

# A Lost London Lament

Geoff Dodd invites information on several lost London rings (RW p.1132, 2-12-88) and the excellent and interesting letter by Phil Corby "Old men and their yarns" (6-1-89, p.4) affords interesting sidelights into aspects of London ringing just before the Second World War. Far from being tedious, as Phil suggests, such "yarns" are of more than passing interest to many of us. I hope that Mr. Charles Kippin's Star Street experiences and Jim Prior's at St. Mary Matfelon may be shared with us in your columns. We ain't seen nuthin' yet!

Geoff invites further comment on a number of London rings and I would first refer him to the following:

- (a) RW 10-12-71, Cover and pp.1050/67 by me, RW 2-2-73, Comment p.163 by Bill Cook - All Hallows, Berkyngchirche-by-the-Tower.  
 (b) RW 5-12-79, pp.859/60 by me - St. Dunstan-in-the-East.  
 (c) RW 10-5-85, pp.412/3 by B. R. Gildersleve, RW 14-6-85, p.532 by me - St. Dunstan-in-the-West.

So far as **All Hallows** is concerned, Phil has added some interesting comment as to their pre-War condition. The sixth, which could not be kept up was recast (by whom I don't know) in 1886 but the chiming apparatus was fitted in the 1930s. J. A. Trollope simply mentions that they were unringable since World War I. Of the peals rung there, the first four were commemorated by peal-boards destroyed in World War II; quite how the facsimile board of the 8446 Oxford T.B. Major on 16-2-1818 came about I don't know; it occurs to me that it may be the old one revamped. As to the chime, Phil is doubtless correct about the lack of a "ringing lobby" and the excuse was always made that the tower was unsafe. That didn't stop the architects who so declared it from surmounting it with a tall spire (a feature it never before possessed). The pre-War Ellacombe apparatus and the attitude of Fr. Clayton ("Tubby's" father), who as Vicar of St. Mary Magdalene, Oxford, expelled the ringers on the ground that they had "introduced a Jezebel up there, and I mean to get them out" perhaps reflect a distinct lack of interest in ringing bells by "Tubby". Be that as it may, he was in Canada, fund-raising for the new church when one wealthy Toc H member, John McConnell offered to pay for the whole chime. An original quote for a set of 15 with a bass of 20 cwt was considered too modest as early as 1946; it took very little to alter the specification to a 2 ton bass bell for a chime of 18 operable both by clavier and the back eight by electro-pneumatic action. They were installed by the middle of 1948. I have to add that although personally preferring the thought of replacing a ring with a ring, this fine set of bells is entirely worthy of the church and a credit to its founders, John Taylor & Co.

My article on **St. Dunstan-in-the-East** was called "The last word in every respect" (a quote about the bells by Ron Dove) and beyond expressing appreciation of Phil's very gracious words, I intend this to remain the case.

The other **St. Dunstan's (in-the-West, Fleet Street)**, which now possesses a single stationary Mears bell of 11 cwt cast in 1961 and installed to replace the quite derelict eight in 1970 is a tower in which I have never even heard of anyone ringing. Although bells, gear and fittings were completely removed, the three peal boards described in my article are I think in situ. As there is every danger of the church becoming redundant to Anglican use surely there's a London ringing society who would attempt to

rescue, restore and preserve these boards **before it is too late?** Nearby St. Clement Danes would be a fitting home; the board downstairs is surely one of the finest of its period ever made.

I think that Phil Corby has said much of what I could only say secondhand from his intimate knowledge of the bells of **St. Magnus-the-Martyr**. The bells were originally a ring of eight by Richard Phelps 1714, augmented to ten by Robert Catlin in 1748. The tenor (22½ cwt) was recast in 1831 and the treble in 1843, both by Thomas Mears II.

There is also a sanctus bell of 25½", the bells being thus inscribed:

Treble (27½")	THOMAS MEARS FOUNDER LONDON 1843
2nd (28½")	THOS * GILLMORE * IOS * ISMAY * THOS * HUX CHURCH * WARDENS * R T CATLIN FECIT 1748. C N
3rd (30½")	THE GIFT OF MR. RICHARD WEST OF ST. MAGNUS PARISH; FISHMONGER R: PHELPS FECIT: 1714
4th (31")	RICHARD CAMBRIDGE & THOMAS PRESTON ESQ. BOUNTYFUL BENEFACTORS 1714
5th (34")	SIR: GEO: MERTINS KT: ALD OF THIS WARD & SIR FRA: FORBES KT: ALD: OF DOWGATE WARD BENEFACTORS 1714 R: P: FE
6th (36½")	RICHARD TUSTIAN GENT: BENEFACTOR RICHARD PHELPS MADE THESE BELLS 1714
7th (39½")	RICHARD PHELPS MADE ME. 1714
8th (41½")	THESE FIVE BIGGEST BELLS WERE MADE AT THE CHARGE OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF ST: MAGNUS & ST: MARGARET 1714 BY R: PHELPS (2 ileurs-de-lis)
9th (46")	(waist) MR: CHARLES WALKDEN CH: W: OF ST MARGARET NEW FISH STREET WILLIAM STANDART MR: GEORGE BROWNE CH: W: OF ST MAGNUS THE MARTYR NOY WILLEY R: P FECIT: 1714 (coin) I GUY SEXTON (coin)
Tenor (51½")	T. MEARS OF LONDON FECIT 1831 (waist) WILLIAM SMITHERS } HADAZER WHITFIELD SHARP } ST MAGNUS THE MARTYR THOMAS LINDLEY } JOSEPH CARPENTER } ST MARGARETS NEW FISH STREET EDMUND RONALDS } WILLIAM MATTHEWS } ST MICHAELS CROOKED LANE CHURCH WARDENS

The surviving Sanctus bell bears the usual formula:

C & G MEARS FOUNDERS LONDON 1845

I think that I am correct in thinking that Fr. Fynes-Clinton (whose father's name was inscribed upon one of the bells at Blandford Forum - (see RW 19-10-88 p.967) had always intended the bells to be rehung after their removal, and had spoken in that vein to the College Youths. After his death interest waned, particularly after the bells were brought up from their store to the foundry and on shot-blasting four of them, numbers five to eight, were found to be cracked in the crown through rust and consequent expansion of their cast-in crown staples. I first made their acquaintance in the bellfoundry yard, where they were being kept whilst the church authorities, devoid of Fr. Fynes-Clinton treated both the bells and the foundry with scant courtesy. In 1966 I paid a visit to the tower, where it looked as if no mortal had been for a very long time (though the clock was in good order and must have been maintained).

The gloomy ringing room was notable for the vast amount of dirt which had come through the open hatchway in its ceiling and covering the panelling, seats, sundry bell fittings even down to the ropes whose remains still hung around on coathooks.

There were two large peal-boards; one 18th century and one of 1853 recording "46 years have elapsed since a peal has been accomplished in the steeple". One of these has certainly been restored and is I believe now in the church crypt. There were other small boards and it was not difficult to imagine the shades of old London ringers looking on in this most ghostly belfry. Above in the bell chamber the west window was completely blocked up (to reduce sound distortion from the face of Adelaide House), with the massive oak frame, complete with the cast-iron tenor headstock still swinging in the plain bearings. The tenor's swan-song was on loan to the Royal Albert Hall to accompany Tchaikovsky's "1812".

Approaches were made to the Diocese of

London for permission to sell the bells which could be held no longer at the foundry in 1970. The London Diocesan Fund's DAC consulted

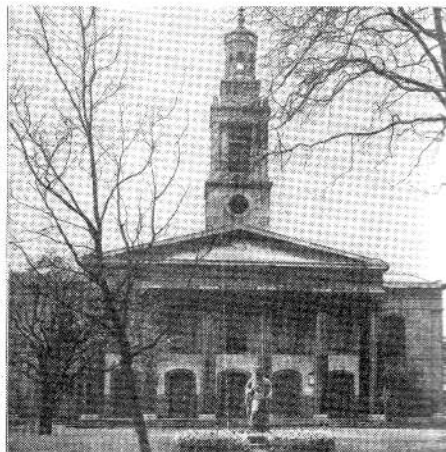


All Hallows-by-the-Tower. The tower pre-Wa without its modern spire.

the Council for the Care of Churches who advised against such sale. Five years later the matter was again raised and the Fund again referred to the Council which suggested three alternative schemes: to restore and rehang the ten; to restore and rehang the back eight; to restore and rehang the front six or alternatively make a new light eight. This was rejected out of hand and the only other scheme was to scrap the front eight, tenor and sanctus, and to rehang the ninth for slow automatic swinging. Even this - thought up because the tower stands "open" with a right-of-way beneath, access to the upper parts being through a tiny door in the north-west pillar - did not commend itself to the mercenary authorities then in office and thus St. Magnus is left with only a small, poor, inaudible and inaccessible fraction of the generosity of its "Bountiful Benefactors".

Phil Corby is way out on **Holy Trinity, Southwark** which he claims is the Southwark Diocesan Offices in St. Thomas Street. This is the former St. Thomas Church, built 1702 under Thomas Cartwright. It was later adapted as Southwark Cathedral Chapter House. Holy Trinity Church still stands - not as a church, but a concert hall - in Trinity Church Square, go down Borough High Street, past St. George's (8) and just before one gets to Newington Causeway turn into Trinity Street, and the church is a short way along. Of the same date as St. Peter, Liverpool Grove, Walworth (1823/4) it possessed an even heavier ring of eight (18 cwt) in an equally small tower rising above the south portico. The church was in a sad way when I saw it in 1966 - no longer in use and in poor repair. The ringing room was, I think, behind the south gallery and had a large window. The ropes had gone and a vertical wooden ladder led one to the biggest "heap" imaginable. Never in the field of pigeon fancy has so much been done by so many for so long. The smell was indescribable and I did not envy the bellhangers who a couple of years later had to take the derelict octave out of their two-tier oak frame. For a couple of years they lay alongside St. Magnus bells until their turn came, this time to provide metal for the delightful little ring of eight at SS. Andrew & Thomas, Short Street; within carshot of their old home. The old eight, by Thomas Mears II, 1824 all bore standard foundry inscriptions and ornaments. They had been rung and perhaps Canon Felstead can amplify any peal information which is known. The ringing chamber certainly once had peal boards although they had gone when I visited, hopefully to another home.

Holy Trinity is actually in the old borough of Newington whose parish church of **St. Mary, in Kennington Park Road**, is the fifth on the site



Southwark, Holy Trinity Church, Trinity Square (formerly eight bells, tenor 18 cwt).

(1957/8) having only an open gable with a Mears chiming bell. In front stands the tower of its Victorian predecessor (1876) whose contents I have never examined. It succeeded a building of 1792, itself the successor of one in 1721, but retaining the mediaeval tower. One wonders what did happen to the eight bells which the latter was said to hold.

It would be good if anyone who remembers them or knows about them could write about the lost bells of **Christ Church, Blackfriars Road** which was bombed and whose successor is a "nice" little modern church with a little tower to match. How much greater to have rebuilt as they did at **St. John, Vassal Road, Kennington**, even down to the bellframe - but somehow the bells were never put in. The original eight at St. John's were invoiced out of Whitechapel complete with ringing fittings, frame, chiming apparatus, boxes for the 7th and tenor ringers and a felt-lined sound-deadening floor, all for £731.0s.0d. (what service!) at the following weights:

Treble	6-0-02	5th	9-2-08
2nd	6-1-10	6th	11-0-01
3rd	7-1-20	7th	13-3-14
4th	8-0-10	Tenor	20-0-00

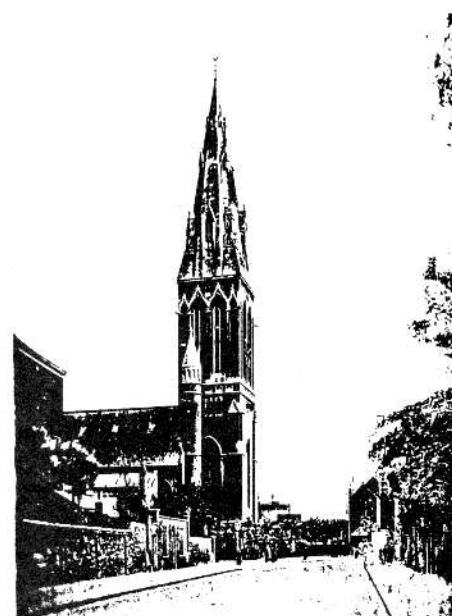
I have heard that the St. John's ring were a very good lot; no doubt there are those who remember them.

In his letter Phil Corby mentions the **St. George, Camberwell** ring with some disfavour. I wonder if he meant the bells (again in a tiny tower) or merely the "go". I went up there with the late Jack Phillips who said that they were a pretty little ring. All the ropes, peal-boards and ringers' paraphernalia were still there, though in a bit of a state, as though the last to ring there (can anyone make the claim?) had merely left and forgotten to come back. The bellfounders were sold the bells for repairs to the church roof (it is still derelict) and it has to be said that Whitechapel did all they could to prevent this Dobson, of Downham Market ring, from being scrapped. Sadly, it was just before Bell Rescue Funds and transfers came in earnest - there were no takers.

Phil is again a little astray when he quotes **St. Nicholas, Deptford** as a "pretty dreadful Warner ring". In fact they were rehung by Warners in 1904, following the collapse of the top stage of the tower and subsequent rebuilding. They were in two separate cast-iron frames which still remain; bells 3, 6 and 7 being above. Apparently the tower movement was excessive which would contribute to the poor "go" of the bells; but it was not considered dangerous, and I personally feel that to condemn a ring for scrap because of tonal deficiency and/or poor "go" (as was in this case reported to have been done) is a poor solution to the problem. The bells were of considerable historic interest, being only the second eight in Kent (Wye was the first) and the only ring cast by Samuel Newton and Isaac Hadley. The front six were simply dated "1701" (fifth 1702) with the bonus of the founders' initials on the seventh: "S N I H 1701". The tenor, recast in 1842, is still inscribed:

THOMAS MEARS FOUNDER LONDON 1842  
(waist)  
REV D A SKETCHLEY MA VICAR  
CHARLES BARLEE }  
WILLIAM KNOTT } CHURCH WARDENS

Devoid of their wheels, and with the old ringing gallery and any ringers "junk" as it was no doubt considered, the surviving treble and tenor were rearranged for clocking. An interesting feature in the intermediate stage of the tower is a mediaeval trusswork which probably supported the previous frame. The particulars of these bells were:



The magnificent tower of St. John, Vassal Road, Kennington (formerly eight bells, tenor 20 cwt) awaits its new ring for which the frame exists.

Treble*	30"	5-0-00	5th	39"	9-3-14
2nd	30½"	5-2-27	6th	41½"	13-0-10
3rd	32½"	6-1-10	7th	44½"	14-3-03
4th	36½"	8-1-19	Tenor*	49"	20-1-02

(note E)

Getting away from Central London and into Kent one finds the neighbouring tower of **St. Margaret, Lee** - where, starting with three bells, then adding and enlarging, then further adding and enlarging in a four-tier frame a 14 cwt eight things really did become dangerous as did the fabric that held them. Rather than scrap bells altogether they went in for a chime of 16, bass bell 6 cwt, on the old frame, and cast from the old metal. Old peal boards, etc., are carefully preserved and a new one records the reason why the work was done. In the circumstances, the parishioners and the founders (Whitechapel) have every right to be proud of the advice given and the work done.

Phil may take comfort that it is not just old men (and who said he was old?) who yarn. At "half-way to 90" I can do so just as well, but only at second-hand. It would be interesting to hear of "lesser" towers: Geoff mentioned **Brentford**, most of whose bells of course now ring at South Mymms. I wonder if there are any memories of **St. Andrew Undershaft** (now hung dead in the ringing frame with a pile of old ringing fittings in one corner) or the derelict six at **St. Katherine Cree**; out of the city, **St. Luke, Nutford Place**, a Warner six of 1854/5; or **St. Philip, Dalston**, six, tenor 11-2-14 invoiced out in May and August 1887 complete with frame and ringing fittings and which the first edition of *Dove* says are "chiming only" and editions II and III transform into eight tubular bells - then they vanish, as surely as the church has. And there's even a mysterious five - the front four presented by the bountiful Baroness Burdett-Coutts to the now vanished **St. Thomas, Baroness Road, Bethnal Green**, to join its original bell of 1851 and accompanied by a "set of lever clappers and ringing machine". These bells still exist, as a chime, at St. Andrew, Roxbourne, Harrow where they were hung with three new Mears trebles in 1957 - cast to ringing weights and with a tenor of 9-2-6 in G sharp.

Long may we yarn, and help the memory to live on.

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