

TOWN OF SILENT TOWERS:

The Story of the Bells of Sandwich

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The last of the three churches to describe is St. Peter's Church, whose brick tower still contains the only ring of bells left in the town today. The building on the whole is somewhat later in date than the other two, its windows being mainly in the Decorated style of architecture. It also has a central tower, though this, for reasons which will be apparent later, is not quite central! The bells of this church were always the principal bells in Sandwich; as early as 1534 we read of the "Brandegose" bell which was rung before every common assembly for half an hour on the fourth bell, and later we hear of the Market bell before the ringing of which no saies were permitted. For these jobs the sexton received four shillings each. He also received money for the ringing of the Curfew at 8 p.m. Originally this and the "Angelus" (at 4 in the morning!) were rung only from two weeks after Michaelmas to two weeks after Lady Day, Sundays or funeral days excepted, and for the twelve days after Christmas (for which £3 extra was due). Payments such as "candles and oil 6/8d." in connection with this are not uncommon. Today, however, the curfew alone survives; and every night at eight the lovely tenor of Sandwich can be heard for miles booming out over the surrounding flats.

We do not know how many bells there were at this time; there must have been at least four. In 1546 there was an accident on the third of these, when one Henry Cosyn was killed by the bell rope, "being snayred therein in the ringing soe that his speache was taken from hym." By 1641 the tower was described as "splitt and cloven" and only fit for rebuilding. As we have read, it was much the same in 1652, though ringing carried on. In 1663 for some reason or other we hear that the "joye bells were much ringed"; and on the same night that St. Mary's tower gave way, St. Peter's steeple split open and the upper portion of the tower fell, completely destroying the south aisle. As the church was otherwise sound, the upper half of the tower was entirely demolished and dangerous crags removed, and the south arcade and south tower arch bricked up as they are today. For this reason the tower now appears to be half way along the south side of the church. Shortly afterwards the belfry was rebuilt with brick in the upper portions, which bricks were made from mud from the old haven. A new stair turret was built and the tower was surmounted by an onion cupola which is still a distinctive—if not particularly attractive—landmark today. Again the records do not tell us how many bells were installed, though doubtless there was at least one. Things really began to move, however, in 1726. In that year, the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury resolved to recast the heavy ring of six bells in the north tower of the Cathedral and add two trebles to make eight. Owing to the state of the north tower, it was deemed prudent to rehang the new peal in the south tower; and this already contained a ring of six bells, and also the great clock bell "Dunstan." The space problem was solved by placing "Dunstan" on the roof leads, and selling the other bells. With the tenor recast by Samuel Knight—who had also cast the eight for the Cathedral—the bells were hung in the tower of St. Peter's Church. There they became known as the "Oxfords," for the two rings at Canterbury were known respectively as the "Oxford" (south) and "Arundel" (north) rings, after the names of the towers in which they hung.

In 1758 Mr Fausset was able to record five bells at St. Peter's, of which the four smallest were cast by Joseph Hatch, 1625, and the tenor by Samuel Knight, 1727. Whether there were any further additions or whether there was a separate bell in the tower already is not known, but in 1779 we find that the tower

had six bells. As the total weight of these Knight's 1727 tenor had originally been much the tenor weighed some 15 cwt. Perhaps was 55 cwt. 1 qr. 16 lb. we may assume that heavier and had been recast into two trebles—not an unknown practice in those days. Whatever happened, it is clear that by that time the bells were regarded as unsatisfactory, and they were taken down and recast with additional metal into the eight bells at present in use at the church.

The work was carried out by Mr. William Mears, of Whitechapel, before he was taken in as a partner in the firm which was at that time trading as Pack and Chapman; strangely enough, Mears had first become interested in bellfounding while watching William Chapman casting the new Great Dunstan in the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral in 1762, and it was the old Canterbury bells that he was now recasting. The only other bells cast by Mears before he was taken into partnership at Whitechapel are the treble and third of the splendid ring of six at St. Dunstan's Church, in the Mears family's native city of Canterbury.

The new ring of bells cost £366; to this was added £1 14s. for ropes, £59 for new fittings and alterations to the frame, and nearly £4 for carriage from London, making a total of just over £430; the old bells fetched £247, and the rates £36; the rest, nearly £150, was raised by voluntary subscription. Apparently the old frame was retained and altered by Mr. Forbes, whose name appears on the tenor, and who hung the bells. The particulars of these bells are as follows:—

Treble (27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter, 4 cwt. 2 qr. 27 lb., F): I mean to make it understood that tho I'm little yet I'm good. Mears & Co. Fecit 1779.

Second (30", 5-0-13, E): To honour both of God and king our voices shall in consort ring. Wm. Mears & Co., London. Fecit 1779.

Third (32", 5-3-15, D): Whilst thus we join in cheerful sound may love and loyalty abound. Wm. Mears & Co., London. Fecit 1779.

BATH AND WELLS DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION

The Ilchester Branch of the Bath and Wells Association held its September quarterly meeting at the Church of St. James, Preston Plucknett, Yeovil. The Guild service was conducted by the Rev. David Nye. The choir was in attendance, the organist being Mr. Graham Score. The tea and meeting which followed were held in the church itself—a new and very pleasant experience for all.

New members elected were Mr. George Guppy, Mr. John Hawkins and Mr. Simon Hooper (East Chinnock), Mr. M. Walker (East Coker), Mr. John Caller (West Coker) and the Rev. J. G. M. Scott (non-resident life member).

Certificates were presented to Miss L. Leggett, Miss M. Baker, Mrs. R. Rendell and Messrs. E. T. Paul Field, Ivan Reed, Alan Woodhouse, Tim Shire, Nigel Hunt, Tom Tulk, Robin Geard, Andrew Strickland, Ian Bowron, Reg Hunt, Sidney White and Ronald White.

It was unanimously agreed that the name of the late Mr. W. Delamont, of Hardington Mandeville, be recorded in the minutes.

Ringings on the good-going, if somewhat noisy, six (tenor 11 cwt.) was under the direction of the tower captain, Ringing Master and assistant Ringing Master, and included Bob Doubles, Plain Bob, Grandsire Doubles, April Day, Siedman, Kent and London.

The Branch is grateful to the Rev. David Nye, the organist and choir, Mrs. Score and her tea ladies for the very excellent tea, and to the tower captain, Mr. Jim Taylor, for a most enjoyable evening.

Fourth (34 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", 7-1-24, C): Music is medicine to the mind. Mears & Co. 1779.

Fifth (36" 7-2-23, B flat): In Wedlock bands all ye who join with hands and hearts unite so shall our tuneful Tongues combine to laud the nuptials rite. Mears & Co. Fecit.

Sixth (38 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", 9-2-1, A): Peace and good neighbourhood. Wm Mears & Co., London. Fecit 1779.

Seventh (42", 11-3-13, G): Ye ringers all! prize your health and happiness be sober merry wise and youll the same possess. Wm. Mears & Co., London. Fecit 1779.

Tenor (46 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", 15-2-9, F); Forbes. 1779. The Revd. Mr. J. Conant, A. M., Rector, W. W. Bradley, W. Brice, Ch. Wardens. 1779.

These bells form an excellent sounding ring. The first full peal on them was by Squire Powell's Quex Institution on December 27th, 1823, when S. Carter conducted 5,040 Grandsire Triples. Whether there have been any other peals is an open question; the writer would be interested to hear of others. Work on the bells has been infrequent. In 1898 a new clock and chimes were fitted by Gillett and Johnston; and in 1932 the tenor bell was quarter turned, rehung and refitted with ball bearings by Messrs. Mears and Stainbank. The other seven bells retain their original fittings and are quite unringable; the writer has yet to find anyone who can reliably say that they have rung in this tower.

In 1966 the clock was rebuilt, a new aluminium ladder provided to give access above the ringing chamber in place of a rotten newell stair of wood, and the whole clock room and ringing room chamber cleaned, decorated and rewired. New clocking ropes were provided for the bells, though the dangers of this practice are known to the authorities. There is no prospect of the bells being rehung at present. The tenor is rung "up" on most nights at 8 p.m. for the curfew.

It seems that the days are gone when St. Clement's bells shouted across to St. Peter's splendid octave, no doubt reminding the people of St. Mary's of their long-lost ring. Only St. Clement's is in use as a parish church today. Would it be too much to hope that one day those splendid arches in that mighty tower will resound again, possibly with the music of St. Peter's bells responding in the distance, and the music of both rings is carried on the evening air across the open flats, onward and outward to the open sea?

(Concluded)

BELFRY GOSSIP

Aldbourne, Wilts, appears to have some promising material. In a recent Sunday service quarter there were three firsts and a first away from the tenor.

Five members of the Collins family took part in a quarter of Grandsire Triples at Chobham, Surrey. There should be a Collins peal before long.

A welcome back as a peal conductor to Mr. Francis C. Mogford. He called his first on August 26th at Marksbury after his fracture of both legs last September.

The Central District of the Ladies' Guild has arranged a dinner in connection with the 1968 A.G.M. It will take place at the Mayflower, Hertingfordbury, near Hertford.

All inquiries regarding the bells at St. Peter's, Pentre, Rhondda, Glamorgan, should be made to Mr. Tudor P. Edwards, 5, Pleasant View, Pentre, Rhondda, Glamorgan (Tel.: Pentre 3705).

On July 7th the Exeter Branch of the Guild of Devonshire Ringers held their quarterly meeting at Sandford. Although the numbers were small a very enjoyable afternoon was spent. The annual meeting was fixed for December 16th.

In a recent peal rung as a compliment for Mr. George Waterman's 82nd birthday, Mr. Edward B. Smith took part on the first day of his retirement. He is extremely interested in work for his church, and fellow members of the ringing fraternity wish him well in the future.