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OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS

The Waterloo Tower, Quex Park, Birchington-on-Sea

Just to the south of Birchington, in the Isle of Thanet, lies Quex Park, one of the last of the country houses of Thanet which is still farmed and privately owned. The name is taken from the Quekes family who were in possession of the property early in the 15th century. The land passed into the hands of the Crispe family at the beginning of the 16th century, when Agnes Quekes married John Crispe, who was High Sheriff in 1519. Their son, Sir Henry Crispe, was also High Sheriff, and an office bearer under the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports with responsibility for coastal defence; he was known as "Regulus Insulae".

In the middle of the 18th century, Quex Park became part of the Thanet Estates of the Holland family. These estates were inherited by Lord Holland's second son, Charles James Fox, from whom they were purchased by John Powell, a servant of George III and sometime Paymaster General to the Forces. The Estate consisted of land at various locations in Thanet and in 1774 had a total area of 1,340 acres, to which a further farm was added at the turn of the 19th century.

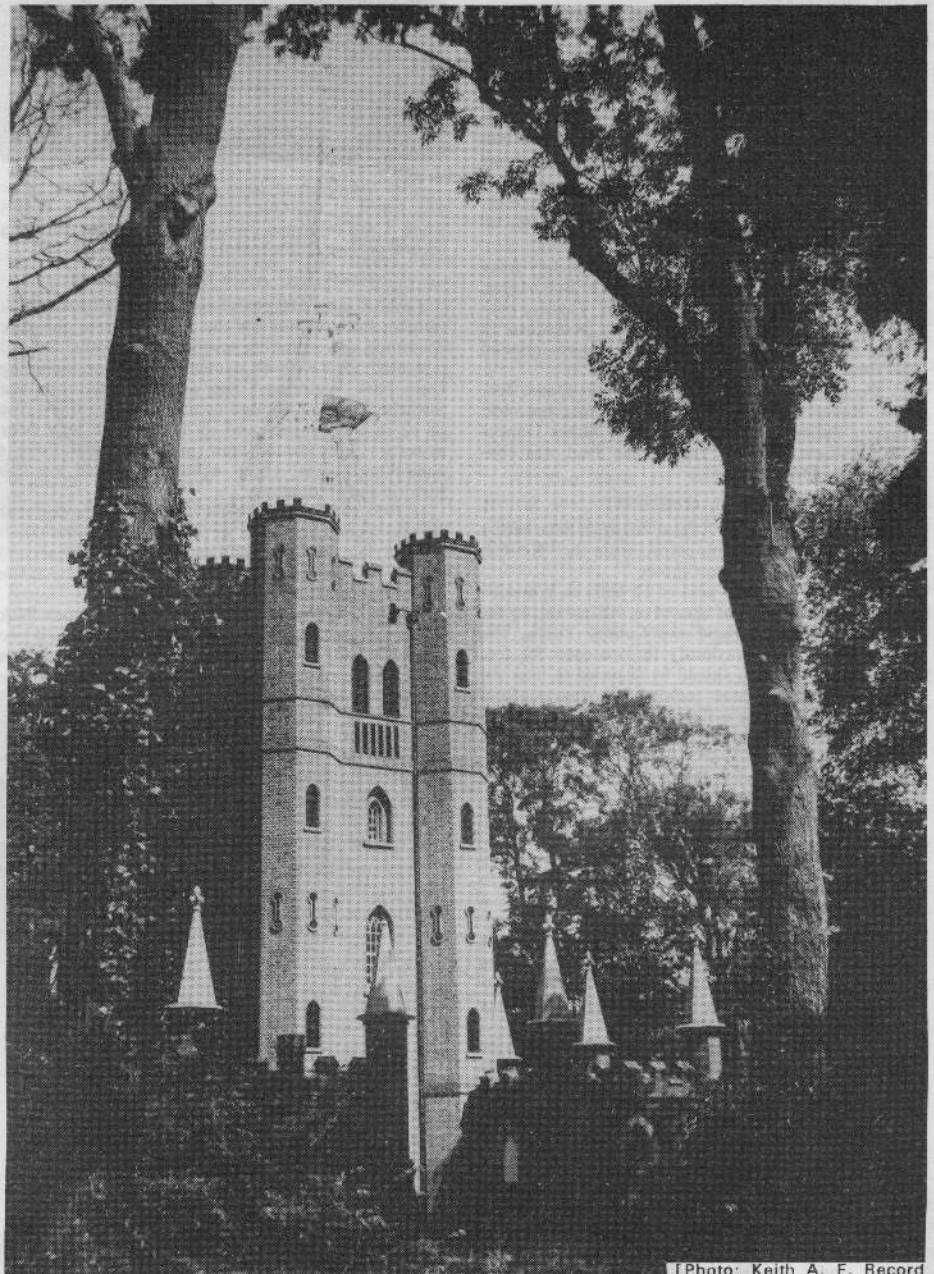
John Powell Powell was responsible for building the present Regency-style house at Quex. The building was started in 1805, but not completed until 1813; progress was very slow because of the shortage of labour during the Napoleonic Wars. The house has since been enlarged on two occasions: once in 1883 and again in 1904. Like most country houses of the period Quex was designed to be virtually self-contained and self-sufficient; it contained a brewhouse, a bakehouse, laundry, larders, storerooms, workshop, stables and a coach house.

John Powell Powell was also responsible for the construction of two less usual features for a country house; namely two towers in the grounds. One, the Sea Tower, was built in 1814 as a watch tower and signalling station to enable the Squire to contact his friends at sea (Powell Powell was, himself, a very keen yachtsman). The other tower is well known to ringers everywhere as the Waterloo Tower. This was built in 1818, not so much to commemorate the great battle of that name, but to house a ring of bells to be used entirely for John Powell's own amusement.

THANET LANDMARK

The tower was originally capped by a timber spire, but this was replaced in 1821 by the fine iron 'pylon' which now surmounts the structure and is a familiar Thanet landmark.

It is not known exactly when, or how, Powell's interest in ringing was aroused, but it is thought that he was taught to handle a bell at Fulham. We know very little of his ringing ability; he rang the tenor to a peal of Bob Triples at the Waterloo Tower fairly soon after the installation of the ring, but few other records of his prowess exist. It is known, however, that he was very interested in composition and method structure, devoting most of his work to Stedman Triples, on which he wrote a short dissertation which was published in January 1828 and "Dedicated, with



[Photo: Keith A. F. Record

permission, to the College and Cumberland Youths, and the Different Companies of Change Ringers throughout England, and Elsewhere."

At the turn of the 19th century the Church of All Saints, Birchington, had but six bells, which Powell offered to augment to 12, obviously with the ulterior motive of being able to practise 12-bell ringing without going to London (the nearest centre for such ringing).

The tower was far too small for such a ring and the offer was declined. Undaunted by this minor set-back, Powell began to make plans for a tower with a ring of 12 to be built on his parkland at Quex. By the middle of 1818 the tower was well on the way to completion and a letter was written to Thomas Mears of Whitechapel requesting estimates for casting the ring. It is

(Continued overleaf)

15 THE 1906

QUEX PARK—continued

interesting to note that, in his letter dated 11th July, Mears quoted a price of £750 for a ring of 12 with a tenor weighing one ton! A ring of 12 with a tenor of about 15 cwt. was duly ordered and they arrived from London in March, 1819. They were hung by Mr. Charles Oliver in a massive two-tier timber frame during March and April. The invoice for the work, dated 9th July, 1819, shows the cost of the work to have been £824, and included all fittings, bellropes, hanging, etc. There is a further very interesting addition to this invoice, which simply states, "College Youths £5". Could this have been John Powell Powell's subscription, collected by Thomas Mears?

It has generally been thought that the first ringing on the bells was that on the day of the official opening in August, 1819, but a perusal of the "Kentish Gazette" for that year shows otherwise. On the 15th July the following report appears:

"RINGING — We are requested to state, that the Ashford Ringers agreeably with the wish of I. P. Powell Esq. of Quex, started on Friday, June 4th, being His Majesty's birthday, for the purpose of ringing 5040 changes of Bob Major, and completed about 4700, in two hours fifty-nine minutes, when they had the misfortune to fail, but which constitutes the opening of the bells as much as if the peal had been completed."

This was not the only ringing on the bells before the official opening, as the "Gazette" for August 3rd shows:

"RINGING — On Thursday last, the Society from Biddenden, by permission, rang a peal of Bob Major, at Waterloo Tower, in Quex Park, Thanet, consisting of 5040 changes, which was performed in three hours and six minutes by the undermentioned persons, viz:—

T. Dean, the younger, Treble; Thomas Dean, sen. 2nd; Robert Honess 3rd; Thomas Dean, jun. 4th; Robert Pullen 5th; John Dean 6th; James Honess 7th; William Bourner Tenor. The Peal was conducted by James Honess"

OFFICIAL OPENING

The official opening on August 4th must have been a very grand occasion, as this extract from the "Kentish Gazette", dated 10th August shows:

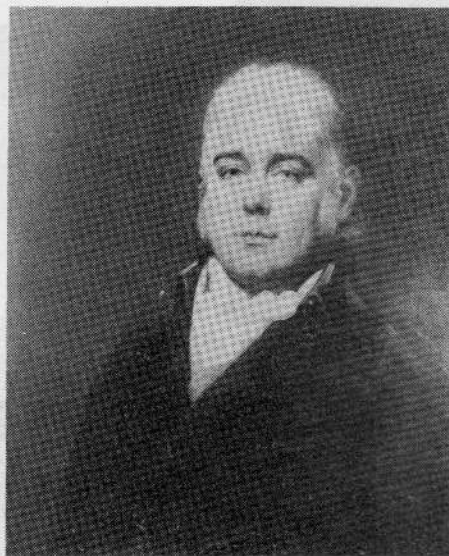
RINGING — The new peal of 12 bells in Waterloo Tower, Quex Park, was opened on 4th instant, by the Societies of Cumberland and College Youth. The Park Gates were previously thrown open for free admission of all that should be disposed to hear the performance of those celebrated ringers from London. The ringing in the morning was commenced by the Cumberlands striking off Grandsire Cinques to try the bells, and were followed by the College Youths. About 2 o'clock the Cumberlands commenced the first long peal on those twelve bells in the musical method of Grandsire Cinques, and which was heightened by being struck off in the Tittum Position. The peal, consisting of 5213 changes, was completed in Three Hours and Thirty-Nine minutes, in the usual style of London performances, to the admiration of the numerous persons.

Each band was handsomely entertained in the Park on that and the following day, a temporary building being erected for that purpose; and again were entertained in the evening at the New Inn and Acorn, in the village of Birchington.

The bands rang alternately in the tower and on hand bells various peals. The whole concluded with a neat touch of Treble Bob Royal by the Cumberlands. The performers of the long Peal were:—

George Gross Treble; James Nash 2nd; William Shipway 3rd; John Hints 4th; Peter Jones 5th; James Blacklock 6th; Thomas Freeth 7th; Thomas Ovenden 8th; James Stithbury 9th; Joseph Riley 10th; Thomas Grainger 11th; Francis Mathew Tenor. The Peal was conducted by George Gross."

After the opening of the ring a local band was formed, under the patronage of John Powell Powell and given the name "The Quex Institution of Change Ringing". Contemporary reports state that Powell had 'imported' a tutor to train the band in the art of ringing. Reading between the lines of various peal reports from the area at that time, the tutor would appear to have been William Shipway. The band seems to have been quite a strong one, ringing peals throughout East Kent, including the first peals on the bells at Sandwich and Ash.



After the death of John Powell Powell, little more was heard of the Quex Institution until the 1880's when it was reformed by some local ringers who rang several peals at Quex, mainly on the back eight.

HISTORIC AND UNIQUE RING

To date, some 160 peals have been rung on the bells, ranging from Minor on the middle six to Surprise Maximus and including several long lengths. Several new methods have been named in the tower, including Quex Park, Waterloo Tower and Birchington-on-Sea Surprise Major. Although by no means the finest ring of 12 in the country and in spite of the very poor acoustics in the ground-floor ringing chamber, there is something special about achieving a peal on this historic and unique ring.

In 1951 the front four bells were recast (it is said that the old second and third were almost the same note!) and the ring was rehung on ball bearings by Mears and Stainbank of Whitechapel. This work was done at the expense of the Powell-Cotton family.

The bells are still rung regularly by the Quex Park Society, a practice generally being held on at least two Saturday evenings a month. The tower is always available, through the generosity and hospitality of the present owners, for visiting bands and peal ringers.

We, the ringing Exercise, should, however, remember that the day is fast approaching when major work will have to be done to these bells to keep them in good condition. It must surely be the ringers of this country who should bear the brunt of this expensive task. It is, after all, we who derive the most benefit from this fascinating and unique part of our ringing heritage.

The writer thanks Mr. Christopher Powell-Cotton for very kindly allowing him access to various documents appertaining to the Waterloo Tower and also for supplying much other information.

DETAILS OF THE BELLS

Treble	3-2-00	C	22"
2nd	3-3-20	B flat	24"
3rd	4-1-07	A	25"
4th	5-0-26	G	27"
<i>Front four cast in 1951 by Mears and Stainbank.</i>			
5th	5-2-14	F	29"
6th	5-3-04	E	30"
7th	6-1-11	D	31½"
8th	6-3-25	C	33½"
9th	8-1-09	B flat	35½"
10th	9-3-24	A	38"
11th	11-2-07	G	40½"
Tenor	15-1-20	F	45½"
<i>Back eight cast in 1818 by Thomas Mears.</i>			

Officers of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers

- President:** Edwin A. Barnett
- Vice-President:** The Rev. John G. M. Scott
- Hon. Secretary:** Cyril A. Wratten
- 19 Ravensgate Road, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham.
- Librarian:** W. T. Cook
- 47 Manor Road, Sidcup, Kent DA15 7HU.

25 YEARS AGO

Taken from the Ringing World for August 27, 1954

Norwich City police converged on St. Peter Mancroft at 4.20 a.m. on hearing a bell tolling. At the church, a policeman was met by Mr. Albert Eagle, a sidesman. When Mr. Eagle shouted up the tower, "Who's there?" the tolling immediately stopped. More police were called to surround the building and then the bell tower was unlocked. It was found that the stay of the treble bell had broken, causing the bell to sound. We need not repeat the moral of this story . . . Belfry Gossip.

Patience was rewarded in a peal of Yorkshire at Great Holland, Essex. Donald Mills, who had just celebrated his 15th birthday, had been hoping for a peal of Surprise Major during the previous two years, and his many attempts occupied over 15 hours' ringing.

40 YEARS AGO

August 25, 1939

Herbert Knight, of Wolverhampton, scored his 500th peal when he took part in a peal of Stedman Triples at Sherborne, Dorset. Mr. Knight was the first person to call a peal blindfolded. This he did when, in 1907, he conducted Thurstans' one-part peal of Stedman Triples at St. Luke's Church, Wolverhampton.

A 5056 of Bob Major at Old Windsor was a peal by Cornelius Charge, which he composed in New Zealand in 1936. It had not been rung before, and it was fitting that the composer should take part in it on his return to the mother country.

Wedding

LOMAX—GUY



On July 5th Sue Guy and Peter Lomax were married at Hastings Register Office and two days earlier a peal of Doubles (12M) was rung by friends in the Sussex Association. The bride and bride's sister took part, ringing the 3 and the treble. Peter and Sue will be living in Birkdale, Merseyside and hope that friends will visit them occasionally for a "cuppa".

Sue will be remembered in the Guildford area where she rang occasionally during her service with the WRAC band.