NO LONGER SILENT....

By David Cawley

....but where else but Sandwich, on the East coast of Kent, can one find three churches which once possessed substantial rings of bells, successively lost them, and in two cases acquired second-hand rings, one of which can be heard to this day (the other having subsequently been recast)?

Sandwich is often called 'the most perfect medieval English town'. I wrote about its bells in *The Ringing World* nearly fifty years ago *(Town of Silent Towers, RW LXIII 2940, 2941, 2943).* The Editor suggested a few years ago that I might like to re-write it: and reading it through, not only was the title no longer appropriate, but there were inaccuracies and assumptions to which the late and much lamented Christopher Dalton was not slow to draw to my attention!

As for being this perfect English medieval town, Sandwich is certainly a most attractive place, but far from unique: Sudbury and Stamford, both with important medieval churches, could well have a snatch at that palm. There was a time too when all of Sudbury's heavy rings of eight were listed in *Dove* as unringable (and one was, briefly, hung dead); Stamford has two eights (one unringable), two fours (one unringable) and a lost six. So far as bell history is concerned (and excluding WW2 losses), I think that Sandwich (which William Cobbett called *'a rotten borough.... a villanous hole'* is at least unusual in losing all three of its rings of bells and making good the loss of two of them from elsewhere.

St Peter's, St Mary's, St Clement's: the three great churches of Sandwich, are testament to its original prosperity, to the misfortunes it suffered both by the silting up of its haven, to disasters of nature, and to the heritage industry of our own time. St Clement's alone remains in regular use for worship: since 1948 it has been the parish church of Sandwich. St Mary's, having escaped narrowly from demolition in 1956, has proved an ideal concert and cultural venue, cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust. St Peter's (like its Sudbury counterpart), dominates the centre of the little town, overlooking the market place, is also cared for by the CCT and much used for all manner of good works, its chimes marking the quarters and, every evening at 8 pm, as it has done since the middle ages, the tenor bell sounds the curfew.

The very existence of three churches of this scale indicates the prosperity of medieval Sandwich: the appearance of two of them, at any rate, suggests that something pretty terrible must have happened. Indeed it has. The town suffered a devastating earthquake in the year 1578/9, which not only accelerated the decline of the once bustling port, but was incipient of disaster in its churches, all three of which were substantially complete by the late 15th-century. All three traced their origins to the beginning of the 11th century: there was much rebuilding in Norman times, of which the massive central tower of St

Clement's is of national significance. Externally, one is struck by the three tiers of Caen stone arcading which enrich the tower from roof-line to parapet; inside, the tower stands on four tall Norman arches of impressive size and strength, with two tiers of arcading above (the upper one in the ringing room). There is a bulky contemporary stair-turret entered by a Norman door with an elaborate tympanum. There were great works going on in Canterbury in the mid-to-late 1100's, prompting the thought that the builders involved were well-known to one another.

St Mary's, too, had a central tower, to whose fate we shall return. We do know that it had a lofty spire; the nearby village church of Ash has such a central tower and spire, and although of Early English date, its impressive size may suggest the vanished outline of St Mary's.

It is St Peter's tower, 100 feet high, which dominates the Sandwich skyline to-day. One of the delights of a walk about the town with its red roofs and abundance of Flemish gable-ends, is to find yet another view of this very distinct feature. Externally, the lower part is late 13th century, the upper part (of brick) crowned with the famous 'Sandwich Onion', is late 17th century. Inside the great height of the crossing arches cannot fail to impress. To the south, a doorway leads into the stair turret, whose wooden steps are formed around a single tree-trunk, turned for the purpose on what must have been an impressive lathe.

Returning now to the time of the earthquake, we find it reported that this calamity *'did shake and cleave four arches in St Mary's Church'*. The wording suggests that these may have been the crossing arches supporting the tower, one of whose pinnacles had caused a scare a hundred years before, when it fell. Presumably the damage was 'put right', but it was only a matter of time. As for St Peter's, it was noted in 1641 that *the Tower and Steeple of St Peter's Church in this Town.... which is an ancient and principall Sea Marke of great consequence to all manner of ships.... is very much splitt and cloven and thereby become very dangerous and ruinous.... the parishioners.... are in noe wise able to undergoe that charge* [£1500]'. It seems not unlikely that this too was the long-term result of the earthquake. Disaster was to strike quickly, and not in one place. Just before midnight on 13th October 1661, the upper two stages of the tower, with its spire crashed down into the south aisle. There had been two services that day, and as the record states, *'had it fell at the time when the people were there, the chiefest of the town and parish had been killed and buried under the rubbish and stones and timber....the rubbish was three fathom deep in the middle of the church, the bells underneath it.'* The nave, chancel and north aisle were quickly cleared of debris, the tower levelled off at the height of the ringing chamber ceiling. The south aisle was sealed off and remains to this day a 'tidy ruin' enclosing a charming garden. Internally, the layout of the church assumed its present form. What happened to the bells, or the remains of them, is not known; but in 1665 Thomas Palmar, the Canterbury bell founder, was working at St Bartholomew's Hospital Chapel in the town. He put up there a small single bell, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that he would at least be interested in what was happening at St Peter's; moreover, owing to its juxtaposition to the Town Hall, there were functions for which specific bells at St Peter's were required.

Time was running out, too, for St Mary's, and on 25th April 1668, the four great arches gave way causing the central tower and spire to collapse into the church. Down came the arcades of the nave: their western responds and several bases can be seen in the church to-day. Essentially what was left were the four outside walls – and a great heap of ruin within, on top of which were the five quite newly-cast bells, which were to have many years service ahead of them – but not at St Mary's. Within seven years, a very different St Mary's had risen within those four walls. Gone was the central tower, gone the arcades. Nave and south aisle were thrown under one stupendous roof, the north aise being separated by a timber arcade. In 1675, St Mary's was open for worship once again.

As for St Clement's the sheer massiveness of the Norman tower was proof against the more devastating effects of the earthquake. All was not well, however – or else the Church Wardens were being prudent as a matter of caution. The lead spire, the last survivor of the three, was taken down in 1664, a wooden balustrade being erected on top of the Norman work and a small 'onion' cupola, which was to be imitated in larger form down the road at St Peter's, as well as at Deal, Woodnesborough and Ringwould churches, all near neighbours. In 1672, from John Hodson of London, they ordered a new ring of bells.

Little is known to me about the bells which St Clement's possessed before 1672, but it is probably not far off the mark to suggest that – as happened at St Mary's – there was a heavy ring of three or four, perhaps with a sanctus bell, which were traded in or recast into the ring of five which inhabited the tower from that date until 1865. Indeed, from 1672 until things got moving at St Peter's in 1726, they *may* have been the only ring of bells in Sandwich. With the installation of St Peter's bells, and the civic predominance of their use, there is little to record about St Clement's: in 1800, Edward Hasted wrote in his *History of Kent: 'There are five bells, not very tuneable, and consequently of very little use, but to hasten the downfall of this venerable steeple in which they hang."* One of the last items of ringing payments is for the Coronation of 'Queen Alexandrina Victoria' in 1838. There is even confusion about the size of the ring. When the tower was restored in 1865, the bells were taken out and four of them were sold – an act of vandalism which apparently found its way even to *The Times* newspaper, though I have not myself seen the article. There is even some confusion as to which bell was saved, and the size of the remainder. In my 1967 article, not having measured the bell, I accepted Stahlschmidt's figure (32"), and assumed that it was the treble of a heavyish five. The late Phil Jakeman and I measured it in 1980 and found it to be no less than 39" diameter and unlikely to have been the treble. I looked at Hodson's other work of the period 1672-5: rings of five were cast for Kent at Chelsfield, Halling, High Halstow and Woodnesborough, the first of which remains augmented but intact. The first three have 38" or 39" tenors; the fourth, a near neighbour to Sandwich, has a 44" tenor. So, of the old five, I reckon the bell to be either the 10-cwt tenor or 4th of a 14-cwt ring. It was this bell which alone served the parish from 1865 to 1888, when a set of eight tubular bells, by Harrington, Latham & Co of Coventry was put in to supplement it. They were presented to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee by Thomas Dorman, Esq, a much respected benefactor to the church and to the town; and they were to remain in service for exactly a hundred years.

To mark their forthcoming centenary, it was arranged to have the tubular bells overhauled, which was done by myself in 1980 with local help, the necessary bits and pieces being supplied by the Whitechapel Foundry; and the following year we rehung the Hodson bell with all new fittings for chiming. It is still in use to-day. Unknown to us, the village of Kirkheaton in Yorkshire was considering the future of its bells, a ring of six, two of 1805 by Thomas Mears I, the remainder by his son Thomas II 1819. The bells had been tuned as far as possible, refitted and rehung in an iron frame by Mears & Stainbank in 1922. The good folk of Kirkheaton had called in John Taylor & Co with a request that they quote for augmenting the six bells to eight. Whilst prepared to do so, the result was unpromising, as the existing layout in the tower did not lend itself to ready adaption; and the six existing bells were the products of a period where bellfounding generally was at its lowest ebb. There was standing in the foundry a ring of bells which had been cast for an Essex church in 1966 but which had never been installed owing to the failure of their potential donor. Two of the eight had been used elsewhere, but the other six were in good condition, requiring only a new 3rd and 4th – and of course a frame and fittings. The old bells could be traded in, or sold on. The parish of Kirkheaton has every reason to be proud of the decision it made and the delightful ring of eight which it now possesses. The Central Council purchased the redundant ring of six, complete with its frame and fittings, in due course selling them on at a very reasonable price to St Clement, Sandwich. The whole installation was taken to Whitechapel for overhaul, the bells themselves having spent a considerable time on the floor whilst the tower was prepared for their installation. In a tower this size (and with a turbulent history) this preparatory work was in itself an operation of some magnitude. *"Your dream has come true,"* wrote Canon David Naumann, then Rector of Sandwich, who had kept me (in far-away Bristol) in regular touch with the project. He was referring to my 1967 article and the purple passage with which it ended! I even complied with a request for some sermon material – and was rewarded with an invitation to attend the Dedication ceremony in March 1990, to be held in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. I was seated right behind Her Majesty. Following the service, the bells of St Clement's rang out, Queen Elizabeth rightly observing, *"This is such a happy day – for everyone."*

St Clement's bells have kept their early 19th-century character, and hopefully are more *"tuneable"* than their predecessors. Rung regularly from their rather magnificent ringing room they have done nothing to *"hasten the downfall of this venerable steeple"*. Elsewhere in the town, it is necessary to retrace our steps, first to St Mary's, where it is not unreasonable to connect the installation of a new ring of five in 1639 (possibly the first change-ringing bells in the town) with the disaster which befell their church when the tower collapsed nineteen years later. This ring, with its 20-cwt tenor, replaced three medieval bells, which – judging from the total weight of the new ring – must have been of impressive size. It is not clear from the churchwardens' accounts how many there were in earlier days: the terms "Great bell", "Best bell", "Mary Bell" "4th Bell", "Little bell" are used together with the "Wackerell", the Kent name for the Sanctus. I have assumed that "Great" and "Best" were the same bell, likewise "Little" and "Wackerell". Whatever the case, by 1639 there were three bells, one of them cracked, and John Wilnar of Borden

was called in. He quoted £16 for recasting the cracked bell and £32 for recasting the bells into a "lighter" ring of five; the latter estimate was accepted and the new St Mary's ring was to be his last job: he (and his great Kent rival, Joseph Hatch died) in that year, as the bill for the work infers: *1640 Paid Henry Wilnor for the use of the widow of John Wilnor for casteing of our five bells and hanging them....£32..0s..0d*; and it goes on to add *To Thomas Barret for making the quarters to strike upon the 4th Bell 23s 8d, the dutch paid halfe 11s. 6d.* The latter statement is of interest, as the church had paid in 1464 for a chiming clock, made in the nearby village of Wingham. Such a feature as early as that date indicates the prosperity of medieval Sandwich; and the fact that the Dutch paid *halfe* for its adaption to the new bells in 1640 shows the increasing Dutch and Flemish influence which is apparent in much of the architecture of the town. They were not destined to be heard for very long.

The collapse of St Mary's tower, related above, the second such catastrophe to visit the town in seven years must have been a shattering blow in more senses than one to those who in the years 1640-1668 *may* have introduced the art of change ringing to Sandwich. The introduction of the new ring of five at St Clement's, in all probability a lighter ring (one may guess at 11 – 14 cwt) as against St Mary's ton tenor, must have seemed a godsend, especially when it became apparent that no attempt was being made to rebuild St Mary's tower. The miraculously undamaged bells were weighed, then sent to Elham, hung in the church of St Mary there, and gave service for the best part of a century until Lester & Pack recast them into a ring of eight in 1763. When they were recast again by Whitechapel in 1970, the order of service recalled the origin of their former bells, brought from St Mary, Sandwich. Reality was faced in 1718 when the medieval south porch was used as the base of a small square tower of brick with a pretty little wooden belfry stage. For £14..5s..11d, Richard Phelps provided them with a bell whose inscription told the story: THIS BEL WAS BOUGHT & STEEPLE BUILT A D 1718 I: BRADLEY R: HARVEY CH: WARDENS R: P: F: Even this was lost in 1876 during an energetic restoration of the church: its successor, after all that proud history, is a 25-inch bell of some 3-cwt bearing only CAST BY JOHN WARNER & SONS LONDON 1876. That's all. The steady, even Cambridge Quarters are calling, not from the ghost of St Marty's shattered medieval clock but from the lofty tower of St Peter's.

We left the good folk of St Peter's in the south aisle, clearing up the havoc which had been wrought by the collapse of the two top stages of their tower, and no doubt thanking the Lord for their providential deliverance during worship earlier that day. They were no doubt some time coming to their bells, which, unlike St Mary's five, were underneath the ruin. What is quite certain is that for a while at any rate St Peter's would be unable to fulfil its campanological obligations to the town, which were considerable. So much so, that being Sexton of St Peter's was a sought-after position until about fifty years ago, that ecclesiastical dignitary residing in a little cottage opposite the church (appropriately *Curfew Cottage*). William Boys in his *Collections for a History of Sandwich* (1792) tells us that the sexton *"has a salary from the parish of 40s* (£2) *for tolling the Tenor whenever service requires. He rings likewise the tenor bell every night at 8 o'clock....and every morning at 4 o'clock from a fortnight after Michaelmas* (29th September) *to a fortnight after Lady Day* (25th March), *except on Sundays, and in the 12 days after*

Christmas, for which he has from the Corporation annually 3 pounds, and an allowance of 6s 8d (33p) *for Candles and Oil. The sexton also rings the 4th bell at every common assembly by way of notice to the freemen that the Mayor and Jurats are proceeding to the Hall."* One feels that the sexton could make a pretty penny from his ecclesiastical and civil duties. The *Curfew* is of Norman origin; the 4 o'clock waking-up bell was, even in Victorian times, not peculiar to Sandwich (possibly being left over from the morning angelus.) Likewise, the ringing of the 4th as the 1 p.m. *Brandgoose* bell may be a survivor of the mid-day angelus. The ringing of this same bell for the Civic Procession is unique to Sandwich, and the bell is actually specified to be rung for half an hour in a decree of the Common Assembly in 1534. A reference to the bell being rung for the opening of the Market could refer to this bell. It is notable that of the present front seven bells, the present condition of this bell is far better; as if, like the tenor (still maintained by the Council) it had received at least a degree of maintenance in the past. And some still call it "The Mayor's Bell".

The excerpt from Boys, given above, refers to the Tenor and 4th; presumably those bells in the present ring of eight. In October 1661, things were very different, and it is not clear to me how soon the clearance operations, building up the south arcade (which included the south tower arch) took to complete, let alone the rebuilding of the top stages of the tower. Rather than sort out the rubbish, it was cleared away, and the rebuilding was carried out in yellow/brown brick in as plain a style as can be. In place of the spire there arose *"curiously emphasising the foreign note....the preposterous Dutch buld at its top. Nothing could be quainter, nothing pleasanter nothing sweeter, than this assembly of red roofs; nothing more suggestive than that leaden bulb breaking in...."* (J. Hueffer *The Cinque Ports,* 1900). Few writers have found the lofty plain tower of mellow brick not devoid of interest; it draws me like a magnet. In its ample bell-chamber was plenty of room, though what survived the fall, and what was replaced hasn't come to my attention. Whatever it was paled into insignificance when news came of great things happening at Canterbury Cathedral.

In brief it was this: Canterbury was one of the few Cathedrals which retained two rings of bells after the Reformation; by 1716 they had resolved themselves into two rings of six, of which it is recorded that the heavy ones, with a 35-cwt tenor, were in the old Norman Arundel, or north-west tower, and four of which were cracked; and a lighter ring in the Oxford, or south-west tower, on top of which hung "Great Dunstan". Ten years later it was resolved to remove bells altogether from the Arundel tower, which was considered to be in a bad condition (and was of course replaced by the present tower a century later). The six large bells would be recast to their original weight, augmented to eight, and the lighter ring (whose tenor was also cracked) in the Oxford tower would be sold to make room for them. The news reached Sandwich and the upshot is recorded in the Cathedral Chapter Act Book for Midsummer 1727:
"OXFORD TOWER, <u>Old Bells:</u> Upon receiving a letter from Mr R. Solley of Sandwich, offering as the last resolution of his Corporation, to give us for the Six old Bells lately taken out of our Oxford Steeple Nine Pence Halfpenny a Pound Ready Money & to carry them away at their own charge provided that the Tenor now crack'd be recaft at our expense: We are come to these Resolutions, That we are content to take Nine Pence Half

Penny a Pound ready money, provided that the purchafers take away the Bells at their own Charge: and we have agreed with Samuell Knight, Bell Founder that he shall for the sum of £8 to be paid to him by us, recaft the Tenor and put in tune the other 5 bells, & put us at no other charge for cafting the fame. We are willing to give him leave to caft it at Our Foundry, But we desire that this whole Affair may be completed by the First day of August next. Accordingly, we order the Founder to set about the recafting of the Tenor without delay."

Indeed it was. Samuell Knight of Holborn had been in occupation of the Cathedral Foundry on the site of the old detached Campanile, and was to remain there for some while as the contents of many local towers testify; two of the eight bells he cast for the Cathedral are still in use as part of the clock chime in the present Arundel tower. The Cathedral Account books give the following receipt:
"1727 Oct 2 Rec'd Eight Pounds for the casting of the new tenor bell and also Ten Shillings Six Pence for weighing and loading the Bells sold to Sandwich SAMll KNIGHT". The total weight of the six bells, the front five by Joseph Hatch of Ulcombe, 1625, plus Knight's new tenor was 56-cwts, suggesting a tenor of 17-cwts.The bells were duly hung in a new oak frame, the design of which suggests Robert Catlin, Kght's regular bellhanger and eventual successor. They became known as "The Six Oxfords", from their original location in Canterbury's Oxford Tower, and it must have been a source of pride that from the newly-built tower rang the bells of the Cathedral! It was a further step forward in change-ringing, for as far as we can tell, no tower in Sandwich had as yet possessed six bells. It was to bear fruit.

The upsurge in 8-bell ringing in Kent had not started with Canterbury Cathedral. The oldest surviving such ring is at Wingham, not far from Sandwich, cast by Richard Phelps in 1720, and still intact to-day. There had been at least two such rings in Kent, St Nicholas, Deptford (6 bells scrapped in 1956) and Holy Trinity, Dartford (all since recast) were the first in 1701/2 (all since recast). It is possible that Maidstone had an earlier eight than all these. Of the 24 towers provided with or augmented to 8 bells in the period 1727-1779 only a third were in East Kent, and the nearest to Sandwich were the Cathedral, Dover and of course Wingham. The locals, therefore, had little opportunity for regular practice on eight, but at least had the advantage of two towers in which to ring.

The glory days of Sandwich might well have been over, but it remained a Cinque Port with a proud history. It would have been known, however, in the Sandwich towers (and, importantly, in the Town Hall) that just round the corner, St Mary, Dover had a ring of eight as long as St Peter's had six; the old five from St Mary, Sandwich, in their new home at Elham, had been recast into eight in 1763; in 1778, Folkestone acquired a new ring of eight, while along the road at Ash, Thomas Swain of London was preparing a new frame for eight (whether they were actually cast is not clear). James Barham was making ringing history elsewhere in the county with his Leeds Youths, one of the principal provincial peal bands. It was to William Mears, the young man from Canterbury, who must have known Sandwich well, that the Mayor, Jurats, Rector and Church Wardens turned to put their bells on an equal footing. The result was a ring of eight of which any founder might be proud.

Assuming that the "Six Oxfords" were sound, the easiest way had there been room would have been to add two trebles. Every inch of space was, however, taken up with the existing frame, and the bells hung very high in the tower, where space was further constricted by the raking beams supporting the "Onion". William Mears had not yet been taken into partnership with William Chapman, whose business partner, Thomas Pack, was still alive. The circumstantial evidence is that Thomas Pack and William Mears were not on good terms, for it was only after Pack's death in 1781 that Mears joined Chapman at the Whitechapel Foundry – still known as "Mears" to many ringers and to others beyond the Exercise. Mears' experience went back to 1762 where he attracted the attention of Chapman who was recasting Great Dunstan at Canterbury Cathedral's foundry. For Sandwich he proposed a new ring of eight, the tenor to be about 15-cwt in the key of E-flat. This was therefore to be a thin peal indeed, but his efforts were attended by excellent results so far as the bells themselves were concerned. Meanwhile, Mr Forbes, who was Mears' bellhanger found a tenor of 45½", the back bells could be accommodated in the existing back five pits, that of the tenor being shortened to accommodate the new treble; the old treble pit was partially replaced with slighter material, and now accommodated the new 2nd and 3rd bells. The result was that the treble, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 7th now swung north/south, where there was nothing to support the tower. During an inspection in 1980, the tenor and the 4th, the only bells capable of being rung full-circle, and it was significant that the 4th, swinging N/S generated about 1/64" movement on its own, nearly twice as much as the tenor, twice the weight and swinging E/W. This suggests that Mears and Mr Forbes should have given more attention to the direction in which the bells swung, to say nothing of the height in which the frame was placed. It suggests that the authorities, both of 1727 and 1779 wanted them "loud and deep". They also got Mears' bill:

		£ s. d.
"To a ring of 8 Bells....Ct 67 3 13 @ £5..8s..0d		*365 19 11*
Bell ropes		*1 14 0*
New stocks, iron work, altering frame, etc		*59 0 0*
Landing and wharfage of the old bells		*3 18 7*
		430 12 6
By the six old bells Ct 55 1 6 @ £4..10s..0d	*246 12 6*	
Public Subscription	*147 10 0*	
	394 2 6	
Church Rate	*36 10 0*	*430 12 6"*

The bells were hung with all new fittings of conventional late 18th-century type; these exist in their entirety on the 4th bell, which has had running repairs in the distant past. The treble headstock is dated 1815, though its wheel, like those of the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th and 7th has largely collapsed and broken. The front seven all have spatula topped clappers, the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 7th and tenor being fitted with clock hammers.

There is no doubt that this fine ring of bells was a "handful" from the start. Part of the reason is the height at which they hang in the tower (when the tenor is "up" its lip is half-way up the bell-chamber louvres). There must have been considerable movement even when they were a six, and more notice should have been taken. This is exacerbated by the layout described above which suggests that ideally and unusually, these bells should all swing east/west. The one advantage of their present position is that the clock chimes are heard all over the town, Cambridge Quarters, as even and sedate as I've heard anywhere, Big Ben included. It is a treat to listen to. As to ringing, there was certainly a band in Sandwich up to the early years of the 20th century. There has only ever been one peal on the bells – what does that tell you? The great James Barham never came here, or if he did, he must have lost the peal. It was Squire John Powell Powell's select band from Quex Park, Birchington – then the very latest thing in private rings – who came after Christmas 1823 and rang a peal of Grandsire Triples on December 27th. The equally great William Shipway conducted it, and there is one of the Quex Institution's great peal-boards, painted by W Friend of Canterbury, recording the historic event. You can see others like it at Margate, Ash, Faversham and I think there's one at Fulham, the Squire's London residence. Often inscribed UNANIMITAS ET PERSERVERENTIA / QUEX INSTITUTION OF RINGERS / J. P. POWELL ESQR PATRON AND FOUNDER / etc, the Sandwich one lacks the Latin motto in a place where it was perhaps sorely needed, not least by S. Carter, who rang the tenor.

The Kent County Association was formed in 1880, but as far as I can see, St Peter's was never an affiliated tower. A Canterbury District meeting was held there in 1892, but that seems the extent of its involvement. It is not until 1957 that the tower appears classed as "unringable" although the received wisdom is that by then the bells had not been rung for forty years. The historic occasion was in 1913 when, during ringing for a wedding, *"dust was observed to fall from a crack"* and it was decreed that the bells should not be rung again until the trouble had been addressed. There are some gems of literature from this period. A 1904 guide book, *Deal, Walmer and Sandwich Illustrated* states, *"It is from the tower of St Peter's church that the Curfew bell still sends forth its sonorous tones, but....the modern inhabitants of Sandwich are not thereby beguiled into spending the remainder of the evening in darkness, or retiring to rest at a particularly early hour."* Few writers could resist mention of the curfew: usually coupled with the adjective *ancient*, for flavour – although in this case true. W Gordon in *Sandwich and Round About it* (1910) informs us, *"....Sandwich gets its full value out of its bells, tuneful bells doubtless, but seemingly over-busy. What with chiming the quarters and striking the hours, and the whole eight of them pealing for services and weddings and rejoicings and practisings, and the tenor going every morning at five as 'the rising bell,' and at eight o'clock every evening as 'the curfew bell', and whenever a native or inhabitant dies, so many strokes for so many years, and as many again at the funeral....they never seem to be at rest.* F. Watt, *Canterbury Pilgrims and their Ways* (1917) was similarly moved when in St Clement's churchyard, when *"there pealed forth the sweet note of its melodious bells"*. These of course were the tubular bells, so he must have been easily pleased: *"Presently the bells of St Peter's* (being chimed by this date?) *and St Mary's* (1 bell) *echoed from the near distance in a confused jumble of sound."* Rather more reliable is the *Bell News* account of Margate ringers' outing of June 1901: *"Sandwich was the*

first stopping place. The peal of eight here are in rather a bad state and practically unringable, but after a struggle 168 of Grandsire Triples was brought round." The one person to have rung at Sandwich personally known to me was the late Samuel R Garner, formerly of Ospringe, elected to the Association at that 1892 meeting. Sam well recalled the occasion: *"They were lovely-sounding Bells with a grand ringing-chamber. The tower moved a lot and you had to get the right speed or it all fired out – in fact they were jolly hard work, but well worth the effort."*

After the Great War, there appears definitely to be no ringing in Sandwich, and the bell fittings, by now nearly 150 years old, began to deteriorate. In 1928 there was a minor earth tremor, which caused more than a slight scare in Sandwich. Following this the tower received extensive repairs. The bells were examined by Gillett & Johnston and Mears & Stainbank who submitted extensive reports. I have never seen these but in the spring of 1932, as a short-term measure, the Tenor was quarter-turned and rehung with mainly new ringing fittings by Mears, at a cost of £33..5s..0d. The nature of the G&J report is mentioned in a letter to John Taylor & Co from Arthur A. Saxby, the secretary of the Margate company, who had apparently kept up their interest following their visit of 1901. *"The Bells at Sandwich,"* he wrote, *"are likely to be done by Gillett & Johnston who have submitted a very fine detailed report & estimates all as clear as ABC....I do not think the order has yet been placed. Also our old friend the Architect is in no way interested in the bells or Gillett & Johnson* (sic). *I wish you could have got in there as I have the promise to open them* (as) *I and my company were the last band to ring there 35 years ago."* As we have seen, the last statement is not quite accurate. The late Pat Cannon told me that the then Mayor had raised a considerable sum for the bells, which the Rector had then spent on other church projects. The case went to court, but the bell scheme was never implemented.

Time was running out for St Peter's, however, and an even bigger threat hung over St Mary's. The last Rector of St Peter's moved in 1948, St Mary's already being held by the Vicar of St Clement's, who was also shortly to retire. Accordingly, the three benefices were united. The first incumbent being styled Rector of Sandwich and St Clement's being the Parish Church. Sir Roger Manwood School took over St Peter's as a school chapel, which secured its immediate future; the demolition of St Mary's actually reached Faculty approval, when the redoubtable Ivor Bulmer-Thomas stepped in, and with the help of the Friends of Friendless Churches, it was restored for occasional worship. Under the Pastoral Measure 1968, St Mary's, and subsequently St Peter's were declared redundant and directly vested in the Churches Conservation Trust (then the RCF), their upkeep and maintenance proving too great for Sir Roger Manwood School, the Friends of St Mary's and the Parish. The nature of the work carried out by the Trust is both extensive and exemplary.

The key to the restoration of St Peter's had been the need to preserve the tower, work which was carried out in two stages in 1973-4, when the tower was underpinned and 1978 when work at first and second floor levels was completed at considerable expense. Although Mr Saxby's *"very funny old architect"* of 1935 had gone to his reward, there was difficulty with the distinguished and very competent architect under whose care the

work took place at St Peter's: he had a record of bad relationships when it came to the question of bells. In 1973, Alan Berry, the General Secretary of the KCACR, in his new capacity, having succeeded me as Canterbury's Diocesan Bells Adviser, undertook a full report on St Peter's Bells and submitted this (supported by a report from Alan Frost) as to a way forward. The reply was courteous, but firm: there was a long way to go, and bells were not the first priority. Then in 1979, the tower work being complete, a second bite was had at the cherry and was to prove equally abortive. In that year, I was invited to speak on Bells at the Annual Dinner of the Sandwich Curfew Ringers. This unique body had been formed some years before when the last sexton left Curfew Cottage. It elected its own Captain, who at the time was John Anderson (who had learned to ring at Eltham) and we struck up a good rapport. Each Curfew ringer has an allotted day in the month on which he or she is responsible for the Curfew. In my talk I naturally referred to St Peter's bells including these words, "Your Worship, the present state of these bells is, I'm sorry to say, a reproach to the whole Town and Cinque Port of Sandwich!" To my amazement, the talk went down very well, not least with the incoming Mayor, who was prepared to make St Peter's bells his Mayor's Charity for his year of office. Fortified with reports from Whitechapel and from Brian Threlfall, approach was made to TCCT (or RCF as it was then), who were encouraging but non-committal. A great deal of hard work came to an end some 18 months later when TCCT had to say "No" because of the views of the then architect. One nice touch during Mayor Bert Sneller's Installation was to ring the 4th in full circles – the *Brandgoose* or *Mayor's Bell,* as he proceeded to the Town Hall - the first time in many years. Lately, the Town Council has renewed is obligation to maintain the Tenor, *Curfew*, bell which has been equipped with new ball bearings and pulley. The Curfew Ringers of Sandwich continue the ancient tradition every night at 8.00 p.m. The ringing chamber no longer partakes of the nature of a dungeon. The clock and its chimes are impeccably maintained by that same diligent Council. Let's hope that there is a brave soul out there waiting to take on the challenge, so that Sandwich may again hear the eight bells as they did on the day when Margate ringers last rang them, a century ago.

St Clement's has ably seen to it that Sandwich is no longer the *Town of Silent Towers.* But it remains unusual, if not unique, in having lost three rings of bells, it acquired two more, themselves recycled from a Cathedral and a Yorkshire village church – indeed a town no longer silent.

THE BELLS

ST CLEMENT
Pre 1672 – The tower contained bells, number not known

1672 – A new ring of five was installed. These were all cast by John Hodson of London, and the evidence from other rings of five cast by him at this time is that the surviving 39" diameter bell was the 4th or tenor of such a ring. The other four were sold in 1865/6.

1888 – A set of eight tubular bells, presented by Thomas Dorman, Esq, in honour of the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. They remained in use for exactly a century and were then taken down to make room for the present ring of bells.

1990 – A ring of six bells, complete with frame and fittings, purchased from Kirkheaton Church, Yorkshire, and installed by the Kent County Association of Change Ringers.

Bell	*Note*	*Diameter*	*Date*	*Founder*	*Cwt*	*qr*	*lb*
Treble	D#	29"	1819	Thomas Mears II, Whitechapel	5	0	21
Second	C#	31¼"	1819	Thomas Mears II	6	0	2
Third	B	32¾"	1819	Thomas Mears II	6	1	8
Fourth	A#	35"	1805	Thomas Mears I, Whitechapel	7	1	13
Fifth	G#	37¼"	1805	Thomas Mears I	8	2	10
Tenor	F#	41¾"	1819	Thomas Mears II	12	1	6
Service Bell		39"	1672	John Hodson, London	11 approx		

ST MARY

Pre-1639 – A ring certainly of three plus a sanctus with some evidence of being four or five.

1639/40 – A new ring of five cast from some of the metal of three heavy bells.

Treble		1639/40	John Wilnar, Borden	8	1	22
Second		1639/40	John Wilnar	8	2	13
Third		1639/40	John Wilnar	12	0	7
Fourth		1639/40	John Wilnar	15	0	6
Tenor		1639/40	John Wilnar	20	0	14

Henry Wilnar, his successor, was associated with the casting of these bells; John died in May 1640. The bells were sold to St Mary, Elham in 1668 following the collapse of the tower; they were recast in 1763 (and again in 1970).

Present single bell (see text) 25" 1876 John Warner & Sons, London 3 approx

ST PETER

Pre-1727 – Originally at least four bells, apparently destroyed "underneath the rubbish" when the tower fell in 1661. No details of their successors, presumably at least one or two, In 1727, the lighter six, from the Oxford Tower, of Canterbury Cathedral, total weight 55-1-6 were purchased, the front five being by Joseph Hatch of Ulcombe 1625, the tenor (probably about 17-cwt) recast by Samuell Knight, in Canterbury in 1727. The "Six Oxfords" were recast or exchanged for the present eight in 1779.

Treble	Eb	27½"	1779	William Mears & Co of London	4	2	27
Second	D	29¼"	1779	William Mears & Co	5	0	13
Third	C	31"	1779	William Mears & Co	5	3	15
Fourth	Bb	33¾"	1779	William Mears & Co	7	1	24
Fifth	Ab	35 3/8"	1779	William Mears & Co	7	2	23
Sixth	G	37 3/8"	1779	William Mears & Co	9	2	1
Seventh	F	41¾"	1779	William Mears & Co	11	3	13
Tenor	Eb	45 3/8"	1779	William Mears & Co	15	2	9

The foregoing weights are those recorded by William Boys in 1792; they also used to hang in a framed Whitechapel bell record in the ringing chamber. The diameters and keynotes are as measured by the late Mr W A Hughes of Whitechapel in 1980.

The inscriptions on fifteen of the existing sixteen bells are rather long and have had to be omitted: an accurate transcript is to be found on the excellent Kent Bells web site maintained by the indefatigable Dickon Love, and which should be compulsory reading for all who want to know anything about the Church Bells of Kent....and London (and even Prague): www.kent.lovesguide.com