

## Basildon Glass Bell Tower



**Stirling Moss world champion racing driver and friend of Canon Lionel Webber, rector of St Martin's of Tours, Basildon, dug the first clump of earth in St. Martin's Square on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1998 to mark the historic event of the beginning of the building of the Glass Bell Tower. Destined to be the centrepiece of the millennium celebrations across the district. It therefore became known as the Millennium Tower.**

**Canon Lionel Webber was a former Chaplain to the Queen and of the British Racing Drivers Club.**

**The consultant engineers were Buro Happold – the same firm behind the Millennium Dome at Greenwich and Mowlem Plc built the 95ft tower.**

**The tower with frame-less glass walls houses eight bells, six of which came from the redundant church of St Nicholas, Colchester. Cast over a period of 500 years by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. Two of them being cast by Joanna Hille in 1440/1, being the first cast by a woman in the world.**

**These six bells were given to St Martins as a consecration gift by the Bishop of Chelmsford in the late 1970s. Revd. Webber was keen to have them installed in St Martin's but had no tower to hang them so he worked tirelessly to create a scheme, resulting in the Bell Tower.**

**Several fund-raising events were organised, one such event – Basildon Retro 97 was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1997, and featured modern and vintage vehicles. Vehicles from all avenues of motorsport took part on a 3.4-mile circuit of roads specially closed off for the occasion. Former 16 times formula one and Grand Prix winner Stirling Moss was among the celebrity drivers. The event being the brainchild of Revd. Webber.**



**A seventh bell was presented by Ronald Brown in memory of his wife Peggy and was also cast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in 1997. The eighth bell being the first Royal Jubilee bell was cast and donated by the worshipful company of**

**Vintners and Whitechapel of London. It is the largest of the eight bells, weighing half a ton, and is called – ‘Elizabeth.’**

**There is a ninth bell stored in the porch from the redundant church of St Mary’s Dunton, this was cast in 1712.**



**On the 12 March 1999, Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh paid a three hour visit to the town. During the visit the Queen unveiled a granite plaque to mark Basildon’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and along with the Duke signed commemorative portrait sized photographs.**

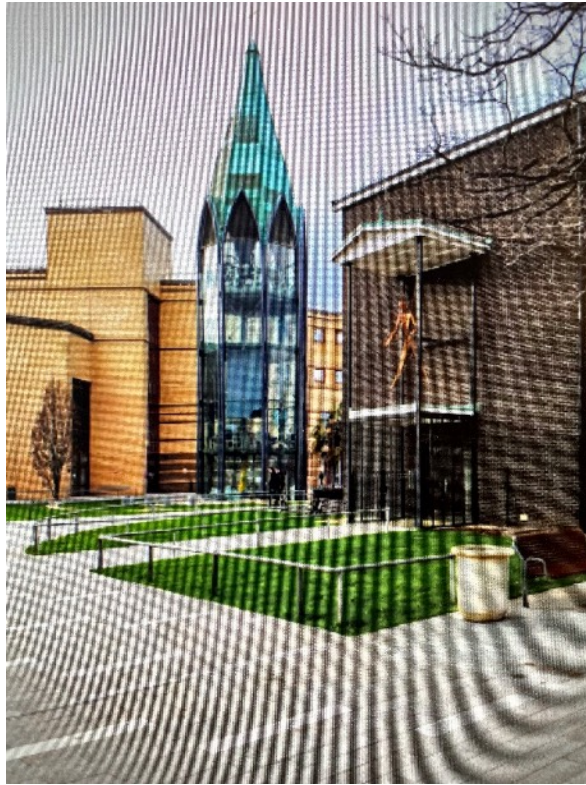
**The Royal party then officially opened the world’s first steel and glass bell tower. They then attended a service in the Church, which dedicated the bell tower**

**and offered thanksgiving for Basildon’s first 50 years.**



## Photo Gallery









Casting of the Treble Bell at Whitechapel Foundry 6 February 1997



Basildon Borough Heritage Society  
Ken Porter – 11<sup>th</sup> June 2022