

The Belfry

September 2006

Issue 83

The Quarterly Journal of the Maidstone District

Editorial

May I first start with an apology. It has been a whole year since the last issue of *The Belfry* hit the streets. As many of our readers will know the Editor's family suffered a double bereavement earlier in the year, this following his mother's long illness, and reluctantly ringing matters have to a great extent been on a back burner this year. Consequently some of the "news" items in this issue are not new at all; in fact they are quite old. Nevertheless we feel that, in the case of the restoration work at Nettlestead and Aylesford in particular, it would be a shame not to have those events recorded in *The Belfry*.

All being well the next issue of *The Belfry* will be in January 2007. This date is significant because it will be the 25th anniversary of what started out in January 1982 as a single sheet *Maidstone District Newsletter No 1*. Much has changed since that time, both in the production and content of *The Belfry* and in the ringing exercise itself. The silver anniversary issue will look back at how our District journal has evolved and recall some of the high spots of the last quarter century.

But no matter how nice it is to wallow in nostalgia, time does not stand still and we make no apologies for again urging members to get themselves on the circulation list to receive their copy of *The Belfry* by e-mail. For those who still have doubts about this means of communication, and the advantages it brings, we feature on page 3 of this issue answers to some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). If our journal is to flourish into its next quarter century it is essential that as many people as possible opt for this method of receiving their copy.

Remember too that *The Belfry* is also available on the District website *Maidstone District OnLine* immediately it is published (and some two weeks before hard copies go out). The website itself will be undergoing some changes in the coming months, including dedicated pages for individual towers.

Finally may we remind all our members that the Annual District Meeting takes place at All Saints', Maidstone, on Saturday 14th October. Do try to get to the ADM to vote in your District Committee for the coming year.

Roy Barclay

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Plus all the usual features

Belfry Gossip

Three new members were elected at the Annual District Meeting at Leeds on 8th October. We welcome **Jill Rutland** and **Catherine Taylor**, both of West Malling. At the Quarterly Meeting at Marden on 14th January a further five new members were elected; they are **Scott Gower** of Marden, **Heather Cuerden** and **Mike Cuerden** both of Harrietsham, **Andrew Millgate** (East Malling) and **Rachel Swaffer**(West Malling). There were no new members elected at the April Quarterly, but at Wrotham in July we welcomed **Andrew Gray** of Barming and **Ben Barnes**, a new junior member from Wrotham. We look forward to seeing them all at District events.



At the District Committee meeting on 1st February **Graham Heath** was co-opted as the second District Ringing Master. We are grateful to Graham for taking on this job and members are urged to support him



This year our District played host to the **County 8-bell Striking Contest**. The event was held at East Farleigh on Saturday 25th February and all six Districts were represented, each ringing a test piece of a

course of Superlative Surprise Major. Maidstone District, ringing first, finished in fourth place with 32 faults. The winners this year were Tonbridge District, and only 12 faults separated the first four bands. Congratulations to our band for a good effort. Next year, who knows....?



It is good to see quarter peals being rung regularly again at Leeds. One of these was Norwich Surprise Minor by the band who regularly ring the bells for services these days, and it was rung to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. The band was Sheila Phyll 1, Chris Saunders 2, Pat Phipps 3, Tim Munt 4, Alan Phipps 5, Darren Elphick (Cond) 6.

Have you any gossip from your belfry?

**Let the Editor know on
(01580) 890247
or E-Mail**

***thebelfry@kcacr-maidstone-
district.org.uk***

Patricia Dickens

In the last issue of *The Belfry* we reported briefly that Pat Dickens of Barming had passed away on 12th July 2005. With the agreement of Pat's family we now give below an appreciation of her life to mark the first anniversary of her passing.

The sudden death of Pat, after a short illness, came as a great shock to her family, friends and everyone who knew her in the ringing world.

Pat had been a member of the County Association for over 50 years having been expertly taught to ring at Egerton by the late Alex Waddington. For the majority of her ringing life she had rung at St Margaret's Barming. She was a member of 'COOTS', and had been one of the organisers of their annual ringing holidays for the past three years.

Besides ringing, Pat was devoted to her family, especially John her husband to whom she had been married for 40 years, her three sons and her grandchildren. She was an active member of St Andrew's Barming Heath, the parish next door to St Margaret's, working with children, the MU and CMS. In her 'spare time' Pat did voluntary work both as a visitor and as a driver ferrying patients to and from hospital.

Prior to her funeral in a packed St Andrew's Church, the bells of St Margaret's were rung half-muffled by members of St Margaret's and 'COOTS'.

David Earl

Distribution of *The Belfry*

Some ringers in the Maidstone District still seem to be unaware that *The Belfry* is now available in electronic format and, even if they do, they don't know how to go about getting a copy. Hopefully the information below will help clarify matters.

Q. How do I know whether I am on the electronic circulation list?

A. If the covering e-mail starts with the words 'To everyone on "*The Belfry*" e-circulation list' then you are on the e-list.

Q. I am already on the "KCACR Maidstone Group". Is this the same thing?

A. No. The KCACR Maidstone Group is a means of members contacting each other. The e-circulation list is solely for the Editor/Webmaster to send information to members.

Q. How do I join the e-circulation list?

A. Simply send an e-mail to thebelfry@kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk with the word "subscribe". You can come off the list at any time by sending an e-mail saying "unsubscribe". It's as simple as that!

Q. Won't I be laying myself open to "spam" (junk e-mail) by joining the list?

A. No. *The Belfry* is sent under cover of a "blind" e-mail. That is, the e-mail address appears as "Undisclosed recipients", so your identity is preserved. Furthermore, the Data Protection Acts prohibit us from passing details on to third parties.

Q. How about viruses?

A. All outgoing e-mails and attachments from the webmaster/editor's computer is checked by Norton Internet Security, one of the world's leading anti-virus programmes. However, as always recipients should also virus check their incoming messages and attachments.

Q. But what are the advantages of receiving *The Belfry* in electronic format?

A. There are several. First and foremost you will receive the electronic version about two weeks before the hard copy is issued. You will also receive it direct, rather than have to wait for your tower secretary to pass it round to everyone in the tower in turn. You can either read it on your computer screen or print all or any part of it off. Even the most basic printer should give a much better quality finish than the hard copy...in particular the pictures which will appear in colour (assuming of course that you have a colour printer!). Finally, there will be a considerable financial saving to the KCACR in terms of paper and copying costs - money that could be put to far better use.

Q. Why not post *The Belfry* on the District website?

A. The electronic version of *The Belfry* is also posted on the website, so you can get your copy by going to www.kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk/electronic_belfry.htm instead. However, you will have to keep checking to see if it has been published, whereas if you are on the e-list it will be e-mailed to you the minute it is published.

Q. What if I haven't got a computer (or I am not connected to the internet)?

A. Don't worry. A paper version of *The Belfry* will continue to be available to those who want it.

Q. Does anyone at my tower already receive the electronic version?

A. The following towers already have a designated person receiving the electronic version: *Aylesford, Barming, Bearsted, Birling, Boughton Monchelsea, Boxley, East Farleigh, East Malling, Harrietsham, Hollingbourne, Hunton, Ightham, All Saints Maidstone, Nettlestead, Otham, Snodland, Stansted, Staplehurst, Ulcombe, Wateringbury, West Malling, Wrotham and Yalding.*

It is hoped that these "primary" recipients will print off a copy for their tower.

Q. Finally, if I join the e-circulation list, will I receive other information from the KCACR?

A. The only other information you will receive is tower updates or "all member" documents, although you can opt out of receiving these if you wish.

So you see, the whole idea is to make individual members more aware of what is going on, and at the same time saving the Association money. Please consider joining the e-circulation list. If you need any further information please contact the Editor at thebelfry@kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk.

Committee Matters

The District Committee has met three times since the last issue of *The Belfry* went to press, on Wednesday 2nd November 2005, Wednesday 1st February 2006 and Wednesday 3rd May 2006. Most matters discussed at the earlier two have now been overtaken by events, and copies of the minutes can be obtained from District Secretary Sue Bassett. Below is a resumé of the main points discussed at the most recent Meeting:

Maidstone District Committee Meeting of 3rd May 2006

Election of Chairman

The Committee agreed the election of Chris Bassett to chair the meeting

Arising from the previous meeting

Tower Webpace: There had been no progress on the idea to offer towers District Webpace for their own tower information

Wedding Fees Survey: This was continuing and results were being circulated to those taking part by Chris Bassett

Reorganisation of Districts: The County Sub-committee had met and agreed no change. It was unclear whether other Districts had actually done any consultation or whether personal views had been expressed. It remained open for any tower to apply to the general committee to change Districts.

April Quarterly Meeting: This had been a great success, and included an (unexpected) home-made lunch. A note of thanks had been sent to East Sutton thanking them for their hospitality.

District Officers' Reports

Ringing Master Graham Heath submitted a written report (copies available from the District Secretary).

The Publicity Officer was not at the meeting due to personal reasons, but apologised via the Secretary for the continued non-appearance of *The Belfry*.

District Reps written report from County Committee had been circulated to towers in advance of the April Quarterly meeting. A verbal update of the County AGM changes

was given: David Manger Chairman, James Hardy Training Officer, Vacancy for Handbook Editor, Membership Secretary Graham Cottle, three additional members Craig Huxley, Philip Elverden, Eric Roughley.

Forthcoming events

Joint District Practice at Benenden – Friday 5th May. 19.30-21.00.

Training the Trainer – Saturday 13th May. 10.00-12.00 at Staplehurst. Had been advertised but no take up to date.

Striking Competition Yalding – 10th June. 16.00 draw. Tea confirmed. Had been advertised but no take-up to date. It was understood that separate District Rules for this competition existed (adopted in 2004) and would circulate these with a positive/ negative response slip. Judges yet to be found.

Quarterly Meeting Wrotham – 8th July. 17.00-20.00. Phil and Liz Barnes had confirmed they would be organising the tea and meeting day. Details to be circulated and advertised nearer the time.

Tower Maintenance Leeds & Staplehurst – 9th September 10.00-13.00. Details yet to be finalised and published.

Annual District Meeting Maidstone – 14th October 15.00-20.00. Graham Heath confirmed that tea would be available in the back of the Church and requested names for tea to Tower Secretary, Peter Borer.

Remainder of 2006 Programme – Remained as published on Meeting Cards.

Draft Programme for 2007

It was agreed that the draft programme should be extended to May 2008 and thereafter maintained at 18 months in advance.

Any Other Business

The Treasurer reported that only three subscriptions remained outstanding and she would chase these.

This does not purport to be a complete and accurate report of the meeting. Any member of the KCACR can obtain a copy of the full minutes by contacting the District Secretary.

Have you looked at the Committee meeting minutes above?

Does it all look like a elite clique of the great and the good ?

Actually it is just the opposite.

The present Committee has ringers from a wide range of ability levels.

The one thing they have in common is that they want to help maintain and advance ringing in the District.

Don't just take our word.
Put yourself forward for election
at the ADM at All Saints Maidstone
on Saturday 14th October.

Now we are Six

by Michael Cowles

We had five bells in St. Mary The Virgin at Nettlestead, which had the reputation of being a difficult ring. Then, in 2002, the tower captain and his wife, David and Marguerite Allen, suggested that we should consider having the bells lowered and tuned with the possibility of adding a new treble.

The wheels were in terrible condition and ran out of true by as much as six inches and as a result tended to throw the ropes off unless the rope was kept tight the whole time, quite a challenge for experienced ringers never mind our learners. The bells were out of tune, quite badly odd-struck and hung on tired old plain bearings. Alan Hughes of Whitechapel Foundry was asked to visit us and give us his opinion and advice and of course an estimate of costs involved.

In the meantime Marguerite's Mother died and David and Marguerite decided to donate the new treble to the memory of Marguerite's parents. The fund raising went on apace and a number of grants were found to add to the fund and finally The Heritage Lottery Fund gave us a very good sum to make up to the £33,000 that was required. A date was set for Monday 8th August when the bells should be delivered to Whitechapel and everything became geared up to that date.

We rang our last quarter peal on the five bells on 25th July with the help of our neighbouring towers, Wateringbury and Yalding, Marguerite rang the treble for her first Quarter peal. Our final service ring was on Sunday 31st July. On the Monday morning three of us went up the tower and started to dismantle the wheels and all the fittings and bring them down into the Church.

There is no lowering hatch in the tower at Nettlestead as the organ is immediately below the ringing chamber so the bells have to be lowered through the stairway hatch into the ringing chamber and from there dragged across to a window into the church, on to a scaffold, and then lowered on to the church floor.

Early on the following Saturday morning Brian Butcher, the county Bell Restoration Officer, arrived with his band of assistants and, with the labouring provided by our band, the work commenced. By four o'clock the bells had been lowered to the church floor, put onto pallets and taken up to the road where they were loaded on to a trailer ready for their trip to

Whitechapel.

Whilst the bells were away the tower was cleaned ready for their return. We were very lucky during this time that Hunton and Wateringbury allowed us to practice in their towers. On 4th October we collected the retuned bells, together with the new treble, from Whitechapel and moved them into the church on 7th.

We are very fortunate at Nettlestead that the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics share the Church. On Sunday 9th October in the presence of a joint congregation. the dedication of the new treble and the blessing of the other five was conducted by the Anglican Bishop Richard Gear and the Catholic Bishop John Hines.

It had been decided that the old frame was in good condition and we would be able to rehang the bells in it with their new roller bearings and new metal headstocks. There were only five pits and this left one bell with no home to hang in. Whitechapel made a steel frame which fitted over the stairway hatch, leaving us just enough room to squeeze through, in which the number three now hangs. The following Monday the bellhangers from Whitechapel, Peter and Neil, arrived and started to raise the bells back up the tower with, of course, our help again as labourers. By the end of the week all was back in place and ready for a test ring. This was a really exciting moment as no one knew how they would sound. They were a great success they were so tuneful and were so much easier to handle – worth all the effort, and the new treble was lovely.

We rang our first quarter peal on the bells on Thursday 10th November with the same band as before plus Peter Mack on the tenor, his first quarter. Everyone who has been involved with the operation is well pleased with the end result and we have a ring to be proud of now we are six.

The Quarter Peals

Before restoration and augmentation:

July 25th 2005; 1260 Plain Bob Doubles in 43 minutes: Marguerite Allen (1st Quarter) 1, Sue Collins 2, Richard Young (C) 3, Michael Cowles 4, Glynne Knight 5.

After restoration and augmentation:

November 10th 2005; 1260 Plain Bob Doubles in 44 minutes: Marguerite Allen 1, Sue Collins 2, Richard Young (C) 3, Michael Cowles 4, Glynne Knight 5, Peter Mack (1st Quarter) 6. First Quarter with the new treble and the retuned bells.

The Bells

Treble Keynote B Weight 3-0-2 Dedication – Whitechapel 2005 To The Glory Of God Given by David and Marguerite Allen in loving memory of her parents Ernest and Joyce Kearl October 2005

Two Weight 2-3-15 Dedication – Mears and Stainbank London To The Glory Of God The gift of many parishioners and friends in memory of Sarah Hannah Cobb 1909
O Lord open Thou our lips

Three (Originally cast in 1700) Weight 3-0-20 Dedication – Mears and Stainbank Founders London To The Glory Of God The gift of friends 1885

Four Weight 3-2-10 Dedication – Mears and Stainbank To The Glory Of God in memory of Sarah Hannah Cobb many parishioners and friends 1909 And our mouths shall shew forth Thy praises

Five (Originally cast in 1700) Weight 3-3-22 Dedication - Mears and Stainbank Founders London 1885 To The Glory Of God the gift of Mary Allen

Tenor Weight 5-0-22 Dedication Thomas Mears Founders London 1838 Recast 1931



Nettlestead's new treble awaits hanging (above left) whilst the refurbished number 2 bell is hauled up the scaffolding before being swung across and lowered into its pit (right).

Centenary of Otham Tenor

Otham Church celebrated the 100th birthday of their tenor bell at a special service on Sunday 16th July. There was a full church, all the ringers - even the new recruits – taking an active part in the service and there was a celebratory cake at coffee afterwards. This was followed by a BBQ at the home of local ringer Maggie Chainey who, together with her daughter Katherine, has only been ringing for just over a year. The vicar of Otham blessed the tenor and acknowledged the work and service that the ringers offer as part of their faith life to the church. Dot Hooker gave the address; lack of space precludes us from reproducing it here, but it can be seen in its entirety on the District Website at www.kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk/pdf/othamsermon.pdf.

It really is remarkable that a 3 bell tower continues to get so many new recruits, taking the total number of ringers to 11 - all regular Sunday service attendees. Otham may be just a 3 bell tower but its certainly one of the most active and well supported in the District. Much of this is down to the sensitive care and encouragement of Tower Captain Mal Williams who has taught quite a number of ringers in the last 3 or 4 years - both at Otham and elsewhere.

It was indeed a special day for Otham. Wouldn't it be great to see them augmented to six some day in the not too distant future!

Coots over the water

by David Earl

On a sunny October day, a party of 17 ringers plus friends and relatives, travelled from all parts of Kent to the Isle of Wight with the aim to ring, over a five day break, at all towers with peals of bells.

Arriving on the Island we met at Ryde's large Victorian church whose tower dominates the skyline as you approach by ferry from Portsmouth. Despite having the heaviest tenor of all the towers on the Island, the holiday got off to good start and we managed to ring Grandsire Triples and Bob Major. Full of confidence we then went on to Brading where our aim of ringing at all towers was dashed. Builders were working at the church, and Health & Safety notices were everywhere banning entry to the tower which we gather was unsafe. Slightly deflated we continued our trip to Daishes Hotel in Shanklin, our comfortable base for the holiday.

Day two was our busiest day with five towers. Despite all Freda Groves' careful route planning and timings, we were immediately faced with the major problem of the main road between Shanklin and Godshill being shut. The diversion added over ten miles to what should have been a relatively short journey. Despite this early setback, the morning went well, despite the closeness of ropes at both Whitwell and Chale being a little off putting to some ringers. A pleasant surprise awaited Daphne Pollard, the sister of the late Pat Dickens, when at Chale we were met by Paul Mills her next door neighbour when she and Pat lived in Egerton with their mother. Niton with its bells on plain bearings was amongst the best rings we encountered. We then rallied through single width lanes to avoid the diversions and road closures around Godshill, where, after lunch at a local Hostelry, we trudged through rather inclement weather to ring at the church whose position dominates the whole village. The final tower in Shanklin was the only one we encountered on the island which could be classed as disappointing with its challenging heavy going bells. Despite the difficulties at the final tower, overall we had a good day's ringing with the highlight being the

course of Cambridge at Godshill.

Day three was to the West of the island, where it was planned to ring at Brighstone and Freshwater in the morning leaving the afternoon free to explore the island. The ringing at Brighstone was at times the best we achieved on the holiday. Onto Freshwater, where once again Health & Safety issues prevented us ringing. The belfry ceiling had collapsed earlier in the year, and until the cause of this problem could be identified no ringing was being allowed. Twenty five of us did, however, celebrate Communion taken by the local incumbent who had met his wife when they were both ringers. John Dickens played the organ and David Earl assisted with the Communion.

The three towers on day four, unlike the miserable weather, were good. Shorwell, where as with so many other towers today suffers from lack of local ringers, the highlight was a course of Kent. Arreton where a craft village has been established next to the church, we once again managed to ring Cambridge, while at Newchurch the highlight was ringing All Saints at All Saints church.

The final day was warm and sunny, and we were faced with the twelve bells of Newport and ten at Carisbrooke with a depleted band of ringers. Some of our more experienced ringers had unfortunately had to leave early for home. Despite this, we managed to ring good rounds and call changes at Newport where a local dispute over the noise of the bells meant that we asked to limit the length of our visit. We had no such restrictions at Carisbrooke, and once again managed good rounds and call changes, finishing with Bob Minor on the back six. Everyone then departed for the ferry to Portsmouth and then onto their homes.

Overall it was a good break, with all the ringers appreciating the hard work in organising the towers, route planning and accommodation by Freda Groves and the late Pat Dickens. A special thanks must go to John Dickens for agreeing to complete Pat's work on the finances.

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Aylesford Bell Restoration Project completed

by *Gordon Hunt*

After more than a year of planning, the restoration of our ring is now largely complete. The front five bells, including the two oldest, cast in 1652, had their canons removed and were fitted with new headstocks, bearings, and clappers at Whites of Appleton's works in Oxfordshire. White's also built new wheels for the treble and 2nd and refurbished and adapted the other wheels to suit.

Brian Butcher ("Red Leader") and five intrepid members of the KCACR's bell restoration team arrived on Saturday 10th December 2005. With help from our steeple keeper Paul Bastow, they got their lifting gear in place and, in quick time, created a suspension point in the roof of the tower, lifted out a section of frame to clear the hatch and set about lowering the front five bells. Quite a large crowd of onlookers had gathered in the church to see the historic event following a short opening service conducted by the Vicar, Simon Tillotson, with a lesson read by the Mayor of Tonbridge and Malling and prayers by representatives of the Aylesford ringers. We lost count of the visitors but think their must have been at least 150. A team of stewards, led by Alison Harman and Tina Bastow, made sure the public, the press, and the VIPs were out of harm's way and kept well informed, while a catering team, led by Brenda Sladen, churchwarden and ringer, provided a continuous supply of hot drinks and sandwiches for the workers and the public.

The church was kept open and manned for the following Sunday and Monday for visitors to see the bells and we were pleased that 62 people plus pupils from some local schools called by.

On Tuesday 13th December the bells were loaded with assistance provided by Ringway Highway Services to a lorry loaned with a driver by Dean and Dyball. We were delighted that the Mayor made time in his busy schedule to come and support us once again.

Whilst the bells were out the electrical system in the tower was renewed and work started to refurbish the ringing chamber.

The bells were returned to the church on February 22nd and hoisted back into the tower on February 25th ready for rededication and ringing to resume on March 12th once again with the invaluable help of the KCACR team.

The ringing chamber has also been refurbished (including provision of a display cupboard to store the hand bells) and the restoration of the chiming apparatus is now almost complete.

All this work has only been possible with the co-operation of the PCC, with obtaining the necessary faculties, and, of course, with fund raising. Total project costs are budgeted at £34,300 including £6,000 in voluntary labour and services, £3,200 for contingency and £3,500 for VAT. More than £10,000 has been raised or promised locally; the remaining amount (up to £17,500) has been promised by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Whilst the project is set fair to be completed to budget and on time there have been some hairy-scary moments! Balancing on ladders and on the bell frame while waving long poles to persuade the resident pigeons that they would prefer the fresh air outside the tower was one. Discovering that each of the three hatches was obstructed was another delightful moment. But the most bizarre was that Dean and Dyball's lorry was stolen shortly before the bells were due to be transported to Appleton AND exactly the same thing happened just before the bells were due to be brought back.

A lot of effort has been required to get this far. New friendships have been made, a lot of new contacts with the community have been established, both for the church and for the ringers, and a lot of goodwill and publicity generated. But the proof of the pudding has been the restoration of the full ring, and the resumption of ringing at Aylesford which by common consent is now much easier. Grateful thanks are due to all who have helped and supported the project in so many ways.

Gordon Hunt

For Aylesford Bell Restoration Committee



Aylesford bells arrive back home (left)

The second bell is hoisted up into the tower (right)



Competition Page

There have been two District Striking Competitions since the last issue of *The Belfry*. Although the Call Change Contest is rather old news now, we include it so that the winners don't miss out on their moment of glory. The method ringing contest is of course much more recent.



The 2005 **Call Change Striking Contest** was held at Ightham on Saturday 12th November. Once again only three bands took part, a sad decline from those heady days of 2000 when no less than eleven entered.

On the up side, we have a new name on the winner's shield. Congratulations to Leeds who came first with just 22½ faults, with Staplehurst as runners-up. A joint Aylesford /East Farleigh band came third. For the second year running it was not possible to present the shield for the most improved band because there wasn't one!

We are grateful to Emma Cundiff who came down from the Rochester District to judge the competition for us, and to Richard Abnett of Ightham for providing a delicious tea in a nice warm hall.

Full results of the Contest are on the left, together with a picture of the victorious Leeds band with the trophy. Let's hope that when they come to defend their title next November they have a few more challengers.

Winners	Leeds	22½ faults
2nd place	Staplehurst	35 faults
3^d place	Aylesford/ East Farleigh	65 faults

The **2006 District Striking Contest** was held at Yalding on Saturday 10th June. Five bands met on a lovely warm sunny day to do battle – a fairly impressive entry for these days.

It was a very close contest this year, with only three faults separating the first three bands. East Farleigh took the winner's shield with just 25 faults, and they go forward to represent the District at the County Finals in September. Staplehurst were runners-up with 27 faults, with Aylesford third just one fault behind.

We are grateful to Stephen Beckingham and Jenny White who came up from Hailsham, Sussex, to judge the competition for us, and to the Yalding ringers for providing the usual delicious tea.

Full results of the Contest are on the right, together with a picture of an extremely happy East Farleigh band with the trophy!



Winners	East Farleigh	25 faults
2nd place	Staplehurst	27 faults
3^d place	Aylesford	28 faults
4th place	Leeds	43 faults
5th place	Yalding	51 faults

District Events

Since a number of events since the last issue are now ancient history, our review of District events only goes back to the beginning of the year.

January Quarterly Meeting

The Winter Quarterly is always well attended, but the event at Marden on Saturday 14th February exceeded all expectations. At one stage no less than 33 ringers were crowded into the ringing room – more than twice the number that attended the ADM and the highest attendance at a District Meeting for some years. Consequently, we were able to ring both the special methods (Grandsire and Superlative) as well as a variety of other methods including Stedman and Cambridge. There was also plenty of opportunity for those who wished to ring rounds and call changes. Our thanks go to Diane Copas and the Marden ringers for the use of the bells and for a delicious tea in a nice warm hall!

Tower Captains' Meeting

The annual Tower Captains' Meeting took place at Marden on 14th January prior to the Quarterly meeting. Amongst items discussed were the recruitment and retention of ringers; encouraging support for and attendance at District events; training needs; and maintenance. Representatives shared examples of good practice and exchanged ideas, and also reported on the situations at their own towers. Views were also canvassed on the suggestion to re-organise the KCACR Districts. Copies of the minutes of the Tower Captains' and Quarterly Meetings will be available to members of the KCACR in due course, upon application to the District Secretary.

Surprise Major Practice

Enough people attended the morning Surprise practice at Staplehurst on 11th February to enable a fair variety of ringing, although the Cambridge Royal, in particular, would have benefited from a few more experienced ringers.

District Visit to Piltdown Campanile

This was a District meeting with a difference. Ringing on a 22lb mini-ring of twelve requires a totally different technique to tower bells – not least that it is best to ring with bent arms! Around twenty people availed themselves of Phil and Liz Barnes' hospitality, ringing from rounds on twelve up to Grandsire Caters on their Piltdown Campanile. It's just a shame that only seven of them were from Maidstone District.

April Quarterly Meeting

Twenty-five ringers turned up to the Spring Quarterly at East Sutton, including three visitors from Tunbridge Wells; it was also good to welcome Monty Gilbert - one of the District's former stalwarts, now ringing in Canterbury District. There was a wide variety of ringing from Call Changes upwards, including both the special methods, Plain Bob Minor and London. But perhaps what made this meeting just that extra bit special was that, instead of providing the traditional ringers' tea, the East Sutton ringers put on a wonderful lunch of Shepherds Pie followed by Apple Pie and cream or Blackberry Pie and cream. They would not accept any donation for the food as apparently they decided at their ringers' AGM that they would fund it themselves. This was an extremely kind gesture from them and is much appreciated.

Joint Practice Meeting with Benenden

Around 25 ringers from the Maidstone and Ashford Districts got together for a joint 12 bell practice at Benenden on Friday 5th May. It was particularly pleasing to see this event well supported by people from our own District, bearing in mind that the lack of a twelve-bell tower means that our opportunities to ring on twelve are somewhat limited. Methods rung ranged from call changes to Stedman Cinques to Little Bob Maximus, culminating in a half course of Cambridge Maximus. At least three of our District ringers rang methods that they had never attempted before. The practice was followed in time-honoured fashion by an adjournment to the Benenden Bull. Our grateful thanks to Rod Lebon and the Benenden ringers for making it all possible.

District Striking Contest

The District Striking Contest was held at Yalding on 10th June. Please see page 9 for a report of this and last November's Call Change Competition.

July Quarterly Meeting

The summer quarterly meeting at Wrotham on 8th July took a while to get going, and with only 13 people present ringing before tea was rather limited. However after tea (and a mercifully short business meeting!) we were joined by three visitors who made all the difference, and we were able to ring both the special methods – Stedman Triples and Spliced Surprise Major – interspersed with plenty of rounds and call changes.

Somerset 199

by Wendy Borer

At the time of water shortages, a hosepipe ban and the threat of standpipes, the Maidstone ringers and friends set off for their 199th visit to Somerset, in the rain.

The suggested lunch stop was, as in previous years, the "Butt of Sherry" at Mere. However, there was a last minute change of plans when your revered editor remembered that last year he left without paying his bill!

The ringing began with three lovely ground floor ringing chambers the third of which was Thornfalcon where everyone was to time – except Mr & Mrs Barclay! Having remembered this year to pay his lunch bill, Roy then went to the wrong church.

After Creech St Michael we made our way to Taunton and our guest house for the weekend, the very comfortable Bloreng House.

A quick check-in before setting off for dinner and on to ring at West Monkton at 8.00 p.m.

Once again we had absent ringers. Yes, Mr & Mrs Barclay. "We could see the tower, hear the bells but could not find the church!" Here's to a better day tomorrow!

Saturday morning dawned dull and chilly but it was up bright and early and on to the first tower.

An uneventful day where members of the party were either enjoying the ringing in some of the most delightful churches or basking in the wonderful Somerset countryside.

Some of the band enjoying the ringing at Halse, Somerset.....



*.....and others enjoying the food and drink at Firestone's Restaurant in Taunton.
(No jokes about them all looking tired, please).*

A very satisfying lunch was taken as a group at the White Hart in Wiveliscombe during which the weather turned very wet.

After returning to Bloreng House for a wash and brush up the group met at a local restaurant where, despite the very slow service, a very convivial evening was enjoyed by all.

On Sunday morning the ringers joined the local band at St George Wilton in Taunton for their Sunday Service. On arrival the ladies were presented with daffodils in celebration of Mothering Sunday.

It was hoped that the transport for the remainder of the day would be the West Somerset Steam Railway. However, this proved a little costly as not only was it Mothering Sunday but the railway had a steam weekend in place.

Our route for the day took us along side the railway which was lined with steam enthusiasts laden with cameras and binoculars of all shapes and sizes. This pleased the men of the party (especially Chris B) as they were able to see some of the trains even if they were not able to ride them.

A very enjoyable weekend concluded in a very wet Watchet. Thanks were extended to Mal and Dot for their infectious enthusiasm for enjoyment, and to everyone who had some part in the organisation; the excellent planning and spot on timings.

Here's looking forward to the 200th.

Barming ringers in East Kent

by David Earl

On a fine sunny day at the end of September, a large party of ringers from Barming plus friends from Harrietsham, East Sutton, Ulcombe and Otham went to the East of the County for an outing where the bells varied from 'extremely challenging' to excellent.

Rodmersham, our first tower, was uneventful apart from having to carry out a bit of spring cleaning before ringing could commence. We then 'rallied' to Chislet, where the stretching of the new ropes on a good heavy six meant that even striking proved difficult to maintain. Minster in Thanet was our final tower before lunch where we found the bells to be very hard work. Problems were encountered in both ringing up and completing any methods satisfactorily.

Lunch at Pegwell Bay saw many of the party picnicking and recovering from their earlier exploits at Minster.

After lunch, Kent's heaviest six at St Nicolas at Wade, were the high spot of the day. The ringing by all was of a high standard, with an excellent course of Kent finishing off our visit there.

The last tower of the day was Herne, where the bells proved to be 'rather interesting'. We were met by a local ringer who announced that the bells were still on plain bearings, odd struck, and investigations were underway into having them re-hung. We soon found out what he meant, for the bells were difficult to raise, keep up, and even ring decent rounds and methods because of them being so odd struck.

In spite of the larger number of 'challenges' than we usually encounter on our outings, everyone enjoyed the day. Freda Groves must be thanked for all her hard work in organizing the trip.

The winning numbers so far this year in the 120 Club Draw are:



March:

- 13 (£20) Dot (Maidstone)
- 62 (£15) Gerald (Boxley)
- 113 (£10) Robert (Barming)

April:

- 91 (£20) Robert (Boxley)
- 23 (£15) Carmen (West Malling)
- 118 (£10) Fran (Wateringbury)

May:

- 75 (£20) Sheila (East Peckham)
- 18 (£15) Nick (West Malling)
- 100 (£10) Richard (Yalding)

June:

- 13 (£40) Dot (Maidstone)
- 114 (£30) Sonya (Boughton Monchelsea)
- 59 (£20) John (Maidstone)

July:

- 22 (£20) Rosemary (Boughton Monchelsea)
- 66 (£15) David (West Malling)
- 71 (£10) Christine (Boxley)

August:

- 116 (£20) David (Barming)
- 75 (£15) Sheila (Mereworth)
- 57 (£10) Rosie (East Malling)

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

Belfry Reminiscences

5 years ago in October 2001 the world was still reeling from the horrific events of "9/11", and the Editorial to issue 69 focussed on how the ringing of church bells marked both the celebrations and tragedies of life. Among the features were reports on the Yalding ringers' weekend in Northants and Aylesford's visit to Hertfordshire, whilst *Belfry Gossip* reported that Boughton Monchelsea and Linton bells had featured on consecutive weeks on the short-lived bell spot on Radio Kent's Good Morning Sunday. The District also bade farewell to Revd Canon Brian Barnes, then Rector of Staplehurst and previously curate at All Saints Maidstone, who was moving to become Vicar of Hythe.

The layout of *The Belfry* had recently been revamped and the Editor asked, not for the first time, for more input from readers. Not for the first time little was forthcoming. Issue 69 was the first to appear on the District Website although it had teething problems—not least that in those days before broadband was widely available it took an age to download.

10 years ago in September 1996 ringing was making national news as a result of an elderly lady in Wiltshire breaking down the 15th Century door of her local church before hacking the bell-ropes to pieces. The Editorial in Issue 51 of September 1996 suggested that we as ringers should do our best to live in harmony with our neighbours and as far as possible pre-empt complaints. On a happier note a band of past and present Yalding ringers rang a peal to celebrate the 300th anniversary of four of Yalding's bells. To tie in with these celebrations Yalding was the featured tower in Issue 51. There was also a rare peal at Mereworth. Meanwhile the series of interviews with District ringers featured 14-year-old David Bassett of Staplehurst.

The other major event in the autumn of 1996 was the announcement that as part of their restoration project Staplehurst bells were to be augmented to ten. Issue 51 carried a report on the removal of the bells.

15 years ago in August 1991 the Editorial to issue 31 looked at the high level of publicity that ringing was getting that summer. This provided a good opportunity for recruitment; this would of course mean extra effort in training. Amongst the one-off items was an article by Dot Hooker on *Rites of Passage* and a report of Nigel Baker's 11th annual ringing tour, to Suffolk, which contained many references to a mysterious "Master Conductor" whose speciality was (miscalling) Grandsire Triples.

Amongst the achievements were Jim Eagle's first quarter-peal as conductor (Plain Bob Doubles at Fooks Cray) and Mark Gilham's first peal of Maximus (Cambridge at Bow). Meanwhile a band comprising 5 pupils and one teacher from King's School Rochester rang a peal at East Farleigh. The peal was conducted by the teacher, Barry Roberts - a long-time friend of the Maidstone District. The attendance at the summer quarterly meeting at Hunton was so low that there were not enough to ring until shortly before the service. By 4pm there were only two ringers! Numbers had swollen to nine for evening ringing on the ten bells at Leeds - surprisingly that enabled 6-spliced surprise major to be rung!

20 years ago in October 1986 Issue No 8 of *The Belfry* was somewhat smaller than usual. Nevertheless its eight pages contained some interesting items. There were some happy events to report, including the birth of Sue and Chris Bassett's second son Stephen (now a ringer himself), and the marriage of *The Belfry*'s Editor Roy Barclay and Sallyann Farmer of Headcorn. On the debit side the District said farewell to Nigel and Jacky Boorman, long standing stalwarts who were moving to West Sussex. The 1986 Striking Contest had been won for the first time by Staplehurst from what was then considered a "poor" entry of six bands. Meanwhile 63 ringers took part in Quarter-peal Week with 20 of the 26 attempts being successful including an encouraging 44 firsts of one kind or another. Eighteen new members were elected to the Association during 1986. Twenty years later few of them are still active in the District.

But perhaps it is the Editorial, though, that makes the most interesting reading: "...the District is approaching an all-time low...attendance at District Meetings has been abysmal and even some of our more popular practice nights are attracting less and less people..." Well, by present day standards that was Utopia! At least we had proper District Meetings then, and today's general apathy towards any organised event makes those days look exciting!

Future Events

Summer is, alas, now drawing rapidly to a close, but don't be downhearted. With the cooler days and darker evenings there is more reason than ever to get out and go ringing. Better still, why not try to get to some of the District events lined up for the rest of the year. Details of these are below.

A full list of the remaining District events for 2006 is on the District Calendar on the inside back cover. Could Tower Captains/Secretaries please detach it and place prominently on their tower notice-boards. 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".

Firstly, in October we have the **Annual District Meeting** which this year returns to All Saints Maidstone on Saturday 14th October. Timings are as follows: Ringing from 3pm, Service (now the only one of the year!) at 4.30pm, followed by tea in the church at approximately 5.15pm. The Business Meeting is likely to start at about 5.45pm and there will be further opportunities to ring on All Saints' ten bells after the Meeting. The ADM is the time when members can have their say on what happens in the District and to vote in the District Committee for the coming year. So do try to attend; better still why not stand for election? It is always good to have new people on any committee and the Maidstone District Committee is no different. Contact any existing Committee member for more details of what is involved.

The **Call Change Striking Contest** this year will be held this year at Boxley on Saturday 11th November. The draw for order of ringing will be at 2.30pm in the church. 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 will be receiving full details nearer the event.

Hard though it is to believe, it is only three months to Christmas, and with it the **District Carol Service** which this year is being held at Boughton Monchelsea. We always get a warm welcome there and, as usual, we hope to have mulled wine and mince pies after the service. The date is Saturday 9th December, there will be ringing from 4pm and the Carol Service starts at 5pm.

Looking ahead, the first event of 2006 is the **District Quarterly Meeting**, which will be held on Saturday 13th January at Aylesford. The Quarterly Meeting will be preceded by the **annual Tower Captains' Meeting**. Towers will be notified shortly of the timings of these meetings.

It is hoped that the full programme for 2007 will be confirmed shortly after the ADM. When available, it will be posted on the District website. Any updates or revisions to the above events will be notified to towers and will, of course also be posted on the website.

Articles for publication in the
The Belfry
should be sent to the Editor
at the address on page one
or e-mail to
belfry@kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk

*Please limit articles to one side
of A4 if possible*

District Carol Service



Boughton Monchelsea - Saturday 9th December at 5pm
Ringing from 4pm



MAIDSTONE DISTRICT CALENDAR

Autumn 2006

Saturday 14th October

ANNUAL DISTRICT MEETING at ALL SAINTS, MAIDSTONE

*Ringing from 3pm, Service 4.30pm, Tea 5pm
Followed by Business Meeting at 5.45pm approx
Further ringing in the evening*

Saturday 11th November

CALL CHANGE STRIKING CONTEST at BOXLEY

Draw 2.30pm

Saturday 9th December

DISTRICT CAROL SERVICE at BOUGHTON MONCHELSEA

*Ringing from 4pm
Service 5pm*

Saturday 13th January 2007

QUARTERLY MEETING at AYLESFORD

timings to be confirmed

Please note that this will be preceded by the
ANNUAL TOWER CAPTAINS' MEETING

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For updates visit Maidstone District OnLine at
www.kcacr-maidstone-district.org.uk
or contact the District Secretary