



Centenary of the Alexandra Peal



The Imperial Institute.

The Imperial Institute was built to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. The Institute was established by Royal Charter in 1888 for the purpose of carrying out research into the resources and raw materials of the Empire and to provide a meeting place for overseas visitors. However, from the outset the Institute was not a great success and soon ran into financial difficulties. In 1899 the University of London took over half of the building for administrative offices. Between 1902 and 1953 the Institute was run by various administrations including the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Education.

In 1953 the Government announced plans to extend the Imperial College which would include the demolition of the Imperial Institute. Objections from the Royal Fine Arts Commission persuaded the authorities to retain the Central Tower. The work commenced in 1957 with additional strengthening provided for the 287 foot tower which would no longer be supported by the surrounding buildings. When this was complete the tower was removed from the rest of the Institute and the old buildings were systematically demolished. The work was finally completed in 1968 by adding new steps and entrance doors, leaving the Queen's Tower as we know it today.

A personal gift

Hence, the 10th May 1993 marks the centenary of the Alexandra Peal of ten bells in the Queen's Tower, Imperial College. The bells, cast by Taylors of Loughborough, were a personal gift to the Prince of Wales (Edward VII), President of the Imperial Institute, from Mrs. Elizabeth Millar of Melbourne, Australia. In a letter to the Prince, dated 29th June 1892, Mrs. Millar said:

"I . . . know of the great interest which Your Royal Highness takes in the Imperial Institute which is to commemorate the reign of your great and good Mother, and, as I learn there is a handsome tower to the building, I write to ask if Your Royal Highness will permit me to have the pleasure of presenting to you a complete peal of bells to be placed therein. In the event of Your Royal Highness's acceptance of this offer, I hope you and Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Wales will allow the bells to be named the 'Alexandra Peal'."

Mrs. Millar also requested that the bells should be rung on certain Royal occasions. The gift and this request were entirely acceptable to the Prince and to the Executive Council, and Mrs. Millar's wishes have been honoured ever since.

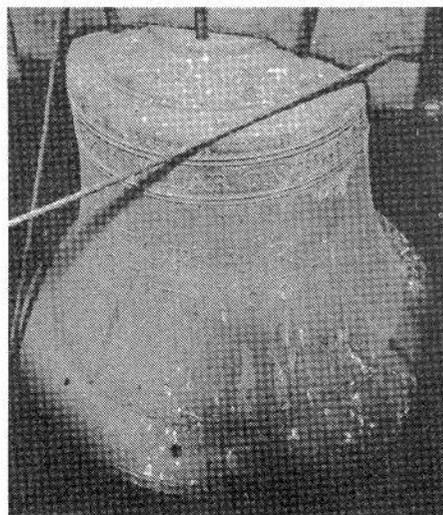
The bells were rung for the first time at one o'clock on 10th May 1893 at the conclusion of the opening ceremony of the building. The

Queen turned a gold key to complete an electric circuit which sent a signal to the bell chamber for the ringers to commence.

Each of the bells is named after a member of the Royal Family at the time they were installed. The full details of the Alexandra Peal are:

Treble	2'4½"	F	6-2-16	Maud
2nd	2'6½"	E-flat	7-2-21	Victoria
3rd	2'9"	D-flat	8-1-05	Louise
4th	2'10"	C	9-0-19	George
5th	3'1½"	B-flat	10-3-14	Albert Victor
6th	3'4½"	A-flat	13-1-18	Arthur
7th	3'8½"	G-flat	16-2-19	Alfred
8th	3'11½"	F	20-2-24	Alexandra
9th	4'4½"	E-flat	27-0-00	Albert Edward
Tenor	4'11¾"	D-flat	38-1-15	Victoria R.I. 1837-1887

Total Weight 158-3-11 or approx 8 tons



The Victoria R.I. Bell.

Each bell has cast around the shoulder, in addition to its name:

*"Elizabeth M. Millar gave me—
The Loughborough Taylors made me."*

On the 8th bell is the following additional inscription:

"The peal of which this bell forms one was by special permission of the Princess of Wales named after Her Royal Highness."

A magnificent view

The ringing chamber is reached by a climb of 273 steps and the bells themselves are hung over 200 feet above the streets below. From the balcony just above the bells, a magnificent view of London can be seen on a clear day.

Perhaps one of the most extraordinary events was in July 1934 when Mr. Walter Prime, 79 years of age, collapsed and died in the ringing chamber after ringing at the Imperial Institute in celebration of the Royal wedding anniversary. He had just rung the

(Continued overleaf)

Little hall packed full

Some 50 or so members of the Taunton Branch of the Bath and Wells D.A.C.R. gathered at Rockwell Green on Saturday afternoon, 13th March, for a service at All Saints' Church, by kind invitation of the Vicar, the Rev. Robert Pitt, who gave a lovely welcome to all present, and conducted the service, giving a very inspiring address. Thanking them all for the ringing they do and creating the lovely sound of the bells around the countryside, he spoke with enthusiasm and encouragement with quotations from poems by past writers, i.e. "Ring out your joy to the land", "Holy, Holy, His glory fills the whole earth", "The sounding bells proclaim the message", etc., etc., together with other continuous reminders to the ringers present that the bells ring out Sunday by Sunday to call people to worship, and to tell them that the Church is there and active. We must keep up, and if need be "step up" our activities, rather than there should come a day when there

are fewer or no people in church, and consequently no bells and no bellringing. All of the singing during the service was typical of bellringers standard, very robust and full of "go", and ably accompanied on the organ by Mrs. Hazel Weston. Lessons were read by the Branch Treasurer, Mr. Bill Slocombe, and Mr. Alan Cooke, the Tower Captain, who welcomed us to the tower for ringing prior to the service, and again during the evening, under the leadership of Mr. Mike Hansford, the Branch Ringing Master.

Langford Budville tower was opened also during the afternoon, under the leadership of Mr. R. Arcsott, Assistant Ringing Master, mainly for the benefit of the learners, who turned up in goodly numbers, to prove that this ancient art of campanology is still very much alive, at least here in the Taunton area. With them they brought their support, their tower captains and tutors, who over the past few months have given of their time, patience, knowledge and experience, to teach the learners, eight of whom proved themselves worthy and qualified for their membership certificates. A fine tea was prepared in the Church Hall by the ladies' group, the Misses Webber, Edwards, Braddick and Luke. The little hall was packed full, but there was plenty for all.

The business meeting followed, under the direction of the Branch chairman, Mr. Alan Lee, and commenced with a welcome to visitors, apologies for absence, and special prayers for Mrs. Betty Coles of Hillfarrance who was very poorly, but sadly has since passed away on 17th March. A short silence was kept in memory of Mrs. Edna Grabham, who passed away during January following a relatively short illness. She was a lifetime bellringer and an Honorary Life Member of the B & W, earned by her tireless work in the teaching of bellringing in the diocese over many years. She "died in harness" so to speak, as Education Officer to the diocesan ringers, a post she had held for the past eight years.

During the meeting the chairman presented the certificates to the newly-elected members and welcomed them to the Association - three from the Stawley and Kittisford areas, two from Kingston St. Mary, two from Holy Trinity, Taunton, and one from Trull.

Mr. Reg Colman, the Branch Secretary, who had previously said he would be resigning at this meeting, decided fortunately to carry on until November, and Mr. Gordon Baldham's offer of assistance to him was warmly accepted. In the absence of a Branch representative, who through illness was unable to attend, Mr. Ray Arcsott, the Diocesan Tower and Belfries Adviser, reported back to those present with information from the Annual Committee Meeting held some two months previous.

Tower movement

Votes of thanks were made by the secretary to all those responsible for making the occasion such a success, and at the close of the meeting a draw was made which had been ably arranged by the Deanery Bell Funds Officer, Mr. Peter Willan, and had raised some £32.70 for the Bell Fund. The lottery draw was also carried out, and the prize-winners disclosed.

The next gathering of the Branch ringers was planned as an evening practice at Langford Budville, where the villagers in the past couple of years have raised an enormous amount of money to restore their bells; and with Wellington bellringers currently teaching new ringers there soon, it is hoped these bells will again be ringing at Sunday services to call people to worship.

CLIVE BUSWELL/CLAIRE F. EDWARDS.

* * *

"A timeless occupation"

by April Rigby of Fowey Ringers

Time usually flies or stands still, but it did both in our tower on Sunday. Five of us had assembled ready to ring for the morning service, all bemoaning the loss of an hour's sleep caused by the beginning of British Summer Time. All except Arthur, who was bustling energetically around the tower, dusting and rearranging pictures and certificates. Inevitably the clock attracted his attention. "An hour slow - I'll soon fix that" he announced to those who cared to listen. But the clock had its own opinion of British Summer Time and was determined to make the most of being removed from its customary position. It leapt from Arthur's hands and fell to the floor with an explosive clatter. Batteries and plastic casings flew everywhere. Having gained our full attention it proceeded to roll majestically towards the open door while we sat mesmerised, unable to believe it would not fall over and be still. Through the door it went, to begin its downward spiral. Our awed silence was replaced by hysterical laughter as we listened to it bounce and bump down and around each of the 49 steps. But its escape was short lived, as Cliff, our Captain's son opened the door at the bottom of the tower just in time to catch the clock making a final bid for freedom. With a slightly puzzled expression on his face and a clock in his hands he climbed upwards, only to find four giggling ringers and one slightly sheepish Arthur. While explanations were made Arthur optimistically put the clock back together, set it at the correct time, and hung it firmly on the wall. Ringing commenced at 10.30 by the recaptured clock, and guess what? According to the same clock it finished at 10.30 as well.



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