

## Chapter 13

### Social Aspects of Ringing

Bell ringing is one of the few activities all people can engage with, regardless of age, background and technical knowledge. While natural ability and the opportunities available will inevitably impact on the level of advancement in the art of ringing itself, the hobby has a wider focus that extends beyond the physical activity of ringing a bell. As such there is something for everybody whether their interest is based around music, mathematics, engineering, psychology, history or another relevant topic. With such a diverse mix of individuals social opportunities have always been an important aspect which has helped to knit the ringing fraternity together as a single cohesive group.

#### Ringling Societies

While societies of ringers have always been based around a tower or location these grew with the emergence of change ringing from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Early societies that are known to have existed from historical records include:

***Brethren of the Gild of Westminster***, Westminster (1254) – in a patent roll of Henry III, dated 6 March in the thirty sixth year of his reign, is a grant which translates ‘*Know all men, that we have granted the Brethren of the Gild of Westminster, who are appointed to ring the great bells, that they and their successors shall receive annually out of our Exchequer 100 shillings, fifty at Easter and fifty at Michaelmas, until we provide a like sum for them payable out of lands for the said ringing.*’ These were almost certainly the ringers at Westminster Abbey who rang the bells, but not in full circle until much later with the development of the full wheel.

***Gild of St Paul’s***, London (1507) – the rules of which required the ringers to be responsible for opening and closing the Cathedral, ringing the bells and other duties.

***Schollers of Cheapside***, London (1603) – a manuscript in the Library of All Souls College, Oxford which in 1682 belonged to Narcissus Luttrell. It includes a section entitled ‘*ORDERS conceived and agreed upon by the Company exercising the Arte of ringing, knowne and called by the name of the SCHOLLERS of CHEAPSIDE in LONDON, begun and so continued from the second day of February anno 1603.*’

***Companie of Ringers of the Blessed Mary of Lincoln*** (1612) – the society was established on 18 October 1612 with Robert Sandie, the scrivener, as its first master. The rules for governing the body, including fines and payments, were set out in *The Ordinances of the Society of St Hugh of Lincoln* at the time of its establishment.

***Antient St Stephen's Ringers***, Bristol (1620) – at its inception it was a body of practical ringers and is still active today, but now only for social and convivial purposes. It is said the society was promised a charter or ordinance by Elizabeth I in 1574, but that promise was not fulfilled until 1620 by James I.

***Society of College Youths*** (subsequently re-named ***Ancient Society of College Youths***), London (1637) – founded on the 5 November it was originally known as the Society of College Youths and operated within the London area. It is still active but as a premier ringing society now has a global membership.

***Northern Youths*** (subsequently re-named ***Sherwood Youths***) Nottingham – origins of the society are lost in the historical record, but the original society is mentioned as having added to new bells to the ring at St Peter, Nottingham in 1671 to create an octave.

***Western Green Caps*** (1683) – little is known beyond a set of rules within the Rawlinson manuscript in the Bodleian Library.

The development of change ringing throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century periods saw a greater participation of individuals from the lower social classes. This was blamed for the frequent drinking and smoking found in many belfries at the time, and demands from the ringers to be paid for ringing usually for special events rather than church services themselves. Writing in 1849, the Revd H T Ellacombe wrote that '*as a body, a more drunken set of fellows could not be found*'. At the time this was written laxity in the Church of England had led to neglect of church buildings and in the holding of services. Some clergy formed what has become known as the *Oxford Movement* to improve matters. An attempt to reform the ringers' behaviour followed as a consequence with the church authorities seeking to establish diocesan and other territorial societies. This *Belfry Reform Movement* led to the establishment of many of the current guilds and associations found today in place of the previous local secular societies, although some of the earlier ones have continued to exist.

The first of the modern territorial associations was founded in Devon in 1874. It was followed a year later by the Yorkshire Association and in 1876 by the Lancashire Association. Then in August 1877 there came the first of the diocesan guilds, then known as the Durham Diocesan Association. A month later the Norwich Diocesan Association was founded, with the Gloucester and Bristol Diocesan Association following in January 1878. The initial modern territorial societies therefore saw three county societies followed by three diocesan societies established. Since then further societies have been established to reflect new interest groups (e.g. University Societies) with others re-established to reflect subsequent changes to boundaries, both county and diocesan.

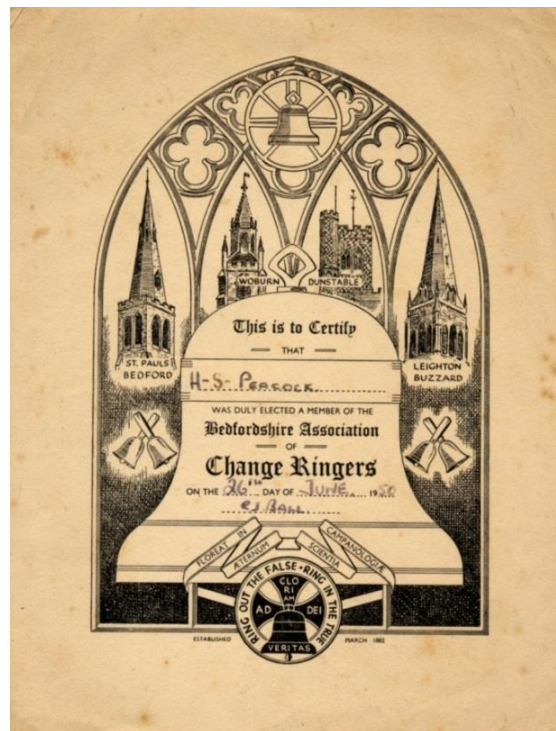
**(i) Guild of Devonshire Ringers**



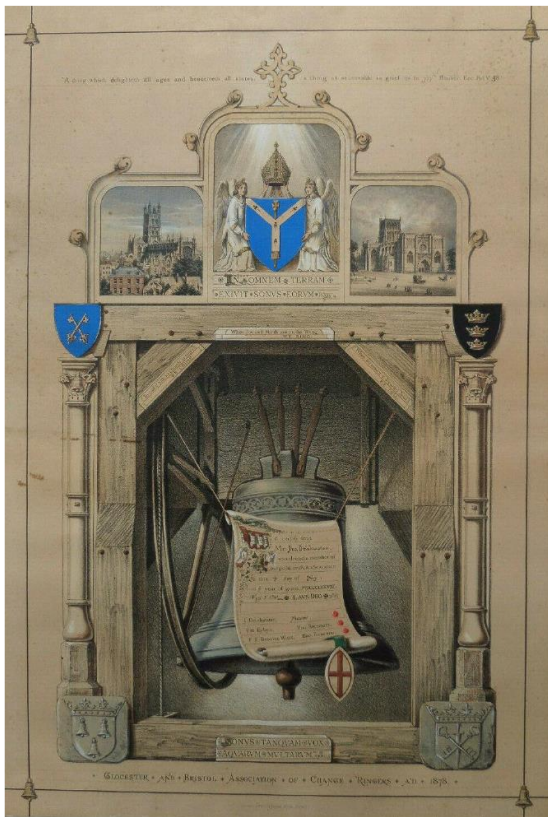
Example shown is certificate number 7 for a founding member of the first Guild set up following the *Belfry Reform Movement*. It is probable the certificates were produced after the inaugural meeting on 21 March 1874 and then back dated. The design for the Guild of Devonshire Ringers remained in use for many years the only difference being the adoption of different colours. The initial printing used black ink, while later versions are known in brown or mauve colour (22.2cm by 27.1cm).

**(ii) Bedfordshire Association**

Example shown is dated 26 June 1950 (13.3cm by 17.7cm). It displays a badge at middle bottom which is derived from the Church and General Agency badge advertised in the Bell News (examples shown below). The first advert appeared on 23 September 1899 (page 210) with the final appearance being 11 February 1905.



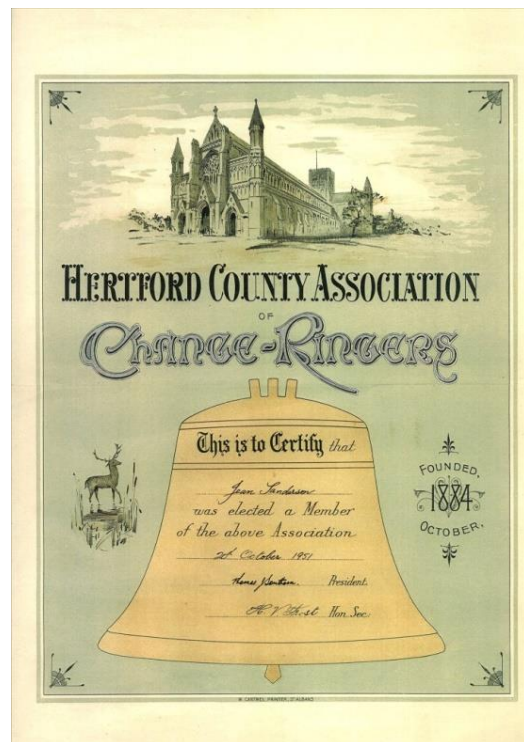
**(iii) Bath & Wells Diocesan Association**



Example shown is dated 4 July 1878 (i.e. 3 days after first AGM held on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1878 at St Mary Redcliffe) and was issued to John Drinkwater who had been appointed as the first Master of the Association. It is marked 'Lavers, Litho, 51 Broad Street, Bristol' (42.0cm by 61.0cm).

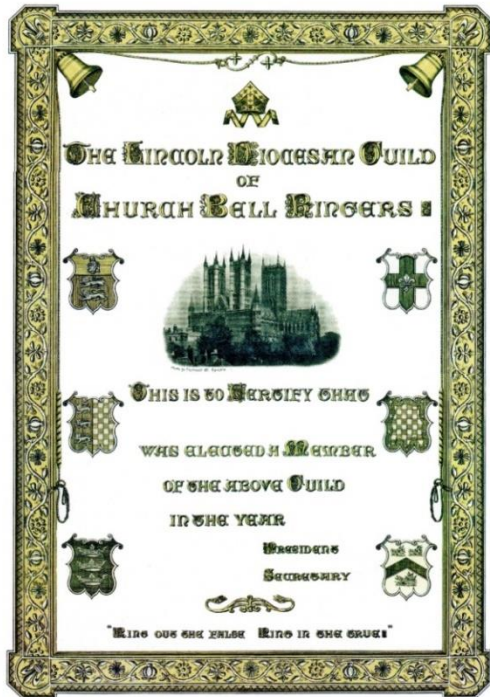
**(iv) Hertford County Association**

This example is a later design used by the Association and records the election of Jean Sanderson on 20 October 1951. Printed by W Cartmel, St Albans (29.0cm by 41.0cm).





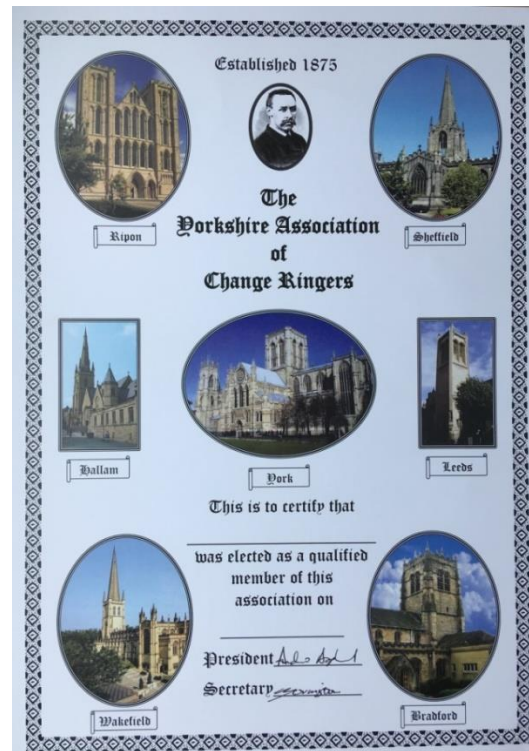
**(v) Lincoln Diocesan Guild**



This example shows a floral band used by the Oldfield founders as on a bell at Haugh with the corner fleur-de-lys as on the bells at Heapham and Scampton. The bells are from a photograph supplied by the Loughborough Bellfoundry. Ropes as at St Peter-at-Arches, Lincoln, and joined in the middle by an ornamental S as on the bells at Horkstow. The mitre from the Bishop of Lincoln's official seal. Lincoln Cathedral is in the centre, and the Lincolnshire-born poet laureate, Tennyson, supplied the motto "Ring out the False, Ring in the True". Above this is a scroll from a bell cast by Harrison's, a Lincolnshire founder; The coats of arms, clockwise from the top right are: Lincoln, Grantham, Grimsby, Boston, Stamford and the Bishopric of Lincoln; All the lettering is in the form used by a previously unknown local founder of the South Somercotes bells, now thought to be John Smith of Louth (28.0cm by 36.5cm).

**(vi) Yorkshire Association**

Modern style certificate used by the Association in 2019 (29.5cm by 42.0cm – A3).



Fuller details of the scope of society membership certificates can be found in the *Catalogue of Bell Ringing Society Membership Certificates* published by the author elsewhere (see *Ringing World*, 2 March 2012, pages 228 to 229) but the above examples have been included for illustrative purposes.

## **Annual Feasts**

Newspaper reports from the early part of the eighteenth century frequently report on ringing and other related activities. Local ringing societies acted as social groups in addition to promoting ringing – in some cases the activities appear to have been more social than ringing! It is not therefore surprising to see the Annual Feast as a key event in the calendar. As the century progressed great advances were achieved in ringing but the social element appears to have been sustained despite the changing nature of the Exercise.

### **(i) Society of College Youths** (subsequently named **Ancient Society of College Youths**)

A good example of this change can be found in the College Youths. When the College Youths were founded in 1637 the majority of members were drawn from the upper echelons of society. The advancement of ringing in the early 1700s saw a broader spectrum of the population taking up ringing. This led to the establishment of a number of other London based ringing societies from which the College Youths appear to have attracted many members. By 1756 however, tensions had arisen within the College Youths between the older members and more recent recruits who on the whole tended to be the better ringers. This led to a split in the Society. The older members went off to form the Ancient Society of College Youths, whilst the remainder kept the original Society of College Youths name (though are often referred to as the Junior Society). Both societies had merged into a single identity again by around 1788, but whether by merger or one ceasing to exist is unknown.

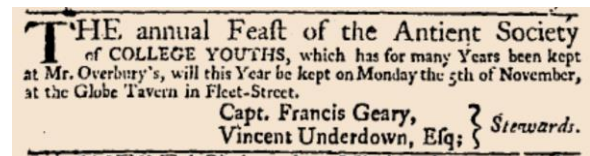
Both Societies appear to have continued to hold separate Annual Dinners throughout this period. The Junior Society was the first however, to use a specially engraved ticket for the event. The original design, still used on the front of current Annual Dinner menu cards, was the work of Thomas Kitchin a well-known cartography. He was born in Southwark in 1719 and was apprenticed to Emanuel Bowen in 1732. Originally based in Clerkenwell, he had by 1755 moved to 59 Holborn Hill after becoming hydrographer to the King in 1773. He died in St Albans on 23 June 1784.

The earliest known example of a Kitchin style dinner ticket is from 1763. The ticket provides details of the Master and six Stewards and invites the member to attend the event at the Half Moon Tavern in Cheapside. It is thought that the first two names represent the elected Stewards, with the other four names being members who were responsible for organising the Dinner. In addition to a blank copy, further used examples from 1766, 1772 and 1775 are known to exist, the latter two giving the venue as the Globe Tavern in Fleet Street which

occupied the corner with Shoe Lane (the advertisement for the Annual Feast shown below suggests the Society held its first event at the Globe Tavern in 1744). The two later tickets include a postscript at the foot of the ticket inviting the member to attend St Mary Le Bow at one o'clock precisely, prior to the dinner at 2pm. The towers illustrated on the ticket are St Mary le Bow, Cheapside (top left), St Brides, Fleet Street (top right) and St Mary Overie, Southwark – now Southwark Cathedral (bottom middle).



Kitchen ticket from 1775



*Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Wednesday, October 24, 1744; Issue 4369

The Kitchin design measures 1.9cm by 2.5cm and appears to have been printed on paper measuring 2.15cm by 3.25cm.

A manuscript entitled *Collection for a History of Bellingring* compiled by John Osborn in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, provides an interesting glimpse of the event in those days. It includes an account by William Eversfield of Gravesend, who recalled that members walked in procession from the Barley Mow (Salisbury Court, Fleet Street) to the church appointed for Divine Service. The procession being led by the Beadle, who wore a black silk gown and gold laced hat, and carried the silver mace acquired by the Society in 1762 (which is still used at Society meetings to this day). The Osborn Collection also contains a copy of the oldest known rules for the Society (1776). Rule 12 states that '*Master and Stewards were to cause tickets to be printed and directed to the several members to be delivered by the Warner.*' For this service all members had to contribute 1s (i.e. 5p).

Around the time of the emergence of a single Society around 1788, a new Annual Feast ticket was commissioned from the eminent designer Francesco Bartolozzi. He was born in Florence on 25 September 1725 and demonstrated such skill as a designer that he was sent to Venice where he studied engraving. After arriving in London in 1764 he worked as an

engraver and soon afterwards was appointed ‘*engraver to the King with a salary of £300 per year*’. He was a founding member of the Royal Academy in 1768 and in 1802 became founding President of the short-lived Society of Engravers. In 1802 he accepted the post of Director of the National Academy of Lisbon, where he died on 7 March 1815. Engravings were the means of creating reproductions of fine art in the pre-photographic age, and Bartolozzi was considered one of the best. Prominent artists such as Sir Joshua Reynolds praised his work and today his engravings are still highly regarded for their composition and quality of engraving.

The Society still holds the original copper plate for printing these tickets (restored in 1923), the design now being used for the membership certificate. This cost 15 guineas at the time (i.e. £15.75 – a considerable sum in those days) and an initial printing run of 300 copies cost £1-19s-0d (i.e. £1.95). Two blank copies of these invitations are known to exist - one in the Osborn Collection in the British Library, the other is in the London Metropolitan Archives. The churches shown on this ticket (left to right) are St Brides, Fleet Street; St Martin-in-the-Fields; St Michael, Cornhill and St Mary Overie, Southwark.

The later Bartolozzi design is the same size as the current membership certificate measuring 2.4cm by 3.3cm.



Unused example Bartolozzi ticket

**(ii) Society of Cumberland Youths** (subsequently named **Society of Royal Cumberland Youths**)

An early rival to the Society of College Youths at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the Society of London Scholars. Both societies practiced at St Brides from 1710 and jointly paid for the augmentation of the ten bells to a ring of twelve in 1719. The *Clavis Campanalogia* of 1788 records that both societies kept the two trebles they had donated chained up to stop others from ringing them.

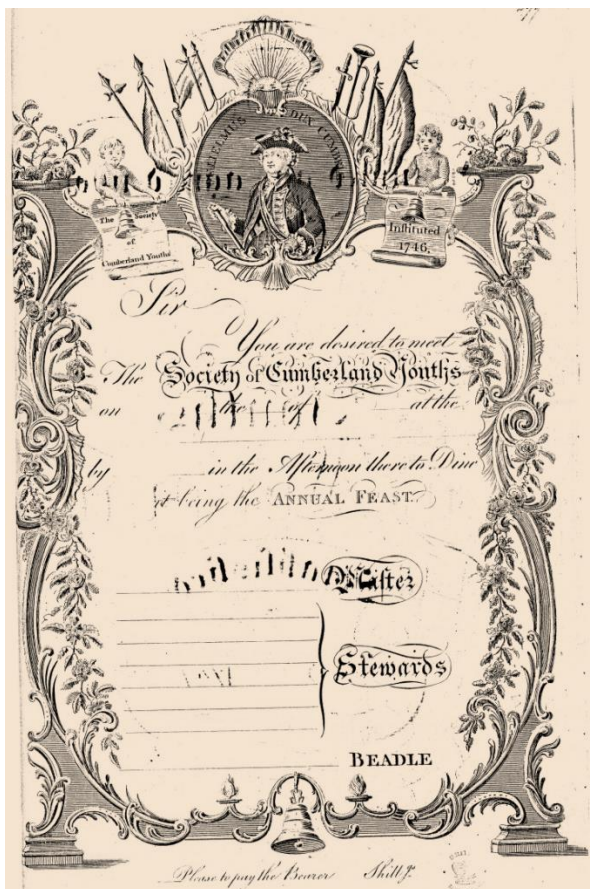
Newspaper reports of the time record ringing competitions between the College Youths and London Scholars. Initially the rivalry appears to have been cordial. *Mist's Weekly Journal* (23 March 1728) reported ‘*a Trial of Skill in Ringing*’ with 6,000 changes attempted at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London where the Scholars were deemed to have rung the better peal.



The cordial nature of the rivalry did not last however, with the appearance of articles reporting successful peals while drawing attention to unsuccessful attempts by the other society. This culminated in a number of articles in which the College Youths attacked the London Scholars for using relays of ringers in their peals, which they saw as unprofessional. An article from the *Daily Journal* (30 March 1731) suggested the Scholars had '*never been Masters enough of the Art to perform a Peal in any other [way]*'. Further reports followed, culminating in a *Daily Journal* (17 February 1732) article from the College Youths refuting '*several scandalous paragraphs*' published by the London Scholars. Similar exchanges continued over the next five years.

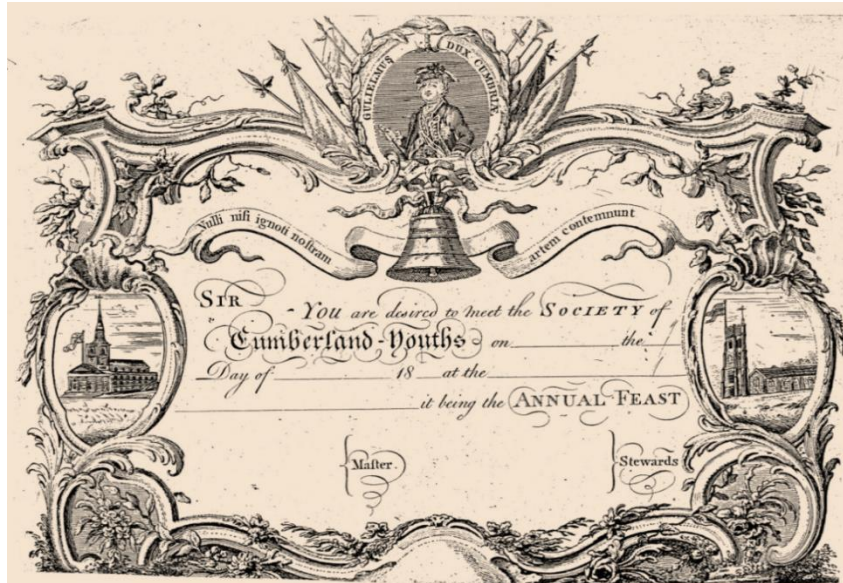
The Society of Cumberland Youths was founded on 6 September 1747. The Osborn papers suggest the Cumberland Youths were created when the London Scholars changed their name in honour of the Duke of Cumberland's achievements at the Battle of Culloden. No other evidence for this has been found. An early newspaper report (*Remembrance*, 26 November 1748) suggests their first peal was of 'Bob Majors' in three hours and twenty seven minutes at St Leonard's church, Shoreditch.

The word 'Royal' was added to their title during the 1870s. This act was challenged in *Church Bells* (October 1878) but drew an evasive response from the then Secretary of the Society. No further challenge was received so the society continues to be known as the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths to this day. Two distinct design of ticket are known.



The example opposite is unfortunately blank so only provides limited information. It has the floral surround so typically found on tickets of this period and in that respect is similar to the Kitchin ticket for the College Youths. A portrait of the Duke of Cumberland is the main feature at the top of the ticket with a single bell appearing at the bottom (size 19.5cm by 28.0cm). No price is shown for the annual dinner, although the entry at the foot suggests it was a whole number of shillings in pre-decimal currency.

The second (overleaf) and possibly later design shows the date '18—'. It again includes a portrait of the Duke of Cumberland. It further includes St Martin's-in-the-Fields, London (on the left) but the one on the right is less easy to identify with certainty (size 26.5cm by 20.0cm).



A slightly different design appears to have been used at the time for peal invitation cards. This was engraved by W Grainger who was active at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (size 21.5cm by 14.0cm). The design used for peal tickets was utilised for the Royal Society of Cumberland Youths 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner ticket in 1997.



### **(iii) Society of London Youths**

The first mention of a separate society known as the Society of London Youths appears in the *St James's Evening Post* and *General Evening Post* (30 December 1736) recording 5,544 Bob Maximus, all twelve in, at St Mary Overy, Southwark. This society appears to have been based in the East End area of London until it was re-founded on 27 Dec 1737. Its headquarters was the Three Goats Heads tavern in Whitechapel Road.

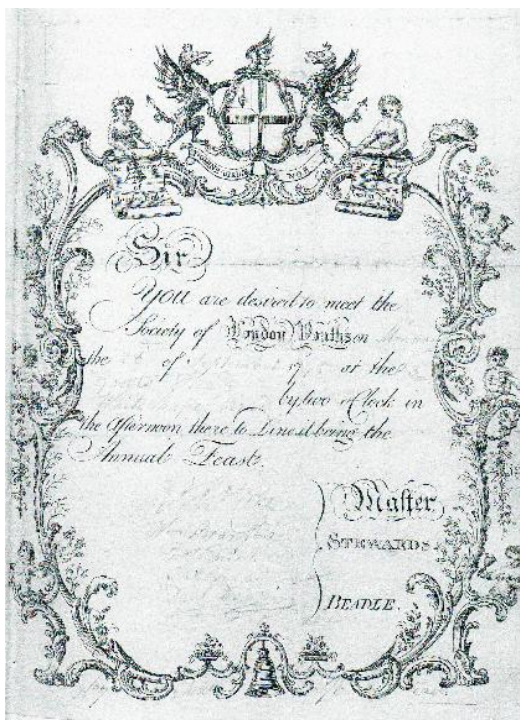
Nearly all the Youths early peals were rung at St Mary Matfelon, Whitechapel or St George-in-the-East. They imitated freemasonry by calling themselves 'The United Brethren of the Most Noble Order of the Bell' and adopted the year to reflect the first mention of bells in



the Old Testament, so the year 1766 became 'year of Bells 3265'. This phase only lasted around three years however, between 1766 and 1769. By 1780 most members appear to have migrated to the College Youths and the society disappeared.

A separate second or Ancient Society of London Youths appears to have been started around 1776, initially based around the local band at St Matthew's, Bethnal Green. They met at the Whittington and Cat tavern in Church Row. The first or original society having by then moved to towers in the West End of London. A peal rung at St Mary Overy, Southwark in 1758 (*Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle*, Wed 12 April to Fri 14 April 1758) refers to the Society of Old London Youths. The Ancient Society rang their last recorded peal in 1801 but appear to have been extinct by 1804.

The dining ticket opposite (size 19.0cm by 26.5cm) is blank so cannot be dated but includes illustrations of St Mary Matfelon, Whitechapel (left – ring of bells later destroyed) and St Dunstan-in-the-East, London (right – bells later transferred and became chime).



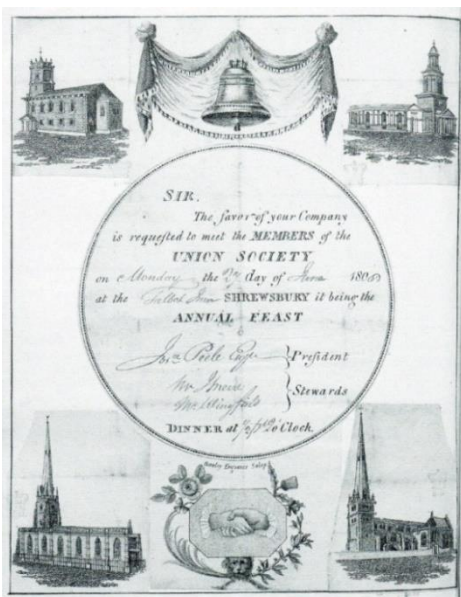
The example shown opposite (size 20.0cm by 28.0cm) is for the Annual Feast held at the Goats Heads, Whitechapel (former headquarters pub) on Monday 28 September 1795 at 3pm. It was ticket number 7 issued. The Master is shown to be Thomas Cox with feast Stewards William Branton, Thomas Michael, James Mead and Daniel Dearing. It has a similar style to the first Cumberland Youths ticket shown above. The tickets were priced at 3/6d (17.5p). The average weekly wage at the time was equivalent to 40p. On this copy the date is partially printed '17—' while other known copies contain a partially printed date '180-' suggesting they were used around the turn of the century.





from both ringers and non-ringers. There was a weekly ringing practice at St Chad's Shrewsbury on a Thursday evening along with a Club meeting on the same evening.

An annual feast had been held since 1779, first at the Raven and Bell and then the Lion Hotel, before moving to the Talbot Inn. A split in the Society appears to have occurred in 1806, with the different factions being known as the Salop Ancient Union Society and Union Society of Shrewsbury respectively. The feast appears to have been moved back to the Lion Hotel in 1806, but with the proprietor of the Talbot Inn continuing to organise his own rival feast. How long this situation lasted is not known, as the records that exist are for the Salop Ancient Union Society with no mention of feasts held by the rival group. There are no records of a feast held after 1808. The separate Societies continued until 1811 when it was agreed by both groups to reform as a single society with the Annual Feast taking place alternatively at the Talbot Inn and then the Lion Hotel. A more detailed history of the Union Society has been prepared by John Eisel and can be found in the *Ringling World 1997* at page 823, and then pages 838 to 839.



An example of the Society's dinner ticket is held in the Osborn Collection but it has unfortunately been cut to fit the manuscript page size (see illustration). It records a dinner held on Monday 2 June 1800(?) at the Talbot Inn, Shrewsbury at 2pm. The President is shown to be Jos. Peele Esq at the time. The engraver of the original plate is shown as Bowland of Salop and shows the prominent local churches in the town associated with the Society.

Reports in newspapers (*Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 20 July 1798, with similar reports in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* 23 July and the *Hereford Journal* 25 July) record the opening of the new ring of twelve bells at St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury and the Annual Feast which followed:

*On Tuesday last, being the day appointed for opening the new Peal of Twelve Bells at St Chad's Church in this town, the Union Society held their annual feast at the Lion Hotel, where upward of 150 of the members dined with their president on the occasion. A Select Company of the Society of College Youths, from London, attended to open them, and on the following evening, the Sons of Harmony were highly*

*entertained by their ringing a peal of Grandsire Cinques containing 5148 changes, which they completed in a very masterly style, in 3 hours, 55 minutes.*

A number of the prints illustrated are from the *Osborn Collection* with thanks to the British Library for permission to use them in this article. The text has primarily been adopted from an earlier article by the author in the *Ringling World*, 18 October 2013, pages 1045 to 1051.

### **Beer and Bells**

A close association between ringers and the local hostelry has existed since the earliest times when bells were hung on plain bearings making practices a thirsty affair. It has since evolved into a key aspect of the Exercise being the occasion on which future arrangements are initiated and individuals sign up to ringing challenges they might not otherwise have agreed to.

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century and for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the ringing of bells was predominantly pursued as a secular sport for its own sake rather than as an integral part of church services. The connection with the church had largely arisen because church steeples constructed to house chiming bells were the obvious place to install bells with full wheels upon which change ringing could then be practised.

The social changes which had spread across the country towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century following the Industrial Revolution had the advantage of increasing the mobility of the population, allowing ideas and existing practise to be spread more rapidly than had previously been the case. A result was that a wider range of the population took up ringing rather than it being restricted to the professional and upper echelons of society. A downside however, as already explained earlier, was the deterioration in the behaviour of ringers which led to abuses such as smoking and drinking in the belfry. Many ringers would only ring when paid to do so, often to celebrate secular events, and would use the funds raised to purchase alcohol. This state of affairs further led to many belfries having an external access to the belfry rather than through the interior of the church.



Sketch of the St Peter Mancroft, Norwich ringers drinking from their jug on New Year's Eve 1872

Examples of ringers' beer pitchers from these times have survived although they are quite rare. They are also described in places as a 'gotch' meaning beer jug. At Hornchurch in Essex pitchers were taken around Hornchurch village on a barrow by the ringers to get them filled with ale, which was then drunk at intervals during ringing. Perhaps the inscription on one of the bells was a gentle reminder not to over indulge '*Ye ringers all that prize your health and happiness. Be sober, merry, wise and you'll the same possess!*' As if that wasn't enough, an old set of ringing rules in the ringing chamber required:

*If you ring with spur or hat (wearing them)  
 Three pints of beer yuo pay for that  
 If you swear or give the lye  
 A pot you pay immediately  
 If a bell you overthrow  
 A pint you pay before you go*

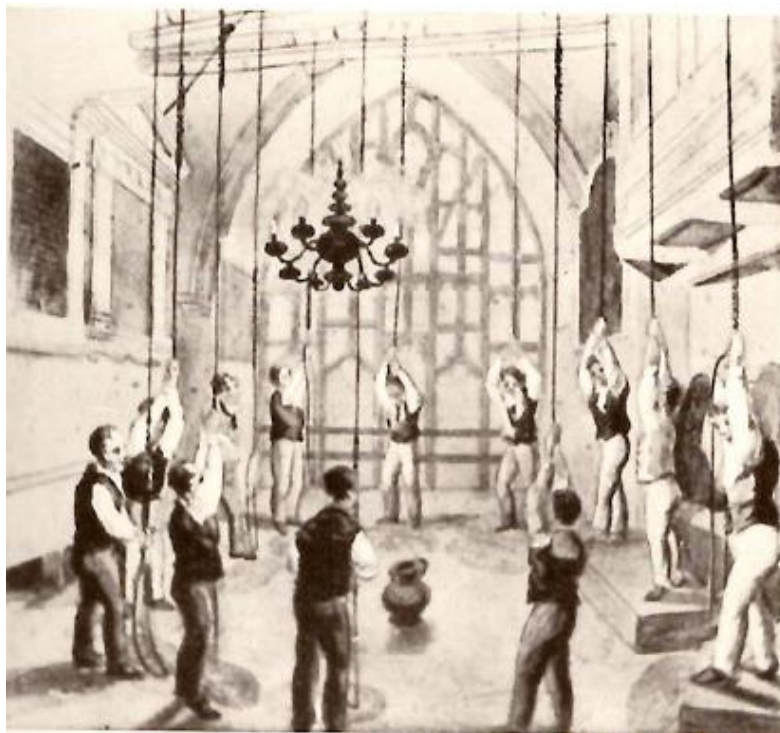
At Beccles in Suffolk a potter, Samuel Stringfellow, made a large pitcher in 1827 with three handles for the use of the ringers. It is thought to hold around 50 pints. The inscription reads:

*When I am filled with liquor strong  
 Each man drink once and then ding dong  
 Drink not too much to cloud your knobbs  
 Lest you forget to make the bobbs  
 A gift of John Pattman, Beccles*

The following prints all show ringing scenes with beer pitchers evident.

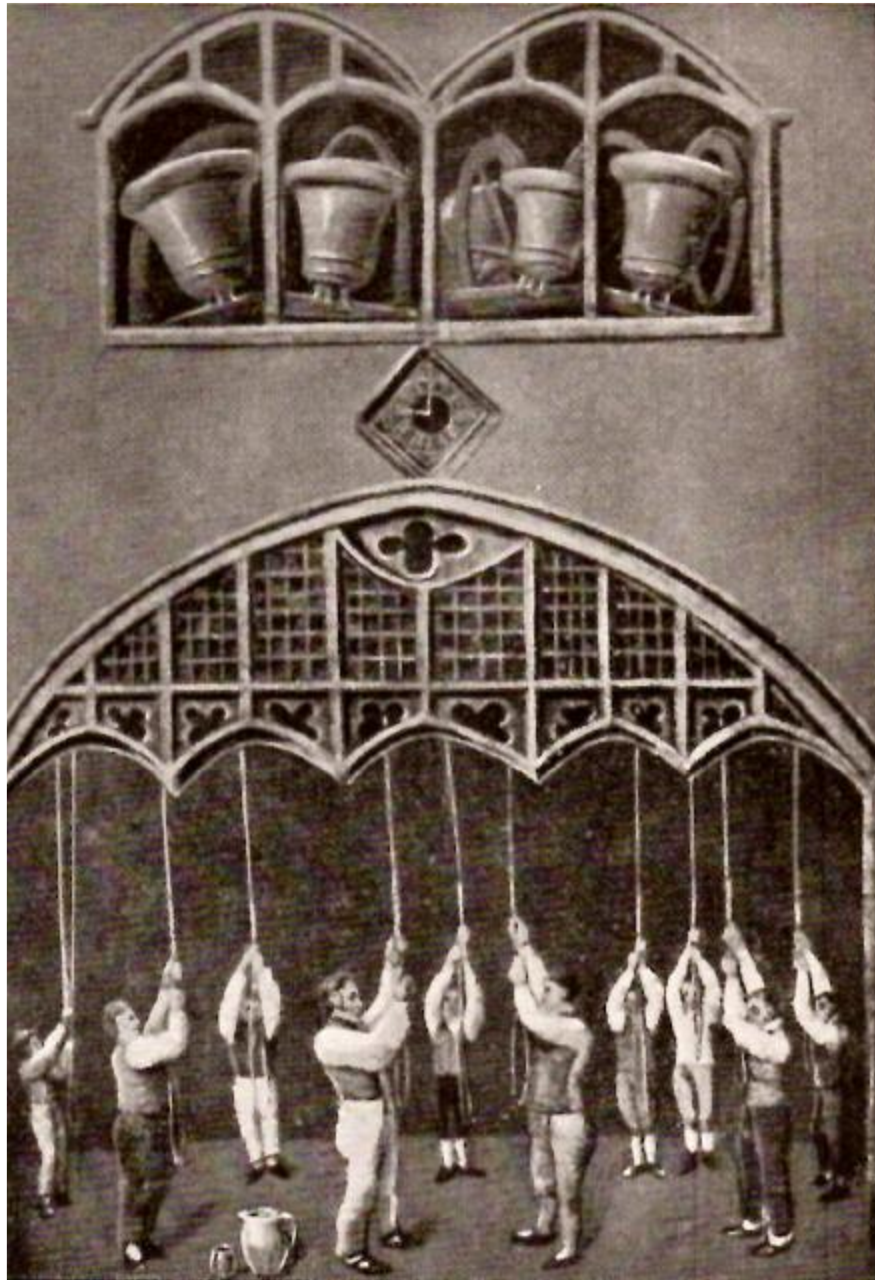


Bell-Ringing: *The Book of Christmas* by Thomas K Hervey with illustration by R Seymour (First edition 1836 page 219; later editions 1845, 1852, 1880 and 1888 with illustration on page 125 in latter) (circ. 4.0cm by 5.5cm)

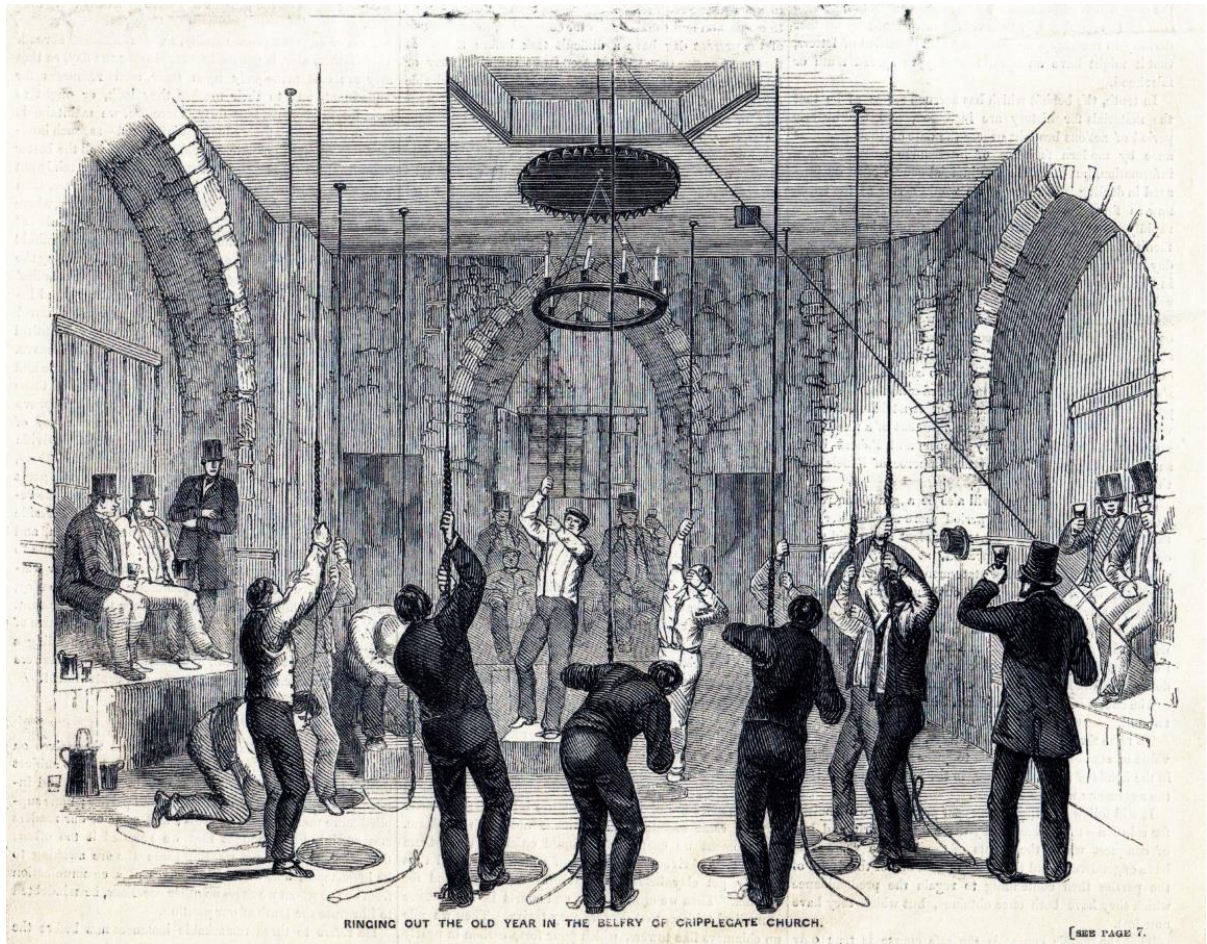


Ringling Chamber, St Peter Mancroft, Norwich in 18th century from a watercolour by Ninham. It has been reproduced in a number of printed forms. Reproduced in Morris' *The History and Art of Change Ringing*, page 182 in 1931 edition (8.0cm by 7.5cm)





Kendal Ringers in 1828: reproduced in Morris' *The History and Art of Change Ringing*, page 309 in 1931 edition (8.7cm by 12.7cm)



Ringling Out the Old Year in the Belfry of Cripplegate Church, London: *The Illustrated Historic Times*, 4 January 1850 p1; also *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 27 March 1858, page 268) (23.0cm by 17.0cm)