The reformation of the bells in early modern England

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Abstract: This dissertation explains the significance of an important episode of aural history in early modern English society. Between 1530 and 1640, England, like many other nations in Europe, experienced profound religious change. Not least of these were fundamental changes to the soundscape as parish bell ringing in England was transformed during the years of the long Reformation. Bells, once believed to hold power and efficacy, became the objects of new restrictions and changing attitudes. Although these reforms sought to distance bell ringing from the doctrines and ceremonies of the Catholic Church in Rome, the prohibitions against the bells in England were not as restrictive as those advocated in Zurich. Yet the argument that English bellringing was nationalised and secularised fails to convince, for the bells tolled and pealed in Elizabethan and Stuart parishes retained their ability to communicate solemnity and to remind parishioners of life, death, and the power of prayer.

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