



St Michael's, Hernhill – North side.

A village ring restored

The village of Hernhill lies some six miles west of Canterbury in East Kent; in typical English village style St Michael's Church is situated on one side of the Green and the pub is directly opposite. There are eight bells in the church and over the past 30 years they became progressively more difficult to ring. The noise from the fittings at times seemed to be louder than the sound of the bells and it was regularly agreed that 'something ought to be done' but apart from some sucking of teeth, nothing happened.

At last an inspection by Whitechapel was sought in 1990 and, as was feared, an extensive and expensive programme of rectification was recommended. At the time, this was considered to be beyond the resources of the Parish, so all that happened was the imposition of rigid restrictions on the frequency of ringing and the length of time that the bells could be rung at any one time.

This unsatisfactory state of affairs lasted until in late 1994 a small group of enthusiasts sought the authority of the PCC to launch an appeal to try to raise the necessary funds for whatever work needed to be done, or at least to put the bells into some semblance of working order. The PCC agreed, but not without reservations on the part of some members, and a well-respected member of a long-standing village family who did not have a great deal of regular connection with the Church and who didn't know one end of a bell rope from another was invited to chair a 'Bell Fund' committee. One of the Churchwardens with a similar knowledge of bell ringing was

persuaded to undertake the duties of secretary to the committee. Two better choices could not have been made; the drive of the one and the exceptional administration of the other made the project feasible. An assemblage of various expertise enabled a well balanced committee to be formed.

After several months of preliminaries such as getting up to date costings and deciding on what would be realistic objectives, we launched an appeal in Spring 1995 with a 'freebie' in the Village Hall to which a general invitation to all villagers was extended. This party was attended by our MP and County Councillor as well as a good turn out from the locals. We are fortunate in the Rev. Will Mowll in having a Vicar who is a skilled model maker and he made a 1:12 model of the tower with bell frame, ringing room and working bells with a full range of fittings for exhibition at the launch party. This model generated considerable publicity in the local press and also in the *Model Engineering* magazine. It was subsequently exhibited at Olympia in the Model Engineer Exhibition, and now that our project is complete it has been given to the Kent County Association of Change Ringers (KCACR) for use in their display at various public events.

Our fund-raising went very well and we were given or promised substantial grants from several trusts and organisations as well as receiving generous donations from individuals. Our Vicar again came up trumps by heading a first class 'pop group' with organist Stuart Neame and their talented

Downed St Mary

George Calvert is up to his old tricks again. After playing a co-starring role in the Midge Mather trial as the legal adviser thrown out for contempt of court, Mr Calvert now find himself centre stage in his own noise complaints row.

This time it is the Devonshire village of Down St Mary, near Crediton. Mr Calvert has taken the vicar, Tony Gardiner, to court because of excessive bellringing. The court hearing, scheduled for Thursday 6 November, will likely be adjourned to allow the Rev Gardiner to gather his own evidence.

According to local newspaper reports, Mr Calvert claims that the bells are killing him, particularly that they are causing bowel problems and a bleeding nose (remarkably no one has yet asked if he has been reading *The Nine Tailors* recently).

This is Mr Calvert's second attempt to silence the bells since moving to a cottage adjoining the Church in the early 1990s. His first complaints were so successful that the restrictions on ringing ultimately decimated one of the finest Devon call change bands. Down St Mary was also a popular venue for call change competitions, the last time being in 1994.

The latest complaint occurred because the Rev Gardiner has begun to train a new band of ringers, in order to preserve the Down St Mary ringing tradition. The Vicar is said to be really excited about the new ringers, and would like to learn to ring himself, but cannot, as he has to stand guard in the church during every practice.

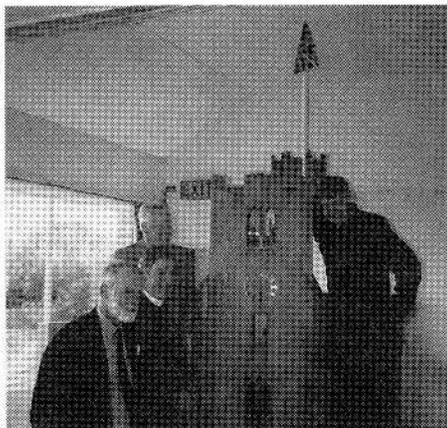
Arrest in Southampton

Derek Jackson reports that the Mike Marshall, who on 29 September prevented ringers from entering St Mary's Church for normal practice, has been arrested. He is being charged with the fatal stabbing of a 92-year-old pensioner. Mr Jackson writes: "Knowing now that he carried a knife, I am doubly pleased that, on Monday, 29 September, we did not attempt to move him away from the church door. I am also pleased that we did not enter by another door, start ringing, and leave latecomers to face his wrath."

Mr Jackson also points out that the ringers have followed exactly the EHO guidelines, and hopes that this new development might lead to some relaxation of the restrictions. In the meantime the *Southampton Echo* has been printing letters of support for the bellringers from members of the community.

families and friends for non-stop music and dancing at Mount Ephraim (the local 'Big House'); two such 'do's' augmented our funds by a four figure sum. The committee decided to apply for charitable status outside the PCC accounts and in due course this was granted. Our initial expectation was for fund-raising to take some three to four years at best, but

(continued overleaf)



The Rev Will, the Chairman (Willie McKeever) and Secretary (Brian Geliot) of the Appeal, and Archdeacon, Ven M. Till, standing by model.

HERNHILL – continued

things were going so well that at the end of 1995 we decided to put a firm order in to Whitechapel for the work to be carried out in 1997; some uncertainty in respect of VAT regulations concentrated our minds.

The date for removing the bells from the tower was set for as soon as possible after Easter 1997. It would have been sooner, but as the Chairman's daughter was getting married on Easter Saturday, the least we could do was to ensure ringing for her wedding. In mid April the KCACR 'Hit Squad' arrived and in a very short time on one Saturday morning they lifted the tenor out of its pit. This allowed a carpenter to cut new hatchways for the bells to be lowered (a clock had been installed since the bells were put in place in 1886 and this was directly below the original hatch). On the following weekend the KCACR team returned and in a very short time all the bells were sitting around the church on pallets awaiting transport to Whitechapel. A local firm provided lorry and driver as contribution to our appeal and we then sat back to await the call for the bells' return.

The work done on the bells included removal of the cast in crown staples and the complete provision of new fittings. As the five larger bells are 'listed' we were not permitted to have the canons removed so we decided to have the latest style canon-retaining headstocks fitted to whole ring rather than to just the back five. We also had constraints imposed as to the amount of tuning that could be carried out. The three smaller bells added in 1886 were not particularly tuneful and did not fit in too well with the others. The Diocesan Advisory Committee agreed with the Whitechapel proposal that there should be some limited tuning of the tenor and fourth and that the three small bells should be tuned to the rest of the ring as far as was practical. Profiles and photographs of the modified bells were required before and after the work.

While the bells were away we took the opportunity to have a sound control system fitted even though complaints about the bells are virtually non-existent; we actually had some people express concern that they might not be able to hear them if such a system was fitted.

In June the bells were ready for collection, and again we had transport provided. The driver became so interested in the job that he was disappointed to learn that the bell-hanger would not be working over the weekend so that he could come and help on his days off. The bells stood in the church over the weekend and in the Family Service on the Sunday they were featured as a theme; at one stage there were 30 or more children holding on to a bell or some part of the fittings while the Vicar was blessing bells and ringers.

It took a week for Trevor Bailey of Whitechapel, with local assistance, to hang the bells ready for a test ring by ringers from the local area. The job was completed a few days later and on 13th July a very enjoyable peal of Stedman Triples was rung with the band including representatives from the KCACR as well as local ringers.

The final celebration occurred on 5th October when the work was commemorated during the Harvest Thanksgiving, after which a party took place in the Village Hall. We were very pleased to welcome to our festivities Donald Niblett, the chairman of KCACR and John Barnes, chairman of the Central Council Bell Restoration Fund; the encouragement given by John in the early days helped to convince some of our doubters of the feasibility of such an ambitious project.

In retrospect, it has been an enjoyable experience, hard work at times but over all much easier than at first envisaged. At times we were frustrated by seemingly unnecessary delays in getting official approval for our work, but we appreciate that Diocesan authorities have a legal responsibility to ensure that rules are complied with. It is surprising how quickly the money came in and how many people and organisations were willing to help either in cash or with services. The key to our success was a good team with good leadership and administration. For too many years it was considered impossible in what is a relatively small community to raise the money necessary to have the bells put right, but we would say to any other parish in a similar situation – go for it; if you have the will and determination, you will succeed.

All constraints on ringing have now been lifted and we hope to have the occasional peal rung on the bells. Visitors to our practices on the first Tuesday of every month are very welcome and we ring for the main Service which is held on the first and third Sundays. Together with ringers from our sister parish of Boughton under Blean we are training several youngsters and hope to have enough ringers to ring in the Millennium in both towers.

Bells of St Michael's Church, HERNHILL

	Founder	Date	Weight
Treble	John Warner & Sons	1886	2-3-23
2	John Warner & Sons	1886	3-2-10
3	William Mears	1785	4-1-0
5	William Mears	1785	4-2-19
6	William Mears	1785	5-2-1
7	William Mears	1785	6-1-0
Tenor	William Mears	1785	7-1-10

The tuning of the tenor has reduced its weight so that the entry in 'Dove's' is now incorrect

Bellringers service with a difference

At St Matthias, Malvern Link, as in many parish churches, we hold a family communion once a month instead of the normal communion. Occasionally the D.C.C. ask one of the church groups to take a major part in this service, thus allowing them to present themselves to the parish. Sunday 28th September was the bellringer's day, it was also Harvest Festival.

For service ringing the tower was crowded. As well as a dozen or so of our ringers we had about the same number of German W.I. members who were visiting Malvern this particular week. Ringing finished slightly early to enable the crowd to get down the tower and take their places in church.

The first hymn was 'We plough the fields and scatter' which allowed us time to settle down before the service began. The lesson was read very well by one of our youngest ringers, Lisa Mayes aged 11. The sermon slot was taken by the Ringing Master who gave a (very) brief history of the bells, introduces the ringers as a group of church workers and explained, with the help of some handbell ringing, why we augmented to ten bells. The intercessions were taken by Gerry and Pauline Edwards, our two Methodist members. All the ringers took part in The Peace. Three members of the band took up the offertory and four the collection. Two ringers' hymns were used during the service. The last hymn of all 'Come Ye Thankful People Come' began with the handbell ringers, Rosemary Davis, Julie Doogan (both 14) and Ruth Morris (slightly older) ringing the first verse solo then being joined by the organ choir and congregation.

The whole thing was deemed a great success by most of the participants and all the parish.

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