

THE LOST BELLS OF LONDON (4)

ST. STEPHEN'S, COLEMAN STREET

By W. T. COOK

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It is interesting to reflect that, up to 1939, the various London Societies had more rings of bells at their disposal than they needed; so that rings of bells such as the 14 cwt. eight at St. Stephen's, Coleman Street—in the heart of the City, close to Guildhall—only appear briefly in the history of London ringing, and fade out again; so that the destruction during the air-raid of December 29, 1940, of the church and bells seems to have passed almost unnoticed by London ringers. This latter circumstance is, however, partly explained by the fact that after the war it was decided not to rebuild the church. Today, if you pass along Coleman Street, you will find nothing to mark even its site.

St. Stephen's was originally a chapel in the parish of St. Lawrence, Jewry, and was incorporated a parish in the reign of Edward IV (about 1470). Of considerable interest are some statutes drawn up in 1467 which set out in detail the duties of the clerks and sexton with regard to ringing the bells, of which there were three or four. The sexton was to "ring curfew when it is rung with one bell and call for help when it is rung with more" (I have modernised the spelling), while the clerks were to "ring 3 peals with the least bell to the morrow mass and before the last peal warn the morrow mass priest and ask him if (he) shall ring all in. And so to do to the Curate or his Deputy on Sundays and holy days after the good custom of London. . . . They shall be ready to ring to all manner of divine service at due hour assigned of the Curate or his deputy, after the use and custom of London the City of. And not to ring the last peal until the Curate or his deputy be present." Ringing the first "peal" for the morning Mass, held at seven o'clock, started at five o'clock in the summer and half past five in winter. The object in ringing different bells at fixed times was to let people know exactly what service was to be held.

When the church of the wealthy Priory of the Holy Trinity in Aldgate was pulled down at the time of the Reformation, four of its largest bells went to St. Dunstan's, Stepney, and five small ones were sold to St. Stephen's. The Edward VI Inventory (1552) shows that there were at that time five bells and a saunce bell in the steeple of St. Stephen's. There is some evidence to suggest that the ring was subsequently augmented, but, as is so often the case with London bells, there are no precise details. In any case, the bell, with the church, were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666.

The church was rebuilt to Sir Christopher Wren's designs between 1674 and 1681. As often happened in those days, the design of the church was influenced by the surrounding, often contiguous buildings, so that there was not a square corner anywhere in the edifice. The north side of the church was ten feet longer than the south, and the east end twelve feet shorter than the west. The tower was placed at

the north-west corner, only 65 feet in height, and was surmounted by a small lead-covered lantern crowned by a spire and weathervane. Like the rest of the church, the tower was rhomboid in plan. Some of the furnishings of the church were particularly fine, especially the pulpit and the reredos.

After the church was completed, it was 12 years before a ring of bells was supplied. James Bartlett of Whitechapel cast a ring of eight bells for St. Stephen's in 1693, all of which except the fourth, seventh and tenor remained in the tower until 1940. The fourth and seventh were recast by John Waylett, a founder of whom very little is known, in 1771-2, and the tenor was recast by Mears in 1833.

The first peal on the bells was one of Bob Triples rung by the College Youths on August 21, 1731. It was called by William Laughton, of "Rambling Ringers" fame, who was steward that year. The Eastern Scholars also visited St. Stephen's; on the lead roof of the church there used to be the following inscription, partly obliterated by subsequent repairs: "Tuesday, . . . 12,1741 was rung in this steeple by the Society of Eastern Scholars a compleat peal of 5040 Bob Major. P. Mainwaring 1, R. Butterworth 2, J. Newell 3, W. Goodman 4, T. Bennett 5, W. Lovell 6, J. Bradshaw 7, W. C. . . . tenor. Completed in 3 hours and ten minutes." Close by someone had scratched on the leads: "This is a lye as sure as ever the performers lived." What the origin of this remark was we cannot now tell. The Eastern Scholars rang another peal of Bob Major here in 1747.

The next ringing recorded on these bells was by the newly-formed or re-formed St. James's Society in 1827. They used St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, as one of their regular meeting places for a year or so, and rang their second peal there on April 2, 1827—Grandsire Triples, conducted by William Atherton. A board in the tower recorded this as being the first peal on the bells for 80 years, which appears to be correct. On October 29, 1838, the College Youths rang a peal of Grandsire Triples here, conducted by Thomas Tooladay.

Perhaps the bells received some attention in about 1895, for shortly after that they enjoyed a brief period of comparative popularity for peal ringing. The College Youths rang Stedman Triples here on March 6, 1897, conducted by I. G. Shade, which they claimed as the first on the bells for "Upwards of seventy years, and the second in 150 years." As we have seen, this was an inaccurate claim, no doubt based on the fact that the 1827 peal was the only one recorded in the tower. History was not a strong point with the College Youths in those days! Between then and 1904 the College Youths rang six peals, including one of Double Norwich and one, on June 13, 1902, to mark the end of the Boer War. On January 14, 1899, a band from Brighton rang London Surprise here; it was the

first peal in the method in the City of London. On St. Patrick's Day 1905, eight English members of the Irish Association rang at St. Stephen's a 5024 of Bob Major "as a compliment to the Sister Isle, being the first peal by the Irish Association out of Ireland." A report in Bell News tells us that, "At the conclusion of the peal an adjournment to the Plough Hotel enabled the band to take 'Irish' all round when success to the Emerald Association was drunk."

ANOTHER TRIP TO LONDON

Last year, Gordon Rendell, Ringing Master, Ilchester Branch of the Bath and Wells Diocesan Association, organised a trip for members and friends to London to visit the Whitechapel Bell Foundry and to ring in a few London towers. Such was its success that he was asked to arrange another this year, which took place on Saturday, November 18th, when some 37 members and friends assembled at Yeovil Junction en route for London.

Because of its size the party was divided into two groups. Those in No. 1 making their way to the Bell Foundry where they were met by Mr. W. Hughes. No. 2 party explored Whitehall and then went on a conducted tour of Big Ben, climbing close on 400 steps to witness a panoramic view of London and to be among the bells when the quarters and hour of noon were struck.

After an ample and welcome lunch at the Wootin's Shades, Bishopsgate, the party divided again, No. 1 going to a demonstration on the Carter Ringing Machine at the National Science Museum by Mr. and Mrs. Dobbie, while No. 2 rang at St. Botolph's, Aldgate, meeting No. 1 party at St. Olave's, Hart Street, and then on to St. George's in the East for ringing until 6.15 p.m. Returning to Waterloo everyone voted it a very enjoyable day, made more so by the bright, sunny weather.

All express grateful thanks to Mr. W. Hughes for conducting the Bell Foundry tour; Mr. D. Hughes and Mr. and Mrs. Dobbie for the Carter Ringing Machine demonstration; Mr. and Mrs. G. Brooks for the excellent lunch; the various tower masters; Mr. Bill Theobald for arranging the ringing; Mr. Wilf. Williams for the musical touch of Stedman Triples at Aldgate, and last but not least the Branch members, i.e. Bill Shaw for supervising the Waterloo and Whitechapel party; Jim Taylor the Science Museum party; and Gordon Rendell for the Whitehall and Big Ben party and in particular his great effort in organising the whole outing. Gordon has asked that his thanks be recorded for the generous appreciation and co-operation shown by all.

M. M. L.

B. C. HILL SHIELD

A competition took place at Somerton for the B. C. Hill Shield. Eleven teams took part and the judges were P. Aggett and F. Gregory.

Results. — 1 and shield Meavy 34, 2 Lamerton A 50, 3 Lamerton B 53½ 4 Lydford A 59½, 5 Buckland Monachorum 71½, 6 Tavistock A 79, 7 Lydford B 82½, 8 Tavistock B 83½, 9 Lamerton C 103, 10 Whitchurch 106, 11 Lewtrenchard 185.