

THE LOST BELLS OF LONDON (5)

ST. DUNSTAN-IN-THE-WEST, FLEET STREET

By W. T. COOK

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This church, which stands near Temple Bar on the north side of Fleet Street, is a prominent landmark in that street, with its tower crowned with a pierced octagonal lantern, and its famous clock, which has two life-size carved wooden figures, popularly supposed to represent the giants Gog and Magog, "standing erect with each a knotty club in his hand wherewith they alternately strike the quarters (on saucer-shaped bells), not only their arms but even their heads moving at every blow." The church was apparently first built between the years 1000 and 1065, and presumably altered and enlarged at various times. Edward VI's inventory shows that there were "In the steeple ffour great belles and a small bell."

St. Dunstan's was extensively rebuilt in 1613, and was said to have been "a fair and beautiful church." It escaped the fire of 1666—only just, for the third house from it was burnt—and was again altered and beautified in 1701. It must be presumed that by that time very little of the original mediæval building was left. The church projected far out into the middle of Fleet Street, and was surrounded by small shops belonging to booksellers.

The bells of St. Dunstan's first appear in ringing history with the first peal of Double Bob Major ever rung, on January 14, 1727, by the College Youths, conducted by Benjamin Annable. This was not claimed in the College Youths' peal book as the first peal on the bells; however, I have no information about any earlier peals there, nor as to the founder of the bells, or when they were cast. A year later, on January 27, 1728, the College Youths rang a peal there in a new method which they called St. Dunstan's Triples.

Other peals known to have been rung on these bells in the 18th century were two of Bob Major by the Eastern Scholars (1735 and 1749), one by the "Junior" College Youths of Oxford Treble Bob Major (1770), and two in 1778, also by the "Junior" College Youths, of which the first was Grandsire Triples, and the second was the first peal of "Real" Double Bob Major, with "two bobs in a lead, one before and one behind." Of this peal, J. A. Trollope wrote (R.W., 1944, p. 156), "Charles Purser called the peal and presumably composed it. It was claimed as the first of the kind ever completed, and a board was erected under the tower to commemorate the performance, but it is almost certain that the composition was false."

The bells do not seem to have been used again for peals until 1823, when the second Junior Society of College Youths rang a peal of Grandsire Triples, which they claimed as "the first on the bells for upwards of 40 years." The College Youths rang a peal of Oxford Treble Bob here on February 10 of the same year, and on

April 6 the Junior Society scored another of Grandsire Triples.

By 1829 the church had got into a ruinous state and was pulled down. It was replaced by the present building, an early example of "Gothic Revival." The interior is an elongated octagon in plan, and has no special merit, but the tower and lantern are fine. The present church was built further back than its predecessor; the architect was John Shaw.

In 1832 the bells were recast by Thomas Mears (tenor 19 cwt.) and hung in the new tower. The first peal on them was rung by the Cumberland Youths in 1833 (5600 Oxford Treble Bob). Apparently the men who rang these bells when required (probably not on Sundays, but only when they were paid to do so) formed themselves into the "St. Dunstan's Society," for there used to be a board in the tower recording a peal of Grandsire Triples rung in 1834 by a band calling themselves by that name. Some of the names are familiar—the conductor, Thomas Tolladay, belonged at that time to the College Youths and the St. James's Society, and I believe that Charles Goozee, who rang the sixth, was at that time a Cumberland.

It may have been members of the St. Dunstan's Society whose ringing is described in a book called "The Bell: its Origin, History and Uses", written by the Rev. Alfred Gatty and published in 1848. Speaking of a procession in London, in which the Queen was taking part, he wrote: "But see—there approaches the procession . . . and off goes from every neighbouring church a clashing peal . . . St. Dunstan, in thy lantern tower—how sweet and fine ring the notes from thy new eight!"

Tolladay also called peals on these bells in 1839 and 1843, and there were a few other peals rung here in the 19th century, the latest of which I have any note being a peal of Grandsire Triples rung by the Cumberland Youths on January 11, 1879, conducted by J. Nelms. A board recording this peal can still be seen inside the church.

Apparently some of the bells became cracked, and they ceased to be rung shortly before the end of the last century. I think I have been told that the last person who remembered ringing there was T. H. Taffender, who died in 1963. As we read recently in *The Ringing World* (p. 788), there was a scheme afoot in 1914 to restore the bells, which, however, came to nothing. As a result of the post-war reorganisation of the City churches, St. Dunstan's became a Guild Church with the special task of promoting good relations with foreign churches. Quite recently it was decided that there would be no point in spending money on the restoration of the bells, and they were taken out and sold for scrap.

RECORDING AT BRISTOL

A group of ringers from the Bristol area and a South Gloucestershire recording company have combined to launch what they claim is the first stereo long-playing record of bellringing.

The record, "Bells of St. Mary Redcliffe," will be released during 1973 to coincide with Bristol's celebrations to mark the 600th anniversary of its charter.

The idea for the record came after the success of the mono record "Bells of Bristol." Both records are part of a series being made by Saydisc Specialised Recordings called "Bells of Britain."

St. Mary Redcliffe was chosen for this latest recording because the tower had room to house the array of recording equipment, and also because of the variety which its bells offer. The record will contain touches of Little Bob Maximus, Stedman Cinques, Grandsire Caters (light ten), and Double Norwich (back eight). Six recording sessions were held over a period of weeks and each touch was rung several times by a variety of bands drawn from a pool of 15 ringers. The recordings were made from above the bells, where the best sound is produced.

The final recording session took place on December 3, when the local Press photographed the technical adviser and scrutineer, Emlyn F. Hancock. The recording engineer, Geoff Licena, estimates that the record will be released in May.

P. J. B.

UNITED NETHERLANDS MEETING

(See p. 22.)

Holland now has three change ringing groups, based at Amsterdam, Schoonhoven and Dordrecht, and another landmark was reached on December 9, when the first ringing meeting was held at Schoonhoven. This is claimed as the first ringing meeting to be held in a language other than English.

Ringing was on the carillon of the historic Stadhuis (Town Hall), where eight of the fifty bells have been fitted with chiming ropes. By the way, Schoonhoven had an augmentation nine years ago. English ringers usually think of an augmentation from six to eight, or eight to ten, but Schoonhoven gained twelve extra bells, increasing from 38 to 50. Uncertain of local reactions, chiming on the carillon was limited to two sessions of about an hour each and most of the ringing was on handbells, ending about ten o'clock. The most impressive ringing on the carillon came from the Amsterdam group, four of them chiming a double-handed course of Grandsire Triples; normally this group only use handbells.

The ringers had a very enjoyable time, exchanging ideas and impressions, especially three of them who had tried their hand in England this summer. Present were five from Amsterdam, seven from Dordrecht, five from Schoonhoven, and Rodney Yeates and Harry Thompson representing England. The Stadhuis was open to visitors, many of whom showed great interest, and it was reported in the Press.

For the success of the meeting we are indebted to the enthusiasm of Jaap van der Ende, carillonneur of Dordrecht and Schoonhoven, who arranged it, the burgo-master and wethouders of Schoonhoven for the use of the bells, and the ladies of Schoonhoven for arranging tea (including wine in which to toast the future).

"Great Oaks from Little Acorns Grow."
H. P. T.