

THE PUMMERIN BELL IN ST. STEPHEN'S CATHEDRAL

SARASTRO'S PROTOTYPE

H. S. Brockmeyer

Like a sip of fine, old Bourbon or aged whiskey, it moves silently through every vein of your body; a warmth that is almost spiritual. So, the old Pummerin bell, in the South Tower of St. Stephen's Cathedral, known as 'Boomer', sent its deepest voice out to every soul in Vienna, to every rock, and every bush; all things living and inanimate, penetratingly tenebrous and enlivening, simultaneously.

It was said that Beethoven discovered his total loss of hearing when he observed birds flying out of the bell tower of St. Stephen's Cathedral, when the bells' loud *clungs* rang out over the city.

It's entirely possible that Mozart was inspired by the immeasurably deep tones of the Pummerin bell, in composing arias for bass singers, such as Francesco Benucci, in the role of *Figaro* (1786, Vienna); or the frightening Commendatore in *Don Giovanni*, sung by Giuseppe Lolli, in the 1787 Prague performance, followed by Francesco Bussani, in the 7 May 1788 performance in Vienna.

Bass singer, Franz Xaver Gerl, in the role of Sarastro, in the 1791 premiere of the *Magic Flute* at the Freihaus Theater, on 30 September, perhaps best imitates the sound of the old Pummerin bell at St. Stephen's Cathedral, which may have inspired Mozart again, as he lived near the cathedral in his last year, 1791, in his apartment at 970 Rauhensteingasse, and often heard the booming of the huge, ancient bell.

Sarastro's earth-shaking arias, "O Isis und Osiris," and especially, the solemn, reverberatingly beautiful, "In diesen Heil'gen Hallen," undeniably replicates the sonorous, profound tones of the Pummerin.

St. Stephen's Cathedral has 22 bells; the largest, Pummerin – recast from the former bell -- hangs today in the North Tower. It is the largest bell in Austria, and about 4,000 lbs larger than the first Pummerin, destroyed in a fire in 1945.

Pummerin is the third largest swinging bell in Europe, weighing 20,130 kg [44,380 lbs – the clapper weighs a massive 813 kg, or 1,792 lbs; the biggest bell is *Petersglocke*, in Cologne Cathedral, which weighs 51,800 lbs, and coming in second, is the 22,700 kg [50,044 lbs] *Maria Dolens*, in Roverto, Italy.



The magnificent old Pummerin that was destroyed in 1945, in a fire that looters started. It spread to the roof of St. Stephen's Cathedral, causing the bell to crash to the stone floor. A 22-ton bomb also hit the cathedral, demolishing the bell. The second Pummerin was re-cast with pieces of this original bell

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The Pummerin is the largest bell today in the North Tower of the cathedral; the eleven other, smaller bells, are found in the South Tower. The North Roman Tower holds six bells, four which still survive from their casting in 1772. These chime for evening prayers and for funerals, considered as the “working bells” of the Cathedral.

A fire in 1945 destroyed the bells that hung in the South Roman Tower; the Pummerin and several other bells, were among the tragic losses.



St. Stephen's Cathedral, on fire in April 1945

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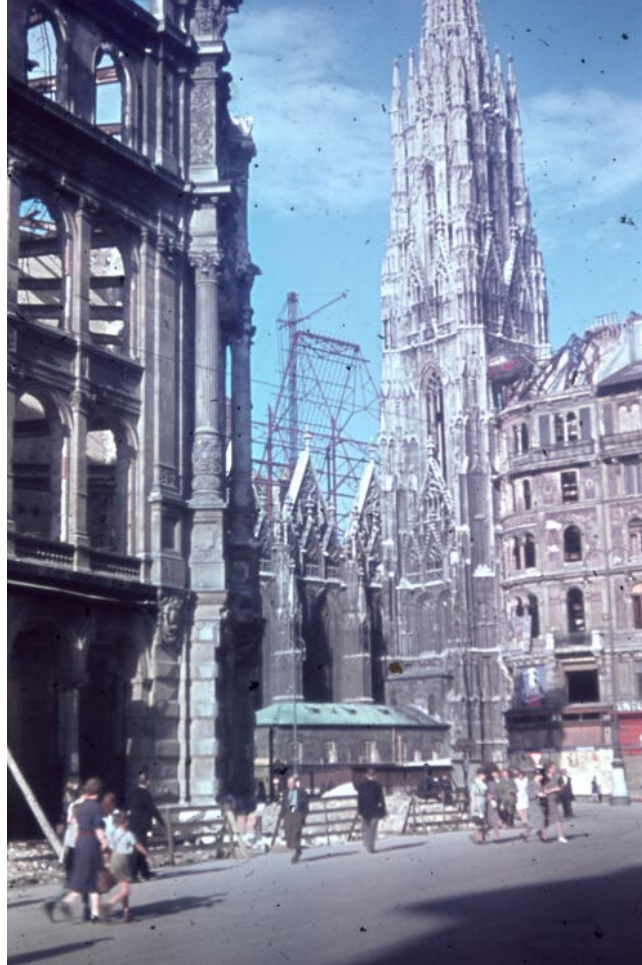
The roof of St. Stephen's Cathedral burns, destroying the Pummerin on 11 April 1945. A 22-ton bomb hit on 12 April 1945, further damaging the South Tower where the Pummerin was housed

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek



The Cathedral, showing the destruction of the roof after the fire

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek



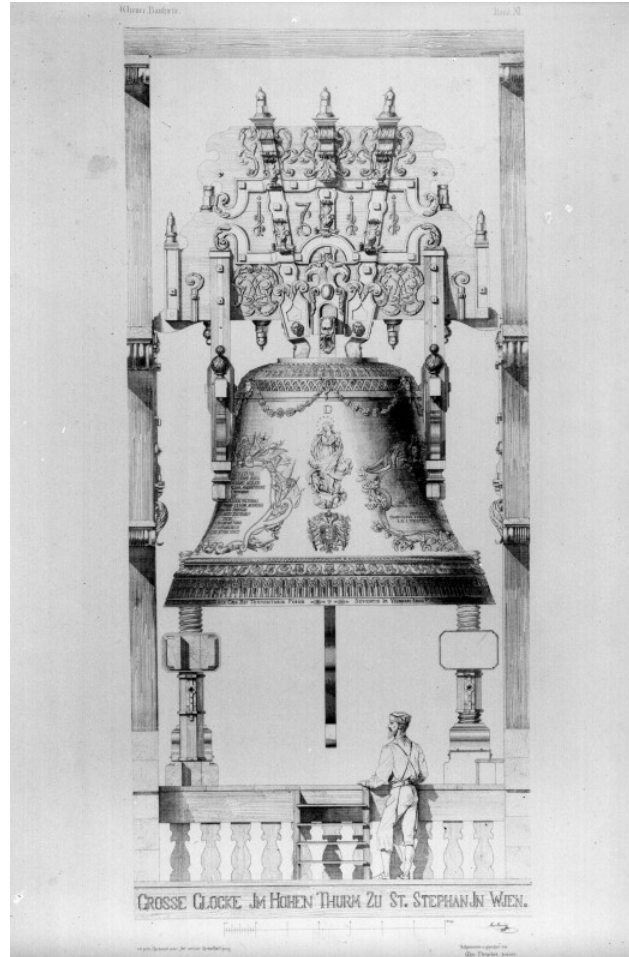
Another photo showing the destruction and rebuilding of the roof of the Cathedral

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

For centuries, the sonorous, profound, older-than Methuselah song of the first Pummerin bell --- *boom -boom- boom* – was heard on Sundays in Vienna and on New Year’s Day, where it is still heard from Pummerin the Second, in our 21st century, on January 1st and on other significant holy days. ‘Pummerin’ is translated as ‘Boomer,’ also known as *Marienglocke*, or the ‘Mary Bell.’

The old bell comforted, reassured, and was an aural solace to those who heard the old *Glocke*’s ghostly tones, the voice of *Stephansdom* – St. Stephen’s Cathedral – or, as I like to call the church, “The Guardian of All Ages,” with the straight, proud steeple, standing fearlessly though the rain, the snow, blizzards and gentle summer

storms. And, so, I recognize the Pummerin as the living voice of the Guardian of All Ages.



A drawing of the original Pummerin, with engravings of the saints around it. It was cast and transported to St. Stephen's Cathedral on 5 November 1711

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek LW75278Bpriv.jpg on the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ONB Digital)

Among all of the wonderful, old architecturally stunning buildings of Vienna, St. Stephen's Cathedral is truly one of the most fascinating, and the home to Pummerin the First, and Pummerin the Second. Its history harkens back to medieval times; one senses an old soul, when observing the amazing, venerable limestone geezer,

unphased by the changing centuries, reincarnated again after being partially destroyed in a fire in WWII.

The Cathedral's history is most interesting.

You can experience the amazing, deep sound of the original *Alte Pummerin* [the Old Pummerin], the *Josephinische Glocke* [Josephinian bell] on Youtube: It is in B flat.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIYZ8XtnI20>

Hear the 1951 recast (in St. Florian, near Linz) Pummerin at St. Stephen's Cathedral, with all the smaller bells in all the Towers. The tone is a bit higher, in B natural.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGWULC_ha2A



The newer Pummerin; here you can see the massive size of the bell, 44, 380 lbs – over 20 tons. Its tone is a pitch of H (B natural). The height is 9.5 feet, and the diameter is 10.3 feet. The original Pummerin was 10.4 feet in diameter – two centimeters larger than the new bell, but not as heavy; its pitch was B flat

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By Gryffindor - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,

Here is the sound of the 1951 recast Pummerin in the North Tower of St. Stephen's Cathedral; as the video goes along, you can hear the other bells in the different towers of the Cathedral: see if you can detect the difference in the pitches:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fW6zWOESXM&t=177s>

THE BIRTH OF PUMMERIN

The huge, old metal Pummerin was cast originally in 1705 by Johann Achammer, from 208 of 300 captured cannons from Muslim invaders during the Second Turkish Siege of Vienna.

This battle was instrumental in the history and origin of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna; the Ottomans would be flushed out of Austrian lands, and control of the territory, including the commercially thriving city of Vienna, would be turned over to Emperor, Leopold I.

This was the Battle of Vienna, occurring at Kahlenberg Mountain, about eight miles from the city, on 12 September 1683; the battle commenced after Vienna was besieged by the Ottoman Empire, and lasted for two months.

The battle was fought by the Holy Roman Empire [with leaders of the Hapsburg monarchy]; the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. King John Sobieski led troops against the hated Ottomans, who fought alongside of vassals and tributary states.

This battle marked the first that the Commonwealth and the Holy Roman Empire faced the Ottomans on the battlefield. The triumph went in favor of the Hapsburg monarchy, which kept the Ottomans from conquering and expanding their lands throughout Europe. The war would continue until 1699, when the Ottomans would relinquish their gains in Ottoman Hungary, to Leopold I, the Holy Roman Emperor.¹

The Ottoman-Hapsburg battles were a 300-year tug-of-wars between the Turkish Empire and the Hapsburgs, from the 14th up to the 16th and 18th centuries. In the ensuing sixteen years following the 1683 battle, the Austrians would conquer southern Hungary and Transylvania, forcing out the Ottoman troops.

The Battle of Vienna is recognized for the biggest cavalry charge in history. This Middle Age cavalry charge included the “new” technology of a frame horse saddle, firmly secured by a breast band, stirrups, and the rider holding his lance under his arm, increasing the force of blows while utilizing the horse’s momentum. They were a formidable force if delivered by a disciplined formation, and highly skilled fighters, equipped with the latest in armor gear.

But now, let us progress several centuries forward, where we will again run into war, but with much better technological weapons – though it was not just bombs or weapons that destroyed part of the old Cathedral, but a fire, started by looters in April 1945, that destroyed the roof of St. Stephen’s Cathedral, bringing about the demise of the original Pummerin bell.

This event will have lasting significance with St. Stephen’s Cathedral’s history, and the Pummerin’s history, as well.

ST. STEPHEN’S CATHEDRAL



One of the most beautiful old cathedrals in Europe; St. Stephen's Cathedral stands proudly in the heart of the inner city of Vienna; the North Tower that houses the Pummerin today is in the tower on the left of the arched entry door, bottom left

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Photo: C. Stadler/Bwag, 27 April 2017 © CC BY-SA 4.0

This exquisite old edifice is made of porous limestone, which is subject to the elements, but the old limestone was coated with a silicone-like sealer. This caused problems, as the moisture became trapped in the stone, causing it to crack when the water froze from falling temperatures.

The *Dombauhütte* [Cathedral Construction Department] now employs more modern techniques, based upon scientific research; this includes laser cleanings of the delicate stone areas. Currently a new technique is being explored; the cavities within the limestone would be filled with a substance that would prevent water

from collecting. Periodic cleaning of the colorful roof tiles prevent a blackening of the Cathedral, from atmospheric elements and other darkening factors.

By mid-twelfth century, Vienna was already becoming a significant center of German civilization. The burgeoning population was filling the four city churches and one parish church. In 1137, Bishop of Passau Reginmar and Margrave Leopold IV signed the Treaty of Mautern.

Under this treaty, Leopold VI received lands from the Bishop, extending outside of the city walls; territory for a new parish church was apportioned. This would be the location for St. Stephen's Cathedral.

It is believed that the new church was built on an ancient cemetery from Roman times; excavations in 2000 revealed graves at 8 feet below the surface, carbon-dated to the 4th century. It is possible that a much older church or religious edifice on this site anteceded Vienna's oldest church, St. Rupert's Church (founded between 796 and 829).

The first, not fully constructed building on the site, was erected in 1137, following the Treaty of Mautern, and dedicated in 1147 to St. Stephen, in the presence of German nobles about to journey off on the Second Crusade. The original building was completed in 1160, with other construction continuing until 1511.

In 1258, a huge fire destroyed much of the original building, and a larger structure in the Romanesque style, was constructed over the ruins of the former church, and consecrated on 23 April 1263.

The anniversary of this second consecration is still remembered each year, by an unusual ringing of the Pummerin for three minutes on the evening the 23rd.

Continual constructions expanded St. Stephen's; on 7 April 1359, Rudolf IV set the cornerstone for a Gothic expansion westward of the Albertine choir, in the vicinity of the South Tower; this Tower was completed in 1433. Work on the North Tower began in 1450, but this was halted when all major work on the Cathedral concluded in 1511.

While digging the foundation for the cathedral, a huge mammoth thigh bone was unearthed in 1443, during construction of the North Tower. It was believed to be the thigh bone of a giant man, killed in the Great Flood. The bone was inscribed

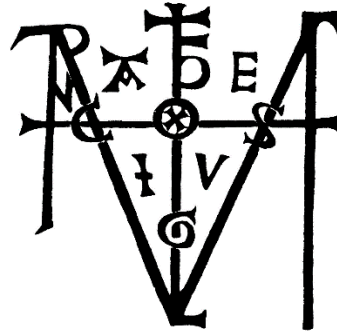
with '1443' on one side, and 'AEIOU' on the other side; this is an acronym for the motto of Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick III.



The mammoth thigh bone which hung over the Giant's Gate at St. Stephen's Cathedral. One side of the bone has AEIOU carved on it, and the other side has the year it was discovered, 1443

Reproduced by permission of the Institute of Geology, University of Vienna

The motto, written in German and Latin, found in Frederick's notebook in 1666, translates to "All the world is subject to Austria" [Alles Erdreich ist Österreich untertan], or the Latin: *Austriae est imperare orbi universo*. Frederick had a habit of signing buildings, along with his tableware and other implements, with the letters, AEIOU.



Left, a heraldic plaque from 1466 with the Habsburg motto, F.I. A.E.I.O.U., featuring the double-headed eagle, and the Habsburg fesse coat of arms on the left, with the Counts of Celje coat of arms, right, united under the symbolic two-headed eagle. This medieval plaque is on the Savinska Gate in Celje; Savinja is a district in Celje city, in Slovenia, a coal region

Right, Frederick III's monogram, used by the Habsburg emperors

en.wikipedia.org, 'A.E.I.O.U.'

Photo on left: By Petar Milošević - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=93977078>

Image right: From Peter Diem, *Die Symbole Österreichs*, Wien: Kremair & Scheriau, 1995. {{PD-US-expired}}

When I was searching for a photograph of the old mammoth bone, I received an email from Martin Maslo, who works at the Institute of Paleontology, University of Vienna. He was most informative:

The bone (a right femur of a pleistocene mammoth (*Elephas primigenius*)) belongs to the University of Vienna (Institute of Geology) and is kept in a chest in the Geological-Paleontological Department of the Natural History Museum in Vienna, and is not accessible to the public.

The bone was once thought to be hanging over the the *Riesentor*, but, according to current research, was in the area of the North Tower, known as the 'Adlerturm'. Johann Matthias Testarello della Massa, a canon at St. Stephen's Cathedral, and a historian, described it in the 17th century.

The oldest literary reference from 1564, [in another source], refers to the mammoth bone:

“ubi Truncus ferro uisitur conclusus, ubi gigantis crus appensum est” -- “where the trunk is seen enclosed in iron, where the giant's leg is hung.”

Della Massa wrote detailed descriptions of churches in Vienna, up to year 1685; a source of great historical and cultural value. [His book has never been printed, with exceptions to excerpts about St. Stephen's Cathedral and St. Peter's Church. It is at the Austrian National Library, under Codex 8227.]



The *Riesentor*, or ‘Giant’s Gate’, a Romanesque entrance to St. Stephen’s Cathedral. It dates from 1230 to 1240. According to legend the name *Riesentor* originated from the High German, meaning ‘risen’, ‘sink’ or ‘fall’, and alludes to the funnel design of the deep, recessed diagonal portal. It was long believed that the mammoth bone was hung over this door, but recent research puts the bone in the area of the North Tower

Wikimedia Commons.org

Photographer: Gryffindor, June 2006

The impressively high steeple of St. Stephen’s Cathedral looms over the inner city. Construction began in 1368, and was finished sixty-five years later, in 1433. The tower rises to 448 ft tall; it has been nicknamed ‘Steffl’. The foundation stone was placed by ‘the Founder’, Rudolf IV. Beautiful and beloved, the steeple is regarded as a symbol of Vienna, and the city’s unique identity.

Citizens of Vienna and church authorities desired to obtain its own diocese for St. Stephen’s Cathedral; in 1469, Emperor Frederick III approached Pope Paul II, requesting that Vienna be granted its own bishop, to be appointed by the Emperor.

Despite resistance from the Bishops of Passau, who wanted to retain control of the land, the Diocese of Vienna was established on 18 January 1469, with St. Stephen’s Cathedral as the mother church. In 1722, Pope Innocent XIII elevated the see [the area or town where the cathedral or bishop’s residence is located] to an archbishopric, during the term of Emperor Charles VI.



Der Stephansdom in Wien, painted by Rudolf von Alt in 1832

Wikimedia Commons.org {{PD-US-expired}}
1832 Purchase of the exhibition Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna for the Imperial Picture Gallery
Current location: Oberes Belvedere

SAVED BY A NAZI

In March 1945, as depicted in the movie, *The Zookeeper's Wife* (2017), an immensely tragic event happened. 300 bombs were dropped on the *Tiergarten Schönbrunn* [the Schönbrunn Zoo], the world's oldest zoo. 2,000 animals out of 3,500 died, including a beloved bull rhino, a favorite of the zoo-keepers. This could only have been an act of unspeakable cruelty.

On 13 April 1945, Soviet soldiers of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts temporarily conquered Vienna—the city where the young Hitler lived for six years, as an artist. From his underground bunker, still believing that victory was imminent, Hitler ordered his inadequate troops to hold Vienna, despite the opposition.

But as German forces gathered in the city for an all-out assault on the city's southern suburbs, only the diminished anti-aircraft units, II SS Panzer Corps, convalescing soldiers, and Hitler Youth remained to fight on. They were no match for the better-equipped, well-fed Soviet troops.

Retreating to the center of the city, the Germans could not withstand the Soviets, and fled to the north. In just a few hours, the Soviets took over Vienna, but they weren't much nicer than the Germans, terrorizing the population and looting shops in the city.



Soviet troops heading to Vienna on Studebaker US6 trucks, during the Vienna Offensive, 16 March – 15 April 1945; ‘Vienna’ is written in Russian on the street post

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Photo: A. Grigoryev, May 1945

Vienna was bombed fifty-two times during WWII air raids beginning from 4 September 1942. Not only did the city sustain bombing attacks from the Soviets, but was also hit by US and British aircraft. More than a fifth of housing in the city was destroyed, approximately 80,000 apartments. 3,000 bomb craters were counted; damaged bridges and blown-up gas, water and sewer pipes added to city's destruction. Only 41 civilian vehicles withstood the raids.

It was only when Allied troops from other nations arrived and set up occupied zones in Vienna, that the bleak reality of the destruction of the city began to look hopeful for the devastated Viennese citizens. [My mother and father were in the US Army in 1946, and witnessed the terrible destruction of the beautiful buildings in the city.]

Fires started by looters – possibly Soviet soldiers, in nearby buildings, spread to St. Stephen's Cathedral on April 11, 1945, burning the entire wood roof structures of the nave. When the vaulting collapsed, the Gothic choir stalls were destroyed. On April 12, a 22-ton bomb struck the floor of the church. Only the clapper of the Pummerin remained intact.



The bombing of Vienna – 4 September 1942- 16 April 1945

En.wikipedia.org

Photo: online at 17 February 2007 Ultraviolet scissor flame, user

On 12 March 1945, the fighting intensified directly prior to the Battle for Vienna, taking place from 6-13 April. Soviet troops captured the city from the west, forcing the German soldiers to retreat on the 13th. Luckily, many of the historic buildings survived the bombardments and were reconstructed.

An odd event ensued, that we can only be eternally grateful for; a *Nazi captain* saved the old *Stephansdom* from total destruction, defying all orders from his commanding officer – personally communicated from Hitler -- to totally decimate the old Cathedral.

For those of you who believe in divine intervention, it can only be said that perhaps, the ‘better angels’ stepped in.

The Nazi commander in Vienna, General Sepp Dietrich, ordered that the old Cathedral be demolished. But Wehrmacht Captain Gerhard Klinkicht, bravely disregarded those orders. Dietrich ordered him to “fire a hundred shells and reduce it to rubble,” upon specific orders from Hitler.



General Sepp Dietrich (1892-1966) in all his brutal splendor and Nazi medals; the man ordered by Hitler to demolish St. Stephen's Cathedral

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Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-J27366 / CC-BY-SA 3.0
https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-J27366,_Sepp_Dietrich.jpg
www.bundesarchiv.de
Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien
Location: Koblenz

Dietrich was a formidable commander – he was responsible for the Malmedy massacre in December 1944, where US prisoners of war were murdered in Malmedy, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge. Eighty-four US POW's had surrendered to the German soldiers after a brief battle. Dietrich's Waffen-SS soldiers grouped the POW's in a field, and opened machine gun fire on them. The Germans next walked around, adding a *coup de grâce* – a gunshot to the head. Fortunately, a few POW's survived to testify against him later.

An American military tribunal convicted him of war crimes, and he spent several years in Landsberg Prison (located in Landsberg am Lech, Bavaria, the same prison where Hitler was held in 1924, after the failed Beer Hall Putsch). The war prisoner was released in 1955. He later became a politician, active in HIAG, a lobbying group consisting of former high-ranking Waffen-SS personnel.

Dietrich's failed Operation Spring Awakening (6-15 March 1945), with his 6th SS panzers, was unsuccessful in setting up defensive positions to keep the Soviets out of Vienna. This likely prompted Hitler's fury and desire to raze the city.

At the end of WWII, by 1945, Hitler realized that his battles were lost. But he did not want to accept this. In April 1945, resistance fighters climbed up the South Tower of St. Stephen's Cathedral, and waved white flags – signaling surrender.

This one action infuriated Hitler, hiding out in a bunker. He issued an order: blow up St. Stephen's Cathedral, and keep firing until the old church was entirely decimated. His Nazi commander, Sepp Dietrich, was in command to carry out his Führer's orders.

The ruthless Nazis blew nearly all the bridges up across the Danube Canal, to prevent Russians from crossing it. This was part of the Battle for Vienna – *Schlacht um Wien* – where the city was finally liberated. Some 80,000 Russians died in the attack. In an area behind the Vienna Central Cemetery [*Zentralfriedhof*], some 2,000 Russian soldiers rest, who lost their lives in this battle.

Dietrich, apparently having better things to do, handed over Hitler's order to Captain Gerhard Klinkicht, who refused to blow up the beautiful old Cathedral. In doing so, Klinkicht committed an act of high treason, which carried with it the death penalty. And, yet, in doing so, he committed an act of the highest courage.

It's not known what stopped Klinkicht from following orders, but it is believed that he "may have been moved by the cathedral's beauty and history."² Klinkicht went on to donate money to restore the grand old Cathedral, after the fire in 1945, and contributed toward its maintenance.

Finally, Hitler was gone, and the old Cathedral survived. Perhaps an act of karma, one cannot help thinking; a force of evil is forever vanished, while the good persists.

A web page about Klinkicht notes:

Probably due to the turmoil of the last days of WW2 Gerhard Klinkicht survived his decision. He remained loyal to St. Stephen's Cathedral throughout his entire life and donated a total of about 150,000 Euros for the renovation and preservation of our landmark. At the foot of the South Tower, an inscription commemorates his decision of conscience in April 1945.³



Plaque with dedication to Gerhard Klinkicht in the South Tower of St. Stephen's Cathedral. It reads: "Thanks to Captain Gerhard Klinkicht, with his conscientious decision he saved the St. Stephen's assault from destruction in April 1945"

Wikimedia Commons.org

Gedanktafel für Gerhard Klinkicht († 2000) (Wien, Stephansdom, Südturm)

Photo: GuentherZ, 28 February 2017

We can all be grateful for Klinkicht's ultimately brave actions, for preserving St. Stephen's Cathedral. After the 12 April bombing, restoration began immediately, and the Cathedral opened partially on 12 December 1948. In 1950, the new roof was totally restored, and all rebuilding was finished on 23 April 1952.

There was only one thing left to do – resurrect the Pummerin. The old bell wasn't finished yet; it would make a come-back, more formidable than ever.



The author's mother, stationed in Vienna as a WAC [Women's Army Corps] in 1946. She worked in the marriage department, investigating the fiancées of US Army soldiers; they looked for possible spies and prostitutes. As a Jew from Chicago, she had a special interest in the war



Love among the ruins. While working for the US Army, and living amidst the bombed-out buildings in Vienna, my mother and father, a Corporal in the US Army, met and married there in April 1947. Her three bridesmaids here are all WAC's

CAN YOU IMAGINE MELTING DOWN 208 CANNONS ?

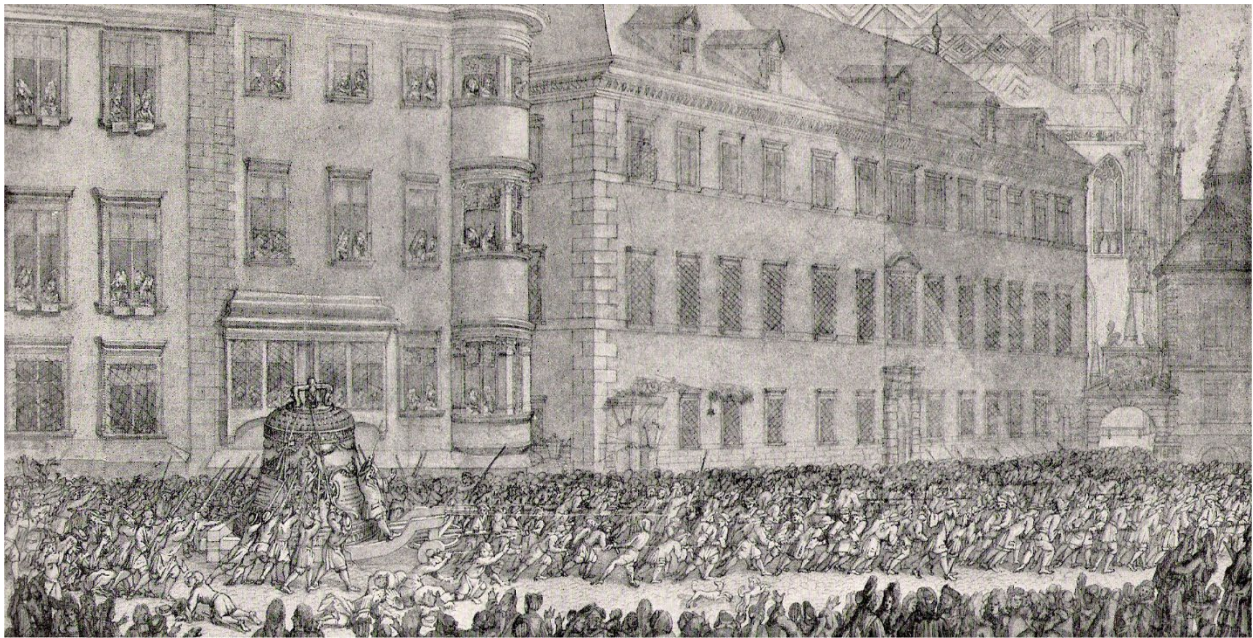
After reading about the destruction of Pummerin the First, we will investigate the history of the old bell, and how there came to be a Pummerin the Second. The bell's history is of great interest.

After the capture of the 208 cannons in 1705, which were melted down, Vienna spent 19,300 florins to create the huge Pummerin. Engraved around the outer metal shell, were images of St. Joseph, the Virgin Mary as the Immaculate Conception,

and St. Leopold. These images appeared with the arms of Bohemia, Hungary, Austria, and the Holy Roman Empire.

The massive dimensions were: diameter 10.4 feet (3.16 m – two centimeters more than the new, recast Pummerin). The old bell's pitch was in B natural.⁴

On 15 December 1791, the Pummerin was consecrated by Bishop Franz Ferdinand Freiherr von Rummel. The massive *Glocke* was installed next, in the lower part of the south Tower of the Cathedral. On 26 January, 1712, the first vibrant booms of Pummerin sounded out over the city, to announce the entry of Emperor Charles VI, traveling to Vienna from Frankfurt, directly after his coronation.



The massive Pummerin – weighing a little over 40,000 lbs -- cast from 208 captured Ottoman cannons, being transported to St. Stephen's Cathedral on 5 November 1711. Here it is being drawn by many men – they go from the bell to the right end of the drawing and beyond --on a wheeled wagon up the former Bishofgasse, today, Rotenturmstrasse. St. Stephen's Cathedral is seen on the right

en.wikipedia.org {{PD-US-expired}}

Drawing: by Ehrenberg, in the collections of the City of Vienna

The following takes a closer look at the drawing and the buildings depicted on it: Emil Hütter: *Die große Glocke bei St. Stephan zu Wien* in: *Berichte und Mittheilungen des Alterthums-Vereines zu Wien. Band XIII*, Karl Gronemeyr, Wien 1873, S. 1–9

On this day, it took 16 strong men over fifteen minutes, to be able to pull on the bell rope in order to swing the massive bell back and forth, enough to make the clapper strike the metal. However, it was discovered in 1878 that the forces caused to the 18,161 kg [40,039 lb] bell from swinging, were damaging the bell tower, so the Cathedral architect, Friedrich von Schmidt, announced that the Pummerin would only be rung by pulling the clapper, instead of being swung.



The original Pummerin. It rests on wooden rails. When it was rung, the rails were lowered away from it by turning jackscrews – a type of jack that operates by turning a leadscrew. It is generally used to lift heavy weights, and as adjustable supports for heavy loads, such as house foundations. After the jackscrews were turned, 8 men pulled on the two ropes attached to the clapper (seen hanging under the bell. The old bell last rang out on Easter 1937

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek



A 2.5-ton jack screw. The screw turned by inserting the bar (left) into the holes at the top, and turning it. The jackscrews turning the Pummerin must have been massive

en.wikipedia.org “Jackscrew”
Photographer: Johnalden, taken 1/6/07, in Johnalden’s yard

On 12 April, Easter, 1945, tragic events brought the Old Pummerin to its final destruction. Looters at the end of WWII set fires to shops near St. Stephen’s Cathedral, and the fires jumped to the roof of the old church. The wooden cradles burned through, and then, a 22-ton bomb struck the floor of the church. Only the clapper of the Pummerin remained intact.

Pummerin crashed onto the stone floor in the South Tower, taking the *Johannesglocke* [John’s Clock] in the North Tower, *Zwölferin* [Twelve] and *Neuerin* [The New] clock of the South front Tower, down with it.

The four largest bells were completely destroyed in the fire and the bombing. The Pummerin fell from the Tower and broke, while the other three bells were melted from the heat of the fire in the Towers.

But, as life tends to renew itself, the original remains of the Pummerin would be used to cast a new bell.

The other six bells in the North front Tower survived, luckily, and still chime out today. The other 11 bells of the Southern Tower were re-cast in 1960, after their destruction in the fire.

The loss of the old bells might have been an unsurmountable loss – but the Viennese didn't give up on their beloved 'Boomer'.

Pummerin – Recast, Reincarnated

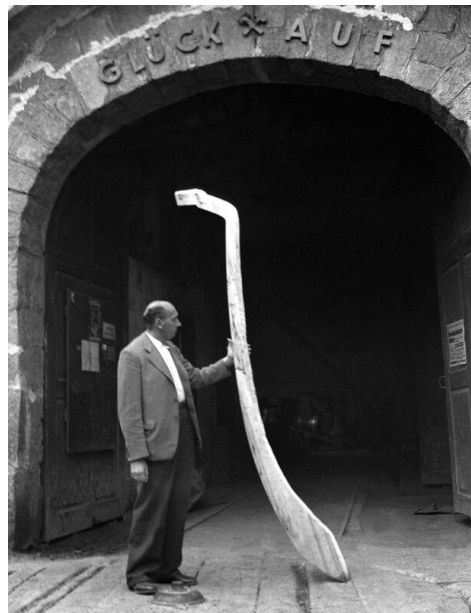
The story of the Pummerin's return to glory is a tale of hope, of formidable love, and of an endurance in the tenacity and resoluteness of the citizens of Vienna. They had weathered the bombings in WWII. They would go on to breathe life into the destroyed bells of *Stephensdom*, and lost no time in bringing the beloved bells back, in new castings.

The recast Pummerin was a gift from Upper Austria. It was cast on 5 September 1951 in St. Florian, Upper Austria, (about ten miles from Linz), using the metal remains from the original old bell, with metal supplemented from some cannons at Vienna's Military Museum.



The new Pummerin swings out in the North Tower in St. Stephen's Cathedral. The clapper that hits the sides of the bell, creating the tone, is also referred to as a 'tongue' or 'striker'

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
"Pummerin läutet nach Unterzeichnung des Staatsvertrages auf Gerüst am Stephansplatz"
Photo: 15 May 1955



The massive clapper of the new Pummerin; the clapper weighs 1,792 lbs. The original clapper can be seen on a tour of the Cathedral's catacombs

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St. Florian, Upper Austria, is named after Saint Florian, the patron saint of chimney sweeps, soap makers and firefighters. He is also the patron saint of Poland, Linz, Austria, and Upper Austria. St. Florian is the location of one of the oldest operational monasteries in the world.

Composer Anton Bruckner was a choirboy there, and later, organist in the town, and is buried beneath the organ inside the monastic church. The ancient town is known for its boys' choir, the St. Florianer *Sängerknaben*, founded in 1071.

The new Pummerin has a diameter of 10.3 ft. and a height of 9.6 feet, weighing 44,380 lbs, making it slightly heavier than the original bell. Three bas reliefs show the Blessed Virgin as the Immaculate Conception, and a scene from the 1683 Ottoman siege of Vienna. Similar to its predecessor, heads of Turks are engraved on the brackets at the top, and a square chain design encircles the bottom rim.

The new Pummerin was transported from Linz to Vienna -- 114 miles -- on a large, wheeled wagon, pulled by two of industrial-sized trucks. A huge crowd followed the slow-moving bell, and women dressed in the National costume for German-speaking countries, the Tracht, arrived to show support for the new bell.



The first failed casting of the new Pummerin ... oops....

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
“Erster mißlungener Guss der Pummerin für den Wiener Stephansdom”

Photo: 14 September 1950



The new Pummerin, on its way to St. Stephen’s Cathedral. This bell-wagon is part of a column of two trucks that pulled the bell 114 miles from Linz to Vienna, to its new home

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
“Mädchen in Tracht vor der Glocke in Enns” Photo: 25 April 1952



Thousands of spectators lined the streets, from St. Florian to Vienna, in excited anticipation of viewing the re-cast Pummerin

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
"Bie der Einfahrt nach Amstetten" Photo: 25 April 1952

The bell arrived in Vienna on 26 April 1952, and was consecrated by Cardinal Theodor Innitzer on that day. Its sonorous tones range out the next day at a Pontifical High Mass, with a bishop presiding over the solemnities. Pummerin remained in the Cathedral's building yard, until the new bell tower was completed.

Because the bell's former South Tower had proven to not be as sturdy, the Pummerin was designed to be hung in the shorter, but better reinforced, North Tower. On 5 October 1957, the new Pummerin was driven through the west side's Giant's Door, and installed on a durable steel structure in the North Tower.

To minimize the vibrations of the supporting structure, the Pummerin's electrical swinging mechanism has, since 2003, been controlled by a computer. Visitors can take an elevator ride up 223 feet in the Cathedral to visit the Pummerin -- and the

old clapper, which was saved intact after the destruction of the original bell. On a tour of St. Stephen's Cathedral today, the original clapper is now in the cathedral's catacombs.

Currently, a 'bell surgeon'— a bell technician --checks the bell, with sensor strips wrapped around the bell. Using acceleration sensors and echo microphones, the strips function like 'electrocardiograms' to determine any cracks or defects in the bell. This safety measure can also calculate the life span of a bell, and "to unlock the secret of the optimum chime."⁵



Almost there....

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
“Einfahrt in die Kärtnerstrasse, im Hintergrund ist bereits der Stephansdom sichtbar”
Photo: 26 April 1952



Triumphant arrival

Photograph reproduced by permission from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
“Ankunft am Stock-am-Eisenplatz, vor dem Stephansdom”
Photo: 26 April 1952

Today, the grand bell is rung only on special occasions, such as the high Catholic holidays: Easter, Pentecost, the Feast of Corpus Christi, All Soul's Day [2

November], Christmas Eve and St. Stephen's Day, or the Feast of St. Stephen, on 26 December, in remembrance of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

The Pummerin is the living voice of the soul of Vienna, surviving through the centuries, damaged but not obliterated, resurrected through the resilience and will of the citizens of Vienna, who revere the Pummerin -- and St. Stephen's Cathedral -- as beloved, old family members, a love that transcends the centuries, inherent, passed on from generation to generation.

We can imagine Mozart and Constanze, enjoying cups of hot coffee on a quiet Sunday morning. Karl, their young son, is off in the corner, playing quietly with his tin soldiers. The day is gray and bitterly cold; the promise of snow hovers in the air.

Mozart puts more wood into the ceramic oven. The room is warm, just as Constanze likes. He's dressed in his heavy white cotton nightgown, which comes down to his knees; thick, dark woolen socks warm his feet, and his light blond hair is loose and disheveled.

Constanze wants to go to Mass, but Mozart has a composition he is working on. She nearly decides to stay in on this chilly Sunday, but the old Pummerin is sounding its unutterably deep song, calling all to Mass. She gets up, gives Mozart a quick kiss, throws on her heavy woolen cloak and mittens, blows a kiss to Karl, and heads out into the gray day, where a few snowflakes herald an afternoon storm.

"Don't be too pious!" Mozart calls after her. He had written this in Constanze's prayer book, before they were married, and he liked to repeat it every now and then, to tease her.⁶

Entering St. Stephen's Cathedral, frosty inside, in the winter cold, Constanze sits with her family members: her mother, Cäcilia, sisters Aloysia, Josepha, and Sophie. Her mother slips Constanze a hot baked potato, to warm her hands.

Aloysia's husband, the actor, Joseph Lange, joins them at the last moment. Lit candles exude a smoky scent, lending the darkened Cathedral a sepulchral glow. Constanze admires, as always, the beautiful, tall glass windows, lit by a pale, gray light.

She pauses, as the profound, ancient voice of the Pummerin reverberates throughout the Cathedral. Sighing deeply, Constanze feels an immense sense of security; the Guardian for All Ages, the Cathedral, surrounds her, and the voice of the Cathedral – the Pummerin -- fills her soul, and lulls her into a contentment, that is beyond all words.

A SUPERNATURAL EVENT AT ST. STEPHEN'S CATHEDRAL

I visited Vienna for a few months in 2010, after the publication of my first book, *Echoes of a Distant Crime: Resolving the Mozart Cold Case File*. It was July, and the weather was hot and humid.

But that didn't stop me from walking the old streets, from daybreak to the late hours of the night. I was restless, and could not sleep for more than an hour or two. On one such night, a little after 2 a.m., I arose, grabbed my bag with water and a few coins, and left the hotel, setting out for the inner city.

Many people, mostly tourists, were still out, and milling around. It felt safe, so I continued on, until I came to *Stephansplatz*. The ghostly old cathedral steeple, lit up, rose high into the night sky. I could not help but always admire the ancient church, which had survived through all the centuries; I found it stoic, beautiful and riveting.

A crowd hung out on the sidewalk at *Stephansplatz*. We were all gazing up at the tall, statuesque steeple. Suddenly – something eerie emerged from the top of the steeple. The 'thing' resembled an enormous, rectangular, translucent bed sheet. It was instantly obvious that this was a paranormal experience.

It exuded an intelligence. The sheet twisted, dove and rose, its massive movements amazingly agile, in an elegant, ghostly pantomime. The crowd was silent,

bewitched by this macabre entity. It never went far, but, as if noticing our attention, continued to dip and dive in the dark sky, twisting and untwisting, in a joyous, spectral performance. It almost seemed as if the entity needed to escape from the confines of the Cathedral, and stretch out in the immense expanse of the night sky.

The crowd grew larger; everyone looked up at the aerial phantom, who seemed to enjoy our attention. It was spectacular; ancient, and uncanny. We all sensed that we were in the presence of something phenomenal.

I could not help but imagine the spirit of Pummerin. Casting fears aside, I waved to it and called, "Hello, Pummerin!" The massive crowd turned, and stared at me, unbelieving and stunned, at my audacity.

The 'sheet' paused briefly, and hovered, fluttering slightly in the air, scrutinizing me. For a few seconds, I froze in fear, wondering if I had done the right thing. Several people moved away from me.

But the entity twisted again in the night sky, a translucent, living spirit, rising into the firmament, and finally dissolving like fog, evaporating into the darkness. Was this the spirit of Pummerin, floating boldly and fearlessly through the night air?

I like to think so. I'm betting that the ghost of the bell often arises late in the night, restless, like myself, and takes a refreshing flight in the balmy summer air, floating high above the city it watches over.

A poem from the German poet Oldřich Zemek comes to mind; writing about Mozart's dear friend, the singer Josepha Dušek, in the Villa Bertramka in Prague, where Mozart visited for his operas, *Don Giovanni* and *La Clemenza di Tito*:

Two worthy names, which are truthfully one
I say Mozart, I hear 'Josephine'
The linden leaves fall in golden beauty and murmur
The dead will not revive
In the scent of roses, and in the trembling of a heart
I hear Mozart's eternal youthful sounds.⁷

Here, I could not refrain from pondering:

Two worthy names, which are truthfully one;
I say Vienna, I hear 'Pummerin'...
In the soul of the city, and in the trembling of hearts,

We hear the old bell's eternal, ancient sounds.

¹ This information is from Wikipedia, "Battle of Vienna," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Vienna> (19 January 2025).

² Google, AI Overview, "Captain Gerhard Klinkicht."

³ Gabi Tours, "Gerhard Klinicht – A Decision with a Clear Conscience," 2020, <<https://www.gabitours.at/en/gerhard-klinkicht-a-decision-with-a-clear-conscience/>> (20 January 2025).

⁴ Much of the information about the Pummerin is from en.wikipedia.org, "Pummerin," <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pummerin>> (18 January 2025).

⁵ NBC News: Science News: Zawadil, Alexander, "Scientists study how long bells will bong," 2 May 2007 (Source: Reuters), <<https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna18397858>> (24 January 2025).

⁶ Nottebohm, Gustav, *Mozartiana: von Mozart herrührende und ihn betreffende, zum grossen Theil noch nicht veröffentlichte Schriftstücke*, Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1880, 10. Mozart wrote, "Seyn Sie nicht gar zu andächtig, gute Nacht."

⁷ Gärtner, Heinz, *Folge der Heißgeliebten: Frauen um Mozart*, München: Langen-Müller, 1990, 263.