

ST. BARTHOLOMEW THE GREAT, SMITHFIELD, LONDON, E.C.

We are indebted to Mr. R. L. Byrne, for the following information:

The architects of St. Bartholomew's, Smithfield, London, have advised the rector that due to cracks which have appeared in one of the pillars of the old Norman arches, which support the red brick tower of 1628, no ringing of the bells should be allowed. The arch, which is nearly 850 years old, is shored up with wooden baulks, and "tell-tales" have been fixed across the cracks in the pillar to measure any further movement. In the meantime a more detailed examination of the structure is being undertaken by the architects, assisted by engineers, and on the result of this examination a decision will be given as to whether there will be a short- or long-term curtailment of the ringing.

The cessation of the ringing has come at an unfortunate time, as over the last few years ringing has progressed from call changes to advanced Doubles methods, the weekly Thursday practices are well attended and as a result it has been possible to ring quarter peals for Sunday Evensong, and two quarter peal attempts have now to be cancelled.

The bells were cast in about A.D. 1510 by Thomas Bullisden and are the oldest complete ring of bells by one founder (only St. Lawrence, Ipswich, have a ring of bells which can compare with them in age). Before the Reformation the Priory possessed two rings of bells, the ring installed in the tower at present, and a ring of six bells which had a tenor with a reputed weight of 36 cwt. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries the latter ring was sold by Richard Rich, who was awarded the Priory as his share of the spoils, to St. Sepulchre's Holborn Viaduct. These bells were destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666. The wooden bell frame appears to be that installed in the new tower of 1628, but it is not known if this frame came from the old tower which housed the bells previously. Only two recorded peals have been rung at Smithfield, the first by the Middlesex Association in 1923 on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the Priory, and the second in 1956 by the Kent County Association. Due to the proximity of the tower to the newly-built Neurology Wing of St. Bartholomew's Hospital the possibility of any further peals being rung is extremely remote. Sound-proofing of the tower has been carried out recently, especially on those sides of the tower adjacent to the hospital wing.

An amusing tale is told of a vicar who before deciding on taking a new living went to view the church. After looking around he came across an old man and asked him if he was the caretaker. The old fellow replied: "I dunno rightly, sir, the first parson I served under called me a beetle (beadle), then we has another who called me a sextant (sexton), and the last one called me a virgin (verger). "Well, my good man," said the vicar designate, "you must have served here a long time?" "Aye, sir, I've rung yon tenor bell for five dead parsons, and I'd like to make it half a dozen afore I retire." — Bells, Uses and Abuses, by Ernest Morris.

A DANGEROUS INCIDENT

The following incident, which could have ended in tragedy, may be regarded by readers as a sobering reminder of their responsibility in ensuring that after ringing activities have ceased and towers vacated keys giving access to stairways be locked away or taken away by the person in charge in order that unauthorised persons cannot gain admission.

Recently at St. Wenfreda's Church, March, Cambs, the rector on entering the building heard noises emanating from the steeple. At first he thought a ringer or clock mechanic had ascended the tower, but finding no vehicle in the car park he went into the church again and heard footsteps of people descending the turret stairway. The turret door had been locked from within, an unusual procedure.

Waiting outside the door, the rector was astonished when three 15-year-old boys emerged from the turret. They were drunk. Evidently another boy had informed them that the tower keys could sometimes be found on top of the elevated switch box, consequently out of sight of prying eyes. Having found the keys one of them unlocked the rood-loft turret-door at the chancel end, which is used as a cupboard to store communion wine. Taking a bottle of wine, the teenagers ascended the tower, entered the belfry and drank the contents of the bottle.

The rector promptly snatched the keys from one of the boys, ordered them into the turret, locked the door and went out to phone for the police.

Meanwhile the boys, despite dull stupor, panicked, entered the clock chamber, opened the trap-door, hooked one of the bell ropes and slid down it to the open ringing gallery 30 feet below. Their hands were badly burned.

When the rector returned a few moments later he found one of the boys prostrate on the nave floor. The lad, in his fear and confusion, had leapt from the Jacobean gallery and fallen 25 feet on to the floor. His two friends in the gallery declined to take that risk. All three received medical attention.

One shudders to think what might have happened if during this mad escapade the boys had attempted to slide down the rope of a raised bell. A person would almost certainly have had his head crushed by impact with the ceiling, and would then either fall on to the concrete floor far below or be hurled more than 50 feet into the body of the church.

The steeple concerned is regarded as "safe," there being two doors to unlock before gaining admittance to the ringing gallery. The keys are normally returned to a secret place at the far end of the church. On occasions the bells have been left raised in readiness for the next day, and a warning notice displayed on the locked gallery door. On this occasion (a practice) a little forgetfulness prevailed and the keys were deposited on the switch-box (the usual Sunday arrangement), whereas they ought to have been returned to their usual place. Arrangements are now being made so that the keys will be obtainable only from the rector and ringers.

MOTHERS' DAY RINGING

The bells of Gaywood Parish Church, Norfolk, were rung for the children's service on March 21 appropriately enough by the five youngest members—Caroline Lambard, Jean Howling, Stephanie Whitley, and brothers Kevin and Trevor Fox, whose average age is 14½ years. Rounds and call changes were well rung and congratulations extended to all, especially Caroline, who has been ringing for only three months.

Southwell Guild.

25th ANNIVERSARY YEAR

The A.G.M. of the Newark District was held at Newark, with ringing from 3.15 until 4.30 p.m. Evensong was conducted by the curate (Rev. W. J. Cull) and was followed by a buffet tea prepared by local ladies in St. Mary's Rooms. The business meeting was attended by the general secretary and treasurer of the guild. The secretary's report and the accounts were adopted, and officers elected for 1971 were: Chairman, Mr. F. W. Midwinter; hon. secretary, Mr. P. Raithby; committee member, Mr. P. F. Curtis; Ringing World representative, Mrs. M. E. Snyder; ringing masters, C. W. Reed and D. J. Tysoe.

A proposal that Mr. C. Copp and Misses K. and G. Burchnell be made honorary members of the guild was carried. The chairman said that as this was the 25th anniversary of the guild he hoped all would make a special effort to ring a quarter peal or peal at all ringable towers. A quarter peal week was fixed for June 19–26.

The meeting ended with votes of thanks, and ringing was then resumed. M. E. S.

The quarter peal of Grandsire Caters No. 2 by Edgar C. Shepherd (R.W., page 199) was incorrectly printed and is revised below:

1259	
23456789	
42357968	1.5s
3425	1.2.3.
2345	1.2.3.
—	
42357896	1.4.
3425	1.2.3.
2345	1.2.3.
—	
42357689	1.4.
3425	1.2.3.
2345	1.2.3.
—	
53427698	2.4.5.
3452	6.
4532	6.
3254	2.3.4s.
—	

The ringers of St. Augustine's, Penarth, Glamorgan, at their annual meeting elected the following officers: Tower captain, Jack Palmer; guild chairman and assistant captain, Yvonne Apsitis; tower master, Jack Garrett; librarian, Elizabeth Jacklin; hon. secretary and treasurer, Derek Herbert. Ringing practices continue to be held on Wednesday evenings from 6.30 p.m. to 8.15 p.m. From the Christmas handbell activities a cheque for £25 has been given to the Church of England Children's Society.