

*G & B Diocesan Association of
Church Bell Ringers
Cheltenham Branch Newsletter
July 2004*

Recent firsts: well done!

Philip Abbey: 1st QP of London No.3 S. Royal in-hand.
APOLOGIES to Mark Davies who rang his 1st Peal of London No.3 S Royal (not QP as stated before).
Max Drinkwater: 1st QP of Stedman Triples
Caroline Ridley: 1st Peal, Rutland S Major
Simon Ridley: 1st Peal of 8 spliced S major

Change of location of practice

Because of the work on Swindon Village tower, the surprise practice on Saturday 7th August has been moved to Dumbleton.

CD-Rom to support branch email policy

Just a reminder that there is a CD-Rom with all the software mentioned in the Branch Email Policy? Just email Philip to borrow it, philip@abbey1.org.uk. The Branch Policy URL is http://www.lynches.demon.co.uk/ringing/publications/Branch_Email.pdf

A potted history of St Marks,

St. Mark's church was completed in 1862, and finally in 1884 Mrs Murray Miller, a member of the congregation at St Mark's, gave a ring of five bells with a tenor of 16-3-14 in F#. The bells, St James (1) St John (2) St Stephen (3) St Andrew (4) and St Paul (tenor) were cast and hung in the tower by Taylor's and first rang out on the 12th February 1885. Three peals have been rung in total on these bells in 1891, 1892 and more recently in 1987, with many quarter peals too.

Unfortunately, the frame is not of the best design for the tower with 3, 4 and 5 all swinging across the weaker direction of the tower and the whole installation being just under the base of the spire causing severe tower movement during ringing and the fittings are in a poor state. Most of the clapper bushings allow the clapper to be lifted about 1-2 inches in the bell, two of the headstocks are seriously cracked, the frame moves quite a bit, most gudgeons are leaking and loose and the bearings are worn.

The bells themselves however are of interesting historical note despite being only 125 years old. When one enters the bell chamber, it quickly becomes apparent that the bells despite being cast and hung at the same time they are of two quite different designs. The back two bells are of a short squat profile and are hung with flat tops, tucked up into large headstocks. The front three bells are hung upon cannons (all the bells have independent clapper staples) and are long and narrow in profile. The author is informed that this is because they were cast during a "cross over" between cannons and flat tops, although casting with cannons then drilling the clapper through remains unusual as far as the author has seen. The idea behind this hang we can only guess was to cause the tenors to be quicker and the trebles to swing slower. Alas, it does not work. The

bells were also cast during a unique period in the history of tuning. They are not Simpson tuned but attempts were clearly being made towards some form of harmonic tuning other than a single note.

What's going to happen

In late 2003, Taylor's inspected the bells, and identified several serious problems with the bells which although not terminal, could soon become so if extensive work was not undertaken.

These included major cracks in some of the headstocks, loose gudgeons, remarkably loose and worn clapper bushings, frame movement and serious rust upon vital fittings. It was "now or never" to re-hang, if the bells were to be rung regularly again.

We decided the first step in doing any work upon the bells was to get them ringing again; so after a lot of elbow grease and nut tightening, they were cautiously test rung by a local band who were surprised they went better than expected and sounded good! A practice was soon re-established.

The next stage was to gently break the news to the church that urgent work was needed and would cost significant money. Following discussions it soon became clear that the church building itself was in need of serious repair and the PCC could not even begin to consider the contents of the tower. It was this slightly depressing scenario that was brought to the Cheltenham Branch AGM in 2003 and following discussion, the local ringers agreed to raise the funds themselves with the support of the Branch.

Since the current ring was a gift and sounded good (but in need of tuning), it was decided to retain the existing ring and re-hang it in a new frame, lower in the tower, with all new fixtures and fittings. The design also incorporates three new trebles. Hopefully, the end result will be a 16 cwt ring of 8 in F, rung from a balcony similar in design to Winchcombe's ringing chamber. The existing unused balcony will hopefully be adapted for this purpose and will include the necessary trap door required for the bells to be removed.

The restoration appeal has been launched and we have just over £8000 in the bank, the total required being in the region of £80,000. Money was raised from the G&B on AGM and the pudding party. We would appreciate the support of anyone who can help us restore this glorious sounding ring of bells and would welcome all donations towards the work. To date two of the three new trebles are still available should anyone wish to give a bell. Beer, T-shirts, mugs, pens and other useful items you never have enough of in the belfry will be on sale and we hope to see supporters on tower Open days and "fund raisers". We are currently building up a record of all ringing done at the tower so if anyone has rung any quarters at the tower please could they let us have the details.
Simon Ridley