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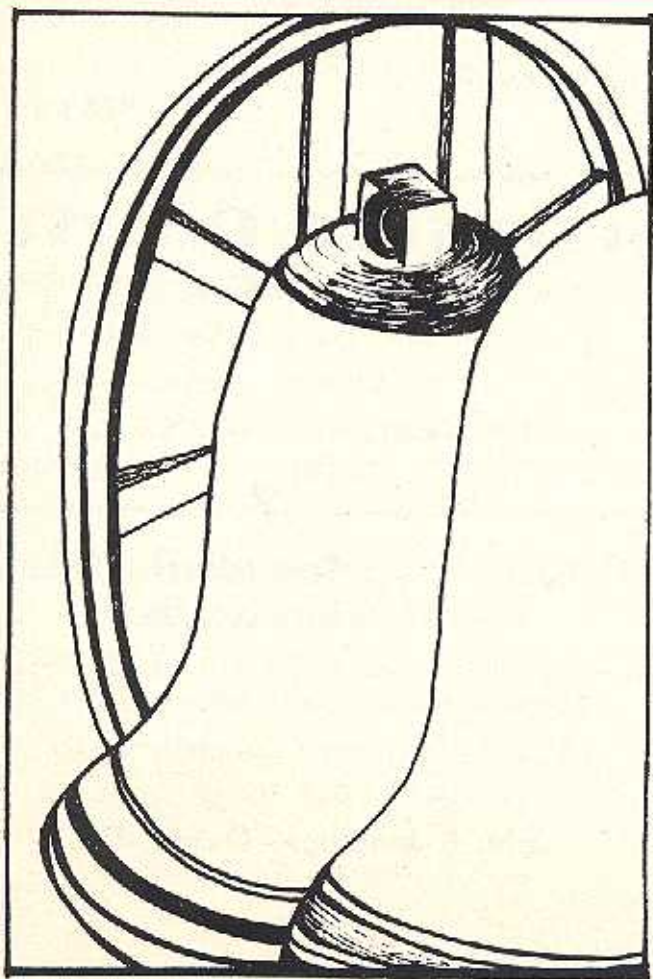
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Oxted & Limpsfield



Review

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CHURCH BELLS



100 NOT OUT



by Christopher Mew

THIS YEAR SEES THE Surrey Association of Church Bell Ringers celebrating the centenary of its foundation which took place in the church hall at Beddington on Whit Monday, 21st May, 1880. The aims of the Association have always been to promote the art and science of change ringing as part of church worship and as such to maintain Sunday ringing wherever possible.

In the first year there were 59 members and the subscription was 2s. from which members had teas at meetings subsidised up to 9d per head. The early membership was drawn from 11 churches and by 1900 the number of churches represented had risen to 29 with 247 members. Up to this time the churches at Oxted, Limpfield and Limpfield Chart had not any ringers who were also members of the Surrey Association; this was partly due to the proximity of the Kent ringers whose association the Limpfield ringer's expressed a desire to join in 1906. In order to realise the potential in the Southern half of the county a Southern District was formed in 1912 and was an immediate success attracting 53 new members in the first year.

The first world war not only curtailed ringing activities through ringers joining the armed services but also resulted in an appalling long-term loss. In 1913 there had been 299 resident ringing members of the Association and the total number who died as a result of hostilities was 149.

The bells in S.E. Surrey had reached their present state with the installation of a new ring of 8 bells cast by Gillett and Johnston of Croydon at St. Nicholas, Godstone in 1915. By the late 1920's all the churches had representative members of the Association including families familiar to the area. At Godstone the Rector, Rev. G. E. Hoare and H. G. P. Hoare, Churchwarden, were joined by Robert Hoare as Secretary of the ringers together with J. W. Hoare in the company. At Limpfield Chart there were already four members of the Tidy family ringing, Edward, Hylton, Leonard and Wilfred. Len Tidy was a leading ringer in the area in the 1930's conducting many peals and was Ringing Master of the Southern District of the Association from 1931 to 1934.

On 1st May, 1927 the Guildford Diocese had been formed and at the end of that year the Guildford Diocesan Guild of ringers was formed covering the activities of the Surrey Association in South West Surrey. Despite the overlap of activities the Association was very active in the 1930's and immediately prior to the second war had a membership of 280.

Following restrictions being placed on ringing, on 3rd June 1940 a

Church Bells

total ban was imposed on ringing, the understanding being that bells would only be rung as a sign of invasion. The impracticalities of the system were soon realised and in April 1943 the Noise Order imposing the ban was lifted allowing ringing on Sundays, Good Friday and Christmas Day. Churchill, announcing the decision, told the House: "We came to the conclusion that this means of warning is redundant" and added with his inimitable wit . . . "For myself, I cannot help feeling that anything like a serious invasion would be bound to leak out!"

During the war years John Knight of Limpsfield Chart was Secretary of the Association's Southern District and in the years up to 1950 membership grew to nearly 400. In 1949 the subscription was raised for the first time in 69 years from 2s to 2s6d!

The 1950's saw ringing for the death of King George VI and coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and the establishment of ringing at Limpsfield under Eric Jarrett and Eric Nixon, at the Chart under Len Tidy, with the Fordham family at Oxted and Rev. Kenneth Hoare and Tom Bird at Godstone. Eric Nixon served on the Southern District Committee in 1962/63 and Tom Bird, having been Ringing Master of the Southern District in 1964 served on the District Committee in 1965. The area lost some loyal members with the deaths of Edward Tidy in 1960, Len Tidy in 1965 and Arthur Newnham in 1973. Rev. Kenneth Hoare also moved away to Norfolk in 1966.

The 1960's and 1970's were epitomised by an increased activity in the fields of instruction in ringing and in raising cash for bell restoration work through the Belfry Repair Fund. The latter fund has made several donations of £1,000 toward bell work and in this the centenary year has donated a bell at the cost of £2,000 as part of a replacement ring of bells for those destroyed by fire at St. Leonard's, Streatham. The celebration of the Association centenary sees the ringing in Surrey in an active state with efforts being made in all towers in the area to keep and improve Sunday ringing. John Hall at the Chart, David Putnam at Oxted, Albert Wood at Godstone and Frank Reed at St. Peter's are amongst those leading the ringing in the area.

It is not possible to mention all the individuals who have contributed to keep bellringing active in Surrey over 100 years but it is through the efforts of many individuals that we can today call from the tower the faithful to worship through the music of the bells.

Dear Sir,

I would like to say thank you to the Rev. Guy Bennett and Mr David Putnam and his team of Bell singers, who, at my request rang a special quarter peal on September 28th, before morning service, at Oxted Church to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain, I hope others enjoyed this as much as I did.

(Mrs.) Peggy Baker, 31 Barnetts Shaw, Oxted.

THE BELLS OF ST. PETER'S

by Michael Emery

THERE ARE SOME 6000 churches in the British Isles with five or more bells which are rung regularly for Sunday services. Most of these are in England—there are fewer than 50 towers in the rest of the world where the bells can be rung in the English way; in which each bell is attached to a wheel and caused to rotate backwards and forwards through almost 360°, by pulling on the bell rope which is fastened to the rim of the wheel.

Until the 14th century, church bells were normally hung on a simple spindle and chimed by pulling a rope attached to the spindle. There is evidence in St. Peter's bell chamber that the church's earliest bells were hung and chimed in this way, not only for Sunday services—7 am in the summer and 9 am in winter—but also on the occasions of funerals. In fact as recently as the 1890s, Limpsheld still followed the practice of identifying the sex of the dead person by means of 'teller' strokes; three groups of three for a male and three groups of two for a female.

St. Peter's has had six bells for only just over a century, but as early as Edward VI's reign (1547 - 1553) it is recorded as having "in the stypell flower grete bells." As for the frame they hung in, George P. Elphick—an expert on bell-frame archaeology—visited the church in 1946 and considered the old frame, still in existence but no longer supporting the bells, to date from the 13th century.

He also confirms that, what is generally believed to be the oldest bell in the tower, the third, was cast by Thomas Harrys (or Harris), who died in 1479. In addition to the dedication "Sancta Mergereta ora Pro Nobis", it carries the initials T H and other marks associated with Harris; it is widely believed that he cast it in the churchyard in 1460 while passing through "Limenesfelde". The practice of casting bells on site was fairly widespread in those times.

The fourth bell tells its own story. It was cast in 1619 by Bryan Eldredge, the first of a family of London bellfounders to settle in Chertsey, where our bell was probably cast. It bears the inscription "Bryan Eldredge made Mee 1619" and other marks associated with the bellfounder.

There is evidence that the fifth bell, inscribed "In multis annis resonet Campana Johannis" was the work of a London bellfounder William Burford, who died in 1390—though just when it was first hung in St. Peter's is not clear—and that the sixth: "Sum Rosa Pulsata Mundi Maria Vocati" was originally cast in 1500. However, it appears that they were fitted with modern headstocks and re-hung in the early 1700s.

In 1877 all the bells were removed, numbers 5 and 6 were re-cast, with their original markings, by J. Warner & Sons, and numbers 1 and 2 were added, making up the present six.

The Churchwardens were not happy about the amount of metal removed when the tenor (number 6) was re-cast (it had slimmed down from 21 cwt. to 14½ cwt.) and a set of handbells was presented by the bellfounders as an appeasement!

The bells were last tuned and rehung on ball bearings by Gillett and Johnston of Croydon, and rededicated by the Rev. C. Steer in 1948.

(Reprinted from St. Peter's Octocentenary Brochure)

THE BELLS OF ST. MARY'S

by David Putnam

"Good folks with one accord we call to hear God's word
We honour to the King and joy to brides to sing
We triumphs loudly tell, and ring your last farewell."

THUS RUNS THE INSCRIPTION on the tenor bell at Oxted. Five bells were cast by R. Phelps and hung at a cost of £106, in St. Mary's tower in 1729, when it was restored following the fire which destroyed the church in 1719. In 1923 two of the bells were re-cast by Mears & Stainbank, at the Whitechapel Foundry, which is still in business after over 400 years. They also cast the treble bell, which was added in 1923, as a memorial to the fallen of the first world war.

The Oxted bells now range in weight from four hundredweight to just over twelve, with a total of two tons. We are fortunate to have a steel frame, which requires little or no maintenance, unlike some timber frames, which are susceptible to the ravages of death watch beetle, damp and rot.

The one thing Oxted is short of at the moment is ringers. For various reasons we have lost several in recent times, and although we are teaching some new recruits it takes a little while for anyone to become proficient. There may well be some people in Oxted who have rung at some time, and however long ago this may have been, they could well be of help to keep the Oxted bells ringing.

Enthusiasm has never been lacking, and three times in the last three years a full peal of over 5,000 changes has been rung. This takes about three hours and a great deal of concentration on the part of six people! The first of these, in March 1978, was the first recorded peal by an entirely local band, and the second was to celebrate the birth of a grandson to one of our ringers. The third was in honour of the centenary of the Surrey Association of Bell Ringers and was rung on the 31st August 1980. Quarter-peals are also rung on special occasions, the last being for the anniversary of the Battle of Britain. If need be, we can sometimes 'borrow' ringers from other towers, but we still need to build up the Oxted band. Practice night is on Monday at 8 pm and visitors are welcome, with or without experience.



Bells, Bells & more Bells



August Bank Holiday saw some 70 or so bell ringers visit each of our three churches between 9 & 10.30 to ring the bells, on the occasion of an Open Day arranged by the Southern District of the Surrey Association of Church Bell Ringers. Apart from our local ringers, visitors came from all over southern England. For 10p a tower, or £1.50 for a day ticket, they had 25 towers open to them all over the southern part of Surrey—from Caterham in the north, Lingfield in the south and Dorking in the west. Many ringers managed 18 or more towers by 5.45, though no one is known to have rung at all 25! The money raised—some £200—will be put towards the cost of the Surrey Association Centenary Bell, to be hung in Streatham later this year.

M.W.E.

THE BELLS OF ST. ANDREW'S

by Keith Buchan

THE HISTORY OF A BELL TOWER can be gleaned from the plaques, peal boards and other information hung on the walls of the ringing chamber. These notes are almost entirely compiled from such information.

St. Andrews is a six bell tower with the treble being just over 2ft in diameter and weighing some 3 cwt to the tenor 3ft 3ins in diameter and weighing just over half a ton. The bells, which are hung in a steel frame, were manufactured by Messrs. Taylor & Co. of Loughborough and were presented by Mr R. Ernest Alexander who lived at the time in Treveraux Manor, each bell being inscribed with the name of one of the Alexander family.

The bells were first raised and rung on 23rd May 1902, with the first 720 (1/4th of a peal) rang for Christmas Morning 1902 and the first peal on April 26th 1903. The bells were overhauled and rehung with new gudgeons and ball bearings in 1949 by Gillett & Johnston of Croydon and for those who understand these things they are unusual in that they have Hastings stays!

There is a list of twelve rules in the belfry of unknown date giving fearful monetary penalties for such crimes as lateness and missing practice nights; by way of example rule 7 states "Swearing, intoxicating drink and bad language are strictly prohibited in the belfry, should anyone offend a fine of 3d shall be imposed". A far cry from a well known tower where a secret bar is known to exist!

The bells of St. Andrews are a joy to ring and under the enthusiastic

captaincy of John Hall more quarter peals have been rung at the Chart in the last two years than in any other Surrey Association Southern District Tower. In 1979 18 quarter peals were rung. If a quarter takes an average of 45 minutes this equates to 81 man hours or over 3 days. However such a doubtful statistic falls into insignificance when one considers the greats of old. In 1906 in the days of such ringers as Tidy, Jarrett and Hoad the St. Andrews "company" rang 110 complete 720's. Taking the average time of 25 minutes to ring a 720 this equates to 275 man hours or nearly 11½ days. Not content with this the "company" rang 202 complete 720's in 1911 (505 man hours or 3 weeks or on average over one every other day). In those days St. Andrews was in the Kent County Association but was elected to the Surrey Association on May 2nd 1921 since when the ringing has come down to earth!



BELLRINGING



by Bill Regner

I have been asked to write an odd 350 words on why I took up bellringing and the enjoyment I get from my hobby. The pat answer would be to say I took it up as a service to the Church or for the greater glory of God. However this would be far from the truth. There was, you see, this gorgeous dolly bird who both sang in the choir and bell rang. Now I can't sing . . .

When some few years later I married (not the dolly bird!) and moved into the district, there was the problem of how to slip out to the pub in the evening. The most obvious solution seemed to be a dog, until I discovered that dogs were actively discouraged in the local hostelry. At this time I was approached to see if I would again help with the bells. Now, I was well out of practice but Oxted practise on a Monday evening, Limpsheld on a Wednesday evening and the Chart on a Friday evening. Here then was an answer to a prayer, but what, I wondered, were the snags—would I be required to change a lifelong habit of not regularly attending church? However, I soon discovered that all over England, after calling the faithful to worship, at least 75 per cent of ringers can be seen slipping out of church during the first hymn!

What then is the fascination of ringing? Is everybody like me—only in it "for the beer"? No, I can tell you it is sheer masochism. The ultimate in bellringing is to ring a peal. This entails pulling up to 1 ton of bell metal on the end of a rope 5040 times in three hours, never deviating from the method being rung, until your head sings, your legs have cramp, your hands blister and most of the local population is after your blood. Then we wonder why we are so short of ringers! Why not come and join us?