

August 25, 1972

THE RINGING WORLD

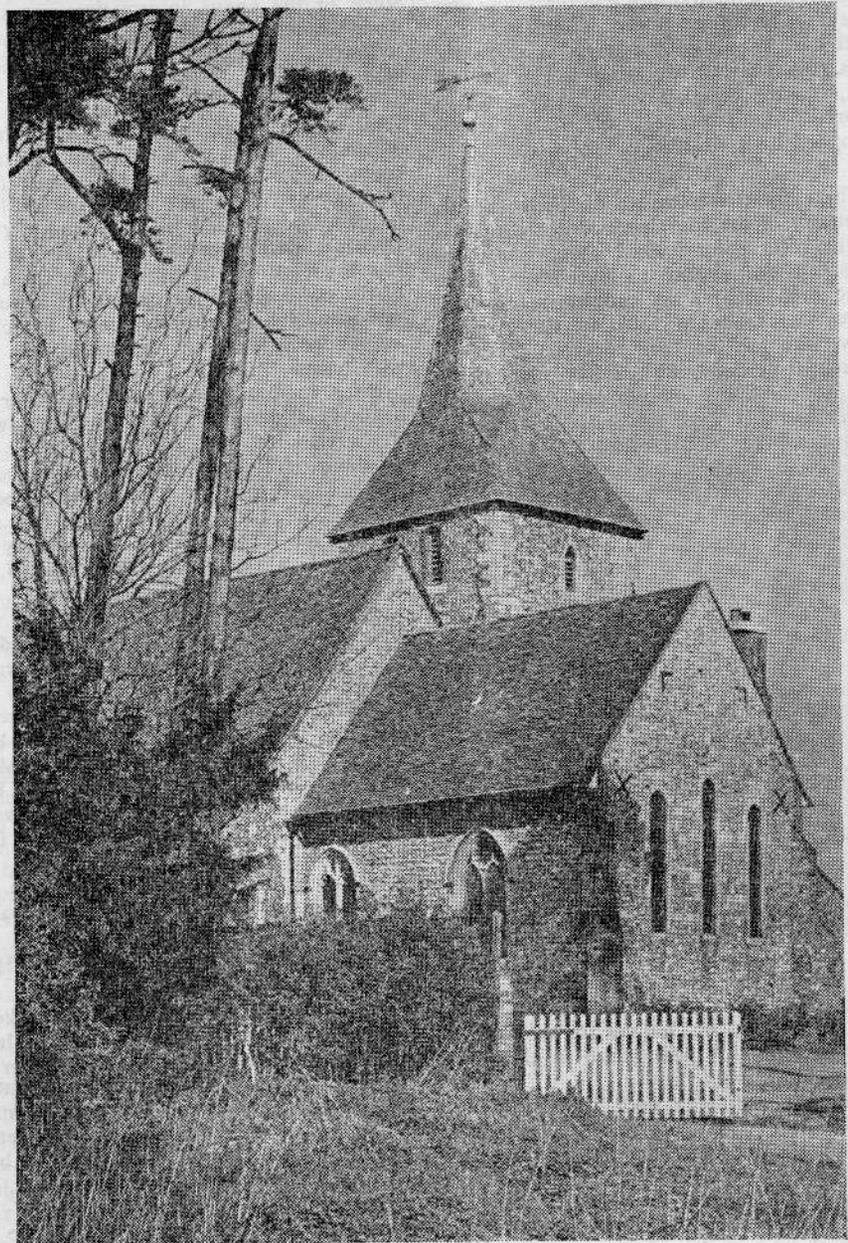
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CENTRAL COUNCIL
OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS

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St. Martin
of Tours,
Chelsfield,
Kent.



COVER PICTURE St. Martin of Tours, Chelsfield, Kent.

CHELSEFIELD VILLAGE is about two miles south-east of Orpington and is divided in two by the Orpington By-pass. On one side of the road is the main body of the village, including the Rectory and the Village Hall, and on the other side is Court Lodge with, next to it, the church, approached in the shadow of a magnificent row of limes.

The church is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086) and in Textus Roffensis (1122), the latter being a list of churches in the Rochester Diocese compiled by Bishop Ernulf. Two Norman windows are all that remain from this time. It was during the 13th century that the church underwent many alterations, and some additions were made. The nave was enlarged, the chancel given its present structure and the tower was added. The square tower, jutting from the north-east corner of the nave, contains six bells, the heaviest weighing just under 11 cwt., and the shingled octagonal spire which is broached on to the tower in two stages is topped by a weather vane.

THE BELLS

The earliest reference to the bells is in an inventory of the church made in the middle of the 16th century, which mentioned three bells. These appear to have been there some time because an endowment for bell ropes was made in 1509 by Dame Alice Bray, who left the "bell ropes field" to the church, the income derived from the sale of the produce going towards new ropes. These three bells were replaced in 1672 by a ring of five, cast by John Hodson, and now form the oldest maiden ring still surviving as originally cast in Kent. Hodson cast some bells for nearby St. Mary Cray in 1655 and established a foundry there in 1677. Business would appear to have been good because many churches in this area have bells cast by him.

In 1880 the Chelsfield bells were quarter-turned and rehung by Gillett and Bland at a cost of £75 to the parish. In 1936, to commemorate the restoration of the tower and spire, the ring was augmented to six by the addition of a treble cast by the Whitechapel Bellfoundry.

In 1938 the first peal of Minor was rung on the bells and this was followed in 1948 by two peals of Grandsire Doubles rung by the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths. It is interesting to note that the present senior steward of the Cumberlands is a member of the local band. Soon after the war John Carpenter founded a local band and it was this Sunday service band that rang a peal of Doubles for the Coronation in 1953. A peal board in the tower records this event.

In 1963 a ringing floor was added and proves useful, as the ringers on the gallery are in full view of the congregation and tend to get a number of fascinated recruits.

In June, 1971, six members of the local band rang a peal of Minor in 2hrs. 58 mins., when there were four first-pealers, a first as conductor, and all the band except one were in their teens. A junior ringing practice on Saturday mornings has helped re-

cruit schoolchildren. This has meant that there has been a great influx of youth into the band which has gone from strength to strength. At present there are about 20 ringers, many of whom are also in the choir.

DETAILS OF THE BELLS

- 1.—4-2-11. 1936. Note E. 27 in.
M & S LONDON
TO COMMEMORATE THE RESTORATION
OF BELFRY AND SPIRE 1936
B PARSONS RECTOR
A F. NORMAN BUTLER, F TERRY,
CHURCHWARDENS.
- 2.—4-3-16. 1672. Note D. 29 in.
JOHN HODSON MADE ME 1672
JOHN ALLEN WILLIAM CHAPMAN
CHVRCH WARDENS. CH.
- 3.—5-0-13. 1672. Note C. 30½ in. (Ditto.)
- 4.—6-2-2. 1672. Note B. 32 in. (Ditto.)
- 5.—8-1-5. 1672. Note A. 35½ in. (Ditto.)
- 6.—10-3-15. 1672. Note G. 30 in. (Ditto.)

Some of the above information was taken from Church Bells of Kent, 1887, as is the following, which gives old uses of the Chelsfield bells:—

The death knell was rung as soon as convenient after a death and within 12 hours if possible. For a man the tenor was tolled for an hour, followed by 3x3 tellers; for a woman the fourth was tolled for an hour, followed by 3x2 tellers; for a youth (7-16 years) a similar procedure as for a man was used but on the third; while for a girl of the same age the procedure for a woman was employed but on the second. For children under seven years the treble was used with tellers 1x1x1.

Prior to funerals the bell used for the death knell was tolled for one hour, while for services the bells were chimed for half an hour, followed by three minutes of tolling on the tenor. There were "peals" on church festivals. It was noted that ringing on New Year's Eve was temporarily discontinued, while that on November 5 had been obsolete for the last 20 years. For vestry meetings the treble and second were chimed for five minutes, while wedding peals were usual at the end of a marriage service.

Method names are not always connected with the community whose names they bear, and at first sight Chelsfield Surprise Major would seem unconnected with the Kent village possessing just six bells. However, the first peal in the village was rung at Deddington, Oxfordshire, in May, 1965, and was conducted by Nicholas Martin, a former tower captain at Chelsfield, who named it after his home tower.

THE PLACE OF RINGERS IN THE CHURCH

The rector, Canon Leslie King, takes a keen interest in the bells and ringers, always dismissing the ringers with prayer after the service touch, and this helps to create a good atmosphere in the ringing chamber. Three members of the band are members of the Parochial Church Council, two being on the Deanery Synod, one of whom, Mr. Charles Rowe, is vice-chairman of the Rochester Diocesan Board of Finance and serves on the Diocesan Synod. Several other members of the band are engaged in other aspects of church life. The close connection between the church and the

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THE RINGING WORLD

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ringers is again demonstrated by the fact that the tapestry kneelers and cushions, made by members of the congregation, prominently feature bells and sallies.

Every year the band enjoys an outing and each September features a Ringers' Sunday, in which ringers read the lessons, act as sidesmen and occasionally one gives the address. Last year for Ringers' Sunday two quarter peals were rung, one by the seniors for Evensong and one by the "junior band" in the morning for the family service. It is interesting to note that in 1971 14 members of the local band rang quarter peals at Chelsfield. Practice night is at present on Monday, plus Saturday mornings for beginners.

There is at St. Martin's a worshipping and serving community in which the ringers play their part, and which could well be the envy of other parishes. N. WILKINS.

AFTER 34 YEARS

Hard work and skilled carpentry by Peter Wakefield and Vaughan Evans have enabled the five bells at SS. Peter and Paul's, Belton, Grantham, Lincs. to be rung again after a silence of 34 years. A quarter peal was attempted on July 19 but came to grief with a broken rope. Three ropes were borrowed from Grantham and a successful quarter was rung on July 31.

Particular mention must be made of young Pippa Ryan ringing her first quarter, and Bill Dale, ringing as capably as ever at a stately 78 years.

Details of the quarter of 1260 Grandsire and Plain Bob Doubles are: Treble Pippa J. Ryan (first quarter), 2 W. H. Dale, 3 V. P. Evans, 4 G. J. N. Colborne, tenor P. Wakefield (cond.) It is believed to be only the second quarter on the bells.

G. J. N. C.