

Editorial

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What do you think about striking competitions? Do you love them or loath them, or do they hold no interest for you at all?

The arguments for and against competition ringing have been well rehearsed over the years, so I will not repeat them here. However, it is hard to believe that the 90% of towers in our District who did not enter the recent striking contest at Chart Sutton are opposed to competitive ringing *per se* so let us look a little more closely at why there seems to be a general apathy towards these competitions.

A quarter of a century ago the Annual Striking Contest (for method ringers) regularly attracted around ten bands and the Call Change Contest even more. Ironically this was in the days when there were far more restrictions on eligibility than there are now. For example a band entering the Call Change Contest could not include more than three people who had rung a peal. One of our bands were overjoyed when they rang their first ever local band peal but weren't so happy when they found that by so doing they had disqualified themselves from entering the call change competition!

In recent years several changes have been made to the rules for both the method and call change contests, in an effort to encourage more towers to enter. The restriction on peal ringers mentioned above was removed some years ago. Bands in the method competition are now permitted up to two "guest" ringers. Holding the method contest on a knockout basis was tried, but after a few years this experiment was abandoned through lack of support. Timings have also been adjusted – this year's contest was held on a Saturday morning to avoid the age-old problem of clashes with weddings. Despite all this only three bands entered.

So is there any point in continuing to hold striking competitions? Although the days have long gone when the same tower used to win every year and honours are spread far more evenly these days, being the best of three teams has a hollowness about it. Furthermore, is it really fair to expect judges to come from the other end of the county to judge around half an hour's ringing?

At the ADM in October the Committee will put forward the proposed programme for 2008. In view of the apparent apathy I think we need to ask ourselves whether we really want Striking contests in that programme.

Roy Barclay

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Ringers scoop £1000 National Prize: Page 10

Plus all the usual features

Belfry Gossip

We welcome **Mrs Fellwood** of Hollingbourne who was elected to the Association at the Quarterly District Meeting at Watlington on 14th April. We look forward to seeing her at future events.



Congratulations to **Daniel** and **Adam Brady** of Staplehurst, who both achieved firsts in a quarter peal rung for Evensong at their home tower on 15th April. The quarter of Doubles (Grandsire, Plain Bob and April Day) was the first as Conductor for Daniel, while younger brother Adam scored his first quarter on an inside bell. Both boys have recently returned after a period away from ringing and are now making rapid progress. Daniel is calling touches in various methods, including Stedman, on practice night, while Adam is trying his hand at composition.



The weather may have been grey over the Bank Holiday weekend but this did not stop **Brenda Sladen** (Aylesford's answer to Anneka Rice) from completing her tandem skydive to raise money for the Flush Fund at Aylesford. This, for those of you who don't know, is the fund started so that Aylesford Church can have proper toilets installed as well as kitchen facilities. Her leap of faith has raised the grand total of £3110 and there will be a further amount to add to this once the gift aid side of things has been sorted out.



After more than 30 years of sporting non-activity **your Editor** completed a 5 kilometre run around Victoria Park in East London on Sunday 3rd June in an unbelievable time of 29 minutes 21 seconds. His sons **Richard** and **Andrew** also took part, finishing in 24min 16sec and 22min 35sec respectively. Between them they raised over £400 for The Institute of Cancer Research &

Everyman in their work to raise awareness of, and research into, male cancers.



We all know that many District ringers have other skills besides ringing. One of the more unusual is **Sue Gullett** of Staplehurst who is a qualified Mickel Therapist. Mickel Therapy enables people to recover from ME, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, IBS, Fibromyalgia, anxiety and depression. It's a talking therapy but it is absolutely not psychotherapy! The therapist guides the client in working with their emotions to bring about their own recovery. If you know of anyone who feels such therapy would be useful to them they are welcome to get in touch with Sue on 01580 891060 or e-mail her at sueg@mickeltherapy.com



Bill Cox, **Boughton Monchelsea** tower secretary, has changed his e-mail address. The new address is billcox@vodafoneemail.co.uk.



The tower secretary's e-mail for **Stansted** is no longer working. We have not yet been advised of alternative contact details so the tower captain's telephone number (Keith Foxwell 01732 823451) should be used for the time being.

Have you any gossip from your belfry?

**Let the Editor know on
(01580) 890247
or E-Mail**

thebelfry@kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk

A right Diamond Geezer

by Darren Elphick

Surprise at a practice is one thing but at Aylesford on Monday, 19th February, one member of the band had a surprise of his own when he was presented with a rather special birthday cake. With news reaching the ringers that **Gordon Hunt** was about to reach the 'diamond' age of...60, we thought he deserved some special attention that night. So after tucking in to some delicious cake, it was champagne all round (and lemonade for the kids) with a bit of ringing thrown in.

On the right is a picture of Gordon, still looking somewhat surprised, together with the rest of the Aylesford band.

Happy birthday Gordon!



ROSEMARY JUNE FERRELL

7th July 1934 - 16th January 2007

Rosemary Ferrell of Boughton Monchelsea passed away on the morning of Tuesday 16th January 2007. She had been a ringer for more than 50 years. She had been taken ill in November and had only recently come home from hospital. A service of Thanksgiving for Rosemary's life was held at St. Peter's Church, Boughton Monchelsea on Monday 29th January 2007 and the many who came to bid her farewell showed how loved and popular she was.

Rosemary started ringing at Boughton Monchelsea in 1952 and above all what she brought with her was enthusiasm. This was so evident and it remained with her during her long ringing career. Rosemary quickly picked up the rudiments of managing a bell rope and then the intricacies of Change Ringing. "She was a breath of fresh air" says her Tower Captain then, Arthur Lamb. In no time at all she was Secretary. She continued ringing from then on until the end of her life - over fifty years. She last rang on Remembrance Sunday 2006, but she was very weary then, and was not able to ring again.

In her working life she was Secretary to the Managing Director of Hernden Farms Ltd., Boughton Monchelsea. Rosemary was born in Boughton Monchelsea and spent all her life in the village. She was very much a country girl at heart.

Rosemary was one of the Flower Arrangers at St. Peter's Church for over 40 years, a stalwart of the team responsible for providing and arranging flowers at the Altar weekly and for the many Annual Festivals and Fund raising events when the whole church would be decorated to a given theme. Rosemary was always available to help where ever she was needed. She loved particularly the decorations for Easter when the spring flowers, possibly her favourites, would fill the church.

One of her closest friends, Brenda Way (herself a bell-ringer at Boughton Monchelsea,) says of her: "I knew Rosemary all of my life. A lot of water has gone under the bridge: Her nickname during our teen years became "Ros". Just this past summer while out on a walk in Cranbrook area I asked her during our lunch break "What made her decide to become a bell ringer? She answered, "I was sitting in church, having just taught my Sunday School Class and I said to myself, if Bren can ring, I can too!". Eventually Ros came along to a Practice night, and was hooked! The rest is history, as our years of walking many long distance walks raising funds for Peggy Woods Charity, three of us. Sixteen years ago we met Elsie Ellis and she joined us from the first long distance walk, the Pilgrims Way. That proved to be a great financial success as did our friendship with Elsie. Upon the very sad news of Ros, we both said at the same time "We must do a walk in memory of Ros".

A sponsored walk in aid of Friends of St. Peter's Boughton Monchelsea, of which Ros was a Member as are Elsie who is their Secretary and myself, was held on Easter Monday April 9th and we both knew that Ros was with us in spirit.

"WHAT A BEAUTIFUL DIFFERENCE ONE SINGLE LIFE MADE"

David Sayers



Committee Matters

The District Committee has met twice since the last issue of *The Belfry*, on Wednesday 28th February and Friday 11th May. Below is a résumé of the main points discussed at those meetings.

Maidstone District Committee Meeting of 28th February 2007

Matters arising from the previous meeting

District Website: The Committee considered a sample tower page constructed by the District Webmaster. Comments received were favourable subject to the addition of further standard detail e.g. local "tourist" information about car parking, toilets, local facilities, etc. A pro-forma for towers to complete would assist conformity and annual updating.

Welcome Pack: The Secretary was unable to pursue the idea to create a Welcome Pack and asked for volunteers from the Committee to take this on. No offers were forthcoming and it was suggested each new member be given a Handbook, Meeting Card and Certificate only.

Creation of members only area within the website for Minutes: The webmaster was encountering difficulty and would seek advice.

Jubi-Peal: A permanent site was still being researched.

Meeting cards: These would include additional practices and special methods and would be ready for the April Quarterly.

District Officers' Reports

The Ringing Masters reported that the District band had done well in the County 8-bell Competition, coming third - just one fault behind the runners up. A practice on the morning of the competition had helped to improve the standard. Extra training sessions had been added to the calendar together with special methods for meetings.

The Publicity Officer reported that the 25th Anniversary issue of *The Belfry* was issued electronically at end of January with hard copies issued at the end of February.

He was also planning to revamp the district website to look more up to date.

District Reps gave a verbal report on proceedings at the recent General Committee Meeting. A new design and quote were being sought for the County Chairman's Chain of Office. A new KCACR prayer would be printed alongside the existing on the next Annual Report. Information had been circulated about Ringing Foundation, Child Protection issues, redundant churches, ringing centre meetings and Central Council ambitions to promote ringing during the Olympics in 2012. The membership database had not been developed and the membership was to decide whether it should be deleted. The county 6-bell competition on 22nd September would be at Chevening.

Forthcoming events

Striking Competition – 16th June at Chart Sutton. The draw would be at 9.45am. The Ringing Masters would organise judges.

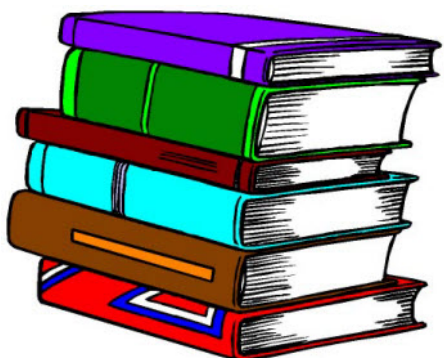
Quarterly meeting – 14th July. Ringing will be at Hollingbourne from 9.30am followed by coffee & biscuits with meeting. Further ringing at Harrietsham from 11.30am.

Remainder of advertised calendar with the inclusion of additional practices and special methods to be circulated on Meeting Cards in April 2007.

Any Other Business

Leeds Meeting Room : The Committee agreed a donation of £20 be made to the Church for use of the meeting room during the past year. The Treasurer would send a cheque and letter of thanks.

AGM 2009: Maidstone District would be hosting this event. Committee Members were asked to begin working on feasible ideas for venue and format. One suggestion had been the new Hotel at Allington for the meal with Park and Sail to Maidstone All Saints. Committee members were asked to bring ideas back to the next meeting for discussion.



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South Willesborough, Ashford, TN24 0DR**

Tel: 01233 663365

Maidstone District Committee Meeting of 11th May 2007

Matters arising from the previous meeting

District Website: A sample tower page had been circulated to those towers on the e-mail list, seeking expressions of interest by 1st June. A pro-forma asking for the requisite information would then be sent to for interested towers.

Creation of members only area within the website for Minutes: No further progress to date.

Jubi-Peal: County committee was now investigating the Paddock Wood Hop Farm site as a permanent location

County AGM 2009: Aylesford was suggested as meeting the required criteria for the County AGM, which Maidstone District is due to host in 2009. Investigations would be made locally.

Wedding Fee Survey: to be circulated.

District Officers' Reports

The Ringing Masters reported that the Surprise Minor practice at Nettlestead had been well attended, but a high proportion of ringers had come from outside the District. Ringing at the Quarterly Meeting at Mereworth and Wateringbury had been good.

The Publicity Officer had nothing to report other than items already mentioned.

The District Reps reported on items concerning Maidstone District from the meeting held on 5th May 2007.

There was to be a maintenance course run in September. There were planned restoration projects in Maidstone District at Otham and Mereworth.

Forthcoming events

Surprise Major Practice – 2nd June: St Michael's Maidstone from 10.30am – 12noon This was still subject to confirmation

Striking Competition – 16th June: Chart Sutton 9.45am draw.

Quarterly meeting – 14th July: Hollingbourne 9.30am ringing followed by coffee and biscuits with meeting. Further ringing at Harrietsham from 11.30am.

District Practice – 4th August: Yalding 10.30am – 12noon. Special methods will be Plain Bob and Grandsire Doubles.

District Practice – Wednesday 12 September: Linton 7.30 – 9pm. Special methods will be Plain Bob and Rutland Major.

Any Other Business

There was no other business.

This does not purport to be a complete and accurate report of the meetings. Any member of the KCACR can obtain a copy of the full minutes by contacting the District Secretary.

Aylesford at the Double

Aylesford made it a double when they won the 2007 District Striking Contest, to go with the Call Change Trophy they won in November. Only three bands entered this year's competition, held at Chart Sutton on Saturday 17th June, making it the least well supported for some years. The successful band is pictured right with the shield and the judges. The full results are below the picture.

Our judges this year were Monty Gilbert, well known to some of the older ringers in the District and now ringing in the Canterbury District, and Paul Barton, Canterbury District Ringing Master. Unusually, as well as the results they also gave the numbers of "clean rows" rung by each band. Our thanks to them for coming over to judge the contest for us, and to Chart Sutton for hosting the contest and providing refreshments.

Aylesford now go forward to represent Maidstone District at the County Striking Contest to be held at Chevening on 22nd September. We wish them well.

However, the continuing downward trend in the number of bands entering both this and the Call Change Contests must call into question whether the Maidstone District really wants any kind of competitive ringing. Nevertheless, despite the small entry it was, all in all, quite a sociable morning – not least because we had to huddle indoors from the rain!



District Striking Contest 2007

Winners	<i>Aylesford</i>	18 faults
2nd	<i>Staplehurst</i>	41 faults
3rd	<i>Leeds</i>	70 faults

District Events round up

District Barn Dance

The District Barn Dance returned on 10th March after several years' absence. It was a welcome return too, judging by the 70 or more ringers and friends who turned up to Downswood Community Centre. Live music was provided by Skinners' Rats, who led us in a variety of simple and not so simple dances. As can be seen from the picture below, everyone seems to have had great fun, especially when it came to "stripping the willow" (one of the more complicated dances!). The whole event was masterminded by Darren and Cathy, to whom we are extremely grateful.



Joint Meeting with Tonbridge District

Attendance at the joint meeting with the Tonbridge District on 17th March was, appropriately, half from each District. Ringing at Hadlow is restricted because of the nearby residents and the two hours permitted were put to good use with a variety of Methods being rung – including an excellent course of Cambridge Major.

County Annual General Meeting

Just ten members of the Maidstone District attended the County AGM at Thanington on Easter Monday. The rest missed an amusing sermon by Revd David Cawley, a

tasty lunch and good beer. Oh, and a fairly uneventful meeting, half of which was taken up with a debate on whether to continue the Association's Membership Database. True to form a compromise was reached! A fuller report on the AGM can be found on the main KCACR website.

Surprise Minor Practice

The recently introduced series of Saturday morning District Practices certainly seem to be fulfilling a need, with the Surprise Minor Practice at Nettlestead on the morning of Saturday 14th April attracting no fewer than 18 people.

Quarterly District Meeting

The Spring Quarterly Meeting was held at joint venues. Afternoon ringing was at the architecturally unusual church of St Lawrence, Mereworth. We then moved on to Wateringbury for tea, business meeting and further ringing on the light six, including an attempt at the special method London Minor. Nineteen people signed the attendance book, one more than the number who attended the very successful **Surprise Minor Practice** at Nettlestead in the morning. Methods rung at the Practice included Cambridge, Norwich, Bourne and of course London, in readiness for the afternoon!

Surprise Major Practice

Only 11 people turned up to St Michael and All Angels, Maidstone on the morning of Saturday 2nd June, for the latest in the series of Surprise Major practices. Consequently we were only able to ring Cambridge, but at least this proved useful to two of those present. Stedman Triples, Grandsire Triples and Bob Major were also rung.



CHURCH CHUCKLES

Seen on a church notice board:

Churchyard maintenance is becoming increasingly difficult and it would be appreciated if parishioners will cut the grass around their own graves.

Things that go Bump in the Belfry

by Graham Heath

Over the years we have had many 'odd' things happen at All Saints Maidstone and the latest unnerving experience, which I will mention later, has inspired me to write an account of these.

Whether you believe in ghosts or things that go bump in the night or not, every now and then something happens that defies rational explanation, especially in an old building such as All Saints, which is 600 years old.

Our experiences there are quite broad, always the feeling and sound as if someone is the other side of the ringing room door, strange noises which makes one have a look to see who is there. This happens all the time at All Saints but there are other, more definite happenings from time to time. On two occasions I have been in the tower, once on my own and the other in company where the definite sound of foot steps walking up the stairs have been heard. These are always heard further up the tower and I have heard these on both occasions when I have been in the bell chamber. The first time was when myself and Mike Birkbeck were giving the belfry a bit of a spring clean. Mike had to pop out for ten minutes to go to a shop and I locked the door behind him and carried on upstairs to the bell chamber where I was just putting the last of the collected rubbish into a bin bag. My first impression on hearing someone ascending the tower stair was how quick Mike had been at the shops and it suddenly dawned on me that it could not be him as I had locked him out!! Surprisingly this did not scare me.

The second time was possibly a year later when myself and Dot Hooker were sorting out the tool box up in the bell chamber. In mid conversation on hearing these heavy footsteps coming up the tower we both looked at the same time towards the bell chamber door and then looked back at each other as we knew this could not be possible.

On various other occasions ringers have asked me after a quarter if we were locked in, and we always are. On each occasion the same thing has been reported by different people of the sound of someone entering the clock room above, walking across the floor and then walking back the way they came ! How strange !

One time after a Sunday morning ring when just myself and one other ringer were present I had the fright of my life. I left Denise to sit in the ringing room while I went up to the clock room to stop the clock for a couple of minutes as it tends to gain. Just standing there with the clock stopped out of the blue there seemed to be movement on the stairs higher up accompanied by the definite sound of a male voice. This unnerved me greatly as I knew this could not be. I hastily returned to the ringing room to find Denise still sitting there reading. I asked, just to be sure, if she had spoken at all or seen or heard anyone going up the tower. She said she had not said a word or seen or

heard anyone going up there, the door to the ringing room being open all the time, so she would have heard.

In 2000 Taylor's came to do some work on the bells and I helped the bell hanger to save money. We thought we would have a little break and so locked the tower behind us as we proceeded towards the bell hangers van which was parked by the archway. We both looked at each other in surprise when we heard the treble bell sound ! We rushed back up there as this was an impossible thing to happen. We checked everything and both came to the conclusion that this was a bit strange. I have never experienced this before or since.

I am leaving the best until last!! One Thursday evening at our practice the whole team witnessed a very strange series of events that lead us to have an 'early night' that night. I had had a headache and someone had kindly given me some tablets. With the empty water bottle in hand I walked down the stairs to the porch to fill it. When in the porch I had a terrifying thing happen to me. Out of the blue I felt as if I was surrounded by electricity, a strange feeling I can hardly explain . There was a really

strange buzzing in my ears and I had the overwhelming feeling I was not alone. I hastily went back up to the ringing room and entered even though they were mid way through a ring. I closed the door and sat behind the 5th ringer only for us all to be startled by what can be described as an unearthly racket on the stairs with the door being banged and rattled several times. I immediately got up and opened the door and not a soul was there. The whole band were freaked out. I opened the door so

immediately that there would not have been time for someone to leave that quickly ! Later mid way through a course of Bob Royal people started to look at each other as something strange seemed to be happening. It suddenly got very cold . This was followed by the same sound again at the door. Poor Pat Phipps on the 5th, right by the door was very disturbed and said her heart was in her mouth. No one could explain what had happened that night but we decided to finish early!! What was great about it for me was that it involved everyone there.

And now to our latest happening which has inspired this whole piece. This happened but a few short hours ago, a nice Sunday morning ring, a few away so front six only. While ringing Bob Minor something happened that is making me shake almost as I write this! I was ringing the 4th and out of nowhere came the most horrible human groan, right in my ear. Mike looked at me in disbelief and I was pleased someone else had heard it too ! To be honest that has really scared me. We can find no explanation of it other than things we do not understand. We ring on Thursdays at 7.30pm, don't be put off, these things don't happen very often, just now and then. All welcome !

Have you had any strange experiences in your tower? Please let us know.

"...out of nowhere came the most horrible human groan, right in my ear..... To be honest that has really scared me."

Ringling all over the world

by Dot Hooker

At the beginning of January, Clive and I set off across the world to catch up with daughter Sally and her other half in New Zealand. At their suggestion we had investigated and then arranged for a round the world air ticket with STA (Student Travel Association – a very good travel arranger who happens to specialise in student requirements). On the way to NZ we stopped off in California for a week, driving down one of the most renowned drives of the world, the Big Sur, from San Francisco to Los Angeles along which we did find bells but only hung for chiming and usually in the Franciscan Missions that run up this coast as part of a chain extending from Mexico.

From LA we flew to The Cook Islands in the South Pacific. The main island of Rarotonga is paradise personified or as near as! White sands, varied blue lagoons, palms trees, the heavy scent of a multitude of tropical flowers in their brilliant hues and the constant roar in the background of the Pacific rollers breaking on the reef that surrounds the island. However the most poignant memory for us was of the big smiles on the faces of the Cook Islanders and of their very warm welcome to enjoy their islands and culture including church on Sunday in their best gear including the hand woven straw hats. No bells though.



The impressive Swan Tower in Perth, Western Australia

A week later and totally relaxed, we flew on to Auckland, North Island, New Zealand and after all the hugs, kisses and catching up with the offspring spent the next few days exploring the city and its environs which have much to offer the resident and traveller alike - most memorably great fresh food (low carbon footprint mileage etc) and clean, clean air! A No Smoking ban has been the norm for a few years in NZ and the difference to the air quality in UK is immediately noticed!

We spent the next two weeks visiting some of the places that every tourist should have on their list of 'Places and things to do in New Zealand' – Bay of Islands and dolphin watching, The Treaty House just north of Paihia; the Thermal areas around Rotorua, Napier and its Art Deco restoration and of course the amazing scenery to be enjoyed wherever you go. It's totally gobsmacking.

Arriving in Wellington mid afternoon on the Sunday, I had mentioned I would like to ring at the new cathedral that evening and had left a message with one of the tower contacts. I was left at the door while Clive, Sally and Andrew found the nearest bar for the next hour and then had to find my way up to the ringing room. After enquires, I was escorted upstairs, via a much welcome lift (Wellington like several NZ cities being built on hills that taxed the ageing leg muscles) and spent a very pleasant 45 minutes ringing a variety of methods up to Grandsire Caters, taking a break when the method of the moment – York Minor – was being rung. It's a new cathedral (circa 1950s) and more impressive inside than out.

Taking the ferry across to South Island and picking up another hire car we said our goodbyes the following morning to the youngsters to make our way around South Island by ourselves. Wherever you travel in New Zealand the scenery is amazing – you can see some of the examples in the film *Lord of the Rings* – and everywhere the genuine warm welcome and interest in you as an individual is so affirming, from the smallest hamlet of Haast to the tourist cities of Christchurch and Wellington. It was just the same in Dunedin where every effort was made to find us accommodation for the night in a city about to be invaded with its new year intake of students, the University of Otago, Dunedin being the oldest and most prestigious in that part of the world. A cold southerly wind was blowing as we made our way into the city centre to find the First Church of Otago and hopefully a ringing practice! Again a very warm welcome and lots of chitchat in between ringing on connections of 'home' – the UK – and where the relatives lived! I was invited to ring the southernmost bell in the world – the treble on this lovely light ring of 8, doing their own version of Tittums and Queens i.e. it's called and you go straight into the changes! Quite scary and the lazy mind goes into overdrive as you have to work out which bell you should be following in just one pull!

We left NZ from Christchurch where the timing didn't fit with their practice night or service ringing but we did get to visit the cathedral and although considerably smaller

than cathedrals here in UK, its persona and welcome more than made up for the discrepancy.

Onto OZ and Sydney – the first city of the early settlers, the primary place to visit now and its plethora of nationalities, traditions (old and new) and a constant bustle of commerce and play. We got a Sydney Explorer ticket so we could maximise the public travel system (highly advised) and set off to get our bearings in this frenetic city with its strong transport and recreation reliance on water – Sydney harbour and the local coastal beaches. Tootaling around on the Hop On Hop Off bus we located St Mary's RC Cathedral (practice night Thursday) and St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral (service ring on the Sunday). The climb up to St Mary's ringing room is not for the faint hearted or short of breath but the reward, apart from the excellent bells, is a truly brilliant view out over the city and harbour. Sadly we were only 6 that evening and thus the full experience of ringing on the twin equivalent of Canterbury Cathedral could not be taken but you did get a clear impression of how wonderful the sound would be with all 12 bells ringing.

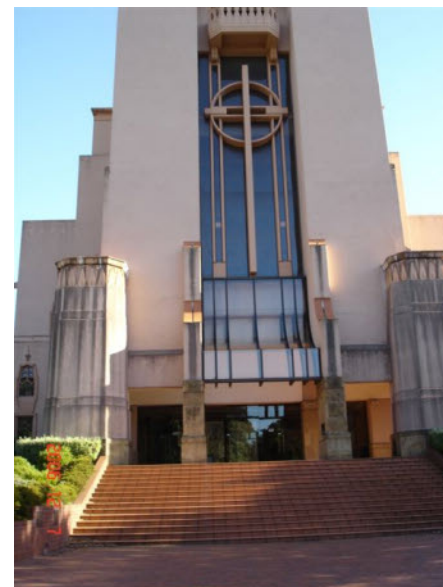
Sunday service ring at St Andrew's proved to be a severe jolt to the grey matter as when asked what I could ring and I had had some strange idea they were a light ring of 8, I was asked to take a rope for a touch of Cambridge Major on the back 8 of a ring of 12 with a 29cwt tenor! Luckily the good Lord provided and I managed the touch without any problems.

The warm, sunny weather turned later that day and after a final buzz around on the Explorer bus, packing and concocting something from the goodies in the fridge, we set off next morning for the flight up to Cairns, then onto Port Douglas and hopefully have a day out on the Great Barrier Reef. The travel brochures depict this truly amazing natural phenomenon with lovely deep blue calm seas and people bobbing around a still anchored boat in diving and snorkel gear. It is amazing and well worth a visit but those pictures must have been taken on the odd day when the sea is calm etc etc. You also have to take into account that for three months of the year at least, you have to swim in protective suits because of the 'stingers' – the box jelly fish (kill more people than sharks we were told).

While arranging our itinerary, I had managed to include a 4-night stay in Perth, mainly to get a ring on Swan Bells, with much muttering from Clive. However, he had to admit after our stay in this lovely city on the Swan River that it was definitely on the list to come back to and that the whole concept of Swan Bells is a unique, successful working partnership of the civil authorities and the volunteers at the tower. I could write a whole chapter on this Millennium Project and all the people who have worked and continue to develop what is not only the centre for ringing in Western Australia but also a major tourist attraction in Perth.

I had contacted Richard Offen before we left UK on the possibility of ringing at Swan Bells and maybe a quarter if it could be arranged. The welcoming hospitality in their unique 'tower' bowled us over and during the weekend, we were driven around the area taking in their amazing

Wellington
New Cathedral,
New Zealand



beaches, the light ring of 6 at Claremont, the noisy exuberance and large bottles of Spitfire at the ringers watering hole – *The Lucky Shag* – and shared news and what life is like working in the gold fields with Michael Bryant, a frequent visitor at All Saints Maidstone when in UK. Oh, and I did get the Quarter of Grandsire Caters which was a real joy to be a part of. Yes, definitely on the return visit list.

After a brief stopover in Singapore – the electronic buffs 'mecca' and then onto Cape Town, South Africa for a last soak up of warm sunshine. Table Mountain and the Cape Region were well explored including on the last day a visit to the oldest winery in South Africa at Groot Constantia established more than 365 years ago. I had thought I might get a quick ring on the 25cwt ring of 10 at Cape Town Cathedral but the long day's exploring and, I have to say, a bit of travel weariness dictated evenings spent in the hotel area on the city outskirts. Something else perhaps to come back for in the future.

So what was the best place we visited? We'd have to say that everywhere we went had its own individual character and attractions but if we did a 'places to visit again' list it would have to include San Francisco, the Cook Islands, New Zealand visiting places not covered this time and re-visit others and definitely Perth and its wider area. There are at least 4 more towers to get in NZ and the same in the Perth area and I suppose if we managed Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra areas then towers in those vicinities could be included.....

There is though one but very big difference in tower grabbing here in the UK and elsewhere in the world and that's the distance between the towers! It takes a lot of commitment and time to attend weekly practice and service ringing in the old colonies; it often taking up a whole weekend. You can't just pop down the road for the last hour of ringing and a swift drink in the pub after! It can be a return journey of up to 200 miles!

Dot Hooker rings at All Saints Maidstone and Otham

Ringers scoop £1,000 National Prize

Staplehurst Bellringers have won £1000 in a competition organised by Charles Wells, the brewers of 'Bombardier', which features the St. George's flag prominently on its label. The prize was for toasting St. George's Day in the most unlikely circumstances and place, and we thought that up amongst the bells was a pretty unusual place to be.

Kevin Fulcher spotted the advert for the competition whilst glancing through 'Adscene', and thought it was worth having a go. Local photographer Frank Page took an excellent photo of the toasting and tippling ringers, he being perched precariously high up in a louvered arch, and Kevin sent it off with a covering letter explaining the circumstances. We mentioned that it was a very unusual place to be, as the sound up there when the bells are ringing is tremendous, and the dangers of five tons of swinging metal are too obvious to be worth stating. We think it appropriate to donate the money towards the re-ordering and refurbishment of St. George's chapel, for which plans are being drawn up at the moment.



Kevin will be going up to London in July to collect the cheque and a specially struck silver medal at a presentation ceremony at the Farmers Club in Whitehall, and would like to thank everybody who took part. The Bellringers themselves would also like to thank Kevin for coming up with the idea and then going ahead and organising it, and Frank Page for taking the photo. There will be a small display about it in Staplehurst church, and the photograph and medal will be on permanent display in the ringing room.

For those readers, knowledgeable about the dangers of bells in the "up" position, who might think we were acting irresponsibly, I should explain that the two bells which appear up in the picture were in fact blocked and tied. There would therefore have been no health and safety issues whatsoever!

Roy Barclay



The latest winning numbers in the 120 Club Draw are:

March:

43 (£20) Margaret (Yalding)
115 (£15) Sue (Snodland)
30 (£10) Nick (Boughton Monchelsea)

May:

21 (£20) Doreen (Maidstone)
120 (£15) Jackie (Staplehurst)
25 (£10) Tim (Rainham)

April:

32 (£20) Janet (Ightham)
37 (£15) Peter (Linton)
101 (£10) Richard (Ightham)

June:

28 (£40) Robert (Barming)
22 (£30) Yvonne (Boughton Monchelsea)
112 (£20) Aylesford Ringers

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Winners have been notified.

Remember that results are available 24 hours a day on the 120 Club's very own website at:

www.kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk/120Club

Belfry Reminiscences

5 years ago.....

.....in **July 2002** issue 72 reported on the part ringing had played in two recent national events - the death of the Queen Mother and the golden jubilee of the Queen's accession to the throne. The Editorial used these events as a springboard to try to encourage more members to take an active part in running the District, in particular by standing for election to the District Committee.

There were a number of congratulations offered, including a first quarter peal and first as conductor respectively for two 13 year olds, Daniel Brady, and Richard Barclay. A quarter at Ulcombe was believed to be the first by an all-local band. Sadly we also had to report the passing of Bridget Rix, secretary of the Boxley ringers.

For several years the Striking Contest was held on a knockout basis and the last four remaining teams would meet in the final. The 2002 winners were All Saints, Maidstone, for the second consecutive year.

15 years ago.....

.....in **July 1992** attendance at District ringing meetings and practices was at an all-time low, and the Editorial in Issue 35 castigated ringers for their apathy. No lack of enthusiasm at some of our towers though - Boughton Monchelsea were busy raising funds for their restoration project, and can it really be fifteen years since the new six at Stansted were dedicated?

People in the news that summer included John Keeler, who had just rung his 1000th peal, and your Editor and his wife who became proud parents for the second time with the birth of Andrew. At the other end of life's spectrum *The Belfry* sadly had to report the death of Phil Corby, an Honorary Vice-President of the KCACR and former President of the Central Council.

Twelve bands entered the District Striking Contest, in what was destined to be the last before eligibility restrictions were brought in. Numbers subsequently fell until in 1998 there were just two entries, prompting the introduction of the knock-out style contest mentioned above. However, even that experiment proved unsuccessful and was subsequently discontinued.

20 years ago.....

.....in **June 1987** the future of *The Belfry* was by no means assured. Readers were not submitting articles, and issue 20 included a desperate request for help with preparation and reprographics (this was at a time when very few people had personal computers, and programs were very basic). Someone came forward to save the day, and the rest is history. The District itself, on the other hand, was going through a particularly active stage. The District Quarter-peal Week saw 26 attempts being made at 15 different towers, with 14 being successful including 18 "firsts" of one kind or another.

Birling bells were heard for the first time in more than 30 years when the new eight were dedicated by the Bishop of Rochester. So many people turned up to the Service that the start was delayed. After the Service a well-struck peal of 8-spliced was rung on the bells.

Socially, too, things were on a high. No less than 19 teams entered the inter-tower Darts Tournament. Numbers dwindled in subsequent years and the final tournament had just one entry (they won and still have the shield in their ringing room - any challengers?)

25 years ago.....

..... in **July 1982** the Maidstone District Newsletter, as it was then still known, was still taking its first tottering steps of infancy. Issue 3 was merely a four-side stapled document typed on a mechanical typewriter and photocopied; it was, however, the only issue until the late nineties to have photographs - of two bands who rang a peal and a quarter-peal for the visit of Pope John Paul II to Canterbury.

The News and Views column (forerunner of today's *Belfry Gossip*) congratulated Chris and Sue Bassett of Staplehurst on the birth of their first child David; David is now himself an accomplished ringer and is currently studying for a Doctorate in Canada. Issue 3 also carried an article by Andrew Gunstone, then tower captain at East Farleigh, on the Role of the Tower Captain. There was also a report on the District Striking Contest which was won, just for a change, by All Saints Maidstone!

Future Events

The Calendar tells us summer is here, although at the time of writing the weather is more akin to November than July. Hopefully things will have improved by the time you read this but, if not, don't worry - there are still ringing activities going on throughout the summer months. Details of these are below, and all are now confirmed.

A list of District events for the next three months is on the District Calendar on the inside back cover. Could Tower Captains/Secretaries please detach it and place prominently on their tower notice-boards. Remember that you can also check out future events by visiting the District website *Maidstone District OnLine* at www.kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk and choosing "Calendar of Events".

The most imminent event is the **Quarterly District Meeting** on Saturday 14th July. This will be a morning event and once again there are joint venues: Ringing on the six at Hollingbourne from 9.30am to 10.30am, followed by Coffee & Business Meeting, then moving on to Harrietsham where there will be further ringing on the eight from 11.30am to 12.30pm. The special methods will be Stedman Doubles and Double Norwich Major, but as usual there will also be ringing to suit all levels from rounds upwards.

For those who are not on holiday and would like some intensive practice in ringing **Plain Bob and Grandsire Doubles**, there will be a special **District Practice Morning** at Yalding from 10.30am -12noon. Ideal for those taking their first steps in method ringing, but helpers would be appreciated too.

We start autumn with our only midweek meeting of the year when on Wednesday 12th September we have a general **District Practice** at Linton from 7.30-9pm.

Special methods will be Plain Bob Major and Rutland, but as usual there will be ringing to suit everyone who attends.

Next up is a District **Surprise Major Practice** to be held on Saturday 6th October at St Michael and All Angels, Maidstone, from 10.30am - 12noon. This is a great opportunity both for those who are just beginning to venture into the field of surprise methods and for those more experienced ringers who want to extend their repertoire. There will be ringing to suit all levels, but please make sure you know the blue line before you come!

A week later brings us to the **Annual District Meeting** which this year will be held at Staplehurst. Timings are as follows: Ringing from 3pm, Service (now the only one of the year!) at 4pm, followed by tea at approximately 5pm and then the Business Meeting. There will be further opportunities to ring on Staplehurst's pleasant ten bells after the Meeting. The ADM is the time when members can have their say on what happens in the District in the coming year, and to vote in the District Committee for the coming year. So do try to attend; better still why not stand for election? Remember that all existing Committee members have to stand for re-election if they want to continue; no-one holds their post by right. New blood is always welcome, particularly if you have firm views on how the District should be run or how things might be improved. Contact any existing Committee member for more details.

Looking further ahead we have the **Call-Change Striking Contest** at Snodland on Saturday 10th November, draw 9.45am, and then the **District Carol Service** at Hunton on Saturday 8th December starting this year at the earlier time of 4pm. More information about these events will be circulated by the District Secretary nearer the time.

Tired of waiting to see that single tower copy of The Belfry?

Now you can get your very own copy on-line and you will get it before the hard copy version is even printed ...and it's free!

To add your name to the circulation list e-mail

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Articles for publication in the The Belfry

should be sent to the Editor at the address on page one or e-mail to

belfry@kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk

Please limit articles to one side of A4 if possible



MAIDSTONE DISTRICT CALENDAR

Summer 2007

Saturday 14th July

QUARTERLY MEETING at HOLLINGBOURNE & HARRIETSHAM

Ringling at Hollingbourne from 9.30am to 10.30am

followed by Coffee & Business Meeting

Ringling at Harrietsham from 11.30am to 12.30pm

Saturday 4th August

GRANDSIRE & PLAIN BOB DOUBLES PRACTICE at YALDING

Ringling from 10.30am to 12noon

Wednesday 12th September

DISTRICT PRACTICE NIGHT at LINTON

Ringling from 7.30pm to 9pm

Saturday 6th October

SURPRISE MAJOR PRACTICE at St MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS, MAIDSTONE

From 10.30am to 12noon

Saturday 13th October

ANNUAL DISTRICT MEETING at STAPLEHURST

Ringling from 3pm. Service 4pm

followed by Tea & Business Meeting

Further ringling until 8pm

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For updates visit Maidstone District OnLine at
www.kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk

or contact the District Secretary