

## THE STORY OF GREAT PAUL

By W. T. COOK

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In order to move the bell from its trolley in the roadway to the centre of the South-west tower, a kind of tramway had been constructed of beams a foot square, starting from the level of the trolley and sloping down to the foot of the tower. There were two parallel beams, faced with thick, smoothly-planed oak planks screwed securely down to the beams. The surface of these planks was blackleaded and tallowed, so that the bell could slide smoothly down, hauled by a powerful windlass, till it reached the doorway, where another windlass took over.

By the time the bell arrived at St. Paul's, "the crowd of spectators . . . had become a large one, mustering perhaps two thousand people, who cheered vociferously as the engines pulled up alongside." (The quotation is again from the "Daily News".) "In an hour or two the space intervening between the top of the trolley and the platform from which the bell was to slide down to the front of the tower . . . was bridged by complimentary timbers, and the various stays and ties by which the new comer had been secured to the carriage were removed. In order to do this it became necessary for one or two men to creep up through a hole in the woodwork at the bottom of the bell into the body of it and a large pair of bellows and elastic tubing had to be brought into play to guard against their possible suffocation. While the work was proceeding and the ever-increasing crowd was surging around the Cathedral boundaries, the Lord Mayor drew by in semi-state, on his way to the Old Bailey Sessions-house, and in passing his lordship was seen in endeavouring to address to Mr. Penrose something, which was no doubt, as currently assumed to be, his congratulation at the success thus far attendant on this weighty undertaking. His responsibility, however, had only just commenced, and some little anxiety among the spectators inside the enclosure was naturally experienced and expressed as to the success of the arrangements that had been made. . . . With the smallest possible delay, and with apparently no difficulty whatever, Great Paul was induced to make a slow and stately movement towards the Cathedral, and set out upon the sloping launchway that had been constructed towards the enlarged doorway at the foot

of the clock-tower. One strand of a rope gave way, but another and a stouter rope, with all necessary gear attached, was immediately forthcoming to take its place, and to illustrate the provident forethought of the day's proceedings, which were as successful as the most exacting could have desired."

### LIFTING THE BELL

The work of lifting the bell commenced on Tuesday, May 30, and was completed at noon the following day, the actual operation having taken fifteen hours. Huge beams had been fixed in the cupola of the tower, and the chain used came from Woolwich Arsenal, where it was normally used for lifting 35-ton guns. The work of raising the bell was under the charge of Capt. English, R.E. The headstock was then attached and the gudgeons "seated on the bell-cage", and at last all was ready for the service of Dedication, which took place on Saturday, June 3, immediately after the afternoon service in the Cathedral. A procession of fifty or sixty clergymen and choristers climbed the dome staircase and went along the South gallery to the West end, where a good many visitors had already gathered. The service of dedication was conducted by Canon (afterwards Dean) Gregory.

Descriptions in the daily papers of the first ringing of Great Paul at the conclusion of the service give a picture which, even allowing for the lack of expertise on the part of the reporters, not unsurprisingly called forth strongly critical editorial comment in the next issue of "Bell News". One paper said, "Presently amid the dead silence the hoarse, heavy swing of the monster could be heard, but it was a long time before he could be persuaded to speak. . . . The first stroke of the bell, however, must have satisfied all who heard its fine tone. . . . Saturday was a quiet day in the City, but there were considerable crowds of listeners gathered about the Cathedral, and the sweet musical tone of the bell was admitted on all hands."

Another paper described the event as follows: "There was now a pause of what seemed, to the strained attention, some minutes, during which the dull thudding of the headstock moving on its gudgeons could be heard, increasing as the bell got up its swing, and then the pure, deep-tone, solemn note of Great Paul boomed through the tower doorway, and vibrated through the

corridor; stronger became those solemn boomings when the swing of the bell was maintained. There was one universal admiration of the quality and musical perfection of its tone. . . . Everyone in turn mounted the dark ascent to see, as best they could, between each other and the timbering of the massive cage, the great bell knolled. By the ropes attached to the cross-levers eight or ten stalwart ringers pulled the bell over some ten or twelve degrees, just enough for the clapper to strike the soundbow. Out of doors, amongst the populace, there was the like gratification expressed with the music of the bell; but it seemed to be thought less powerful than had been imagined. There are reasons, no doubt, for this opinion. In the first place, the bell is not a noisy one; the note has, however, already been heard beyond the Edgware Road. In the next place, the bell in its present site is surrounded by thick masonry, and the comparatively small orifices through which the sounds are admitted are much choked by the works and dials of the clock; whilst there is little or nothing to reflect the sound downwards into the Cathedral-yard. Thirdly, the bell at its dedication was not swung so high nor hit anything like so hard as it will be when the masonry disturbed for its ascent shall have been replaced. Then when there shall be ringers at both cross-levers and the bell shall be swung right up full 50 degrees, will the ponderous clapper deal harder strokes and increase, possibly by ten times, the roar of its voice?"

### RUNG BY COLLEGE YOUTHS?

In spite of all these defects in the hanging—and, even making all allowances for inaccurate reporting, things seem to have been far from satisfactory—regular ringing of the bell was soon undertaken. By July it was being rung daily for the morning service at ten o'clock, and for the evening service at 3.15. Presumably "eight or ten stalwart ringers" were still needed; perhaps they were drawn from the Cathedral maintenance staff, as was the custom in recent years. Oral tradition has it that on Sundays the bell was rung by members of the College Youths after they had finished their touch of Stedman Cinques in the other tower.

Once it was going regularly, Great Paul ceased to be "news", so it is more difficult to trace its subsequent history. Almost immediately, however, adverse comments were being made as to its inaudibility. "The papers tell us," wrote one gentleman, "that for some time past Great Paul has been knolled every morning. To have so big a bell and not to notice that you have heard it is a valuable acquisition indeed! We can only say that Great Paul made a great deal more noise than this while he was on his way to town."

In "Bell News" for November 25, 1882, and in subsequent editions, appears an advertisement for a pamphlet called "Great Paul Tongue-tied; Why don't He Speak Out?" by A. Bellringer, W.S.C.R., obtainable by post from Mr. G. Walker of Shelton, Stoke-upon-Trent. This pamphlet was reviewed in the "Bell News" of February 3, 1883, and is therein described as being a review of "a work by Dr. Stainer and a Mr. Mackie, C.E., with the title of "Great Paul. From its Casting to its Dedication." Apparently the author of the pamphlet was concerned to point out the technical errors in this work, from which he gave copious extracts. The "Bell News" review goes on: "With regard to the question asked in the

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title, i.e., 'Why don't Great Paul speak out?' that can but be looked upon as a fair question to ask. It was generally understood that such an immense bell would be heard at a distance of several miles, even farther than 'Big Ben', it being so much larger, but as it has not, up the present time, although rung twice daily, as the author pertinently remarks, been heard but a very short distance outside of St. Paul's Churchyard, it would be only fair to the public, whose interest in the subject a few months ago was at fever heat, that some one in authority should give a reason why it cannot be made to 'speak' louder. That the fault does not lie in the bell itself may be taken for granted, it being pronounced by every expert that has seen it, with whom we have come into personal contact, both founders and ringers, to be a 'good casting.'

#### FURTHER WORK

In May, 1883, it was reported that further work on the bell was being carried out by Taylors. Unfortunately, I have no details of what that work was, but it could well have been at that stage that the primitive system of levers attached to the headstock was replaced by a wheel. The present headstock appears to be very different from the one described earlier on, so perhaps that was replaced as well. At all events, the bell is now equipped with a huge iron headstock in the shape of a flattened U, so that the bell is well "tucked-up". Until the recent work of providing automatic machinery, there was a wheel of the normal design, remarkable of course for its size, with one garter-hole and two ropes on each side. The ropes, which had no sallies hung on either side of the works of the clock. Thus equipped, the bell could easily be swung by four men; indeed, so well was it hung that one person could have swung it by himself! It was the custom to raise the bell until it was halfway up, swinging through an arc of ninety degrees, and then let it drop of its own accord. The new machinery appears to do the same, as far as one can judge from listening to the bell. Even so, it does not sound as loud as might be expected, though the sound does carry quite a long way. A good place from which to listen to Great Paul is just across the river, in Bankside.

As has already been mentioned, it appears that the College Youths used to ring Great Paul before the Sunday morning and afternoon services. It was perhaps on the outbreak of the First World War that this was discontinued, along with Sunday ringing at St. Paul's for the duration of the war, for in 1920 it was agreed that the tenor of the ring of twelve be rung for five minutes before these services. Perhaps at the same time the Cathedral maintenance staff undertook the ringing of Great Paul for five minutes daily at one o'clock, which was said to be a revival of an old tradition of an "apprentice bell" being rung at that time.

The Cathedral staff certainly brought the ringing of Great Paul to a fine art, starting their pulling so that the bell spoke immediately the clock had struck, and sounding it for exactly five minutes. But, as was mentioned in an article earlier in 1970, this ringing stopped in 1963, and Great Paul failed to "preach the gospel" as the inscription on it says, until May, 1971, when an electric machine took over the job.

W. T. COOK.

[Concluded]

#### Lincoln Guild

##### RINGING SCHOOL

The North and West Lindsey Branches' combined annual ringing school was held at Winterton Infants' School on October 9. An introductory talk was given by Mrs. Margaret Parker on the importance of good striking, which she illustrated by using a tape recorder.

The course then divided into four groups: (1) Plain Hunting; (2) Plain Bob Minor; (3) The Development of Minor Methods; (4) A discussion on Conducting and Method Construction. Equal time was spent between the classrooms and the towers (Winterton, Appleby and Broughton). Later a course appraisal was held under the chairmanship of Mr. Jack Bray, the only "complaint" being that not enough time was spent in practical ringing. S. A. S.

#### Bath and Wells Association

##### ILCHESTER BRANCH A.G.M.

On December 4 the Ilchester Branch held their A.G.M. at Drayton, when there was a very good attendance. The association master, Rev. H. F. Warren (Exford), general treasurer, Mr. Eric Naylor (Bath Abbey) and the Crewkerne Branch ringing master, Mr. G. A. Hartland (Curry Rivel) also attended.

The guild service was conducted by the vicar (Rev. A. P. Mills), with Mrs. Young as organist. Tea provided by the wives and friends of the Drayton ringers was followed by the business meeting. New members elected were Mr. Peter D. Hawkins (Norton-sub-Hamdon), Mr. Albert Hughes and Mr. Jack Andrews (East Coker), Mr. John Glass (Drayton), Mrs. Ann Davies (West Coker), Misses Elizabeth Cottle, Alison Stocker, Deborah Trecharne and Kirsty Ferguson (Somerton), Mr. Roger Price (Preston Plucknett), Mrs. C. Long, Misses Heather Bartlett and Angela Magnus and Messrs. Reg Brown and Martin Brown (Yeovil); non-resident life member, Mr. Malcolm S. Turner (Ecclesfield). Certificates were issued to Miss Jacqueline Greenaway (Yeovil) and Mr. J. Harris (East Coker).

The following officials were elected: Chairman, Rev. C. J. B. Marshall (Long Sutton); vice-chairmen, Mr. T. J. Setter (Yeovil) and Messrs. Gilbert W. Rendell and W. E. Turner (Hardington Mandeville); branch ringing master, Mr. Gordon W. Rendell

(Montacute); diocesan representative, Mr. Gordon Rendell; hon. secretary and treasurer, Mrs. M. M. Legget (Montacute tower), Ridgeover House, West Coker Hill, West Coker, Yeovil.

Congratulations were extended to Mr. H. Pearce (57 years' ringing), Mr. V. J. Farthing (60 years), Mr. E. T. Paul Field (40 years), Mr. Hubert Pester (40 years) and Mr. William Warr (61 years). The meeting also congratulated Preston Plucknett (tower captain Mr. C. Taylor) and Chiselborough (tower captain Mr. Lewis Cavill) on their excellent endeavours in restoring the bells at both churches. A collection taken was donated to the Drayton Tower Bell Fund.

An instructional course held in November at East Coker had been successful due mainly to the efforts of Mr. Roger Fox and Mr. Gordon Rendell, as was also a visit to the Whitechapel Bellfoundry with ringing at three London churches.

Ringing on the pleasant, tuneful 19½ cwt. eight was under the direction of Mr. Gordon Rendell and Mr. Roger Fox.

#### Durham University

##### ANNUAL DINNER

D.U.S.C.R. held their dinner during the week-end December 10-12. Members of the resident society went to Brancepeth on Friday and successfully rang a peal of Plain Bob Major, and on Saturday the life members scored a peal of Yorkshire Surprise Major at Staindrop. Visitors attempted but unfortunately did not achieve a peal of Cambridge Surprise Major at Chester-le-Street, and those not involved in peals were taken to Blaydon (6), Winlaton (6) and Newburn (6). After lunch all rang at St. Michael's, Bishopwearmouth (8) and at Roker (10).

The dinner was at Van Mildert College, when Mr. E. Llewellyn-Jones took the chair. The speakers were the Rev. T. Horwood (Brompton, Yorks), Mr. Denis Bayles (Ringing World Committee member and recently retired general secretary of the D. and N.), Mr. Norman Johnson (general secretary, D. and N.), Mr. Nicholas Webber (past president), Miss Diana Bradford (master), and Miss Jenny Bell (secretary). Resident members entertained on handbells and all adjourned to the Chaplaincy for a party arranged by Mr. Fred Bone.

Think like a man of action and act like a man of thought.—Henri Bergson.

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