

THE LOST BELLS OF LONDON (9)

**ST. MARY MATFELON,
WHITECHAPEL**

By **W. T. COOK**

This church was originally founded as a chapel of ease to the parish of Stepney. I am not sure when it was first built, but it was in existence in the 13th century. The name "Matfelon" or "Matfellow" first occurs in 1280; various theories have been put forward as to its origin, the most plausible being that it perpetuates the name of a benefactor.

St. Mary's became a parish church in its own right in the seventeenth century, and was rebuilt in 1675. The first notice of any bells in the tower comes yet again from William Laughton's chronicle of the Rambling Ringers' doings. They visited Whitechapel in January, 1734, and rang 720's of Plain Bob and Oxford Treble Bob on the six bells. Perhaps the Society of London Youths had already been formed by then, and were using the bells of Whitechapel and St. George's-in-the-East for their practices—the early records of this Society have been lost. It was certainly in existence in 1737. On the inside of one of the covers of the peal book of the Second Society of London Youths (established in 1776) is pasted a record of one of the earliest known six-bell peals, seven 720's in seven different methods, rung in 3 hours 15 minutes "by a Society of Compilers". The record states that the ringers of the treble and second were Eastern Scholars, the third, fourth and fifth were London Youths, and the tenor-man, William Barrett, who called the peal, a College Youth.

The London Youths seem to have died out for a time, but were re-established in 1753, with their headquarters at The Three Goats' Heads in Whitechapel Road. In the following year the bells were recast and augmented to eight (tenor 20 cwt.) by Thomas Lester of the Whitechapel Foundry. These bells, except the fifth, which was recast in 1783, survived until the church was destroyed by bombing in 1940. During the remainder of the eighteenth century, Whitechapel was one of the most popular of all London towers for peal ringing; up to 1800, 53 peals are recorded as having been rung here. The first was 5,040 Bob Triples by the Eastern Scholars in 1755, followed three days later by a 5,152 of Bob Major by the London Youths. In the same year, the Society of Cumberland Youths rang two peals there, both in a method they called Cumberland Pleasure.

The first "long length" on the bells was 6,400 Oxford Treble Bob, rung by the Junior College Youths in 1757 'with the tenors at home 60 times'. This was called by George Meakins; the last peal he conducted was also rung there in 1771 (Grandsire Triples). This was his 41st peal as conductor, no mean achievement in those days. The longest peal at Whitechapel was 8,448 Kent Treble Bob by the Junior Cumberlands in 1787. This was the first peal in the Kent variation in London. Other notable peals in the eighteenth century were two of London Court Bob, one by the London

Youths in 1764, the other by the Cumberlands in 1767. In 1769 the Cumberlands rang there the first peal of Real Double Bob Major (which they called 'Cumberland Real Double Eight-in').

Two peals of interest rung at Whitechapel in the nineteenth century were Grandsire Triples rung by the London Youths in 1801, and a College Youths' peal of Stedman Triples in 1804. The London Youths' peal seems to have been the last by that Society. It was called by John Reeves, and was his variation of Holt's Ten-part, this being the first time it was rung. The College Youths' peal appears to have been only the fifth true peal of Stedman Triples ever rung. It was called by George Cole, and may have been the composition of Henry Cooper of Birmingham containing 582 calls. After this, the tower seems to have declined in popularity for peal-ringing, probably because the bells went badly. They were rehung in a new iron frame in 1865.

In 1875 it was decided to replace the then existing building with a much larger church. This new church apparently only lasted five years; it was burnt down in 1880, and yet another building replaced it. This building was consecrated two years later. The old peal had been taken down, and the bells were rehung in the new tower in 1878. I presume the fire of 1880 did not affect the new tower or the bells.

This new steeple consisted of a tall red brick tower with a stone spire, the whole rising to about 200 feet. The tower was slender for its height and unbuttressed. The steeple was placed on the north side of the church, and so got no support from the building. As a result of all this, the "tower sway" was considerable; as often happens in that sort of tower, it caused the bells to drop suddenly, so that ringing them was extremely hard work. It was often said that the Underground Railway passing beneath the church affected the tower—it moved whenever a train passed—but this was surely wrong. The lines do not, in fact, pass under the site of the church, but under the street, and neighbouring buildings are not affected by vibration from trains.

In spite of all these difficulties, the tower was quite frequently resorted to for peals and other ringing, especially by those perverse souls who enjoy taking on a tough job! The first peal after the bells were rehung was scored in 1887, and I believe that quite a large number were rung there after that, until the church was destroyed in an air-raid in 1940. When the steeple was burnt, the bells crashed to the ground and were broken. The metal was promptly looted and, says J. A. Trollope, 'Though some trace of them was discovered, they were melted down before the act could be brought home to the guilty persons'. The church was not rebuilt; its remains were demolished, and the site laid out as an open space. [Concluded

JUNE D. REGAN

Leading Lady Peal Ringer, 1972



The leading lady peal ringer for 1972 is Miss June D. Regan from Reading, who rang 114 peals (100 for the Oxford D. Guild). This total may break the record for the number of peals rung in any one year by a woman.

June, born at Sandford-on-Thames, Oxford, went to local schools, later reading chemistry at Reading University, where she changed disciplines and graduated in Microbiology last year.

Her first introduction to ringing was in June, 1970, as a result of a recruiting drive by the R.U.S.C.R. With help from local Oxford ringers during the vacation she learned to hunt the treble; two months later was elected secretary of the R.U.S.C.R.

Her first peal was Plain Bob Major, in July, 1971, and by the end of that year she had a total of 9. She was introduced to St. Mary the Virgin, Reading, and was soon ringing 8-Spliced.

In 1972 she rang peals in a variety of methods (Plain Bob Minimus, Spliced Surprise Major and Surprise Royal) and is now a competent conductor.

Her total has been achieved in spite of a month out of circulation following a road accident. The convalescent period did see her first peals in hand.

Her future ambition is to call 23 Spliced all the work. J. H. S.

ANALYSIS

(h=handbell, c=conducted)

Plain Bob Minimus 1, Plain Bob Doubles 1 (h), Minor and Doubles 1 (c), Plain Bob Minor 11 (h) (1 c), Cambridge Minor 1, Two Minor Methods 1, Three Minor Methods 2, Four Minor Methods 3 (1 c), Five Minor Methods 1, Six Minor Methods 3, Seven Minor Methods 11, Eight Minor Methods 1, Nine Minor Methods 2, Fourteen Minor Methods 2, Plain Bob Triples 1, Grandsire Triples 1, Plain Bob Major 3 (1 c), Yorkshire Major 1, Cambridge Major 10 (1 c), Yorkshire Major 5, Lincolnshire Major 4, Pudsey Major 3, Superlative Major 3, Bristol Major 4, London Major 2, Wye Major 1, New Cambridge Major 1, Glasgow Major 1, Belfast Major 1, Double Norwich 1, Two Spliced Surprise Major 1, Three Spliced Surprise Major 1, Four Spliced Surprise Major 3, Six Spliced Surprise Major 1, Eight Spliced Surprise Major 6, Nine Spliced Surprise Major 1, Ten Spliced Surprise Major 1, Fourteen Spliced Surprise Major 1, Seventeen Spliced Surprise Major 1, Plain Bob Caters 1, Stedman Caters 1, Plain Bob Royal 1, Cambridge Royal 3, Yorkshire Royal 3, London Royal 1. TOTAL 112 (12 h, 5 c).