

The Weekly Journal for Church Bell Ringers since 1911

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# 30 years on – has the National 12-Bell Striking Contest brought 12-bell ringing of age?

by Stephanie Warboys

# In the Beginning

Like all the best ideas, it was brewed in a pub. In this case, after a monthly practice at Redcliffe. Not long after St. Stephen's, Bristol had been augmented to 12, in early 1974 Pat Bird had put forward the idea of holding a striking competition on 12 and the leading ringers in Bristol considered this an excellent idea and a number of ringing centres were invited to put in a band. Interestingly, not all those invited accepted and there were 5 bands that met on Saturday 31st May 1975: Bristol, the Ancient Society of College Youths, Reading, Leicester and Birmingham (in order of ringing).

The competition was conceived as a one-off event – according to Chris Kippin, the Bristol ringers considered that they rang Stedman, Cambridge and Yorkshire (Bristol Maximus was still considered quite advanced) pretty well in those days and were keen to see how the major centres compared. They were a little disappointed to be placed fifth, having drawn the "death slot" of having to ring first. To this day, no band ever drawn to ring first in a final has won! The format for the day was 255 Stedman Cinques, preceded by 4 minutes practice. After all 5 teams had rung, there was a buffet tea and the results. It is believed it was the first time a truly national striking competition had been arranged.

# Leicester carries it forward

It is rumoured that the Leicester ringers had agreed to invite the event back to Leicester the following year on their minibus on the way to Bristol – but the result reinforced this plan – it was a very popular victory for Leicester. The College Youths sowed the seeds of a definite pattern for future years by securing the first of what has now become 11 runners up placings – nearly 3 times as many as any other team! Leicester were presented with the Emlyn Hancock trophy, which is understood to still be at Leicester Cathedral today.

Almost right from the off, there was evidence of a highly competitive spirit – one of Leicester's back end having failed to set the bell at handstroke and in fear of being penalised after ringing so well, set the bell



The Paul Taylor Trophy

at backstroke and left it there. The incoming Birmingham ringer had to use a chair to retrieve the rope which was sportingly left out of reach! However, the overwhelming impression left from Redcliffe was that it was a great day out, a brilliant idea, a fun social gathering with excellence of striking sought.

And so, Leicester's warm invitation was taken up the following year, although it is believed that the competition was advertised more widely that year, the same 5 teams took part at St. Margaret's, Leicester and the home team prevailed again with a somewhat unorthodox touch of Stedman Cinques spliced with 6 leads of Cambridge Maximus. The Leicester ringers had had the Paul Taylor Trophy made, which has been awarded annually to the winning team ever since. The occasion at Leicester had less of a "ringers' tea atmosphere". Even at Redcliffe "the

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David House - "Stick to tiddlywinks"

Brummies" had sought and obtained special permission to store their crates of beer in the church – to keep them cool – of course. At Leicester, there are recollections of the late John Illingworth emerging from "The Joiners" with a toilet seat around his neck.

# The Organising Committee is Born

It had become obvious that the way to secure the continuity of the Competition was to set up an Organising Committee comprising representatives participating bands. It was also considered important that if the Competition was to serve some worthwhile purpose, then it should be ringing centres, rather than "all-comers peal bands" that should take part. The Contest rules and Committee structure have remained pretty much in line with that original conception. At present, the 9 finalists plus the next highest placed teams in the eliminators are represented on the Committee to ensure the numbers are manageable.

In the early days, the Committee used to meet at the Hind Hotel, Lutterworth for lunch but as the Contest grew in popularity during the 80's, it was decided that the Contest Committee should have a secretary to help with the administration of the Contest. The Committee has been blessed with quite excellent secretaries over the years - the first was Ann Wilby, followed by Swaz Apter, Heather Kippin and currently Carol Franklin. The contribution of the secretaries to the success of the Contest should never be overlooked – many a time, they have been the neutral face to whom frustrated bands have let off steam - they have provided invaluable help and guidance to host towers, spent endless hours on the phone and guided hapless Chairmen of the 12-bell Committee (myself included) down the right track on countless occasions.

The Contest was hosted by each of the 5 founder participants in turn for the first 5 years – 1977 being the turn of the College Youths at Southwark. Advertising the Contest had borne fruit and 8 bands took part in each year from 1977 until 1979. The Society of

Royal Cumberland Youths took part for the first time in 1977 and have entered every year since, except one. Other bands entering for the first time were Derby and the London County Association, which made its first and only appearance at Southwark. This was the year when the personality of the judges first began to assert itself – that young slip of a lad David House, who has gone on to judge 9 finals and 6 eliminators, was cutting his teeth with a comment or two - the immortal line: "this band would have done better sticking to tiddlywinks" has gone down in Contest folklore. These days the judges have guidance from the Organising Committee and aim to be constructively critical, especially at the eliminators where less experienced bands take part.

The "Competition" became a "Contest" when the Cumberlands joined in. Other noteworthy happenings for Southwark 1977 include the legendary Wilfrid Williams becoming so inebriated that when he had a minor accident and was carted off to hospital, health professionals declined administer any further pain relief. The Southwark Contest was Birmingham's first win and the start of 2 sets of "3 in a row". To date, Birmingham has won the Contest 12 times and in 3 out of the last 4 years. This recent run of form has been attributed to more professional preparation but those involved in the early days report that they have always taken things quite seriously!

# The Strike 12 Tapes

The 1978 Contest was held at Birmingham Cathedral and there is a permanent record thereof in the "Strike 12" recording that was principally from the Participants were unaware that professionalquality microphones had been rigged up by a BBC sound engineer to record the ringing (and the bands' belfry comments) for posterity. The Strike 12 Master tapes are being digitalised and the currently Committee's thanks go to Lucy Reeve for assisting with this. Such a recording probably wouldn't be allowed in these days of the Data Protection Act. The Strike 12 tape sold well and immortalises Jim Diserens' panicstricken tones when one of the Reading band disappeared when it was time to ring and certainly gives something of the suspense and elation of the judges' comments and results. Birmingham won again on their own bells, which was no surprise to the ASCY Master, Jonathan Porter, who anticipated correctly that his team would become runners up for the 4th time on the trot, and proceeded to the front to collect their certificate as soon as the 3rd place team was announced! It was 2 years later that the College Youths scored the first of their 4 wins on the Contest's first visit to York Minster.

Ringing World reports have often commented on the dramatic increase in the quality of the test pieces over the years (RW 89/585) "There is no doubt that the Contest

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has been a major influence in the encouragement and development of 12-bell ringing throughout the country." There appears to be no doubt about this amongst several of the original participants, many of whom are still taking part at the highest level. In many ways, the only way to be sure of this widely-held opinion is to listen to the Strike 12 1978 tape and to compare it to Adrian Udal's excellent recording of the 2000 Contest, also at Birmingham Cathedral, where serious maintenance/refurbishment was imminent, meaning the bells were actually much more odd struck than in 1978. The result of serious study of the 2 recordings is the inevitable conclusion that the Birmingham winning 1978 ringing - considered top notch in its time would almost certainly be good enough to get through to a final - but nowhere good enough to win.

# The Development of 12-Bell Ringing

So to what extent can the 12-bell Contest take the credit for this improvement in standards? Chris Kippin believes that the difference is that back in the 70's there were very few centres practising 12-bell ringing. There were certainly fewer 12's – the 1976 Dove lists 69 towers in England and Wales – this compares with approximately double that today. There were also significantly fewer 12 bell peals rung - in 1977 there were 227 total (133 Maximus 94 Cinques) - compared with the 2003 statistics of 388 total - (280 Maximus/ 108 Cinques). Obviously quantity and quality are 2 entirely different things but access to 12 bell ringing is now much wider and there are many more opportunities and centres with the ability to nurture aspiring 12-bell ringers.

Birmingham, through those early consecutive victories acquired something of a reputation for arrogance. Those who did not know the late John McDonald might be forgiven for thinking that this was deserved when he announced at Evesham: "we want to be beaten!" John nearly got his wish that year as Reading came a close second, their highest-ever placing – a result that has proved difficult to replicate but they have shown glimpses of this type of form by winning an eliminator and coming 4th at South Petherton in 2001.



Heather Kippin retired after 5 years as Secretary of the Organising Committee at Birmingham in 2000



"that's my boy" - Rod and David Pipe

The Brummies got their come-uppance the following year at St. Paul's and were 7th, the St. Paul's Cathedral band having entered for the first time in 1978 won an overwhelming victory on home bells.

Only 7 bands have ever won the Contest but noteworthy performances from teams that have not yet won include High Wycombe's famous 2nd place in 1994 at Exeter, Liss Campanile's runners up slot at Leicester Cathedral in 1986 and Bedford, Guildford and Bristol have all managed top 3 positioning, Bristol on several occasions. Two university bands have taken part – the University of London, who reached 2 finals and livened up proceedings with their colourful attire and hair and the Cambridge University Guild.

#### Yards of Ale

The general tendency for a large amount of alcohol to be consumed at 12-bell Contests led early on to there being an informal "Drinking Contest" running in parallel with the ringing. The bookies' favourites in this field are normally the College Youths, St. Paul's Cathedral, Birmingham and Manchester, who made a welcome return to the Contest in 2000 after a 13 year sabbatical! In the very early days, the judges were also provided with alcoholic refreshment before they announced the results. The late Peter Border judged at High Wycombe from the church roof and a strategic delay in the ringing proceedings was required due to significant beer consumption. Peter described the method that year (Lincolnshire) as "a series of mistakes joined together by 5 pull dodging and plain hunting". It was also the year that The Rev Brooke Lunn, sleeping off his lunch in the churchyard beneath his old raincoat, was moved on by a local constable.

# 'Judge not, lest ye be judged"

Judges' comments can often come back to haunt them: St. Paul's Cathedral (a Sunday Service band) was once described as "obviously not used to ringing with each other". According to David House: "judging is really hard - when there are 8 or 9 teams, the challenge is keeping consistency concentration. It is often not too difficult at a final to find the right winner but layering the teams correctly all the way down the order is tremendously challenging. Of course at an eliminator, you are aware that the first 3 positions mean qualification for the final and this can often be an even harder task. You are acutely aware that every single placing in the order matters enormously to the team concerned. Churchyard opinion is influenced by knowing who is ringing, whereas the judges do not. There are always some interesting exchanges after the results and

# **Editorial**

The Essex Association did a first rate job of hosting the Central Council last weekend in Colchester. The meeting itself proceeded very smoothly – even though there were some heavyweight issues in the air such as Child Protection and the CCC Listing Proposals. The energetic work throughout the year of the President, Michael Henshaw, and other Council Officers in responding to these issues with speed and common sense was rightly recognised. We hope to bring you the usual overview of events in Colchester, together with some pictures shortly.

It is fascinating to read Stephanie Warboys' account of the development of the National 12 Bell Contest. The balance of opinion certainly seems to suggest that the contest has had a very positive effect on the general standard of 12 bell ringing since its inception thirty years ago. There is a lot be said for having a tangible goal to strive towards. On that basis perhaps there is a case for instituting a National 8 Bell and 6 Bell Contest too (we already have the Tewkesbury Shield competition for ringing on 10). This idea was recently discussed in some depth on one of the e-lists. It would be no mean feat to organise – but certainly not impossible. What do readers think?

We owe Dorothy L. Sayers a great debt of gratitude for The Nine Tailors. For seventy years her book has helped to raise awareness in the general public of the rich culture of ringing — albeit against a fictional background of murder, mayhem and aritocratic sleuths! Hopefully many other association branches will follow the Chertsey District's example (p.553) and organise an event to mark the anniversary. If you want to know more about the author and her work see the website of the Dorothy L. Sayers Society at http://www.sayers.org.uk.

# First Peal Congratulations

Tom L. Blythe, Christopher M. Stephens, William D. Lovell, Steven Clarke

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once you know which team was which, you can normally predict who they will be with!"

The judges' comments on the Cambridge band at Evesham were: "clearly a less experienced band" but within 4 years they had started a real purple patch of success. In the 10 years from 1987, they won 4 times – initially at home and then at Pierhead, Ipswich and Coventry and consistently out-performed all other teams during this period.

It has often been the case that an initial victory can give a band the confidence to go

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The SRCY at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1984 (I-r): Derek Sibson, Ben Duke, Roger Baldwin, Alan Regin, Ian Campbell, Enid Lawson, John Barnes, Geraldine Lea, Stephanie Pattenden, Gwen Rogers, Ian Oram, Stan Jenner

on to even greater achievement. The young Cambridge band were excellent, popular and modest winners.

By 1989 there was another new name on the trophy. The Cumberlands had been consistently placed 3rd or 4th in finals and had suffered elimination at Rotherham in 1988. They bounced back with a vengeance as the Contest revisited its roots at Redcliffe the following year. The Cumberlands won again at Towcester in 1993, a Contest remembered for an accident involving curry and the Committee Chairman's trousers, and particularly memorably they won in SRCY 250th anniversary year at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, where they were hosts.

# Goodbye to the Bye

This meant that when St. Martin-in-the Fields entered for the first time that year, they had to qualify to ring in a final on their own bells. This was because at this time the only "hosts" and previous year's winners had a "bye" to the final. The Committee dispensed with this rule in 2003 and now there are no "byes", the top 3 bands at 3 eliminators going through to the final. St. Martin's have done extremely well in the 7 years they have been taking part, scoring a 3rd and a 2nd place to date and becoming the 4th different band from London to enter regularly.

**Previous Winners of the Competition** 

Year	Venue	Winners	Runners Up	Number of
				Entrants
2004	Bow	?	?	21
2003	Surfleet	Birmingham	College Youths	21
2002	Winchester	York	St Martin-in-the-Fie	
2001	South Petherton	Birmingham	York	23
2000	Birmingham Cathedral	Birmingham	College Youths	22
1999	York	York	Cumberlands	17
1998	Norwich	College Youths	Cumberlands	19
1997	St Martin-in-the-Fields	Cumberlands	College Youths	26
1996	Sheffield	St Paul's Cathedral	College Youths	20
1995	Coventry	Cambridge	St Paul's Cathedral	16
1994	Exeter	Birmingham	High Wycombe	18
1993	Towcester	Cumberlands	Birmingham	17
1992	Newcastle	College Youths	Cumberlands	17
1991	Ipswich	Cambridge	Cumberlands	21
1990	Pierhead, Liverpool	Cambridge	Birmingham	21
1989	Redcliffe, Bristol	Cumberlands	St Paul's Cathedral	20
1988	Guildford	Birmingham	Cambridge	16
1987	Cambridge	Cambridge	Birmingham	23
1986	Leicester Cathedral	College Youths	Liss	18
1985	Canterbury	Birmingham	St Paul's Cathedral	19
1984	St Paul's Cathedral	St Paul's Cathedral	College Youths	16
1983	Evesham	Birmingham	Reading	10
1982	Manchester	Birmingham	College Youths	16
1981	High Wycombe	Birmingham	College Youths	12
1980	York	College Youths	Birmingham	11
1979	Reading	Birmingham	St Paul's Cathedral	10
1978	Birmingham Cathedral	Birmingham	College Youths	8
1977	Southwark	Birmingham	College Youths	8
1976	St Margaret, Leicester	Leicester	College Youths	5
1975	Redcliffe, Bristol	Leicester	College Youths	5
			_	

Several other recent participants have gradually become more successful. Melbourne qualified for the final at their 7th attempt and repeated it again this year. Towcester have entered every year since 1991 and have now qualified 2 years on the trot. The award for perseverance goes to Oxford, who qualified this year at the 16th attempt. Their conductor was deeply disappointed that not all the band had kept the final date free!

### A Useful Goal

Many bands have used the Contest as an opportunity to really focus on improving or encouraging their 12-bell ringing, using it as a development tool. York first entered in 1994 at Exeter and the young band deliberately used the Contest as an objective to strive for, as a significant amount of York ringing took place on 10 rather than 12 in those days. It has not taken York long to become a highly fancied team, winning initially at home and again within 3 years at Winchester. Until this year's eliminator, York were the only team to have entered more than once and always qualified. The ignominy of failing to qualify has hit all the previous Contest winners, although Birmingham's "excuse" was being disturbed by an unexpected belfry intruder at a 1996 eliminator.

As a newly-formed band, Leeds proudly announced (RW 99/455) that the 12-bell Contest had been a key milestone in their development and, quite rightly, they were euphoric after qualifying for the Surfleet final at Stourbridge at only the 5th attempt. Other teams such as Hull and Manchester have also specifically set out to encourage, galvanise and improve their 12-bell ringing through the Contest. Some bands have used the opportunity of an eliminator on their own bells to enter the Contest for the first time, and several have qualified for the final under these circumstances. It is always good to see new bands deciding to take part for the first time and we would be delighted to see new centres entering or returning to the Contest. More information is on the comprehensive 12bell Contest website (www.12bell.org.uk), where the Frequently Asked Questions section is particularly useful.

# This Year's Contest

And so, we come to Bow 30 years on from Pat Bird's first experiment. Has much changed? Each Contest is different, the venues dictate this and every year has something special but what remains constant is what Heather Kippin called "the great day out" - the social gathering set against a backdrop of excitement, effort, old and new friendships formed and rekindled as ringers meet up from all over the country and sometimes even further afield. The graveyard pundits will happily provide a running commentary. Many consider it the finest occasion in the ringing calendar. It is not just a day for the participants and their supporters; all are invited to London on Saturday 26th June and will be made welcome. The College Youths, who should prove excellent hosts, have been in close collaboration with Fullers, who are brewing a special beer for the occasion. The fine bells of St. Lawrence, Jewry will be available during the day and the pub will not close until everyone has left or 11:00pm - whichever is the later! Further details are contained in the advertisement opposite. If you'd like to know more, please contact secretary@12bell.org.uk or chairman@12bell.org.uk.

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The ASCY at York in 1980 (I-r): Stephen Munday, Clarke Walters, Chris Rogers, Paul Mounsey, Nigel Thomson, Ian Dear, Michael Uphill, Graham Firman, Mark Regan, Bernard Taylor, Andrew Wilby, Jonathan Porter

The late Pat Bird's legacy to us, which has been nurtured and supported by so many in the ringing community, has even been described as "the best day of my life" by a winning team captain. His wife, who was also in the winning band, looked less than impressed! Our legacy to Pat will be a new sharp second at St. Stephen's, Bristol.

If you wish to contribute contact Mick Hobbs on 0117 956 8510; Ref RW 4845 p.236.

My thanks go to David Hull, Contest Archivist, for providing most of the facts and figures for this article and the further statistical information which is available on the website. He would be particularly grateful if anyone could supply details of the following band lists:

1982 Final at Manchester: Manchester, St. Paul's, SRCY and University of London 1984 Final at St. Paul's: Leicester, SRCY 1986 Final at Leicester: St. Paul's, SRCY 1987 Final at Cambridge: St. Paul's, SRCY

If these can be completed, then he can start working on producing comprehensive statistics for the eliminators!

Many thanks also to Chris and Heather Kippin, David House, Andrew Wilby, Alison Edmonds, Dinah Reed, Dave Bassford and Mark Bell for their help with this article.

STEPHANIE WARBOYS Chairman, 2004 12-bell Contest Committee

# The National 12-bell Striking Contest - The First 30 Years – Some Facts and Figures

# Teams

- 1. Most appearances in finals: Birmingham this year's final will be their 29th appearance, having been eliminated just once, in 1996.
- 2. *Most entries:* The ASCY, Birmingham and Bristol; they have all entered in each of the 30 years.
- 3. Two bands have only entered the Contest once but qualified for the final at their first and only attempt: Leighton Buzzard and Rotherham.

- 4. Consistency: The ASCY team has managed to win the contest on 4 occasions, exactly every 6 years 1980, 1986, 1992 and 1998. 2004 perhaps?
  - 5. Number of different teams entered: 52.
  - 6. Highest entry: 26 teams in 1997.
- 7. Reward for persistence: The Oxford band put recent disappointments behind them to reach their first final in 2004 at the 16th attempt.
- 8. *Unluckiest team?*: The SRCY team has been drawn to ring last on 6 occasions it's a good job they're keen on orange juice!

# Ringers

9. Different ringers in finals: almost 700 ringers have rung in the final.

Old hands: 9 ringers will be competing at Bow in 2004, who took part in the original contest – David Hilling, Frank Rivett, Andrew and Ann Wilby are now ringing for different teams and Tony Cox (Bristol), David House (ASCY), Frances Dodds and Maurice Edwards (Birmingham) have remained stable geographically.

10. Best record: Richard Grimmett – 7 wins from 10 appearances.

- 11. Most appearances by ringers in finals: Frances Dodds and Maurice Edwards have each rung in 27 finals. They, and Rod Pipe, have been in all 12 winning Birmingham bands.
- 12. Out on a high: Four ringers have rung in only one final, but also been in the winning team Cliff Barron, Alan Hartley, Catherine Speed and Bernard Taylor.
- 13. ...and three ringers have rung in only two finals and have won them both – Terry Hampton, John Harrold and John Pladdys.
- 14. Youngest participant: David Pipe (in the winning Birmingham team in the 1982 final) aged 14.
- 15. Spreading themselves around: John Loveless, Peter Sanderson, John Warboys and David Woodward have each represented 4 different teams in finals.
- 16. ...and winning: Mark Regan has won the contest with three different bands Birmingham, the College Youths and St Paul's Cathedral.

# Geography

- 17. *Towers visited:* 51 different 12-bell towers have been visited by the Contest.
- 18. *Green issues:* It is estimated that participants have travelled over 1.5 million miles to take part in the Contest.
- 19. Furthest distance: The final that required teams to travel the furthest was held at Newcastle in 1992 teams had an average round-trip of 478 miles to take part.
- 20. Weight range: the final has been held at three of the four heaviest twelves, Exeter (1994), St Paul's Cathedral (1984) and York (1980 and 1999). In 2003, it was at one of the lightest twelves in a church, Surfleet.

### Miscellaneous

- 21. *Disqualification:* Only one team has ever been disqualified from the Contest the College Youths at Canterbury in 1985 when the test piece was miscalled.
- 22. Most prolific judge: David House (9 finals, 6 eliminators).
- 23. Number of people who have judged the Contest: 95 (but only 3 at a time! on 2 occasions 4 judges have been used).
- 24. Test pieces: the test piece has been Cinques on 14 occasions (Stedman: 13, Erin: 1), Maximus 15 times (Cambridge: 11, Lincolnshire: 2, Yorkshire: 1, Superlative: 1) whilst in 1976 the touch included both Stedman Cinques and Cambridge Surprise Maximus.
- 25. The Graveyard slot: a team drawn first in the final has never won.
- 26. Early teams: only 2 teams have ever won drawn second.
- 27. The advantage of being late?: Average placing of teams drawn first in the final: 5.8; average placing of teams drawn last in the final: 3.0.
- 28. Pints of beer: venues are advised to have not less that 1200 pints of bitter available.
- 29. Final fact: Who wins in 2004? Why not come along and find out?
- If we have anything wrong, or you are aware of any interesting statistics or material from previous contests, we would love to hear from you!

# NATIONAL TWELVE BELL STRIKING CONTEST FOR THE TAYLOR TROPHY

The 2004 final will be held at

St Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside,

on

# **SATURDAY 26th JUNE**

Teams taking part are:
Birmingham, Bristol, College Youths,
Cumberlands, Melbourne, Oxford,
St Martin in the Fields, St Paul's Cathedral,
Towcester.

Chief Judge: Mark Regan Programme: 10.30 Draw in the Church 11.00 – 3.30 Contest Ringing (Cambridge Surprise Maximus) 5.00 Results

Open Ringing at St Lawrence Jewry 11.30-12.30 and 1.30-2.30

Hot and cold food will be available at The Red Herring, Gresham Street from 8.30 am (no need to book)

Licensed bar from 11am

Accommodation can be booked through Reservations 2000 (020 8547 0601) quoting College Youths www.12bell.org.uk.

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