

# The Ringing World

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The Weekly Journal for Church Bell Ringers

## Bickley – rising from the ashes

Until 1861 Bickley was part of the parish of SS. Peter and Paul, Bromley. In that year, however, the substantial residence of Bickley Park and the new owner, a Mr. George Wythes, set about an extensive scheme of development, including the building of a new church. So it was that St. George's Church was begun in 1863 and opened for worship in 1864. The church was built of Caen stone in Victorian Gothic style, with a tower and spire measuring 175 feet at the west end. By 1906 deterioration of the stonework necessitated the rebuilding (and slight shortening) of the spire to its present height.

Enemy action during the early years of the second war caused repeated minor damage to the church which was patched up without the need for major structural repair. However, on 18th June, 1944 a flying bomb fell in the adjacent road, destroying the windows and most of the roof, and putting the church out of commission until 1946. At this time the tower contained five bells hung for chiming, the heaviest being about 14 cwt. The story of the new ring of bells really starts with the tragic events of 6th April, 1989, when an electrical fault in the base of the tower caused a fire which destroyed the lower part of the tower interior (including the organ) and the nave roof and caused extensive damage to the rest of the church.

The plans to rebuild the church began immediately and the reconstruction recommenced in July 1990. During the discussions about the restoration of the church, it was suggested that the old clock chime should be replaced with a new ring of bells of about the same weight, hung for full circle ringing. So it was that in the autumn of 1989 the KCACR bell restoration subcommittee were called in to give advice, and subsequently, in December, 1990 an order was placed with the Whitechapel Bellfoundry for a ring of six bells,

with an option on another two as and when funds became available, to be hung in a new eight-bell frame. The old bells and fittings were lowered from the tower by KCACR members under the watchful eye of Peter Romney, the convener of the County Bell Restoration Sub-committee.

The new bells were cast in July, 1991, attended by several members of the congregation who had travelled up to Whitechapel for the day, and were transported to the church in August. During a brief stay on the tower floor a service of hallowing was held, at which the bells were blessed and named in honour of six English saints. The next day the job of raising the bells into the tower began, and we soon received the news that they were in the tower and ready to be rung. However, the try out had to be delayed for several weeks, as the continuing building work on the tower made access to the ringing chamber impossible.

In the meantime a massive restoration project was under way in the rest of the church. The nave roof was completely rebuilt in its original style, with hammerbeam vaulting, a new concrete floor was laid, the whole building was rewired and replastered, a new organ and choir were installed in the south transept, and statues and artefacts rescued from the fire



*The picture which has become a symbol of the restoration – the Church of St. George rising from behind the phoenix.*

were carefully cleaned and restored. The tower, the area of the worst damage, has been completely refitted, and now contains two levels of balcony, the second of which forms the ringing chamber. Throughout the restoration the phoenix has been adopted as the symbol of the work. This mythical bird burnt itself to ashes after living for 500 years, then came to life again from the ashes with renewed youth. So it was with St. George's, Bickley that, to quote the words of the Bishop of Rochester in his address at the rededication service, "through the initial tears came the determination to rebuild a church of greater glory". Perhaps the most potent symbol of the restoration is the magnificent west window, high in the wall of the tower. It is an abstract representation of the phoenix by Alisoun Howie, a stained glass artist from north London, and forms an impressive backdrop to the ringing gallery when viewed from the body of the church.

During this period of rebuilding, members of the Lewisham District were hard at work training a band of ringers for the bells. At first teaching was done at the nearby church of The Annunciation, Chislehurst, to whom we are very grateful, but we have now moved to the bells at Bickley itself. We are also very grateful to the ringers of SS. Peter & Paul, Bromley, who have made their bells available to us for additional practices, and to David Kingston for his assistance.

The culmination of the whole rebuilding and restoration project came on Saturday 21st December with the festival service of rededication, conducted by the Bishop of Rochester, the Rt. Rev. Michael Turnbull. In

*(Continued overleaf)*



*The band which rang the first quarter peal on the bells (L to R: Alan Hall, Mary Andrews, Brian Butcher, Chris Munday, Frank Lewis, Andrew Young).*

## Money matters

There were those who predicted a stormy meeting for the Guildford Guild AGM this year. The only two motions on the agenda involved MONEY. Before the main business of the day, however, the afternoon began with a good turn-out of ringers at Bagshot, Puttenham and the host tower, Farnham. Here the start of the service was somewhat delayed by the absence of the key to the organ, but once this was found the retiring Guild Secretary and organist extraordinaire gave his usual virtuoso performance, especially in his choice of recessional music.

The tea and meeting were held at the Memorial Hall in Farnham. The Master, Roger Heyworth, drew attention to some of the highlights in the "new look" Guild Report, notably the continuing enthusiasm for bell restoration with work now well advanced at Hawley and Epsom Common, and fundraising keeping up well.

The meeting stood in silence in memory of those members who had died. Three of the

existing Guild officers were re-elected: Roger Heyworth, Master; Jeremy Pratt, Treasurer; and Roger Pashley, the Auditor. Both the Secretary, Robin Walker, and also the Bell Restoration Fund Administrator, Timothy Wellen, had decided not to seek re-election, and the Master paid tribute to their work for the Guild. Although much of his work went on behind the scenes, Robin had been a very visible secretary, visiting most towers in the Guild while he had been in office. Tim of course had been a major force in the Guild's bell restoration activity, his hard work and enthusiasm never diminishing. Jackie Roberts and David West were elected as Secretary and BRF Administrator respectively. Robin Walker was then elected to fill a vacancy which had occurred for one of the posts of Central Council Representative.

Both of the motions to increase the membership subscription - the first increase since 1985 - and to introduce a peal fee were passed after some discussion, but without much opposition. In addition, other rule changes to make the life of the Peals Recorder a little easier were passed (see Notices this week).

The Master then thanked the very many members of the various sub-committees who had worked so hard during the year, and also thanked the Farnham ringers for a splendid tea and excellent organisation.

The new Guild Secretary can be contacted at 4 Laleham Court, Woking, Surrey GU21 4AX. Telephone: (0483) 765678. J.R.

## BICKLEY - continued

his address the Bishop praised the magnificence of the restored church, and gave thanks for the dedication of all those involved in the restoration work, and in particular to Father David Herbert for his spiritual guidance through a very difficult period. After the service a band of ringers representing those who had been involved in the work on the bells rang a touch of Stedman Doubles. Although none of the Bickley ringers are yet able to ring unaided, most of them did then come to ring some rounds on their new bells, with varying amounts of help. As the congregation departed to the local school for a celebratory buffet lunch, another band of ringers who had been involved in the project rang a quarter peal of Cambridge Surprise Minor.

Although sound control has been installed, we are very aware that bells are new to this largely residential area, and so ringing will necessarily be restricted. Practices will be held on tied bells for the foreseeable future, and ringing for services will be by arrangement with the local District officers. At least for the time being, peal attempts will not be allowed and ringing for other visiting bands will be strictly limited. There will, however be an opportunity for everyone to have a ring on the bells, together with all the other rings of bells in the Lewisham District, on our Open Day on August Bank Holiday Monday - why not book the date now?

The details of the bells are as follows:

Treble	2'4"	Gabriel	D-sharp	4-2-14
2nd	2'6½"	Hugh	C-sharp	5-2-13
3rd	2'8½"	Augustine	B	6-2-22
4th	2'10"	Mary Magdalene	A-sharp	7-1-26
5th	3'2"	Michael	G-sharp	10-1-11
Tenor	3'6½"	George	F-sharp	14-1-9

All the bells were cast by The Whitechapel Bellfoundry, 1991.

After the service of rededication of the church the following quarter peal was rung by members of KCACR, who have been involved in the project to install the bells and train a band of ringers.

**Bickley, Kent** (S George). 21 Dec, 1296 Cambridge S. Minor: Christopher J Munday 1, Mary R Andrews 2, Alan G Hall 3, Brian G Butcher 4, Frank W Lewis 5, Andrew M J Young (C) 6. First quarter on the bells. To celebrate the rededication of the Church of St George.



[Photo: Michael J. Head.

One of the instruction courses in Mere belfry.

## Successful day

The Salisbury Diocesan Guild of Ringers held an Instruction Day based on Mere on 21st March 1992. Five courses were arranged at which the learners were taught a range of techniques under plain hunting and the method Cambridge Surprise Minor. In all, some 60 ringers participated from all over the diocese, about half being learners, and the bells of 10 churches were used. In charge of the day was Miss Shirley Rymer, from Calne, and thanks are due to all who helped, but particularly Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Barnett of Mere, who made the local arrangements and also served tea and coffee.

## Royally entertained at Crantock

The Annual Meeting of the Truro Diocesan Guild was held this year at Crantock, where we were royally entertained by our hosts, Rev. Morley Wills and the Crantock ringers. The afternoon commenced with the new style Guild Office, and it was later to be agreed to submit this to the Bishop to be approved for use as an alternative to the original.

The meeting itself, held in the village hall, proceeded according to the agenda, although a number of additional items were added by the President, who was anxious to know how England were getting on against Wales: "Item 5b - does anyone know the score?" Reports were received from the various officers, including the Librarian, who also strongly encouraged everyone to search the dusty corners of their towers for press cuttings, service sheets, etc., which might be of interest with the approaching Guild Centenary in 1997. The elections proceeded with equal alacrity, with all but one of the sitting members being re-elected. Wilf Boucher had indicated his desire to stand down as a Central Council representative, and so from 1993 his place will be taken by Peter Cummins. Wilf was thanked most warmly for his service in this capacity over more than 30 years.

The Summer Festival will be held at St. Stephen's-by-Launceston on 20th June, and next year's Annual Meeting will be at Camborne. Other than to confirm the election of some non-resident life members, that concluded the meeting and members turned to the excellent tea, laid on by their hosts at the back of the hall. Ample justice was done to the pasties, sandwiches, cakes and trifle, before ringing continued at Crantock and at Perranzabuloc.

P.J.T.



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