

## St Paul's Cathedral bells – 2000 a special year

When the Queen Mother was born on 4th August 1900 the ring of twelve bells in the Cathedral's north-west tower was only 22 years old. Almost 100 years later, the longest peal on the bells was rung on 1st January to mark 2000 years of Christianity; a special service and peal is planned to celebrate the Queen Mother's 100th birthday in the summer, and on 7 August the bells and fittings will be fully dismantled for the first time and left in their pits. The first major refurbishment in their 122-year history will be carried out by Whites of Appleton.

When the bells were installed in 1878 they were the heaviest ringing peal in the world. The heavy ten at Exeter Cathedral were yet to be augmented although they would remain, overall, a lighter ring. The 'modern' twelves at York and Worcester were not to be cast until the 1920s and Simpson tuning was to become a hotly debated topic for the first two decades of the century. The new bells at Liverpool Cathedral were not cast until 1939. St Paul's bells are the heaviest 'Grimthorpe' ring and remain a unique example of the art of bell tuning from the nineteenth century. Whatever one's views on their tuning no one can deny how magnificent they sound in the ringing room and around the Cathedral precincts.

Not only are the bells exposed to the corrosive London environment, they also survived Zeppelin raids in the First World War and remarkably they were not damaged during air raids in the Second World War. Hanging in a massive oak frame they have needed little maintenance over the years. In the 1960s metal headstocks were fitted to the

heaviest three bells (after the tenor came off its headstock during Sunday ringing) and ball bearings were fitted to all of the bells. Wheels, pulleys and clappers have been replaced and repaired when necessary.

The bells are not being rehung, rather they are undergoing a conservation-based refurbishment and will be out of action between August and November this year. Although the bells still 'go' remarkably well, the Cathedral's ringers and authorities felt it was time for the bells' first major service. The work will include: a new iron headstock for the ninth; new ball bearings for all twelve bells; repair and restoration of wheels and fittings; all clappers annealed and rebushed, and a new wrought iron clapper for the tenor; additional pulleys fitted to several of the bells and the remaining pulleys replaced or repaired. If any of the elm headstocks are past their best they will be replaced with new iroko ones copying the original dimensions; the existing iron work will be repaired or replaced and the treble will be quarter turned. The Clerk of Works' staff will repair flooring and install new lighting in the belfry. The Wightman service bell will be rehung and refitted. Finally, the eleventh and tenor are to be weighed which will give accurate weights for the first time.

The work is being paid for by the Friends of the Cathedral, whose patron is the Queen Mother, and Whites of Appleton who have a long association with the bells were awarded the contract. 2000 will be a special year for Queen Mother and the Cathedral's bells.

MARK REGAN

## Bright outlook for notable Taylor eight

Kingston, near Corfe Castle, Dorset, has a notable Taylor eight (26-3-26 in D. oak frame of 1878) in a very fine Victorian church. The former estate village has few parishioners, but the bells are rung regularly by the Swanage ringers and friends. An order has just been confirmed with Nicholson Engineering of Bridport to augment the bells to ten. The project is funded by a Swanage ringing couple, and the dedication may be on the Sunday immediately preceding day one, of month one, of year one of the new millennium.

Twenty years ago the bells were unringed and virtually derelict and, initially, the Wimborne ringers inserted some 20 vertical steel tie bars through the frame and had the clappers rebushed. Quite recently, Swanage ringers have removed some 20 wedges and added steel bracing in plan view and to the foundation beams. The total effect has transformed the 'go' of the bells, and the additional framework to house the new bells can now be built upon a stable foundation. The work, with voluntary assistance, is scheduled to take place in the Summer, with casting of the bells at Loughborough in mid June.

RON POCKLINGTON

## BERWICK UPON TWEED – continued

the 5th, 6th and 7th with the old 5th being hung for chiming as a Curfew bell. A very long wait then ensued for these bells to be released which caused the installation to run right to December 1999. The bells were first tried out on December 23rd when they were heard again for the first time in 64 years. Present and ringing on that occasion was Ben Faragher who is the only surviving member of the original band when ringing ceased in 1935. He had returned to ringing after a gap of over 60 years when he heard of the restoration and joined the new trainees at their practices at nearby Bamburgh. He is now rediscovering ringing and has progressed to plain hunt on eight. The bells were a delight to ring at the try out and had a traditional, mellow sound with the original and replacement bells blending perfectly – thanks to Andrew Higson's tuning expertise at Taylors. Since the building is situated in the middle of the high street sound control had been installed. This proved to be very effective. Internally the acoustics were excellent and have since needed only minor adjustments. The weight of the tenor after retuning is 20-3-14 in E flat.

The bells were officially opened at a blessing ceremony by the Vicar of Berwick preceded by a formal lunch with the Freemen of the Borough. An excellent peal of Yorkshire S. Major then followed, being the first peal of Major on the bells and only the second ever in the tower. The band included Nigel Herriott from Wokingham whose family are Freemen to the Borough and Frederick and Rosemary Ross, members of the local band since their retirement from Melbourne. Much local publicity was given via Border TV and the local papers and the whole installation has received excellent support from the local community. Since that enjoyable and memorable day a local band has been in action on Thursday evenings and a good practice has been established. Ringing is also provided for the nearby parish church evensong on Sunday.

The bells are now available for visiting ringers who should contact the secretary, Rosemary Ross, on 01289 306041 for information. Please do not make applications direct to any part of Berwick Council. Passing visitors intending to visit a very vibrant practice (7pm) should contact Rosemary for access etc. DAVID HIRD



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## Fractured gudgeon at St Mary's, Dover

During the beginners' tied-bell practice last Monday the gudgeon of the 2nd fractured. Luckily it gave enough warning signs to allow the bell to be rung down before it sheared completely.

It has come at a most unfortunate time, just before Easter and within weeks of work starting on a major restoration. Wednesday practices will continue from 7 to 9pm, but on tied bells for the first hour. Visitors are always welcome; use the bell push at the West door and walk round to the North door to gain entry.

Change-ringing practices will be on Mondays from 7.30pm at St Leonard's, Deal.

PETER DALE  
Tower Secretary

## Date Touched

On 7th April 1897 war broke out between Greece and the Ottoman empire.

On 7th April 1902 the Texas Oil Company TEXACO was formed.

On 7th April 1906 mount Vesuvius erupted destroying the town of Ottaviano.

On 7th April 1947 Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company died aged 83.

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