

THE LOST BELLS OF LONDON (2) ST. SEPULCHRE'S, HOLBORN

By W. T. COOK

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To return to the 17th century, it seems that in spite of all these difficulties with the bells, they were the ones most favoured by the College Youths, and were probably also used by the London Scholars. Evidence suggests that, soon after the bells were augmented to ten, the College Youths started to practise Grandsire Caters on them. It was probably because they were the only ring of ten in London that the College Youths had the ninth recast at their own expense in 1699.

A "Historical Account" in one of the College Youths' books, dated 1796 but based on a manuscript dating from 1738, states that "The first account we have of Triples being rung was at St. Sepulchre's without Newgate London—March 4th 1684-5 The College Youths rung two eighteen scores Grandsire Triples and two days after that 700 Triples at the same place. On Jan. 7th 1689-90 the whole peal of Plain Bob Triples was rung at St. Sepulchre's without Newgate, London, in 3 hours forty five minutes, (and the first trial) being the first 5,040 that was ever rung." Contrary to most ringing historians, I am inclined to believe the last statement to be true, in spite of the fact that the first peal on these bells of which we have any definite record, 5,040 Grandsire Caters in 1731, bears the note in the College Youths' peal book, "First peal on the bells". This peal was conducted by John Cundell, and was reported in the "Norwich Gazette" for May 22nd, 1731, as follows: "On Saturday last the Society of College Youths rung a complete Peal of 5040 Caters in 3 Hours and a Half, on the 10 Bells at St. Sepulchre's without Newgate, being the first that ever was performed in that Steeple, those being such difficult Bells to ring, that no Ringers except themselves ever had the Courage to attempt it before altho' there have been 10 Bells upwards of 40 Years."

This state of affairs seems to have been remedied by Samuel Knight's recasting of the bells in 1739. The inscription on the ninth, by the way, reads, "Samuel Knight cast us all, and Robert Catlin made the frame and hung us all, 1739." The first peal on these new bells was one of 5,200 Oxford Treble Bob Royal, rung by the Eastern Scholars on April 17th, 1741. On May 30th of the same year the College Youths rang there a 5,000 in the same method, which they called Union Bob Royal. Both these peals were commemorated by peal boards in the tower. In view of the fact that the College Youths appended to the peal board the lines:

"When merit's justly due,

A little praise then serveth;

A good peal needs no frame,

A bad one none deserveth."

—it has been suggested that the Eastern Scholar's peal was false, or otherwise defective, but there is no real evidence for this.

I know of only four other peals recorded as having been rung on the bells in the 18th century. They were 5,040 Eastern Bob Royal by the Eastern Scholars in 1750;

6,390 Grandsire Caters by the College Youths in 1752, conducted by John Holt; 5,075 Grandsire Caters by the "Ancient" Society of College Youths in 1776; and 5,111 Grandsire Caters by the Junior Cumberlands in 1793.

A few peals were rung here in the 19th century, including one of Stedman Caters by the St. James' Society "on the occasion of the visit of Her Majesty Queen Victoria to open the Holborn Viaduct on Saturday, November 6th, 1869." But the former glory had departed from the tower. A biographical note relating to William Hopkins ("Bell News", 24th March, 1894) says, "His first experience of ringing rounds (1865) took place at the church of St. Sepulchre's . . . where with some difficulty he and his tutor (Joseph Cattle, Jun.) managed to get a band together once a fortnight to practise call-changes on the back eight. This was hard work, as the bells at the time went very bad, having thick ropes with sallies quite eight feet long. These drawbacks, combined with a very long draught, made ringing at St. Sepulchre's anything but an easy job."

The church was restored in 1880, and the Cumberland Youths rang a peal of Stedman Caters on May 3rd to commemorate the event. I know of only five peals rung here since the bells were rehung in 1904, but there may well have been more. The bells do not seem to have been often rung, but I appear to have less information about ringing on these bells in this century than I do about the 17th century! I believe that, since the Second World War, the bells have been rung very occasionally, but the condition of the tower is said to prevent their being rung at all now; so, although the bells still hang in the tower, the cost of restoration would be such as to make the likelihood of their being heard again remote indeed. Unfortunately, therefore, these fine bells, the successors of those on which ringing history was made, must be classified among the "lost bells of London".

Dedication

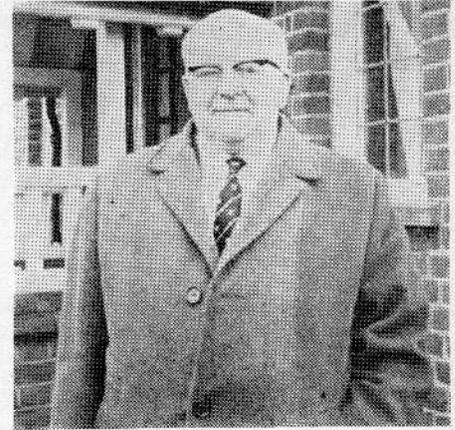
CHERITON, HANTS

For many years a problem had faced the parishioners of Cheriton. It had been discovered that the main beam which supported the old bellframe was rotten. It was decided that the only solution would be to rehang entirely the whole ring. Accordingly the bells were removed to the Loughborough Foundry, where they were tuned and fitted with new fittings into a new steel and cast iron frame.

Sunday, October 29, saw the culmination of much effort when at Evensong the restored ring was rededicated to the service of God by the Bishop of Winchester. It was very gratifying to all present to know that the full cost of the whole operation had been raised in a very short time. During and after the service the bells were rung by local ringers and friends. A very marked improvement has been made in the general order of the bells.

John Taylor and Co. were represented at the service of dedication by Mr. A. Clayton.

The original bells were cast by John Warner and Sons in 1888. The tenor now weighs 6-1-26.



ARTHUR'S SPECIAL DAY

Christmas Day, 1972, was a special day for Arthur Radley and his wife, for it was 50 years ago that they were married at the Parish Church, Broxbourne, Herts, where Arthur's father was captain of the bell-ringers. "I didn't ring that day," said Arthur, "for there were plenty of ringers and they didn't need me!"

He succeeded to the captaincy of the tower on the death of his father, and although he talks frequently of giving up the office in favour of a younger man, the ringers of Broxbourne won't hear of it. He is a sort of captain-emeritus, however, and is greatly esteemed and respected by ringers in the area. A congratulatory card signed by all his friends was handed to him when he entered the tower for ringing at 9.30 a.m. on Christmas Day, and a bottle of "bubbly" and a huge box of chocolates were presented. The Vicar of Broxbourne handed over an envelope and congratulated Arthur and Mrs. Radley (who, unfortunately, had succumbed to an attack of flu) on their 50th anniversary, and a special touch of Grandsire Triples was then rung.

"My father made that box over there for me to stand on when I started ringing in 1914, and I've enjoyed ringing ever since," said Arthur. His sister, who died some five years ago, also rang at Broxbourne for many years. A Cumberland of many years' standing, his first peal for them was one of Stedman Cinques in 1936 (with George Cross) and although he has rung a number of peals of Stedman Caters and Cinques in and around London he has never rung Stedman Triples to a peal!

He remembers Alf Pulling with affection and admiration, for Alf was in Hertford Hospital following a serious motor-cycle accident and after his recovery regularly visited Hertford and joined in the ringing in and around the area.

A nurseryman all his life, Arthur retired some five years ago and has since been doing a "post-boy" job a few hours a day with a firm in Hoddesdon.

All send greetings, congratulations and good wishes to Mr. and Mrs. Radley and wish them many more years of happiness together.

Specially printed peal forms are available (free) from R.W. Office, Seven Corners Press, Guildford. Send stamped addressed (9" x 4") envelope.