

*The Weekly Journal for
Church Bell Ringers since 1911*

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Editor: Robert Lewis

The Johannesburg Project *by Colin Lewis*



*All Saints Anglican Church, Fourways Gardens, Johannesburg, showing the bell tower and main entrance.
The ringing chamber, immediately above the porch, opens onto a balcony facing the nave*

The foundation of Johannesburg

In the late nineteenth century the region in and around modern Johannesburg was a quiet farming district of the Transvaal. In 1886, however, George Harrison, who had come to the Transvaal from the Cape to seek his fortune, discovered the outcrop of the main gold reef of the Witwatersrand. Development followed almost instantaneously, and on 8th December that year the first stands were auctioned of what was to become southern Africa's largest and wealthiest city. The new town was named

after the two commissioners sent by the Transvaal Government to inspect Harrison's discovery, both of whom had the Christian name of Johannes!

Already, by the time the commissioners reached the site, The Central Hotel had been opened and agents of some of the greatest financial houses in the world were in residence, including Cecil Rhodes and J. B. Robinson (the latter representing the Werner Beit Company that also represented the Rothschilds).

* * *

Rapid growth

Johannesburg grew with great rapidity and by 1889 "was the largest town in Southern Africa. Each day, nearly a thousand ox wagons carried supplies to the goldfields". The railway reached the town in 1892. Six years later, on 11th October 1899, partly as a result of international greed, the second Anglo-Boer War began. "Johannesburg became almost deserted as trainloads of refugees fled". Three years later, when the War ended and the British were in control, "work resumed and former citizens rushed back".



(Founded by John S Goldsmith)

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<http://www.whitechapelbellfoundry.co.uk>Carter and Ridout: pioneering church
builders and bell ringers

During its early days Johannesburg was very much a boom-town, based on the gold mines, attracting adventurers of many kinds. It was hardly the place for thoughtful religious developments, let alone for the luxury of sonorous ringing bells. Nevertheless, in 1906 a gifted change ringer, who had rung a peal of Plain Bob Major in hand in 1905 for the Cambridge University Guild: G. H. Ridout, came to the town as Curate of St. Mary's church, which was later to become the cathedral. Three years earlier Fitzwilliam Carter, who had rung at Oxford University and was to become Vicar of Witleigh in Devon in 1915, and President of the Guild of Clerical Ringers, had arrived in Johannesburg and was attached to St. Mary's.

Both men canvassed for the installation of church bells, but first they had to build churches. Carter, in 1904 and at the youthful age of thirty-one, was appointed Headmaster of St. John's College, which had been founded in 1893 on grounds adjoining St. Mary's. St. John's was planned "on the lines of an English public school", but by 1904 was in severe financial straits. Carter's first task was to rescue the finances. Two years later he was appointed as priest "to the Northern suburbs" of Johannesburg, ministering to some thirty newly built areas. By 1907 he had built St. Luke's Church, in Orchards, but never managed to install a ring of bells in it.

Ridout was Rector of St. Alban's Church, Ferreirarstown, from 1907-41, where he also had to engage in building. Although he advised on the installation of two rings of bells in Durban (at St. Mary's and at St. Paul's) he never had the pleasure of seeing rings hung in Johannesburg. He wrote, regretfully, of his own church that "On 10th March, 1929, the new church was dedicated though the bells are not yet forthcoming.."

On a more hopeful note Ridout added that: "St. John's College, Johannesburg, is building a bell tower, ... St. Boniface Church Germiston, seven miles away, is to start building its tower soon after Easter ... we have hopes that when bells are forthcoming they will be put to good use". St. John's now has a clock chime of five bells by Gillett and Johnston, and a swing-chiming bell cast in 2005 at the Xmeco foundry in Port Elizabeth and designed by Dr Ray Ayres.

The first (and so far only) ring of bells in
Johannesburg: St. George's, Parktown

The first, and so far the only ring of bells in Johannesburg, was hung at St. George's Church in Parktown in 1980 in time for Christmas. Bishop Timothy Bavin dedicated this Whitechapel octave, with its 4½ cwt tenor, on 25th January 1981. Timothy, who had learnt to ring in England before coming to South Africa, later returned to his homeland as Assistant Bishop of Portsmouth. Another clerical ringer at the dedication service was the Very Reverend David Bruno, Dean of Windhoek in Namibia, who had formerly been a ringer at Darlington.

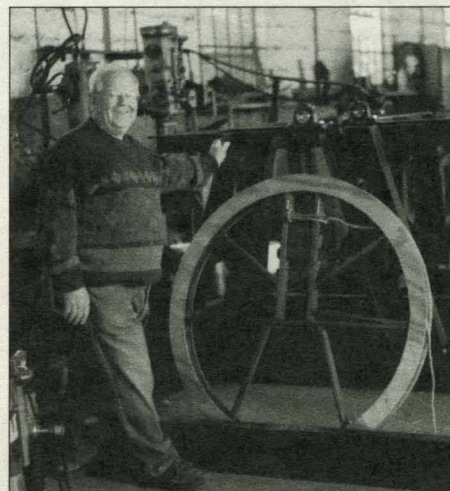
Many well-known ringers have been members of the band at Parktown, including Richard Grimmer, Steve Barton and Paul Smith. The first quarter peal was rung for a Confirmation service taken by Thomas Stange, the Suffragan Bishop of Johannesburg. He had been a ringer at Cuddeston and joined the band after the service.

The African Renaissance Programme

The days when many clergy came from Britain have gone and it is doubtful whether any South African clergy can ring these days, although the Dean of Johannesburg has recently had a few lessons. The Mbeki government's African Renaissance programme also makes it difficult for non-African immigrants to enter the country, thus cutting off supplies of ready-made ringers. It is against this background that a new project to install a ring of bells has been started in one of the Northern Suburbs of Johannesburg.

All Saints' Anglican Church,
Fourways Gardens

All Saints' Anglican Church, in the suburb of Fourways Gardens, was opened in March 2002 and was founded by the mother parish of St. Michael's in Bryanstown. The site was donated by a benefactor and the church and two staff houses cost about R4½ million, "most of which is accounted for in various loans". The parish has a population of some 200,000 and is growing rapidly. There are about 160 families on the electoral roll and the usual congregation at the main Sunday service has grown to around 150, although the building can seat 500. All Saints is therefore very much a mission church. It is also the first major Anglican Church to be built in the Diocese of Johannesburg for some fifty years and it has a fine tower.

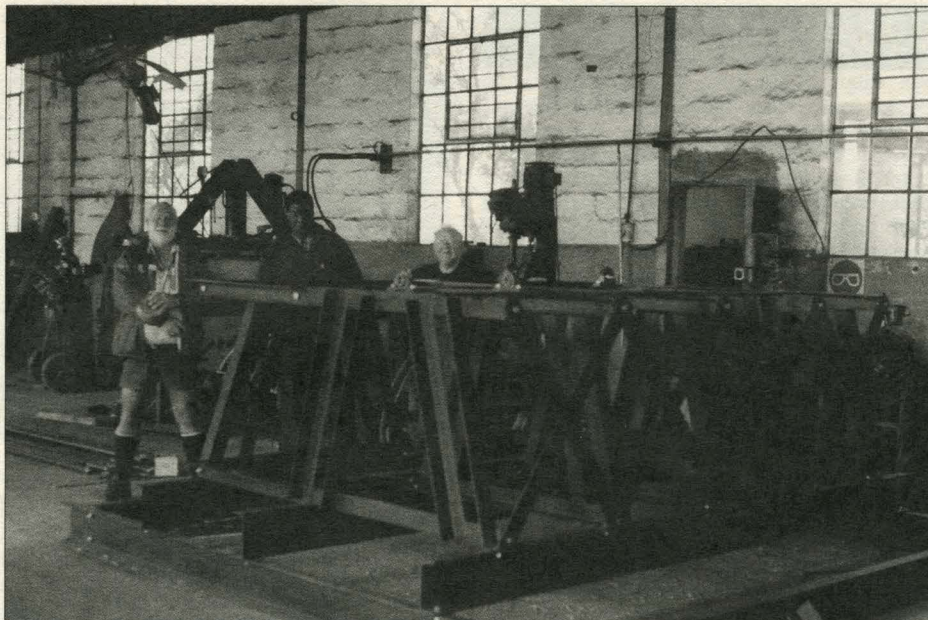


Eric Tasmer with the wheel of the tenor bell

A new ring of bells

An anonymous benefactor recently donated R120,000 for the installation of a ring of bells at All Saints. Initially the Parish Council feared that the sound of bells might lead to noise complaints, but subsequently agreed to the installation of a peal of six bells with a tenor of just under three cwt. Grahamstown Engineering then fabricated the steel bell frame, the design of which is based on that at Hillandale (RW, 25.6.1999).

The tenor was designed by Dr. Ray Ayres and cast at the Xmeco Foundry in Port Elizabeth. Grahamstown Engineering produced the headstock and other metal fittings. Eric Tasmer, who made the wheels for Hillandale, crafted the wheel of the tenor. The frame was installed in August 2005 and the tenor was hung in it. The cost of this work was rather more than the amount that had been donated. The excess was provided by parochial benefactors. Production of the bell, frame and fittings was organised by Colin Lewis.



The bell frame assembled in the workshop at Grahamstown Engineering. Roger Peters, who with his staff built the frame, is on the left

Late in 2005 the number five bell was purchased and Eric completed work on the wheel just before Christmas. The headstock was in production in January 2006. The aim of David Hutton-Wilson, who is one of the Churchwardens and the project leader, is to complete the ring during 2006. David is from Helmsley in Yorkshire while Valerie, his wife, is from Scunthorpe. For them the sound of church bells ringing is part of the culture of the Anglican Church. They worshipped at Parktown for many years and enjoyed listening to St. George's bells.

The parishioners are very keen to see the project completed and, according to David, "There is huge interest in the congregation in learning the art of change ringing". A band is already with instruction at St. George's in Parktown under the guidance of Dr. Richard Roberts and Ian Knox.

Support from England

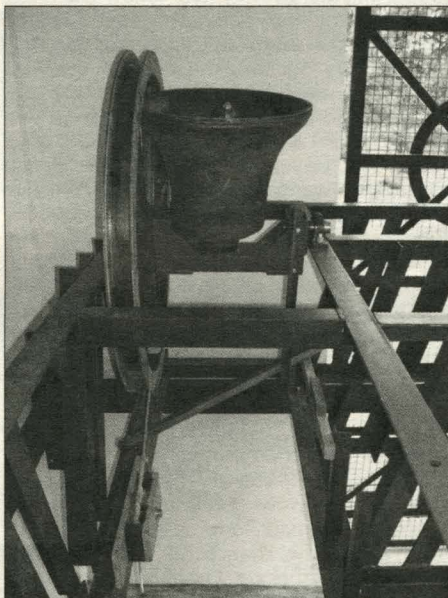
Taylor, Eayre and Smith Ltd. have given great support to this venture and it is anticipated that, in order to keep costs to a minimum, the remaining bells, like the tenors, will be cast in Port Elizabeth. The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers has been most generous and at the end of 2005 made a grant of £900 to the parish council. Application has also been made to the Trustees of the Fred Dukes International Bell Fund for a grant-in-aid to purchase clappers from Taylor, Eayre and Smith Ltd.

Ringing visitors to South Africa

Over the years many British, and some Australian, American and New Zealand bell ringers have visited South Africa, where there are presently only seven rings of bells. South African ringers have always made visitors most welcome. Now, however, they ask for your financial support, so that the eighth ring of bells, and the first in which all the bells are cast in Africa, may become a reality. All Saints has a purpose built bell tower. The frame is already in place. The tenor has been hung and rung. The number five bell exists and should soon be hung. Another R100,000 is needed to complete the project. This sounds a great deal, but in Sterling terms it is only a few thousand pounds.

Donations: what could your money buy?

£2,500 is sufficient to pay for one bell with its ringing fittings. Have you rung in South Africa? Are you willing to donate £100? If twenty-five people are generous that will mean one less bell for which the parishioners of this new church have to pay.



The frame and tenor installed in the tower (Photo courtesy of Dr Richard Roberts)

Donations and the Central Council

The Treasurer of the Central Council has very kindly agreed to accept donations towards the cost of completing the ring of bells at All Saints. If you would like to contribute towards this worthwhile project, please send your cheque, made out in favour of: CCCBR, to Mr D. Harbottle, 31 Green Street, Brockworth, Gloucester, GL3 4LU. If you are a UK tax payer, please make a Gift Aid declaration to the CCCBR with your donation (i.e. state your name, address, and that you are a UK tax payer).

COLIN A. LEWIS

(Bell Projects Officer,

South African Guild of Church Bell Ringers)

Editorial

The plight of the London County Association is certainly generating correspondence: Simon Holden raises interesting related points this week about leadership in ringing and its impact on the success or otherwise of our organisations (letters, p.202). Are other associations really experiencing difficulty in filling committee vacancies? Will the LCA be the first of many venerable associations to 'cease trading' in the next few years? Is the day of the territorial association and diocesan guild really over? Or is this just a London phenomenon? We would like to hear from more of you on the subject ...

The Ringing World receives a surprising number of enquiries from family historians seeking information about ringing antecedents. Occasionally we are able to be helpful and point them in the right direction – but generally speaking we do not have the resources to do very much. It has always struck me as slightly odd that the Central Council's Biographies Committee concerns itself only with records of members and former members of the Central Council. Perhaps the remit of this committee should be widened to include *all* ringers and to assist, where possible, in providing information to the growing number of people researching their family history.

Much as I respect the viewpoint of Chris Hughes (p. 203) it will come as no surprise that I disagree with it. One of the considerations here is that quarter peal reports already dominate the paper in a way which alienates some of our readers. If one has a policy to publish and remain up-to-date with quarter peal reports then, like peal reports, they have to take precedence over most other material in the paper. We are again printing an extra 4 pages in this issue – just to catch up with the back log. Donations rarely cover the total cost of publication. So please forgive us for not sharing Chris's enthusiasm for publishing "non-bell" quarter reports as a matter of course.

See also Comment on p.221.

First Peal Congratulations

Lee D. Avery

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