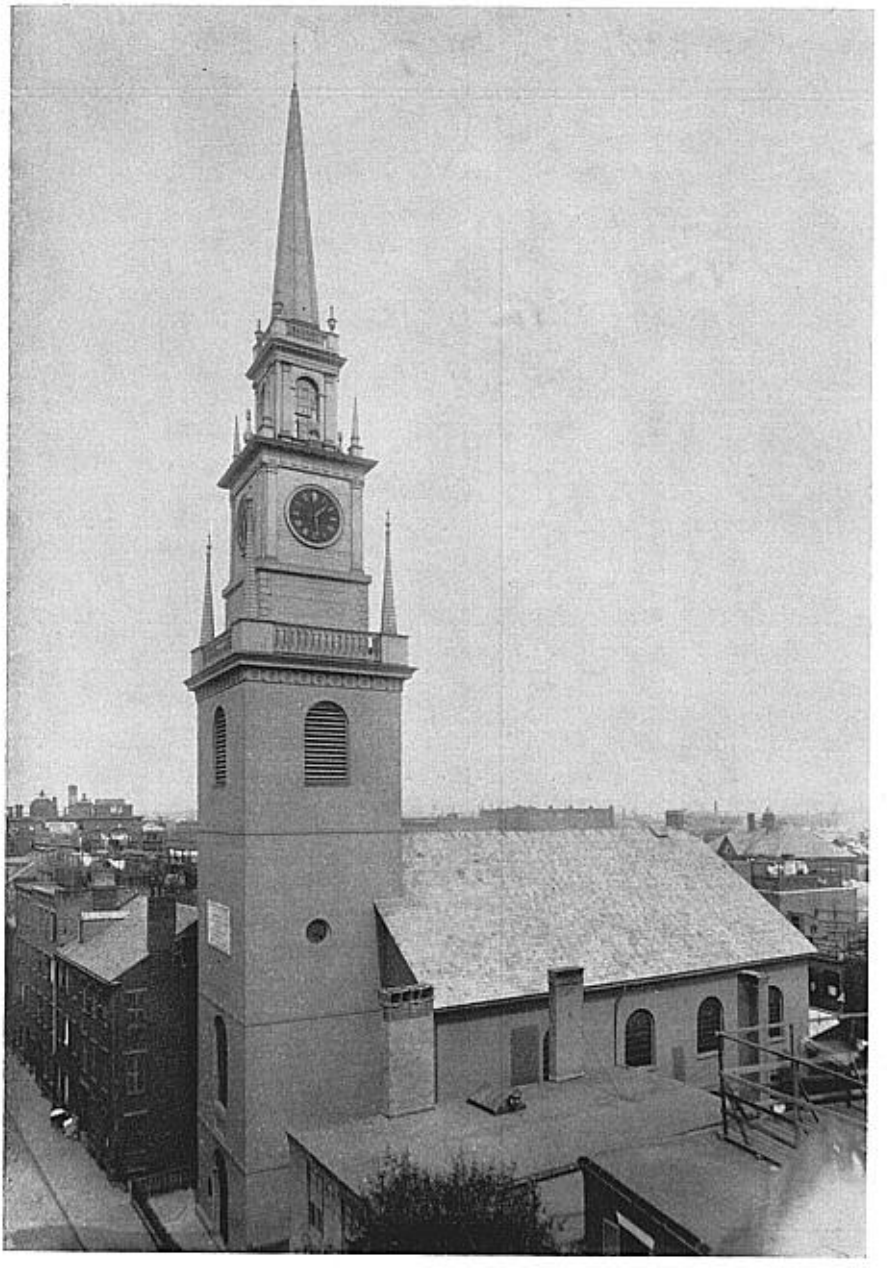

TOWER OF CHRIST CHURCH, BOSTON
Photograph taken 1900. Courtesy of the Bostonian Society.

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English Bells

By MARGARET H. SHURCLIFF

THE soft tone of a bell sounding across the countryside is a form of music so familiar to us all that one seldom stops to consider the intricate mechanical processes involved in producing a powerful musical vibration, pleasing to the ear both nearby and at a distance. To obtain the correct proportion of tin and copper which composes the bell metal, to best design the contour of the molds in which the bells are cast, to tune the bells, to hang the bells so they may be controlled with the least physical effort and finally to ring the bells, all these processes require the knowledge of skilled experts and afford possibilities for endless variations, the ultimate success of which may be detected only by a trained bell ear.

In England the occasion of the casting of a set of bells is as awe-inspiring as in the days of Schiller's "Lied von der Glocke." When the peal of eight bells for the Church of the Advent in Boston was cast, I was present in the foundry of Mears and Stainbank in Whitechapel, London. Peering into the furnace, I saw the mass of white-hot metal as a ladleful was extracted for sampling purposes. The tester, finding the mixture too brittle, ordered a little more copper. Two helpers appeared carrying between them a huge ingot of copper and thrust it into the molten metal where it rapidly dissolved. When all was ready a door was opened at the bottom of the furnace and the thick, glowing mass slowly made its way along a system of troughs arranged in the form of a main river with its tributaries. The metal disappeared down a hole at the end of the first tributary and gradually filled the underground mold of the heaviest bell. When the hot air and dust shot spitting out of the vent hole, a barricade was rapidly built at the head of the tributary and the endless stream flowed slowly on to the next branch. Thus noiselessly and without mishap the eight molds were filled with the homogeneous mixture of bell metal, as it is necessary to ensure the same quality of tone in all the bells of a peal.

When the molds are removed the bells are anxiously examined for imperfections in casting and are tested for mathematically correct harmonics. Besides the

tap note the old English bell has for overtones a major third, fifth and octave above and a hum tone a flat seventh below. The modern Simpson system of tuning has for overtones a minor third and fifth and octave with a hum tone a full octave below. A bell which possesses true overtones when first cast and requires no tuning is called a "Maiden Bell." But as a general rule tuning is necessary. Formerly a file in the hands of an expert tuner, working on the sound bow or thick part of the bell against which the tongue strikes, was the only method of lowering or raising the note. Recently a tuning lathe in which the bell is placed has come into general use. Bells are tuned to the true or natural scale slightly differing from the piano which is tuned to the scale of equal temperament. Before the days of Bach, the piano had different keyboards for the different scales and the notes were all toned true to the fundamental of each scale. Music written for so many keyboards was extremely difficult of execution. Realizing this, Bach composed "The Well-Tempered Clavier" for the purpose of testing a compromise system whereby the keyboards and notes were reduced in numbers. At the present time twelve notes only are used to represent all notes in an octave. One note, for instance, serves as A♯ $B^{\flat}$ and $C^{\flat\flat}$ though accurately interpreted they should be three notes and are still rendered as such by players of stringed instruments.

Unfortunately even the English bells are not always in tune. In the neighborhood of Westminster Abbey the boys were said to whistle out of tune and the blame was put squarely on the Abbey bells which for nearly two hundred years were noticeably off the key. However, in 1919 the bells were retuned and are no longer a cause of complaint.

In a set of eight bells the relative weights vary much less in English bells than American. The tenor or heaviest bell is about three times as heavy as the treble or lightest bell when cast in England, but when cast in this country the tenor weighs about eight times as much as the treble with the result that the tones of the lighter bells are overpowered by the deeper vibrations of the heavy bells.

The English bells when set for ringing rest mouth up. When the rope is pulled the bell makes a complete revolution and is struck by the swinging tongue on the upper side as the bell ascends. The ringer, in the ringing chamber some twenty feet below, holding the tufted bell rope checks the bell, balances her mouth up for an instant then pulls her off again for the next stroke. Thus the great volume of sound, with the resonant overtones, is thrown out first to one side then the other. To handle a bell weighing anywhere from five hundred pounds to three tons through the intricacies of change ringing requires a degree of skill achieved only after long practice. Tunes are out of the question on swinging bells as the interval of striking can be changed only slightly.

Bells of Christ Church, Boston

"This peal of eight bells is the gift of a number of generous persons to Christ Church in Boston, New England. Anno 1744 A.R."

"We are the first ring of bells cast for the British Empire in North America A.R. 1744."

Thus read the inscriptions on the first and third bells in the tower of Christ Church (Old North) on Salem Street in the North End of Boston.

Installing this set required special skill and Rudhall planned to send his work-

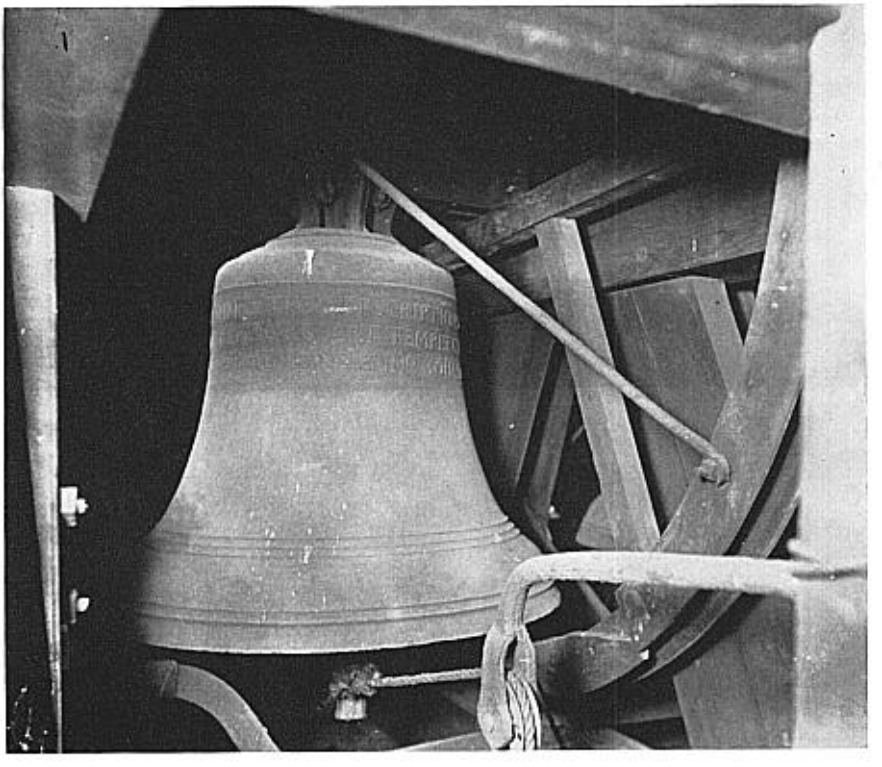
man with the bells. Circumstances beyond his control interfered as is shown by the following letter.

Mr. Gunter

Sir:

I am very sorry for the disappointment in not being able to prevail upon John Baker to go with ye bells (whom ever since they were first ordered I depended upon) for Baker's own part he would very willingly take the voyage, but ye moment the news came to his wife that the bells were sent for down to Bristol, she immediately swooned away to that degree that the people about her after great difficulty could scarce bring life into her, which affected her husband very much and with her persuasions after has prevailed upon him not to go (though quite entirely against his own inclinations) for she says if he does go 'twill be the death of her, and so upon his not going have sent a moddal of ye frame for your Carpenters to work by, and have likewise sent a written direction for putting the Headstocks and wheeles on ye bells.

There is a person in Philadelphia that is capable and has been concerned in England with Bell-hanging whom, if you can agree with, will do the business perhaps as well as Baker, if you'll be pleased to write to him you may direct to Henry Clarke at the Coach and horses opposite ye Stathouse, Philadelphia to whom if he comes sh^{d} be greatly obliged to you Sir, if you^{d} be so good as let him have ye Catalogues of bells which I have sent, or otherwise if he does not come, beg if you have any opportunity of sending them without any



ONE OF THE BELLS, CHRIST CHURCH, BOSTON
Halliday Historic Photograph.

expence, that you would be so kind as do it. I can think of nothing more for directions concerning ye bells and materialls than what I have already wrote down.

I have sent you a good Peal of Bells, and hope you will get ringers to have them well rung.

I return you a great many thanks for ye favour you have done me and heartily wish you good success with ye bells and am

Sir

Your most obliged
and Obedient Servant
Abell Rudhall

Bristol,
March ye 9th 1744

Tacked up on the wall of the ringing chamber was found an old contract which showed that a guild of ringers had been organized in 1750 and that they were to be allowed to ring the bells for two hours, once a week. The second name on the contract is that of Paul Revere. One of the stipulations in the contract reads "Provided we can have the whole care of the Bells."

This might explain why the tower of the Old North played such an important part in signaling on the night of April 18, 1775. Paul Revere though not a member of the church may have had access to the key of the tower.

My father, Arthur H. Nichols, was born on Stillman Street in 1840 almost under the tower of Christ Church. He was an enthusiastic listener to the bells as they rang for Sunday service and soon he was helping the sexton chime the tunes. Some of these are still familiar such as "Watchmen Tell us of the Night" and "Oh, dear, What can the matter be?" Even when my father was a student at Harvard he walked home Sundays in time to ring the bells.

Many years later while on a trip to England my father ascended to a ringing chamber while ringing was in progress and became greatly intrigued by the English art of change ringing. He was elected a member of the "Ancient Society of College Youths" founded in 1637 and he subscribed to the magazine *Bell News*.

On returning to Boston he learned that Christ Church was undergoing extensive restoration. He visited the Church to look at the bells and to his surprise he found eight well-worn holes in the floor under the bells and also an old brass ground truck with ball bearings made years before the modern ball bearing was patented.

Greatly excited by the possibility of starting English change ringing in Boston my father set to work to rehang the old bells. He enlisted the help of Bishop William Lawrence and together they raised sufficient funds. New bell ropes with their red, white and green tufting were imported from England. The repairs were completed just in time to celebrate the eighteenth of April, 1894. My father had collected eight Englishmen, all ringers and organized as the Old Colony Guild of Bell Ringers. They rang before and after the church service and hundreds gathered in the streets to hear the bells. They had not been rung since the day Marquis de Lafayette visited Boston till the nineteenth of April, 1894.

The members of the Old Colony Guild met regularly, sometimes at Christ Church and sometimes at our house for hand bell ringing. It was not till I was through school that I had my first lesson on how to handle the rope of a swinging bell.

The rope was new and stiff and did not rise and fall evenly. The floor of the ringing chamber was covered with a thick layer of dust and grime. Every stroke as the rope coiled on the floor picked up soot which was deposited on my hands and face as the rope descended. There was plenty of excitement and al-

most too much exercise on my part. I either overpulled my bell and then had to check it or I failed to pull hard enough and the bell began to fall. A green ringer is sure to be the hottest and most exhausted of the band.

Although the Italians in the neighborhood enjoyed the sound of the bells our practice ringing was not universally welcomed. The librarian in a nearby public library considered the ringing a nuisance and complained. This was quite a blow to my father but the church authorities asked us to give up our practice night and ring only on special occasions.

Fortunately in 1900 the bells which I had seen cast in London were installed in the Church of the Advent in Boston. We were asked to ring for the blessing of the bells. We had several practice evenings but always with the tongues clamped. Bells are supposed to be sounded for the first time after the service of the blessing.

While the service took place in the church below we stood by our bells high up in the ringing chamber. The band consisted of six skilled Englishmen and Mr. S. F. Batchelder and myself, two novices. Our bells were set and ready to be pulled off. Finally the electric light flickered, our conductor shouted "She's going—gone" as he pulled off his bell and we in quick succession all pulled at our ropes. The tongue of a bell does not strike as a bell drops but hits the upper lip as the bell ascends. This causes an appreciable interval between the pull and the stroke and the larger the bell the greater the interval. Generally one is familiar with the sound of one's bell and after a few rounds one can correct any uneveness. But at this important ceremony we had never been privileged to hear our bells. The clashing was terrific and we were too bewildered to bring order out of chaos. "Stand!" called the conductor and we all did our best to set our bells as soon as possible.

Fortunately we did not have to face the congregation as they left the church. The bells had received their blessing and their voices had been heard.

For some time we practiced enthusiastically one evening a week when again complaints arose. Dinner parties were disturbed, children were kept awake and what were we trying to celebrate anyway?

The bells were hung in a low steeple, close up to dwelling houses and they did send forth a volume of inexplicable sound as we practiced our change ringing.

Ringing in England

Discouraged by the limited opportunity for ringing practice in Boston, in the spring of 1902 my father announced he was going to take me to London where "the more they ring the better they like it." I did not at first relish this break with my anticipated summer of tennis in Cornish, New Hampshire, but my father's enthusiasm for the trip and his complete faith that I was made of ringing stuff swept me along. On July second we boarded the *SS. New England* at Charlestown and three or four boys from the Ellis Memorial Club came to the pier to see me off. As the parting whistle pierced the air there were certainly tears in my eyes.

* * * * * * *

Papa brought his set of heavy hand bells with him and soon he formed among selected passengers an enthusiastic group of ringers so that I could continue practicing the Grandsire method. Al-

though I did not then realize it, my father's ambition in taking me to England was to have me ring a peal.

Before telling of my struggles, I shall try to explain just what a peal is.

In the early seventeenth century there were seldom more than six bells in a tower and they were generally rung in rounds; that is, in scale beginning with the treble or highest bell and going straight down the scale to the tenor or lowest bell. In writing changes a bell is always designated by its number. The position of the number in a line indicates when it is rung in relation to the other bells. A scale is written 1 2 3 4 5 6 and a change is written 2 1 3 5 4 6 In other words at the change, number two bell rings first and number one rings second. Number three still rings in third place, etc. Call changes were the first changes to be rung and were known by name. The conductor called "Queens" and the bells rang

1 3 5 7 2 4 6 8
7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

After that had been rung a few minutes the next, Tittums, was called

1 5 2 6 3 7 4 8
5 1 6 2 7 3 4 8

Then Whittington

1 2 3 5 7 4 6 8
1 2 7 5 3 4 6 8

and another called Tommy

1 3 2 5 4 7 6 8
1 3 2 5 4 7 6 8

The conduct of ringers in the steeple was not always in keeping with the quiet dignity expected in a place of worship. It was the custom to post warnings in the tower and even to impose penalties as is shown by this poem dated 1650.

If that to ring you do come here
You must ring well with hand and ear.
If that you ring in spur or Hat
A quart of ale you must pay for that
And if a bell you overthrow
Sixpence is due before you go.
And if you curse or sware, I say
A shilling's due without delay.
And if you quarrel in this place,
You shall not ring in any case.

At that time John Bunyan was an enthusiastic ringer as is shown by two of his poems on a Ring of Bells. After his conversion Bunyan felt obliged to give up ringing, though not without great reluctance. The following is taken from his autobiography in "Grace Abounding."

Now you must know, that before this I had taken much delight in ringing, but my conscience beginning to be tender, I thought such practice was but vain, and therefore forced myself to leave it; yet my mind hankered; wherefore I would go to the steeplehouse and look on, though I durst not ring; but I thought this did not become religion neither; yet I forced myself and would look on still. But quickly after I began to think, How if one of the bells should fall? Then I chose to stand under a main beam, that lay overthwart the steeple from side to side, thinking I might stand sure; But then I thought again, should it fall with a swing, it might first hit the wall, and then, rebounding upon me, might kill me for all this beam. This made me stand in the steeple door; and now, thought I, I am safe enough; for if a bell should then fall, I can slip out behind these thick walls, and so be preserved notwithstanding.

So after this I would yet go to see them ring, but would not go any farther than the steeple door; but then it came into my head, How if the steeple itself should fall? and this thought (it may, for ought I know, when I stood and looked on), did continually so shake my mind, that I durst not stand at the steeple door any longer, but was forced to flee, for fear the steeple should fall on my head.

In the seventeenth century Fabius Stedman, a ringer at St. Benet's tower in Cambridge, England, invented a system which could be memorized and by which all possible changes on any number of bells could be rung. Each ringer could

vary his position by one step at a time without conflicting with another bell and the sound effect was pleasing and harmonious.

In 1668 Stedman published his famous book called *Tintinnalogia* dedicated to the Noble Society of College Youths. An extract from the opening paragraph reads "for within these Fifty or Sixty Years last past, changes were not known, or thought possible to be rang."

With the discovery of the Science of change ringing, men from all walks of life joined ringing bands among which there was keen competition. New composers appeared and today in a book entitled *Standard Methods* there are diagrams of twenty-five different methods by which a peal may be rung.

On seven bells there are 5,040 possible changes. To score a peal every change must be rung and no change can be rung twice. The first recorded peal took place in 1715 and required three hours and eighteen minutes of steady ringing.

On eight bells there are 40,320 possible changes and in 1767 two energetic bands joined forces and rang all the changes in twenty-seven hours. This peal on eight bells still holds the record in length of time and the number of changes, but single bands are continuously attempting new record breakers. On the twelve heavy bells of Southwark Cathedral 12,675 changes have been successfully rung and the longest peal of 23,363 changes of Stedman Caters on ten bells took twelve hours and twenty-five minutes.

The Grandsire method is one of the easier methods and I concentrated on learning the path of the different bells.

The following in which the treble is in the plain hunt and goes from the lead to seventh place and back again is called a lead, and shows the pattern of Grandsire Triples.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2	1	3	5	4	7	6	8
2	3	1	4	5	6	7	8
3	2	4	1	6	5	7	8
3	4	2	6	1	7	5	8
4	3	6	2	7	1	5	8
4	6	3	7	2	5	1	8
6	4	7	3	5	2	1	8
6	7	4	5	3	1	2	8
7	6	5	4	1	3	2	8
7	5	6	1	4	2	3	8
5	7	1	6	2	4	3	8
5	1	7	2	6	3	4	8
1	5	2	7	3	6	4	8
1	2	5	3	7	4	6	8
2	1	5	7	3	6	4	8
2	5	1	3	7	4	6	8

It is seen at first glance that the ringer of the tenor has an easy time. He always rings last as his bell is just a "covering" bell.

The next easy bell is the treble. He rings in regular progression second, third, etc., strikes twice in seventh place and then goes back to the lead. Number two is likewise a plain course bell until a "bob" is called and then it goes into the work. All the bells follow a plain course till the treble leaves the lead when the bell in third place strikes third again and returns to the lead and the other bells dodge. Following these simple rules the bells will come into rounds at the end of seventy changes. A conductor with his marvelous skill will call either "Bob" or "Single" at a certain lead. More complicated rules will come into action and new sets of changes will be started till finally the bells come round after ringing all the changes.

On reaching London my father and I settled in at Brook's Private Hotel, Surrey Street, Strand. It was small and of the variety where you are charged five shillings for breakfast and apartment and sixpence for a sponge bath, hot or cold. The breakfast served at one large table was a hearty meal of bacon, eggs and fried sole. Afterwards the guests almost entirely English retired to the drawing room and chatted. We made good friends with Mr. Barnes, an interesting man from Australia, and a bearded Boer General.

My father lost no time in notifying his ringing friends that his young and hopeful daughter was in London and all set to learn to ring. The first belfry we climbed was in the Tower of St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green in the Whitechapel region famous for its crooks and poverty.

Much out of breath after climbing the circular stone stairs leading up to the ringing chamber I was introduced to the ringers who had already gathered. Matthew Wood, a well-known ringer of over sixty, was the conductor. He asked me if I would like to have a go at the bells and which bell I preferred.

I spoke for the third and then set to work to raise her. I knew that was the best way to get the feel of a bell and to learn the exact place to grasp the tufting. After four or five minutes of hard pulling my bell was raised and set, but the rope was too long. I was so much taller than the average ringer that nearly always I had to have the rope shortened. This is quite necessary as otherwise the tail of the rope flapped in my face.

Ringing is exercise and the day was warm. Before starting each ringer removed his coat and dickey and rolled up his sleeves. All I could do was roll up my sleeves and hope my shirttails would not rise above my skirt band.

After the bells are set, each ringer raised on his toes reaches high up on the tufting and pulls slightly on the rope. The conductor says "Here goes Gransire." The treble ringer shouts "She's going, gone" and we all pull off our bells at what we judged to be the correct interval to produce an even scale.

In contrast to our ringing at the Church of the Advent these bells rang with perfect precision. Mine was the only bell out of place and I soon corrected that. When the conductor judged the bells were running smoothly came the exciting moment when he shouted "Go." For a while I kept my place, but my experience in change ringing was almost zero. The bells ring in very rapid succession all seven striking in one revolution of the tenor. It was difficult to pick out the bell I should follow as my rope sight was poor. There were times, too, in the excitement, when I lost control of my bell and it rang sooner than I intended. To the other ringers this plain course of Grandsire Triples was child's play. On my part it took every bit of concentration and every muscle I possessed.

The ringers all kept an eye on me and tried to help me. Suddenly the ringer of number five took one hand recklessly off the rope and beckoned to me. How was I to know that was his way of telling me that he and I were dodging? The would-be helpful coaching, shouted at me in cockney bell-ringing vernacular, drowned by the noise of the bells, was completely unintelligible to me. How was I to know that "Let her go" meant not to pull so hard and "Let her go up" meant to pull harder. Fortunately a less excitable ringer stood behind me and his

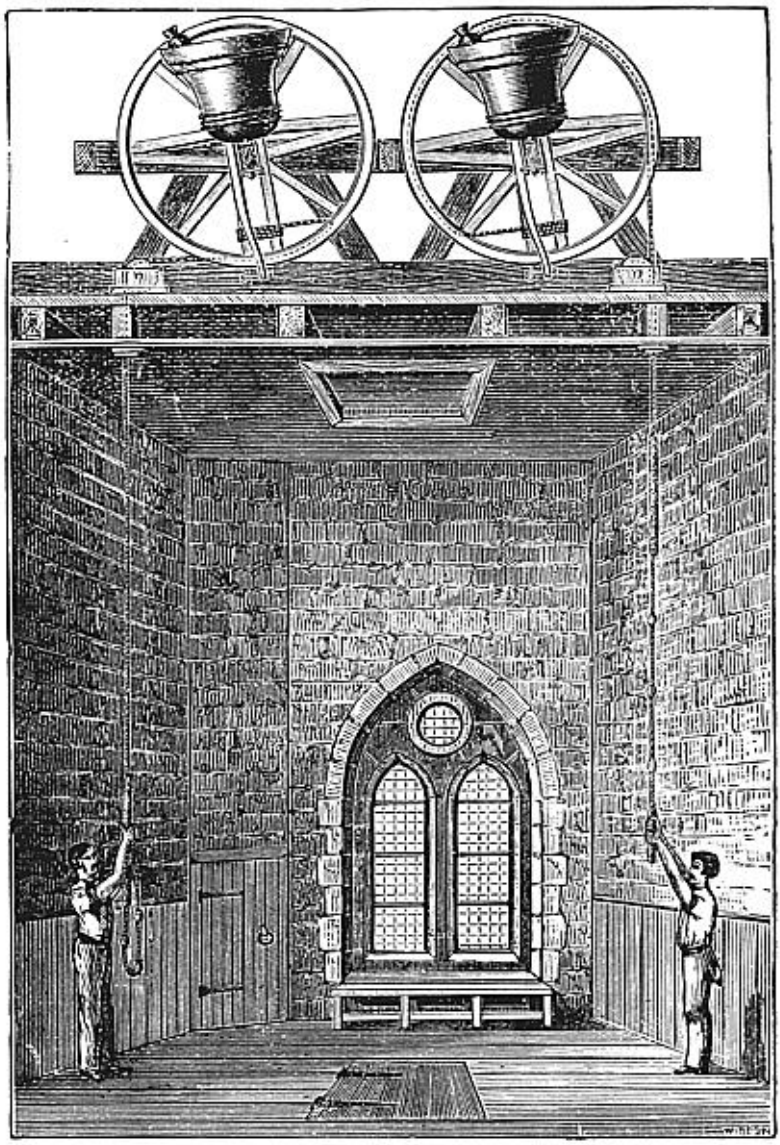


ILLUSTRATION OF HAND-STROKE AND BACK-STROKE

Frontispiece of William Snowdon's *Rope-Sight; An Introduction to the Art of Change-Ringing* (London, 1900; 5th ed.).

directions really helped. It is a breach of etiquette to stop ringing till the conductor gives the command. I simply could not say "I am lost; let's start again." At last he called "Stand" and without the least difficulty all bells were set except number three.

We tried again and again. Each time we got a little further before the conductor called "Stand." After a while Mr. Wood said to me in most polite cockney, "I 'ope you don't moind if I swear at you Miss but eye'nt used to ringing with a loidy." By that time no amount of swearing could have deterred me from ringing.

We came home hot and tired but my father was pleased with my performance and I was determined to master the art of change ringing.

Invitations to ring were received and daily Papa and I would start off by train or bus to some remote church on the outskirts of London. As my ringing improved I was asked to join the Middlesex County Association, The Royal Cumberland Youths (1747) and the Ancient Society of College Youths (1637), all of which I accepted. Each Society has at least one practice night and I never lacked an opportunity for daily practice and twice on Sundays. At St. Mary's Abbots, Kensington, I rang my first quarter peal of 1,260 changes in three-quarters of an hour.

The ringing was nearly upset by the entrance of two ladies in the tower. They waited quietly till we were through, then introduced themselves. One was Lady Burford Hancock and the other a girl my age named Mabel Gilbanks. Her father was the rector of a church in Stourbridge and she herself was one of the bell ringers. She was very cordial and asked us surely to look her up in Stourbridge, which we did later. Mabel Gilbanks was the only lady ringer I saw all the six weeks I was in England.

My muscles improved with daily practice but once in a while I had to cancel a ringing engagement on account of blisters. As the ringers were all workingmen we only met for ringing in the late afternoon and evening. That left the mornings free so I took lessons in electricity at the London Polytechnic. Mr. Frisell, my teacher, never pronounced an H where it should be and invariably put it in where it didn't belong, all of which kept me interested in every syllable he uttered.

Our search for meals was time consuming and unsatisfactory until we found Hermelins on the Strand. A French restaurant where a delicious lunch was served, always ending with creamy ice cream, was a pleasing contrast to the inevitable boiled dinner which made no concessions to hot weather. Sundays were almost fast days as none of our local restaurants were open.

Mr. Challis F. Winney, a worker at the Broadwood Piano Company and an outstanding member of the College Youths, took me under his special tutelage and coached me day after day on tower bells, switching me from one bell to another to force me to learn the principle of the method and not to learn by heart the work of any special bell. When the practice hour at the church was over we sometimes went to a nearby public house where the men quenched their thirst in a smoke-filled barroom. Then we retired to a small upstairs room and set to work for another hour's practice on handbells.

On a Sunday afternoon we met at Mr. Winney's home in Fulham to try for a peal on handbells. I chose the easi-

est bells, seven and eight, and in two and one half hours we scored a peal of Grandsire Triples with excellent striking. Mr. Winney's mother and sister served us a hearty tea with ham and bread and butter after which Mr. Winney suggested we try for a peal of Stedman. We all accepted with alacrity and tapped off a second peal in another two and a half hours. After which my father who had sat silently umpiring both peals said, "Please don't suggest any more ringing tonight." For once he had reached the limit of his power of enjoyment.

The ringing of two handbell peals in a day was considered a feat and Mr. Hughes, the owner of the handbells on which we had performed, very generously presented me with the bells. They were a set of ten bells of an exceptionally fine tone.

Finding my progress in ringing was satisfactory my father relaxed enough to allow us to see a few friends. We went to visit Lady Scott at St. Albans. Her daughter Lilian had visited us in Boston. There I took part in a quarter peal rung at St. Peter's Church.

The coronation ceremony for King Edward VII was scheduled for August ninth and Papa decided that was a good day to get out of London and avoid the crowds, so I missed the fun of watching the Coronation procession. We only saw the empty chairs everywhere and littered streets on our return.

* * * * * * *

When I was considered sufficiently proficient in change ringing, arrangements were made for me to try for my first peal with the College Youths. We met at six o'clock at St. Mary's, Acton, and by 6:15 the bells were going well and we started to ring a peal of Grandsire Triples. All went well for about two hours. Then a little excitement occurred and the conductor called "Stand." He had discovered that two bells had exchanged places, presumably anxiety about my bell had caused the mix-up. Heated argument followed as is customary and each ringer was positive the fault was not his. Gloom prevailed and we all went home after arranging to meet again at the same tower the following week.

A few days later I tried again for a peal with the Middlesex Association at the Church of St. Matthew, Upper Clopton. My father as usual sat on a bench in the tower and the next day he wrote home the following account of that memorable evening.

"At 6:20 P.M. the ringers having got together, the bells were raised and ringers assigned to their posts by Mr. Brighton, who was to act as conductor. To Margaret was given the third bell. The ringers of the two trebles, Pratt and Eden, struck me as very young but I was told the former had rung in more than sixty successful peals of the method about to be tried, while the second was a skilled conductor. As the only privileged spectator in the tower, I held the watch while the tower doors were securely bolted to keep out any intrusive stragglers. Of course Margaret was a very uncertain quantity and was sure to be a constant source of anxiety to the others who had never seen a woman ring and were naturally doubtful as to her powers of endurance and her capacity for retaining a level head and acting promptly in the emergencies sure to arise. And her position, an inexperienced beginner among performers of the highest repute, all strangers to her, was em-

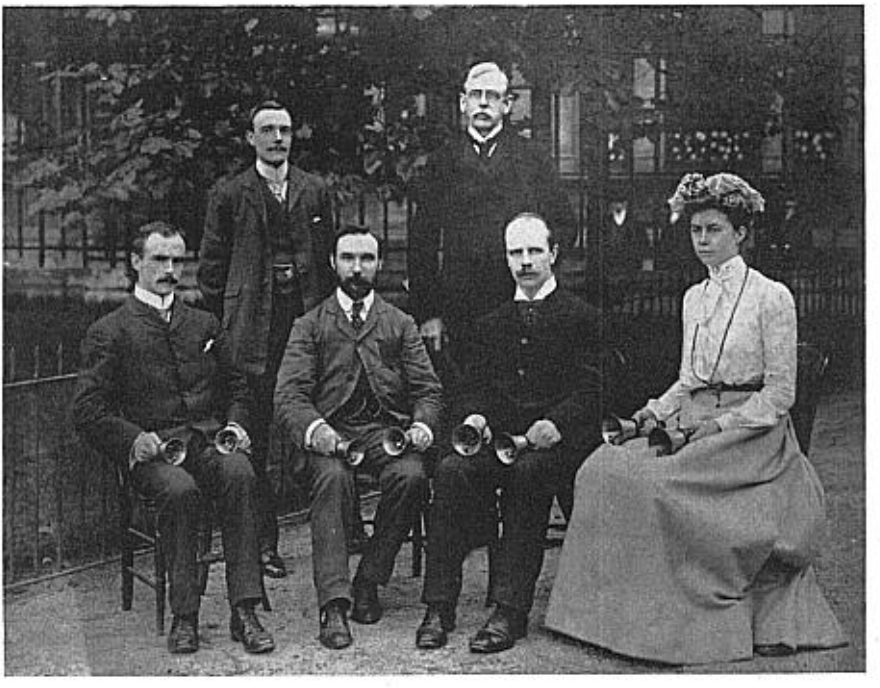
barrassing, for the slightest fumble or hesitation would be instantly noted and the loud call necessary to set her aright might disconcert her and lead to hopeless confusion. One of the brothers, Pye, was put therefore on her left at number four to pilot her through the difficult places. The chances of success were further lessened by the fact that the method to be rung, Stedman, was the one in which she was least proficient. The start off was far from assuring, and two successive attempts ended within a few moments in a hopeless tangle, which led the conductor to suggest after the bells had been stopped, 'Perhaps, Miss, you would profer to try "Grandsire" ' (a less intricate method). Margaret, not disposed to give in, appealed for one more trial, a request which amused and pleased the men, and accordingly at 6:29 the leader having shouted 'Go it again,' the bells swung off into changes, and the compass being gradually gauged and improved the striking soon became perfect while the sequence of changes with increased interval after each sixteenth stroke became as regular as the notes of a music box. Margaret's good striking imparted an air of confidence to the men who no longer thought it necessary to watch her movements while she settled down into steady, quiet work, nothing being heard but the even music of the belfry, the rise and fall of the ropes, and the occasional bob-call of the conductor. Thus things ran smoothly along with only an occasional error of interval or in one instance the omitting of a bob-call instantly observed and corrected by some of the men who, as well as the conductor, kept count of the course ends, when, all at once, the ringer at number two, who was apparently engrossed in Margaret's work with the friendly notion of easing her dodging, failed to grasp his tufting at handstroke, his bell having cast the rope, and his bell thus unchecked at a critical moment, rolled over, rebounded against the stop stay and going wild caused the greatest confusion and dismay, for the peal was now within three-fourths of an hour of its completion. Great excitement at once ensued among the men for this vexatious accident seemed irremediable and with any ordinary band extrication from this maze would have been out of the question. Not so easily baffled, however, were these old ringers. Holding up their bells while the delinquent ringer, springing for his rope, brought his bell to its proper position and indicated that he was all right for the next change, the shouting of the ringers heard above the clashing of the bells signified to each one just what was to be done in this emergency. Meanwhile Margaret kept a level head and maintained her count, and to my surprise and relief on the following change the correct sequence was resumed and for the remaining three-quarters of an hour the ringing was most excellent.

"At 9:29 P.M. the bells came 'home,' that is they came back to opening change, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, which marked the five thousand forty changes of the complete peal accomplished in three hours less one minute. The conductor shouted, 'That's all. Stand!' and the bells were raised to the balance and thus brought to rest.

"Margaret now became the recipient of congratulations on the part of the men who, being of phlegmatic temperament are usually quite reticent. 'Admirably done' cried the ringer of the tenor, to whom the bunching of the bells at the time of the trouble had brought very hard work, causing him to labor at his rope for a considerable time. And each of the men, some in rather an unpolished

way, had something agreeable to say in appreciation of Margaret's efforts. Before parting an appointment was made to afford her an evening's practice on handbells when there will be another attempt at a peal.

ever, to minimize the discomfort and by the time we reached the hotel, having returned by steam train and omnibus, she was clamoring for something to eat having taken no nourishment whatever since the lunch hour."



LONDON TOWER BELL RINGERS WITH MISS MARGARET HOMER NICHOLS AND DR. A. H. NICHOLS (REAR RIGHT) OF BOSTON

Photograph taken August 21, 1902, in the garden west of the Law-Courts, near St. Clement Danes, London.

"Margaret came out of this prolonged effort in better condition than I supposed possible. She was certainly overheated for the ringing chamber was imperfectly ventilated and the night was close; her hands had developed eight large blisters from steady contact with the rope, while her back muscles were so stiff that at first she could hardly bend to sit down. A successful issue of the affair served, how-

The second attempt for a peal of Grandsire Triples at Acton was a success as was a third peal at the Church of St. Magnus, London Bridge. In that tower a peal board was later set up recording the names of other ringers, the umpire and the time in which the peal was rung and customary items. I wonder if the tower survived the blitz.

I also rang a third peal on handbells

with the Middlesex Youths after several unsuccessful attempts.

As far as I have ever been able to discover I have the honor of being the first citizen of the United States to ring any kind of a peal, and I just missed being the first woman.

Nowadays a woman ringing in the belfry is an ordinary sight and peals have been rung consisting of women only. One young prodigy, Jill Poole, rang a peal of Grandsire Caters taking nearly four hours when she was only thirteen years old.

In the *Bell News* of August 23, 1902, are recorded four peals which I rang in four days; Stedman Triples at the Church of St. Matthew, Upper Clopton, Grandsire Triples at the Church of St. Mary, Acton, and the two peals, one in each method on handbells, at the house of Mr. Challis F. Winney, Harbledown Road, Fulham.

Also in the column notes on Peals in reference to the handbell peals the *Bell News* says, "It is worthy of note that Miss Nichols is the first lady ringer to score a peal of Stedman Triples double-handed." Another paragraph says, "The Peal at Upper Clopton—This, the first peal of Miss Margaret H. Nichols of Boston, U.S.A. after a comparatively brief study of the method, is almost unique in the annals of the Exerasi. It is not often that a peal of Stedman Triples is rung as a first peal in any circumstances, but when a young lady comes triumphantly through the ordeal, it speaks volumes for her ability, and stamps her as no ordinary ringer. The peal was rung practically without a hitch, save for the slipping wheel of the rope of the second bell. . . . There is something poetical in the fact that a daughter of the land of the Stars and Stripes has, in the heart of the Empire of Great Britain, taken part in a peal upon church bells which has been rung to celebrate the coronation of our King."

Epilogue

In the spring of 1954 I was able to get together at 66 Mount Vernon Street, Boston, representatives of several bands of ringers. As so many ringing groups were springing up all over the United States we thought it would be a good plan to form an American Guild. The name on which we settled was The American Guild of English Handbell Ringers. We had several carillonneurs from a distance present, and I as chairman rushed the business so all would have a chance to ring. I wanted the carillonneurs, all skilled musicians, to have the new experience of ringing on handbells. They were more skillful and more enthusiastic than I had dared hope, and a good time was had by all. My idea of a perfect business meeting.

As it is always beneficial and interesting to hear all kinds of ringers and exchange ideas, we decided to hold a ringing Festival at Castle Hill, Ipswich. We had aimed at getting twenty-five ringers together at our first Festival and just barely reached that number. Castle Hill proved an ideal spot for a meeting place for young and old. We have been fortunate to be able to hold our Festivals there every subsequent August on the week end before Labor Day. We now are obliged to limit our week-end guests to two hundred and have many more applications.

Castle Hill, a large house on the top of a high hill overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, a three-mile stretch of beach and sand dunes and with extensive grounds

which provide space for outdoor concerts, is a perfect setting for our guests. About two hundred persons arrive Friday afternoon and leave Sunday. Friday we have an evening concert in the ballroom followed by a dance. Saturday serious classes are held for beginners and more advanced students.

Saturday evening we give our big concert on the terrace which is always well attended by the public. We have not only local bands but ringers from Battle Creek, Michigan, or from Georgia and other remote spots. Some add singing and organ to the ringing. All groups wear costumes and we really put on a first-class show.

The American Guild now has a membership of over one hundred and sixty coming from nearly every state in the Union, and judging from the letters I receive they all have more engagements than they can fulfill.