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OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS

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St. Olave, Hart Street, City of London

St. Olave's is one of the City of London's smaller and lesser-known churches. It lies not far from the Tower, at the corner of Hart Street and Seething Lane, surrounded by the glass and concrete office blocks which now form so monotonous and depressing a feature of many parts of the City. The tower contains a light and functional, rather than pleasing, ring of eight bells, and for the past 20 years or so has been the home of the University of London Society of Ringers.

There are at least 16 ancient parish churches in the British Isles dedicated to St. Olav, the Patron Saint of Norway. Olav was King of Norway from 1016 until 1030. He was responsible for bringing Christianity to Norway, although modern historical research shows both his motives and character to have been less than saintly. St. Olave, Hart Street, is the only surviving church in London dedicated to this saint. There were originally four others — St. Olave's, Southwark, and three in the City, St. Olave, Broad Street (pulled down in the 13th century), St. Olave, Old Jewry (pulled down in 1889), and St. Olave, Silver Street (destroyed in the Great Fire of London). It is uncertain whether the relative popularity of St. Olave as a dedication of London churches is due to St. Olav's participation in the battle of London Bridge in 1014, or to the Scandinavian seafarers and merchants who frequented London.

The present church is the third on the site. The first is believed to have been built in about 1060 and was a wooden structure. It was replaced by a stone building at the end of the 12th or beginning of the 13th century. This in turn was almost entirely replaced by a new church built in 1450 by Richard and Robert Cely, fell-mongers of the parish.

Most churches and other old buildings of London have suffered from one or both of the twin ravages of the Great Fire (1666) and the Second World War bombings. St. Olave's escaped the Great Fire, although less than half-a-mile from the place where it first started. However, it was not so fortunate in the Second World War, when it was badly damaged by an enemy bomb. After the War, it was



restored and re-opened in 1954. Three years earlier, on June 15, 1951, King Haakon VII of Norway had laid the Restoration Stone, thus rather nicely underlining the connection between the church and the saint to whom it is dedicated. This event is commemorated by a small plaque and by a large Norwegian flag, which still hangs at the back of the church.

In restoring the church, the 15th century style has been almost entirely preserved, and indeed a large proportion of the masonry is the original. Architecturally, the church is rather plain; its more attractive and notable features are to be seen

in some of its fittings. In particular, mention should be made of the finely-carved oak pulpit, reputedly the work of Grinling Gibbons, the richly-carved altar rails and handsome altar table, a fine specimen of Chippendale work, the late 16th and early 17th century silver Communion plate, and a large number of monuments and brasses. Historians may be interested to know that a complete set of Church Registers has been preserved since 1563: one of the more curious entries is that for September 14, 1586 which records the burial of Mother Goose.

(continued overleaf)

ST. OLAVE, HART STREET—continued

STRIKING FEATURE

Externally, the most striking feature is that which the visitor sees first — the gateway to the churchyard. In his *The Uncommercial Traveller*, Charles Dickens describes the gate — “a ferocious strong spiked iron gate like a jail.” Above the gate are skulls and crossbones carved in stone, and the top of the gateway is implanted with yet more spikes and skulls. In the churchyard were buried many victims of the Great Plague of 1665, and this fact and the sombre gateway led Dickens to christen it “the Churchyard of St. Ghastly Grim.”

Although Dickens knew the church well, the most famous literary association with St. Olave's is undoubtedly that of Samuel Pepys. Pepys lived and worked in Seething Lane during most of the years covered by his *Diary*, and both he and his wife not only worshipped at St. Olave's, but are also buried there. The *Diary* contains many references to the church and churchyard.

The earliest mention of bells at St. Olave's appears to be in 1552, when the Edwardian Commissioners reported that “ther remanyth in the Steple iiii greate beles and a Saunce bell.” It seems that these bells survived until 1662 when they were recast into a new ring of five by Anthony Bartlett, and in 1694 the ring was augmented to six by the addition of a treble, the new bell being cast by James Bartlett. The Churchwardens' Accounts record some details of the expenditure involved:

	£	s	d
Pd Mr Bartlett for a bell and brassis for ye other bells	28	8	0
Pd Mr Cole for hanging a bell and Repairing ye other five bells and for Carpenters worke timber and other things done in the Church	8	17	4
Pd the Clerke of St. Dunstons in ye East for Laying ye Bells in Tune	1	10	0

REBUILDING

The rebuilding of the top stage of the tower in 1732-3 necessitated the installation of a new bell frame and the bells were rehung by William Cole, who was paid £20 for his work. The six bells did duty down to 1929 when they were taken down and removed to Whitechapel for retuning. At that time, two trebles, the gift of Viscount Wakefield, were added to make a ring of eight in G with a tenor of 11 cwt. 1 qr. 2 lbs. In May 1941 these bells were destroyed when the church was bombed, but the metal was salvaged and in 1953 a new ring of eight, tenor 11 cwt. 1 qr. 1 lb. in G, was installed by Mears and Stainbank. The first touch on the new bells, three courses of Stedman Triples, was rung by ringers from St. Paul's Cathedral on Christmas morning 1953. In 1972 the tenor was found to be cracked in the crown and was replaced by a new bell from the Whitechapel Foundry which weighs 11 cwt. 3 qrs. 23 lbs.

When the bells were installed in 1953, the church authorities were faced with the problem which confronts most City churches with bells—a tiny residential population—and where is a regular band of ringers to be recruited? At that time, the University of London Society of Ringers had been in existence for some seven years, but were without a permanent home. The answer to both St. Olave's and the Society's difficulties was therefore found by the Society offering to undertake to provide regular ringing at St. Olave's. Since that time, it has rung regularly for the

(Continued at foot of next column)



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AMBITIOUS

We congratulate pensioner Ernest Morris (73) of Killamarsh, near Sheffield, on ringing his first quarter peal after 30 years as a ringer. However, the Sheffield Star for July 4, which printed a report and picture, got a few facts wrong.

“In the 50-minute session with five other ringers, Mr. Morris helped ring 11,520 different changes. Mr. Morris, a retired works foreman for a Chesterfield glass tubes firm, said: ‘I got through a quarter peal all right; I don't see why I can't manage a full one. He has now set his sights on ringing a full peal of more than 50,000 changes.’”

Sunday morning service during term-time, and in recent years — thanks to a number of graduate members still resident in London — to a considerable extent during vacations. Practices are also held every Thursday during term-time (6.30 to 8.00 p.m.), and visitors are most welcome. The bells are also fairly popular for peals, and just over 100 have been rung in the tower.

DETAILS OF THE BELLS

No.	Note	cwt.	qr.	lbs.
1	G	3	1	11
2	F sharp	3	2	11
3	E	4	0	14
4	D	4	3	11
5	C	5	1	22
6	B	6	2	18
7	A	8	1	6
8	G	11	1	1

Cast in 1953 by Mears and Stainbank. The tenor was recast in 1972 and now weighs 11 cwt. 3qr. 23 lbs. The inscription on the original tenor read: “From the same metal which the fires of war melted down, 1941, we were recast 1952.” The tower also contains a sanctus bell weighing 1 cwt. 1 qr. 12 lbs., note C.

Llandaff and Monmouth D.A.

SECOND CONTEST

The Monmouth Branch members held their second annual Striking Contest on June 7, at Mathern. The warm, sunny day proved just right for such an occasion, and those not engaged in ringing wandered along the leafy lanes or lazed in the churchyard in the sun. The village shop did unusually brisk trade in ice-cream!

The judges, Christopher Ricketts and Trevor Lewis, made themselves comfortable on the Vicarage lawn. The Vicar (Rev. Keith Dennison) made the draw for ringing order and the eight teams duly followed each other up the well-worn steps. Teams were entered from All Saints', Newport, Llantaranam, Chepstow, Monmouth, 'Aber-Vale', Grosmont and two teams from St. Woolos', Newport. The oldest participant was Mr. 'Bob' Stephens, now of Abergavenny, and a sprightly 75. The youngest ringers were Edward Surman (13) of Chepstow, a pupil at Monmouth School for Boys and therefore eligible to ring for Monmouth.

At 5 o'clock a very welcome tea was awaiting at the village hall, kindly prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Don Herbert and the other Mathern ringers. After tea the judges delivered their results, giving Chepstow first place, with All Saints', Newport, second and Grosmont and 'Aber-Vale' joint third.

The hard work of the judges and their helpful remarks were much appreciated. Many visitors joined in on the return to the tower, and the bells continued ringing until 7.30 p.m. J. S. K.

Kent C.A.

SCRAP METAL COLLECTION

Eighteen towers of the Canterbury District were represented by about 60 members at a meeting held at Great Mongeham. The usual things were done at the usual times during the afternoon, and evensong was conducted by the Rector (Rev. G. P. Chidgey), members of the local choir leading the singing.

Tea in the Village Hall followed, members sitting down to a meal, complete with an early summer salad (why do friends desert you after onions?). We heard that the local ringers had turned themselves into amateur Steptoes and organised a house-to-house collection of scrap metal in the village, which realised around £130 towards the cost of the repair of one of the windows in the tower, and we added the collection in church to this. New members were elected from Elham and St. Nicholas - at - Wade, in the latter instance bringing that tower back into union.

Among those we thanked were the rector, the organist, the owners of the Old Rectory, who had allowed us to use their property as a car park, plus the opportunity to see the gardens; and not least those local ringers from Great Mongeham and Walmer who had prepared and served the tea, who, after clearing up the mess we made, started to get ready for a social and dance organised by the “Mongeham Tipplers” — in reality the local ringers. B. J. L.