

Wormshill – the Real Story

by Richard Offen

When, in 1978, I took over from Alan Berry as Advisor on Bells to the Diocese of Canterbury, I inherited a large amount of correspondence on St Giles' Church, Wormshill and its quest to possess a ring of bells. Very soon I also found myself in correspondence and discussion with the Churchwarden and Squire of the Parish, Michael Nightingale, who had set his heart on having a ring cast by Joseph Hatch, the celebrated 17th century Ulcombe bell-founder. Needless to say, such bells, although fairly profuse in Kentish towers, do not come on to the transfer list all that often and those that *might* have been available were far too large to fit the tower. So began a long process of persuasion to get the parish to look at other possibilities.

At about this time it became clear that the Parish Church of St Gregory, Canterbury was to be declared redundant and I was asked to try and find a suitable home for the delightful chime of three Whitechapel bells which the open gable contained. These bells had been cast from the metal of the previous bells during the incumbency of the Rev'd Derek Ingram Hill, a well known Canterbury cleric and non-ringing bell enthusiast.

Finally, after the usual protracted negotiations and legal wrangling, it was decided that St Gregory's should be converted into an arts centre for the nearby Christ Church Teacher Training College and the proceedings for "change of use" got under way. Because of the need for scaffolding to reach the bells, it was finally agreed that the contractors undertaking the conversion would remove the bells, under supervision as part of their contract.

It was a heart-stopping morning when the bells were removed by builders who refused to take any notice of those present with experience of removing bells: "they knew what they were doing" – the rest of us were not nearly so sure, especially when they nearly dropped the treble off the scaffolding! Once safely on the ground the bells – which still had no new home to go to! – were loaded into the back of my estate car and transported to our house where, for the next two years they became a permanent fixture outside the kitchen window. It says a lot for the tolerance of our neighbours that not once did they complain about the occasional chiming of the bells by interested visitors – not even when Richard Jones, Chris Dalton and Mark Regan chimed Stedman Singles very loudly on them one Saturday evening!

Wormshill was an obvious home for this ring and, after much further deliberation, negotiation and counting of pennies, the scheme which has eventually produced the present six came into being. In order to cut costs it was decided that one of Mr Nightingale's own companies, an iron foundry in Sittingbourne, would fabricate the steel grillage bell frame to plans purchased from Whitechapel and that the K.C.A.C.R. bell-hanging squad would carry out the hanging.

It was then that we discovered that Wormshill's original Richard Phelps bell was badly cracked in the crown. It soon became apparent that there was no way the Parish was going to allow it to be recast or even have its canons removed – much further deliberation!

Eventually, with a Faculty granted, the Phelps' bell back from the welders and tuned to fit the Canterbury three, work in the tower could commence. It was a cold November one Saturday morning when the K.C.A. gang assembled to carry out the work of hanging four bells, "shouldn't take long to get this little lot up

and ringing", commented an optimistic member of the team. Little did he realise that the Sittingbourne steel fabricators couldn't read a drawing properly and seemed incapable of measuring to the Whitechapel pin-point accuracy with which we had become so accustomed in Kent over the years! It required a fair bit of ingenuity and hard work, not to mention extra drilling, to get everything to fit together as it should. So much for the earlier optimism!

The morning's difficulties were all forgotten however by the time lunch was over. Over the course of many years voluntary jobs in the towers of Kent, the K.C.A.C.R. bellhanging crew have been treated to some pretty lavish picnics in ringing rooms and at the back of dank, cold churches, but never before has roast beef with all the trimmings, followed by apple pie and cream been served up to the ravenous mob – in the charming surroundings of an elegant farmhouse dining room, complete with a roaring log fire! Needless to say the afternoon's labours were rather slow in re-commencing and, it has to be said, did not reflect the normal vim and vigour for which the K.C.A. team was justly renowned!

By the end of the afternoon all four bells were in action and, in spite of being deafening in the ground floor ringing room, handled well and sounded very good – for a 1, 2, 3, 6 of a ring of six! So at last, Wormshill had a ring of bells. I still remember the tone of disbelief in David Cawley's voice when I phoned him to tell him the good news! But there were still two empty pits to be filled and not a Hatch bell in sight!

It was soon after this that I conceded defeat, upped sticks and moved to the rural tranquility of Shropshire, vowing to retire from the search for redundant bells for parishes with firm views on what they wanted and stick to enjoying our newly found nice little G & J restored six ... "our fourth and fifth could do with better designed canon-retaining headstocks". I remarked enthusiastically, "don't even think about it until you've finished re-hanging the House", snarled 'er indoors!

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Having been responsible for the first phase of work to get St Giles' Wormshill a ring of bells, I was therefore delighted to read your cover article on the successful augmentation to six. I feel sure that my predecessors as Bell Advisors to the Diocese of Canterbury, namely David Cawley and Alan Berry, would wish to join me in congratulating Michael Nightingale and everyone at Wormshill for the successful completion of a very long held ambition to see a ring of six hanging at Wormshill. I know that, like me, David and Alan spent an inordinate amount of time in trying to find a suitable ring of bells for this small tower and to fit the parish's even smaller budget!

Having matched the St Gregory's Canterbury bells to the Wormshill bell, there still remained the problem of finding suitable bells to make the fourth and fifth of the ring. Just before I left Kent for Shropshire, news came of the pending redundancy of Leysdown Church on the Isle of Sheppey, with its chime of three. These were soon offered to Wormshill in the hope that they could be recast into the two missing bells. At this point I left the county, with no final decision having been made.

I was therefore interested to read that the Leysdown bells have been retained at Wormshill "just in case". In my day on the Canterbury D.A.C., redundant bells were offered to a parish as a gift, provided that they were used in the church to which they were offered. It would be interesting to know where these bells actually



"Pssst! Did you ask?"
 "Yeah! He said they're practising Bob Doubles! He's running in! T'other's running out! And she's making the Bob!"
 "Weirdos!"
 "Yeah!"

Well – look at it this way!

Making bobs in Plain Bob doubles is *easier* than ringing plain leads because the work at bobs is all plain hunting.

- If you were going to make seconds place you run out – which means that you have a "free lead" of plain hunt before actually making seconds place.
- If you were going to dodge 3-4 down you run in – which again means that you have a "free lead" of plain hunting before actually dodging 3-4 down.
- If you were going to dodge 3-4 up you make the bob – which is just a plain hunt up to fourths place (you are counting places, aren't you?) and back to lead. (Long fifths next time.)

All this must be simpler than dodging! There is just one more thing about bobs that should always be explained to pupils:

- If you are making long fifths when a bob is called you are not affected – **but** – instead of striking over two bells in the sequence A-B-A-B you now strike over three bells in the sequence A-B-B-C. Pupils should be made aware that they strike twice over the same bell, handstroke and backstroke, in the middle of the "four blows" when a bob is called.

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are now and if Wormshill really intends to keep these bells indefinitely? Surely the Leysdown three should be returned to the diocesan authorities so that they can be offered to another parish where they can be put to use.

RICHARD OFFEN

Former Consultant on Bells to the Diocese of Canterbury

5040 Cambridge S Royal Colin Woods

2345678	W	H
42365	3	s
3426587		s

6 part, calling 3W only in any one part.

s = 1456. S = 1478.

18 each 5678, 6578, 5687, 6587.

Also true to Lincolnshire