



Practising Grandsire Doubles on single handbells.

Scottish Association ringing course

The Scottish Association held its first ringing course in Aberdeen from Friday, 30th March, to Sunday, 1st April. There had been an enthusiastic response when the idea was first proposed and in the event it attracted 46 participants - pupils, tutors and helpers - about one-third of the resident membership.

Aberdeen provided the ideal venue for such an event as the bells can be made virtually silent outside, allowing us to ring almost continually throughout the weekend. There is also convenient accommodation available in the nearby University Halls - we shared ours with the four home countries International Women's Hockey teams

On Friday evening there was general ringing as people gradually gathered from all over Scotland. This enabled the less-experienced to become familiar with the bells before the serious business began on Saturday morning. With four groups, each with two tutors, studying combinations of Plain Bob Doubles, Grandsire Doubles, Plain Bob Minor, Double Norwich Court Bob Major and Raising and Lowering in Peal, a tight schedule was necessary. Each group had two tower sessions on Saturday and in between fitted in lectures and tutorials and handbell practices. Meanwhile the helpers did 2-hour stints in the tower, where some of us discovered that raising and lowering continuously for an hour does strange things to the arms! After an intensive day, the formal proceedings ended at 6 p.m. and were followed by more general ringing, both at St. Machar's and also on the new light six at Potterton.

On Sunday, the groups were slightly re-organised in the light of Saturday's experience, and each group fitted in another tower session as well as practice with handbells. The 8-bell group scored a quarter of Plain Bob Major during their allotted tower session. Most participants gathered for the hour's ringing prior to the morning service, and also at lunchtime when "tokens of our appreciation" were presented to the organisers, Magnus Peterson and Peter Sipton, by Nick Sturgess. On Sunday afternoon, as the final tower sessions were being completed, other participants had the opportunity to hear Magnus Peterson lecture on raising and lowering, and John Jenkins on elementary conducting.

As a first attempt by the Association, the course was a huge success and we hope it will be the first of many. Our thanks are due especially to Magnus Peterson and Peter Sipton for taking on the organisation, to the Minister and Kirk Session of St. Machar's for the use of the Cathedral and all its facilities, the members of the St. Machar's band for their delicious catering, the tutors - Nigel Booth, Norman Chaddock, John Jenkins, Nick Sturgess, Bob Hancock, Stewart Bamforth, Andrew Bradshaw, Magnus Peterson - all the helpers and all the pupils. C.C.

Progress at Sandwich - Part 2

On Saturday, 31st March, at just about 6 o'clock the six bells which until two years ago rang out over part of Yorkshire once again rang out, but this time over the ancient Cinque Port of Sandwich. It was the first time Sandwich has heard that sound since the turn of the century.

During the previous four Saturdays, members of the KCACR BRF sub-committee (Romney Bell Hangers Inc.) and some local labour had successfully built the frame and hung the bells. Once the bells were in their pits, stayed and roped, they were rung up one by one. All went well until the fourth was part way up. Unfortunately the bell appeared to be too big for its pit. It was quickly rung down again and the bellhanger-in-chief scratched his head. However, the problem was soon solved "by moving a spacer to the other side of a cross-member" (I think!). The bell was again raised and all was well. The fifth went up without any mishaps. Then it was time to raise the tenor. At this point Frank Lewis had the almost unique experience of being able to see the bell ring whilst pulling on the rope, there being no flooring in the tenor pit. It was also extremely noisy. Once again the bell appeared not to fit the space provided. It is such a tight fit that just turning a couple of bolts around solved the problem. However, all was still not well. It appeared that as the bell turned it was catching on the block of wood on the slider. How to solve this one? Well, a quick bit of carpentry and it's all right now. The job was almost finished. There were one or two bits left over, grey bits of metal with holes in, a bit worrying at the time, but the Foundry has since informed us that they were "extra bits" just in case.

There were (still are) some cosmetic jobs to do, putting on bosses, finishing the floor under the tenor, that sort of thing; but we were itching to have a go and as luck would have it there were just enough ringers around to ring a plain course of Bob Minor and a few rounds. After the initial burst of ringing, footsteps and voices were heard on the stairs, in came the Rector and his wife, carrying baskets containing glasses and sherry with which to toast the installation.

The bells were lowered and the clearing-up began, tools put back into tool boxes and lowered to the floor of the church through the trap-door.

Two days later, we were told that the structural engineer in charge of the job had been decidedly peeved that the bells had been rung without him being present. Nobody had said that he needed to be there, and anyway you can't please everybody.

Quick progress

Congratulations are due to Simon Ford who rang his first peal on 21st April at Childswickham. The feat is noteworthy as Simon has been a ringer for only five months. He began ringing at Charlton Kings in November, and after only one month had scored his first quarter peal (tenor behind). This was soon followed by ringing the treble to a quarter peal of Doubles, and he has continued to make rapid progress since then. His punctuality, reliability and enthusiasm for ringing augur well for the future, and Charlton Kings band is very lucky to have acquired a new member of this calibre.

J.R.

Now that the bells were very nearly ringable it was felt that it was time to get the band organised. A meeting was arranged on the Friday before Easter and everyone duly met in the Church Hall. Discussion on all manner of topics. Lists were made of things that were needed and needed to be done. Officers were elected, and those of us who are familiar with this "peculiar" world of bellringing attempted to explain some of the more confusing aspects of tower life - like for instance, why you have to have a "local", the difference between peals and quarter peals, and why some of us are daft enough to stand for three hours or more ringing without a break. (Most of the learners can't imagine ringing for more than two minutes without a break!) Also at the meeting it was decided that a "cleaning session" in the tower was very much needed, and so during Holy Week the newly-appointed steeple-keeper led his more or less willing band, with vacuum-cleaners, brooms and large plastic sacks. The sacks to clear away loose insulation and rubbish (including Coke cans) left behind by the builders. It was a decidedly filthy job.

The next bit of excitement was Easter Sunday morning. It was to be the first time that the bells would be rung for any length of time. At 8.45 a.m. we all gathered outside the church (awaiting the end of the previous service) and it was then that the "learners" had their first lesson in the craziness of some ringers. We were "tower grabbed" by ringers from Oxford and London. Tower grabbing in the extreme, and they're not even new bells.

The bells go quite well, but due to the short draft they are very noisy, and because the sallies are very new and a bit fluffy you are aware that they go around the wheels. The structural engineer was also present and whilst we rang he went about feeling walls and beams. When we stopped he pronounced himself satisfied.

On the Wednesday after Easter, with the bells fully muffled, the first practice night was held. The "learners" having their first goes on their bells. There is general agreement that they are easy to ring (my guess is that having so far been taught on bells with a long draft, the lack of rope at Sandwich is a distinct advantage!) There are a few quirks (the fourth is very light set at hand!) which need sorting out, but in general everyone is very pleased with them.

The bells will now not be rung for service until 20th May, when H.M. Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (who is Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports) will attend Matins in St. Clement's Church on the occasion of the dedication of the bells. The KCACR will be at the forefront at the service. It is hoped that six of the "learners" will be able to ring rounds during the service. Peter Romney and Phil Young will read the lessons, and the Association Chairman, along with the bell-hangers, the ringers who are teaching the Sandwich band and the captain of the tower where tied practice was held, will all attend.

As the service is an "all ticket" affair it will not be possible to have open ringing on the day of the dedication. Ringing will be restricted to those ringers who are attending the service. However, arrangements are in hand for the tower to be open for ringing by visitors on Saturday, 26th May, between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. There will be a break between 2.45 p.m. and 4 p.m., when refreshments will be available in the Church Hall.

All inquiries about ringing at St. Clement's should be addressed to the newly-elected secretary, Tony Hyne, at 5 Upper Strand Street, Sandwich.