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OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS



GREENWICH PARISH CHURCH

St. Alfege with St. Peter, Greenwich

The present Church, dedicated to Alfege, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was put to death in a hall at Greenwich, by the Danes, on 19th April, 1012, is the third to be built on the site. The first Church was probably built soon after the martyrdom and the second was probably a rebuilding dating from the late 13th century. Of that Church little is known; it reached the height of its splendour in the Tudor period when the Court spent much of its time in Greenwich. John Moreton, later Cardinal and Chancellor of England was Vicar from 1444 to 1454. In 1552 an organ was installed and the console of that instrument is still to be seen in the south-west corner of the present Church. It was in use until 1910 and may have been used by Thomas Tallis, "The father of English Church Music".

In November 1710, as the result of a severe storm, the roof of the Church collapsed, but the tower, rebuilt in 1617 remained undamaged. The parishioners petitioned Queen Anne, their Patron, for a new church and as a result of the Act of 1711, under which 50 new churches were to be built, financed by continuation of the Coal Tax this was one of the few to be built. The Church, erected between 1712 and 1714, was designed by Nicholas Hawkesmoor, a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren, and included a tower, but due to shortage of money it was reluctantly agreed to recase the old tower to the design of John Jones of Greenwich. The tower was completed in 1730.

In the night of 19th March 1941 the Church was burnt out by incendiaries, but the walls and tower remained undamaged. The costly restoration was entrusted to Professor Richardson, R.A. (later Sir Albert Richardson, P.R.A.) who determined to follow the principles laid down by Hawkesmoor. Remaining fragments were collected and full scale drawings made. New and

excellent work was blended with the old and restoration was completed in 1953.

ATTRIBUTED TO GRINLING GIBBONS

Much of the original carving was attributed to Grinling Gibbons. The main pilasters at the east end and the apse were originally painted by Sir James Thornhill, who also did the Painted Hill at the Naval College, and by careful study of the remains of his work, Mr. Glyn Jones was able to restore the original painting. The wrought iron work of the altar and gallery rails are original, the designs being attributed to Jean Tijou. The only window to survive the 1941 fire, is a small 19th century creation representing Cardinal Moreton. All the other stained glass windows are the creation of Mr. Francis Spear. The main theme of the east window is the glory of the Risen Christ. The six side aisle windows reproduce scenes formerly depicted in the main windows of the gallery, St. Alfege, the marriage of Princess Mary, sister of Henry VIII, to Thomas Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, in 1514, the future Henry VIII baptised in 1491 and General Gordon of Khartoum baptised 1833. The other two show General James Wolfe and Thomas Tallis who were both buried in the Church. The Benefaction Boards, which survived the fire of 1941 sum up the post-Reformation history of the Church.

The first entry on the south board records the establishment of Queen Elizabeth's College by William Lambard; this was the first public charity to be founded in England after the Reformation. Other entries record the foundation of Trinity Hospital, the Roan School and the Royal Hospital which was founded by King William III and Queen Mary in 1694. The vestibule contains memorial tablets of the Angerstein family and of two Astronomers Royal: Sir George Biddell Airy and Sir Frank Dyson. John Julius Angerstein was a notable connoisseur of pictures and his collection became the nucleus of the National Gallery when it was formed in 1824. Sir Frank Dyson, Astronomer Royal from 1910 to 1933, conceived the "six-pip" Greenwich Time Signal, first broadcast in 1924.

The restoration was completed in 1953 and the Church was rededicated by the Bishop of Southwark on 18th April, the eve of St. Alfege Day.

THE BELLS

Whitechapel foundry records show that there were four bells in 1552, the tenor having a diameter of 43" (about 13cwt.). There is little further information about the bells until the Church was rebuilt.

The tower now contains a ring of ten bells. Eight bells were originally cast in 1731 and two more in 1734. All except the tenor, which had been recast in 1824 by Thomas Mears II, were (Continued overleaf)

GREENWICH—continued

recast and rehung by the Whitechapel Foundry in 1954. The original 4th bell bore an inscription: "The Gift of our gracious Queen Caroline, 1731, R. Phelps fecit". An early "Peal Board" in the ringing chamber, dated 1st December 1732, records the names of the eight ringers who "in the Eighth Month of their Practice" completed a peal of 5040 Grandsire Triples in 3 hours and 9 minutes.



The following items have been extracted from Churchwardens' accounts 1630-1640:

1630	Pd. to ringers at the princes brth	5 0
	Pd. to ringers at Princes Charles Christening	2 6
	Pd. to ringers at the King and Queens coming to town in March on Coronation day	10 0
1631	Nov. Pd. --- when the Kings Majesty came to hunt	2 6
	Nov 4th. Pd. --- on the Lady Maries birthday	5 0
	Pd. to ringers on Gunpowder Treason day (expected)	5 0

1634/5 To the Almers men to release our church when the door was sealed up 5 0
(In the accounts of St. Margaret's, Westminster, 1540, there is an entry which perhaps explains this: "Pd. to the Kings Almoner when he would have sealed up the church door at the departure of the King's Majesty because the bells were not rung".

On Saturday, 27th October we have invited former ringers, parishioners, friends and the Lewisham District of the Kent County Association, to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Rededication of the bells. F.C.

Officers of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers
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Obituary

BERNARD C. CASTLE

The name of Bernard Castle is to be seen on peal boards in several of the Sonning Deanery (Oxford D.G.) towers. The casual observer may conclude, if he thinks anything at all, that he was a man of some standing in the area; he would be right, but for the wrong reason. True, Bernard was a fine ringer, but the peal boards show only a mere fraction of what he did to earn the respect and love of all those who knew him. His work for the Branch was tremendous, yet he was reticent in claiming any credit. If, as Branch secretary, he had to record an action in which he was involved, he would write in the third person. Many of the peal boards on which his name appears were actually made by himself, but he would consider that to be part of what he was prepared to put into his work and therefore not worth any special mention.

To begin at the beginning . . . He was born in Sutton Coldfield in 1910 and in 1932 moved to Winnersh, near Reading, by way of Winchester. He was a cabinet-maker and worked for the furniture department of Healas in Reading, when furniture was made of real wood. During the war he was called to work for Miles Aircraft, when aircraft, too, were made of wood and real craftsmen were needed to repair them.

He started his ringing career at Hurst, under the tuition of C. W. Mortimer, and rang the treble in his first peal, Minor in five methods, at Finchampstead in October 1935. His last peal was of Grandsire Triples by the local band at Hurst, all trained by himself, on 18 November 1972 for the silver wedding of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh. Of his 72 peals, almost all in the local area, the one of which he was most proud was Grandsire Triples on 8 April 1967 at Hurst. This, which he conducted, was the first peal on eight by an entirely local band.

He was elected Branch Secretary of the Sonning Deanery in 1942, an office he held for 29 years. After the war he organised Branch outings as well as for his home tower. But if one of his achievements must be selected for special mention it has to be the 6-bell striking competition which he devised in 1960. The first one was held at Sandhurst in 1961. The idea was later taken up by the Oxford D.G.



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He gave up his office as secretary in 1971 and in 1975 retired through failing health to the Isle of Wight. In 1976 he and his wife (Vi) were elected as life-members in recognition of all they had done for the Branch, and we might say **they honoured us** by accepting.

Bernard died on 30 August, 1979; in our sense of loss we may feel that we shall not see his like again, but he has shown us how things should be done and it is our duty to keep trying. W. H. M.

(L. to r.) John Froome, Bill Mortimer, Ernest Allum, Bernard Castle, Fred Hicks.

