

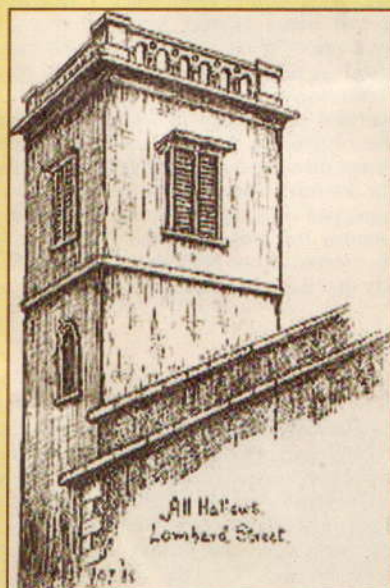
*The Weekly Journal for
Church Bell Ringers since 1911*

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Editor: Robert Lewis

Where the Towers no longer stand

- Formerly ten bells
- Tenor 19½ cwt in E
- Anti-clockwise
- Church demolished in 1878
- Bells hung in All Hallows, Lombard Street in 1879

St Dionis Backchurch, Lime Street



- Former ten bells
- Tenor 19½ cwt in E
- Bells originally from St Dionis Backchurch
- Church demolished in 1938
- Church, tower and bells rebuilt as All Hallows, Twickenham

All Hallows, Lombard Street

Where the towers no longer stand

The Demise of St Dionis Backchurch and All Hallows Lombard Street in the City of London

by Dickon R. Love

Two weeks ago these pages told of the demise of the bells of St Magnus the Martyr. In an act to save the bells from destruction in the War, they were removed from the tower but never replaced leaving the tower standing today devoid of its ring. This week our attention is drawn to a story where the converse is true, where the bells were rescued from the tower while the tower itself was demolished. Of the church that received them, the tower alone stands some 13 miles away from its original location!

The church of St Dionis, Backchurch once stood on the north side of Fenchurch Street at the corner of Lime Street behind a row of houses. ('Backchurch' in distinction to the

former St Gabriel, Fenchurch sometimes known as 'Forechurch'.) The original church was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 although the tower largely survived. That fire was responsible for changing the skyline of London for ever. Dominated by the tall tower of St Paul's Cathedral and the spread of towers from all the other churches, many of which were never rebuilt, the City's architects effectively had a blank sheet of paper on which to create the new skyline. The fire also destroyed a huge number of the bells. Today, over four hundred years later, only two bells dated earlier than the Great Fire survive in the City Churches that were destroyed and rebuilt after the fire (at St Margaret Pattens and St Stephen, Walbrook).

It is not known how many bells were in St Dionis' tower at the time, but certainly there is a record of five bells and a sanctus in 1552, three other sanctus bells having been sold some years earlier. One historian claims that the bells in the tower at the time of the fire were hung in 1632. The body of the church was rebuilt and a new ring of six bells was purchased from James Bartlett at Whitechapel in 1674 at a cost of £50 5s. 10d. They were hung in the old tower by a Mr Allen who was paid £10 for the job. As funds permitted, so a new tower was designed and built for the church in 1684 together with a clock and dial. The old tower stood next to the new one for some years during construction and presumably the bells were moved from one to the other at this time.

Lord Mayor and Master

One of the most notable benefactors to the church was Sir Henry Tulse, alderman, Lord Mayor in 1683 and Master of the College Youths in 1684. After his death in 1689, he was buried in a vault in the church, and after the church was eventually pulled down, the stone was moved to the courtyard which then marked the site of the old churchyard. The inscription on this stone was recut in 1937 at the expense of the College Youths, and the stone itself was later moved to the churchyard of St Edmund King and Martyr.

By 1726, the six bells were found to be out of order and the tenor was cracked. At the meeting of the vestry on 28th August, a debate on the various options to restore the sound of bells to their tower took place. One was to recast the cracked tenor and rehang the six bells in a new frame. Some members of the vestry however had investigated the possibility of exchanging the bells and old frame for a new ring of eight bells and a new frame. A contract was drawn up between the church and Richard Phelps, the Whitechapel bell founder, to provide a ring of 8 bells with a tenor of 20 cwt and a new oak frame. Maybe funds were more forthcoming that expected as eventually two additional bells and associated framework were finally received. St Dionis now had an anticlockwise ring of ten together with a chiming machine to play eight tunes on all ten bells in the 24 hours (at 3, 6, 9 and 12 o'clock). The clock was set to strike quarters on the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th bells with the hours on the tenor bell and a repetition of the hours on the saints bell. The clock was altered and the chimes added by Langley Bradley and the final cost of the bells from Phelps amounted to £479 8s.

Not many rings of ten had been cast at that stage, and few were as light, so the difficulty experienced by the foundry might explain why

the treble soon broke and was recast five years later. The 4th and 8th however were also to crack some years later and were themselves recast at Whitechapel by Thomas Lester.

The responsibility of ringing the bells fell to the College Youths who rang on Christmas Day, Easter Day, Ascension Day (when the triennial perambulation of the parish boundaries took place), Whit Sunday, the Queen's birthday and other special occasions. The College Youths were granted 2 guineas each time by the churchwardens on behalf of the parish.

The first peal on the bells was on 10th October, 1729 when the College Youths rang Grandsire Caters. The Eastern Scholars rang the next one seven years later, also of Grandsire Caters. The College Youths rang the next few peals in 1752 (Grandsire Caters), 1760 (Double Bob Royal) and 1785 (Oxford T.B. Royal) following which there was a long gap before the next peal, a Cumberland peal of Stedman Caters, which was rung in 1850. Another peal of Stedman Caters rung by the College Youths in 1852 and the 1785 and 1852 peals were recorded on peal boards in the ringing room. The last peal at St Dionis was rung in November, 1878, just before demolition commenced, being 5,200 Kent T.B. Royal in 3 hours 30 minutes.

Transfer to Lombard Street

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there were moves afoot to reduce the number of churches in the City, unite the parishes, and from the proceeds of the sale of the increasingly valuable land, build churches to serve the ever growing suburbs of the capital. St Dionis was one of the first casualties under the City Union of Benefices Act: it was pulled down in 1878 and its parish united with that of the neighbouring parish of All Hallows, Lombard Street. The proceeds of the sale of the church went to repairing All Hallows and building a new church of St Dionis, Parsons Green in Fulham.

All Hallows, Lombard Street was another church that was built before the Great Fire and was damaged during it. Records show that the building of the church commenced in 1516 with the tower completed in 1544, much of the stone and a bell frame coming from the recently dissolved priory of St John of Jerusalem near Smithfield. A ring of bells was purchased by a Mr Warner, one of the drapers of the parish, with the intention of donating them to the parish. However, before the donation could take place, Mr Warner died and his son refused to continue with the donation. Therefore, the new tower was only equipped with one bell. Some time shortly later another bell was installed in the tower as there is a record of two bells in 1552, although it is likely that the other bell was a small sanctus bell.

The Great Fire

Following the Great Fire, All Hallows was rebuilt by Christopher Wren between 1686 and 1694 at a cost of £8,058 15s 6d. This was the last of the City churches that this celebrated architect completed. Instead of being transferred to St Dionis, Parsons Green in Fulham, the bells were presented to All Hallows and hung in that tower in new framework and fittings by Mears & Stainbank in 1879. The two peals boards that used to hang in the St Dionis ringing room were

(continued on p.867)



(Founded by John S Goldsmith)

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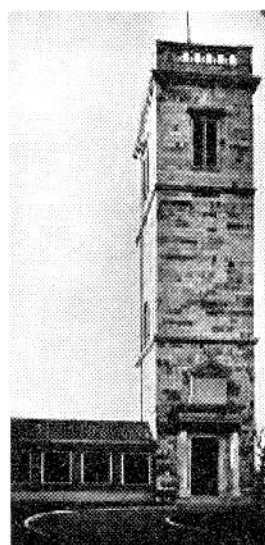
(address above)

WHERE TOWERS NO LONGER STAND—*contd.* also transferred to the wall of the ringing room of All Hallows. The Order in Council did however stipulate that the two bells at that time occupying the tower of All Hallows should be transferred to Parsons Green. This was an order that the All Hallows churchwardens disregarded as they went instead to St Paul's, Southwark. The churchwardens at Parsons Green were not happy about this, but were soon pacified with the donation of the bell formerly at St Michael's, Bassishaw (cast by James Bagley in 1710 and came via St Etheldreda's, Fulham; St Michael's was eventually demolished in 1900). One of the bells at St Paul's, Southwark was later sold to St John's, Herne Bay, Kent at the generous price of £20 where it was hung by Samuel Goslin. Even that church was pulled down in 1973 and an attempt to rescue the bell was made by the Kent County Association - to no avail as it fell to pieces in the process! It was discovered to have been cast by Richard Phelps in 1723, weighed 7-1-25 and had a diameter of 34 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". The Southwark church was bombed in the war and demolished, and the other All Hallows bell disappeared.

Occasional practice

Not much ringing took place at All Hallows and only four peals were ever rung: two in 1897 of Grandsire and Stedman with another in 1928 of Stedman. The last peal was rung on 24th May, 1930 for the bells were not destined to remain in the tower for much longer. The connection with the Ancient Society of College Youths continued as it was listed as a tower where the Society 'occasionally practised'. After barely 60 years, the east wall of All Hallows was found to

be 'unsafe'. Despite a protracted battle, the support of the Lord Mayor and the Common Council, the parishioners lost the day. As with St Dionis, the money raised from the sale of the land went into building new churches in the suburbs of London, the first being All Hallows, North Greenford (consecrated 1941). The City church itself was demolished in 1938 and rebuilt as the new church of All Hallows, Twickenham.



The tower was dismantled and rebuilt stone for stone at Twickenham. The bells were offered to Guildford for its new cathedral, although in 1951 they too went to Twickenham.

They were tuned, the 8th and tenor recast, and hung with new fittings and frame a stage lower in the tower, by Mears & Stainbank.

As a post script, the two trebles at Twickenham (remembering that the 2nd was from the original 1726 Backchurch ten) were replaced with new bells in 1988. The old bells were purchased by St John the Baptist, Windsor, where it is hoped they will one day be hung to augment the ring of eight to ten there. St Dionis to All Hallows to

Twickenham to Windsor ... this would be the fourth tower in which these Backchurch bells would call the faithful to worship.

Both towers are now gone, and very few people alive today would remember All Hallows. While we still see the likeness of All Hallows in the daughter building, and allowing for the various retunings and replacements, the sound that now calls from those louvers is still the Backchurch sound. In the early days, the transfer of a ring of bells must have been an unusual occurrence: how pleasing it is that now, through the good work of the Keltek Trust and others, such acts of conservation are turned to more regularly.

Details of the ring of ten bells transferred from St Dionis to All Hallows.

			Key of E
1.	Richard Phelps	1732	25 $\frac{3}{4}$ " 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ cwt
2.	Richard Phelps	1726	27" 5 cwt
3.	Richard Phelps	1726	28 $\frac{3}{4}$ " 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt
4.	Thomas Lester	1750	31" 6 cwt
5.	Richard Phelps	1726	32 $\frac{3}{4}$ " 7 cwt
6.	Richard Phelps	1726	34 $\frac{1}{2}$ " 8 cwt
7.	Richard Phelps	1726	39" 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt
8.	Thomas Lester	1750	39 $\frac{3}{4}$ " 11 cwt
9.	Richard Phelps	1726	43 $\frac{1}{4}$ " 14 cwt
10.	Richard Phelps	1726	48 $\frac{1}{4}$ " 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt

These words about the Backchurch bells merely scratch the surface of a fascinating piece of London ringing history, and there is much more to be researched, learned and disclosed. As this research continues, updates may be found on the Church Bells of the City of London Website at

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/dickon.love/london>.

The author would like to thank Chris Pickford and Rev'd David Cawley for their assistance in preparing this article.

ADVANCE NOTICE

Southwell D.G. North Notts District

OSWY STREET MEMORIAL OPEN CUP CONTEST

(FOR TEAMS RINGING MINOR METHODS)

SATURDAY 13th OCTOBER 2001
at Sutton-cum-Lound

For copies of the Rules ring John Coates on (01777) 703072 or visit the Guild website at www.southwelldg.org.uk

A further notice will appear requesting final team entries and names for tea by Saturday 6th October

1021

YORKSHIRE ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY 15th SEPTEMBER 2001

Striking competition at Sprotbrough (540020)
10.00-12.30

10.00-10.45	Blyth, Notts	(6)	624873
10.45-11.30	Harworth, Notts	(6)	614917
11.30-12.15	Bawtry	(6)	653930
12.15-13.00	Tickhill	(8)	592931
14.00-15.00	South Anston	(8)	519836
15.00-16.15	Eckington	(8)	432798

Service at Eckington 16.15

followed by Tea (approx 16.45) and Meeting
Names for tea **MUST** be sent to Ian Hudson (0114 269 8773) by Tuesday 11th please

Evening ringing

19.30-21.00 Rotherham (12) 429929

N.B. (i) At Eckington, please use the Town Centre Car Park; (ii) There will be a ballot for Central Council Representatives; (iii) Unfinished business from the AGM will be taken at this Meeting

1020

OPEN DAY

SATURDAY 1st SEPTEMBER 2001

Open from 1000

last admission 1600 hrs

The Whitechapel Bell Foundry Ltd.
34 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DY
ALL WELCOME

Admission: £7 adult/£4 child

Visit the historic foundry where Big Ben and the original Liberty Bell were cast and learn how bells are made

Due to the age of the Foundry, it is regretted that disabled access is not available

All children under the age of 16 should be accompanied by an adult who will be responsible for their conduct and safety

Coach parties are requested to contact us directly so we can stagger their suggested arrival times in order to prevent visitor congestion

3144

THE GUILD OF RAILWAY RINGERS

AUTUMN MEETING

WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY

SATURDAY 1st SEPTEMBER 2001

Tour departs from Taunton railway station and includes travel by vintage bus between towers and West Somerset Railway steam

Ringing will be at four towers on the route

For more details please contact Chris Mew on 01926 402273

Everybody is welcome - come and enjoy a day of ringing and travel by vintage transport!

1022

MORE NOTICES

MIDDLESEX C.A. & LONDON D.G. N & E District.
10 bell District practice at St Clement Danes, Friday August 31st from 6.30pm. Everyone welcome. 1055

MIDDLESEX C.A. & LONDON D.G. Southern District. Saturday 1st September. Ringing at Harlington 3.30-4.30. Tea at Harmondsworth 5.00. Ringing at Harmondsworth 6.00-7.00. 1054

ELY DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION

STRIKING COMPETITION

SATURDAY 29th SEPTEMBER 2001

2.00pm 6 bell draw Gt Gransden

5.00pm Lt Gransden Village Hall

for tea, results and business meeting
to ratify £3,500 grant and £7,000 interest free loan to Cottenham

6.30pm 8 bell draw Gamlingay

Names for tea and teams entering to Catherina Griffiths (01480) 393372, by 24th September

1019

LANCASHIRE ASSOCIATION OF CHANGE RINGERS

125th ANNIVERSARY DINNER

PARK HALL, CHARNOCK RICHARD

SATURDAY 29th SEPTEMBER 2001

Speakers: The Bishop of Blackburn and Steve Coleman

Tickets, price £23 from Donna Jones, 324 Station Rd, Bamber Bridge, Preston PR5 6EH 01772 330941 donnajones@lineone.net

Choice of menu, please ask for form

All replies by early September

Please make cheques payable to LACR

0972