

Towers Ringable and Unringable

Dear Sir,—Replying to the inquirer who is too bashful to disclose his identity, there can be no hard and fast rule as to when bells may be classed as unringable, for there will always be those ringers to whom the report that any particular bells are unringable presents a challenge—it may be that they wish to dispel the myth, if it is a myth, or they may wish to show off or simply to add to their tower total, and I must plead guilty to falling into the later category.

As to those towers which are shown in "Dove" as unringable, this means "unable to be rung." By this I do not mean "not allowed to be rung" but physically impossible to ring for such reasons as derelict framework or fittings, tie-rods passing through the wheels or other structural reasons.

If a ring of bells is in such a state that a few days' work is necessary to render it ringable, in my view it is unringable. A correspondent once wrote to me to say that a certain ring was not really unringable as it could be rung if new headstocks and wheels were fitted, which put me in mind of a story I once heard of the man who took a pair of boots to be repaired and, apologising to the cobbler, remarked that the soles were bad and the uppers pretty well gone, but the laces were quite good. By the same argument Coventry Cathedral bells are not unringable, they merely require new fittings and a new frame and, of course, a tower.

The object of describing bells as unringable is twofold. Firstly to save ringers from wasting their time in applying for permission to ring where the bells are not in a fit condition to be rung, and secondly to spare the clergy the annoyance of having to say "No" repeatedly—one such Vicar wrote to ask in effect could the same medium which told ringers he had a ring of bells also please say that they were unfit to ring, as he was becoming tired of receiving repeated applications.

I am aware that certain reported unringable bells have been rung after a fashion, indeed I have myself rung at certain towers where I had been given to understand that the bells could not be rung, and if I can be told of cases where "unringable" bells have been rung properly I shall be only too pleased to delete "unringable" in the next edition of "Dove." I am all for "debunking" accepted unringables wherever possible.

I would dearly like to add "Vicar unringable" in certain cases, but I am not sure how the Law of Libel would apply. Then there is the case recently reported to me where the Vicar has removed the ropes and turned the ringing room into an office, and the Wiltshire six-bell tower where, until the arrival of the present incumbent, meetings were held, but he decreed that the bells were unsafe, and when I asked his permission to ring he told me a cock and bull story about the tower not being insured.

I do not class either of these as unringable in the hope that some day the parsons may receive the call to a more fruitful part of the vineyard and when the respective parishes are rid of them the bells may well be rung once more.—Yours sincerely,

R. H. DOVE.

OBITUARY

MR. C. WOODARD

We regret to record the sudden death of Mr. Claude Woodard whilst on holiday with his son in Anglesey, North Wales. He had been a member of the St. Margaret's, Ipswich, band for the last 37 years and will be greatly missed by his many friends.

On the day of his funeral a quarter peal of Grandsire Triples was rung to his memory by P. Whittell 1, K. Whittell 2, A. Munnings 3, C. Sedgley 4, P. May 5, E. Bloomfield (conductor) 6, J. Morley 7, J. Munnings 8.

STEEL BELLS OF BICKNOR

Dear Sir,—What an interesting omission from "Dove" the ring of five at Toller Whelme seems to be; whoever will ring the first peal there? These bells are somewhat unusual but they are by no means unique. I thought that some ringers might be interested to read of a similar experience we had at Bicknor, in Kent. Here is a very light set of four steel bells, of which I append a description, hung in a dilapidated and isolated church nowhere near a house. Here also is a 30ft. climb to the bell chamber, though there is a fixed ladder in position. The bells hang in a frame for five—they form Nos. 1, 2, 4 and 5 of such a ring, and they are hung with all steel fittings, even fabricated steel channel wheels.

This leads me to believe—and I am sure that the Hampshire experts would bear me out—that such bells were never intended to be rung in full circle. The Bicknor bells—described in Grayling's "Kent Churches" as a "quackery of steel bells," were cast for the 1862 exhibition, and were purchased after that extraordinary event for Bicknor Church.

Treble.—14½ in. diameter. Inscribed 8322.
Second.—17½ in. Naylor Vickers and Co., Sheffield. 1862. 8622.
Third.—19½ in. Naylor Vickers and Co., Sheffield. 2665. Patent (Royal Arms).
Tenor.—20½ in. Naylor Vickers and Co., Sheffield. 8145. Patent (Royal Arms).

Perhaps someone will one day produce a complete article on the history and productions of the Sheffield Bell Foundry, of whose products Cocks, the Buckinghamshire bell-historian said: "Let us hope that nothing short of the removal of their miserable remains from the towers will check the progress of disintegration," the latter referring to the fact that they were rusting away.

A similar set of bells existed at nearby Wormshill, consisting of two steel and two bronze bells. Three of these bells were sold in 1962, leaving only a single bronze bell, for chiming.—Yours sincerely,

Whitstable, Kent. DAVID L. CAWLEY.

SANDWICH: THE TOWN OF SILENT BELLS—By D. L. Cawley

(Continued from page 601)

The second church in Sandwich of which we shall treat is St. Mary's. Like its companions it also had a central tower, and from what is left of its original architecture it can be assumed that it too was Norman. The early records of these bells are most interesting. The earliest payments are of course for bell ropes, these being specially frequent between 1444 and 1582, but by far the most remarkable entry is a payment in 1464 for a chiming clock which was made in the nearby village of Wingham. At this time there was a ring of four bells known respectively as (tenor) Great bell; (3rd) Mary bell; (2nd) Little bell; (treble) Fourth bell. There was also a "wackerell" or Sanctus bell. In 1516 two clappers were purchased for the tenor, and the wheels were "reset." Presumably these were only half-wheels. One frequent payment at this time is for ringing the bells during thunderstorms; in 1517, for example, the princely sum of 1d. was paid "for bread and drink for the ringers on St. Lambard's day at night when it thundered"; the sexton came off even better—he got 1½d.! After the Reformation Sermons replaced Superstitions; and entries for tolling the "sermon" bell on the "Sabbatho daye" are not uncommon. By 1639 there were

only three bells left; perhaps "Mary" and certainly the "wackerell" had been disposed of for religious reasons. But the others still went by their old names for the "fourth" (which by the old backward notation is the treble) was reported as being cracked.

To remedy this, the wardens called in John Wilnar, of Borden, who made a report which still exists. In it he estimated £16 for recasting the "fourth" bell; but to recast the three remaining heavy bells into a lighter ring of five, taking the remaining metal to his own use, would be only £36. The churchwardens agreed to the latter course, and the ring of five was cast and installed in 1639 and 1640. The wardens paid Henry Wilnar, the founder's successor, the sum of only £32; and also £1 3s. 8d. for the installation of the chimes. Evidently the clock of 1464 was still ticking away merrily.

The period 1660-1670 was a troublesome one politically and otherwise. After the troubles of the Commonwealth, the churchwardens of Sandwich seem to have been slow in repairing their churches. As we have seen, St. Clement's lost its spire in 1664; in 1662 St. Peter's tower was described as "cleft or split from the very toppe"; and in a terrific gale in 1663 the tower of St. Mary's collapsed into the body of the church. So much for the tower; the bells,

however, were undamaged. As only the outer walls of the church were left the whole building was thrown under one gigantic roof; no attempt was made to rebuild either arcades (of which there are still remains) or tower. To pay for the rebuilding, the five bells were sold to the church of Elham, near Canterbury.

As late as 1757 Mr. Fausset, the Kent antiquary, was able to note at Elham "5 heavy bells all made by John Wilnar in ye year 1659." Assuming that he misread 1659 for 1639, we may be fairly certain that these were the Sandwich bells. Only six years later they were recast and made up to eight (tenor 16 cwt.) by Lester and Pack, and these are the bells which ring out from Elham Church today. No attempt was made to replace the ring at St. Mary's; in 1718 a turret was built over the south porch, and a bell by Richard Phelps was installed. This cost £14 15s. 11d. No other bells have ever been added, and apart from the recasting of the bell in 1876 by Messrs. Warner there have been no alterations in the tower. The vast church remains with traces of its ancient grandeur; the great roof still remains intact, a veritable maze of timber, and a tremendous piece of craftsmanship; go and see it if you are ever in Sandwich.

(To be continued)

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