

To,

Edwin H. Lewis Esq M.A
President of the Tentative Council of
Church Bellringers.

Master of the Ancient Society of
College Youths - 1937/8 -

from

an Australian admirer -

Melbourne.

15th Febry 1938

“An Australian Admirer”

by William Willans

Things were reverting to normal. Or that's how it seemed in “The Ringing World” at the end of 1943; there was the war, of course, but the threat of invasion was past, that of the doodle-bugs yet to come, and The Ban had been lifted. There were peals, meetings, Letters To The Editor, and of course “Belfry Gossip”, where, in the issue of 3rd December, an announcement appeared that “Mr E F Behan of Melbourne, Victoria passed away on September 15th last.”

Three weeks later there was a letter from Mr A C Hazelden, of Guildford describing a “small manuscript book” held by the Guildford Diocesan Guild, “written throughout by Mr Behan containing a great many touches of Grandsire Triples and Caters of varying lengths, also a small number of touches of Stedman Triples...”

This is Accession No 125 in the “Manuscripts” of the Central Council Library: a robust commercial notebook, No 892 in the “Oxford” series. Inside the front cover is the signature of E H Lewis, with a pencil note - “Author probably E F Behan”: and on the page opposite, an elaborate dedication:

“To / Edwin H. Lewis Esq M.A. / President of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers / Master of the Ancient Society of College Youths – 1937/8 – from / an Australian admirer – Melbourne / 15th Febry 1938”

It is indeed the work of Ernest Francis Behan, sometime Secretary of the Victorian Association, ringer at St Patrick's and later St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne.



Ernest Behan



Edwin Lewis

“The contents of this book...”

It does contain an immense collection of touches and quarters, lovingly transcribed, although the range extends beyond Grandsire. But Behan was as prolific in writing as in composing; there are essays and commentaries as well, the most substantial being the Forward, an introduction of eighteen pages to the collection, its purpose, and its background:

“The contents of this book are selected from three smaller selections of Triples and Caters compiled by me some years ago. When a regular ringer at St Paul's Cathedral Melbourne in my younger days, the need for such a book to the aspiring conductor, wherein various “lengths” were set out in a clear and concise manner, was often felt by myself and others ... Since the year 1904 or 1905, it has not been my privilege to be a ringer – anywhere – for

more than a week or two at a time. But, from time to time when stationed in different parts of the world, and far removed from the sound of bells rung in changes, I have been able to devote my leisure hours to the subject of composition, mainly in the Grandsire method on 7 and 9 bells... Absence from the sound of bells has caused me many a "pang of regret" in past days, but I often think these feelings have been somewhat lessened by keeping my "hand in" at the little things given in this book. It has occupied many a pleasant hour, whether in the Bush or Back-blocks of Australia – in South Africa, or in the wilds of New Guinea and adjacent Islands of the vast Pacific Ocean..."

The choices in structure and music for Grandsire Triples are set out: for instance, *"The "purist" will, maybe, object to 6/4 – 5/7 and 7/6 at "back-stroke" but, personally, I have never been able to give such objections serious consideration ..."*

In Caters, too: *"... there are times when one feels inclined to dispute or disagree with certain things. One of these concerns the fixed custom that Caters – Grandsire – should be given with 978 at course ends. True, a "-5-" Or a "6978" is mellow & sweet and good to hear – but so in my opinion are the other variations of 7-8- and 9. ... The bells 6789 and 10 – behind sounds "thrilling" to me – there is a "ground-base (sic)" - it is solid and inevitably reminds me of Handel – and some of the monumental choruses of that great master ... The fact that the bells come down to lead -6-8-9-7 does not – to me – affect the majestic volume of 6789 and 10 behind."*

And the claims for authorship are modest: *“Except where otherwise stated, I regard the contents as my own, for most certainly they are the results of my own efforts. But ... I am not so bold as to regard anything as “original” ...”*

Grandsire

After the Introduction, there is an “Extra”, a page of short touches of Grandsire Doubles coming round at handstroke *“from Mr J S Wilde of Dunedin N Z”* - *“Personally I think the idea is “cute” ...* and then, “Grandsire Triples” - more than eighty pages of touches from 84 to 1092, followed by 109 quarter-peals. For one, the ten-part 1,260 with Holt's Singles, 1,4,4 (275634), there is a claim - *“First rung – Melbourne 1st Jan 1901 – at St Paul's Cathedral / Conducted by A.E. Bames / Has also been rung in Christchurch N.Z. - at Cape Town S.A. - and in England.”*. The final items are his Date Touch for 1932 and a peal by A E Bames.

For Caters, there are touches from 180 to 1044, some of them *“forwarded to me by Mr Gabriel Lindoff during the year 1930 or 1931... Then, 32 quarter peals, in a variety of styles: round at backstroke from Tittums; round at hand; in a variety of back-bell positions, while one, no 17, is Backstroke Home all the way - “14 courses of “6789” - the extent in 70 leads”*. Three at the end of the section *“were forwarded to me by my old friend Mr W T Elson, who conducted the first peal it was my privilege to take part in – at All Saints, Fulham – London – Grandsire Caters - 1903”*

There are twelve peals. One is a 5,021 given to the St Paul's ringers by J H Goldsmith during the Great Adventure - *"I understand it is by Mr A Knights of Chester (sic) – Eng -"* Four are by Lindoff, and the rest are Behan's apart from the 10-part 5,220 by Matthew A Wood: *"NOTE – This peal is given here as an ideal composition in 10 uniform parts with 3 bells at home at each part end. Suitable for an "inexperienced" conductor to call his "first" peal of Grandsire Caters."*

"Part 2"

And Cinques? That had been the aim: *"As, however, the prospect of "Grandsire" being rung on 11 bells in Melbourne – or Australia, is remote, I have decided to omit the Cinques ..."* So instead there's "Part 2", with a selection of other methods.

Stedman Triples is the first, with an extract from the C D P Davies "Stedman", twin-bob touches up to 1,008 and four five-part quarters. Then, Oxford Bob, Double Court and Union; for each, a lead of the plain course is given, with rules – no blue lines here – and a selection of touches, save for Double Court, for which there's a note that Oxford Bob touches will work; *"No further directions are necessary"*.

After eight blank pages – there had been an allocation in advance of so many per section – there are the "Even Bell Methods", and Bob Major – the usual essay, then touches, and a "schedule" for

obtaining more; one quarter, but no peals - *"I have found peals in this method fairly easy to construct but have also found it very difficult to work out anything "original" ..."* Double Norwich is next, and finally, Oxford and Kent Treble Bob Major: *"These are beautiful methods, and to my mind give the best music obtainable on Bells in even numbers... When well struck, the music is a constant delight to hear and has always reminded me of the joyful & lovely music of the immortal Haydn..."*

The next section is on composing Grandsire Triples, with tables and charts; and the last is a series of transposition tables.

"Partly biographical"

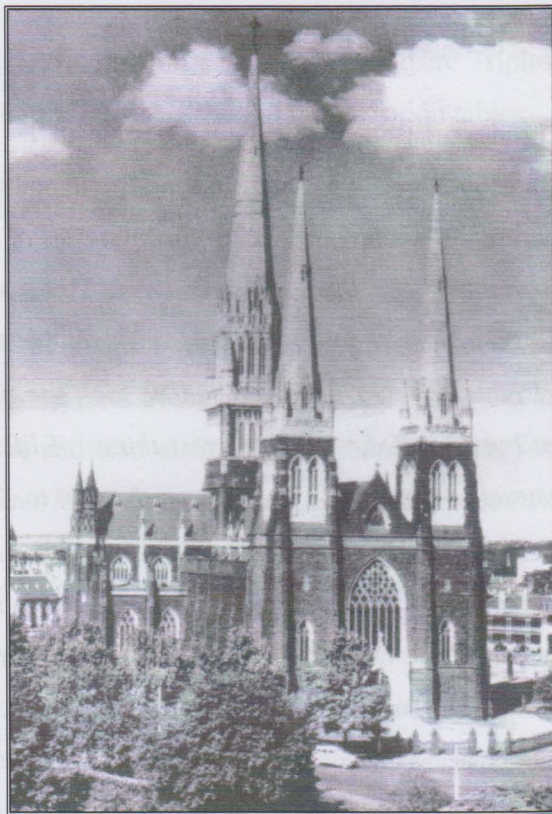
The Library Catalogue description has the apt phrase "partly biographical": his ringing career may have been short, but there were tales to tell. In the past, Stedman Triples had been rung in Melbourne, at St Patrick's; and also at St Paul's - *"...the longest length attained being a Quarter Peal. I was present in the Belfry when this took place - but in those days was not a change-ringer myself. Some years ago, I endeavoured to obtain confirmation & details of that performance, but was unable to locate the books of the former Victorian Association. In consequence, therefore, I can submit no proof of that ¼ peal being rung except that I have clear & distinct recollections of its performance."* On Bob Major *"Many years ago ... the method was rung at intervals on the light bells of St Paul's Cathedral Melbourne, but for a number of years it has ceased to be practised."*

There was the handbell ringing with Canon Ridout in Johannesburg: *“Though the effort did not last long owing to the sudden and unexpected departure of our third member, we succeeded in ringing Grandsire and Stedman Doubles – and a few 720’s of Plain Bob and Oxford and Kent. This was the first “double-handed” work in South Africa – and there is no doubt that had circumstances permitted, we should have scored the first double-handed peal in seven (7) different minor methods.”*

Wilde, Lindoff, Elson and Ridout all come in for thanks and praise. A warm tribute is paid to “my life-long friend and tutor, Arthur E Bames”, counting in his favour that *“of the mysteries of composition he would tell nothing. His invariable reply was “reason it out for yourself – your own work should teach you, or anyone else – far more than I can.” I have at times felt glad that he took the firm stand in those pleasant but far-off days, for in most things of life there is no teacher like oneself – if forced – as I frequently was, to “reason” for myself.”*

He respected “The English Tourists”; the party of ringers from Britain that in 1934 came to Australia on the Great Adventure, especially for their peal of Kent Treble Bob Major at Sydney: *“It was not my privilege to hear that peal, but the striking on that occasion won the highest praise from those who did hear it, both in the vicinity of St Mary’s Cathedral and per – Radio – for much of the peal was*

“broadcast”...” And he did admire E H Lewis, who as President had signed the “gracious message” conveyed by the Tourists from the Central Council expressing the hope “that the sound of bells rung in changes would become endeared to the people of Australasia as it is to those of the Motherland”. That message is framed and hangs on our Belfry walls, and almost on every occasion I visit the Tower, I read it over and draw the attention of others thereto...”



St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne

“Reluctantly and with sorrow...”

But ringing at Melbourne was his despair. The Tourists' visit had failed to inspire: *“I had hoped that the visit of these fine ringers & gentlemen would stimulate change-ringing here and encourage us to make our ringing worthy of the bells of our Cathedral and worthy of the beautiful science. After 3 ½ years of patient waiting and effort – with one other member – to try to “better things”, I can see no signs of improved striking or a desire to proceed to other methods ...”*

A tragedy is hinted at: *“Reluctantly and with sorrow I have at length come to the same conclusion as the late Arthur Edward Bames, who some 25 years ago, abandoned hope and gave up change-ringing. I was absent from Australia at the time, but know what this meant to my friend, and how it shortened his life. These being my views, I propose to leave Melbourne in the near future – perhaps never to return ...”*

So, he had decided not to present his book to the St Paul's ringers, as first intended. But what would become of it? *“Finally, and after due consideration, I have decided to “take a risk” and to forward it to Mr Edwin H Lewis, President of the Central Council of Church Bellringers, for disposal as he thinks fit ... “I fully realise this book will be of little use to Mr Lewis, and as just stated I run a grave risk in sending it to him. My concern – my anxiety is – to dispose of it in such a manner that it shall not be lost & that my work shall not have been in vain.”*

“His only interest.”

He may have left, but if so he did return. In “The Ringing World” for 7th November 1939, there's a letter from him on the beauties of the Bames peal, having seen it rung - *“It was highly thought of by the Rev C D P Davies and on his recommendation the block of 350 changes was deferred to the end ... It needs no word of commendation from one in this far off land.”* - and the address is “Melbourne, Victoria”. He kept in touch with his correspondents, particularly with Elson, who, in a letter on the ringing cricketer Monty Noble, added that he had heard from

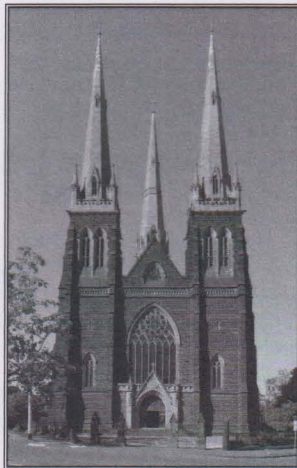
Behan, who was in a bad way - “with a smashed ankle and is (or was on April 27th) just getting about on crutches” - but nevertheless wished to be remembered to the tourists “whom he held in high regard”. (RW 5 July 1940).

At the news of his death, Elson wrote again, commenting on the peal at Fulham, observing that they had been in constant communication ever since, and that ringing seemed to be “his only interest” (RW 8 Jan 44); which was understandable, but not quite true. Behan was simply a very prolific writer; contributing letters to the Melbourne “Age” on a wide range of subjects: “Botanical Gardens bye-laws Ignored” (16 Jul 43), “Philharmonic Society and Elijah” (2 April 37), “The University Lake” (7 Apr 38) - *“the pond of dirty water by courtesy called a “lake”*; but above all on New Guinea, which he loved. His attitude is frankly colonial, but leavened with charity, in a

long piece on abuses - *“The future, the welfare of that magnificent land depends on what – the native. I have shown how we treat him. (28 Nov 21).*

For all the biographical detail, there is nothing personal apart from just one clue, his address: *“c/o Dr J C V Behan, M.A., B.C.L., L.L.D ,Etc...”* - this is the celebrated Sir John Behan, at the time Warden of Trinity College, who was a younger brother. Sir John's life is a record of honour and distinction: in contrast, Ernest appears to have been a loner, unmarried, without family ties, unhonoured, eccentric in outlook, and an exile from the world of ringing who on his return became disenchanted with the ringing he found.

But his notebook survives, as he had wished; and for it to be held in the Central Council Library is an outcome he would have approved.



St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne

I am most grateful to Alan Glover for permitting me to have this Notebook out on loan.

The references from "The Ringing World" are taken from the CCCBR "Publications Online"; a wonderful resource indeed.

Another wonderful resource is "Trove" - <https://trove.nla.gov.au/> - the newspaper section of which has yielded Behan's letters to the Melbourne "Age".

It seemed more than likely that Ernest and Sir John were brothers, but I only succeeded in establishing this with "ancientfaces.com". And that was a fluke, because on the website Ernest is spelled "Ernst".

Where I have not succeeded, is in finding who it was whose "sudden and unexpected departure" brought to an end handbell ringing in Johannesburg.

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- No. 2 Indexes (Mar 1995)
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- No. 3 Hubbard's *Elements of Campanalogia* (Feb 1996)
Identifies all the different edition and variants
- No. 4 Troyte's *Change Ringing* (Feb 1997)
Brings together information on various editions
Troyte's Change Ringing An update (Jan 1998)
Identifies more variants of the various editions
- No. 5 Ringing Periodicals (Feb 1998)
A brief history, including samples of title pages
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Examines the various historic customs for ringing related to death

Essay No. 11 was written by Bill Butler

Essay Nos. 22, 23 and 24 were written by Will Willans

All other essays were written by Dr John C Eisel FSA