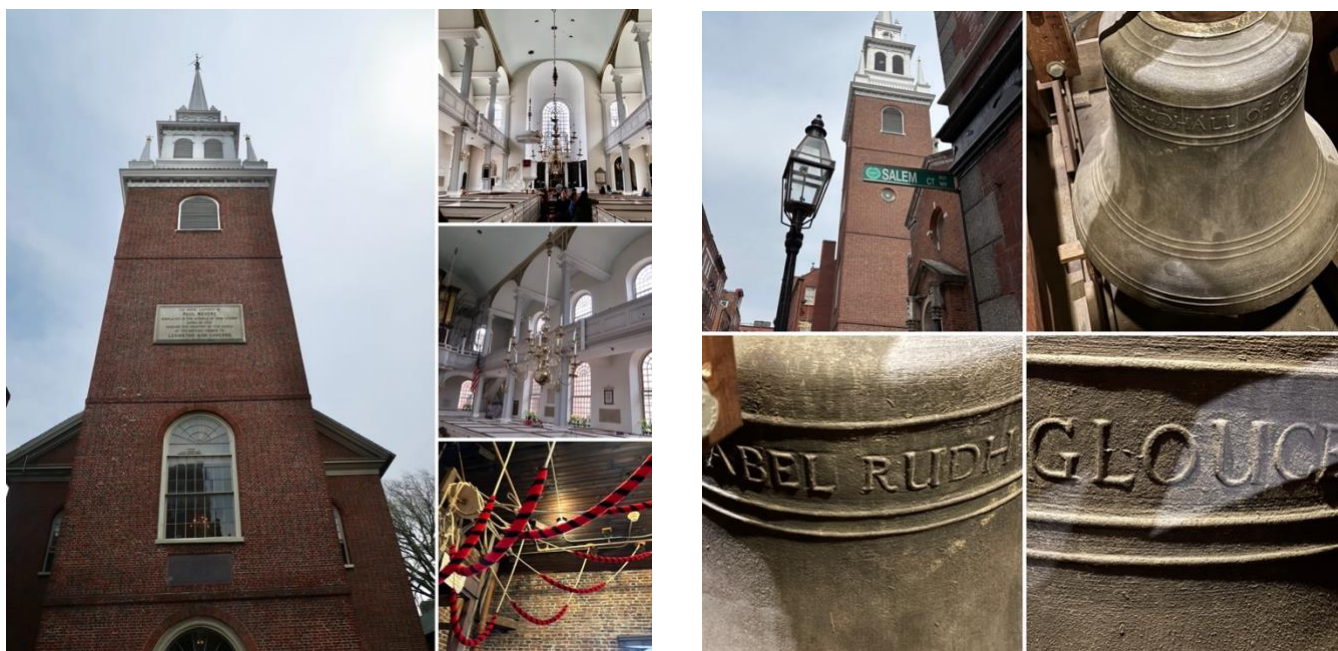


WHAT A DING DONG!

QUESTION: What links Gloucester, England with Boston, Massachusetts, USA?

ANSWER: *RUDHALL BELLS* -made in Gloucester and housed in The Old North Church, Boston.

The Old North Church was built in 1723 as a mission church and is the oldest standing church building in Boston. The design was inspired by works of Sir Christopher Wren. The wealthy were encouraged to buy box pews and pay an annual tax as a way of bringing money to the church. Many still exist today. On the Upper Gallery were cheaper pews for the poorer residents of Boston and families often shared. Enslaved people were expected to be baptised and had to attend church with their enslavers. They would have sat up there where it was cold in winter and hot in summer. The Crypt was used from 1732-1860 and each tomb is sealed with a wooden or slate door. There are believed to be 1100 bodies buried there.



So what about the bells? Old North Church has the honour of having the first ring of eight bells in North America and an even greater honour of having bells that were cast by Abel Ruddhall in Gloucester in 1744 and hung in 1745. One bell has the inscription: "We are the first ring of bells cast for the British Empire in North America, A.R. 1744." The bells were restored in 1894 and in 1975 by the Whitechapel Foundry and are maintained and rung regularly by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Guild of Bellringers.

Social focus for traders, During the 18th century the church became a social focus for Boston's younger merchants and privateers as Boston played an important role in the Atlantic Trade. Goods such as cacao and logwood (from which a purple-red dye is made) were traded and enslaved African people were trafficked by the Boston merchants throughout the Caribbean. Some of the profits from the trade funded the first steeple on the church.

Why is the church and its steeple famously linked to start of The American War of Independence?

On the night of the 18th April 1775 church sexton Robert Newman and vestryman John Pulling quietly entered the church and carefully climbed to the top of the church's bell tower. They briefly hung two lanterns near the windows and made their escape through a window as the British had seen their signal. This signal, from the tallest structure in Boston, served as an early warning to Paul Revere and other riders that a detachment of the British Army was crossing from Boston across the Charles River and heading west towards the towns of Lexington and Concord.

The lantern signal was pre-determined - *"one if by land, two if by sea"*. So Revere, who was employed in Boston as an express rider to carry news and messages, set off across the river towards Lexington, narrowly avoiding capture, to warn local militia that the British were about to march on it and arrest two leaders of the Sons of Liberty, Samuel Adams and John Hancock and then probably on to Concord to capture or destroy military stores (although whether this actually was the British intention is not clear). This led to the first shots to be fired the next morning at Lexington and Concord and by the end of the next night, the American Revolutionary War had begun.



Almost a century later, the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a poem which was to become famous as *"Paul Revere's Ride"*. It is said that Paul Revere rode alone through the the night shouting "The British are coming" as he reached the villages. Verse 1 is below

Paul Revere's Ride by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.



And of course Gloucester's very own Button Gwinnett was one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th 1776 which declared the thirteen British colonies to be independent of Great Britain.

Debbie Vass
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