

## THE LOST BELLS OF LONDON

Nowhere in England have there been so many cases of former rings of bells being sold, destroyed by enemy action, or now hanging derelict, as in the London area. This may at first sight seem an obvious statement, considering the size of London and the consequent number of churches, but perhaps the reader will see what I mean when I mention that I have compiled a list, which is probably incomplete, of no fewer than 25 "lost" rings of bells within a radius of four miles from, say, St. Paul's Cathedral. As these include many bells on which ringing history was made, it is hoped that a brief account of some of them may be of interest. My researches have not been exhaustive, and probably more information about these bells is available somewhere, but I believe that what is written here will be found to be accurate.

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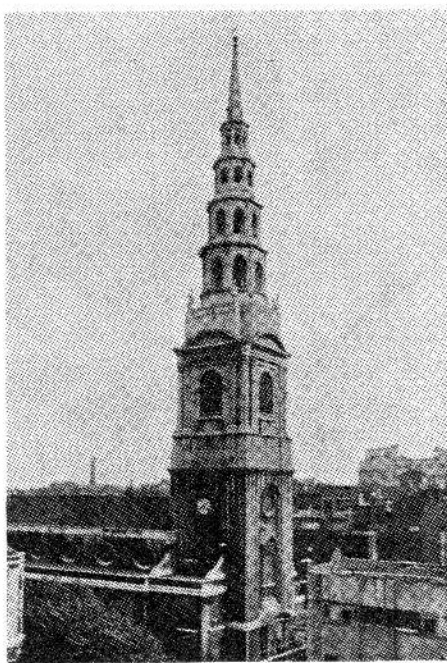
Sidcup, Kent.

### 1. ST. BRIDE'S, FLEET STREET

THERE HAS BEEN A CHURCH on this site, just beyond where the bridge used to cross the River Fleet, for a very long time. During the work of restoration of the church after the last war, traces were discovered in the crypt of Roman work, which may have been a place of worship, and the foundations of a Saxon church, possibly of the 7th century, came to light. A larger Norman church was built there in 1134, which had a tower containing at least one heavy bell, for the Curfew of St. Bride's is mentioned in a 12th century document.

In 1370 the then Mayor of London, John de Benness, issued a proclamation naming four churches in different parts of the City, of which St. Bride's was one, as the places where the curfew was to be rung, the other City churches being instructed to take their time from these four. In 1410 one William Bette is recorded as having contributed "to the work of the bells newly bought". However, there seems to be no record of who cast these bells, or how many there were. Nor is the Inventory of Edward VI helpful, as the account is mutilated at this point. Probably there was a ring of five or six bells, and a saunce bell.

The church had been much enlarged in 1480, a new nave and aisles being built, leaving the old church as a choir, but this building was destroyed in the fire of 1666. The church was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren, and the new building was opened in December, 1675. This was one of Wren's most successful designs, and was elaborately furnished and ornamented. Perhaps the cost of the main body of the church—£11,430 5s. 11d.—was greater than the parishioners had expected, for it is stated that it was owing to lack of funds that the steeple was not completed until 1703. It is the tallest in the City, 226 ft. high. Originally it measured 234 ft., but it was seriously damaged by lightning in 1764, and its elevation was reduced when it was restored. The belfry stage is beautifully designed, and the whole steeple—tower and spire together, the spire with its diminishing arcades—is generally reckoned to be one of Wren's greatest masterpieces.



St. Bride's, Fleet Street.

Until the steeple was completed, one bell, cast from some of the metal salvaged from the fire of 1666, hung in the middle aisle. In 1710, Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester cast a very fine ring of ten bells for St. Bride's, with a tenor of 28 cwt. The inscriptions on these bells were of no particular interest. The third and fourth bells of this ring of ten were recast by Samuel Knight, whose foundry was in Holborn (possibly in Shoe Lane), in 1736; the other bells remained until the destruction of the church in 1940.

Before 1710, there was only one ring of more than eight bells in London, the ten at St. Sepulchre's, Holborn. This was apparently one of the favourite meeting-places of the College Youths, who practised Grandsire Caters there, but it seems the bells were of inferior quality. It was not, at that time, the custom for the London Ringing Societies to be associated exclusively with any particular tower, and when St. Bride's bells were opened, they were used for practice by both the College Youths and the other leading Society of that time, the London Scholars.

There seems no doubt that, now there was a good ring of ten to practise on, this led to a great advance in the art in London. On January 11th, 1717, the London Scholars rang at St. Bride's what may have been the first peal in London, and was almost certainly the first ten-bell peal ever rung, a 5,040 of Grandsire Caters. A board was put up to commemorate the peal, but unfortunately it was destroyed when the church was repaired in 1796.

Two years later, in 1719, the two Societies—the College Youths and the London Scholars—gave two trebles, also cast by Abraham Rudhall, to make up the 12. At that time the only other ring of 12 in the country was at York, but they did not have a band there sufficiently advanced to practise Cinques, so St. Bride's bells take their

place in the history of ringing as the ones which first made 12-bell ringing possible. These two trebles were given to the church solely so that the London ringers could have an opportunity of advancing their art; change-ringing was at that time a purely secular sporting activity and had no connection with the work of the Church. Indeed, the two Societies looked on the bells as their own property, and for a time kept them chained up so that other ringers should not have the use of them.

It was at this time that a change was coming over the Society of College Youths. Hitherto, perhaps the majority of their members had been members of the upper class, professional men, or men of some standing in Society, and the social side of the Society's activities had been as important as, if not more important than, their ringing practices. For various reasons which are outside the scope of this article, the new members who were elected in the early part of the 18th century were to a large extent tradesmen, and the interest in practical ringing was increased. It was these new members who made full use of the opportunities afforded by the ring of 12 at St. Bride's, and started practising Grandsire Cinques.

It is commonly held these days that Benjamin Annable, a baker by trade, was the young man who pushed the College Youths along the road to regular peal-ringing, and there are good grounds for taking this view. The early history of peals at St. Bride's and the influence of Benjamin Annable on the ringing Exercise as it exists today are closely linked, but are again too wide to be dealt with here.

The first peal on the 12 bells of this church, which was of course also the first on 12 bells ever rung, was on January 19th, 1725 (new style—it appears in the College Youths' peal book as 1742, but in those days the new year started in March). It was a 5,060 of Grandsire Cinques, composed by William Jackson. The figures of this peal appear in the College Youths' peal book; it was in the Tittums position. This is recorded as the first College Youths' peal, but in fact two of the band do not appear in the list of members.

It seems that by this time, St. Bride's was the regular meeting-place of the College Youths, and perhaps one of their members was appointed steeple-keeper, to the virtual exclusion of other Societies, of which once common practice vestiges remain in the London Exercise to this day. It was probably at this period, or a few years before, that the College Youths fixed their Club Room at "The Barley Mow", Salisbury Court (since rebuilt and renamed as "The Cogers"). In those days, meetings in the Club Room were almost as important as meetings in the belfry; towards the end of the 18th century, we read in the earliest surviving copy of the College Youths' rules "That the members do not make it later than nine o'clock before they move to the belfry." (Quoted from memory.)

[To be continued]