

Benenden and beer

As has already been announced in this esteemed paper, the fine ring of eight (tenor 18cwt) of St. George's, Benenden, Kent, is to be augmented to 12 by the addition of 4 new trebles. Some shunting around of the pits of the existing 1969 steel Taylor frame will occur so that the new trebles will go in alongside on the same level. As those who have rung these bells may recall, the sound down in the ringing gallery is very clear, and we feel there is at least a good prospect that this may be true also of the forthcoming 12; we are well aware of the acoustic problems that can occur with this kind of augmentation, and have long taken this into account in the decision to go ahead. Peter Hayward, whose careful frame plan gives straight drops from the the plane of each wheel to a good rope circle, has also specified new bells of a weight which should assist audibility of these high notes. The tenor, which is, in fact, as a result of the excellent tuning by Taylors in '69, a semitone deeper – E flat – than typical for her weight, should thereby make a good base for a light twelve. The success of this 1969 tuning is such that visitors are often surprised to find that the eight come from three different founders at seven different dates!

What does a rural parish want with a 12? Good question. In common with very many such country churches with a fairly meaty octave, we struggle both to recruit and maintain a local band capable of ringing all eight with acceptable striking on Sundays. Even the lighter bells are a challenge for youngsters, at the ideal recruiting age, to handle. Like several former eights in the area, for example Hythe, Staplehurst and Wye, the addition of a couple of trebles to make a ten – and, far more important, an easy light six – to such an octave does make teaching and learning, and the rapid progress that motivates and retains learners, very much easier. Maintaining a local Sunday service band on the basis of a light six is a far more realistic long-term proposition in a rural parish than trying to do so on a heavier eight; and, of course, if numbers and enthusiasm permit, the heavier bells are always there. However, towers do not exist in isolation, but as part of the ringing of their District and Association; and Benenden bells, both because of their quality and ready availability, have long been a valuable resource as a local centre of more advanced training and performance, used on a weekly basis for quarters which have steadily built up the capability of the Ashford District in Spliced S. Major. While Kent, and east Sussex, are not short of rings of ten bells, it has always lacked a really available light practice twelve, suitable (as by no means all twelves are) for those who wish to progress to ringing methods on this number. Most would agree that the acquisition of ropesight and striking on twelve is difficult enough without additional difficulties of handling and acoustics, and it certainly helps such acquisition to do so on a ring which is easy to handle and hear. The frame and tower at Benenden are such, that this augmentation is comparatively simple and cheap. Essentially, the existing frame needs to be shunted about anyway to get two new trebles in; and the amount of shunting required to make room for four trebles is no greater – so why not? The intention has long been to do this, and to add two trebles, leaving room for a future further augmentation if the desire, and more important the funding, were forthcoming. There seemed no reason, in the circumstances, not to appeal for four trebles and see what happened, being content with two if donations only went that far.

These fairly modest aspirations have been, with extraordinary speed, overtaken by events. We launched our Appeal with a quite low-key tower open day, in the course of which a parishioner, previously entirely unknown to us, walked into the church and, to our complete astonishment, wrote out a cheque on the spot to the full value of one bell complete with all ringing fittings. Within six days three other local families had come forward to pledge similarly for the other three trebles. However, we still need about £10,000 to hang them, including most of the less 'glamorous' costs such as frame parts and professional fees. Applications for grant funding have so far been uniformly unsuccessful, and indeed it would be foolish to count on any such – a bonus if it happens, but we have to assume at this stage it won't.

We hope that the many readers of this article who have rung, and enjoyed, a peal, quarter, or just a visit on these very fine bells may be moved to make a donation – anything welcome; preferably call us on 01580-240083, or e-mail rodlebon@onet.co.uk first so we can send you a Gift-Aid form so (assuming you pay UK income tax) we can add to your donation a further 28% from the Govt. If you prefer to 'pay' later, why not sponsor Ed Lebon's forthcoming cycling marathon from the southern to the northern tip of Norway – over 2000 miles of mountainous sub-Arctic terrain, so he'll certainly earn your sponsorship the hard way!

We have also commissioned, from Britain's oldest brewery, an excellent bottled ale (after much critical sampling!); and are offering, with attractive and distinctive artist-designed label, 'Bellringer's Delight' by case of 12 bottles at well below comparable shop price; see advertisement elsewhere in these pages. We've already sold 200 cases without trying very hard; so don't delay in placing your order, not least because it would be nice to have our house back – having it stacked to the ceiling with beer cases may be some folk's idea of heaven, but the boss is already heard muttering about the daft things we do to raise money for bells. We are confident that our worthy Editor will prudently be leading the rush to this elixir, so as not to be trampled by the herd!

RODERICK LEBON



Cambridge University Guild Central Council
rep. Simon Farrar unwinds in the bar
at Llandudno

FROM THE E-LISTS

A round-up from the internet
compiled by John Camp

Is Wirral part of Merseyside or Cheshire? Should Ernie Runciman be paying for the bus passes of elderly folk from Birkenhead? What counties should towers in north Wales be ascribed to? Most of the contributors to this discussion on the Chester Guild Wirral Branch mailing-list didn't appear to live there.

Perhaps others should be paying for Ernie's bus pass. His appearance on BBC television news, in an item about redundancies at Marconi, was mentioned on **ringing-chat**. He was interviewed in the ringing-chamber at Pier Head, where, in a wholly unconnected item, it was noted that a pair of men's shorts had been found after a CY peal.

The announcement of Jeffrey John's appointment as Bishop of Reading produced some serious discourse about the future of the Church of England, evolution and animal behaviour. It also led to the usual **ringing-chat** tangents. Was he a relation of Graham John? He looks more like Elton John, said Stephen Ivin. Olivia Newton John's trousers, as displayed in 'Grease', excited Peter Giles. Bill Hibbert reported that, contrary to his expectation, he was met with blank stares when he referred to the 'john' in Texas. A notice had been sighted on the door of a ladies' loo in an Essex pub saying: "Chelmsford Morris Dancing in here 21st June".

Why did Paul Graupner want to know the Latin for "beware of the spider"? The list also embraced parasitic worms, camels, sphinxes and the proper use of capital letters. Maybe it was the last of these which led to the description of **ringing-chat** subscribers as "pedantic halfwits" (actually another word) in a late-night message to **change-ringers** from one of those nice young men from the CUG.

A heated debate was engendered on **change-ringers** by a question from Fran Johnson about how best to set the heights of sallies. Garden canes, measuring average nose-level and the use of knots were advocated and ridiculed. Kneeling to ring proved remarkably common, except in Annapolis. Beautifully crafted but impractical boxes aroused annoyance.

Earlier in the week, the list retained its interest in calling bells direct from rounds into tittums or, in one tower, whittingtons. Those American schools with bells seemed especially inclined to such practices.

The **bell historians** took me to task. I had not mentioned, last week, that a set of handbells being offered for sale on the web had come from Leeds, Kent and had, at some stage, probably been misappropriated (not by the seller). They had been sent away for repair in the 1930s. They should be rescued. The legal issues could have been aired. I was also reprimanded for not understanding the difference between "deadrope" and "hung dead". Honestly, I do, but writing this column to a deadline means the occasional misunderstanding creeps in and I confess that my eyes sometimes glaze over when reading the historians list. It serves its core constituents well, though, as I believe the other lists do. The historians, for their part, probably don't want to talk about the sexual habits of dolphins.

Why does the **FODS** list come to mind at this point? They were cock-a-hoop about the election of the openly gay bishop of New Hampshire. Some of the issues raised by Canon John's appointment also surfaced here.

The week saw the setting up of a new list, for players of the Fantasy Peal Ringing game. Details are in the information e-mail (see below).

If you want to know more about ringers' e-mail lists and how to join them, send a blank e-mail to ringinglists@bellringers.org.