

History of Westown School's antique bell wanted in England

By Leigh O'Connor

In 1947 an antique bell was donated by Plymouth Mayor Issac Foot and shipped from England to Westown School in memory of those from the area who had died during World War II.

Now almost 50 years later, school principal Eddie Betts and the Parent Teachers' Association are tracking down the bell's more recent history to send back to England.

Westown school received a letter from St Michael's Church in Plymouth, where the bell once hailed parishioners to church at Devonport. The church was demolished during a German bombing raid on April 22, 1941.

The bell tower was wrecked but the bomb-scarred bell was retrieved and still displays shrapnel splinters in it.

In 1995, St Michael's is celebrating its 150th anniversary and is keen to find out what happened to the historic bell and what it looks like now.

The school has undertaken a large research project that will be completed with a photograph and information dossier being sent to Plymouth.

Helping find out the details are teacher Sally Morch and PTA representative Marie Rogers. The bell is an active feature of the school and is still rung daily to let the pupils know when to return to class.

The story began in 1945 when the Westown Home and School Association decided to erect a memorial bell tower in the school grounds as a memorial to those scholars that died during the second world war. NP businessman Eric White began

making inquiries in London as to the possibility of the school purchasing a school bell. He thought maybe a ship's bell or old church bell could be found which the school could have and replace with a new one.

Frequent correspondence between Mr White and Barry Fenton of London resulted in the generous donation of the old church bell from the people of Plymouth.

Once the bell finally arrived in New Zealand, Westown school pupils' parents helped raise funds for a new bell tower which was dedicated in 1953.

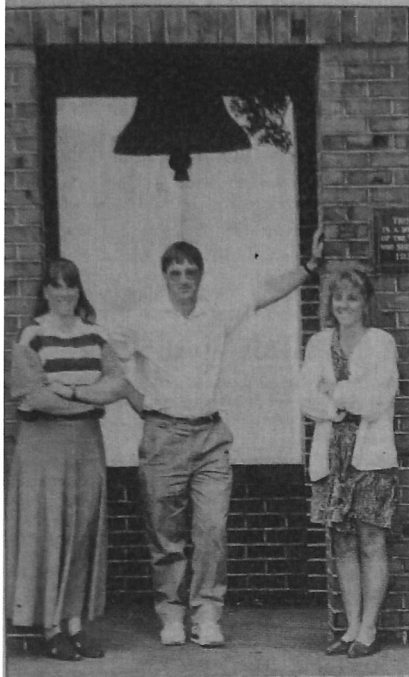
A special bronzed inscription reads: "This bell from the church of St Michael from Devonport, Plymouth, England

— destroyed by enemy action 22nd April, 1941 — is presented to the Westown School at the instance of the Rt. Honourable Issac Foot, Lord Mayor of Plymouth, England, by the vicar and churchwardens of the church of St Michael. — 2nd November, 1946."

For several years from 1955 onwards, the school's head pupils were asked to sign a scroll accepting responsibility to maintain the bell properly.

The school is anxious to produce a full and correct history to be sent to St Michael's for its anniversary.

Any information would be greatly received and can be left at the school office or please phone (06)753-4939.



ABOVE LEFT: Pictured beside the Westown School bell as it is today, are three new teachers who started at the school this year. From left they are: Susan Long, Paul Ramsay and Ann Meuli.

RIGHT: Plymouth Lord Mayor Issac Foot discusses the damage caused by a German bomb in 1941 with Miss D. Marfell and the St Michael's Church vicar, in Devonport, England. The bell tower was wrecked but the bomb-scarred bell was retrieved and still displays shrapnel splinters in it. The bell was later given to New Plymouth's Westown School by the people of Plymouth. The school is keen to track down the bell's more recent history to send back to England.



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