

Quex well and truly quartered

It was five o'clock in the morning, Venus was hanging over the eastern horizon and the magnificent spire of the Waterloo Tower stood out silhouetted against the morning sky. Then the silence broke: the descending sound of the back six rolling across the Quex Park meadows towards the awakening settlements on the Isle of Thanet. Quarter peal number one had begun. Eighteen and a half hours later, the bells came into rounds for the last time and were set to rest leaving evening to drift into night. Quarter peal number 20 had concluded and a new World Record had been set.

It might have merely started as "beer talk", but after the idea was conceived a couple of years ago to ring more quarter peals in a day than had ever been done before, plans were set and put into motion. The record set several years ago was 18, so 20 was considered a good number to attempt.

The obvious venue for such an attempt was the Waterloo Tower, built in 1818-19 by John Powell Powell, that stands in the middle of the Quex Park estate in Birchington-on-Sea, Kent. Since the tower is essentially in the middle of a field and well away from residential areas, the disturbance that would be caused would be minimal. Many other feats of ringing have taken place here, such as the 13,280 of Cambridge Major in 1959, and the remarkable four peals of Maximus in a day on 11th June 1988. Clearly then, 20 quarter peals should be accommodated without too much local inconvenience. As an added extra interest, there was the opportunity to circle the 12 bells in the tower during the day.

Restoring the bells at Sturry

Two years ago, an appeal was launched to restore the bells of St. Nicholas Church, Sturry. Since the would-be quarter pealers had

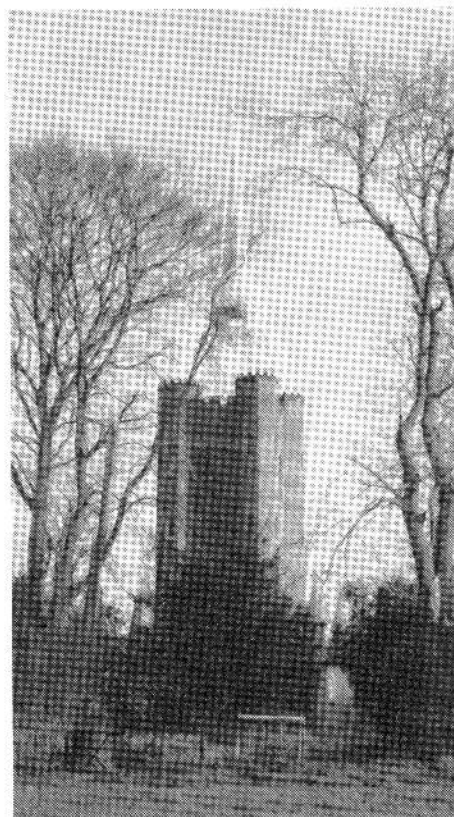
close links with the tower captain, Jo Horton, and all had rung at Sturry on many occasions, it seemed natural to have the quarter peals sponsored in aid of the restoration project. Sturry (which is near Canterbury) has six bells which, according to the bell foundry when they did their inspection, must be some of the most unringable bells still being rung on a regular basis. In the first place, the bells need a much firmer frame lower in the tower. £30,000 is needed to achieve the full restoration, of which £17,000 has so far been raised.

Six ringers agreed to ring in all 20 attempts: Andrew Farmer (Peterborough), Mike Little (Captain of All Saints, Birchington), Dickon Love (Sittingbourne, ringer at Canterbury), Stephen Smith II (Reading), Terry Streeter (Hemel Hempstead) and Stephen Wheeler (Slough). Stephen Wheeler agreed to conduct them all. Of these six, four are members of the Quex Park Society, and indeed, Mike Little was formerly Master. We were not however confined to ring six-bell quarters, and since we had 12 bells at our disposal, it was decided to arrange some Major, Royal and Maximus in addition to the Minor. As it happened, the ringers for a Maximus attempt couldn't be found, but nonetheless, quarters in the rest were rung.

The date was set: Sunday 27th October 1991. Mr. C. Powell-Cotton, the owner of the Quex Park Estate and whose grandfather built the Waterloo Tower, gave kind permission for us to ring (for which we are very grateful). The sponsor forms were printed, the bands were sorted out and the methods were chosen. Jo Horton together with Toni Smith (Stephen's wife) agreed to form a support group to feed us during the day and deal with any outside emergencies should they occur. The ropes and fittings were checked during the preceding week by David Sheekey (the Master of Quex) and Alan Andrews, and lighting was also sorted out (since there is no electricity at the tower). All was set.

World record fever

On the day, we got up at 3.45 a.m. and made our way over from Sturry to the Isle of Thanet. It was certainly dark and chilly when we all finally met outside the tower. With intrepidity we began with three quarters on the back six (tenor 15-1-20). The plan was to ring the quarters in pairs, stopping between each quarter only to swap ropes. Between each



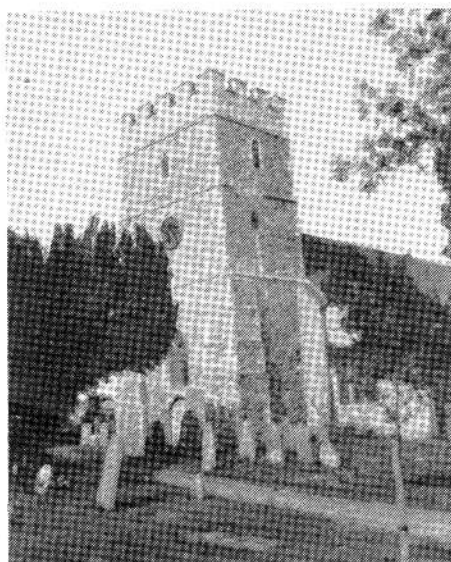
The Waterloo Tower, Quex Park.

pair, we emerged outside for a 15 minute break to eat and drink anything that Jo and Toni had prepared for us. The next six quarters were on the front six (tenor 5-3-4) as the sun began to stream in through the magnificent glass peal board in the east window. Although not a conventionally melodic six, these bells had to be rung if each of us was to circle the tower by the end of the day. The only major crunch of the day occurred during quarter number six when the aroma of bacon seeping under the ringing room door knocked people's concentration off the Bourne!

At this point, we were invaded by the local press who appeared to have "World Record Fever". First of all the TVS television cameras arrived and filmed us ringing, before giving Stephen Wheeler and me a short interview (where Stephen admitted to the world that he was indeed mad). Then a photographer from the *Kent Messenger Group* asked us to pose behind our ropes while he flashed away. Eventually, after being joined by some other ringers, we were able to get on with some Cambridge Royal, before tucking into a tasty lunch cooked by Jo and Toni on the outside stove. During the lunch hour, the ropes and fittings were again checked by another member of the Quex Society, Mike Cook.

The afternoon kicked off with some Bob Royal and Yorkshire Major before we re-

(Continued overleaf)



The Church of St. Nicholas, Sturry, whose bells we are trying to restore.

QUEX PARK - continued

sumed our programme of six bell quarters, this time on the middle six (tenor 6-1-11). As time went on, light soon faded, but our spirits were still high, and we achieved some good ringing on this very musical six. According to a well-known leading Kent conductor who rang in the four Maximus peals in a day, this would be the point where we would dread re-entry into "the hole" after each coffee break. As it happened, things weren't so bad as our supporters kept us in good cheer. It was only in the last pair of quarters (which we thought would psychologically be the easiest of the afternoon) that we felt the day really catch up on us.

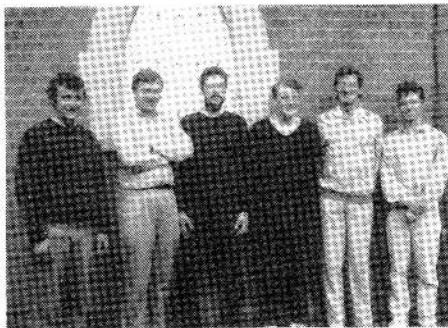
People had been coming and going all day wishing us well, and by the time we finished the last quarter peal at a quarter to midnight, there was quite a crowd gathered to congratulate us, thrusting cans of beer into our hands. Each of us seemed to have different ailments at the end of the day. One complained of sore wrists, another of a sore back, or sore legs. Everyone had tender hands, although there were few, if any, blisters.

A Guinness between attempts

During the following morning, I was inundated with calls from the Press who wanted to know the outcome. One woman asked "How did you all keep going? Did you have to drink Guinness between attempts?" Not a bad idea, except that we *did* want to catch our ropes! We appeared on the television news bulletins during Sunday afternoon and evening, and also all during Monday, as well as in newspapers across the country during the following week - all good publicity for Sturry and the Exercise in general. There were no complaints, but some of us had a bit of a turn when a television report began "The occupants of houses at Birchington in Kent had to flee their homes in the early hours of this morning. . .". Fortunately the report was about a fire and not us!

During the day and apart from one false start of a few changes, all the quarter peals were achieved at the first attempt. It was calculated that we had been at the rope for **13 hrs 46 mins**, and that we had amassed **25,668 changes**. This is the greatest amount of ringing yet heard at Quex in a day (which already has a good track record), and probably anywhere else in Kent and further for that matter. Congratulations also go to Stephen Wheeler who conducted all 25,668 changes - a good effort. All the ringing was of a good standard and didn't tail off as the night went on. Certainly some very fine six bell ringing was heard and was recorded. One of the newspaper men said that he had been listening to us from his back garden in Birchington and that it was very pleasant - just one of the many compliments we got. Sponsorship money has raised approaching £1,000. Since Toni Smith works raising money for the Red Cross in Reading, it was agreed that her husband's sponsorship could go to this, otherwise the remaining money has gone to Sturry.

The band are very grateful indeed to the group who fed and watered us throughout the day, without whom we would have conked out long before the 20 mark; to the steeplekeepers of the Quex Society for checking the ropes and fittings; to Mr. Powell-Cotton for the use of his bells, and to his villagers in the estate for putting up with us (and including I suppose the Grey Old Lady of Quex whose hauntings we must have interrupted). But thanks of course go to all those people who sponsored us and came to cheer us along during the day.



The gang of six (L to R): Stephen Smith, Andrew Farmer, Terry Streeter, Stephen Wheeler, Mike Little and Dickon Love.



The core supporter group (L to R): Jo Horton, Toni Smith and Toni's parents.

Details of the 20 quarter peals

Birchington-on-Sea, Kent (Quex Park)
Sunday 27 October 1991

On the back six:

1. **1296 Beverley S. Minor:** M J Little 1, A M Farmer 2, T J C Streeter 3, D Love 4, S R Smith 5, S A Wheeler (C) 6.
2. **1272 Kent T.B. Minor:** T J C Streeter 1, S A Wheeler (C) 2, A M Farmer 3, S R Smith 4, M J Little 5, D Love 6.
3. **1260 Buxton Minor:** S A Wheeler (C) 1, D Love 2, S R Smith 3, A M Farmer 4, T J C Streeter 5, M J Little 6.

On the front six:

4. **1320 London S. Minor:** S R Smith 1, M J Little 2, A M Farmer 3, T J C Streeter 4, D Love 5, S A Wheeler (C) 6.
5. **1260 Armitage-is-the-Name Minor:** D Love 1, S A Wheeler (C) 2, T J C Streeter 3, A M Farmer 4, M J Little 5, S R Smith 6.
6. **1320 Bourne S. Minor:** M J Little 1, D Love 2, S A Wheeler (C) 3, S R Smith 4, A M Farmer 5, T J C Streeter 6.
7. **1260 Lakesend Minor:** A M Farmer 1, T J C Streeter 2, D Love 3, S A Wheeler (C) 4, S R Smith 5, M J Little 6.
8. **1272 Norwich S. Minor:** T J C Streeter 1, A M Farmer 2, S R Smith 3, M J Little 4, S A Wheeler (C) 5, D Love 6.
9. **1260 Childwall Minor:** S A Wheeler (C) 1, S R Smith 2, M J Little 3, D Love 4, T J C Streeter 5, A M Farmer 6.

On the back ten:

10. **1282 Cambridge S. Royal:** M J Little 1, W Emma S Cundiff 2, S J Dixon 3, R H Edwards 4, S R Smith 5, S M Cox 6, D Love 7, T J C Streeter 8, S A Wheeler (C) 9, A M Farmer 10.
11. **1260 P.B. Royal:** A M Farmer 1, Joyce Vernon 2, W Emma S Cundiff 3, S J Dixon 4, S M Cox 5, T J C Streeter 6, S A Wheeler (C) 7, M J Little 8, D Love 9, S R Smith 10.

On the back eight:

12. **1250 Yorkshire S. Major:** S R Smith 1, Catherine J Axford 2, D Love 3, S J Dixon 4, M J Little 5, S A Wheeler (C) 6, A M Farmer 7, T J C Streeter 8.

On the middle six:

13. **1260 Remigius Minor:** S R Smith 1, T J C Streeter 2, M J Little 3, D Love 4, A M Farmer 5, S A Wheeler (C) 6.
14. **1320 Wells S. Minor:** M J Little 1, A M Farmer 2, S R Smith 3, T J C Streeter 4, D Love 5, S A Wheeler (C) 6.
15. **1260 St. Clement's C.B. Minor:** T J C Streeter 1, S R Smith 2, A M Farmer 3, D Love 4, S A Wheeler (C) 5, M J Little 6.
16. **1320 Durham S. Minor:** M J Little 1, S R Smith 2, T J C Streeter 3, S A Wheeler (C) 4, A M Farmer 5, D Love 6.
17. **1260 P.B. Minor:** S A Wheeler (C) 1, D Love 2, S R Smith 3, M J Little 4, T J C Streeter 5, A M Farmer 6.
18. **1320 Stamford S. Minor:** M J Little 1, S R Smith 2, T J C Streeter 3, A M Farmer 4, D Love 5, S A Wheeler (C) 6.
19. **1320 Westminster S. Minor:** M J Little 1, S A Wheeler (C) 2, D Love 3, S R Smith 4, A M Farmer 5, T J C Streeter 6.
20. **1296 Cambridge S. Minor:** A M Farmer 1, T J C Streeter 2, M J Little 3, D Love 4, S A Wheeler (C) 5, S R Smith 6. £8

At the moment, this does set a new world record for the number of quarters rung in a day. For how long this will remain the case I don't know, probably not long as we hear that Donald Carter now has similar plans at the 1 cwt ring at Potters Yard, Taunton. We wish him all the best in his attempts and trust that he feels as well as we did after he spends 13 hrs 46 mins plus at the rope in a 21 hour day! We all had tremendous fun and an enormous feeling of achievement, but are not inclined to do it again - just yet!

DICKON LOVE.

If anyone would like to make a donation to the Sturry Bell Restoration Fund, please write to Brian Wetherall, 23 Verwood Close, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7HS, who would be very pleased to receive it.



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