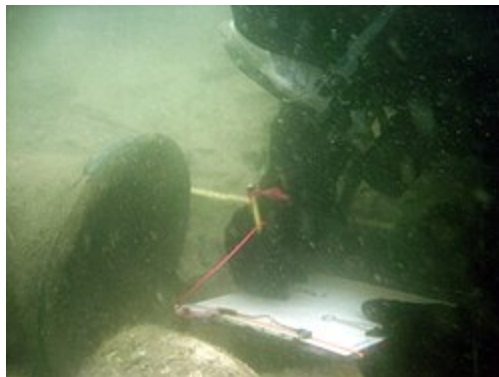


Ship's bell

A **ship's bell** is a bell on a ship that is used for the indication of time as well as other traditional functions. The bell itself is usually made of brass or bronze, and normally has the ship's name engraved or cast on it.



Bell from RMS *Titanic*



An underwater archaeologist with the Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program in *St. Augustine, Florida*, recording the ship's bell discovered on the 18th-century Storm Wreck

Strikes

Timing of ship's watches

Unlike civil *clock* bells, the strikes of a ship's bell do not accord to the number of the hour. Instead, there are eight bells, one for each half-hour of a four-hour watch. In the age of sailing, watches were timed with a 30-minute hourglass. Bells would be struck every time the glass was turned, and in a pattern of pairs for easier counting, with any odd bells at the end of the sequence.

Classical system

The classical, or traditional, system was:^[1]

Number of bells	Bell pattern	Watch						
		Middle	Morning	Fore-noon	After-noon	Dog		First
						First	Last	
One bell	1	00:30	04:30	08:30	12:30	16:30	18:30 ^[a]	20:30
Two bells	2	01:00	05:00	09:00	13:00	17:00	19:00 ^[a]	21:00
Three bells	2 1	01:30	05:30	09:30	13:30	17:30	19:30 ^[a]	21:30
Four bells	2 2	02:00	06:00	10:00	14:00	18:00		22:00
Five bells	2 2 1	02:30	06:30	10:30	14:30		18:30	22:30
Six bells	2 2 2	03:00	07:00	11:00	15:00		19:00	23:00
Seven bells	2 2 2 1	03:30	07:30	11:30	15:30		19:30	23:30
Eight bells	2 2 2 2	04:00	08:00	12:00 ^[b]	16:00		20:00	24:00

a. British usage after the [Nore mutiny](#).^[2]

b. Before the introduction of [time zones](#), noon was not struck by the hourglass, but when the captain or officer of the deck confirmed local noon by the sun, using a [sextant](#).

Most of the crew of a ship would be divided into two to four groups, called [watches](#). Each watch would take its turn with the essential activities of manning the helm, navigating, trimming sails, and keeping a lookout.

The hours between 16:00 and 20:00 are so arranged because that watch (the "[dog watch](#)") was divided in two. The odd number of watches aimed to give each person a different watch each day; it also allowed the entire crew of a vessel to eat an evening meal, the normal time being at 17:00 with first dog watchmen eating at 18:00.^[2]

Simpler system

Some "ship's bell" clocks use a simpler system:



Number of bells	Bell pattern	Hour (a.m. and p.m.)		
One bell	1	12:30	4:30	8:30
Two bells	2	1:00	5:00	9:00
Three bells	2 1	1:30	5:30	9:30
Four bells	2 2	2:00	6:00	10:00
Five bells	2 2 1	2:30	6:30	10:30
Six bells	2 2 2	3:00	7:00	11:00
Seven bells	2 2 2 1	3:30	7:30	11:30
Eight bells	2 2 2 2	4:00	8:00	12:00

Other uses

- Ship's bells are also used for safety in foggy conditions,^[3] their most important modern use.^[4]
- On US naval vessels, bells additionally are rung as "boat gongs" for officers and dignitaries coming aboard or leaving the ship, in a number equivalent to the number of [sideboys](#) to which the visitor is entitled.^[5]
- At midnight on [New Year's Eve](#), 16 bells would be struck – eight bells for the old year and eight bells for the new.
- When a sailor has died he or she can be honoured with the sounding of eight bells; meaning "end of the watch". The term "eight bells" can also be used in an [obituary](#), as a nautical [euphemism](#) for *finished*.

Markings on the bell



Ship's bell of [HMS Cavalier](#)

The ship's name is traditionally engraved or cast onto the surface of the bell, often with the year the ship was launched, as well. The earliest ship's bell was recovered from the wreck-site of a Portuguese armada ship off the coast of Oman. The bell was dated 1498.^[6] Occasionally (especially on more modern ships) the bell will also carry the name of the [shipyard](#) that built the ship. If a ship's

 name is changed, maritime tradition is that the original bell carrying the original name will remain with the vessel. A ship's bell is a prized possession when a ship is broken up^[3] and often provides the only positive means of identification in the case of a [shipwreck](#).

Number of bells

Most [United States Navy](#) ships of the post–World War II era have actually carried 2 or 3 bells: the larger bell engraved with the ship's name, mounted on the forecastle, and smaller bells in the pilot house and at the quarterdeck at the [1MC](#) (public address) station, for use in making shipwide announcements and marking the time. The larger bell on the forecastle is rung periodically as a fog signal when the ship is at anchor in reduced visibility.

Cook and boatswain

According to seafaring legend, the ship's [cooks](#) and [boatswain's mates](#) had a duty arrangement to give the cooks more sleep. The boatswain's mates, who worked 24 hours a day on [watches](#), would build the fire in the [stove](#), so the cook could get up a little while later and the fire would be already going so he could begin preparing [breakfast](#). In return, between meals, the cooks would shine the bell, which was traditionally the boatswain's mates' responsibility.

Baptizing children

It is a naval tradition to [baptize](#) children using the ship's bell as a [baptismal font](#) and to engrave the names of the children on the bell afterwards. Christening information from the bells held by the [Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt](#) Museum has been entered into a searchable data archive.^[7]



Ship's bell as a [baptismal font](#) at chapel, Yeo Hall, [Royal Military College of Canada](#)'

A baby is baptized with holy water from the ship's bell'



A baby is baptised by a chaplain on Ship's bell on the nuclear a Royal Navy [armed trawler](#) in submarine [Alexander Nevsky](#). 1943.

See also

- [Eight Bells](#) (painting)
- [The Lutine Bell](#)
- [Watchstanding](#)
- [When Eight Bells Toll](#)



[Transport portal](#)

References

1. Cutler, Thomas J. (2009) [1902]. *The Bluejackets' Manual* (24th ed.). Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute. p. 370. ISBN 978-1591141532.
2. Tony Gray. "Workshop Hints: Ship's Bells" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20110612045510/http://www.bhi.co.uk/aHints/ships.html>) . *The British Horological Institute*. Archived from the original (<http://www.bhi.co.uk/aHints/ships.html>) on 12 June 2011. Retrieved 12 June 2011.



3. "Ship's Bell" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20081209002216/http://www.nmm.ac.uk/collection/s/nelson/viewObject.cfm?ID=EQA0482>) . *National Maritime Museum*. Archived from the original (<http://www.nmm.ac.uk/collections/nelson/viewObject.cfm?ID=EQA0482>) on 9 December 2008. Retrieved 7 April 2008.
4. *International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea* (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/International_Regulations_for_Preventing_Collisions_at_Sea#PART_D_-_SOUND_AND_LIGHT_SIGNALS) – via Wikisource.
5. "Customs, Ceremonies and Traditions of the USN" (<http://www.seaflags.us/customs/trads.html>) .
6. Mearns, David L.; Parham, David; Frohlich, Bruno (14 March 2016). "A Portuguese East Indiaman from the 1502–1503 Fleet of Vasco da Gama off Al Hallaniyah Island, Oman: an interim report" (http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/23370/13/Mearns_et_al-2016-International_Journal_of_Nautical_Archaeology-1.pdf) (PDF). *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*. **46** (2): 331–350. Bibcode:2016IJNAr..45..331M (<https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2016IJNAr..45..331M>) . doi:10.1111/1095-9270.12175 (<https://doi.org/10.1111%2F1095-9270.12175>) .
7. "The Christening Bells Project" (https://web.archive.org/web/20091230223824/http://www.navalandmilitarymuseum.org/resource_pages/bells/bells.asp) . *CFB Esquimalt Naval & Military Museum*. Archived from the original (http://www.navalandmilitarymuseum.org/resource_pages/bells/bells.asp) on 30 December 2009. Retrieved 6 November 2012.

External links

- The Ship's Bells: Telling Time on Board (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHZyzsrOXv4>) Battleship New Jersey Museum
- "Discovery of a ship's bell by underwater archaeologists on a colonial shipwreck lost off St. Augustine, Florida in the late 18th century" (https://web.archive.org/web/20140807212024/http://www.blogstaugustinelighthouse.org/blog/lamposts/lamp_divers_discover_four_cann.php) . *blogstaugustinelighthouse.org*. Archived from the original (http://www.blogstaugustinelighthouse.org/blog/lamposts/lamp_divers_discover_four_cann.php) on 2014-08-07. Retrieved 2011-08-20.