

Letters

Early eights of Kent

I was very interested to read David Cawley's excellent and lucid article entitled "A Lost London Lament" - it brought back many memories of ringing in some of the lesser frequented London towers during the early 1960s together with the ubiquitous Paul Cattermole and I particularly remember ringing at St. Barnabas, Pimlico after carrying out a lot of work in the tower. What gave as much concern as the state of the bells was how an exclusive residential neighbourhood would react to a sudden intrusion on their tranquility after a long silence; happily, no complaints of any substance were received and I gather that the tower is still perpendicular (or is it Victorian gothic?).

However, the purpose of writing is to question David's interesting disclosure under his description of St. Nicholas, Deptford that these were the second ring of eight in Kent, being preceded by Wye. The earliest date I have for Wye bells as an eight is 1734 at which time they were augmented by Richard Phelps, although the original back six were an early ring by Robert Mot 1593/94.

By 1740 the following towers in Kent were known to have eight bells:

- 1701 Nicholas, Deptford (by S. Newton & I. Hadley)
tenor 20-1-14
- 1702 Holy Trinity, Dartford (by Philip Wightman)
tenor 18-1-12
- 1720 St. Mary, Wingham (by Richard Phelps)
tenor 19-1-00 approx.
- 1724 St. Mary, Dover (by Samuel Knight)
tenor 16-3-26
- 1726 Canterbury Cathedral (by Samuel Knight)
tenor 30-0-00
- 1731 St. Alphege, Greenwich (by Richard Phelps)
(augmented to ten in 1734) tenor 23-0-00 approx.
- 1734 SS. Gregory & Martin, Wye (by Phelps and Mot)
tenor reputed 25-0-00
- 1736 St. George, Gravesend (by Richard Phelps)
tenor 17-3-00 approx.

Also Maidstone parish church had eight bells by this period (founders and dates unknown) with a tenor reputed in excess of 30 cwt.

Of these bells only Wingham and most of those at Dover remain; the remainder have been recast or, as in the case of Deptford, scrapped.

I was recently given an early history of New Romney church which quotes the following from a document preserved in the corporation archives:

"The rule and custome of using the bells of ye chirches of Saynt Martin and Saynt Nicolas at Romney accordynge to ye most anyent manner for tyme out of mynde of men.

For service on Sondayes, holidiaes and festivals, a pele one ye smaule bel at viii of th clocke afor noon; raise hur upp, ryngge hur a shorte tyme and faule her downe agayne.

For chiche praier tol the bigge bel V min, chyme 1-2-3, then 2-3-4, then 3-4-5, each V min, then tol ye bigg on tenne M.

Deathe knelle; raise greate bel; ryngge hit (? set) and faule hit after a space; strik it at ye ende 3 tymes 3 for mankynde, and 3 tymes 2 for a womane, doe lykewyse on leetle bels for lads and lasses. For joie raise alle uppe, ryngge alle and faule at ye endynge."

At this time St. Martin's and St. Nicholas' (the present parish church both possessed five bells. St. Martin's church was pulled down in 1549 so the document obviously predates this

and we have here what I believe to be clear evidence that full-circle ringing was being practised from an early date in this part of Kent and also that stays or similar devices were in use to allow the bells to be "set". I am hoping to trace the original document to ascertain whether there is a clue to its actual date.

Sadly all ringing on this fine anticlockwise octave at the Norman tower of St. Nicholas has had to cease until cracks in the fabric have been investigated and remedied; the whole church suffered badly in the October 1987 hurricane when a large proportion of the roof and part of the tower SW pinnacle were demolished.

Lydd, Kent.

N. J. DAVIES.

Octave bells - well before Canon Simpson

From the letter of "Henry Simondson", p. 204, one might think that the history of the now standard octave bell with the prime and hum notes an octave apart, and tuned to a minor third and perfect fifth, started with Taylors and Canon Simpson a century ago. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. It is sometimes stated that this five-tone tuning originated with the Dutch founders Francois and Peter Hemony in the middle of the 17th century. The Hemonys may well have been the first to tune bells accurately, i.e. to adjust their notes by turning them on a turret lathe; but they did not invent the minor thirds octave bell (in Dutch: kleine tertsklokk). The beautiful "Maria Gloriosa" in Erfurt Cathedral is an almost perfect minor thirds octave bell of 11½ tons cast by Geert van Wou of Kampen, Netherlands, in 1497 (see R.W., 1st May, 1981).

Bells of this type antedate even Geert van Wou by another three centuries! At St. Martin am Ybbsfeld, near Melk in Austria, is a bell of this type 96 cm. in diameter and weighing about 600 Kg., which was cast in 1200 by an unknown founder*. It bears the inscription "O REX GLORIE VENI CV PACE - MCC", and is possibly the oldest octave bell still extant. Its notes are given as: a_0+2 , a_1+2 , c_2+5 , c_3 , a_3+3 ; where the figures denote the deviation from the whole note in sixteenths of a semitone and $a_1=440$ Hz.

This type of bell is considered to represent the highest stage in the development of bells in the West; and from the 13th century onwards, many other examples are to be found.

* A. Weissenböck und J. Pfundner: "Tönendes Erz", Hermann Böhlhaus - Graz, 1961.

Jülich, W. Germany

ALAN BLAIR

Four-letter words

The Ringing World Quarter Peal Analysis for 1988 records that I rang 205 quarter peals. My personal records show that I rang 70% of these quarters in Somerset (or Som.). I did not ring any in Avon or (more recently another four-letter word) Soms. The only regional four-letter word in the Bath and Wells Diocese is Bath (Somerset).

But what about the record-keepers? I hear you cry. I suggest they categorise my quarter peals (should they want to) in the same way as they categorise those rung in Rutland (or do I mean Ruts.?).

Mark, Somerset

ROSEMARY HIGMAN

"Rung" not "scored"

There are many good reasons for ringing peals and for ringing quarters, but may I suggest that these do not include personal prestige, or competing with others for the patronising good opinion of self-appointed arbiters. Am I alone in thinking that if no better reason can be found for a quarter peal it had better not be rung?

Let us be grateful for ringers like A.W. and H.P. (p. 208) who ring quarters which are not sent up to the R.W. These people do something towards putting the figure-jugglers in their place.

The way things are going nowadays I expect there will be some readers whose reaction to this letter will be: "Who does he think he is - how many peals has he rung?" So I will answer them. I am an ordinary ringer and I do not know how many peals and quarters I have rung, but those that I have rung were rung - not "scored".

JOHN CLARK-MAXWELL
Swallowfield, Reading

"Opportunity Knocks" for Ecclesfield

The 13-strong, all female team from the present 4th Year at Ecclesfield School, near Sheffield (the school with a peal board in its Main Entrance and two World Records for marathon tune-ringing) will be appearing on BBC TV's "Opportunity Knocks" scheduled for transmission on Saturday April 22nd at 7.15pm.

The 62 bells, a superb 1971 casting from the Whitechapel Foundry, are rung in the off-the-table style, mainly on the "upstroke". The final tune has not been chosen yet but four have been prepared, each of which has to be learnt off by heart (i.e. THERE WILL BE NO CUE CARD!). Their tunes are shortened versions of "The Dambusters' March" (E. Coates); "Sobras las Olas" (J. Rosas); "Colonel Bogey" (K. Alford) and "Dawn of Spring" (J. Near). The team has already been to two auditions and their performance has been warmly received by the producer of the programme even though, in order to comply with his TV-orientated views, the format of the team has had to be altered but not the style of ringing.

The ringers normally ring in the form of a rectangle, less one side and follow a form of number/lettering notation that generally mystifies members of the audiences but which is quite easy to learn (at least half the team can't fluently, if at all, read musical notation). Ringers wishing to view the programme will have to see how we hope our act will be presented.

M. KING,

Leader of the Ecclesfield School Handbell Ringers.

Doubles variations named

The following variations have been rung to quarter peals and named:

At St. Paul, Burton-on-Trent

On March 1st, 1989. **Cymric Doubles** (Reverse Wollaton, Wallflower Bobs, Earls Court Singles).

At Church Gresley, Derbyshire

On March 5th, 1989. **Langwathby Doubles** (New Wollaton, Grandsire Bobs, Earls Court Singles).

On March 7th, 1989. **Athenic Doubles** (Reverse Wollaton, Antelope Bobs, Earls Court Singles).

(First extents rung February 28th, 1989).

Burton-on-Trent.

DEREK P. JONES.