



St Margaret's Church, Great Barr | Used under CC license, courtesy of Penny Hayes

Behind the louvres: St Margaret's Great Barr

by Denise Large

There is no known record of how long there has been a church on the site of Saint Margaret's Church, Great Barr. In a 1710 manuscript describing the rectory of Aldridge there is mention of the Chappel of Barr Magna having been founded "long before The Reformation". This Chapel remained a Chapel of Ease until 1846, when it became a Parish Church in its own right.

The current bells date from 1796 and were the gift of the Scott family who lived in Great Barr

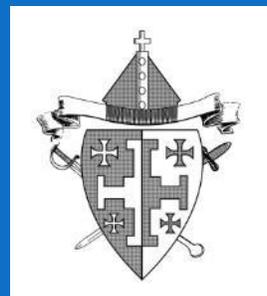
Hall, the large and now derelict house in the valley to the south of the church.

Cast by Edward Arnold of Leicester, the bells range in weight from five to nine hundredweight. The first five are inscribed with the names of Sir Joseph Scott, his wife Margaret and their three children William, Edward Dolman and Mary. However, the name on the tenor, Mary Whitby, was a complete puzzle to us, when we started research for the bicentenary in 1996.

Mary Whitby turned out to be Joseph Scott's mother-in-law. She was also Lady of the Manor of Great Barr and had married into a family that owned land and property in many parts of Staffordshire. Her father, John Dolman, had been Rector of Aldridge and so she had close connections with the church.

The installation of the bells in 1796 is well documented. The Chapel Wardens' accounts record many items including:

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Expenses at Mr Moore's house when the bells came; 5 horses, 2 men, dinners, hay, corn and ale at a cost of fourteen shillings and three pence

Expenses of the bell hangers and ringers at opening the bells at Barr Wake – one guinea

Unloading the new and loading of the old bells – nine shillings

Carriage of bells – thirteen pounds, ten shillings and three pence

Scales and weights to weigh old bells and trouble and turnpike expenses – ten shillings and sixpence

Bell ropes – one pound, eleven shillings and two pence.

From these accounts it is also evident there were bells in the tower before the new installation, but we have no record of how many or by whom they were cast.

On the front page of Aris's Birmingham Gazette for Monday

August 1st 1796 there is a short article which reads:

On Monday last was completed at Barr Chapel, Staffordshire, a NEW PEAL of SIX BELLS with a new Bell Frame, new Hangings &c, on the newest and best Construction, by Mr. E. Arnold, Bellfounder, Leicester, the Gift of Joseph Scott Esq. They were opened by the following Societies of Ringers, viz. Birmingham, Walsall, Wednesbury and several others, which gave great Satisfaction and does Credit to the Founder.



The bells return in 1980

There was no major work done to the bells until 1924 when the tenor was recast by Charles Carr of Smethwick after it was cracked by the clock hammer. A peal board records a 720 of Bob Minor rung for the dedication of the new tenor bell on Ascension Day of that year, by a band from the Saint Martin's Guild of Change Ringers.

In 1980 the bells were removed from the tower and tuned and rehung in a new frame by John Taylor's of Loughborough, with much of the work being carried out by the band

of that time, some of whom are still ringing at Great Barr today.

Drayton Bassett project update

by John Mulvey

The bell appeal leaflets were distributed throughout Drayton village in April and also given to Society members at meetings. The results have been very encouraging. May I thank the many Society members who have given generous, individual donations to the appeal. A steady stream of donations have been received from villagers. These included £1,000 from a couple who had been married at the church a number of years ago and a donation from the local scout group who want to follow the appeal's progress.

At the end of May we held an open meeting at Drayton Club to discuss how to take the appeal forward, 9 people attended and 2 more volunteered to learn to ring. In June we held another quiz evening at the village club, over 50 people attended which included 16 ringers. £300 was raised for the fund.

Just before the end of this school year I again met with Nicky Jarrett, who teaches the Y5/6 class at the village school. In November we plan to do a topic on Drayton now and 100 years ago to tie in with the new bell that will commemorate the 6 men from the village who died in the 1st World War.

The hope is that this work will form part of an exhibition to be held in the village. Descendants of 3 of these men have contacted me and are going to provide mementoes.

In early 2016, when I hope the new bells will be cast, the class will then do a topic on bells and bell ringing and will record the casting and installation of the bells. This will include a visit to John Taylor's bell foundry at Loughborough and watching at least one of the new bells

being cast. The hope is that when the bell work is completed we will start an after school bell ringing club.

A couple of weeks ago I received an email from the PA to the Managing Director of Drayton Manor Theme Park asking if I would go along and meet him and his family. The theme park was founded in 1950 by George and Vera Bryan, who both died last year. Their family still own and run the business. I had the pleasure of meeting their son Colin and grandson George. They gave me a VIP tour of the theme park, of which they are very proud.

When I was about to leave, Colin Bryan said the family wished to donate a bell to the appeal in memory of his parents and would gift aid a minimum of £5,000 to the appeal.

I have today received a letter from the Allchurches Trust stating that we have been successful in our grant application and enclosing a £1,000 cheque.

This now brings the total raised or promised to just under the £30,000 mark. This leaves about £2,000 more to be raised to ensure that we carry out the necessary ancillary work such as improvements to electrics, woodwork and the ringing room.

It is our hope to be able to invite the Society to hold an event at Drayton in the later part of next year. So in order for that to happen if you haven't given yet, a donation, however small, will be very welcome.

In September I am attending the PCC meeting to brief them on progress and to decide a timetable for the work needed to be done in the tower. Hopefully in the next newsletter I can report that the order has been placed to cast and install the 3 new bells.

Contact the appeal:

mfjohn1@ntlworld.com

07760 367570

Calling all young ringers!

by Anne Ogden

A youth ringing group within the Society has been meeting for some time, under the leadership of Matt Hardy. Through this we have been able to enter a team in the Ringing World National Youth Contest where groups of young ringers from across the country get the chance to meet others and ring at some amazing locations, e.g. Oxford this year and Worcester last year.

As well as the actual competition ringing, lots of other towers have open ringing and the atmosphere is really good.

Thanks to Matt's hard work, the team have performed well in the competition!

We are keen to keep a team going who can represent the Society so are now looking for young ringers who would like to join us.

We try and meet regularly on a week night at different towers throughout the Society and are also planning some extra 'team building' activities.

Matt has decided to step down this year so I will be taking over for now.

I've been involved with the young ringers for a couple of years and have seen how fun the practices can be so if you are a young ringer

or know of one in your tower then please get in touch with me, Anne Ogden on:

youthringing@lwascr.org.uk

The next event will be at Armitage on Saturday 29th August, 10.30 until midday. Hope to see some of you there!



The 2015 LWASCR youth team

National Youth Contest report

by Matt Hardy

On Saturday 11th July, eight young ringers and their supporters travelled to Oxford to take part in the Ringing World National Youth Contest. This is the third year the Society has entered a team, having previously competed in both York and Worcester, and some team members have now taken part in all three competitions. Our team included young ringers from

Darlaston, Lichfield St Michaels, Cannock, Brewood and Armitage.

Our team rang well in the 8 bell call change competition and scored a B grade, placed joint 4th and competing against 16 other teams. During the day the team also rang at many of the Oxford city centre towers including the Cathedral, attempted a quiz and those that had energy left to spare finished the day with games on Christchurch university playing fields.

Well done to all those who took part! Next year's competition will be in London.

Peal and quarter peal congratulations

An update from February Challenge Month – David Hall writes:

At Alrewas, our plan was to ring a quarter of Plain Bob Major with just our Sunday band. In the end because of illness and family commitments, three of our ringers were unavailable and Derek Giddings, Peter Olding and John Wybrew took their places.

The quarter was rung on Saturday 7th February at Alrewas – details here:

1344 Plain Bob Major

1. Jill E. Butcher
2. Peter W. Olding

3. Derek Giddings
4. John S. Wybrew
5. Lesley J. Hall
6. John E. Bark
7. David Hall
8. David Herschell (c)

Congratulations also to David Hall who rang in his first quarter of Plain Bob Royal at Cannock on 9th February.

Well done to Canon Andrew Stead and his wife Alison. On 19th April Alison rang her first quarter and Andrew his first inside on open tower bells:

1260 Plain Bob Doubles

1. Helen R. Jarvis
2. Canon Andrew M. Stead
3. Jordan M. Lawley
4. Lance G. Hill
5. Clive M. Smith (c)
6. Alison R. Stead



Pet Hughes rang her first peal at Armitage on 18th June. She was taught to ring by Roy Mowforth in 1973 and has been a loyal

member of the Penkrigde band ever since.

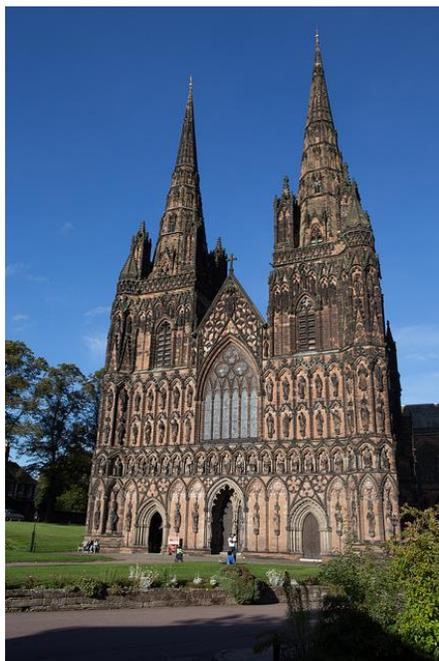


All change at the Cathedral

With effect from 1st September 2015, the Sunday service times at Lichfield Cathedral change and this affects ringing times, which change to:

Sunday morning: 1015-1055

Sunday afternoon: 1415-1455



A point of view: Is there a future for ringing?

by John Mulvey

What are people saying at the moment?

If you've been reading The Ringing World or looking at ringing sites on Facebook or other social media, you will be aware of the concern about the future of bell ringing. Many statistics have been produced indicating that ringing is in sharp decline; a fall in the number of peals and first peelers, an ageing profile of ringers as a whole and of tower captains in particular. The Ringing World has a declining readership and is facing financial difficulty and considering reducing publication to every two weeks.

How do we help to halt this decline or do we just accept it is happening and do the best we can for ourselves? Some say this outlook is merely being negative and does not help. "Be positive" say some. But adopting this mind set, without taking some action, is akin to the orchestra playing merry tunes, as the Titanic slides gracefully under the ocean.

A great many have suggested that contributing to this decline is the fact that institutions such as the Central Council and local ringing associations, formed in

the 19th Century, are not fit for purpose in the 21st and therefore should look for new ways to address the urgent problem of decline.

National response

In order to turn around the decline in numbers of ringers, there needs to be an emphasis on recruitment, training and retention. The big question is what role the Central Council, as our national body, and associations, on a local level need to play in promoting these aims?

In the last year or so, the Central Council has held open meetings in venues throughout England to hear the views of ringers and a report was made to the Central Council Annual Meeting in Hull at the end of May.

Our Reps will report back on the deliberations on this subject at the Society AGM in September. I am sure that they would welcome your views on how the Central Council could be better at supporting ringing at a national level.

If ringing is to attract more participants, is the present national administration made up of volunteers fit for that purpose? Other pastimes and sports have national bodies with paid full time officials and central administration.

The main thing preventing such an arrangement in ringing is finance. Ringers are used to participating in a hobby where costs are low; a few pounds each for a peal, no yearly or weekly

subscriptions expected for regular use of their church's bells. There is often a major debate and objections at Association AGMs if it is proposed to raise annual subscriptions by a few pounds. But in order to finance national full time officials, the Central Council would have to ask local associations to contribute a great deal more money. Is this something individual ringers in local towers see as something to which they are willing to contribute?

The Central Council may, as far as many Sunday service ringers in our local towers are concerned, be something distant and of no relevance to recruiting, training and retaining ringers. It has certainly lacked any ability to adapt to combat the decline in the number of ringers. The last great national initiative was to recruit more ringers in order to ring in the Millennium over 15 years ago.

In the last few years an attempt has been made, with the introduction of ITTS courses, to improve the standard of ringing tuition. This was mainly due to the efforts of a few enthusiastic individuals rather than the Central Council. This has not been greeted with wholehearted approval by the ringing community. Cries of "We've managed quite alright in the past" and "No one is telling me how I should teach" have been heard. But they are ignoring the fact that what has been done in the past is not effective now.

What's been happening at a local level?

Let us examine what things look like locally. I think the trends in our Society reflect the state of ringing nationally. With the demise of church choirs, which contained boy choristers, a major source of young recruits disappeared. If we examine the age profile in many towers there is a distinct shortage of ringers in the 20-40 age group.

There are still some towers with a group of school-aged ringers but these are very much the exception. A much larger proportion of these youngsters nowadays, rather than in the past, are the children of ringers. Also there are many more activities for this age group to take part in these days which could mean that they may be here today but gone tomorrow.

For the last few years, the greatest source of recruits has been the 50s or 60s age group, now known as "the baby boomers" They have retired early and are looking for something different to fill their time. Teaching this age group presents different problems to teaching youngsters and they tend to make slower progress. The recent rise in the retirement age in the public sector for teachers, nurses, local authority workers and civil servants from 60 to 65 or higher may see a drop in recruits coming forward from this age group and also the availability of experienced ringers with spare time available to teach.

Has our Society adapted to changing circumstances?

When I started ringing in the 1970s, the Society still had a very unwieldy means of making decisions. Apart from appointed officers, there was no committee to decide on policy. Decisions were made at the business meetings where every tower could send a representative. For well over 30 years ago now, decision making has been devolved to a committee who were able to adapt to changing circumstances.

We have also seen Society membership opened up to all who ring for services rather than just open to those who can ring changes. This has been more representative of those who ring in our Society area and has seen Society membership maintained or even slightly increased. But this may have had the effect of cloaking the decline in the total number of ringers in the area.

On the positive side, in recent years, 3 ITTS courses have been held at Tamworth which have supported and encouraged ringers to teach learners at local towers such as Alrewas, Brewood, St Michael's Lichfield and Trysull. But providing support such as this for local bands to progress is a continuous process and therefore these type of courses need to be offered on a regular basis.

Nationally, some ringers are debating whether local associations as they exist today, based on church boundaries are fit for purpose. Also they question

whether the old formula of monthly or bi-monthly events which revolve around ringing, service and tea is what the ringers in the area believe meet their needs. In any institution there is always the temptation to stick to what you know, it's safe and to devise a new formula would demand a lot more thought and effort. This Society, like many other associations, has faced for many years the difficulty of finding enough people willing to serve as officers or committee members. Therefore without people willing to take on responsibility change could be difficult.

Our neighbours in the St Martin's Guild a couple of years ago decided on a radical course of action. They no longer have monthly Guild meetings and all their efforts go into a training programme called "The Birmingham School of Bell Ringing" which takes place every Saturday at up to 4 towers in the Birmingham area. An article on the reasons why they adopted this approach and what they are trying to achieve has appeared in The Ringing World.

St Martin's Guild and other associations in the country have been brave enough to examine if what they provide for their membership is what will ensure that bell ringing, not only survives into the second half of this century, but prospers. Is it time that this Society discusses how it functions and is there need for change?

Is the future one where competent ringers huddle together in centres of excellence? They travel miles from their home villages on Sundays, past silent towers or ones that struggle. Thus, they avoid having to teach people to ring or ring in rounds and simple methods for learners. There are already places where this happens now. No one person has come up with a magic bullet to increase the number of ringers but being positive and doing what we have always done is not an option.

Perhaps the Society AGM in September at Aldridge will provide a suitable forum for members to express what they think the Society should do to support local towers. Is there a need for a change to the format of Society events? Let the Society Secretary know your opinions or better still come along to the AGM and express your views.

John Mulvey
mfjohn1@ntlworld.com

The secretary can be contacted using: sec@lwascr.org.uk

Ringling Master vacancy

Matt Hardy is stepping down this year, so we are seeking a new Ringling Master. If you are interested, or would like to nominate someone, please contact the Secretary, before the AGM: sec@lwascr.org.uk

We thank Matt for all his hard work

Diary dates

Please make a note of the following events, coming up (full details on the website):

- ✓ **29th August**, General Practice, Kings Bromley
- ✓ **15th September**, Tuesday Daytime Band
- ✓ **19th September**, Society AGM, Aldridge
- ✓ **17th October**, Training meeting (better striking)
- ✓ **20th October**, Tuesday Daytime Band
- ✓ **31st October**, Surprise Major Practice, Stafford
- ✓ **21st November**, Full Meeting, venue TBC



CC Amanda Slater

Bell restoration fund

Contact the Secretary to apply for a grant from the Bell Restoration Fund. Full details on how to apply are in the Society Report.

sec@lwascr.org.uk

Society Rope Bank

Recycle your old ropes by sending them to Andrew Ogden. Andrew will splice in new tail ends and sallies, or provide complete, newly recycled ropes to any Society tower that needs them. All we ask is that a donation is made to the Bell Restoration Fund. If your tower would like to make a deposit or withdrawal from the Rope Bank, please contact Andrew by phoning [07970 389590](tel:07970389590)

100 Club Update

Lucky winners of the 100 Club draw on 20th June were:

- ❖ 1st Blakenhall Tower
- ❖ 2nd Gill Lees
- ❖ 3rd Malcolm Quimby
- ❖ 4th Janet Bramall



If you'd like to try your luck and help raise money for the Bell Restoration Fund, please contact Linda Pick:

lindapick@totalise.co.uk or download an application form from the Society website.