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A VICTORIAN SERVANT'S BELL

a sprung indicator bell originally from a series in the scullery of a large house,

the brass bell mounted on a steel spring and rotating spigot with a roundel cap,

DIMENSIONS: 25cm (9¾") High, 13cm (5") Wide, 8cm (3¼") Deep

STOCK CODE: 44716

HISTORY

Servants' bells were the bottom end of intricate signalling systems in any Victorian house of any size that had a supporting service of maids, butlers and cooks. Next to each fireplace and bedstead of the principle rooms and bedrooms, a sprung rotating lever handle would enable a summons to be sent below-stairs. There, high up on the scullery wall would be a row of these bells each corresponding to a particular room - smartly labelled.

The network of tensioned cables ran through the house, under the floor-boards and behind the skirting. The brackets and tubes that enabled the wire to turn corners and pass through walls can still be found in these houses today. A large stately home would have a complex network of wires and ranks of many bells. The maids would learn to descerne the sound of the bells which were of different tones in order the room could be differentiated without even looking. If the servant was unsure which bell had sounded and needed to consult the panel, each bell would have had a small lead weight suspended from a wire that would have swung for a while after the bell had stopped ringing.

In Edwardian times, the bells were often replaced with an electric indicator panel. A small solenoid would set a square of card bobbing within a window - accompanied with the sound of a buzzer - the height of sophistication.