

The Belfry

The Quarterly
Journal
of the
Maidstone
District

October 2004

Issue 80

Editorial

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“Where shall we go ringing tonight?”

That was the question ringers were always asking each other when your editor first learnt to ring some thirty years ago. And we did—ringing at three or four practices a week. Add to that at least one quarter a week, a District meeting once every month, various ringing outings and the odd peal for good measure. How did we ever find the time?

A recurring theme in this issue is how we can keep ringing alive in this District. Many towers are finding it increasingly difficult to get ringers for weddings, Sunday service ringing and even what might be termed “pleasure” ringing. This is not a problem unique to our District or even to Kent. It is, with a few notable exceptions, a nationwide problem.

So what can we do about it? For a start we have to face the fact that the days are gone when ringing was the be all and end all of people’s lives. As Dot Hooker says in her thought provoking article on page 7 we have to be prepared to change and adapt. This is already beginning to happen. Groups of towers are beginning to pool their resources. Since January Harrietsham, Lenham and Ulcombe have joined

forces to have a monthly joint practice on a rota basis. Charles Tassell of Ulcombe reports that the idea of the joint practice was to encourage a social interaction between towers, especially now that ringers are, to quote his own words, “becoming a rare breed”.

However it is at Sunday service level that the problem is at its most critical.

At least three towers in our District have been silent in recent months because they simply do not have enough people to ring. With this in mind Mal Williams has initiated a help squad to enable the bells at these towers to be rung at least once a month. There is more about this aptly named “Bells on Sunday” project on page 3.

Make no mistake. The situation is becoming serious, and we need to rise to the challenges the situation is throwing at us. In her article Dot gives us food for thought. Have you any comments or suggestions on how towers can help each other, not just in ways that have been tried before but also in new ways? The future of ringing depends on it.

Roy Barclay



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The Belfry

The (supposedly) summer **Quarterly Meeting** this year was held at Yalding on a cold damp July day, although at least the sun had come out by the evening. The number attending was 15 – exactly the same as the previous Quarterly Meeting in April, but at least it was a different 15 and six of those were Committee members. Ringing ranged from rounds to Cambridge Minor and included both special methods, Grandsire Doubles and Single Oxford Minor. The main item discussed was the proposed rule change setting a prescribed minimum level of competence for new members wishing to join the Association. Alas there were no new members elected at this meeting!



We are pleased to welcome **Leeds** tower back in to union with the Association. Chris Saunders has returned as tower captain after a break of about seven years, and practices have begun again on a Friday evening from 7.45 to 9.15pm. Everyone is welcome, including visitors, and all standards are catered for. Chris will also be looking for help with Sunday service ringing once a month, from 10am to 11am. For further details please contact Chris on 01233 663365.



In the **County 6-bell Competition**, held at Penge on 25th September, Maidstone District were represented by District winners All Saints Maidstone. Ringing last of the six bands, they finished in 4th place with 26 faults. The winners were Hadlow from the Tonbridge District with a mere 7 faults!



Still on the subject of All Saints Maidstone **Graham Heath**, Tower Captain and Secretary, has moved. His new address is 2 Hartnup Street, Maidstone, Kent, ME16 8LR. E-mail mb006q8249_2@blueyonder.co.uk, telephone number unchanged at 01622 721288.

Following their successful recruitment morning (featured in our last issue), **Yalding** have managed to retain two of the new recruits. However, as most 'normal' adults, they have other commitments and are not able to attend every practice. Both are ringing rounds and one is now starting call changes. News too of some of the more experienced Yalding ringers. Ralph Bird is back from his gap year in New Zealand and starts at Cambridge University soon. He will ring there! Chris Grant is in Australia doing a two month work stint as part of his engineering and mining course at Exeter University.



Congratulations to **Pat** and **Alan Phipps** who scored their first peal, at the first attempt, at Hunton on 11th September yesterday. It was for the 1400th anniversary of the Diocese of Rochester, and was 5040 Plain Bob Minor, conducted by John Hawes.



A group of ringers including a number from our District have just returned from what must be the ultimate ringing holiday - to Ireland! Copy deadlines, and possibly an over-indulgence in Guinness, have meant that it has not been possible to report on the event in this issue. Hopefully your Editor will be able to persuade one of the lucky participants to let the rest of us know how it went!



Ulcombe have changed their practice from Thursday to Tuesday evenings until further notice. Visitors are always

Have you any gossip from your belfry?

**Let the Editor know on
(01580) 890247
or E-Mail
thebelfry@kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk**

District Carol Service



aylesford - Saturday 11th December at 5pm

Ringing from 4.pm

followed by mulled wine and mince pies

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Bells on Sunday

Some readers may remember the days when every Sunday morning just before the 8 o'clock news Radio 4 used to broadcast five minutes of recordings of ringing from churches around the country. The programme was called *Church Bells on Sunday* and several of our towers have featured over the years. Well, this article has nothing whatsoever to do with that programme, but now it has caught your eye read on, because what follows is far more important if bellringing is to survive in our District.

In recent months several of our towers have fallen silent due to a lack of ringers, including Linton and Hunton. Also following the recent change in leadership at Leeds new Tower Captain Chris Saunders faces a difficult task in building up a band again at this famous old tower. Add to this the number of towers who are struggling to man all their bells each Sunday and you have a desperate situation.

With this in mind some of our District ringers recently got together to enable the bells at these towers to be rung at least once a month.

This initiative is called *Bells on Sunday*, and is being co-ordinated at Linton (by David Brydon), Leeds (by Chris Saunders) and Hunton (by Graham Heath). Overall co-ordinator is Mal Williams. A poster has been sent to each tower in the District asking for support and providing contact details.

Please try and support this initiative. Clearly one's own tower must come first, but if one Sunday you haven't got a service or your service is at such a time that you can also ring elsewhere, then think seriously about helping out. Your support could make the difference as to whether or not the parishioners at Linton, Hunton and Leeds hear their Bells on Sunday or not.

Achievements

Pat Phipps	1st Peal (at 1st attempt)	11th September
Alan Phipps	1st Peal (at 1st attempt)	11th September

Come on - there must be more of you out there achieving something. Don't hide your light under the proverbial bushel; let the Editor know at the address on page 1 and share your moment of glory with others. If your achievement isn't listed it's probably because you haven't notified the Editor!



Training Subcommittee

2004/5

County Surprise Royal Practice at All Saints, Maidstone

10 am - 12 noon
Saturday 27 November

Learn to listen sessions

These 2 hour sessions aim improve everyone's ability to hear ringing properly and work out what is going wrong, in order to improve the striking. (No actual ringing involved!) If you would like us to put on a session for your band or for a group of neighbouring towers, please get in touch. (Maximum about 12 people.)

Elementary Ringing School

Friday 1 April 2005

Groups will be available, according to demand, on

rounds and call changes

plain hunting

Plain Bob Doubles

Grandsire Doubles

Whole day event - approximately 10 am - 5 pm
(bookings by 17 February please).

Putting in the bobs

Saturday 29 October 2005

Day course on elementary conducting - learning to call changes or simple touches. It's early days yet, but keep the date!

For further information and/or bookings contact

Catherine Lewis

(01959 563767 or cmlewis@btopenworld.com)

TSC members: Tom Barlow, Peter Dale, Neil Jones, Judith de Leeuw, Catherine Lewis, Don Niblett, Roger Pocock, Philippa Rooke, Mike Worthington
(**ex officio:** Cathryn Hills, Margaret Funnell, Eric Roughley)

Aylesford Bells Restoration Project

by **Alison Harman**

Bells have rung out from Aylesford's Parish Church over the busy crossing of the River Medway for centuries. Aylesford's eight bells, weighing nearly three tons in total, require a stable frame and good bearings to be rung accurately and with ease. This is where we are having some trouble.

In 1885 five new bells together with three old bells dating from the middle of the 17th century, were hung in a new frame at the expense of Aylesford's benefactor, Henry Arthur Brassey of Preston Hall. About 25 years ago it was necessary to re-hang the 3 heaviest bells, replacing the worn old bearings with modern new ones. It is perhaps not surprising that the bearings on the other five bells are now excessively worn after nearly 120 years of regular use.

A technical survey in 2003 identified the poor condition of the fittings, including bearings, and excessive movement of the frame as the key features making our bells difficult to ring. The survey recommended work costing more than £48,000. This was daunting! However, taking further specialist advice, and with the generous offer of assistance from volunteer experts from the Kent County

Association of Change Ringers it has been possible to reduce this to a much more manageable £11,500. This has been achieved by concentrating only on the elements of work that would make the greatest improvements whilst minimising deterioration of the bells mechanism.

The Parochial Church Council has resolved to undertake this task, working in conjunction with the local ringers to raise funds. We are setting ourselves the demanding timescales of having the work start after Christmas this year and to have the bells ringing out again in time for Easter 2005.

We are determined to go ahead. The consequences of failing to proceed would be progressive deterioration in the operation of the bells, making ringing more and more difficult and – eventually – unringable. Before that happens it is likely that regular ringing would stop, as the local ringers would find the bells too difficult and unrewarding

To carry out this work all five bells need to be removed from the tower by block and tackle through the centre of the tower. This would then require transportation to the foundry. When the new bearings have been fitted they will need to be returned to

[continued overleaf]

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Quiz Evening

In aid of the Aylesford Bells Restoration Project

Brassey Centre, Station Road, Aylesford

Saturday 11th December 2004

7.00 for 7.30pm

**Price £5.50 per person including sausage and chip supper
(vegetarian option available)**

Teams of 8 people

Bring your own drink.

the tower and lifted into positions.

There are a number of fund raising events already being planned and we will advertise them through *The Belfry*, so please look out for them as your support in any of these events would be greatly appreciated and help us to reach our target. Please note that there will be a quiz night after the District Carol Service on December 11th to raise funds so please make your plans now to come and ring at Aylesford before the bells go and then stay on for the quiz. Supper will be included in the price, teams of 8 and £5.50 per person. For further details see previous page.



Alison Harman is Chairperson of the Aylesford Bellringers

CALL CHANGE STRIKING CONTEST

**at St Mary, Stansted
Saturday 13th November
Draw 2.30pm**

Put the date in your diary now



The latest winning numbers in the 120 Club Draw are:

July:

- 17 (£20) Rosemary (Boxley)
- 33 (£15) Fred (Hollingbourne)
- 93 (£10) Mary (Boxley)

August:

- 67 (£20) Jean (West Malling)
- 90 (£15) Bert (Yalding)
- 58 (£10) Boughton Monchelsea Ringers

September:

- 94 (£20) John (Harrietsham)
- 14 (£15) Mr A D Payne (East Malling)
- 25 (£10) Tim (Gillingham)

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Winners have been notified.

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

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

Fings ain't what they used to be...or are they?

by **Dot Hooker**

Many people today feel they are living in a frenetic world where the roller coaster of life allows few opportunities to slow down to 'enjoy the view' – it's all go, go, go with so much now available for us to participate in and hopefully enjoy. Life has and is changing at an ever-increasing rate and inevitably within this certainty in life – death being the other – we sometimes find it very hard to cope with the changes life 'imposes' on us. Although we often don't like having to accept these changes, in the end the reality of the situation has to be faced. We have to find ways in which to cope and survive.

"Ringing, as I'm sure we have all experienced, is not exempt from change.....for some it's been very hard to accept and adjust to the situation."

Ringing, as I'm sure we have all experienced, is not exempt from change especially in respect around the problems of recruitment, training, commitment and retention so thoroughly discussed within these pages. A plethora of solutions have been suggested and hopefully some have worked but for some it's been very hard to accept and adjust to the situation.

Not long ago getting a group of people to come out and enjoy a Saturday afternoon's ringing together was comparatively easy. However, recently when sorting out a possible quarter peal band (for 6-bell towers) the usual dozen or so people were contacted and all but 2 were involved in something else and thus unavailable. Things to do with their families, church events, other hobbies, working that extra shift, holidays – the **other** things in their lives that were necessary and very important to them.

Finding enough people to cover wedding ringing is also now becoming a real struggle at times with the same group of available ringers gallantly dashing from tower to tower! And perhaps the saddest scenario is the churches that are silent because their local band has become

redundant or have their bells rung for service on a minimal basis.

It's hard, isn't it, to face the reality of the situation and accept that things ain't what they used to be? We are used to working in certain ways – ways that are comfortable and 'we've always done it this way!'

So how can we adjust to the changes we are all experiencing in our lives and especially in ringing?

One answer maybe is to expand our view i.e. instead of the individual- people or towers – struggling and trying to overcome their problems in isolation– perhaps we could draw on the resources, experience and talents of those in the wider community. This does already happen to some extent but I'm sure could almost certainly be extended. Whatever we might like to believe we are not independent – we are interdependent. We live in communities and for the life of our own community to flourish and survive, it seems obvious that we have to offer and accept help from others around us. How we go about this and to what extent we will succeed may depend very much on our own commitment to ringing and why we do it.

"One answer maybe is to expand our viewperhaps we could draw on the resources, experience and talents of those in the wider community."

What should not be in question though is that our primary reason for the continuance and strengthening of change ringing in our communities is primarily for the glory of God – whether it be for service ringing only or for the added pleasure of using our varied God given talent and expertise for a bit of pleasurable ringing on a Saturday afternoon.

Dot Hooker rings at All Saints, Maidstone

Editor's note: See this issue's Editorial and "Bells on Sunday" (page 3) for more on this important subject.

The Belfry

Committee Matters

The District Committee has met once since the last issue of *The Belfry* went to press, on Sunday 11th September. Here is a resumé of the main points discussed:

Maidstone District Committee Meeting of 11th September 2004.

Arising from the previous meeting

Ringling at Linton: As a result of the problems of manning Linton tower, the Bells on Sunday campaign had been initiated with Sunday ringing being co-ordinated at Linton (by David Brydon), Leeds (by Chris Saunders) and Hunton (by Graham Heath). A poster had been sent to each tower in the District asking for support and providing contact details.

County 6 bell Striking Competition: No team had been entered due to the lack of support at the arranged practice sessions. One other District was also unable to enter a team.

District Striking Competition: It was felt the one day format had been successful and that the BBQ afterwards was a great success.

Rock n' Roll night: The date had been changed to 30th October.

Officers' Reports

The Hon Secretary and Treasurer gave routine reports. Further information was available from the appropriate officer.

The Ringing Master reported that the special method at the July quarterly meeting had been achieved. The method for the ADM would be Oxford Bob Triples, and a link will be made to the method from the District website.

A second raising and lowering training session was held at Boxley and a third was being considered in the future. Ringers were made aware of the forthcoming County Raising and Lowering Training Day in October.

Arrangements for the 2004 Annual District Meeting

Arrangements for the 2004 ADM at West Malling were in place, and the Agenda had been distributed to towers.

The willingness of Officers to stand for re-election in 2004/05 was canvassed.

Officers' Reports on 2003/04 would be amalgamated into one document and photocopied for distribution at the ADM.

Other forthcoming District Events

Rock 'n' Roll Dance Night: Tickets were now available from several sources within the District including Committee members. Approximately 50 have been sold already with about 240 available. Other District secretaries had all been asked to help publicise the event.

Arrangements for the sale of alcohol had been made and the necessary licence had been received.

Call Change Striking Competition:

Arrangements were all in hand with the exception of finding judges.

Carol Service: Aylesford were hosting the event and plans were in place for the service. The ringers were holding a quiz afterwards to raise funds for their bell restoration project. More details would be available soon.

2005 Draft Programme: There was much discussion regarding the format and possible venues for events in 2005. Production of Meeting Cards was also discussed. It was agreed to discuss this further at the ADM.

Any Other Business

Restoration of Aylesford Bells: It is anticipated the bells will be removed from the tower in January 2005 for restoration work.

Social Events: An inter-tower golf tournament was suggested for next year.

Bells on Sunday: The Belfry would include an advert for the Bells on Sunday campaign and also a welcome to the new tower captain at Leeds.

West Farleigh: The vicar of West Farleigh had asked if it is possible for the bells to be rung full circle. Brian Butcher, the County Bell Restoration convenor had been consulted and West Farleigh would be advised to liaise directly with him.

This does not purport to be a complete and accurate report of the meetings. For a copy of the full minutes please contact the District Secretary.



Rock 'n Roll night

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY TO
Chevron

At Harrietsham village hall

Saturday 30th October 2004
7.30pm to 11.30pm

Licensed Bar

Raffle 1st prize 14" colour t.v.
Plus many other prizes

Bring your own supper and buy your drinks

Tickets £6.00 per person in advance from
Mal Williams on 01622 861143
£7.00 on the door





LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
at
The Cinque Ports Ringing Centre at Dover

SATURDAY MORNINGS AT DOVER

The basic skills "clinics" at the Cinque Ports Centre continue every Saturday morning from 10 to 12, but they are in danger of falling victim to their own success. The intention was to provide an opportunity for learners to practise the basic skills of bell control, ringing up and down, and accurate striking, but in fact many of our earlier "customers" have now moved on, either forming self-help groups of their own, or graduating to method-ringing.

We need a steady turn-over of newcomers at the "beginner" stage if these sessions are to fulfil their original purpose. Otherwise we run the risk of catering for an exclusive group of regular "improvers", and raising the level beyond our "target clientele". Please may we ask Tower Captains to let their learners know about this facility and to encourage them to use it. By concentrating solely upon enhancing the basic skills, we don't teach anything that may conflict with what is practised at a beginner's home tower. For further details, or to request a map of the town showing parking arrangements, please telephone or email Barbara Dale: 01304 823217; barbaradale@fastmail.fm

FIRST STEPS IN SURPRISE
Saturday 27 November - 1.30pm to 5pm

This course is for those who would like to know how to approach the learning of more complex methods. It will be suitable for ringers who have already acquired ropesight and good listening skills in plain methods or Treble Bob on six bells. The course will use a Kaleidoscope approach to introduce elements of Cambridge, with a view to ringing a plain course or touch in the method by the end of the day. The cost of £4 includes course notes; cups of tea will be provided.

Further information and application forms available from Barbara Dale,
Tel 01304 823217 or email barbaradale@fastmail.fm

ADVANCE NOTICE— DOVER REGATTA 2005

for which the Lichfield Diocesan Mobile Belfry has provisionally been booked once more. It's the weekend of 6-7 August 2005 and it would be nice if a band, or bands, from Maidstone District might like to ring a quarter at St Mary's. Of the six quarters attempted at the church this year, five were successful but only four Districts were represented. It is a good fun event, with plenty for the non-ringing members of the family to see.

**Further information about events at the Centre, and application forms where appropriate, are available from Barbara Dale,
Tel 01304 823217 or email barbaradale@fastmail.fm
See also www.kcacr.org**

*Remember that the Cinque Ports Ringing Centre is for ringers from all Districts
(not just Canterbury!)*

Belfry Reminiscences

5 years ago in October 1999 Issue 61 marked the 50th anniversary of the first issue of the original *Belfry* in 1949. There were no Belfry Reminiscences in Issue 61 but instead a look back to that very first issue.

The Editorial in October 1999 said that, nice though it is to look back we must not wallow in nostalgia but look to the future. That is exactly what Mal Williams did in his Final Countdown to the Millennium. Mal had done some sterling work as District Co-ordinator for Ringing in 2000 and now there were only a few months to go.

Belfry Gossip reported that of five new members elected to the Association at the previous quarterly four were from Linton. Ironic considering the present situation at that tower (see article on page 3). There were congratulations to Martin and Iris Pring on their ruby wedding anniversary, whilst sadly the death was reported of Peter Carter of West Malling.

Finally, amongst the contributed articles in Issue 61 was a personal view on ringing meetings by then County Chairman Frank Lewis.

15 years ago in September 1989 the Editorial to Issue 26 recognised the many achievements of District ringers in the last year and suggested an *Achievements* column. This eventually came to fruition in August 1993. The suggestion was prompted by a report of a local band peal at Yalding which contained no less than five firsts.

Amongst the contributed articles was one by Peter Smith, then one of our District Reps, on the work of the Association in bell restoration in general and the Bell Restoration Fund in particular. Jessica Vale also wrote an interesting history of Snodland bells, the oldest of which had recently celebrated the 400th anniversary of its original casting.

More than 40 people attended the April Quarterly at Staplehurst, then a difficult eight, whilst in the Striking Contest Bearsted took the trophy by 1½ faults from East Farleigh.

20 years ago in October 1984 issue 12 was the first to have a coloured front cover. (In case anyone hadn't realised the colours correspond to the season of the year—pink being the nearest we can get to rustic autumn leaves). We were honoured to have the Editorial for Issue 12 written by Phil Corby, then Chairman of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, and a former chairman of our own Association.

It was with sorrow that *The Belfry* reported the death of Percy Town, well-known and much-loved Captain of Linton bells. On a more cheerful note, Mike Birkbeck was elected to membership of the Association and your Editor rang his 200th quarter-peal.

50 years ago things didn't really seem much different to what they are now, judging by the Foreword to the October 1954 issue written by the new Vicar of Maidstone. The subject was ringers staying to the service—an issue which still arouses controversy half a century later.

At the 1954 County AGM Dr John Hatcher had been elected County Secretary and issue 20 of the original *Belfry* carried a tribute to his work as District Secretary for the previous eight years. The ADM was held as usual at All Saints Maidstone, but due to catering difficulties at the College Rooms tea was taken at the now derelict Granada Cinema. The September meeting at Charing (then a Maidstone District tower) was "poorly" attended with only 23 people against the average in those days of more than 50. The Maidstone Grammar School Society of Ringers held their inaugural meeting at Mereworth in October 1954 and attracted 30 young ringers from both the Boys' and Girls' Schools.

Future Events

After a total absence of ringing events of any kind in the three months from the July Quarterly to the Annual District Meeting we now swing back into action for the autumn and early winter.

The remaining events for 2004 are on the updated District Calendar on the inside back cover. Could Tower Captains/ Secretaries please detach it and place prominently on their tower notice-boards. Just a reminder that anyone organising events which they would like included on the Calendar should ensure that the Editor has details by the copy deadline, if they are to be included in the next quarter's calendar.

Remember that you can also check out future events by visiting the District website *Maidstone District OnLine* at www.kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk and choosing "Calendar of Events".

Our most imminent event is a completely new venture. On Saturday 30th October the District is holding a **Rock 'n' Roll Night** at Harrietsham Village Hall. Dance the night away to 50s and 60s live music by Chevron. There will be a licensed bar - with Goacher's Ales of course - and a raffle with a magnificent first prize of a 14" colour TV, plus many other prizes. You are welcome to bring your own supper, but please buy your drinks from the bar - without the profits from the bar the event would not be viable! Tickets cost £6.00 in advance from Mal Williams on 01622 861143 or £7.00 on the door.

The **Call Change Striking Contest** this year is at Stansted on Saturday 13th November. The draw will be at 2.30pm in the church with ringing starting at 2.45pm. This is a good opportunity for those less experienced ringers to participate in competition ringing, so if your tower has never entered a Striking Contest before, now's the chance. In addition to the winner's shield there is also one for the most improved band. Towers should by now have received full details of the event.

December is, of course, a particularly busy month for most of us as preparations for Christmas get under way once again. As part of the festivities we will be holding the usual **District Carol Service**, this year at Aylesford. The date is Saturday 6th December, there will be ringing from 4pm and the Carol Service starts at 5pm. Following the service there will be the ever popular mince pies and mulled wine and further opportunity to ring on Aylesford bells. Perhaps a good way of passing the time before going to the Quiz (see below)?

Following the Carol Service there will be a **Quiz Evening** organised by the Aylesford ringers. The venue is the Brassey Centre, Station Road, Aylesford, and the time 7.00 for 7.30pm. The price is £5.50 per person which will include sausage and chip supper (a vegetarian option will be available). Teams should consist of 8 people, and you will need to bring your own drink. This event is in aid of Aylesford's bell restoration project, more details of which can be found in the article on page 5, so please support it.

The first event of 2005 is the **District Quarterly Meeting**, which will be held on Saturday 8th January at a venue still to be decided. This meeting is likely to follow the usual format of Quarterlies, commencing at 5pm and finishing at 8.00pm with a short break from 6.30 - 7pm for tea and business meeting. There will be no service. The Quarterly Meeting will be preceded by the **annual Tower Captains' Meeting** starting at 4pm.

The next issue of
The Belfry
will be available at
the Quarterly Meeting
on 8th January 2005

**Articles for publication must be
with the Editor by
Wednesday 1st December**