

# TOWN OF SILENT TOWERS:

## The Story of the Bells of Sandwich

By D. L. CAWLEY

IN his monumental work on the Parish Churches of England, John Betjeman observed that "after the splendour of Canterbury Cathedral, the Churches of Kent, Rochester Cathedral itself included, are something of an anticlimax." True though this may be, there are nevertheless many extremely fine churches in the county; ringers will know of the glorious fifteenth century church in Maidstone; of the stately towers of Lydd and Tenterden; the unexpected majesty of, say, Cobham, Ivychurch or Minster; or the simple dignity of Brookland with its fantastic campanile, or Fairfield. In East Kent the inquirer might have to look far harder for buildings of this calibre, though they are not lacking. One town is particularly remarkable for its fine churches, the town of Sandwich overlooking Pegwell bay, some fifteen miles east of Canterbury. To ringers the name of Sandwich will probably mean little today; but the story of its churches and its bells is a proud one and it should not be allowed to go unremembered.

To many it may seem slightly paradoxical that there are today so many churches whose size and magnificence is out of proportion to the population which they were designed to serve; many parishes will know only too well what the burden of keeping these buildings in repair means. Sandwich is today a small sleepy town, whose air is decidedly Flemish. Rising high over the roofs of the old cottages are two great towers, those of the Churches of St. Peter and St. Clement, while a short distance away is the now towerless Church of St. Mary, whose central tower collapsed many years ago. The interior of these churches testifies to the vanished importance of Sandwich as the busiest port in East Kent, situated as it is on the estuary of the River Stour. Silt and railways have long since driven away the trade which once came by water, but the churches remain silent witnesses to this vanished prosperity.

The largest of all these churches, St. Clement's, is still the Parish Church of Sandwich. The earliest part is the great Norman central tower, with its massive circular stair turret at the north-west. Above the church roof this tower exhibits several rows of blank arcading characterised by the severe semi-circular arches for which the Norman builders were so famous. Within the church this great tower opens by four splendid Norman arches on massive piers to a church which was largely rebuilt in the early fifteenth century; the nave has a simple angel roof, a great rarity in Kent. The visitor could spend hours in this church with its many objects of interest, not least the fine Miserere seats in the choir. The early records of the bells here are not prolific; but we do know that in 1508 a bequest was made "to the reparation of the bells vii s viii d." How many bells there were at the time of this reparation is not known. At this time the tower was surmounted by a timber spire, but in 1664 this was taken down and the lead sold; in its place a wooden balustrade and a small "onion" cupola were erected, similar to coeval examples at nearby St. Peter's, Deal, Ringwould and Woodnesborough, all reflecting the local Flemish influence. By 1672 the churchwardens were dissatisfied with their bells, and they



THE CHURCH OF ST. CLEMENT

were taken down and sent to Christopher Hodson in London, where they were either cast into or exchanged for a new ring of five. In this same year they were returned and hung up in the church, the method of conveyance to Sandwich being by water; they must have been one of the last cargoes on the London run landed at the now declining port. These bells all bore the inscription: \* John \* Hodson \* Made \* Me 1672 John Wheeler (row of coins) Isaac \* Pearce \* Chvrch Wardens Christopher \* Hodson. As the treble of this ring was 32 inches diameter, the tenor must have weighed about 18 cwt., which would have made the bells one of the heaviest fives in Kent.

There are several mentions of payments to the ringers, which get thinner as the years go on. One of the last was in 1837 when the bells were rung for the accession of "Alexandrina Victoria." By 1865 the tower was unsafe, and the wooden parapet and cupola were removed, and all the stonework and internal arrangements restored. To pay for the work of restoration it was decided to sell the four largest bells, and in 1866 they were removed from the tower. What became of them is an open question; they probably went to the pot. Thus the tower too weak to contain bells became the strong tower with no bells to ring in it. The treble was retained and rehung, but that was all. As if this was not disgraceful enough, at a later date a chime of eight tubular abominations by Messrs. Latham Harrington and Co., of Coventry, was installed, and it is much to be regretted that these are still in working order. Now only the old treble remains from the old ring, hung dead. So thorough were the restorers that they even removed the old bell frame. We shall never know what these bells sounded like; but if they were at all worthy of the church in which they were hung, they must have been magnificent.

(To be continued)

### LETTERS—Continued RULES FOR DOUBLES VARIATIONS WANTED

Dear Sir,—In recent years there has been much interest in multi-method peals. May I suggest that for peals of Triples, Minor and Doubles the length of such peals be restricted to 5,040 changes. It is obviously far easier to fit more methods into a peal which exceeds 5,040 than to fit them into a peal of that length. Naturally the suggested 5,040 restriction cannot be applied to peals on eight or more bells.

Since the publication of the excellent Doubles collection in "The Ringing World," for which the compilers and editor deserve our gratitude, multi-Doubles peals have increased in number. Unfortunately many of the variations given (even some of those stated to be true) are quite false, good examples being the St. Simon-St. Nicholas group when used with a London extreme. Perhaps it is timely to remind ringers of these variations that they should check them before using them to peals, and that it is not sufficient to check the lead-ends or lead-heads. The best way to check many of these variations is to note whether the call alters the coursing order; unless it does the variation must be false.

The Central Council has avoided much comment on Doubles variations, but the time has perhaps come when we should formulate some rules for them. Might I suggest that for a Doubles variation to be acceptable it must be capable of giving 120 true changes. In addition, when variations are used in a peal all the different types of call that occur in that variation must be rung if it is to be claimed that that variation has been rung. For example, if a Grandsire bob and single are used to give a variation on Plain Bob, as in Dedworth, then both calls plus a plain lead of Plain Bob must be rung. This would exclude using a pivot call, half of which is deemed to give one variation and half another.

No doubt many ringers will, on first sight, think I am trying to impose too many restrictions on Doubles ringing, but unless some rules are introduced the field of Doubles will become meaningless.—Yours sincerely,

COLIN A. LEWIS.

Glasbury-on-Wye.

#### 5,040 JUGSHOLME SURPRISE ROYAL

By RICHARD F. B. SPEED

23456	M	IN/5ths	W	H
32654	2			2
34256	2			1
32546	1	X	2	2
43526				1
32465	2			2

Repeated.

#### 5,088 SUPERLATIVE SURPRISE MAJOR

By ROGER BALDWIN

23456	B	W	5	H
23465	2S		2S	S
25463	2S		S	
56234	x			2S
34256			S	S

Twice repeated.

Singles made in 5-6 at lead-end. Contains 18 5678's and 18 6578's, the maximum, without parting the tenors.

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