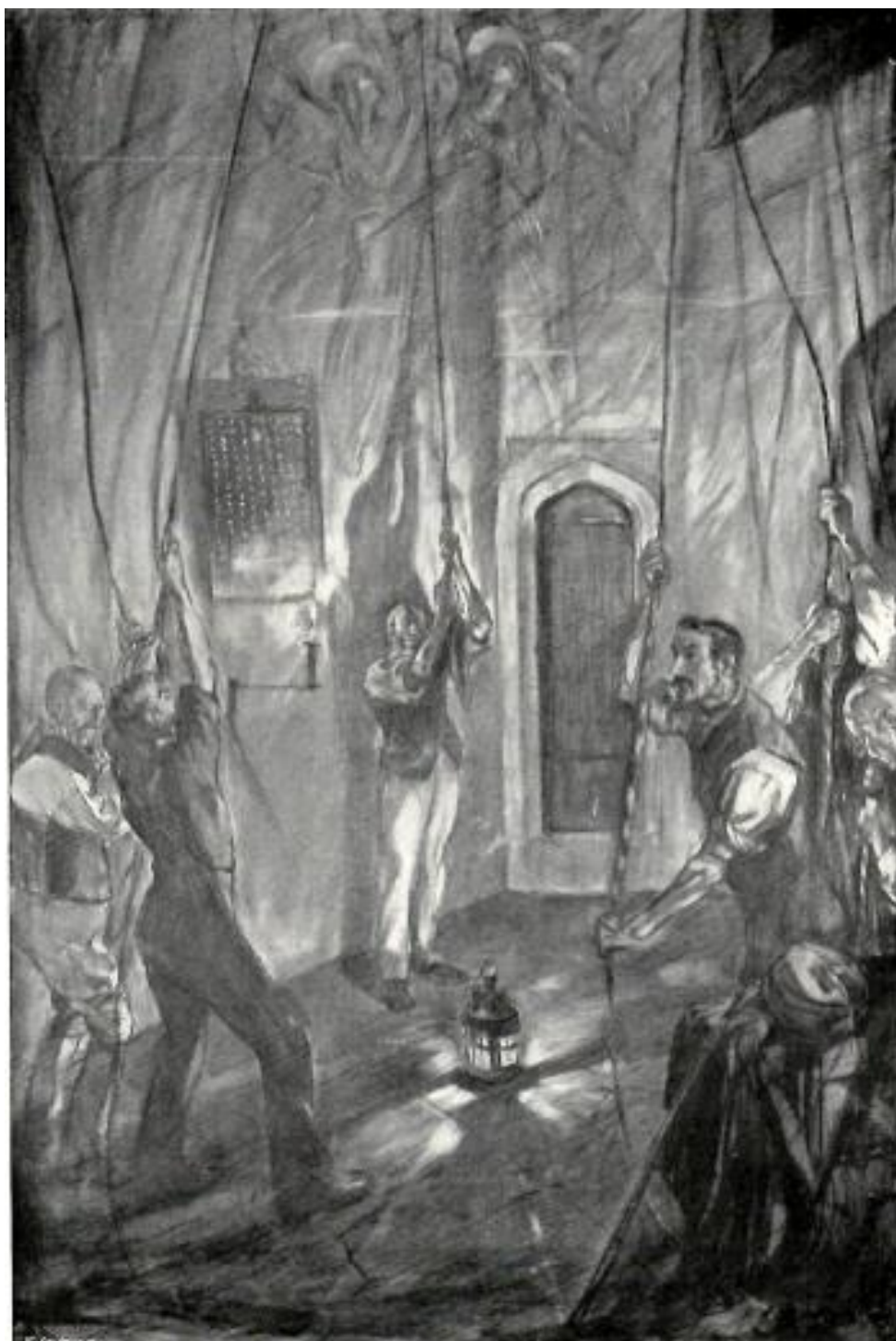
PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.—December 24, 1887.



THE CHIMES.

MR. PUNCH. "NOW THEN, MY LADS! ALL TOGETHER FOR ONCE!—CHRISTMAS TIME, YOU KNOW!"

The Chimes, taken from *Punch or The London Charivari*, 24 December 1887 (18.0cm by 26cm)



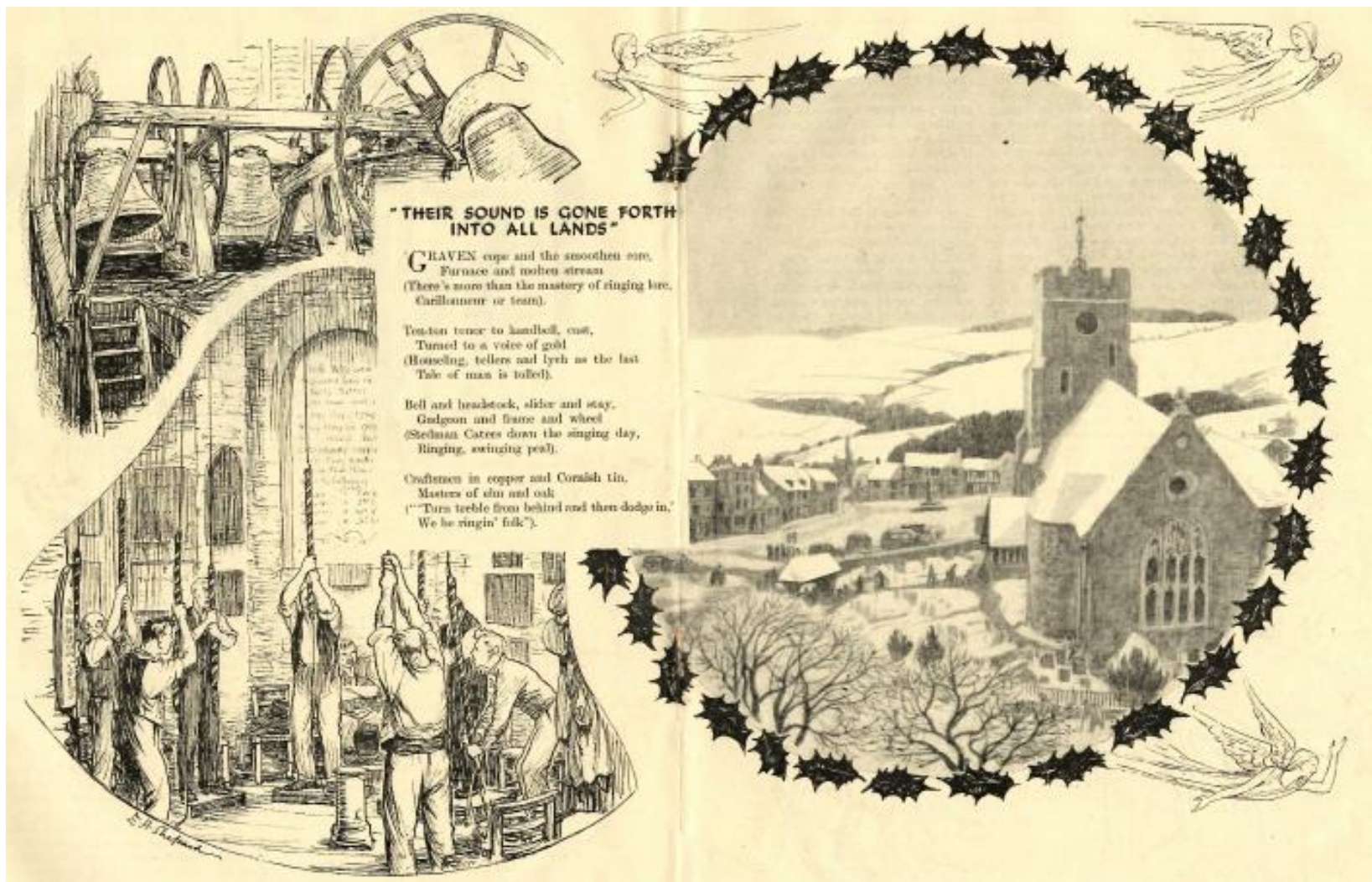
Christmas Eve taken from *Pall Mall Magazine*, December 1899, page 461 (12.5cm by 18.5cm)



Christmas Dawn taken from *The Illustrated London News - Christmas Number, 1902*, page 26 (22.5cm by 31.5cm)



A Christmas Carol – Ring Out the Old, Ring In the New, source not known (12.7cm by 8.0cm)



**"THEIR SOUND IS GONE FORTH
INTO ALL LANDS"**

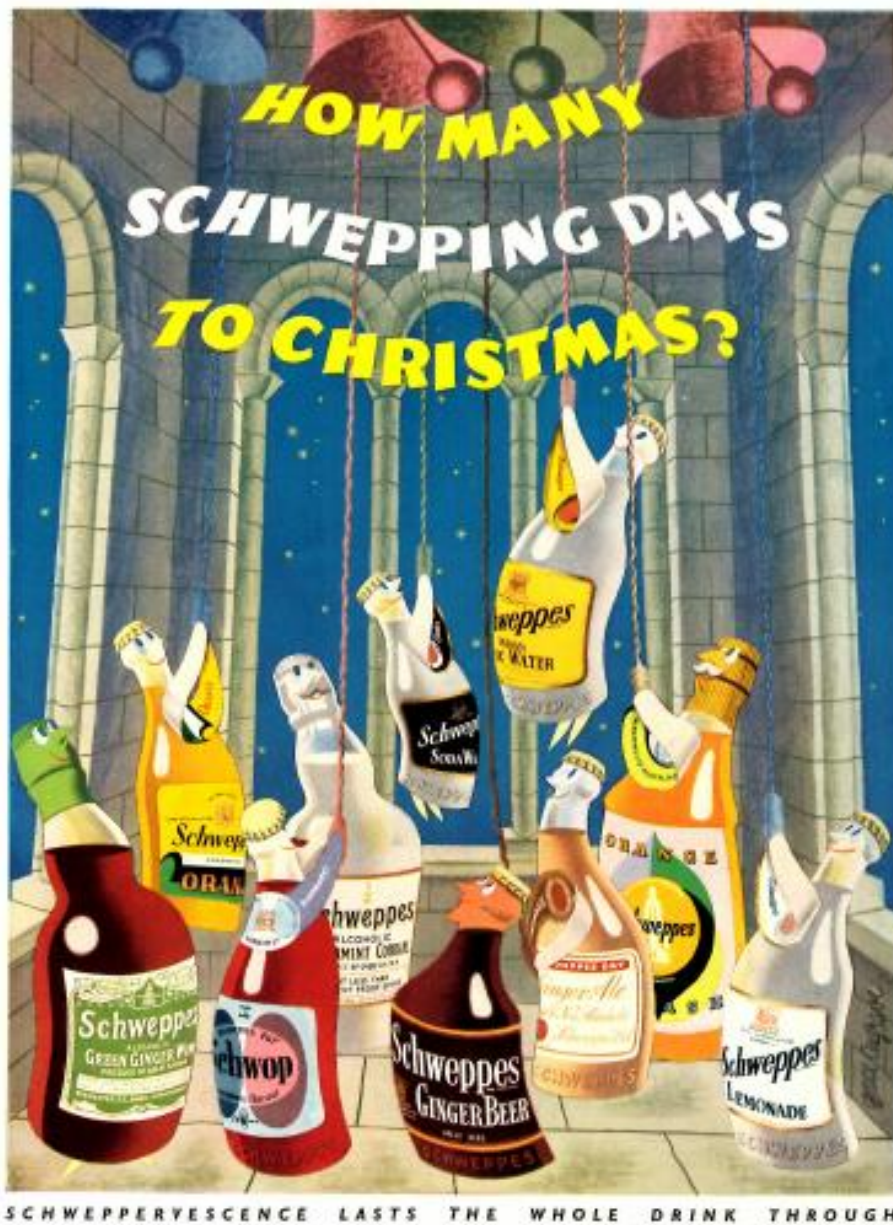
GRAVEN cove and the smoothen eve,
Furnace and broken stream
(There's more than the mastery of ringing here,
Carillon or team).

Ton-ton tence to handbell, cast,
Tuned to a voice of gold
(Housing, tellers and lyth as the last
Tale of man is tolled).

Bell and headstock, slider and stay,
Gudgeon and frame and wheel
(Stelman Cares down the singing day,
Ringing, swinging peal).

Owlsmen in copper and Coraish tin,
Masters of elm and oak
("Turn treble from behind and then dodgo in,
We be ringin' folk").

Their Sound is Gone Forth into All Lands taken from *Punch*, 30 December 1930, pages 616 & 617 (35.0cm by 23.0cm)



How many Scheweping Days to Christmas - taken from *Punch*, 2 November 1953 (18.5cm by 24.0cm). Also larger version from 5 December 1953 (22.5cm by 31.0cm)



Christmas Party "Such a pity the visiting bell ringers can't be at the party" taken from *Punch*, 2 November 1953, page 34 (17.5cm by 22.0cm)



Christmas cards featuring Battersea, St Mary and the bell ringers by Sarah Bryant

Crimean War

This was a military conflict fought from October 1853 to February 1856 in which the Russian Empire lost to an alliance made up of the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain and Sardinia. The immediate cause of the war involved the rights of Christian minorities in the Holy Land, which was a part of the Ottoman Empire. The French promoted the rights of Roman Catholic, while Russia promoted those of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The longer-term causes involved the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the unwillingness of Britain and France to allow Russia to gain territory and power at the Ottoman Empire's expense. It has widely been noted that the causes, in one case involving an argument over a key, have never revealed a 'greater confusion of purpose', yet they led to a war noted for its 'notoriously incompetent international butchery'.

While the churches worked out their differences and came to an agreement, Nicholas I of Russia and the French Emperor Napoleon III refused to back down. Nicholas issued an ultimatum that the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire be placed under his protection. Britain attempted to mediate and arranged a compromise that Nicholas agreed to. When the Ottomans demanded changes to the agreement, Nicholas recanted and prepared for war. Having obtained promises of support from France and Britain, the Ottomans declared war on Russia in October 1853.

The war started in the Balkans in July 1853, when Russian troops occupied the Danubian Principalities, now part of Romania, and then began to cross the Danube. The Ottomans fought a strong defensive campaign and stopped the advance at Silistra. A separate action on the fort town of Kars in eastern Anatolia led to a siege, and a Turkish attempt to reinforce the garrison was destroyed by a Russian fleet at Sinop. Fearing an Ottoman collapse, France and Britain rushed forces to Gallipoli. They then moved north to Varna in June 1854, arriving just in time for the Russians to abandon Silistra. Apart from a minor skirmish at Kötence (today Constanța), there was little for the allies to do. Karl Marx said at the time *'there they are, the French doing nothing and the British helping them as fast as possible'*.

Frustrated by the wasted effort, and with demands for action from their citizens, the allied force decided to attack Russia's main naval base in the Black Sea at Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula. After extended preparations, the forces landed on the peninsula in September 1854 and marched their way to a point south of Sevastopol after the successful Battle of the Alma. The Russians counterattacked on 25 October in what became the Battle of Balaclava and were repulsed, but at the cost of seriously depleting the British Army forces. This eventually led to a stalemate and the front settled into a siege.

Sevastopol fell after eleven months, and neutral countries began to join the Allied cause. Isolated and facing a bleak prospect of invasion from the west if the war continued, Russia sued for peace in March 1856. France and Britain welcomed this development, as the conflict was growing unpopular at home. The Treaty of Paris, signed on 30 March 1856, ended the war.



The Peace Rejoicings – Ringing the Bells taken from *The Illustrated London News*, 31 May 1856, page 600 (24.0cm by 34.5cm). This print represents ringing to mark the end of the Crimean War which ran from 5 October 1853 to 30 March 1856

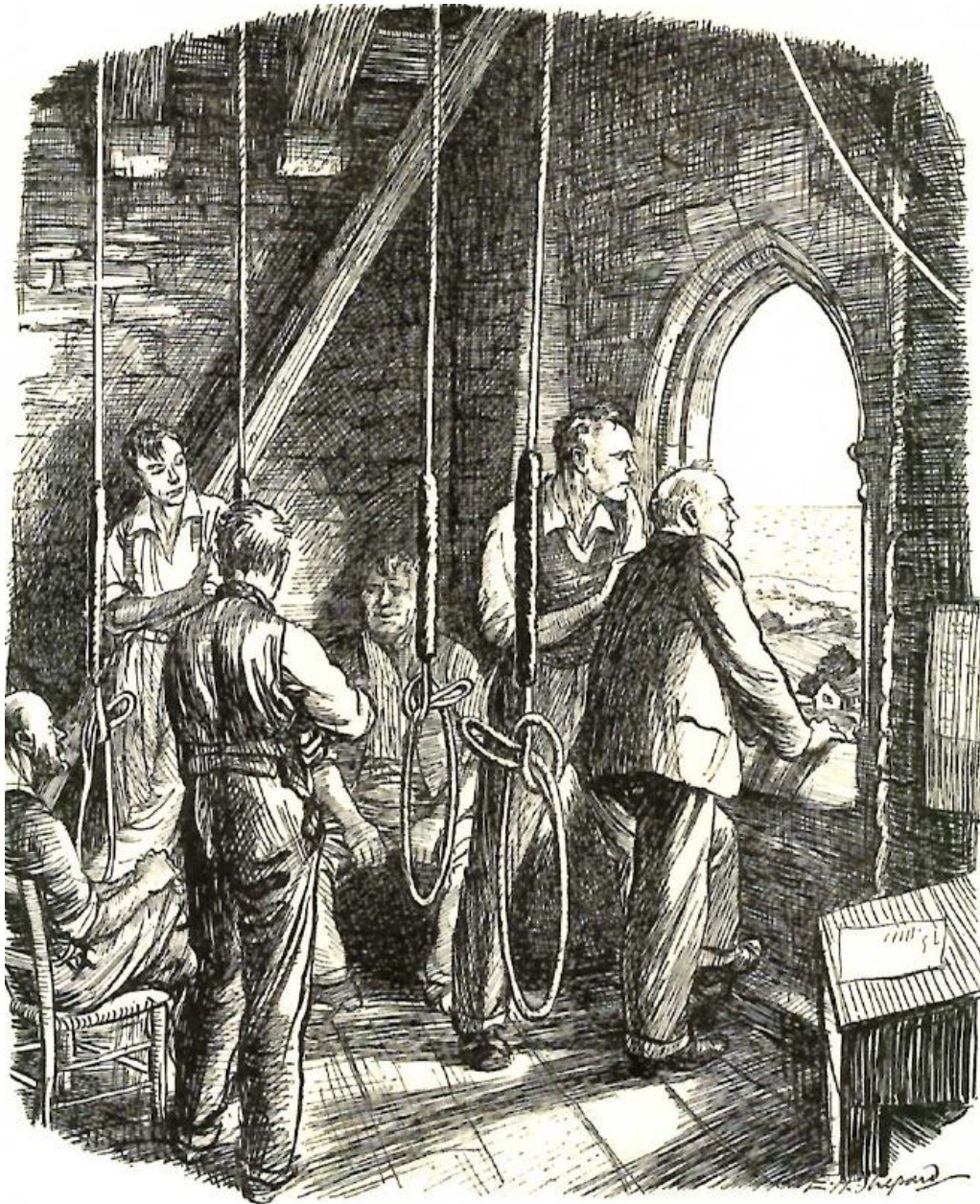
The Crimean War was one of the first conflicts in which the military used modern technologies. It was one of the first to be documented extensively in written reports and photographs. As the legend of the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' at Balaclava demonstrates, the war quickly became an iconic symbol of logistical, medical and tactical failures and mismanagement. The reaction in Britain was a demand for professionalism, most famously achieved by Florence Nightingale who gained worldwide attention for pioneering modern nursing while treating the wounded.

The Crimean War proved to be the moment of truth for Russia. The war weakened the army, drained the treasury and undermined Russia's influence in Europe. It would take decades to recover. The humiliation forced Russia's educated elites to identify the Empire's problems and to recognize the need for fundamental reforms. They saw rapid modernisation of the country as the sole way of it recovering the status of a European power. The war thus was a catalyst for the reforms of Russia's social institutions, including serfdom, justice, local self-government, education, and military service. More recently, scholars have also turned their attention to the impact of the Crimean War on the development of Russian nationalistic discourse.

Suspension of bell ringing

The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939 was passed in the UK at the start of the Second World War. The aim of the Act's introduction allowed the government to take whatever measures were deemed necessary in order to successfully carry out the war and defence of the realm.

One outcome was the silencing of church bells, which were only to be rung to inform of an invasion by enemy troops. While ringing on hand bells continued the general ban was not relaxed until after the Allied success at the Battle of El Alamein in 1942. Bells were rung to celebrate the event and with the threat of invasion diminished it allowed normal ringing to resume shortly afterwards.



The Chimes taken from *Punch or the London Charivari*, 18 September 1940 representing when Church bells fell silent with the order only to be rung to warn the population in the event of an invasion