

(Over The Top Of The Tower)

A report of a fundraising activity at St. Peter and St. Paul, Mitcham.

"Just step backwards and lean back 90 degrees against the wall" were the last words I heard before going over the parapet. The last time I achieved this position, I had consumed more than a few pints of beer! However, this time it was 95 feet above ground level. "What the blazes am I doing here - I can't stand heights", I quietly muttered. I would normally wear a safety harness on the top deck of a bus!

The morning was great. We were blessed with excellent weather and there was quite a gathering around the church, although the quieter ones were, in general, the ones participating in the abseil.

John (brave man) was the first down. He did extremely well, except for 2-3 metres where I believe he accelerated rather more quickly than he would have wanted. A bride and groom were amongst the others following him down. It has to be said that climbing up the tower was also quite hair-raising - formidable enough to stop anyone backing out and taking that route down! Whilst at the top of the tower I was amazed to be joined by Corinne, who appeared nerveless and descended marvellously - an inspiration to us all. Everybody did really well, Margaret and Joan especially. There were a few minor slips (Diarmid got a closer look at the tower's rendering than most) but there were no injuries and the reward of a stiff drink was much needed in many cases.

Many thanks to the CCC Events, who were totally professional and took excellent care of us during our descent, with plenty of advice and words of encouragement.

As usual, thanks must go to the people organising the event, John for the idea and for those who helped prepared and serve the food and drink. It really felt like a community occasion, with many passers-by stopping to spectate. Final thanks to the 55 intrepid abseilers for their fund-raising (some of whom do not even attend our church), and to their generous sponsors.

I look forward to knowing the final figure raised, but at the time of writing it was already in excess of £1,100.

Right what's next? Paragliding off the Chancel step!!!

PETER KINGSTON.
(from *The Northern Stars*,
Northern Surrey District Newsletter).

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I am pleased to see that your R.W. problem page (p.752) is now prospering. Asking for advice is always risky as you might not like the advice you get. It is far better to make up your own mind and come up with some well based and carefully structured conclusions that suit your wishes.

So let me say, that in general, ringing is a good thing and should be indulged in as much as possible. Quarter peals are especially beneficial. However, due care and caution should be exercised in relation to painting, decorating, gardening and washing up. These activities carry a significant number of risks which may have a negative impact on ringing. Indeed, work and toil of many sorts should be avoided if at all possible.

However, excessive peal ringing is a bit dubious and travelling long distances to grab towers is also a bit suspect and taking the trouble to write about any of this is definitely sinister. ...

A.J.B.

Down and out: Staplehurst bells go for renovation at last



Most people who have rung them would probably agree that Staplehurst bells are a *good old-fashioned country eight* - a euphemism for "nice sounding but rather difficult to ring". Indeed in recent years they have become increasingly difficult and various rehanging plans over the last 20 years had come to nothing. However the arrival four years ago of a new Rector, Brian Barnes, heralded a new wave of enthusiasm. Fund raising proceeded apace and the looming spectre of VAT provided the final catalyst.

The project has not been without its difficulties, not so much financial as in obtaining a faculty for part of the work - an issue which still has to be finally resolved. This will be chronicled in a further report in *The Ringing World* once rehanging is complete. These problems had already led to the postponement of Phase One of the project - removal of the bells from the tower and their transportation to Whitechapel - and we were beginning to wonder whether the project would ever take off.

Eventually Saturday 18th May was fixed as removal day. On the preceding Tuesday the local band rang a final quarter peal of Stedman Triples on the bells. But perhaps the most poignant moment was two days later at the Ascension Day High Mass when, immediately following administration of the Sacrament, the bells were rung down in peal for the last time.

So the great day arrived at last - cold and wet and more akin to December than May. The removal was to be carried out by the Kent County Association Bellhanging team, with local assistance. Insurance requirements limited the number of the local band who were able to help, but by the time the KCA team arrived with their block and tackle the removal of wheels, stays, sliders, braces and bearing box covers was all but complete. Because of its relative position to the hatch, the first bell to be removed was the seventh (cast as it happens by Joseph Hatch!). By the time its lip came into view a crowd had gathered in the nave.

It was about this time that we suddenly realised that, despite the meticulous planning of the exercise we were going to be short of palettes on which to stand the bells in the church. We need not have worried. As in the parable of the loaves and fishes they miraculously appeared - 25 of them!

By the time we stopped for lunch - a situation forced on us by a wedding in the church - five of the bells had already been lowered to the ground. With hunger and thirst satisfied, we

returned to the tower to lower the remaining three. Eventually there was only the tenor left; we always feared it might be a problem since at its widest point the bell is larger than the hatch opening, but the KCA gang remained confident. But by the time it was wedged securely between the clock room and ringing chamber even Brian "Red Leader" Butcher appeared to have doubts. Then for no apparent reason it just slipped through, amid gasps of relief from the audience. Clearly the Lord was on our side!

Their work done, the KCA team headed for home. We are extremely grateful to Brian Butcher, Peter Romney, Phil Jakeman and the rest of the team for giving of their time for our benefit, and we hope Phil eventually got his ball-pane hammer back! We are also grateful to those who provided support services, particularly the endless cups of tea and to the many who came to watch and encourage us as the tiredness set in. It truly was a parish occasion. Thanks must also go to Homeleigh Timber Supplies Ltd of Staplehurst who provided transport for the bells to Whitechapel free of charge.

In the week that followed the local band were fully occupied dismantling and lowering the old frame, and our Thursday practice night is now taken up with routine maintenance and odd jobs in the ringing room. Meanwhile, we are joining other towers on their practice nights on a rota basis, in order that we keep together as a unit whilst we have no bells of our own.

As to the future, we hope to have the bells back in a new 10-bell frame before the end of the year. Furthermore, we have been promised a new treble by a member of the congregation in memory of her late husband and are hopeful that a tenth bell will be forthcoming in time for the rehanging.

The whole restoration project is being recorded on video. It begins with the known history of the bells and then follows the progress of the project itself, to continue until the bells are returned and rededicated. When completed, the video is expected to fill a 4 hour tape, but a 1½ hour version will also be available. Further details will be given when the project is completed and a full report appeared in *The Ringing World*.

Exciting times indeed.

ROY BARCLAY.

Staplehurst, Kent. 14 May, 1260 Stedman Triples: Sue Bassett 1, Shirley Norfolk 2, David Bassett 3, Anne Lewis 4, Roy Barclay 5, Patrick Harrison 6, Chris Bassett (C) 7, Alan Webb 8. 1st Stedman Triples: 2,3. Last quarter on the bells before rehanging and possible augmentation. £2.45