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Witney and Woodstock Branch Newsletter

Celebrating 125 years of The ODG.

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PLUS MUCH, MUCH
MORE.....

Newsletter of the Witney and Woodstock Branch of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers

From your Editor



One of Bampton's Bells being re-tuned at Whitechapel. (see report on p 2)

It is pleasing to know Bampton's restoration is well underway. There is an excellent report on p2 of the work undertaken so far. Well done to Dave

Rose and all his team for their efforts. We look forward to ringing on them upon completion.

The Branch were saddened to learn that Phyllis Pimm from Eynsham had passed away. She had been a ringer there for many years.

Whilst browsing through Wilfred Wilson's excellent book 'The Art and Science of Change Ringing', I came across this passage:

"In all areas there is a local guild or association.

Join it and support it by attending its meetings and practices. You will find that, as in many things in life, the more you do for ringing and ringers the greater will be your own enjoyment of the art and of the comradeship you will find among ringers" Make the most of The Guild and everything it has to offer. Mel Leggett has provided a report of a Guild course he went on recently which is very positive. (see p3).

Richard White.

St James the Great, South Leigh. – By David Smith

At St James' we began our new ringing 'season' on September 1st. We give it all a rest during August when so many are away. The bells sounded out well on Sep 3^d, when a band from Marston came and rang a Quarter-peal of Plain Bob Major (Mark Wastie's first of PBM!). On Sep 9^h we rang for a wedding, ably stiffened by Lorna and Demelza Smale, and Mark Wastie again. It sounded great and we had a lot of compliments. Service ringing is back to normal but 0900 means a few yawns!

Beyond all this, we seek to work towards the Centenary of the casting of our bells, which will be in May 2007. Until 1907 there were only 3 old bells in the tower, but the Vicar of those days had begun a big restoration, and a ring new of bells was part of that. The total cost, allowing for the metal of the old bells, came to £410.12.0d A short account of the new ring is recorded in the Minute Book started for the new band. The Bishop of Oxford dedicated the new bells on May 31st 1907, and

afterwards a peal of Stedman Triples was rung by 7 Witney men with Revd. F E Robinson as conductor. ("A variation of Thurstan's Four-Part")

At the moment we have few arrangements, but I have spoken to Lorna about a commemorative peal of Stedman next year. Apart from that we are making an effort to build up our numbers and skill. I will keep the Branch informed of our plans.

David Smith

St Mary's Bell Restoration Project

"We look forward to the return of the bells and our sincere thanks to everyone who has made this restoration possible."

Lift it gently to the steeple;
Let our bell be set on high:

There fulfil its daily mission,

Midway 'twixt the earth and sky."

This is the opening verse of a hymn by J.M. Neale, DD., written especially for the dedication of a new bell at Bampton on 2nd December 1865. The new bell was a recasting of the 2nd bell of the old 1629 ring of 6. Early in 2007 we will be singing the same hymn – with bells in the plural – when the Bells of St. Mary's are returned to the tower, resplendent with their new fittings and with bells 1, 2 and 3 having been retuned. On Monday 14th August Graham Clifton and his assistants, from Whites Bell-hangers at Appleton, arrived at Bampton and proceeded with practiced precision to dismantle and lower bells 1 to 6 of the ring of 8 to the floor of the church (see photo left and p6). This act was the culmination of months, nay years, of planning, fund raising, writing to charities and all the other activities needed to raise £40,000 from a standing start. As well as many very generous personal donations, the main charities giving funds were the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund (£2,600), Friends of St Mary's (£2,000), WREN (£5,000), Barron Bell Trust (£3,500) and the Veneziana Fund (£1,500).

We are very grateful for their support, and to all those who have supported the fund raising events and organised events themselves on behalf of the fund. Following the lowering of the bells from the tower, they were placed on pallets awaiting transportation to Appleton. The picture on page 6 shows Whites cutting the "Doncaster Heads" off the 1906 bells. "Doncaster Heads" were a Victorian method of hanging bells from wooden headstocks. The new headstocks will be metal – so off come the heads. Whites will also be supplying new bearings, clappers, and where necessary, wheels.

The specialist work of retuning the front three bells is being done at the Whitechapel Bell-foundry in London. On examination these bells were found to be up to 30% sharp. Tower Captain Dave Rose and Janet Rouse went along to Whitechapel to see part of the tuning process. The picture on page 1 shows one of our bells mounted mouth up on a vertical lathe and rotated while a fixed cutter pares off the required metal. Originally tuning was done by using huge tuning forks – now it's done by computer.

Following tuning, the bells will be returned to Whites to await the arrival of the new headstocks. Due to the time delay between ordering and receiving the headstocks it is unlikely

that the bells will be back in the tower before the New Year.

Bampton has a long history of that peculiarly English art-science known as change-ringing. It is probable that earlier bells in the tower were broken up and recast into a ring of six bells by Nathaniel Bolter in 1629. This is a very early date for a tuned ring of bells anywhere in England. These bells hung in a wooden frame dated 1608 until 1903 when a new frame was installed and two additional bells added in 1906. The old 5th bell (7th of the present ring) was recast in 1903; the old 2nd now the 4th as previously stated was recast in 1865, and the old treble (bell 1) was recast in 1906 and was the last time that the bells received any serious attention. By 2000 it was evident that the bells were becoming more and more difficult to ring. The old wooden headstocks had warped and were causing undue friction on the bearings, which in turn had become very worn. Fortunately the 1903 frame is in excellent condition – a testament to past and present Steeple Keepers (the ringer who is elected to maintain the bells). We look forward to the return of the bells and our sincere thanks to everyone who has made this restoration possible



LAYING THE RIGHT FOUNDATIONS – JUNE 2006

Mel Leggett from Wootton gives some positive feedback on what the Guild has to offer.

"I don't think I've been on a better organised, comprehensively planned, well structured, well taught and thoroughly useful day's course..."

In my experience, it's a rare event when questionnaires, requiring a bit of thought and time in completion, are actually *READ* by someone and then *ACTED ON!!*

In February, this year, a questionnaire was circulated around the branch asking for people's feedback on what they wanted, from the branch, in terms of help / training / courses and general encouragement.

Being a bit new to this "in charge" bit, at Wootton, I was the irritatingly keen one (we've all come across them!) who badgered everyone to fill in a form and got them in to Lorna "just like that!".

I suppose that I imagined them being perused, discussed and filed away, never to be heard of again... But NO!!!

Shortly after, we were offered, and accepted gratefully, a tower training session on Bob Doubles, which gave a boost to moral and encouragement to improve all round. At around the same time, and directly linked to *my* responses, I was pointed in the direction of a course in Aston Clinton, called "Laying the Right Foundations", aimed at improving teaching techniques and, at the same time, helping you to look critically at your own

bad habits. (I had plenty of the latter, believe me!)

On the appointed day the sun was shining and the drive over there was most enjoyable. Even better if, like Shirley and Hilary from Aston, (who were also on the course from our branch) you could slide through the countryside in an open-top sports car (no envy there, honest!).

I was going to give you a step by step account of the day, but realise I can't remember what came when, so suffice to say that the day was divided between very professional PowerPoint presentations supported by very full documentation, so you didn't have to spend the whole time glued to a pad with pen in hand taking notes; hands-on stuff up the tower, looking at approaches to teaching and what you actually were trying to impart; and practicals downstairs, again looking at an assortment of activities to help put over the esoteric aspects of who rings when and why! I nearly forgot that a buffet lunch was provided too, which, thanks to the weather, we were able to have outside in the churchyard.

As I said to my wife, when I slumped into a garden chair after the drive home, I don't think I've been on a

better organised, comprehensively planned, well structured, well taught and thoroughly useful day's course I've come away with so many ideas and insights both into how and what to teach and also my own ringing!! And what a nice bunch of people to boot!

I'm now wondering just what I'm actually putting into practice, though one technique for getting a young learner into hand stroke, and leaving go(!), was successfully applied at the following practice night. We've also looked at our left hand grip on the tail with variable, and mostly only temporary, success, but at least we all know now what we should be trying to do! I've always thought that the important thing about such courses is not the ten things you can recite as a result, about this or that, but the feeling of being better informed and among others who share your shortcomings and anxieties but want to know more and do the job better.

If, early next year, you get a chance to go....GO!

Mel Leggett

An update of events at North Leigh

— by Alison Merryweather- Clarke

I was very excited a couple of weeks ago when North Leigh's new ringer, Weston Douglas, rang his first "volley" of blows in rounds without needing another hand on the rope at our Friday practice. He repeated his ground-breaking performance after I'd left him in the capable hands of Anthony Williamson, who put in a timely appearance just as I had to desert the practice to be the reserve for the fantastic Ducklington Handbell Ringers. They have had a regular Friday engagement over the summer to entertain Saga Holiday clients at Eynsham Hall, where they've proved popular

even when augmented by one or two "B team" ringers from North Leigh!

We are extremely grateful for the regular support of our friends from other towers who were prepared, besides getting to grips with St Nicholas (AKA "queer thing" thanks to Terry!), to ring lumpy rounds with us every week, thus helping Weston to develop his ringing skills. Appropriately for this time of year, we will soon be reaping the rewards of our labour as Weston can now join us as a much-needed new Sunday morning ringer in North Leigh.

Alison Merryweather-Clarke

WELL
DONE
WESTON!

Chairman's Chatter – Anthony Williamson

The Guild's Festival in Oxford this summer was a great success, with large numbers of ringers celebrating 125 years of the ODG. This meant that some of the queues for towers were long but it didn't matter because friendly conversation would start up and time passed quickly. It was an opportunity to ring in towers not often available, Particularly New College and Carfax. The latter attracted a large crowd to ring bells cast by Richard Keene of Woodstock between 1676-8, and they sounded wonderful. For

me, the highlight of the day was the Cathedral service with its glorious music and singing. The Rt Rev Alan Wilson, bishop of Buckingham, gave a thought provoking sermon which reminded us that the Guild was a successful reform movement started to bring order to bands of unruly ringers. He mentioned the mathematics behind what we do and celebrated the extraordinary unity of a band - a transcript can be found on the ODG's website and in the next issue of Odd Bob. Zoë asked me to attend the Branch Secretaries'

Announcing the arrival of George Richard White

Zoe, Richard, Jimmy, Phoebe and Joseph are proud to announce the arrival of George, born 25th July. 9lb 13oz.



meeting a few weeks ago. We discussed changes to corporation tax for which the Guild is Now liable. The tax, set at 19% on profits, arises from any interest earning income (further details will be in the next issue of Odd Bob). A poster detailing the Guild's logo competition was handed out which I've sent to all tower correspondents. I hope that there will be a good response as it's a chance to have your design on all the Guild's paperwork and presentations; the present logo has lasted about fifty years.

Phyllis Pimm

Below is a letter sent to Fred Bennett from Phyllis's daughter.



Dear Fred and all the bell ringers

We want to thank you for kindly ringing the half-muffled bells both before and after the funeral service, and for the quarter peal at 5pm on 6th of October all in Mum's honour.

Bell ringing had always played such a large part in Mum's life – having started before she was even a teenager – it was a

fitting tribute to her. If she could, I'm sure she would have been smiling down on you all in appreciation! At 5 o'clock we visited the graveside, and just as we arrived the bells rang out. It was a poignant moment and one that will stay with us for a very long time. With Best Wishes and Thanks

Alison and the Pimm family.

See Quarter Peal Reports on page 6.

Did You Know?

Woodstock once had its own bell founder?

From the 1620's to the 1690's Richard and James Keene from Woodstock were casting bells for towers all over the land.

Many of these bells still exist including towers in our own Branch.

Bells in our Branch include the six bells at Cassington, the tenor at Stanton Harcourt and the 4th at Stonesfield.

Eynsham and Clanfield also have bells cast by The Keenes.

The six bells at Carfax Tower, Oxford were cast by the founder. They are a very mellow sounding ring.

The oldest surviving complete ring of six bells are at Martley, Worcs. Richard Keene cast them in 1673.

Dates and Events to look forward to

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**Branch Quiz Night.
January 2007.**

Further Details to follow

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**Branch AGM
Saturday 10th February 2007
Bampton**

Please attend and have your say.

Send your articles
to

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Quarter Peals

Combe, Oxon
Saturday, 17 June 2006
1260 Doubles
(540 Grandsire; 720 Plain Bob)
1- Demelza Smale
2- Mary Clark-Maxwell
3- Anthony Williamson
(1st Grandsire)
4- Jenny Haviland
5- Lorna Smale (C)
6- Simon Haviland
On the official birthday of Her Majesty the Queen.

Woodstock, Oxon
Sunday, 30 July 2006
1260 Doubles
1 and a half extents of Stedman, 2 each of St Martins, St Simons, Plain Bob and 3 of Grandsire.
1- Mary Clark-Maxwell
2- Bernard Coggins
3- John Harwood
4- Malcolm Fairbairn
5- Richard White (c)
6- Ian Davey-Wilson
Rung for the "Churches Together" service in the Town Square. Rung to celebrate the safe arrival of George Richard White, a Son for Zoë and Richard. Also to welcome Isabella Humphreys, a Granddaughter for Celia and Rev Roger Humphreys. Both Born 25th July.

Les Wiltshire

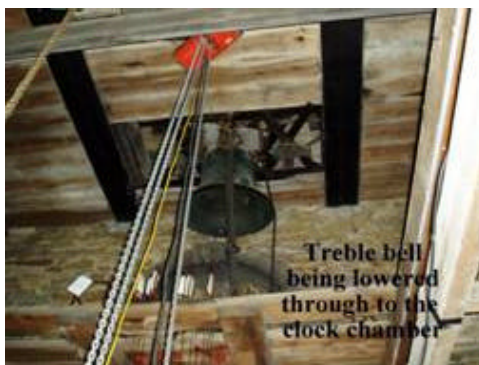
On Friday, 28th July, Roger Barnes, Oliver Chaloner, Joe Dines, Meg Roberts, Kate Targett and Mark Wastie rang half an hour of call changes to celebrate the life of their fellow Ducklington ringer Les Wiltshire. His instructor, Chris Putt, was also in attendance. Les had loyally and invariably rung the 5, which was remembered by ringing 'his' bell down, solo, to conclude the observance

For all the latest news and details of Branch practices and events visit the Branch Website.

Quarters Rung in Memory of Phyllis Pimm

Eynsham, Oxon
Friday, 6 October 2006
1260 Grandsire Doubles (10 extents)
1- Anthony Williamson
2- Terry Hester
3- Dave Rose
4- Roger Barnes
5- Lorna Smale (C)
6- Pete Butler
In thanksgiving for the life of Phyllis Elizabeth Pimm on the day of her funeral. Rung half muffled on behalf of all the ringers of the Witney and Woodstock Branch of the ODG who knew this lovely lady

Woodstock, Oxon
Sunday, 8 October 2006
1260 Grandsire Triples
1- Jimmy Clark
2- John Harwood
3- Mary Clark-Maxwell
4- Victoria Davey-Wilson
5- Bernard Coggins
6- Malcolm Fairbairn
7- Richard White (c)
8- Ian Davey-Wilson
First on Eight - 1 and 8
First Triples 'inside' - 3 and 4
By local Sunday Service Band.
In memory of Phyllis Pimm, ringer at Eynsham. For Holy Communion Service.



Treble bell being lowered through to the clock chamber



Photo's of Bampton's Bell Restoration

