

Centenary celebrations at St. Leonard's, Hythe

History of the ringers

To many the title of this article will raise the question "What centenary? - there was a strong band at Hythe in the 1800s under John Friend". That is correct; there was a strong band and their history has been discussed in *The Ringing World* before. However, when John Friend died in 1881 ringing in Hythe went into decline. Fortunately the revival came fairly soon and in late 1891 the seven and tenor were recast. The first meeting of the Hythe Bellringers Society was on 26th January 1892, and that is the centenary we are celebrating.

Famous ringers

During the last century there have probably not been any members as famous as John Friend, but there has been a string of long-serving men who have held the band together and seen it progress. Some of these may not be remembered by any of the current ringers, for example Sam Gower and William Fright. Sam was the sexton; he rang the curfew every evening until the start of the last war and chimed three bells for all services. He taught many ringers at Hythe and at surrounding towers. "Old Mr. Fright", as he was always known, was a grand old man with a tremendous white beard. His name is on many local peal boards as W Fright Jnr; he rang his last peal at the age of 88. W. J. Prebble is remembered by one or two of the present band: he was a ringer for 74 years. Two ringers known to most of the present band were Dick Birch and Stan Mowl. They learnt to ring in 1918 with a large number of youths. They were to see the band through many ups and downs. The early 1970s were a particularly low period; but these two, both in their 70s, continued to teach, and then in 1975 ready-made ringers moved into the parish and the band started an upward path which is continuing. Stan lived to hear the first peal by an all-local band in 1984.

Another ringer to mention, for his notoriety, is F. Smith. He was expelled from the band in 1896 for "objectionable language and general misconduct". We can only speculate as to what he actually said and did!

Weddings

Many things have changed during the last 100 years; in 1912 the band rang for two or three weddings at £2 2s. (£2.10) each. We are now ringing for about 25 weddings per year - who says that fewer people are getting married? The charge for a wedding was unchanged until 1966 when it was increased to £3 3s. (£3.15); it has increased more steeply since then.

There was perhaps an omen in 1927 when the Ashford District AGM was held at Hythe and the Secretary of the Central Council attended (Alexander Young). That same year



St. Leonard's, Hythe, Kent.

one of the Hythe band was married - Alf Wratten, father of the present secretary of the Central Council. Cyril learnt to ring at Hythe, so perhaps we can claim someone in this century to match John Friend!

Traditions

Many things have changed over the years, but on the other hand many traditions have been developed. Hythe outings are not like other ringers' outings; at most we ring at two or three towers; sometimes we do not ring at all. They are family affairs when we visit something like the Bluebell Railway, or recently we visited Bruges (Belgium) on a day trip. This was not the first occasion the band have taken advantage of the proximity of the English Channel; in 1897 the outing was to Boulogne on the paddle-steamer from Folkestone.

There are other traditions, concerning the ringing, which may interest others. On Easter Morning we tell out the good news of the Resurrection as early as possible. These days it is about 7.30 a.m. but in the 1920s they rang at 5 a.m.

We have a tradition (which also used to exist at Willesborough) of muffling the bells at handstroke for a funeral. The reason for this is the first stroke is in sadness for a loved one laid to rest, the second stroke is rung out with joy for a soul ascended to heaven.

At new year the oldest ringer rings out the old year on the tenor and at midnight the rest

of the bells join in rounds, with the youngest ringer on the treble.

A more recent tradition is to enter the Venetian Fete, a carnival held on the Royal Military Canal. This has led to a number of prizes, a previous front page article in *The Ringing World*, and in 1987 we were part of a documentary programme produced by the BBC.

Matters of sex

A tradition which has been broken is the male dominance of the band. In 1892 the band was entirely male. In 1992 we cannot quite raise an all-male band, but our ladies recently won the District call-change striking competition. The band is now very much a family affair; in 1980 three married couples rang a quarter peal to celebrate the births of their children the previous year. In 1991 three of those four children have started to learn to ring. The future looks bright for the second century of the Hythe Bellringers Society.

History of the bells

Prior to 1802 there were six bells cast by John Waylett, an itinerant founder; the tenor was recast by Robert Pack at Whitechapel in 1752.

In 1802 Thomas Mears cast eight (tenor 20 cwt approx.).

In 1861 George Mears added two trebles to make 10 to the order of Mr. G. Stockholm who had been given the job at Hythe although he was only a handbell founder. It is even said that Mr. Stockholm chiselled off the

(Continued overleaf)

HYTHe - continued

Whitechapel Foundry mark to disguise the fact that the bells were not his work. These bells were not accepted by Hythe as they were too light, being only 3 and 3.5 cwt instead of around 5 cwt.

In 1891 the two trebles were taken back and the tenor and 7th recast (tenor 19-3-23).

In 1914 the 6th of the 1802 ring was recast (11-1-21, new 9-2-22).

In 1928 numbers 1-5 were recast and the whole ring rehung in a new teak frame with metal headstocks and all new fittings.

In 1934 the 7th cracked while ringing for a wedding and was duly recast (13-3-12, new 13-1-24).

In 1991 the tenor was found to be cracked in the crown.

Details of the existing bells are as follows:

	Dia.	Weight	Note	Date	Founder
Tenor	48.5"	19-0-9	E'	1891	
7th	43.5"	13-1-24	F	1934	
6th	39.75"	9-1-21	G	1914	
5th	37.5"	8-3-8	A'	1928	Mears & Stainbank
4th	34.5"	7-2-19	B'	1928	
3rd	32.5"	6-3-9	C	1928	Whitechapel
2nd	30.5"	6-1-2	D	1928	
Treble	29.5"	5-1-23	E'	1928	

Tuning is to the old concert pitch which is about half a note sharp of the present standard international.

The ringers today

The band is to celebrate the centenary of the "Hythe Bellringers Society" with a dinner and no doubt other activities as the year progresses. Currently the band is very active and we can look back at the past year's activities with some satisfaction, the most recent being a quarter peal organised at one hour's notice to mark the release of Terry Waite.

Ringing practices currently range from rounds to Surprise. The bells are rung twice on Sundays with quarter peals attempted for special services. Various competitions have been entered through the year with some good results. A darts challenge against our rivals Folkestone was a close result, the final score being 6-5. This was also the captain's 40th birthday. Less success was achieved here in trying to blow out 40 self-igniting candles!

Striking contest results included second place in the change-ringing competition and first place for the ladies' team in the call-change competition. Our entry in the Hythe

An introduction to ringing

The first thing to remember is that bell ringing is easy. I suppose you could say that Kelso and Westmorland are a bit tricky compared with slumping on the couch watching TV soaps and drinking lager but next time you are in the library have a look in the maths section at a bit of partial integration or thumb through a physics text book and I am sure that you will conclude that, taking the broad perspective, that ringing is easy.

Of course there are those that like to make an art or a science out of ringing. They do this so that they can sell books on the subject and make a bit of an earner. Some like to run courses on what they would like you to think were difficult technical matters. The not-so-

Venetian Fete (Cinderella) gained second place in its class. Some of the athletic types took part in a fancy-dress 5-mile run for charity and came first. Quite a sight this, with a monk who couldn't get into the habit and Superman still wearing his under-pants on the outside!

Unfortunately back in the belfry (I really must stop watching silly TV programmes!) all is not well. Earlier in the year a crack was found in the crown of the tenor bell, and recently a second crack has been discovered radiating in the opposite direction. The tone is unaffected at the moment, but we do not know how much longer the bell will last. It has been decided, with the approval of the P.C.C., to launch a repair and augmentation fund. The first priority is to recast the tenor. The next item will be the routine replacement of the ropes. Finally we intend to augment the ring back to ten, as it was in 1861. The total cost of the project is estimated at £25,000. We are hoping to considerably reduce this by doing as much of the work ourselves as possible. We should also be very pleased to hear of any surplus bellframe and bell fittings suitable for the two new trebles of around 5 cwt. Any surplus bells or bell metal would also be most useful.

The address for anyone wishing to contribute to the fund or requiring any further information is: Brian G. Butcher, Captain of St. Leonard's Ringers, Fairwinds, 87 Shepherds Walk, Hythe, Kent CT21 6QA. Tel. 0303-269657.

Any substantial donation will be recorded on a suitable plaque. Anyone making a donation of £5,000 may have one of the three bells to be cast suitably inscribed. Thank you.

hidden agenda here is the desire for a weekend away and a few pints with old mates; false course heads and method extension are artificially created topics to give a pre-text and a context for drunkenness and debauchery.

What I intend to do in this series of articles is to cut through these man made layers and reduce ringing to the basics.

The first thing is you grab hold of the woolly bit and give it a good hard pull and hang on to the end bit. The bell will go dong. Pull the end bit and catch the woolly bit and the bell will go dong again. Easy. If you have a look at the cockpit of a jumbo jet you will see that the control mechanisms are just a bit more sophisticated and complex. It might take a while to learn how to fly one of these hunks of technological miracle. The traditional bell has a simple control mechanism - a bit of rope. Pull the rope and the bell rings. Easy.

Next is ringing rounds. You pull your bit of rope just after the ringer in front of you has pulled their bit of rope. If you think this is difficult then go for a drive round the M25, it will bring a renewed perspective.

Bob Doubles comes next. If you have trouble remembering the blue line for this method do not venture into town without a map as I fear you may not be able to remember your way home without it. If you can find your way round Sainsbury's on a Friday night you can find your way through Bob Doubles. Once you can ring this you can ring anything. Just learn the line. put your head under and ring fast.

Next week, in the second and final part of this series, we shall go from a few tips on Surprise Royal to composing and ringing Spiced Max. Easy.

A.J.B.



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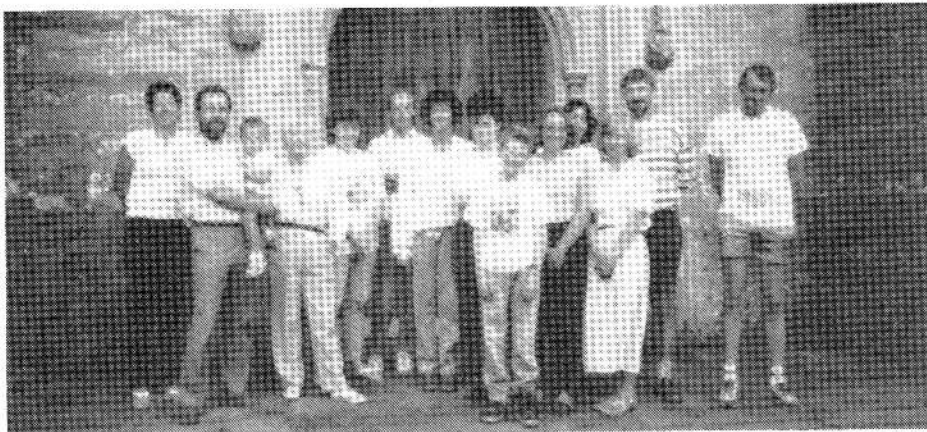
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Left to right: Christine Butcher, Richard Birch with Mathew, Marjorie Webb, Elizabeth Legg, Arthur King, Bridget Peacock, Margaret Ross, Daniel Birch, Wendy King, Jane Wallace, Sylvia Birch, Nigel Spencer, Brian Butcher. (Not present: Martin Spencer, Alan Butcher, Sarah Butcher, Catherine Spencer; also our secretary Elsie Cox, who is not able to ring at present due to ill-health.)