The Swan Bells, Perth

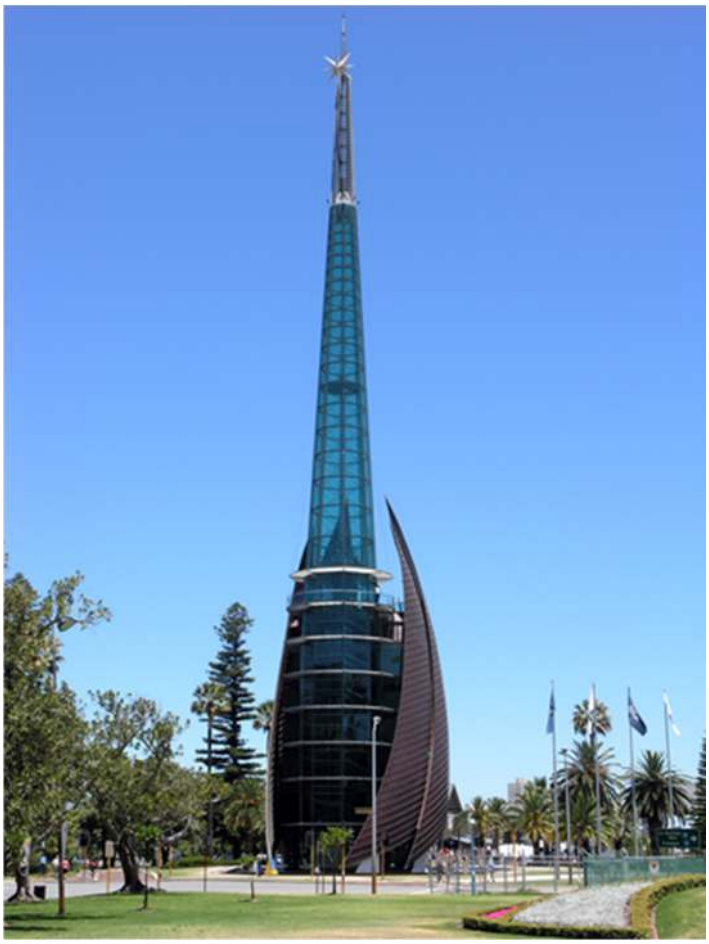
These pages do not often contain information about other instruments, but it is worth our while to consider something as notable as the Swan Bells, Perth.

The Swan Bells are a set of 18 bells hanging in a specially built 82.5-metre (271 ft)-high copper and glass campanile in Perth. Taking their name from the Swan River, which their tower overlooks, and forming a sixteen-bell peal with two extra chromatic notes, they are the second largest set of change ringing bells in the world, the largest being Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, which has nineteen bells.

Twelve of the set are historic bells from St Martin-in-the-Fields, the parish church of Buckingham Palace in Trafalgar Square in London, where they had become too heavy for the ancient foundations of the church and were rescued from recasting. They are rare in that they are one of the few sets of royal bells, and more so since they are the only set known to have left England. The bells are also known to have rung in 1768 as the explorer James Cook set sail on the voyage in which he reached Australia, and in 1771 on his return home.

Six of the bells were cast in recent times by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, designed specially to round off the set. The St Martin-in-the-Fields bells were donated to the State of Western Australia as part of the 1988 Australian bicentenary celebrations; the additional bells were cast with a subsequent donation of metals mined in Western Australia. The six newer bells include five that were presented to the University of Western Australia, the City of Perth and to the people of Western Australia by the City of London, the City of Westminster and a consortium of British and Australian mining companies, and one bell commissioned by the Western Australian Government.

The Bell Tower was designed by the local architects Hames Sharley and built by the John Holland Group. The 18 original bells have a combined weight of about nine tonnes and, when rung, exert considerable forces on the support structure. To achieve the required rigidity, the six-story bell chamber was



made with reinforced concrete cast in situ. Soundproof louvres and doors are used to muffle or direct the sound towards the city, or the river, as required. The glass-clad spire is designed using spokes which radiate horizontally from a centrally positioned axle, declining in width as it rises to a point. The solid-steel columns of the spire are rectangular, and the concrete bell chamber is enveloped in 30 metre high (98 ft) copper sails and glass.

Because this was built as a millennium project, an inlaid path made of ceramic tiles surrounds the tower, with each tile consisting of a list of some of the youngest and oldest students from nearly every school in Western Australia in 1999. The Swan Bells remains one of the only "icon" millennium projects that came in on time, on budget and is still open.

In 2018, in order to commemorate the centenary of the World War One Armistice on November 11th, a large 6.5-ton bell was cast by VEEM Limited, Canning Vale. Unlike the other bells in the tower, this is swung electronically using a motor, supplied by Clock-o-Matic of Belgium. It is known as the 'Great ANZAC Bell'.

Also, on display is the oldest bell in Australia. The Upton Grey Bell was cast c1550 and was once one of four that rang out from the tower of the parish church at Upton Grey in Hampshire, England. The timber headstock bears the carved date of 1763. The bell weighs 459 kg.

The bells originate from St Martin-in-the-Fields, 14th century; Whitechapel Bell Foundry, 1988; and Veem Limited, 2018.

Bruce Duncan

Information has been sourced from:
http://www.lookatwa.com.au/TravellersInfo/swanbelltower.html
https://christchurchcathedral.ie/about/our-famous-bells/
Andrew Reynolds (10 November 2018)
https://dove.cccbr.org.uk/
http://www.swanbells.com.au/

Bell	Diameter	Note	Weight (cwt-qtr-lbs)	Weight (kg)	Casting date
Treble	23.13”	D#	4-2-21	241	1998
2	24.00”	C#	4-2-11	238	1988
3	24.25”	B#	5-0-20	263	1988
Flat 3	25.00”	B	5-0-15	261	1988
4	25.50”	A#	5-0-0	254	1988
5	26.75”	G#	5-1-27	279	1758
6	27.50”	F#	5-0-20	263	1770
7	28.63”	E#	5-2-10	284	1758
8	29.75”	D#	5-3-17	300	1725
9	32.50”	C#	7-1-3	370	1725
10	33.75”	B#	7-2-19	390	1725
Flat 10	35.38”	B	8-3-19	453	1988
11	36.25”	A#	9-2-8	486	1725
12	39.38”	G#	11-2-11	589	1725
13	43.25”	F#	14-1-8	728	1725
14	45.63”	E#	16-1-11	831	1725
15	50.63”	D#	21-1-19	1,088	1726
Tenor	55.75”	C#	29-0-14	1,480	1726
Anzac	87.00”	F#	127-2-6	6,480	2018