

# **0 – 50 in Four Years: The Story of St Paul's Birmingham and the St. Martin's Guild's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

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as published in  
*The Ringing World* issue 5076: August 8<sup>th</sup> 2008  
[www.ringingworld.co.uk](http://www.ringingworld.co.uk)

St Paul's Church Birmingham first featured in *The Ringing World* – on the front cover – on 7 January 2005; oddly, perhaps, for then it possessed no ring of bells, and never had done. But its appearance related to plans to mark the St Martin's Guild's special anniversary: a new ring was to be installed there. As a project that looked towards the future, this idea had received wide support in the Guild and in the church, and an appeal for funds had been launched a few weeks earlier.

At that moment it was unclear how long it would be before any bells were cast – or indeed before any tangible evidence of the proposed ring came into view. But by the end of that celebratory year this new Birmingham belfry had begun to establish itself as a workshop intensively put to use in developing the basis of a local band, and as a peal-ringing venue. Since then progress has continued towards the full scope of its future as a centre of ringing teaching and performance. In January 2008 the local band had a successful first outing – a Saturday visiting five towers in northeast Warwickshire. And now another milestone has been passed, appropriately on Henry Johnson Dinner day: the fiftieth peal has been rung in the tower.

So the new arrival shows all the signs of excellent health and prospects that we could have wished! This is a good moment to thank and congratulate all those who have made this possible, and to present, as an example which may be useful to others, an account of how we have reached this stage in what seems a short four years. It is also an opportunity to recall how the project fitted into the Guild commemorating its anniversary in 2005, and to give (with abject apologies on my part) particulars of three peals which it was my intention to report in the *RW* much sooner.

In one of his historical articles (*RW* 2005 p.3) Richard Jones traced the St Martin's Guild family tree back to the Birmingham ringing scene in its earliest days, and from this it is clear that the date of foundation is somewhat arbitrarily based on the first true peal in 1755 – there had been plenty of ringing before then. Should we honour an earlier date? *Aris' Birmingham Gazette* reported that a 5040 of Grandsire Triples was rung in the tower of St Martin's on 11th of July 1753. The band is not known, and neither is the composition; but the latter has long been thought to be the false one published in *Campanologia Improved*. In any case, the St. Martin's Society of the 1820s decided not to include the performance in its peal book which was newly written up at that time.

Birmingham ringers have often enjoyed anniversaries and are generally not concerned as to whether a performance will lead to a line in a peal book! So eight ringers met on the exact 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary and repeated the false peal, and I include details here for the sake of completeness:

## **St. Martin's Guild for the Diocese of Birmingham**

**Birmingham**, West Midlands

St Martin

Friday, 11 July 2003 in 2h 56m (9)

### **5040 Grandsire Triples**

|   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| 1 | Richard L Jones        |
| 2 | Alan S Burbidge        |
| 3 | Michael J Freebody     |
| 4 | Christopher A Munnings |
| 5 | Roderick W Pipe        |
| 6 | Charles AS Webb        |
| 7 | Richard B Grimmett (C) |
| 8 | Simon DG Webb          |

Rung on the 250th anniversary of the first recorded peal rung in Birmingham. The composition is false.

The Guild decided to remain with the 1755 founding date and suitable anniversary projects were discussed for 2005.

### **March-November 2004: initial moves**

Around the beginning of 2004 the Keltek Trust had told us about the availability of a chime of eight of good pedigree (Taylors 1938) at the redundant Cradley Heath Methodist Church. Having a different weight profile to a ring of bells, such an eight is best split to form the basis of two rings. We immediately expressed interest and started to look for a suitable tower or two.

Birmingham is a relatively modern city. Its older churches, which are mostly parish churches of villages long since swallowed up, are generally quite well stocked with bells, and there are few empty towers capable of taking more than a very light ring. One of these few stood out from the rest – St Paul's church, situated in the historic Jewellery Quarter of Birmingham, at the north end of Church Street (where Thomas Thurstans once lived). A nearby pub had served as the HQ for Birmingham ringers for some years in the 1970s and 80s, and late night chat had often moved to the question of the vacant tower up the hill, and how George Fearn had once considered it as a possible home for the bells of Bishop Ryder's (reputedly saying "we'll be able to tan them every night").

In March 2004 I made a quick call to the vicar, and it produced immediate results – whilst clutching his mobile phone, the Revd. Tom Pyke's enthusiasm over-brimmed and he successfully demolished a small castle of tins in his local delicatessen. Tom had started to learn to ring as a teenager at Llandaff Cathedral, and consequently had great affinity for ringers and bell-ringing. I met with Tom and we agreed, with subsequent PCC approval, to establish a separate charity (the St Paul's Bells Installation Fund) which would have three ringers and three church members as trustees. These comprised the Vicar himself, and two key members of the church, John Sawkill and Frances Jones; and for the ringers Alan Burbidge, Stephen Shipley and myself. The trustees and a few others, recruited as necessary, would also form the working group which would provide the necessary skills in fund-raising, financial management, public relations, technical requirements and programming etc.. Rod Pipe, plus two people with day-to-day involvement at St. Paul's, Jean Stephens and Maurice Walters, were initially co-opted. There is no doubt that the group we assembled embodied an impressive array of relevant skills and experience, and the devotion with which they gave their time played the crucial role in the success – and the rapid progress – of the whole project.

Good planning, we agreed, was vital. Before the launch we needed to have a plan – What? Why? How Much? When? Who by?

A ring of ten was chosen on the basis that Birmingham city centre already has a 16, a 12 and an 8. A smallish 10 would be of great benefit to the local ringers; and as part of the installation project, a room below the new ringing chamber would be brought back from dereliction as an additional facility – of special usefulness in connection with the training mission we held in mind.

A suitably appealing title for the project soon emerged: "A Voice for St Paul's", which seemed well to express the ambition, relating to the silent state of the well-known steeple in the heart of the historic Jewellery Quarter. The Vicar used this especially effectively in the publicity he engaged in. £140,000 was needed to be raised to pay for the bells, frame, installation, clock and the major task of refurbishing the interior of the tower. This target figure was divided proportionately, the amount donors would be asked for relating to the size of bell. For the four trebles, individual rather than company sponsorship was to be sought. Whilst we knew the back four of the Cradley chime would serve very well as the back four of the new ring, we felt it likely that donors would be easier to find for newly cast bells. This proved true and the 1938 bells were in due course gratefully returned to the Keltek Trust.

### **November 2004-June 2005: raising the cash**

A launch was planned: two identical evenings, the first for local business leaders and well-known Birmingham names, the second for the congregation and local community. Press releases were typed up, and television stations, radio stations and local newspapers invited along. A colour pamphlet was produced and a website designed. We also created our own shortlist of potential donors: people and organisations with whom we had some contact and who we felt would be well disposed to our aims; these would be people to whom we should pay special attention. In other words, we identified where we hoped the funds would come from, and so developed ideas about how to sell the scheme.

The VIP evening began the appeal on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2004, and provided excellent omens for the future. Within days we had pledges for several bells. The front four went very quickly: three to ringing families, and the 4<sup>th</sup> in memory of five generations of the Martineau family, each of which had, remarkably, supplied a Lord Mayor to Birmingham. Soon afterwards the 5<sup>th</sup> was allocated as the St Paul's Bell, and was covered by donations from the congregation and the Friends of St Paul's. Similarly, the 7<sup>th</sup> became the ringers' bell which was given by members and friends of the St Martin's Guild helped out by the Guild Bell Restoration Fund. The Assay Office and a Cadbury charity generously clinched two more bells.

The largest sponsorship, that of the tenor, was slower to come in, but after a few more weeks some careful cultivation of new local businesses paid off when Chord, a housing development company specialising in the conversion of old industrial premises, stepped forward with their banker, the Royal Bank of Scotland. This was the turning point and casting dates were quickly booked with the foundry. All that remained to be found was sponsorship for the 8<sup>th</sup>, and a quick bit of remarketing soon sorted that. Instead of looking for a single donor we renamed it the Memorial Bell and invited people to add names to it. This proved popular and the bell was quickly paid for.

Whilst all this activity had been taking place a specification had been drawn up and sent to the two national bell foundries and to two firms of bell-hangers. The specifications requested that the tenors be hung on top (we knew that we could not get all the bells on one level – the belfry at St Paul’s is a tricky one, being an irregular circle in shape, and very tight). We also asked for suggestions as to ringing chamber arrangement and how dumb-bells could be incorporated into the frame. Furthermore the old 16cwt hour bell and the two Barwell ting-tang quarters were to be retained for clock use. The responses were mixed: one did not quote saying that they regarded our requirements as impracticable; others varied considerably in price. Following careful consideration, the working group overwhelmingly decided in favour of Taylors of Loughborough. During a meeting with Taylors held soon afterwards to refine the order, Andrew Higson generously offered St Paul’s a ring of 19 handbells (a diatonic 16 plus 3 accidentals) for use connection with the proposed teaching project.

We needed a faculty! Of course we had sounded out the DAC very early on and had also briefed Andrew Stubbs, our DAC Bells Advisor. There was no obstacle to fear here, and we very soon learned that the DAC was recommending in favour of our scheme. In the event the formal approval papers only arrived through Tom’s front door the day before the first bell was cast.

### **July- November 2005: fitting everything together**

That first casting – the tenor – took place on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005. The remaining bells were cast on July 13<sup>th</sup>, August 11<sup>th</sup>, and September 2<sup>nd</sup>. During this time work started furiously up the tower. It took a week to open up the floors and expose the original 1779 traps, modify electrical cables, move the clock (which was far heavier than I had imagined), cover up holes in floors for safety reasons, lower a 19<sup>th</sup> century clock bed, and take apart a 19<sup>th</sup> century clock shed, having taken photographs for the local historical society of a number of old theatrical bills which, curiously, had been pasted on it.

Scaffolding was erected in the tower and lifting beams sited. The frame required 22 holes in the walls, which were to be double depth as specified by our structural engineer. Getting the right angle is no mean task when the walls are the circumference of a circle, albeit not quite a circle. When the frame arrived from Loughborough it took 2 days to install the 3 bottom girders with plenty of volunteers manning the breaker hammers and plenty of chisel heads breaking. Builders knew how to build something solid in those days!

During this phase the date of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary occurred and a few took time off to repeat the performance from 1755:

#### **St. Martin's Guild for the Diocese of Birmingham**

**Birmingham, WM**

Cathedral of St. Philip

Friday, 16 September 2005 in 3h 37m (31)

#### **5040 Bob Major**

Composed by: Benjamin Annable

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| 1 | Christine Mills     |
| 2 | Richard L Jones     |
| 3 | John H Fielden      |
| 4 | Stephen R Shipley   |
| 5 | Alan S Burbidge     |
| 6 | Maurice F Edwards   |
| 7 | Roderick W Pipe (C) |
| 8 | Richard B Grimmett  |

On this very day, 250 years ago, the first peal in this tower, the first peal for the St. Martin's Guild, and probably same composition, was rung in the same time.

By Friday the 21<sup>st</sup> of October the frame had been erected and many of the bells were in their pits. This was the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Admiral Lord Nelson and we didn’t want to miss it. We quickly bolted on the wheel and other fittings for the tenor and went around the frame tightening it, after which the bell was rung up with the clapper tied. It was then rung open for 47 blows before being tied and rung down again. This was the first official ringing on one of the new bells and had occurred 11 months and one day since the launch. The grog was broken out.

Over the next few weeks the old wooden frame containing the clock bells was winched up and reconstructed on top of the new two-tier frame. The remainder of the ring of 10 was kitted out, the rope circle created and the ringing chamber floor repaired. We were ready for the opening.came into rounds. The Lord Mayor then rang the 6<sup>th</sup> from its chiming rope in the porch to declare the bells officially open. Not much later, he pulled the first pint of “Bell Ringer” in the local Rectory Bar, which had also generously donated to the project, and Andrew Higson presented us with the splendid set of handbells.

**St. Martin's Guild for the  
Diocese of Birmingham  
Birmingham, West Midlands**

St Paul, Jewellery Quarter

Friday, 25 November 2005 in 3h 9m (12-2-13)

**5250 Stedman Caters**

Composed by: R W Pipe

|    |                        |
|----|------------------------|
| 1  | Richard B Grimmett (c) |
| 2  | Christine Mills        |
| 3  | Stephen W Horton       |
| 4  | Michael P A Wilby      |
| 5  | Alan S Burbidge        |
| 6  | Tim R Palmer           |
| 7  | John A Anderson        |
| 8  | Roderick W Pipe        |
| 9  | Andrew W R Wilby       |
| 10 | Andrew J Ellis         |

The first peal on the bells and in the tower. Rung to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the St Martin's Guild. On the official opening day.

Many ringers have placed the bells very high on their favourite small 10s list. We are certainly more than delighted with them.

**December 2005 – February 2008: the developing new belfry**

Much work has continued since the opening. The new ringing chamber has been completely stripped and decorated, and lighting and power provided throughout the tower. The clock dials have been replaced with ones that allow light through to the ringing chamber and the clock mechanisms reinstated. The 60 steps in the spiral staircase are now safe, after every one was cut and cast. Work continues on improving the overall sound mixture in the ringing chamber. Lastly the School Room below the ringing chamber, so named because in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it was where many adults and children received rudimentary instruction in reading and writing, is not far off complete. The necessary arrangements for establishing St. Paul's as a centre of ringing training and development are gradually coming together.

Members of the congregation and other interested people have been taught to ring, and a strong community of ringers (the St Paul's Society of Ringers) has developed and has attracted some "returning" ringers. The band mangle the bells for Evensong ringing (5:45-6:30pm) each Sunday and holds a practice on Thursday evenings (7-9pm.). It is seen as an important part of the church community. The belfry is also a resource, and the ringers were proud to present the Vicar with a cheque for £500 from tower funds at their annual dinner in 2007 as a contribution to church finances.

**St. Martin's Guild for the Diocese of Birmingham  
Birmingham**

St Paul, Jewellery Quarter

Saturday, 23 February 2008 in 2h 53m (12-2-13)

**5080 Cambridge Surprise Royal**

Composed by: R J Angrave (No 1)

|    |                        |
|----|------------------------|
| 1  | Christine Mills        |
| 2  | Clare McArdle          |
| 3  | Anthea S Edwards       |
| 4  | Fiona M Wheeler        |
| 5  | Joanne C Lovell        |
| 6  | Philip A B Saddleton   |
| 7  | Richard B Grimmett (c) |
| 8  | Maurice F Edwards      |
| 9  | Paul Needham           |
| 10 | Andrew W R Wilby       |

Rung on Henry Johnson Dinner Day. 50th peal on the bells.

As of today (24 February 2008) there have been 50 peals rung on the bells. In spite of the fact that the tower sits in an area near the city centre which has partially returned to being residential, sometimes there have been two peals on a single day. Combining this with lost peal attempts, practice ringing, service ringing and outings (we get many requests) means a lot of ringing! No doubt because of our highly effective variable sound control system, we have received not a single complaint.

The vast majority of the work in the tower has been accomplished by voluntary labour. The amount of time given has been enormous. I stopped recording it after the opening in November 2005 when it was already in excess of 400 man days, excluding all the efforts of the trustees and the working group. I would like to record my thanks as Master of the St Martin's Guild to all those volunteer workers who have given their time and sweat to make this a success, and I should also reiterate the profound thanks also due to all those who contributed the funds without which St. Paul's tower would still be empty and silent.

### **Brief details of the bells:**

A ring of ten in the key of F# by John Taylor & Co. cast July-September 2005.

|                 | <b><i>Weight</i></b><br><i>cwt. qr. lb.</i> | <b><i>Name</i></b>               |
|-----------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Treble          | 2. 2. 6.                                    | The Grimmett Bell                |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 2. 3. 2.                                    | The Mills Bell                   |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 2. 3. 2.                                    | The Horton Bell                  |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> | 3. 0. 13.                                   | The Martineau Bell               |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> | 3. 2. 14.                                   | The Voice of St. Paul's          |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> | 3. 3. 23.                                   | The Birmingham Assay Office Bell |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> | 4. 3. 2.                                    | The Ringers' Bell                |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> | 6. 1. 2.                                    | The Memorial Bell                |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> | 8. 1. 9.                                    | The Common Good Bell             |
| Tenor           | 12. 2. 13.                                  | The Chord-RBS Bell               |

| Clock bells:      | <b><i>Founder &amp; date</i></b> |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| First: 4. 2. 10.  | James Barwell 1874               |
| Second: 7. 0. 20  | James Barwell 1874               |
| Hour: 16. approx. | John Warner 1858                 |

### **Brief analysis of the first fifty peals:**

|          |    |  |
|----------|----|--|
| On ten:  | 35 | (22 of Royal, including 7 of Bristol)              |
| On eight | 11 | (10 of Triples, i.e. 9 of Stedman, 1 of Grandsire) |
| On six:  | 4  | (3 of Minor, all Multi-spliced)                    |

Of these, 32 have been for St Martin's Guild.

article by Richard Grimmett  
Master, St Martin's Guild for the Diocese of Birmingham

***Please Note***  
*Practice night visitors, who will be most welcome, will find the north door unlocked only at intervals because of the need for security of the building. It is best to be prompt at 7.30pm or 8pm.*