




# Reading Branch News

## Michaelmas 2008

No. 94

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## Reading Branch Officers 2008

|                       |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Chairman              | June Wells  | (0118 941 0061)   |
| Secretary             | Ken Baker   | (0118 943 2278)   |
| Assistant Secretary   | Joyce Vernon  | (0118 947 4281)   |
| Treasurer             | Keith Vernon  | (0118 947 4281)   |
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| Training Officer      | Vacant  |   |
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| Youth Rep             | Post in abeyance  |   |
| Branch Reps           | Joyce Vernon  | (0118 947 4281)   |
|                       | Len Palfrey   | (0118 984 2698)   |
|                       | Diana McClure   | (0118 947 2353)   |
| Independent Examiners | Brian Gatward and Sarah Dixon   |   |
| Newsletter Editor:    | Diana McClure, 130 Kidmore Road, Caversham,<br>Reading ,RG4 7NB, Tel: 0118 947 2353 email: <a href="mailto:jim.p.mcclure@btinternet.com">jim.p.mcclure@btinternet.com</a> |   |

## Afternoon Practices

These take place on the second Monday in each month, 2 pm to 3.30 pm

|           |    |            |          |             |                |
|-----------|----|------------|----------|-------------|----------------|
| September | 8  | Nettlebed  |          | <b>2009</b> |                |
| October   | 13 | Streatley  | January  | 12          | Caversham *    |
| November  | 10 | Pangbourne | February | 9           | Purley *       |
| December  | 8  | Shiplake   | March    | 9           | Swallowfield * |

Towers marked with an asterisk are provisional

For more information, contact Jim Diserens (01491 824 504) or John Wells (0118 941 0061)

**Old North Berks (ONB) Branch** afternoon training sessions are similar to the Reading Monday afternoon practices.

Reading members are welcome to attend any of the sessions, held between 2-3.30pm on the 4th Wednesday of the month.

The dates for 2008 are 24 September, 22 October, 26 November.

Details can usually be found on the 'Calendar' page of the ONB Branch website at [www.onb.org.uk](http://www.onb.org.uk)

For more information, contact Kate Crennell. Tel: 01235 834357 or [KMCrennell@dpmail.co.uk](mailto:KMCrennell@dpmail.co.uk) - Web address: <http://fortran.orpheusweb.co.uk/Bells/>

## 2008 Forthcoming Events and Practices

|      |    |   |
|------|----|---|
| Sept | 13 | 6-bell competition Whitchurch (6)                                     |
|      | 18 | Advanced Practice, Shiplake   |
|      | 20 | <i>ODG Michaelmas Training Day</i>                                    |
|      | 22 | Shinfield Simulator/minor practice                                    |
| Oct  | 4  | <i>ODG 6-bell Striking Comp<sup>n</sup> (North Bucks Branch)</i>      |
|      | 11 | Branch Practice Shiplake (8)  |
|      | 16 | Advanced Practice, Shiplake   |
|      | 27 | Shinfield Simulator/minor practice                                    |
| Nov  | 1  | <i>ODG Steeple Aston Training Day</i>                                 |
|      | 8  | Branch Practice Swallowfield (6) # TBC                                |
|      | 20 | Advanced Practice, Shiplake   |
|      | 22 | <i>ODG 10-bell Striking Comp<sup>n</sup> (Old North Berks Branch)</i> |
|      | 22 | <i>ODG General Committee Mtg (Old North Berks)</i>                    |
|      | 24 | Shinfield Simulator/minor practice                                    |
| Dec  | 13 | Branch Carol Service—Tilehurst (8)                                    |
|      | 22 | Shinfield Simulator/minor practice                                    |

Branch Practices, 7 – 9 pm  
or # 4 – 6 pm winter.  
Advanced Practices (Shiplake) 8 – 9.30 pm.  
Please see Tower notices for any further events.

1. *St John the Baptist, Padworth, (GF) 6 bells — 7-1-4*
2. *St Denis, Stanford Dingley, 4 bells — 6-0-15*
3. *All Saints, Swallowfield, (GF) 6 bells — 7-0-23*
4. *St Laurence, Tidmarsh, 3 bells — 5cwt—unringable*

*The Reading Branch newsletter is written for and by members of the Branch and contributions are always welcome. However, the views expressed therein are those of the writers and not necessarily shared by the Editor or Branch Officers.*

COMMUNICATION: Chris Johnson has redesigned the Branch website.

See [www.odgreadingbranch.co.uk](http://www.odgreadingbranch.co.uk) The new “Home Page” shows dates for your diary and other news. Please check regularly. Send any views, news, comments or articles you would like published on the website to Chris at [readingbranchnews@btinternet.com](mailto:readingbranchnews@btinternet.com)

The ODG website is [www.odg.org.uk](http://www.odg.org.uk)

## **Editorial round-up**

Fortunately Reading ringers have had lots of events to keep their minds off this summer's gloomy weather.

Reading teams came first and second in the eight-bell ODG competition in May - congratulations to both of them.

The sun did shine for some events: the branch outing to Gloucestershire, organised by Jim Diserens, and Caversham's outing to the Shaftesbury area – see pages 12-16. The band that rang the 500<sup>th</sup> peal at St Laurence had their photo taken in brilliant sunshine – see pages 10-11 for Nigel Herriott's account of that saga. No sunshine for the St Giles local outing, though – page 17. But South Stoke had pleasant weather for their social evening - see below.

The Shiplake Bell Restoration Project was launched in style and Shiplake has hosted two events for youngsters this summer – see pages 6-7.

Jim Diserens continues with his fascinating history of ringing in Reading 60 years ago, this time with memories of St Giles – see pages 8-9. Geoff Dodd, inspired by Jim, has sent us an entertaining account of St Laurence's outing in 1948 – see page 11.

James Milford has written a report on ringing in Zimbabwe, which should help us appreciate how lucky we are, compared to the ringers in Harare – see pages 17-18.

Congratulations to Lucy Davis, who rang her first quarter at St Giles on 31 August, before leaving for a job in Exeter. And to Jack Page, who rang his first quarter on hand bells shortly after his 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. See page 9.

Kate Davis, our newest branch ringing master, has a job at the Science Museum in London - good news for Kate, but sad for us, as she has moved from Reading.

Reading ringers send their deepest sympathy to Derek Howcutt on the death of his wife Daphne, who rang at Tilehurst. See page 19.

### **South Stoke's social evening**

On a pleasant Wednesday evening in late July, South Stoke held a ringing/social evening for the towers of Checkendon, Whitchurch, Pangbourne and Goring. The ringing portion was arranged to introduce our five new ringers to members of our local towers, and for them to ring with experienced ringers thereby gaining them valuable tuition. Approximately 30 people were present and the ringing schedule was organised superbly by Stephanie May and Michael Palfrey.

To conclude the evening we all retired to the Perch & Pike for a well deserved drink and a succulent finger buffet, prepared by the landlords, Neil and Val Dorsett. A fitting end to a successful evening enjoyed by all.

*Robert Small - South Stoke Tower Captain.*

## Reading teams win ODG 8-bell striking competition

The ODG 8-bell striking competition took place on 5 May at St Michael, Tilehurst. Old North Berks had to withdraw at short notice so seven teams took part. The competition was judged this year by Ian Fielding and Cath Merlane.

St Mary and St Laurence, Reading, came first, and the Reading Branch team came second. Although the competition method, Double Norwich, was not everyone's cup of tea, on the whole the ringing from all teams was pretty good. The judges took some time deliberating their decision and gave their comments on each band's performance.

The results were:

| Position | Faults | Team                              |
|----------|--------|-----------------------------------|
| 1st      | 32.5   | St Mary and St Laurence Reading   |
| 2nd      | 36.75  | Reading Branch Team               |
| 3rd      | 38.75  | High Wycombe                      |
| 4th      | 42.00  | East Berks and South Bucks Branch |
| 5th      | 44.00  | Newbury Branch                    |
| 6th      | 75.00  | Goring                            |
| 7th      | DNF    | Oxford City                       |



*Steve Rossiter receives the cup from the judges*

The ringers in the St Mary and St Laurence team were: June Saint 1, June Wells 2, Chris Barrett 3, Jill Galloway 4, John Manley 5, John Wells 6, Alex Byrne 7, Steve Rossiter (C) 8.

The ringers in the Reading Branch team were: Ann Osborne, Bobbie May, Sarah Barrett, Jo Druce, Colin Cairns, Stephanie May, Giles Winter, Doug Beaumont.

Robert Newton, now the new Master of the ODG, offered a vote of thanks to John Rogers, the Rector of St Michael, Tilehurst, for the use of the bells and for providing sustenance to the judges in his garden for the afternoon.

A **BIG** thank you was also given to the members of the Tilehurst band who had arranged the teas, provided the stewards and hosted the event on behalf of the Reading Branch.

*From Chris Johnson's report for the branch website. See [www.odgreadingbranch.co.uk/diary/competition\\_dates.html](http://www.odgreadingbranch.co.uk/diary/competition_dates.html) for photos of the teams, etc.*

## Shiplake bell restoration project gets off to ringing start



*Bell Restoration Project launch at Shiplake College – front row: one of Shiplake’s younger ringers, Henry Loud and his sister, and, kneeling, Tim Woods Ballard, Rev Robert Prance (Chaplain to Shiplake College), Robert Partridge and Cyril Crouch*

The official launch of the Shiplake Bell Restoration Project took place on 20 July.

Its goal is to install eight new bells at Shiplake Church, in a new frame lower down the tower, with new fittings.

They will replace the current bells, some of which date back to 1868. The present fittings are 80 years old, and the bell frame is 140 years old, which makes it difficult to ring the bells effectively and, tonally, the sound they produce is poor.

The new bells will sound significantly better as they will be cast as a single set, to the very latest standards.

Robert Partridge, project coordinator, said the installation of the new bells was essential to safeguard the future of bell-ringing in Shiplake. “By doing this we will protect the heritage and tradition of bell-ringing at Shiplake for the next 100 or more years and also play a part in protecting the heritage of English bell-founding,” he said.

The whole project will cost £90,000. So far, £60,000 has been raised. There are donors for bells 1 to 5, and the tenor. A further two are needed for bells 6 and 7.

Anyone who would like to help, or wants more information about the project, should get in touch with Robert Partridge on 0118-940-1907 or Cyril Crouch on 0118-940-2704.

### **Shiplake holds morning event for young ringers**

Three young ringers - Lucy Smith, Henry Loud and Daniel Moloney -gathered at Shiplake on 28<sup>th</sup> August to learn more of the basics about bell ringing. They took part in a mixture of tower ringing, exercises with hand bells, a trip up the tower to see the bells, quizzes and a challenge to ring and listen using the computer simulator.

A cake made by Lucy Smith was enjoyed by all. *Cyril Crouch*



*L to r: Robert Partridge, Hilarie Rogers, Lucy Smith, Keith Vernon, Henry Loud, Daniel Moloney, Mavis and Cyril Crouch*

### **A link with young people**

The almost annual visit of the year 6 children of Shiplake Church of England Primary School took place on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2008, organised and supported by Shiplake bell ringers.

In the choir vestry they wrote out the pattern of the numbers used in ringing tower bells, “walked” the pattern and then rang it on hand bells. Some of them rang tunes on hand bells.

In the tower they saw a video link to the bells at the top, and Hilary Rogers, the Tower Captain at Drayton St Leonard, with the help of a model, demonstrated how a tower bell works and how it is rung. Finally, the children chimed a bell and partly rang a full size bell, dispelling the common myth of rising to the ceiling!

*Cyril Crouch*

## St Giles, Reading, 60 years ago and onwards - Jim Diserens

At the end of World War II there was a regular band at St Giles, Reading.

Like most of the towers in the area they rang Grandsire, Bob Major and Stedman.

Bob Triples in those days was very little practised, although there were peal compositions in existence.

The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers had labelled it an irregular method. So it was frowned upon, along with the ringing of singles in Surprise and other Treble Bob methods, though today they are commonplace.

The band at that time comprised just eight people, including Ambrose Osborne (whom I only met two or three times); his sons, Len and Horace; Horace's son Stan, and a cousin, Wilfred Osborne.

I occasionally went to their practice, which was on a Monday evening.

By 1951 there were not enough ringers in the old band to man the bells and Horace and Stan Osborne moved to Caversham. [Stan Osborne's daughter, Ann, says that her father and grandfather left St Giles because they were told they must attend all the services they rang for, and because the services had become so 'high church' that the smell of incense penetrated the ringing chamber - *Ed.*]

Bob Turner was a worshipper at St Giles and a competent ringer. He took over the tower and formed a new band, some from the church congregation and several from the University.

The Reading University Society was formed in 1954 and for a while they held their own practice at St Giles.

Their total membership at formation was about 27 people (24 girls and three men!) and, although a number of them joined other towers, several rang for services there.

However, a notice appeared in the ringing room one day to say that people who rang for service must attend that service afterwards.

St Giles has been traditionally 'high church' which did not suit some people, and the demand that they should attend every service after ringing was thought to be unreasonable, so from then on they practised elsewhere, leaving St Giles with few ringers.

In 1955 a request was circulated in the church youth club asking for people to take up ringing.

A number of youngsters came forward, including Joyce Vernon (née Lovett). Vincent Cherrill from St Laurence taught several of them to ring and they helped form the nucleus of the future resident band with Roy Hudson as Tower Captain.

St Giles' bells in those days were quite hard work. Although

the tenor was only 15 cwt they were on plain bearings and had last been overhauled in 1890.

The late Frederick Sharpe, bell historian and past master of the Oxford Guild, always insisted that they were a fine ring of eight.

He said that that a little retuning and repositioning of the louvres relative to the bells would work wonders, and so it eventually proved when they were rehung.

This took place in 1976.

The bell frame was put lower in the tower and a balcony looking into the church now became the ringing room. Strangely enough, the Guild reports from 1975 to 1988 give the tenor as 17 cwt, although after rehung and retuning its then weight was known to be 14½ cwt.

*I wish to thank Joyce Vernon for supplying useful information for this article. NJD*

**Peal in memory of Michael Diserens who died 31 August 1998**

Reading, Berkshire, The Minster Church of St Mary

Sunday, 31 August 2008 in 3h 6 (25)

**5040 Stedman Triples**

Composed by Philip A B Saddleton ("The Climsland Peal")

- 1 Alex F Byrne (C)
- 2 Noel J Diserens
- 3 June D Wells
- 4 Keith D Anderson
- 5 Ronald F Diserens
- 6 E John Wells
- 7 Brian P Diserens
- 8 Antony P Diserens

**First quarter congratulations**

St Giles, Reading: 31 Aug, 1260 Plain Bob Doubles: Lucy Davis 1, Ruth Hine 2, Joyce Vernon 3, Kelvin Britton 4, Peter Ellis (C) 5, Keith Vernon 6. First Quarter Peal: 1.

Farewell and Good Luck to Lucy, leaving Reading University for a new job in Exeter. Also to celebrate St Giles' Day (1st September).

Alderney, Channel Islands. (Trigale Cottage, St Anne) 7 Aug, 1260 Plain Bob Minor: Jack Page 1-2, Helen McGregor 3-4, Alex Byrne (C) 5-6. First quarter peal (aged 11): 1-2.

## Saga of the 500<sup>th</sup> Peal at St Laurence Reading

As the 500<sup>th</sup> peal at St Laurence approached, scheduling it turned out to be somewhat trickier than we had anticipated.

We regularly welcome visiting peal bands.

However they cannot always be relied upon to score their peals, so anticipating the exact date of the 500<sup>th</sup> was difficult.

In addition, the bells were scheduled to be out of action for two weeks during the critical period for White's to carry out some much needed maintenance.

As things turned out, we were not able to schedule the 500<sup>th</sup> in the short window that was available and it looked as if a visiting peal band from Portsmouth would ring it on 21<sup>st</sup> June.

We therefore approached them and asked them if they would mind withdrawing so that we could ring a peal with a local band.

They kindly agreed but when we tried to arrange the peal we found that half our band was away for one reason or another and we could not get enough ringers!

The next peal that was booked was on 12 July as I had arranged a band that was mostly local to ring a birthday peal for my wife (who says that I am not romantic!!) and so we decided to turn this into the 500<sup>th</sup> peal.

We rang Barford Surprise Maximus, a London-type method, which had been our special method on practice nights recently and successfully scored the peal.

We were particularly pleased to have Dinah Reed, the previous ringing master at St Laurence, join us for the peal. She and Rob were back in Reading on holiday from Egypt where they now live and work. In the evening, a celebratory party was held at the Herriotts' and a good quantity of Hop Back brewery ale was consumed.

Our final problem was how we should describe the peal. It wasn't strictly the 500<sup>th</sup> peal on the bells as the bells are not exactly the same ones as were rung for the 1<sup>st</sup> peal. We couldn't really describe it as the 500<sup>th</sup> in the tower either as there have almost certainly been handbell peals rung in the ringing room.

In the end we decided to stick with "500<sup>th</sup> peal on the bells" and hope that no pedants complained. *Nigel Herriott*

Saturday 12 July - 3 hours 27 (23) - 5136 Barford S Maximus – composer David G Hull. A birthday compliment to Jenny Herriott and Nina Byrne.



*Clockwise, from front row right hand side:*

- |                                 |                                  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>1. Dinah Reed;</i>           | <i>2. Alex F. Byrne (C)</i>      |
| <i>3. June D. Wells;</i>        | <i>4. Jennifer M. Herriott;</i>  |
| <i>5. Colin M Parker;</i>       | <i>6. Jillian E Galloway</i>     |
| <i>7. Edward J. W. Manley;</i>  | <i>8. Charles W.G. Herriott;</i> |
| <i>9. E. John Wells</i>         | <i>10. Stephen A. Rossiter;</i>  |
| <i>11. Douglas J. Beaumont;</i> | <i>12. W. Nigel G. Herriott</i>  |

*First in the method: 4, 5, 6.*

### **Geoff Dodd looks back to St Laurence outing in 1948**

Jim Diserens' account of the St Laurence outings [see newsletter No 92 - Christmas 2007] brought back happy memories.

I am one of the few surviving ringers other than Jim, Audrey and Neville [Diserens] and I believe the brothers John and Michael Chilcott, who were on the one to Lincoln Cathedral.

I remember the day as if it were yesterday.

Bill had booked Reg Rex and me into a hotel opposite St Laurence Church.

We were up at 5 am ready

for departure and the first tower was Grantham, ten bells, then Lincoln Cathedral, where Bill had all the band written out in the order they were to ring.

I was in the second band, ringing Stedman Cinques.

Ewerby came next, a ground floor ring of ten, next Boston Stump with its ten bells hung at the top of a very tall tower, and finally Crowland Abbey, with a very long draught, rung from the ground floor, with three sets of guides.

I have never fathomed out why a twelve-bell tower should end up at a six-bell tower, perhaps Jim knows.

Was it its situation? Or perhaps no other ten except possibly Newark's close by. I have been back to them all except Crowland, so Bill did me a favour by including them.

We got back at 3 am.

Staying in the same hotel was Tom Fox, master of the College Youths that year.

We would have rung at St Laurence on Sunday morning before catching our bus back to Newbury, and no doubt had a good breakfast, which is more than we would have had the previous day.

I was not on the other two outings he mentioned, to Exeter and Birmingham, but I knew most of those in his photo.

Being a frequent visitor to Reading, this would have got me an invitation on the St Mary's outing where the first two towers were at Newport in South Wales by way of Gloucester – no Severn Bridge in those days.

The last tower was the twelve at Evesham Bell Tower, and this was where Jim nearly got left behind.

The coach party were determined we would not leave without him, and prevailed on the driver to wait. There was some confusion about the departure time.

Happy memories. I would not be without them.

*Geoff Dodd, Excerpt from a contribution by Geoff Dodd, about ringers who have reached the top of their profession: "Most ringers at St Mary's and St Laurence know of Dr Joyce.*

His generous gift to St Mary's is recorded on a board in the tower. He was the man who operated on Douglas Bader, and removed both his legs after his air crash before the war. He was chief surgeon at the Royal Berks Hospital at the time of the crash. He was a ringer at St Mary's."

### **Reading branch outing in 2008**

This year, the Reading branch outing was organised by Jim Diserens, and it took place in Gloucestershire on 14 June, on a lovely sunny day (with a few dark cloudy intervals, to help us appreciate the sunshine).

The countryside looked gorgeous.

Most of us travelled in the minibus, expertly driven by Steve Rossiter. He set off early in the morning, collecting passengers from different parts of Reading, and arrived at the first tower with a minute to spare, for the 9.30 am start. Impeccable timing.



*Outside St Sampson, Cricklade: L to R: Cyril Lewington, Jim Diserens, Alex and Tomas Byrne, Kelvin Britton, Markus Buss, Diana McClure, June and John Wells, Helen Diserens, James Champion, Kate Davis, Steve Rossiter, Viv Bloundele, Eunice Wark, Bobbie May, Julie Champion, Ruth Hine*

We were given a warm welcome at the five towers we visited.

The first three had eight bells, and – as usual on a Reading outing – there was some very good ringing: Spliced Surprise, Belfast, Glasgow, Yorkshire, Double Norwich, Bob Major, Stedman, Grand-sire, plain hunt, called changes – something for everyone.

We began at St John the Baptist (16-0-8), in Chipping Sodbury, north of Bristol.

The village looked beautiful in the sunshine, and the bells were lovely.

There we had a wonderful surprise: Alison Leach and Simon Meeds joined us for a couple of towers – we don't see them very often, since they moved to Bristol a few years ago.

They had to leave before lunch.

Wotton-under-Edge came next. St Mary the Virgin has eight nice bells (18-2-0) – though one or two of them had a few quirks, which gives a tower character.

Then we came to Dursley.

This is a Byrne family stronghold, and has wonderful bells and an excellent pub.

We had lunch at The Old Spot, decorated with fine pictures of Gloucestershire pigs, and – right next to where we sat – the details of a quarter peal of 1280 Old Spot Delight Major rung to celebrate the pub winning the UK Real Ale Pub of the Year Award in 2003

Alex's parents, Elizabeth and Francis Byrne, both rang in it.

The food was very good – including traditional family puds, such as treacle tart, bread-and-butter pudding, and apple pie.

Ruth Hine, a fount of unusual information, told us that “*apple pie without cheese, is like a kiss without a squeeze*”.

After lunch, six-year-old Tomas Byrne was collected by his grandmother.

The rest of us had a very pleasant walk through Dursley to St James the Great, arriving there in time to hear the local band ringing after a wedding. St James has eight beautiful bells (19-2-9) – and we rang from a gallery which had photos of many of their peal bands hung on the wall. A very young Alex Byrne featured in several of them – he rang his first peal when he was 9.

We had a slow drive to Stroud, crawling up Crawley Hill behind a tractor pulling a trailer laden with cut grass for silage.

In Stroud, we met a traffic jam, and arrived at St Lawrence (10 bells - 20-1-20) rather late.

There we rang Grandsire Caters, plain hunt, called changes, and Cambridge Royal spliced with Plain and Little Bob. Tomas Byrne showed us a short cut to a very nice tea shop, which has a back door on to the churchyard.

The last tower was St Sampson, Cricklade (6 bells, 12-2-27), a lovely church, bathed in evening sunshine. The bells are hung anti-clockwise over the choir stalls, and have a very long draught, which was a little bit daunting for some of us. The tenor rope dropped straight on to a choir stall. We rang Cambridge, Stedman and called changes.

Thank you very much, Jim, for organising such an enjoyable day – with a little help from former Gloucestershire residents, your son Brian and Alex Byrne. And many thanks to Steve, for doing all the driving and giving the rest of us such an easy time. And to John Wells, for ringing up so many of the tenor bells. *Diana McClure*

### **Caversham outing to Shaftesbury area**

This year's Caversham outing, which traditionally takes place over the weekend after the May Day Bank Holiday, took us to England's second-highest and scenically located market town of Shaftesbury, (Thomas Hardy's "Shaston"), offering one of the most famous views in England down its "Hovis" hill. It did not disappoint.

As usual, the weekend kicked off with ringing on Friday evening.

Where possible, we join a local practice but this time we had the bells of St James in Shaftesbury (6 – Tenor 9-2-0) to ourselves. It proved to be a good warm-up for the main event. We rang Cambridge, Stedman and Grandsire, among other things. We also learned that the local band ring by cards. Following an hour at St James, we retired to a local pub, The Ship Inn, to ponder our packed Saturday schedule.

On Saturday, following a hearty breakfast, we set off from our respective B&Bs for the eight bells of St Martin's (16-3-27), Bryanston, set within the impressive grounds of Bryanston public school.

The Portman family, who originally owned the estate, moved the river for the sake of Lady Portman's health and relocated the main house, from which the impressive St Martin's was built, its ball-room floor now forming part of the church roof.



*Jenny Page, Marcia Dieppe & Viv Bloundele on Gold Hill (Hovis Hill) Shaftesbury*

Plain Bob Major and Grandsire were the ringing highlights, the other highlight being the arrival of Joe and Andrea Beaumont from Weston-super-Mare, an invaluable addition to our ranks.

The next stop was Blandford Forum, a very attractive Georgian town, its bustling Saturday market in full swing, and the 1732 parish church of St Peter and St Paul, a classical building with a cupola on top of the tower. Weighing in at 19-3-5, this was probably the best eight of the day, where we rang Stedman and Bristol, one of the outing's special methods.

Our third stop before lunch was St Peter ad Vincula (7-0-0) at Tollard Royal, a delightful ground-floor six, where Cambridge was the highlight.

For lunch we stopped at the Rushmore Park Golf Club, where, thanks to swift and efficient service, we spent a relaxing hour or so. There was even time, courtesy of Ralph Elmes, for some handbell-ringing in the car park.

The first tower after lunch was the six bells of St Mary the Virgin at Donhead St Mary (9-1-10), where Norwich was rung together with the first attempt at the outing's other chosen method, Old Bath Surprise Minor. Unfortunately, it was an early bath for the latter.

The day's two main challenges then followed. First was the eight at St Michael the Archangel (23-0-0) in Mere. Here we managed Stedman and Grandsire. The tenor proved rather temperamental but we acquitted ourselves reasonably well.

Afternoon tea at the Angel Corner Tea Shop near the church in Mere proved a very welcome break after the rigours of the bells.

Then it was on to Gillingham ("G" as in a fish's gills), probably the

most challenging ring of the day, at St Mary the Virgin (24-1-12).

The ringer who let us in warned us that no-one had yet managed successfully to ring up the tenor in peal and advised against turning it in, owing to its small wheel.

We duly followed this advice, with Stedman Triples the main achievement.

Finally, we took our weary limbs to the last tower of the day at St Mary the Virgin, Motcombe (7-0-7), a very pleasant six.

Time for a second attempt at Old Bath (another early bath, I'm afraid, for this challenging method) followed by a commendable course of London, which was greeted with a round of applause. A fine end to a fine day.



*Front row: Julie Champion, Ann Osborne, Joe and Andrea Beaumont, Doug Beaumont. Behind them: Roger, Gill and Jo Hopkinson, Diana McClure, Jenny Page, James Champion, Viv Bloundele, Marcia Dieppe, Janet and Ralph Elmes*

Just time for a quick wash and brush-up at our B&Bs and then back to The Ship Inn for a well-earned dinner.

The weekend was rounded off on Sunday morning with an opportunity to ring at Shaftesbury's other bells at St Peter's (6 – Tenor 12-2-26), considered by some to be the nicest bells in Dorset.

Just time for a last look at Gold (“Hovis”) Hill and the dreamy Dorset countryside, then off to Wincanton's eight at St Peter & Paul (15-1-1), a delightful ground-floor ring, where we joined the locals, most of whom seemed to prefer listening to us to taking part.

Many thanks to Gill Hopkinson and Diana McClure for planning this excellent outing, which was greatly enjoyed by us all.

## **St Giles outing to Old North Berks**

Ringers from St Giles, Reading, went on a local outing on a damp day in April (traditional weather).

Steve Bennett had planned to leave no carbon footprint and travel by train, but the railways did not cooperate.

Instead they rang at beautiful and interesting churches not far from Reading: Brightwell-cum-Sotwell (8 bells – 10-2-25); Harwell (8 bells – 16-1-26), Aston Tirrold (6 bells – 11-3-23) and Cholsey (8 bells – 10-1-11).

Lunch took place at The Red Lion in Blewbury. The children – Jennifer Ellis, Joseph Barrett and Michael Bennett – deserved medals for their Superlative behaviour. It was a lovely day out.

## **Ringling in Zimbabwe - 1961 to August 2008**

The horrific reports coming out of Zimbabwe in the last few years make one wonder how the local bellringers have managed to carry on ringing.

There are two church towers with bells that are rung in the traditional English manner. One is St Luke, Kwekwe, a ring of six with a tenor of 5 ¼ cwt. Initially, four bells (the 1, 2, 4 and 6) were cast at the Whitechapel foundry and hung in 1961. Whitechapel completed the ring of six in 1975.

There was no local experience to draw on, and the first band was set up entirely due to the dedication of one ringer who was self-taught. In the early 1990s the band met infrequently, but since then there has been a self-sustaining group, keeping the bells rung regularly for Sunday services, or at least chimed. All have been trained locally (with occasional help from Harare - not easy at a distance of 140 miles).

The other tower is at the Anglican Cathedral of St Mary and All Saints, Harare, designed by Sir Herbert Baker (who also designed the Anglican Cathedral in Cape Town). It has a fine ring of ten bells, tenor 24 ¼ cwt. They were donated by an anonymous well-wisher who missed the sound of bells in the then Rhodesian capital, cast by Whitechapel and delivered in 1959. At that time the cathedral had no tower, consisting of the chancel, choir and one bay of the nave only, so the bells were placed in their frame at ground level and chimed with an Ellacombe apparatus.

A tower was already included in the plans for the Cathedral, and the Dean was able to raise funds so that it was completed remarkably quickly. and the bells hung: they were dedicated on 5 November 1961.

There were enough Rhodesians with experience of ringing in the UK to form a Guild (for the Mashonaland Diocese) and start to instruct a band. Potential new ringers were recruited, and handbells, donated by Whitechapel, were rung regularly while the tower was being built.

Instruction on bell handling started a month before the dedication, and three recruits rang their first rounds on ten during

the two minutes allowed within the dedication service. (Two of the three currently ring in Reading!)

Simple change ringing followed, and the first peal (Grandsire Doubles) was achieved on 31 October 1962. This was the first peal for three of the band, and was rung on the back six.

Since that time the bells have been rung regularly, the standard of change ringing varying according to the movement of experienced ringers in and out of the country, or to more remote parts within it.

It should be noted that from the start the band was not 100% white, and this was particularly significant in the period before Independence in 1980. In recent years recruiting has been entirely from the local population, and there remains only a small and dwindling minority of white ringers.

Ringling at the cathedral came to an abrupt halt earlier this year. In August 2007 the then Bishop Nolbert Kunonga decided without due authority to remove the Diocese of Harare from the Province of Central Africa which comprises Botswana, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. As a result, the Bishop was sacked and later excommunicated by the acting Dean of the Province.

(Bishop Kunonga is an open supporter of Robert Mugabe. In 2005, at an ecclesiastical trial, he faced charges ranging from incitement to commit murder to bringing the Anglican church into disrepute: he was accused of having solicited assistance from state security agents and militant war veterans loyal to Mr Mugabe to have 10 "unruly" parishioners and priests killed because they opposed his tenure at Harare cathedral.

The trial ended in farce when the presiding judge withdrew from the case before a plea had been heard. Bishop Kunonga emerged from the courtroom, convened at Harare Royal Golf Club, smiling and claiming victory.)

A retired Bishop, Sebastian Bakare, was appointed in his place. A band of ringers was waiting at the cathedral to ring for his arrival when former Bishop Kunonga, with his wife and a group of thugs, locked the cathedral, invaded the ringing chamber and drove out the ringers.

The cathedral has remained locked ever since, and the bells are up. Ruth Hutchinson, the tower captain, reported this incident in *The Ringing World* of 25 July 2008 (page 792).

The following week she reported that she had received generous donations for the deputy tower captain, who had lost money and identity documents which he needed for his job as a trader.

Luckily the ringers of Kwekwe do not suffer from a political bishop, and worship and ringing continue there as normal.

This article is a version of one which appeared in *Landsender*, the magazine for three parishes in Cornwall, by Richard Sweet, whose help is gratefully acknowledged. *James Milford*

## Obituary: Daphne Howcutt



Daphne Howcutt (née Webb), began ringing in her teens at Templecombe in Somerset at the end of the war.

She cycled everywhere then, notably to her work at The West Country Creamery (aka Cow & Gate Group) where she was then employed.

Her husband Derek worked for the South West Region of British Rail and later drove steam trains on the Somerset and Dorset Line.

They were married at Templecombe on 16th July, 1955.

Their children, Glyn and Andrea, were born there, before the family moved to Tilehurst.

Daphne's first visit to St Michael's as a ringer took place in October 1966, and she rang her first quarter peal of triples on 15th October, 1966. At this time Daphne was working for Messrs Francis in Armour Road, Tilehurst. After leaving Messrs Francis, Daphne worked for Peter Brett Associates Ltd, in Westcote Road, Reading.

Derek was still driving trains, but now on the old Southern line to Waterloo on the stoppers.

Owing to vandals damaging cars on Wednesday night practices, Derek volunteered to act as Security Officer at the car-park so now both of them were involved in the Tilehurst ringing.

After they had both retired they helped out at their son's garage, GMH Cars, along the Oxford Road in Reading. They celebrated their Ruby Wedding in 1995 and of course held a party for the ringers, where Daphne and Derek were presented with some ruby glassware.

The ringers rang a quarter peal of 1250 Cambridge Surprise Major on 23rd July, 1995.

Daphne rang over 500 quarter peals and several full peals during her ringing career. To mark her 50 years of ringing, Daphne was invited to ring at St Paul's Cathedral by Dennis Randall, who originated from Templecombe and began ringing on the same day as she did in October 1945.

Both Daphne and Derek loved holidays, notably a long trip to Australia and recently to Hawaii and Honolulu. Daphne grabbed a tower in Honolulu, none other than St Andrew's Cathedral, where Derek bought Daphne a video of bell-ringing and also of bell-hanging.

Towards the end of 2006, Daphne reluctantly retired from ringing.

All the ringers at St Michael's miss her very much and we hope that Derek will accept the thoughts and prayers from the whole of the Reading Branch and the Oxford Diocesan Guild at this time.

*Chris J Johnson, on behalf of the Tilehurst Ringers – branch website*  
[www.odgreadingbranch.co.uk](http://www.odgreadingbranch.co.uk)

## Kate's quiz: Can you identify the church?

These four churches were all in the Reading branch last year - one of them has since transferred to another branch.

Two of them have six bells - the other two have fewer. Reading branch afternoon practices have only taken place at one of these towers. *Kate Crennell.*

(Answers somewhere in the newsletter)



1.



2.



3...



4.