

## A highly satisfactory restoration at Chiddingstone

The eight bells at St. Mary's, Chiddingstone have been retuned and rehung in the existing frame with new headstocks, wheels, stays, sliders and refurbished clappers. They are in the key of E flat, the tenor being unusually light for that note. The 7th is the oldest casting at 1753 and the bells have most likely been eight since that time. The first peal on the bells was on December 26th 1761 (per Mr. Cyril Wratten) on December 26th 1760 (per Canon Felstead). Both agree it was 5184 Oxford tripple Bob in 3 hours 20 minutes by the "Youths of Leeds". This is of course the proper Leeds in Kent and not the Yorkshire village. Even so, how on earth did they get from Leeds to Chiddingstone in those days or indeed even know there would be eight bells when they got there?

### The restored ring

The sixth has been recast and the new weights and dates of original casting or recasting are as follows:

Tenor	17-0-3	1867
7th	14-2-5	1753
6th	10-0-13	1991
5th	9-2-27	1784
4th	6-1-24	1838
3rd	6-0-6	1893
2nd	4-3-0	1838
Treble	5-1-27	1784

All from Whitechapel tuned as a complete set for the first time in 1991

The sixth had previously been recast in 1893. All front six bells had cast-in staples and it was fortunate indeed that only one of them had cracked. The inscriptions from the 1893 casting have been reproduced where appropriate but the recasting in 1991 has given the opportunity of an additional inscription: "In memory of Philip Everest and Jane Streatfeild".

### Mainstays of Chiddingstone

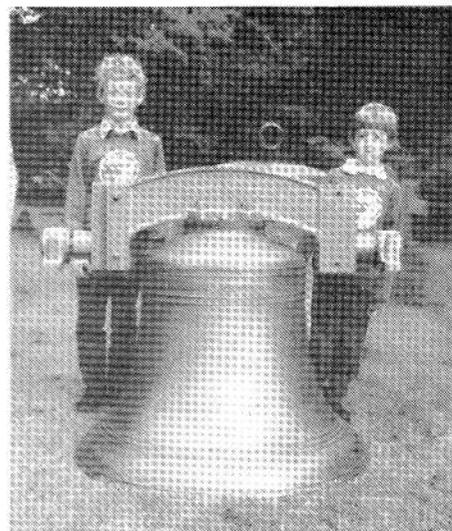
The Everest and Streatfeild families have lived at Chiddingstone since the 16th century. Philip lived in the parish all his life and gave devoted service to the parish church. He had lived at No. 2 The Village, opposite the church gate, the whole of his 39 years' married life. Everyone in Chiddingstone knew him and he knew everyone. At his funeral in February 1990 the church was packed to the very doors and a substantial collection was taken for the Church restoration fund. He died in office as churchwarden having held that post with distinction for many years. He came somewhat late to ringing but he was held in great affection particularly in the Tonbridge District of the Kent County Association and the East Grinstead Guild where he held office for some years as Deputy Chairman.

Jane Streatfeild was left as a widow with a large young family at an early age. She also knew everyone in the village and was known by everyone. She gave devoted service to the parish church throughout her life and as a churchwarden with Philip Everest they were a mainstay of parish life during various long interregna and less than adequate incumbencies.

### Major church restoration

The work to the bells has been part of a major programme of restoration of the church. The tiles for the various roof slopes have been completely renewed and large areas of flat roof and valley gutters re-leaded. The work to the bells could not sensibly be done without considerable builders' work. The mullion to the north sound opening needed rebuilding and after careful thought it was decided to dismantle the stonework. The necessary scaffold was strengthened to allow the lowering of the bells. When the bells had been lowered the scaffold was to be left in position until their return. Whitechapel reduced their Foundry time from 12 weeks to eight to help us to keep down hire charges on the scaffold. This was only one example of the wonderful help and encouragement accorded to us by the Foundry throughout the scheme.

Some £120,000 was needed for the whole restoration programme and at the stage where the roof was completed it was clear this total would be greatly exceeded if there were to be a formal building contract for the tower. The only possibility was to regard the bell work as the principal item and to carry out the neces-



Philip Everest's grandsons with the recast 6th.

sary building as enabling works. We could hardly have been more fortunate. Another native, whose family have lived here for 300 years or so, now exiled to Speldhurst, undertook without overhead charges the procurement of stonemasons and other specialists and through his building business supplied materials at advantageous prices, transported the bells to and from the Foundry and arranged for his fork-lift truck to convey the bells from the foot of the scaffold, repeating the process in reverse when the bells came back.

(Continued overleaf)



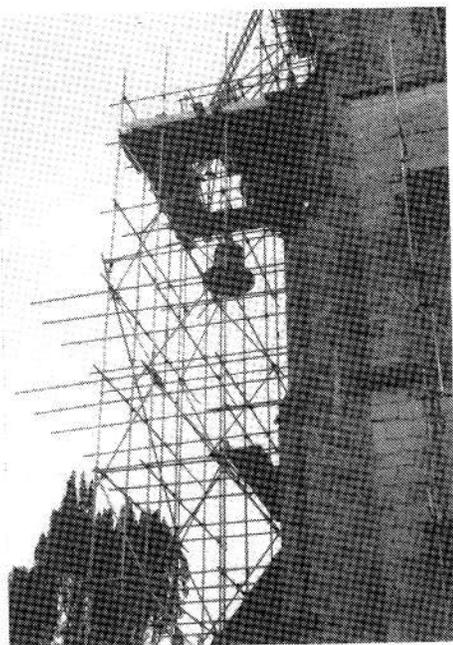
Bells on the move in Chiddingstone.

**CHIDDINGSTONE—continued****Outstanding help**

This practical and cost-saving assistance was exploited to the full by the outstanding personal skills of a local ringer who has a professional involvement in the design side of a branch of the building industry. He and his young son have spent countless hours in carrying out extensive building works to a very high standard using quality materials. There have been parish work-days when all sorts of people of goodwill, some ringers, others not, have cleaned and swept, fetched and carried, scraped and painted, pushed and shoved and willingly carried out instructions to a well thought-out and scheduled programme.

**Restoration details**

The stone steps of the spiral staircase, hollowed to the point of danger by centuries of tramping feet, have been completely resurfaced. The ceiling of the ringing chamber was taken down and the boarding discarded. The existing oak beams were refurbished and re-used and the ceiling built in at a recommended higher level. This entailed the re-boarding of the clock room floor and reducing the matchboard casing to the clock case to the new height of the clock room. The sound openings in the bell chamber have received attention. Due to the Victorian use of ferrous metal cramps the stonework to the mullions had spalled. Stainless steel bars are now in place and the stonework re-instated. Replacement hardwood louvre blades are in position on all four elevations and Thermalite partition blocks have been introduced as sound control and weather protection. Each has a square opening to take removable shutters which will be in position for prolonged periods of pleasure ringing but open at other times to allow a circulation of air in the bell chamber. A new flagpole has been erected and holes in the lead roof of the tower made good following the removal of the U-bolts needed for the lifting tackle for removing and replacing the bells. The pinnacles on the tower have been strengthened and re-pointed having also suffered from the earlier use of ferrous metal cramps. The single clock face on the west wall of the tower has been regilded.



Up via the scaffolding.

**Inside and out**

On the days when we have arranged a Hertford C.A. Western District meeting at Flamstead (Herts) we have to keep our fingers crossed as far as the weather is concerned, for in the absence of a church hall a picnic tea is far nicer outside than in. Usually we are lucky, and this year was no exception, being warm and sunny - in fact, definitely sticky, even in the open, ground-floor ringing area. An afternoon wedding meant that proceedings were delayed by half an hour, and the early arrivals were able to ring for the bride's departure (and also admire the old open-top Rolls in which she drove away).

There were four special methods - Kent, Oxford, Stamford Surprise and Grandsire Doubles - but their juxtaposition posed no problems to temporary Ringing Master George Reading, who easily persuaded a doubting conductor that a touch to include all four was a real possibility. Despite a few hiccups in the other methods involved, the touch

**Precision and skill**

Trevor Bailey, now with 32 years as a bell-hanger for Whitechapel, a veteran of the hanging of Westminster Abbey bells, St. Botolph Aldgate and many others, presided over the re-hanging with his usual precision and skill ably assisted by George. George was in his first week of retirement after a lifetime as a carpenter and joiner. At his work he had carried out a number of items in the church and tower and he was so fascinated at the prospect of seeing the bells installed that he celebrated his first week of retirement by working voluntarily. Trevor acclaimed him as one of the best voluntary assistants he has encountered. The try-out was on Monday, July 29th and the restoration rated as a great success. The retuned bells positively sing without having lost their character as a fine old-style peal of bells. The new headstocks, wheels, stays and sliders are a joy to behold - who says there is no craftsmanship these days?

We are indebted to Whitechapel not only for a job well done but for all the personal care and attention throughout - from first inspection to final completion. In placing the order we accepted the offer of reduced prices for able-bodied assistance. As an acknowledgement of the quality and extent of the assistance given the Foundry have granted most generously a further reduction of the total bill. A very fine gesture greatly appreciated.

**Celebrations planned**

The celebrations are to follow. Sunday, September 8th, the Feast of St. Mary the Virgin is our Patronal Festival. There will be Sung Eucharist at 10.00. Invited bands will ring quarter peals at 11.45, 3.00 and 5.30. There will be a cricket match between Chiddingstone and the Bellringers of England under the captaincy of Jeremy Pratt at 2.00 p.m. Barbecue lunch will be provided without charge at 1.00 p.m. and Tea at interval time. There will be a cash bar available in addition to the Castle Inn and the Village Tea Shop. Various other attractions for all tastes and all ages are intended. All will culminate in a great service of praise and Thanksgiving and general rejoicing at 6.30 p.m. presided over by our Diocesan Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Michael Turnbull. We hope a great many ringers and families will join us for a day out in the country. Formal clothes are not expected for the evening service.

P.A.C.

did indeed come round. The methods were also rung singly, although there was no Kent and Oxford spliced, which could have proved exciting, and there were plenty of non-special methods as well (although some would no doubt argue that Stedman is definitely special). During the afternoon we were pleased to welcome Ray Smith, the Association President, who admitted later on that he was actually grabbing a tower.

The service was taken by the vicar, the Rev. Dennis King, who was, as usual, delighted to welcome us, and who preached on the theme of "Summoned by Bells" (John Betjeman's autobiography having been on the radio recently). There was, unfortunately, no organist, but we managed a spirited rendering of the two hymns unaccompanied, and then it was time for our picnic in the churchyard. This had been provided by the ladies of the church, who had clubbed together magnificently to offer a variety of sandwiches and home-made cakes which were very much appreciated by those who had been ringing all afternoon (also by the unmentionables who had not!).

We returned to the church for the business meeting, anticipating better acoustics inside than out (remembering, too, that last year's meeting had been disrupted by a horse!). A cheque, embodying the profit from the Northchurch barbecue, was gratefully received, and two more Domino cards drawn, making a profit of £26, both of which went into the District Bell Fund. A letter of resignation from the Ringing Master was also read out, but his deputy will soldier on in his place until the end of the year. With the business dispensed, ringing continued, with the same exciting mix as before, until 8.30.

PENNY WATSON.



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