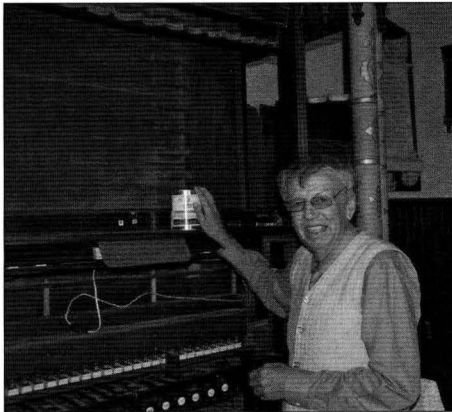


Jimmy Riadore: organ-builder, bell-ringer and hanger of the bells at St George's Cathedral, Cape Town

by Colin A. Lewis

The organ in the oldest Anglican church in the southern hemisphere was in dire need of attention when I worshipped at St James's Church, Jamestown, in 2007. Imagine my delight, and surprise, therefore, when I saw Jimmy Riadore outside the Missions to Seafarers at Cape Town harbour in July this year. I was about to embark on the Royal Mail Ship *St Helena* for an eight-day cruise, via Walvis Bay in Namibia, to one of the most magical of all the magic outposts of what is left of the British Empire: the island of St Helena. Jimmy was going, too, to tune the organ!



Jimmy Riadore at work on the organ in St James's Church, Jamestown, St Helena, July 2009

Jimmy Riadore was born in Lewes, in Sussex, in 1937. In 1952, being somewhat at a loss as to what to do to earn a living, Jimmy became apprenticed to Hill, Norman and Beard as an organ-builder. Two years later, while working on the organ at Binfield in Berkshire, he was invited to learn to ring. Since then Jimmy has never looked back: organs, bells and clocks have been the focus of his life.

In 1958, somebody suggested to Jimmy that he might like to consider working with an organ-builder in South Africa. The climate there was congenial and there was plenty of work. Jimmy was game for a challenge. The outcome was that he wrote to Cooper, Gill and Tomkins, the main organ-builders at that time in South Africa, and asked whether they might be interested in him. This company had been founded in Cape Town in 1902 by W. C. Cooper, from the organ-building firm of Binns of Leeds. The answer came by return of post: "Catch the next boat, we need you."

When Jimmy arrived in Cape Town the old bells of St George's Cathedral stood in a forlorn row in the cathedral grounds. The tower of the old cathedral had been taken down in 1952, and nobody seemed to know what to do with the bells. They had been swung chimed, but never rung full circle:

the tower had not been strong enough for such activity!

In 1961 the old bells, which had been a gift from Angela Burdett-Coutts, cast at Whitechapel by T. Mears and Son, and hung in the tower at St George's in 1835, were sent to Whitechapel. In 1962, supposedly, but probably early in 1963, and with the addition of some metal, they were cast into a ring of ten by Mears and Stainbank. The tenor weighs 25-0-0 and is in E[♯]. These bells were brought to Cape Town in 1965, and, with the steel frame, lay in the yard beside the cathedral, with wooden crates containing various fittings (including ropes).

Organ-building was not Jimmy's only interest. In 1970 he became Verger and Clerk at the cathedral, and was also in charge of maintaining the cathedral organ. Soon afterwards he was asked to rebuild the organ at the Groote Kerk in Cape Town, which is considered to be the mother church of the NGK. He then decided to form his own firm: Cape Organ Builders.

When Jimmy arrived in Cape Town there was already a band of ringers there: at St Mary's in the suburb of Woodstock. The octave at Woodstock had been cast in 1901 by James Barwell of Birmingham, and the first peal in Africa, Grandsire Triples, had been rung on it on 15th December 1904. Jimmy joined the Woodstock band in 1958, on his

arrival in South Africa. At that time Bill Smith was the Tower Captain, and other ringers included Len Hewitt, Robert Stickley from Herefordshire, Victor Sheppard, one of the Ernstzen family, and John Botham. Many visitors from Britain rang there while passing through Cape Town. Unfortunately Woodstock bells left much to be desired, and the ringers were keen that the cathedral bells should be available to them as soon as possible.

Being a bell-ringer and having joined the cathedral staff in 1970, and founded Cape Organ Builders (which seemed to go hand in hand with bells), Jimmy thought it might be a good idea to at least erect the frame for the new cathedral bells. He was allowed to do that during 1970. Then, using a small crane, he hung the bells in it, complete with chiming hammers. When he opened the wooden crates containing the fittings he found that the ropes were rotten: water had penetrated the crates. Some of the bearings had also suffered water damage and were rusty, especially those of the seventh bell. Jimmy did his best to make them usable, and packed them with grease. He then led the chiming ropes to the Verger's Office, so that he could chime the bells before services.

Although money was in very short supply at St George's Cathedral, the cathedral authorities finally agreed to build a tower for the bells. This was designed by Revel Fox, a local architect, and completed in 1979. In spite of the fact that the bells and frame were already erected in the cathedral grounds, Fox designed, or the builders built, a tower that was slightly too small for the frame. Parts of the steel frame were then cut off and, when the tower had reached frame height, the bells and frame, in one piece, were lifted into the



The ringers of St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, in 1979, the year in which the bells were first rung: (l-r), back row: Jimmy Riadore, R. Marriott, Paul Spencer, E. Seabrook, R. Herbert; middle row: Colleen Oxtoby, Ilse Ahrends, Aroon Spencer, R. Law, Roy Horrell; front row: Moira Runnalls, Christina Horrell, Len Hewitt, William (Bill) Smith, Christina Kenyon.

(reproduced courtesy of Dr Edward Elderkin)

tower using a 40-ton crane! The rest of the tower was then completed.

Only the two main foundation girders of the frame were bolted to the new tower, perhaps because the architect did not understand the desirability of fixing all basal girders to the building. Consequently, the frame was subject to lateral movement, a problem Jimmy solved by driving wooden wedges between the frame and the tower walls. Since the walls are of reinforced concrete, clad with stone, they have proved strong enough, so far, to cope with the strain of the ringing bells.

The cathedral bells were first rung in 1979 and the band, as photographed that year, consisted of Jimmy Riadore, R. Marriott, Paul Spencer, E. Seabrook, R. Herbert, Colleen Oxtoby, Ilse Ahrends, Aroon Spencer, R. Law, R. Horrell, Moira Runnalls, Christina Horrell, Len Hewitt, William (Bill) Smith and Christina Kenyon.

The first quarter on the cathedral bells was of Grandsire Doubles, conducted by Bill Smith on 29th June 1980. Almost a year later, on 14th June 1981, Jimmy rang his first

quarter on the bells, covering on the 25cwt tenor to Plain Bob Minor, conducted by Bill Smith. This, incidentally, was Christina Horrell's first quarter, and, as Christina Geddes-Elderkin, she is still, in 2009, a member of the cathedral band. On 14th February 1982 Jimmy covered for the first quarter of Triples on the bells: Grandsire Triples conducted by Bill Smith. The band was: Christina Horrell (first of Triples) 1, Leonard Hewitt 2, Madeleine Lindley 3, Hilary Moekli 4, John Botham 5, William Smith (Conductor) 6, Paul Spencer 7, James Riadore 8. The quarter was rung on the back eight in 53 minutes.

The first peal on the Cathedral bells was rung by the local band on 3rd August 1982, when Jimmy rang the treble to Plain Bob Minor. This was also his first peal. The band was: James Riadore 1, William Smith 2, Hilary Moekli 3, Madelaine Lindley 4, John Botham 5 Paul Spencer (Conductor) 6, and the peal, on the front six, was completed in 2 hours 50 minutes. This was the first peal for 1, 4, 6 and was Spencer's first as conductor: he called seven different extents.

On a warm and sultry evening, 30th March 1985, my wife and I stood in our first quarter in Africa, when Bill Smith conducted Grandsire Triples. Jimmy Riadore covered. Gill rang the second and I rang the third. Since then Jimmy and I have been friends. When the new frame and restored octave of Grahamstown Cathedral were dedicated, on 16th July 1994, Jimmy rang the tenor to a good quarter of Grandsire Triples, in 48 minutes, that I had the honour of conducting.

Jimmy's most recent quarter, and, sadly, probably his last, since he has not been in the best of health in recent years, was on 29th September 2002, when he rang the treble at St George's Cathedral for Plain Bob Triples. This was Dick Holmes's first of Triples as conductor, and took a rather long time: 59 minutes! The band was: Jimmy Riadore 1, Gill Glover 2, Margaret Rueger 3, Christina Geddes-Elderkin 4, Ed Elderkin 5, Alan Glover 6, Richard J. Holmes (Conductor) 7, Mark Ogilve 8. Significantly, Jimmy had taught Mark to ring, at Woodstock.

During his peregrinations around southern Africa, tuning and rebuilding organs, Jimmy has had the opportunity to ring many bells. In the early 1990s, when I was one of the External Examiners at the University of Zimbabwe, I met him one Sunday at the cathedral in Harare. The local band, augmented by the two of us, was just strong enough to attempt a quarter of Grandsire Caters. Sadly, that came to grief almost at the end (and I was not conducting!).

On another occasion, Jimmy gave himself a fright by raising the only bell at St Mary's, in Port Elizabeth. The wooden frame was not bolted down, and started to move, determinedly, high above his head. St Mary's is now the cathedral, and still does not have a ring of bells, having rejected a wonderful offer of an octave during 2008. While rebuilding the organ at Queenstown, Jimmy inspected the two existing bells, treble and tenor of what had been intended to be a 26cwt octave. Both stays were broken, so he replaced them and

taught a number of young people to ring, the most promising of whom was Ross Privet, a pupil at Queen's College. During 1983 Jimmy obtained new ropes for the bells from Pritchard's of Loughborough. I was amazed, staying at a hotel near the church one Sunday in October that year, to hear a beautiful bell being rung: perhaps Ross was ringing it.

In addition to organs and bells, Jimmy does considerable work on clocks. Recently he repaired the clock at the former Christian Brothers' School in Seapoint, Cape Town. He was delighted to get it striking again on the bells supplied and cast many years ago by Gillett and Johnston, the former bell-founders of Croydon. Presently his firm winds the clock in the old City Hall in Cape Town when, because of public holidays, that is not done by municipal staff. Jimmy tends to take advantage of winding days to play the magnificent carillon in the building, which is seldom heard these days.

When I last saw Jimmy, towards the end of July, he was busy at work on the organ at St James's, Jamestown, St Helena. This was made about 1910 by Cussons, a London builder, and is a clever one-manual instrument with rather nifty stops that, when played properly, make it sound as if the organist is playing the pedals (which do not exist). Jimmy, with hair badly tousled, and a very concentrated look on his face, was re-leathering the bellows, straightening a pipe that somebody had dropped and crumpled, and generally enjoying himself. "I'll get this job done properly, unless I die first," he told me. "And those clock bells don't sound quite right, do they?"

Some day I hope to return to St Helena so that I can hear the restored organ in action. The clock will probably be chiming properly, too, and perhaps there will be new bells! I wonder if Jimmy will have had time to tune the organ in the Museum, next door to St James's, before re-embarking on the mail ship for Cape Town? And what about all those pianos that have been neglected for years, and that sorely need attention?

Anyway, even if Jimmy does not manage to repair every organ on the island, and tune every piano, before he leaves, he knows that he will always be welcome to return to St Helena. After all, he was lodging at Harlyn, with Patsy Flagg, a retired teacher and now a Justice of the Peace. I have stayed there, too, and had to make my own meals. Jimmy was doing much better, and although Patsy told me she was not cooking anything special for him, she did assure me that Jimmy was welcome to sit in the kitchen and eat whatever was going. Lucky old Jimmy!

The Stump, Boston has a ground floor ring – albeit temporary



The simulator almost ready for use – left to right: Tom Freeston, Tower Captain at St Botolph's, Dave Collin, Bill Daubney, David Bennett and Tom Palmer

As part of St Botolph's 700 years Anniversary Celebrations, the ringers have acquired the use of the Lincoln Guild's simulator for the month of September. It will be open for the public to use on two Saturdays and two Wednesdays in the month, with local schools, cubs, brownies and other associations using it during the week, together with handbell ringing.

JOHN COLLETT

BBC Radio 4's *Bells on Sunday* is broadcast every Sunday at 05:43 and repeated the following Monday at 00:45.

The Month towers are:

4th: Hurstborne Priors, Hants, Plain Bob Major

11th: Sandhurst, Berks, Grandsire Doubles

18th: Stow on the Wold, Glos, Gloucestershire Triples

25th: Wambrook, Somerset.

Winchendon Place Doubles

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