

*The Weekly Journal for  
Church Bell Ringers since 1911*

No. 4680 January 5, 2001 Price £1.35  
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## Another new six for Kent – déjà vu at Otford



*St Bartholomew's Church, Otford – now has a 3 cwt ring of six.*

*Full story on page 4*

They often say that lightning doesn't strike twice, but any observant readers who read the account of the Chevening installation early in 2000 might well wonder whether our esteemed Editor had not reprinted an article by mistake. Chevening was unusual in that there were two chiming bells in the tower and they were augmented to six by the generosity of a parishioner. Otford is unusual in that there were two chiming bells in the tower and they were augmented to six by the generosity of a parishioner. To cap it all they are both in the Tonbridge District of the KCACR and they are only about three miles apart.

#### New readers begin here:

Otford is a beautiful village in the Darenth Valley, just outside the M25 and a mile and a bit north of Sevenoaks. The relatively squat tower of St Bartholomew's church overlooks the duck pond which forms the roundabout in the centre of the village. There have been a couple of resident ducks on this roundabout for years and, although they don't seem to breed, the locals manage to keep two ducks on the block all the time. In addition to the ducks, Otford, which is a fairly small village, also plays host to four pubs, so the only thing really wanting was a ring of bells.

Before the new installation there were two bells in the tower, the lighter one being a Mears & Stainbank job of 1887 and the other a Whitechapel recast in 1974 of an earlier John/Christopher Hodson bell of 1674. The two were rehung in 1975 and, although they both had wheels, they were not hung for full-circle ringing (Chevening's bells were dated 1715 and 1938, having been rehung in 1938).

In 1998 a lady in the village died and her husband, Ken Dickinson, had a memorial stone erected in her memory. Ken had really wanted something more ambitious, but couldn't think what form it should take. One day he happened to be doing the weekly shop in Tesco and the girl on the checkout remarked that she was nearly at the end of her shift and would soon be dashing off to ringing practice. Light suddenly dawned – what he wanted was a decent ring of bells for the church. This would be a fitting memorial to Joan, his late wife. Much later on, after the dedication, Ken was asked whether he had had any idea of what he was embarking upon. He replied that he imagined that the bells would be hung on some sort of beam and rung by pulling on bits of string.

So, obtaining the bells was the easy bit. We now had to find some ringers. After a preliminary meeting of some 20 or so potential ringers a demonstration run took place at Brasted on 17th February. This enabled the would-be recruits to see how bells are rung, give them a chance to see a (tied of course) bell in action, and eventually have a try on the backstroke for themselves. Teaching began for real during the week commencing 25th February and there were soon three separate groups under instruction at Chevening and Hadlow. Open practices moved to Shoreham in early June and the two old bells were removed from the tower by the Kent BRF gang on 10th June.

The first two of Otford's new six were cast on Friday 14th July, and the others followed during the next week. Major strengthening work was needed on the tower, involving the installation of a concrete ring beam, so work on the actual hanging did not start until 16th October. On 23rd October the bells were rung for the first time – and they sounded great. Whitechapel had got it right again.

#### DETAILS OF THE BELLS

bell	diameter	note	weight	founder	date
Treble	2'1 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	F	3-3-0	Whitechapel	2000
2	2'4"	E flat	4-1-0	Mears & Stainbank	1887
3	2'5 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	D flat	5-0-14	Whitechapel	2000
4	2'7"	C	5-3-0	Whitechapel	2000
5	2'10"	B flat	7-2-14	Whitechapel	2000
Tenor	3'2 $\frac{1}{8}$ "	A flat	10-1-7	Whitechapel	1975

The dedication service was on Sunday 26th November (which was the same date as Horton Kirby in the Lewisham District; wonder if any other bishop has ever dedicated two rings of bells on the same day?) The day was blessed with some great weather – windy but very bright. The church was packed; there were some 16 new ringers, including two 'returners' (one after 50 years in the wilderness), Alan Hughes from Whitechapel, several KCACR officers, and Bishop Brian (Smith) of Tonbridge to lead the service. An interesting feature was the presence of a gigantic television set up at the back of the church with a camera in the bellchamber. This meant that the congregation could not only hear but actually see the bells in action. The Bishop, in his address, introduced a new twist to the standard story of bells on the ephods of the priests in the temple. I for one had never taken on board the fact that the bells were there to indicate to the people that something was happening, since the congregation would not have been able to see the priests. He also pointed out that the ephodic decoration was ordained to be bells and pomegranates. At this juncture he produced from the recesses of his robes an actual pomegranate, remarking, "well, you've got your bells, so here is your pomegranate".

The dedication itself (which included the

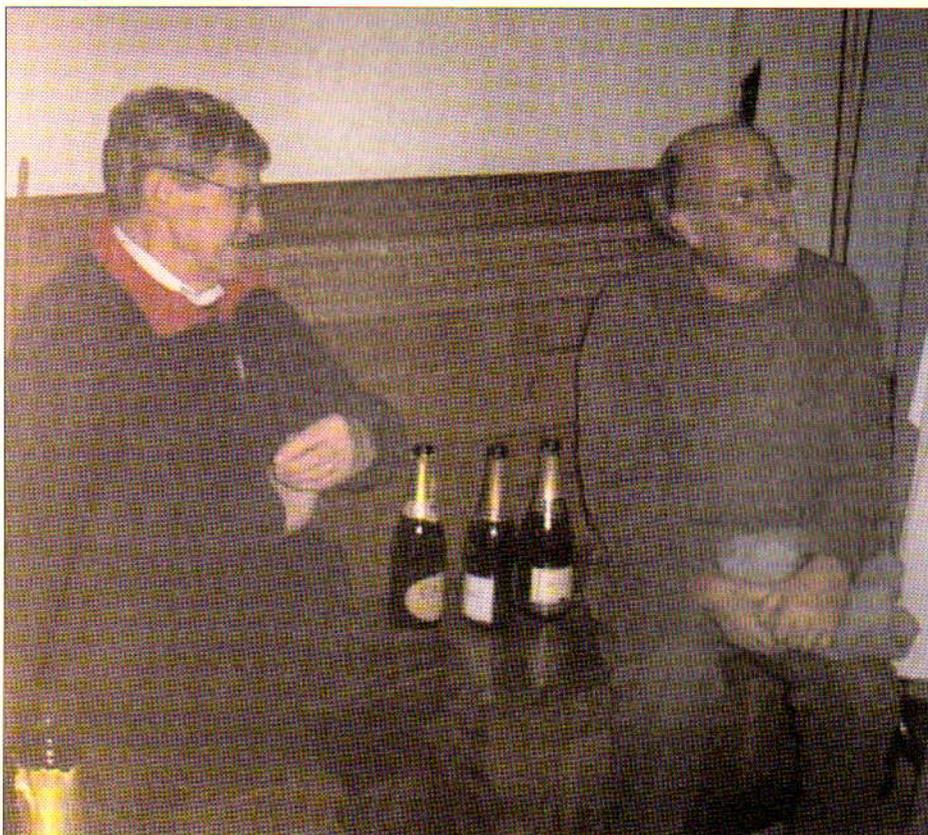
memorial to Joan Dickinson) was a really great event, involving the new ringers, the KCACR BRF and Training Officers and Whitechapel, as well as all of the church officials. After the ropes had been formally handed over to the tower captain the bells rang out, manned by four brand new ringers, one 'returner' and the newly appointed tower captain. After the dedication and communion there was open ringing for all who turned up, and a splendid lunch in the village hall.

In the evening the first quarter on the bells was rung by the new tower captain, Janet Raynor, and five other Tonbridge District people who'd been most involved in the training of the new band. It was conducted by the KCACR 'chief cook and bottler' Training Officer.

The whole event provided a wonderful culmination to an enormous amount of work by a relatively small team of people – but we can't be too complacent, there is a long way to go yet. This is just the beginning of ringing in Otford. We are truly grateful to Ken for his generosity and his continuing interest, and also to the little band of pilgrim teachers and helpers who've given so freely of their time over the months.

FRANK LEWIS

Otford, Kent. 26 Nov, 1260 PB Minor: Janet Raynor 1, Marian Pickard 2, Jen Thomas 3, Fraser Clift 4, Catherine Lewis (C) 5, Stanley Jenner 6.



The donor of the bells, Ken Dickinson, with KCACR BRF 'Supremo' enjoy a bottle or two on the try-out evening.