

New Diamond Jubilee bells for the City of London

by Dickon R. Love

The year 2012 will be a very important year in the life of this nation as it sees our redoubtable Monarch reach the dizzy milestone of her Diamond Jubilee. This has only been achieved once before, by Queen Victoria in 1897. Jubilees are important ringing occasions, and quite often churches will look to restore their bells to ensure that they too can take part in the celebrations. The City of London will be getting not one, but two new rings of bells, and in both cases the Jubilee will be the important focal point for their delivery. In addition, one of these will lead the Diamond Jubilee River Pageant as they ring from a purpose built tower standing on a boat leading Her Majesty down the Thames!

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 prompted a number of new and restored installations in the Greater London area. The three bells at St Mary's, Barnes were augmented to eight and new single bells were installed at St Saviour's, Brixton and St Laurence's, Catford. Whilst not recorded in their inscriptions, it is possible that the new ring of six at Havering-atte-Bower was also dedicated to the Jubilee. Other possible dedications include the five new hemispherical bells at St Paul's, Marylebone, the eight tubular bells at St Leonard, Bromley-by-Bow, the augmentations at St Michael's, East Wickham (two to three) and St Simon's, Hammersmith (one to eight), and also the single bells at St Andrew's, Islington, St Ignatius, Sunbury-on-Thames and St George, Hanover Square (Westminster). There was even a plan to augment St John-at-Hackney from eight to ten, but this never happened through lack of funding.

St Dunstan-in-the-West

The first of the new City of London rings is **St Dunstan-in-the-West**, which stands on Fleet Street at the gateway between the Cities of Westminster and London. The tower will be equipped with a ring of ten with a tenor of just over 11 cwt. This church has a long tradition of ringing, but none of it is recent. Formerly a ring of five, with a tenor of 17-2-21, they were augmented to six in 1667. They were all recast into a new ring of eight, with a tenor of about



The Church of St Dunstan-in-the-West, Fleet Street, home to the new ring of ten

20 cwt, in 1713/4, by Richard Phelps. (Interestingly this was the same year Phelps produced a similar ring for St Magnus the Martyr.) These bells lasted just under 120 years as they were scrapped when the church was rebuilt. The new church had a slightly smaller tower and a smaller new ring of eight was installed in 1832, this time with a tenor of 17-0-4. These bells were almost certainly rung

for Queen Victoria when her entourage entered the City of London, passing the tower on the way, to celebrate her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. However they weren't to ring for much longer; ringing all but ceased, and in 1914 the tenor was reported to be cracked. The bells hung derelict in the tower until 1969 when they were scrapped entirely as part of a wider tower clear out. The first seven of the new ring of ten have already been cast at Whitechapel, and they will all be consecrated on the floor of the sanctuary on 14th March by the Bishop of London. This work has been made possible through the generosity of a number of individuals who have sponsored bells as well as the Viridor Credits Environmental Company through the Landfill Communities Fund. The bells themselves will be hung in Holy and Easter weeks and will be ready to ring for HM The Queen as she follows the footsteps of her predecessor past the church to give thanks for her sixty-year reign at St Paul's Cathedral. Once all the work is complete, the stewardship for the bells is expected to pass to the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths.



The stamps of the Royal Arms, to appear on all eighteen bells, by permission



The 7th bell for St Dunstan's being cast at Whitechapel



The front seven bells for St Dunstan-in-the-West cooling in their moulds



The Church of St James Garlickhythe, home to the new ring of eight

St James Garlickhythe

The other tower to seek a new ring of bells is **St James Garlickhythe**, which stands on Upper Thames Street just south of Mansion House station. A couple of years ago the Rector asked me to inspect the bells at both this and its sister church of St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe, with a view in particular to installing bells in the latter. Within a few weeks of this inspection, the heating at St Andrew's broke down, and the prospect of a

large project to install a new heating system displaced any ideas for bells. However, members of the St James' congregation were particularly keen on the idea of a new ring in *their* church, in particular, Mark White (who is the son of former Ringing World Editor, Tom White) and Alderman Dr Andrew Parmley (Organist and Parish Clerk). Andrew had just finished raising a considerable sum to restore the church organ, and enthused with the idea of a ring of bells being provided as



Logo for the Diamond Jubilee

well. He therefore offered to conduct whatever fundraising was necessary, which meant that I could manage both this and St Dunstan's without conflict of interest in the fundraising. A project was therefore conceived for a new ring of eight bells with a tenor of just over 9 cwt, to be cast at the Whitechapel Bellfoundry using their new Mark III profiles. The tower already has three bells, cast at different times (and in some cases, for different churches), which are chimed by Ellacombe apparatus from the first floor. In addition, the 6 cwt tenor can be swing chimed with a rope from a lever on the headstock. The new ring of eight will be positioned in the room immediately beneath this belfry, with shutters opening in the roof to allow their sound to swell and escape up and out. The bells will be rung from a new ringing room to be constructed four feet above the floor of the existing first floor.

The Diamond Jubilee River Pageant

Shortly after these plans were conceived, the Whitechapel Bell Foundry was approached by the Diamond Jubilee Pageant Trust, which wanted to feature a ring of locally produced bells, to sound from a boat that would head up a planned River Pageant on the Thames. This pageant was to be the City of London's contribution to the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The Trust was unable to actually fund such a new ring, but was very keen to use any bells that might happen to end up in London as a Diamond Jubilee memorial. The Trust was put in touch with me, and we agreed that the Garlickhythe bells could be used for this purpose, provided the Trust covered all costs and insurances. The full extent of the plan then became clear!

The River Pageant will be held on the afternoon of Sunday, 3rd June. It will be one of the largest ever held on the River Thames and certainly one of the largest held in the last couple of centuries. Over a thousand boats will make their way down the river from Battersea Bridge to beyond Tower Bridge, with some going as far



An artist's impression of the belfry leading the pageant (with considerable artistic license!)



An impression of the Royal Barge

as Greenwich. It will pass under 12 road and foot bridges, and the bascules of Tower Bridge will be raised in salute. The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh will themselves be in one of the boats, waving to the cheering crowds on the banks and bridges as they pass by. The flotilla is expected to be 7½ miles long and take 60 – 90 minutes to pass any given point, moving at a speed of between 4 and 6 knots.

The lead vessel or 'herald' for the entire procession will be the bell tower, which will be a purpose built bellframe standing in a large boat (the Ursula Catherine) pushed by a tug. The tower will be a structure which is just tall enough to pass under the bridges (bearing in mind the pageant will be taking place at high tide) with the eight bells hung for full circle ringing, swinging in the same direction as the long direction of the boat. Quite how manageable the bells will be to ring full circle will not be known until they are in place. A band of members of the Ancient Society of College Youths has been put together to man the ropes. If the bells do prove manageable, we will attempt a quarter peal during the

pageant, although if this proves impossible, there will be some high chiming at least to make a suitable noise. At the same time, towers in earshot of the River Thames have been invited to also ring their bells, calling out to the herald and hearing its response. Amongst those will be the towers of Southwark Cathedral, and the Guardian of the Thames, St Magnus the Martyr, both of which will have full peals attempted. There will also be an open peal at St Mary-le-Bow and ringing at a number of other riverside towers from Chelsea to Rotherhithe. A peal will be attempted on the Garlickhythe bells themselves during the weekend before the pageant, while the boat is moored, subject to the bells being sufficiently controllable!

Like the bells at St Dunstan's, permission has been given by Buckingham Palace for the Royal Arms to be cast on to the waist of the bells. In addition, each is to be named after a member of The Queen's immediate family, with the name Elizabeth RI adorning the tenor. The Cabinet Office has also recommended to Buckingham Palace that they grant the Royal



The barge (Catherine Ursula) in which the belfry for the Royal Jubilee Bells will be built

title "Royal Diamond Jubilee Bells" to the new ring, confirmation of which is still awaited. Once the pageant is over, the bells will be held in storage until the Lord Mayor's Show in November 2012, when they will be put on display, although the logistics of this have yet to be determined. All the necessary building work in the tower to create the new ringing room and frame construction will take place in the tower during the summer of 2012 and the bells should then be hung in time for Christmas.

The Diamond Jubilee has offered an exciting opportunity for these two churches to add their voices to the other beacons of sound in the City of London. In turn this has provided further facilities for ringers to teach and practise their art, and ultimately, increase their number. The ringing heritage at St Dunstan's is being restored, and a new ringing tradition is only just beginning at St James'. 2012 will be a busy year!

For further information on both new rings of bells and the River Pageant, contact the author at dickon@lovesguide.com. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Chris Pickford's archive in writing this article. You can follow both projects at Love's Guide to the Bells of the City of London at <http://london.lovesguide.com> and on Facebook.



The route of the Diamond Jubilee River Pageant



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