




Reading Branch News

Easter 2010

No. 99

Shiplake's new bells reach church on time



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| | | |
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Practices for branch members

Branch practices take place on the second Saturday of most months, 6 pm to 8 pm. See the next page (or the branch website) for the tower. For more information, contact Steve Rossiter (0118 941 1146).

Advanced practices take place at **Shiplake** on the third Thursday of each month, 8 pm to 9.30 pm. For more information contact Bob Partridge (0118 940 1907)

12-bell practices take place at **St Laurence, Reading**, on the last Sunday of most months, 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm. For more information, contact Steve Rossiter on (0118 941 1146)

Monday afternoon practices have been discontinued - members can request to ring a quarter peal instead. For more information, contact Jim Diserens - see page 9.

Minor practices at **Swallowfield (no longer Shinfield)**, on the Monday before the last Friday of most months. For more details, contact Bobbie May (0118 988 4172)

8-bell practices at St Mary, Mortimer, the third Monday of most months, at 7.45 pm. For more information, contact Peter MacNaughtan at

peter@cabrioleconsulting.co.uk or Penny Wallace at penny@wallace17.fsnet.co.uk

Diary of forthcoming events and practices

| | | |
|---------|----|--|
| April | 10 | Branch Practice, St John, Mortimer (6) |
| | 15 | Advanced Practice, Shiplake (8) |
| | 17 | <i>ODG Radley Course</i> |
| | 19 | Tower practice, St Mary, Mortimer (8) |
| | 26 | Swallowfield minor practice |
| May | 2 | Dedication of Shiplake's new bells, 3 pm |
| | 3 | <i>ODG Annual Ringing and 8-bell competition (Chiltern Branch)</i> |
| | 8 | Branch Practice, Shiplake (8) |
| | 15 | <i>ODG AGM (Newbury Branch)</i> |
| | 17 | Tower practice, St Mary, Mortimer (8) |
| June | 20 | Advanced Practice, Shiplake (8) |
| | 12 | Branch Outing |
| | 17 | Advanced Practice, Shiplake (8) |
| | 21 | Tower Practice, St Mary, Mortimer (8) |
| July | 21 | Swallowfield minor practice TBC |
| | 10 | Branch Practice, Checkendon (8) |
| | 15 | Advanced Practice, Shiplake (8) |
| | 18 | Re-dedication of Mapledurham's refurbished bells - 6.30 pm |
| | 19 | Tower practice, St Mary, Mortimer (8) |
| August | 26 | Swallowfield minor practice |
| | 14 | Branch practice, Padworth (6) |
| | 16 | Tower practice, St Mary, Mortimer (8) |
| | 19 | Advanced Practice, Shiplake (8) |
| Sept | 23 | Swallowfield minor practice |
| | 11 | Branch Striking Competition - Mapledurham (6) |
| | 16 | Advanced practice, Shiplake (8) |
| | 20 | Tower practice, St Mary, Mortimer (8) |
| October | 20 | Swallowfield minor practice TBC |
| | 2 | <i>ODG 6-bell Striking Competition (Oxford City Branch)</i> |
| | 9 | Branch practice, Caversham (8) |
| | 18 | Tower practice, St Mary, Mortimer (8) |
| | 21 | Advanced practice, Shiplake (8) |
| | 25 | Swallowfield minor practice |

Branch Practices 6-8 pm - these times may be changed. Advanced Practices 8 pm – 9.30 pm. See branch website www.odgreadingbranch.co.uk for further details

Old North Berks (ONB) branch runs training sessions from 2 pm to 3.30 pm on the fourth Wednesday of the month - see the ONB website www.onb.org.uk (Calendar)

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.

Editorial round-up

Last winter was exceptionally cold, and some practices had to be cancelled in December and January because of snow and ice. However, even a major snowfall didn't stop Shiplake's new bells from getting to the church in time for the Service of Blessing on 10 January - see page 11 for Bob Partridge's report on the Herculean task of installing the new bells. Branch members are invited to the Service of Dedication at Shiplake on Sunday 2 May at 3 pm. Reading branch took part in the national 12-bell eliminator contest on 27 March, in London. Sadly, in spite of a promising tour in the Cotswolds the week before, the branch team didn't score enough points to make it to the final at Crediton, Devon, in July. See Nigel Herriott's report, below.

Len Palfrey has drawn up rules for a Striking Competition for Novices, to take place within the Branch Striking Competition on 11 September. The best novice band will receive the John Butler Trophy - see page 7.

Jim Diserens is regretfully discontinuing the Monday afternoon practices, and, instead, is offering to help novices by organising quarter peals. See his report on page 9. Many thanks to Jim for running the practice for so many years, to the many who helped run it and to Nina Byrne for starting it when she was on maternity leave.

Caversham has five new ringers, who all began learning last year, and now ring for services. See Ann Osborne's report on page 15. Mapledurham has lost its bells for a couple of months, and its band has become peripatetic. Shinfield tower has recently celebrated Frank Mitchell's and Pam Mitchell's 80th birthdays. See page 16 for both those reports. The South Stoke band has refurbished its weathercock - see page 18.

And, last but not least, John Harrison reports on his book on the history of ringing in Wokingham, on page 18.

Contest countdown in the Cotswolds - Nigel Herriott



Most people look forward to the end of March as the start of spring, but to the ringers at Reading St Laurence it is the time of the National 12-Bell Contest. This year we had been drawn to ring at the new 12 at St Magnus the Martyr in London and our preparation included an outing to the Cotswolds arranged by Peter Ellis where there are a number of rings of 12 of similar weight. The minibus set off at 7.45am from Reading Minster, ably driven by Steve Rossiter through driving rain. Given the weather, it seemed appropriate that, like Dr Foster, we went to Gloucester where we started our outing by ringing

at the magnificent cathedral.

The ringing chamber is in the huge central tower and the steps up to it seem never ending, albeit with occasional respite as you go outside on a short balcony and then over the roof space of the south transept. As you enter the tower, the first thing you see is the large bourdon bell “Great Peter” (59-3-14) which dates from c1450. Next to this is the ringing chamber in what might be described as a large shed in one corner of the tower. Unfortunately the ring of 12 (tenor 23-3-14 in D) does not match the magnificence of the cathedral and is not particularly easy to ring well. The bells consist of a 1978 Whitechapel front seven on a mixed back five, two of which date from the 15th century. Despite this, we managed some good ringing and made a useful start to a day in which we had planned to focus on getting the best possible striking. Our next stop was St Mary, Cheltenham (tenor 22-2-16 in D) which has a mix of 19th century Rudhall bells with early 20th century Mears. They are not particularly rewarding and are another ring that are a little tricky to ring well. However we managed to produce some quite pleasing ringing once again and were starting to wonder if we might be in with a chance at the competition. This was followed by lunch at the Teddington Hands pub where Pete had allowed a generous couple of hours to eat and drink. As we were in a minibus, some of the band took full advantage of the opportunity, although the two who were running in the Reading Half Marathon the following day were somewhat abstemious.

Our first tower after lunch was Tewkesbury Abbey (tenor 27-0-5 in D) which, like Gloucester, has the bells hung in a large central tower. The climb to the bells is shorter than at Gloucester, but still pretty long with some common features including a walkway through the roof space of a transept. Another similarity is the large size of the tower with the rope circle in one corner. Tewkesbury are a



complete ring of Taylor bells, cast in 1962, and are a pleasure to ring. The Reading band knows these bells well, having competed in the Tewkesbury shield striking competition on a number of occasions and, once again, we managed to produce some good ringing and our confidence continued to increase. Our final stop was Cirencester (tenor 27-1-16 in C#) which was probably the first tower ever to contain a ring of 12 when they were augmented in 1722. The mixed set of old bells, four of which have been recast over the years, used to have a reputation of being the worst ring in the country and were

popularly known as “Fire and Fester”. However the recasting of the tenor in 1984 made a major improvement, although they have a rather old-fashioned sound and are not particularly easy to ring. Everyone was pretty tired by now after climbing four towers and ringing the bells each time, but we soon got to grips with them and our ringing was really quite decent. We all felt very positive and optimistic about the forthcoming 12 Bell Contest.

Postscript - result of the eliminator round of the National 12 Bell Contest on 27 March

The Reading band were drawn to ring first at St Magnus the Martyr and were in the tower in good time for our 11.30 start. The competition rules on timing are strict and we were not allowed to ring before our start time and had to start ringing our competition piece, half a course of Cambridge Surprise Maximus, between 11.40 and 11.45, giving us a maximum of 15 minutes to reacquaint ourselves with the bells since our practice visit earlier in March. The tower is on “legs” so that you can walk underneath. It is over what used to be the main road to the river, which is only a couple of hundred yards away, leading to the site of the original London Bridge. This arrangement, together with bells that are high in the tower, results in a level of tower movement that makes them a little tricky to ring, although it is perfectly possible to get good ringing on them. The bells (tenor 26-3-6 in D) were installed in 2009 and are a very fine modern ring.



Unfortunately, we didn't seem to be able to get to grips with them that morning and struggled with our striking. Despite our optimism, we left the ringing chamber after our test piece feeling that we had not rung as well as we were capable and were not surprised when we came sixth. We found that we had rung the slowest of all the bands which had, no doubt, been the cause of our striking difficulties. Well, at least we didn't come last and we live to fight another day – perhaps 2011 will be our year for greater success!

Nigel Herriott

Novice Striking Competition for the John Butler Trophy

Some time ago Reading Branch pioneered a Youth Striking Competition for the John Butler Trophy.

Unfortunately we no longer have a Youth Representative to organise this competition but we do have a very nice trophy.

I have felt for some time that there are many ringers who are a little wary of entering a striking competition, because they feel that they are just not good enough. However, I believe that listening to other bands performing and trying to pick out their faults will help improve striking. Add to this the constructive criticism of the judge(s), compared with your own observations, and you really can learn a lot, particularly from constructive criticism of your own performance.

I believe that John Butler would have supported these views as much as he would have supported the Youth Competition. For these reasons, at the Reading Branch AGM in February, I proposed the establishment of a striking competition for novice ringers, to work as a competition within a competition. Novice bands would enter alongside other bands in the Branch Striking Competition, held on the second Saturday of September each year, and the judge(s) would mark each team on its merits, not knowing whether any particular team was a novice band. When the results were announced the highest placed novice band would be awarded the John Butler Trophy. This proposal was approved by the AGM with effect from the next competition in September 2010. The Objective, Definition and Rules for the Novice Competition are as follows:



Objective

To encourage bands who would not normally consider themselves of a standard to enter the branch competition, to enter for the experience and to improve their striking by benefiting from the constructive comments given by the judge(s).

Definition

A novice is defined as a ringer who may have been ringing for a number of years but, because of lack of opportunity or for other reasons, has not progressed beyond at least one of the following stages of learning:

Call changes, and who has not yet mastered the art of making a change with consistent, accurate striking and may need assistance with identifying the bell to strike over at the change;

Plain hunting, and may need coaching with striking when leading and

lying behind;

Ringling simple methods, i.e. Plain Bob or Grandsire, and may need coaching with dodging and place making;

In addition, it is expected that novice ringers will have rung few, if any, quarter peals and will not have rung a peal.

Rules

The tower captain of entrants shall be responsible for determining if a ringer is a novice and for declaring it on the competition entry form.

Novice bands may comprise ringers from one or more towers.

Novice bands may have the help and guidance of a maximum of two experienced ringers.

The experienced ringers may ring as part of the band and may coach the band or may coach individual novices by “standing behind” during the ringing of the test piece.

An experienced ringer may conduct the test piece or may “stand behind” and coach the novice conductor.

Novice bands will be judged to the same standard as other competing bands and the judge(s) will not have prior knowledge that the band is a novice band.

A novice band may win the Reading Branch striking competition but may not go on to represent the Branch at the Guild Six-Bell Striking Competition (because Guild Competition Rules do not allow any band to have additional helpers coaching during the test piece).

In the event of a novice band gaining the fewest faults in the competition the next highest placed non-novice band would go on to represent the Branch at the Guild six bell striking competition.

The highest placed novice band shall be awarded the John Butler Trophy.

Tower captains of novice bands or of bands with novice ringers are, therefore, encouraged to enter them in the branch striking competition.

Since the AGM I have had a few requests for clarification, so here goes:

Where a band does not have enough novices to make a complete band the tower captain should notify the Branch Secretary of the names of novice ringers and a novice band will be formed from several towers.

Novice bands can either select their own experienced helpers or can request the Branch Officers to nominate suitable experienced ringers.

The competition judge(s) will know that novice bands may be competing but will not know how many or in which order they are ringing.

If you consider yourself to be a novice and would like to have a go in the competition tell your tower captain to enter you when the entry forms come out. Above all do not be frightened to have a go, enter the competition with a spirit of adventure and enjoy the experience, treat it as a bit of fun and an opportunity to learn. See you at the Competition in September! *Len Palfrey*

Tower Maintenance Award - Len Palfrey

Are you the steeple keeper in your tower? Did you know that your tower could be eligible for an award? Just contact the Chairman or Secretary of the ODG Towers and Belfries Committee (contact details in Odd Bob) and ask for an inspection, and find out just how well your bells are maintained. At the same time you will get advice and guidance on how you can improve things for the benefit of you and your band. To cap it all, it's all free!

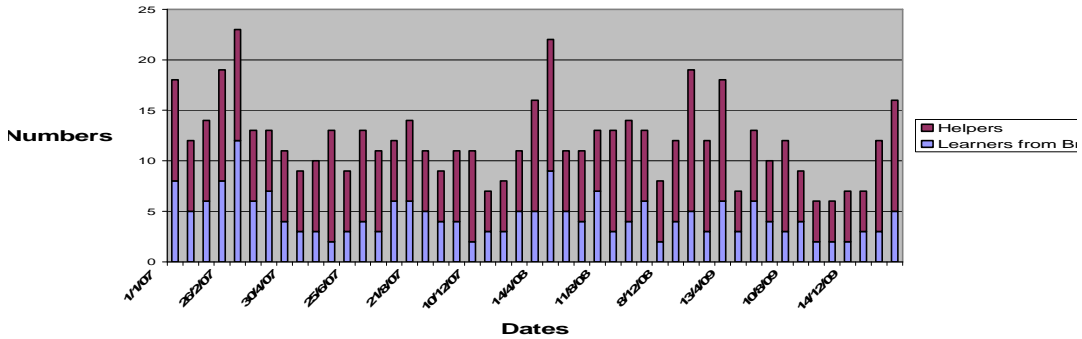
To help you we will send you the marking sheets we use when carrying out the inspection so you can see exactly what we are looking for. We will even carry out a preliminary inspection to help you prepare for the real thing.

The award comes in three categories: Bronze, Silver or Gold, and lasts for two years from the date of the inspection. For more information please contact me, Len Palfrey, on 0118 984 2698.

Farewell to Monday afternoon practices - Jim Diserens

The Monday afternoon practices are being discontinued. These were started by Nina Byrne as Branch Training Officer in 2000 to provide extra tuition to the Millennium learners. Many of these were retired people who were happy to practise during the daytime rather than of an evening. In 2002, when Nina returned to work after maternity leave, I took on the job of booking the towers. Altogether, over a span of just under eight years I arranged 162 practices. A small team of us took it in turns to take charge. These were: John Wells, my wife Helen, and me. Initially, Ian Judd was the fourth member of the team and, when he was no longer available, John Manley took his place. Initially the practices were held once a fortnight, but in September 2006 it was decided that, because fewer people were attending, we would hold them once per calendar month. However, from a peak of 27 in 2002 the attendance has continued to drop and in recent months the number of learners/improvers from within the branch was frequently as low as two and the number of helpers as low as four (see chart on next page). It is now felt that people would benefit more from individual practice by ringing quarter peals instead.

Numbers at Monday Practices



We have always welcomed people from outside the branch, both experienced ringers and learners/improvers, but the aim has been first and foremost to help those from our own branch towers. My sincere thanks go to all who have supported these practices, in particular to those who have taken their turns in running them. For anyone who would like to ring in a quarter peal, we will attempt any method for which we can get a suitable band. Please contact me on: 01491 824 504 or email: jimdiserens@dsl.pipex.com *Jim Diserens*



The last Monday practice took place at Swallowfield Church on 8 March: L. to R: Chris Johnson, Joyce Vernon (behind), Kate Crennell (in front), Keith Vernon, John Wells, Eunice and Don Wark, Mike Sangster, Jim Diserens, David Crennell, Helen Diserens, Frankie and James Milford, Viv Bloundele and Ruth Hine. Photo: Diana McClure. Also present, but not in picture, Jean and John Clark-Maxwell.

Shiplake bells are ringing again

After two years of planning and fund raising and just over five months work in the tower, the £98,000 project to replace the old bells at St Peter & St Paul, Shiplake, Oxfordshire with a new ring of eight bells is now complete. The bells will be dedicated at a service conducted by the Bishop of Dorchester at 3 pm on 2 May. As well as casting a completely new ring of bells and hanging them in a new frame slightly lower in the tower with all new bell fittings, the project also involved provision of a Sanctus bell hung for swing chiming, fitting of adjustable sound control, construction of a platform to allow safer access to the tower roof and the installation of new lifting/Sanctus support beams.



New installation, from above, tenor in the centre. Some of the old frame visible,

After dismantling the old bells and completion of the extensive building works described in the previous newsletter, installation of the new frame foundation grillage took place in early December 2009. The six large beams were delivered and installed in a single day by Graham Clifton and James Haseldine of Whites with the help of the Shiplake team. Our four prepared concrete pads

for the lower two beams proved absolutely level, meaning that no shimming was necessary and all 12 holes in the tower walls (which had taken over a week to cut!), needed no adjustment to enable the beams to be located in their correct positions. The following week Boshers Builders arrived and concreted the beam ends into the tower walls. The Shiplake team then built a new floor under the frame using specially treated and machined timber. The new bells were scheduled for delivery on 7 January, but a major snowfall two days before meant that the large lorry with a tail lift that was booked to carry the bells was stranded elsewhere and all the roads in Oxfordshire were very treacherous. This put the Service of Blessing the Bells, planned for Sunday 10 January, at risk. However, Graham Clifton from Whites organised alternative transport on 8 January using one smaller lorry and his Land Rover with his large trailer. The trip from Appleton was tricky given the state of the roads but both vehicles arrived safely and managed to get down Church Lane.

The only problem then was how to offload the larger bells and frame sides without a hoist or lift. The day was saved by Stephen Doble from Shiplake Farm, who brought his tractor with front forks to offload all the heavy pallets. The picture on the front of the newsletter shows the new bells safely in the churchyard. The bells, frame sides and other components were then moved into the Church ready for the Blessing Service. The Shiplake team spent much of the weekend clearing the Church Hall car park of snow so that those attending could park. Despite the poor weather on the Sunday, 75 people attended the wonderful and joyous service conducted by the Rev Stephen Cousins.

Work on installation started on Monday 11 January and by the evening of Tuesday 12, all the bells were in the frame. The tenor and 4th were the last bells to go up and as the picture on the next page shows, they had then to be temporarily suspended while the frame sections over the trap door were bolted into place. The two bells were then lowered into their pits.

Wednesday and Thursday morning were spent attaching all the fittings, drilling rope holes, resetting guides and adjusting clappers, etc.

The bells were rung individually on Wednesday 13 January 2010 in order to set the clapper positions. The first test ringing of all eight bells took place at 3 pm the following day, 14 January. Rounds, plain courses of Grandsire Triples and Bob Major were rung involving four of Whites' staff and members of the local band including the donors of the treble, second and tenor. All agreed that the bells sounded absolutely superb, the Whitechapel MkIII profiles producing a very impressive sound. The bells ring very easily and after installing a layer of carpet on the clock chamber floor, the internal acoustics are excellent.



James Haseldine of Whites (left) and Tim Haigh of the Shiplake team (right).

The bells were first rung publicly for a wedding on Saturday 30 January with Sunday Service ringing resuming on Sunday 31 January. Practice ringing resumed on Tuesday 2 February.

Measurements of the sound levels outside the tower show that the sound control is working effectively. With the adjustable sound control open, the previous high sound levels in the churchyard immediately around the church have been reduced to a more comfortable level. Our neighbours have also confirmed that with the sound control shutters closed, the bells are very much quieter.

After completion of the roof access platform, ladders, trapdoors and replacing the wooden bosses on the rope guides for quieter metal ones, the ringing room lower walls were lime plastered by Boshers, the old asbestos sheet material having been removed by specialists. This was followed by decoration and completion of the sound control operating system. The clock hand drive was modified and plans are in hand to reinstate the hour strike, with a hammer positioned to sound on the 7th bell.

The final destinations for the old eight bells are as follows:

1 & 2 (cast by Warners 1902) to Newnham Hampshire (used in the augmentation from three to five)

3 (cast by Warners 1868) to Winterborne Stickland Dorset where it is planned to use it to replace the existing treble in the ring of four

4 (cast by Warners 1902) to Thoroton Notts to augment a ring of three to four

5 (cast by Warners 1902) to Nunton Wiltshire to augment a chime from three to four

6 (cast by Warners 1868) scrapped and the metal reused by Whitechapel for casting new bells

7 (cast by Mears & Stainbank 1925) purchased from Whitechapel by Nicholson Engineering of Bridport and expected to be used in a future project in Hampshire

8 (cast by Mears & Stainbank 1925) scrapped and the metal reused by Whitechapel for casting new bells

We are indebted to the Keltek Trust for all their help in facilitating the re-homing of bells 1-5. *Bob Partridge*

| Bell | Name | Inscription | Weight cwt-qtr-lbs |
|---------------|--------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Treble | Simon Peter | The gift of Mavis and Cyril Crouch "Although I am both light and small, I will be heard above you all" Laus Deo | 3-0-3 |
| 2 | Hilda | The gift of Joyce and Keith Vernon In memory of loved ones | 3-0-19 |
| 3 | Ignatius | In loving memory of May and Col Dunesky | 3-1-11 |
| 4 | Paul | In memory of Simon Grant Gallyer 1954 - 2007 "Of love I tell" | 4-0-16 |
| 5 | Luke | The gift of the Pugsley family | 4-3-7 |
| 6 | Agatha | In memory of Lilian Elizabeth Gallyer 1921-1984 "Of love I tell" | 5-1-4 |
| 7 | Katharine | The gift of the Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust | 6-3-19 |
| Tenor | Edmund | In loving memory of Kathleen Partridge 1917 - 1999 and Joan Dove 1919 - 2002 | 9-0-15 in G# |

All the bells - the first letters of their names spell out SHIPLAKE - are inscribed "Whitechapel 2009" with their foundry mark. All the bells except the treble are also inscribed: : "Whites of Appleton Church Bellhangers".

New band rings at Caversham



Caversham tower: L to R - Adults: Celia Anderson, David Sumner, Jane Havelock. Youngsters: Ella Wiles, Edmund Westley. Photo: Ann Osborne

Caversham had an open day on 18 April 2009 and more than 50 people visited the tower. Ten came back for a lesson and five are still going strong: Celia Anderson, Jane Havelock, David Sumner, Edmund Westley and Ella Wiles. The youngest was nine when he started – we didn't ask the eldest for his age. They can now ring competent rounds and called changes, and they rang for a service at Christmas and have recently begun ringing for Sunday services. We also gained a lapsed ringer, Catherine O'Donnell, who had been in the area for some years, meaning to come back to ringing. Mary and Ian Westley, Edmund's parents, also help at the practices, having not rung for a few years. On Christmas Eve the five learners, plus Catherine, with a little help from four

experienced St Peter's ringers, rang for the Christingle service. It was their first public performance.

We had a few nervous moments at the start, but they all relaxed after a visitor, who came to watch English change ringing, applauded them. When it was first suggested that they should be the band for this service, they all said: "No way will we be good enough". Well, they did it, and there were no complaints.

They all took part in the ringing for the Branch AGM at South Stoke on 13 February, and attended the service, prior to being elected members of the Oxford Diocesan Guild. Congratulations to them. We hope this will be the start of bringing some new blood into the Caversham band.

Ann Osborne

Mapledurham without bells until mid-May

During a very cold week in February 2010, the Whitechapel Bell Foundry removed the six bells of St Margaret, Mapledurham. The bells date back to the 17th and 18th centuries, and have crown staples which can cause them to crack – the second bell had to be recast in 1907. The Mapledurham Bell Restoration Appeal was launched in September 2003, with the aim of mounting the bells on new headstocks to prevent further cracking. Various problems have arisen, hindering the project, but at last it is nearing completion. If all goes to plan, the bells should be brought back to the tower during the week beginning 10 May. The Right Reverend Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Reading, will re-dedicate the bells at the 6.30 pm Patronal Festival service at St Margaret on 18 July, shortly before he leaves Reading to become Bishop of Chelmsford.

There was just time to squeeze in a quarter peal of Bob Doubles the week before Whitechapel started removing the bells. The quarter peal was organised by Nina Byrne, Mapledurham's Assistant Tower Captain. Nina has also arranged for the Mapledurham band to ring at other Reading branch towers, while the bells are at Whitechapel. So far, we've rung at Checkendon, Whitchurch, South Stoke, Caversham and Pangbourne. Many thanks to Nina for making the arrangements, and to all the towers for making us so welcome. *Diana McClure*

Loddon Reach ringing

Bobbie May, Shinfield Tower Captain: No doubt in common with most other towers, we have missed a number of practices largely because of the bad weather. However, we have also had the misfortune to lose one of our



Shinfield tower: Frank and Pam Mitchell cut the cake celebrating their birthdays

members, Heather, who increasingly finds Mondays difficult.

We wish her luck when she attaches herself to St Paul's Wokingham, who practise on a Tuesday. Long-term illness has meant that we haven't seen Chris since before Christmas and we hope she recovers soon.

Despite this we ran a successful Quiz Night, with just three of us running it! And raised over £200 for the Benefice funds. In March we decided to cheer ourselves up with a tower birthday party, since one of our members, Frank, reached his 80th birthday and so did his wife, Pam. We rang and ate cake alternately and most people seemed to enjoy themselves. I think everyone got a ring and a piece of cake! Some Swallowfield ringers joined us, one of whom has still to ring a quarter for his own 80th birthday which was late last year.

Please note that the minor practice is now at Swallowfield, since Shinfield bells are now too heavy for the elderly and infirm among us to hack around. We are regularly joined by some ringers from Mortimer and we go to them every third Monday to make an eight-bell practice. The minor practice begins at 7.45 pm and is a Branch Practice and all are welcome. At present we are ringing lots of different plain methods and occasionally Kent. With a few more we could ring Surprise. Please come along and join us: it's the Monday before the last Friday which usually works out as the 4th Monday.

South Stoke's weathercock

Last summer it was noted that the church tower's weathercock and its metal support had a decided lean to it. The metal support was attached to the top of an eight-foot long octagonal oak post via a central bored eight-inch spigot and four external brackets. Water had penetrated the spigot of the supporting oak post resulting in a large split, causing the weathercock to lean over and to become unstable.

The eight-foot long oak post was firmly fixed to the rafters on the underside of the roof timbers and anchored by four long metal rods on the outside. We were fortunate in that only the top third of the post was damaged and therefore were able to splice the new post to it a few inches above the roof. The new six foot by six inch square green oak post was shaped to the original post dimensions by William Trevor, a carpenter friend, and taking the advantage of having the metal support and weathercock at ground level, they were subjected to several coats of Hammerite Gold Paint before being hoisted aloft again to resume their rightful place. *Robert Small, tower captain.*

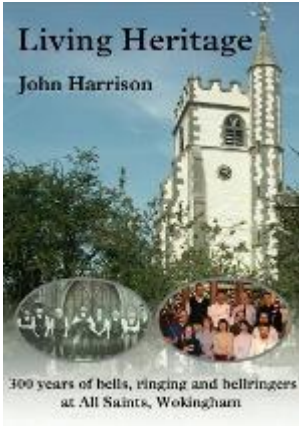


Above: Upright weathercock. Left: William Trevor with new post, and Robert Small with the weathercock. Photo: Geoff Ward



John Harrison looks back at 300 years of ringing

Ringling history might seem a specialist backwater, of limited interest to ringers, and even less to non-ringers. But things are not always as they seem. In recent years, I have become aware that when non-ringers find out what ringling is really about, they are fascinated. So when someone suggested that I write an article about the history of Wokingham ringling, I started to gather



information. But the story emerging soon grew to much more than an ‘article’ – it was turning into a book. The more you dig the more you find. Each answer points to more questions. You get hooked. Historians probably know that, but I didn’t. As the story emerged I was drawn into finding the missing pieces of each little jigsaw. For example F Lush and W Lush are listed as members. The brothers Frank and Walter Lush were famous coach builders, supplying the royalty and nobility of most of Europe. But Wokingham had two F Lushes (both Frank) and two W Lushes (Walter and William) in the late 1800s. The other two had much less exciting jobs. Trying to unravel that puzzle took a lot of effort. And when I found a small wooden cross carved by Frank

Lush from the oak frame removed in 1903, it added further poignancy.

We found articles about bells and ringers in some 19th century Parish Magazines, so I set to work searching through them. They start in 1865 – around 1400 in all! Some of the other content was amazing: railway timetables, opening hours of banks, the soup kitchen, ‘St Paul’s Coal Club’ ...

I searched the Berkshire Record office, Reading Library (which has microfiche copies of the 18th century Reading Mercury), the Guild Library, courtesy of Doug Beaumont, and Bill Butler’s private library. I hunted in indexes of *Bell News* and *The Ringing World*. Cards in the Guild Library that record published quarter peals rung at all Guild towers were very helpful. I went through Sonning Deanery minute books (from 1880), All Saints tower minute books (from 1935) and tower scrap books (from 1978). I contacted ex ringers or their relatives, some of whom gave me old pictures as well as their personal memories.

I especially wanted to make it accessible to non-ringers (as well as ringers), to open the world of ringing to them, and the book does that in a way that no tower visit ever could, because it doesn’t just present a snapshot of current ringing, but follows generations of ringers through times of change, through successes and failures. It is a social history as much as a ringing history.

Ringing is the common thread, but the world has changed. It is sobering to think how much has changed since All Saints bells were installed in 1704. Then we were using the Julian calendar. Europe was in the ‘Little Ice Age’ with frost fairs on the frozen Thames, Johnson’s dictionary and Handel’s Messiah were decades away, the slave trade was flourishing, England had a seventh of today’s population, and Wokingham had regular bull baiting.

The book looks at the ringers’ relationships with other ringers, with the church and with the community. If you think nothing exciting happens to ringers, think again. There is: death in the belfry, warnings of tower collapse, pigeon catchers among up-turned bells, fraudulent impersonation, a donation from the Queen, a house called ‘Ringwell’, burial under the wrong name ... For more information see

www.jaharrison.me.uk/book/ John Harrison

Easter quiz

Can you name this Reading branch church? The second picture shows the view looking south. Clue: It has a new ring of eight bells cast by Whitechapel.

