

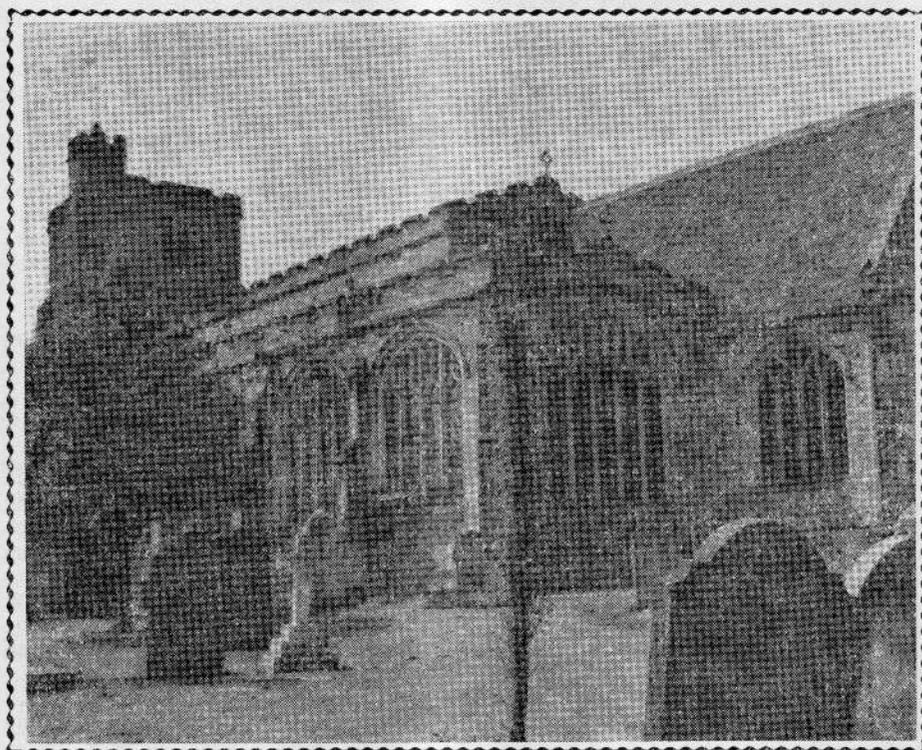
THE RINGING WORLD

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THE CENTRAL COUNCIL
OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS

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ST. DUNSTAN CRANBROOK, KENT

A Wealden Town

It is generally agreed that the name of Cranbrook is derived from CRAN=crane or heron (or possibly a personal name) and BROOC=a stream or marshy place, and that this origin is Old English, leading to the conclusion that the earliest settlement of the parish was during Saxon days, probably before the 9th century. Even this may not be the earliest inhabitation of the area, since flint implements of the Bronze Age have been found in the neighbourhood and at nearby Knox Bridge is an example of a moated stronghold which was excavated in the middle of the last century. Further evidence of early activity in the place is to be found in the remains of a Roman road that linked Rochester and Maidstone to the Sussex ironworks.

There is no mention of Cranbrook in the Domesday Book, but this is typical of the

Weald, where little mention is made of the denes (or swine pastures) which constituted the wealden woodland of that time. These were attached to estates in the more populous parts of the county. However, it was in the 14th century that major changes came to the Weald. In 1331 the first Flemish weavers came over at the invitation of King Edward III, who was anxious to build up this industry in England. The fact that this flourished in Cranbrook, bringing considerable prosperity to the town, albeit for only just over two centuries, is very much the reason why we are now able to enjoy the beauty of our present church.

Cathedral of the Weald

A church is first mentioned on the site towards the end of the 11th century, and it is thought that this church, which would have been a wooden structure with a thatched roof, was built between 1030 and 1060 on land owned by Christ Church, Canterbury, and dedicated to St. Dunstan who was canonised in 1029. Probably the first stone building was erected during the 12th century.

The present building, because of its size, has been called the "Cathedral of the Weald". The tower, south porch, chancel arch and part of the north aisle were all completed before 1425. The middle aisle and clerestory followed in 1520, and the chancel was enlarged about 30 years later. It is interesting to note that St. Margaret's, Westminster, is the town cousin of Cranbrook Church, being of almost identical dimensions and style except that the London church, being built all at one time, has a larger chancel arch more in proportion with the rest of the building than the Cranbrook counterpart, which dates from an earlier time.

One of the unusual features of the Church is the dipping font for total immersion baptism, which is unique in the county and very rare elsewhere. It was built in 1710 by the Rev. John Johnson in an attempt to persuade the Baptists, who at that time were very numerous in the parish, to rejoin the Church of England. That the plan was unsuccessful is indicated by the fact that only one adult baptism is recorded in the registers.

Prototype for Big Ben

The discovery in 1967 about the church clock was made by Mr. T. R. Robinson of Bristol. The clock was made by F. Dent, Londdn, and although not installed until 1857, it probably stood in Dent's workshop for some time. The mechanism incorporates the "Grimthorpe Gravity Escapement", a device to counteract the effects of the weather on the face of the clock, and is almost certainly the first to be fitted with this now famous feature. There are strong possibilities that the clock was shown in the Paris Exhibition, and it is fairly certain that it was in fact made as a prototype for Big Ben.

The Bells

As far back as the 16th century there were five bells and these were rung for Queen Elizabeth I's visit to the town in 1573. In 1715 they were recast into six and by 1783 Cranbrook had a ring of eight. James Barham's band lost no time in ringing the first peal on the bells—Kent Treble Bob Major on 24 November 1783. The bells were recast by Thomas Mears in 1801, following which the College Youths rang a peal of Grandsire Triples on 19 October. This is the only peal where two men have rung the tenor.

In 1812 the bells were again rehung, this time by William Humphry who built Cranbrook's other landmark, the Union Mill. In 1825 the fifth was recast by T. Mears. (continued overleaf)

ST. DUNSTAN'S, CRANBROOK—contd.

The bells were rehung again that year, and further rehanging followed in 1843 and 1845! The seventh was recast in 1857 by C. & G. Mears. Two more peals were rung in the 19th century, Grandsire Triples by the Benenden ringers in 1822 and Plain Bob Triples by mostly Frittenden ringers in 1872.

The next peal came after the rehanging in 1902 and is recorded on a peal board in the ringing chamber. There were four more peals before the First World War, and this was followed by the most intense period of peal ringing in the tower's history, 15 being rung between the Wars. There have been five more rung since 1945, including a local peal of Plain Bob Triples in 1972, after the last rehanging by Taylor's. By coincidence this was 100 years after the only other peal of Bob Triples on the bells.

The Ringers

Little is known of the band before the 1960's, but since that time a tradition of change-ringing has been established. Naturally there have been ups and downs, two of the major achievements being the local peal already referred to and the record number of quarters rung last year for church services—20.

Ringing Customs

It is not unknown for ringers to come into open disagreement with the vicar and churchwardens, and this seems to have happened in Cranbrook in 1746, as a result of a Vestry resolution banning the ringing of bells. It appears that the ringers took no notice and continued to ring, the following compromise being recorded in the churchwardens' accounts:—

"give the ringers for not ringing ... 5s. Od." When Mr. Stahlshmidt visited Cranbrook at the end of the last century, he reported the following ringing customs:—

"On Sundays the 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. bells are still rung.

Passing bell tolled as soon as death is known.

Bells chimed for services.

A bell rung for vestry meetings.

Ringing on all festivals. Also on New Year's Eve, Queen's Birthday and November 5th."

The curfew was also rung and this custom has only ceased in recent years.

One of the most notable ringers of the last century must have been Stephen Jenner, who died in 1878. He was blind, and, in addition to being a ringer, was also town crier and local guide.

One custom that is very popular with the ringers is the Leaney Dinner. Daniel Leaney, who was a local farmer, left £100 to be invested, the interest to provide the ringers with an annual dinner. Unfortunately, inflation has meant that the interest is far from sufficient to provide an annual dinner, but by putting aside part of the wedding fees this is now held every three years. The clergy, churchwardens and representatives of the Kent County Association of Change Ringers are invited to the Dinner.



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Guild of Devonshire Ringers**A.G.M.—AND DINNER**

The month of February saw the A.G.M. and the Annual Dinner of the East Devon Branch, both well-attended and successful events. The A.G.M. took place at Seaton on February 8 and was attended by over 50 members and visitors. The ringing reflected the variety of tastes and abilities present. At the meeting a silence was observed in memory of the former chairman, Ernie Rowe (Sidmouth) and Mrs. Sparkes, wife of one of the ringers. Mr. Frank Parr (Buckerell) vice-chairman, took the chair.

A number of changes of officers occurred as the ringing master and the secretary no longer wished to stand for office. Honiton provided the replacement for these posts with Mr. W. Webb (chairman), Mr. D. Travers (ringing master) and Mr. R. Woodward (secretary). Mr. M. Hollister (Feniton) is deputy ringing master.

THE DINNER

The New Dolphin Hotel at Honiton was the setting for the Annual Dinner on Feb. 22. The president of the Guild of Devonshire Ringers, Brian Pidgeon, chaired the proceedings, which 106 people attended. These included the Guild ringing master (Mr. C. Sanguin) and six incumbents of churches in the East Devon Branch. Speakers drew particular attention to the close relationship that existed between ringers and the local clergy, and appreciation was expressed for the help and encouragement received. Mr. Webb, branch chairman, was regrettably in hospital, and good wishes were expressed for his speedy recovery. Much reference was also made to the highlight of the year in the branch—the augmentation of Luppitt to a ring of eight.

The event was successfully completed by an entertainment provided by the versatile Arscotts from Taunton. The evening passed rapidly with handbells, singing, games for the energetic and dancing for the slightly more demure.

R. C. W.

CHURCH OF THE ADVENT APPEAL

As most of you will know, ringing at the Church of the Advent in Boston, Mass., was begun again two years ago after a silence of about 50 years. Ours is the only ringable peal of bells in the city of Boston, and we now have a dedicated band of about a dozen ringers, most of whom learned to ring on these bells. However, as those of you who have already rung here know, the bells are quite difficult to ring at times. They are heavy and sometimes cantankerous, and although a single quarter has been rung in the last 12 months, it has proved impossible to ring a full peal.

The work needed to be done includes: new cast-iron headstocks with self-aligning ball bearings in the original frame, with new fittings. This would cost approx. 11,000 dollars.

The clergy and congregation are enthusiastic about the ringing, and slowly we are building a favourable image of campanology in the local area. However, we desperately need money to carry out the above work. If every member of the Guild sent just a few dollars the sum total would be substantial. Please donate something... it doesn't have to be a large amount; small contributions mount up and are deeply appreciated. Please send what you can to: Elizabeth Davies, 17 Farmcrest Avenue, Lexington, Mass. 02173.

Your donation will be acknowledged and suitably recorded.—From The Clapper.

Bath and Wells D.A.**AT THE CHAIRMAN'S TOWER**

On March 1, the Ilchester Branch held their March meeting at Holy Trinity, Long Sutton, the home tower of the Branch Chairman (Rev. Chris. J. B. Marshall) who conducted the service. Mrs. Nina Cox was organist and Paul Field read the lesson. The collection was taken by the Ringing Master (Gordon Rendell) and this was given to the Church funds.

New members elected were Jessica H. Hiscock (Hardington Mandeville), David Chapman (West Coker), John Highmore (Yeovil), John Pidgeon (South Petherton), M. Eastment, C.P.O. Ben Fisher and V. Owen-Roberts (Honorary) (Long Sutton). Five members elected at the December meeting were Linda Gardner, Colin Gardner, Dennis Bown, Rex Male and Anthony Crumb—all from Huish Episcopi.

Under 'Milestones' the meeting learned with regret of the passing of Mr. A. G. H. Luffman (Hardington Mandeville). Three ringers at Preston Plucknett were congratulated on scoring their first quarter, viz.: Jane Hammonds, Mark Amor and Trudie Dover.

Branch and social finances were reported by the Hon. Sec./Treasurer (Mrs. Margaret Legget) and were found to be satisfactory, whilst the Diocesan Representative (Gordon Rendell) reported on the findings of the Association Committee Meeting and also the skittles evening.

The Ilchester Branch is grateful to the Vicar, Mr. Albert Lewis (Tower Captain), Mrs. Cox (Organist) and the Long Sutton ringers for their co-operation. M. M. L.

Officers of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers

President: John Freeman.

Vice-President: Edwin A. Barnett.

Hon. Secretary: Cyril A. Wratten, 19 Ravensgate Road, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham.

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