

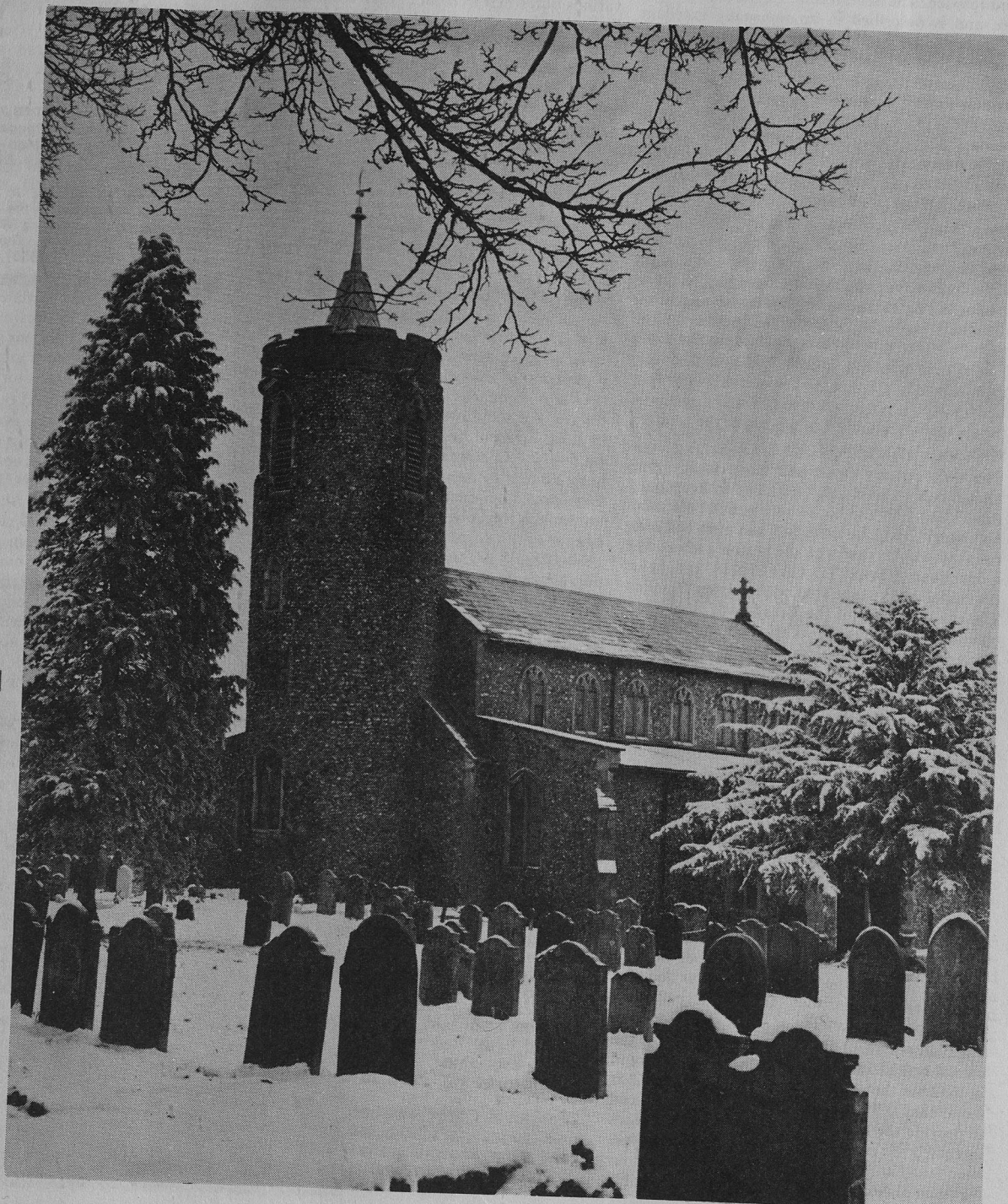
THE RINGING WORLD

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THE
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[Photo: Eastern Evening News, Norwich



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ONE OF THE TEAM

by Bernard Masterman

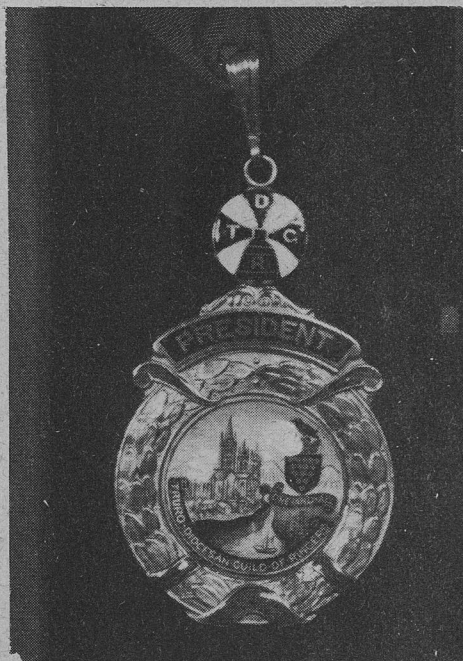
Each Sunday morning, I set off early from my home, and walk the two-mile route to the centre of Oxford. My destination is to rendezvous with the ringers, and to climb the stairs to the tower at Christ Church. After ringing here, as one of the band of 12, I go on to my own tower at S Giles', a short distance to the north of the city centre. Whichever tower I go to, I am now accepted as one of the team. Through the patience and tuition of two ringers, I can handle a bell, and take an active part in change ringing. What is so unusual about this? I am almost totally blind.

I live with my parents, in a suburb to the west of Oxford, and work in the Leyland car assembly plant at Cowley. On two occasions, I had been refused as a candidate for church bellringing, on the grounds that it would be dangerous. One of my work colleagues, himself blind, told me that he had been fairly successful when trying to handle a bell. He had not pursued the idea because, in his home village, they only ring from cards. My friend advised me to contact Mr Fred Sharpe, who might be able to put me in touch with someone, in Oxford, who would be willing to teach me. When I telephoned Mr Sharpe, he spoke to me with that enthusiasm for which he was known, saying that he had rung with several non-sighted people and he put me in touch with Mr Philip Walker, tower captain at S Giles'. Although teaching a blind person was an entirely new experience to him, Mr Walker agreed to give me a try.

A date was fixed for my first tied bell lesson and, in September 1973, I climbed to the ringing chamber at S Giles', little knowing that this was to be the first of many such ascents. I started by learning to handle the bell at back stroke, while Mr Walker took care of the sally. Even at this early stage, I began to get the feel of the bell on the balance. Before going on to the next stage, Mr Walker took the bell at both strokes and told me to clasp my hands, when I thought it was time to catch the sally. Having learned to judge this correctly, by listening to the sound of the moving rope, I passed on to catching the sally, and pulling the bell off at handstroke.

A couple of weeks after I started, a group of girls commenced learning, as part of their training for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. There were now many of us to teach in a limited tied-bell period. It was not long before I met Mr Walker's deputy, Dr Dermot Roaf, a lecturer at the University. Both instructors treated me as a normal person, and it was not long before I was up in the belfry feeling for myself how a bell works.

When learning to handle both strokes, I started by dropping the bell, and a good deal of practice was necessary to overcome this fault. Raising and lowering also produced its problems. At first, I would have the rope flailing all over the place and, later, I would fail to get the bell more than halfway up. I persevered and my teachers exercised the patience with which ringers seem to be gifted, and our combined efforts soon paid off. We were now at the stage whereby we could handle our bells without much individual attention, and it was at this time that I found the advantage of being in a large class. Several bells were tied, so that we could all have a full hour's practice. At intervals, during the session, we would swap ropes, thus gaining the opportunity of practising on bells of different weights. Also, we



Truro DG

NEW PRESIDENTIAL BADGE

The new badge for the office of President was dedicated by Canon J R Jose at a Truro Branch meeting at Perranarworthal on 9 October. The badge, cast in hall-marked silver, has a gilded surround to a multi-colour ceramic centre, depicting the county of Cornwall.

Designed by James L Pengilly, of S Keverne, the most prominent feature is Truro Cathedral, and minutely adjoining is the tower of Kenwyn, and the spire of S Keverne. To the right of the Cathedral is the official county badge, and the background of field, river, boat, mine chimney and china clay tips are representative of the traditional Cornish Industries of agriculture, fishing and mining. The Truro DG Badge, in its colours of black, white and gold makes a worthy apex. AC

would stay for the open practice, and learn to ring rounds with the rest of the band. In my case, this had to be achieved by rhythm and sound. I had to learn to judge the lapse of time between pulling off and striking.

To get a firm sense of rhythm, it was decided that my next step should be to ring the tenor behind. Again I experienced a period of dropping the bell, but I gradually got used to ringing it in rhythm with the band. I became quite proficient at ringing the tenor to all the odd bell methods, both in Doubles and Triples. Another sign of progress came, at this stage, when I felt the honour and the joy of being asked to ring for the morning and evening services on Sundays. Though this was by no means compulsory, I resolved to attend as many of these rings as possible.

I started to ring call-changes by the instructions, "one place back" or "one place forward," but we found that, during repeated changes, I could define which bells were in front of and behind me. Therefore it was possible for me to ring call-changes, by the normal calling of numbers.

On approaching the Royal National Institute for the Blind, in London, I was able to borrow a braille copy of *'The Ringers' Handbook'*. From this, I made notes of some of the more simple five and six-bell methods, the most advanced of these being Kent Treble Bob Minor. For Triples and

Major versions, I obtained an ordinary "Handbook" from Mr Walker and my mother dictated the courses to me, while I made braille copies. Through Mum's patient and encouraging help, I have gradually built myself a binder of methods, from which I can learn the paths of each bell.

I was now ready to start on plain hunting, and for this I was put on the treble to Grandsire Doubles. Obviously to hunt by rope sight was out of the question. Neither was it possible to learn, by a sequence of numbers, which bell to follow. For me, it had to be places from the start. Dr Roaf taught me to ring at three speeds: slow, to hunt up to the back, even (as in rounds), to lie behind, and quick, to come down to lead. This took some time to achieve with any degree of proficiency. However, once I could ring the treble to Grandsire, I could do the same for Plain Bob. Furthermore, when touches were called, I hunted merrily on, without having to take much heed to the changes of coursing order. Not long after this, I was hunting the treble to methods in Minor, Triples, and Major.

Dodging and place-making were easier to accomplish, and I soon learned to tell by ear, when the treble was leading. We found that the best way to practice dodging was to ring the treble, either to Kent or Oxford Treble Bob. Here we found the same as in the Plain Hunt methods:—once I had learned to ring the treble for Kent, I could also catch hold of the same bell for Surprise methods.

In June 1974, Mr Walker proposed me as a member of the Oxford Diocesan Guild, and later I was to join the Oxford Society of Change Ringers. I started going to the weekly practices at other towers, as well as to the Guild's City Branch meetings.

When in strange towers, we have found it best not to untie the rope and hand me the tail end. I prefer to decide my stance according to the natural hanging position of the rope, thus giving me the greatest chance of catching the sally properly. I still have some difficulty, in this respect, when ringing bells with a long draught.

Another step forward came in June 1975, at Christ Church Cathedral. Ringing was conducted by Mr Brian White, one of the well-known family of Appleton bell hangers. Brian had already seen me ringing on eight bells, and he now gave me the opportunity to try some rounds on the Cathedral's 12. On the following Sunday I was at Christ Church, ready to start method ringing on 10 and 12 bells. Straight away, Brian gave me the treble for Grandsire Caters and, later, for Grandsire Cinques. With Brian's encouragement and tuition, I was soon ringing inside bells, and quickly became a regular member of the Cathedral band.

Although I have mentioned just a few names, my feelings of gratitude go to all ringers, in and around Oxford, for the way in which they have accepted me, not only as one of the team, but also, socially, as a normal member of the community.

I have taken part in several successful quarter-peals, and now attend at least three practices each week. I feel I can be of some service to God, as well as to my friends. On that Thursday in 1973, Mr Walker and Dr Roaf took on what, to them, must have been a formidable challenge. To me, it was the opening of a new lease of life.

My twin brother, Roger, who is also blind, took up ringing in March of this year. Neither Mr Walker nor Dr Roaf had any hesitation in starting him, and he has already reached the stage of learning plain hunting.

September 1976.