

Oxford University Society of Change Ringers

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 1995

A Happy New Year to all of you. First of all, Nigel Herriott has retired from his position as General Secretary after five years in office, due to pressure of work. May I on behalf of the Society thank him for the assiduity he has brought to the task. Since the handover only happened a month ago, this newsletter is in many ways a joint effort. In future I take all the blame!

I am now in the middle of converting the Address List software, so if anyone wants a new list I would ask them to give me a month or two to reply. I shall also be undertaking the job of re-filing and cataloguing the correspondence which has survived the last fifteen or so years and is worth keeping. I have, for example, lists of the immediate post-war Dinners, and early tours which I had not heard of.

This year we have further details of John Spice's progress on the Society's History, and appeals for more information. Please give John every support you can, because the History depends for its success and accuracy on what we tell him.

On a lighter note, we have a reprint from a 1970 edition of *Scorpion* about a power-struggle in the OUS between `traditionalists` and `free-formers`. Are these euphemisms for old-fashioned Stedman fogies and hackers? If you were concerned in these momentous events, on whichever side, please give your interpretation to the Editor in time for next year's Newsletter, and give fellow members the pleasure of witnessing the revival of a generation-old bitterness and the reopening of old wounds.

Sadly, the promised inside story about Latham has not been sent, but in compensation we have IWD's account *in his own words* of his learning to ring. Read this, discover Haines' dreadful secret, gain increased respect for Wyld, and be grateful...

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New Officers and Life Members

At the AGM held on Tuesday, November 29th 1994 in Exeter College, the following Officers were elected:

President	Andrew Stubbs
Senior Member	Dermot Roaf
General Secretary	Peter Giles
Master	Catherine King (LMH)
Resident Secretary	Rachel Saunders (St. Anne`s)
Librarian	Sarah Meikle (Lincoln)
Treasurer	Ashley Law (Corpus Christi)
Steeplekeepers	Rhona Cox (Merton) Mark Ainsworth (Queen`s)

The Vice Presidents and CC Representatives are unchanged from last year.

Since the last AGM, the following have qualified for life membership:

Rebecca Axe (Worcester)	Daniel McGregor (Merton)
Alastair Bruce (Keble)	Paul Rogers (Brasenose)
Helen Dickinson (Merton)	Nina Strinivasan (Wadham)
Peter Horner (Keble)	Jonathan Wilson (St. Hugh`s)

Change of Rules

At the AGM, it was agreed that all future TGMs and AGMs would be held on Mondays and not Tuesdays.

Meeting Dates in 1995

TGM dates - Monday, January 16th, April 24th, October 9th (tbc)
AGM date - Monday, November 27th (tbc)

Non-residents` outing

This topic was not raised at the AGM, and I have been unable to establish any details. I shall ask for an announcement to be made at the Dinner.

Annual Dinner, 1995

This year's Dinner will be held on Saturday, February 4th at LMH, at 7.00 for 7.30. Arrangements for the bar afterwards are still being made, with LMH and Wolfson both under negotiation. Tickets are £27.50 and are available from Sarah Meikle, whose home address is 154 Widney Lane, Solihull, West Midlands B91 3LH (tel. 0121-705-3158), and who is at Lincoln College. Please book your tickets as soon as possible.

The menu has not been completely decided, but will be:

1. Cream of Tomato and Basil soup.
2. Warm Avocado and Blue Cheese gratin
or
Warm Chicken and Bacon salad.
3. Fillet of Pork en crouete with sage and apple
or
Pan Fried Breast of Duck in Raspberry and Coriander
(either served with seasonal vegetables).
4. Chocolate Profiteroles.

Unfortunately, this choice will have to be made in advance by the Dinner Committee and will not be available to the diners. Vegetarians however may have Vegetable Lasagne for their main course.

For the past few years, Gerry McCrum's rooms in Hertford have been available on the afternoon of Dinner Day for anyone wishing to meet old OUS friends over a cup of tea. We are most grateful to him for having made this possible. Gerry has now retired, but Dermot Roaf has very kindly agreed that we may use his rooms in Exeter for the same purpose - at any time between 2.30 and 4.30 p.m..

1995 Annual Tour - North Devon

The annual tour will this year be held in North Devon, and organised by Derek Jewell. Derek is not a member of the Society, but had the luck while stationed at RAF Yatesbury to meet David Darby, who was doing his National Service. Since then he has organised the 1971 tour, based in Lynton, helped organise the 1986 tour (Ilfracombe) and regularly arranged Devon weekends for many members.

The tour will start on Easter Saturday, April 15, and finish on the Thursday.

No details of towers or hotels are yet known. This year, Easter week is also Noughth Week.

Address List

The Address List is as complete and up-to-date as possible, and now holds 357 entries. Unfortunately it is now infeasible to include it in the Newsletter, but if you would like a copy, please ask.

Many telephone numbers are now wrong either through miskeying or changes in STD codes. If you any of any such errors - not necessarily just your own - please let me know.

CC Representatives

As Herriott explained last year, new CC rules allow University societies one CC Rep. if fifty or more members attend a Society function in one year, two Reps if over 150, and three if over 300. Reaching fifty is no problem, but to reach 151 and thus retain our second Representative will be difficult. Since I have to supply the CC with a certificate of attendance periodically, I must know who attends each OUS function.

Will the organisers of all OUS functions (remembering the Golden Oldies and quarter-peal attempts) please send me the attendance lists. Remember that a simple total is no use - I must count the number of different members each year, and not count anyone twice. I apologise for this grotesque bureaucratic inconvenience.

Newsletter Account

The cost of printing and posting this Newsletter will be over £140, and last year's was £180. The Newsletter account which pays for it will stand at about £770 afterwards, and the numbers of members on the address list continues to grow. Quite clearly, allowing for inflation and low interest-rates the fund needs topping up by well over £100 each year in order to survive. Many members, but still a mere minority, have contributed to the fund. If you have not done so, or would like to do so again, your contribution would be most welcome. Please make your cheque payable to `Mr P Giles` or `Post Office Counters`.

Members` News

John Lonsborough writes:-

A recent Sunday afternoon saw a gathering of a small group of OUS members - the occasion was a quarter peal arranged (in both senses of the word) by John Lonsborough to mark fifty years since he started to ring, and he called his favourite method from the bell on which he first learned to hunt, which was the treble of the old six at St. Thomas. Two of the band failed to appear, and so a good quarter of Triples was rung instead of the planned Caters. (*Not sure how to take this - ed.*)

As many generations and officers as possible were represented. It was also Julia`s fiftieth ringing anniversary.

On March 27th, 1994 at St. Thomas, Oxford
1260 Stedman Triples

Shirley Rymer	treble	John Camp	5
John Lonsborough (cond)	2	Douglas Hird	6
Julia Edge (nee Preston)	3	Nigel Herriott	7
Dermot Roaf	4	Stephen Ivin	tenor

John has also been cajoled into becoming a Branch Secretary of the ODG. He had been hoping to move to Bicester, but has decided he is better off staying put in Milton Keynes.

Harriet Morgan writes that she has moved to Chicago to pursue a PhD in Sociology, and rings at the university's Mitchell Tower, where the band depends on visiting ringers to keep going and ring simple methods on six. **Sarah Cawdwell (nee Bates)** will spend the next academic year at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, and her husband Simon has been ordained and taken up a Curacy at Christchurch with St. Philip`s, Cheam Common.

Alison Moore, who had a room in LMH next to Rosemary Myers and therefore kept ringing as an undergraduate in the early seventies, no longer rings and is content to hear the ten at Durham Cathedral from her home four miles away in New Brancepeth.

Canon Chad Coussmaker has left Antwerp and is now Chaplain of St. Andrew`s, Moscow. He comments `No bells, alas, despite the huge tower. Our first job is to get full ownership back of the church (which we have for just three hours each Sunday) and the Vicarage: then it would be nice to hang a heavy six or a medium eight here. But I fear there are higher priorities!`.

Roger Heyworth is sufficiently recovered to have rung a couple of quarter-peals recently, and hopes to manage a peal by the middle of next year. On a sadder note, his sister-in-law tells us that **Gerald Bromley** is now a far-gone case of Alzheimer`s Disease, and has had to go into care.

The Society's History

John Spice writes:-

I have spent a good deal of time over the past twelve months gathering material for the OUS History, and have now written first drafts of many of the chapters. As I expected, the main difficulty is in producing an account of the post-war period which is sufficiently comprehensive, interesting, and, above all, readable. I'm not sure that I've solved all the difficulties yet, but I believe I'm now on the right lines.

You may have seen my recent letter in the RW, asking for views of the OUS from ringers not on the address list. The response was disappointing. However, I hope that a similar letter will appear in the next issue of *Oxford Today*, and that this will produce a greater volume of replies.

I shall be in Dermot Roaf`s rooms in Exeter on the afternoon of the Dinner, 2.30 to 4.30 p.m., and shall be delighted to discuss any aspects of the History with anyone who cares to call in. I shall also be at coffee on the Sunday morning.

A number of non-resident members have sent me recollections of the OUS during their time at Oxford, and these are proving invaluable in the writing of the History. I have written to thank all such members, and I repeat my thanks here and now

However, I need more recollections - particularly from those who were up during the Fifties and from the late Seventies onwards. If you have not yet sent anything - PLEASE do so now.

Quite apart from needing general recollections, I have four more specific requests:

- (1) if anyone with a set of term cards will lend them to me, I will extract the details I need and return them without delay.
- (2) I hope to include a number of photographs in the History. If you have any (Society groups included) which might be of general interest and would be capable of reproduction, please send them. I should need to keep them for a

time, but would take great care of them.

(3) There is very little in the Minutes and Masters` Reports about the annual Tour. In the early days this was written up for the RW, but in recent years this has not been done. So I should particularly like to have interesting details and amusing recollections from you.

(4) Kate Wright, in her Master's Report of 1953, mentions an article about the OUS which appeared in Isis `several years ago`. I have been unable to find it in the Bodlean, so should be most grateful if anyone can help me trace it.

I have received a 36% response to the questionnaire included in last year's newsletter. From them, some extremely interesting conclusions can be drawn, but to complete the picture, I need a much larger response - why not 100%?

If you did not complete the questionnaire last year, then PLEASE DO SO NOW. It will only take a few minutes. PLEASE DO NOT put off doing this, or the chances are that you will forget!

Please reply to John Spice, 32 Cheriton Road, Winchester SO22 5AY.

New College peal board

As reported previously in this Newsletter and in the RW, on Sunday, August 16th 1992 a peal of Kent TB Royal was rung at New College. This was the first time a peal has been rung at an Oxford college by a band solely from that college, and has now been commemorated by the erection of a splendid peal board in the ringing chamber. The board was unveiled by the Warden, Harvey McGregor, on Saturday October 8th 1994, preceded by an hour's open ringing by New College ringers and others. The ringers included seven of the peal band; Dermot Roaf and Nigel Herriott representing the Officers; and Stephen Ivin and Clive Holloway representing the Oxford Society. It was especially delightful to meet Dr. Archibald Erskine, son of the infamous Hon. Alexander whose five hours' peal attempt in c.1903 led Warden Spooner to close the tower to the Society. It was also enjoyable to see Spice try to throw him out because he wasn't a ringer. The ceremony was followed by tea in the Panelled Room.

Two good things have resulted from this event. One is that before the Warden could be permitted to enter the ringing chamber, the Bursar felt obliged to inspect it, and finding it unacceptable installed two power points to enable college servants to vacuum the place properly. (It's a pity he didn't hear the bells!). As well as the chamber being cleaner than I can ever recall it, the old peal boards are also cleaner and more legible. Alas, the fascinating old board above the doorway, which had always seemed so weathered that I assumed it dated back to the earlier eighteenth century and the times of Thomas Hearne, can now clearly be seen to come from the 1920s!

The other benefit was in the storage of the Society's archives. The ground floor of the bell tower at New College is about to be converted into a Rare Books Room, with the associated first class security and conditions of storage. John Spice's work on the History has made plainer the common fact that once documents go into the Bodleian they will never come out again, and the Warden seemed to welcome the idea that our archives could be found a yard or so of space in the new Room. Negotiations continue.

`The Truth about Campanology`.

During his researches, John Spice found this article in the 6.2.70 edition of *Scorpion*. IWD says that John Walton admitted authorship. Any interpretations would be welcome by Spice or the Editor.

`Deep in the anonymous backwaters of gnomery, dissension is rife in the University Society of Change Ringers. The results of a power struggle in the city's belfries is affecting the quality of sound experienced by Pembroke men on Monday evening, and Balliol men may have noticed a subtle difference in the Tuesday cacophony from St. Mary Magdalene.

`The dispute involves the fundamental structure of change ringing. The Society's traditionalists led by trendy blue-suited Exeter choral scholar J Pratt are fighting to maintain the orderly progression of bell-sequences produced Sunday after Sunday for 200 years. But a rival `free-form` group, a sort of campanological proletariat long snubbed by the traditionalists, is trying to liberate Oxford ringing from its shackles and convert it into a spontaneous `happening`, rather in the manner practised by Continental churches.

`Action commandos led by David Cooper (Lincoln) are infiltrating meetings and disrupting the mathematical bell-sequences. This revolt of life against art is being conspicuously aided by J Camp (Jesus), a postgraduate bureaucrat who must be unique in having taken Schools three times to get a pass. The free-form group are also helped by a split in the traditionalists resulting from the enmity of Pratt and ex-secretary R Johnston, ludicrous Exeter OICCU misogynist and the Society bore.

`The present Society master R Yeates is an amiable moderate and there are hopes that the revolutionaries, aided by the OUCA know-how of Machiavellian M Petchey (Oriel), will take over the committee at the next elections. Meanwhile, those wishing to demonstrate in favour of free expression may like to infiltrate the belfries of St. Mary the Virgin and New College, so far barred to the revolutionaries on Sunday afternoons. Free-form bellringing seems to be gaining an ever-increasing hold in Oxford.`

Educatin` Idub

We thank Ian Davies for the following frank, if uncomprehending, revelations.

I went up in 1968 and was taught to ring at Oxford. It was some weeks into my first term before I met my `designated` tutorial partner, Lawrence Haines; he had previously always swapped with another chemist in our year. When Lawrence finally appeared and I enquired of the reason for his random behaviour, he explained he had thought the tutorial too late to enable his prompt attendance at the All Saints bellringing practice. When I laughed and made some remark about `that being somewhat rustic` he challenged me to come along and see what it was all about. I still don't know why I agreed; in any event, I went to All Saints one Wednesday and was instantly hooked.

I cannot remember the date of my first lesson (on a tied bell at Mary Mag.); Lawrence might well - owing to my total lack of co-ordination, attempts to teach me to ring are still engraved on the memories of the many who tried. After many valiant attempts Lawrence declared himself unable to help (describing me, amongst other terms, as a `sag-ridden object` and `an inept oaf`) and handed responsibility to Steve Thompson. I suppose it is possible that I was ringing rounds and call-changes by my second year and then moved on to plain hunt doubles in my third. Steve did a sterling job taking me around to local tower practices (Hinton Waldrist and Appleton, among others) but this also was to no avail; I improved not one jot.

I was observed by Jeremy Pratt who declared me completely unable to control my bell. At the time I considered this assessment somewhat unfeeling, even heartless, (being an extremely sensitive flower in those days) but now recognise it as totally accurate. Although he tried to help, he gave up very quickly, as did Roger Abbott. All this lack of success intrigued John Camp, who was determined to discover the source of the problem, and eradicate it (or me?). He was no more successful than the others; I remember his describing me as `totally the opposite of Nelson`, (whom he described as the neatest ringer he knew). Camp did, however, impress upon me the importance of collecting tidy coils when ringing down.

Under the heading `Towers Visited During the Year` one of my diaries from about this time contains several entries `Broke Stay`.

Although, in view of these trials, it seems unlikely, I remember enjoying little in Oxford other than bellringing and other activities with the OUS. Chemistry was dreary in the extreme and this did not encourage hard work. I realised there was a distinct possibility of my failing prelims but my sole concern was

that because my first OUS subscription had been paid in my second term I would not qualify for life membership (the rules were later explained to me). In the event there was no problem; somehow I passed. Even so, I remember wondering whether I really could endure another three years of such a dreary course (changing was never contemplated); in the end it was the enjoyment of my first year with the OUS which persuaded me to return to Oxford. From then I did as little work as possible.

The final major effort to teach me to ring was that of Colin Wyld, who came up in my second year. I don't remember whether it was I who asked him to help, or one of those condemned to ring with me. Colin tore relentlessly into my `style`, my bent arms in particular; I remember painful and seemingly endless sessions (again at Mary Mag., the scene of all these failures) as he slowly straightened me out. Hour after hour, week after week, ringing a tied bell until my body ached and I could hardly stand - my requests for a break being cruelly refused. At practice nights at St Thos I was demoted to rounds, and Colin stood behind me, in front of me, and to the side of me screaming at my style; and when I begged him to shut up he screamed even louder. On outings I was forbidden to ring at some towers. I remember very clearly the stark realisation that this was going to break one of us, that it wouldn't be Colin, and that the torture would cease only when I finally learnt how to ring with straight arms. This dawning, I believe, led me, in time, to the straighter and narrower.

Even when Colin declared my style acceptable, however, any measure of success was a long time arriving. At about this time I recall ringing with Hogwash (Roger Heyworth), probably during my second dinner day; rounds at Christ Church if I remember correctly. As he observed me closely from the opposite side of the ringing chamber, a smug grin crept across his face; when `stand` was called, he approached me and observed `Yours is some achievement. I'd have thought it impossible for anyone with such a good style to ring so appallingly badly`. I hadn't really liked him until then.

Despite my handicap I was, in my second (or third?) year, elected Society steeplekeeper (being instructed in the art by Jeremy Pratt) and was thus expected to ring in the Officers` peal which was in those days a Dinner Day tradition (is it still?). The Society was resigned to the end of this tradition, most did not even consider it worth our while starting; neither could they understand how the other officers (Colin, Lawrence, Shirley Jones (now Danby), Rodney Yeates, and Roger Abbott) could even begin to contemplate three hours ringing with me. Lawrence and Colin were, however, sure that given enough effort I could be forced through a peal of Doubles on the tenor. And they were correct. I don't remember feeling any sense of achievement

after this success, nor do I remember it being particularly tedious. I do, however, remember the other officers` claiming to have enjoyed the event, Shirley Jones describing it as a `fun` peal. Obviously they were just being kind.

I rang only one other OUS peal as a resident member - David Brown guided me through a peal of Bob Minor on the treble. There had been (at least) one other attempt at this during which David had recognised that I needed lots of time to think before I was able to work out where to put my bell. For this reason we went to West Hanney (tenor 18 cwt) for the successful attempt.

By the time I left Oxford, after almost four years` instruction, I had reached the stage of being just about able to hunt the treble to Grandsire Triples for two or three leads (after which the bell - the treble at All Saints - almost invariably went haywire). And now, over twenty years later, I am still ringing. Over the years I have been amazed at the distress generated by my disability among members of a society accustomed only to instant success. Some years ago, after I had rung eight-spliced on an OUS outing or tour, Rodney Yeates approached and congratulated me on the achievement. `Many times`, he confided, `I was on the point of telling you to give up ringing because you had no chance of success`.

Some OUS members, certainly, still wish he had; David Darby, for instance, whose obsession with my incompetence has, for as long as I can remember, been little short of psychotic. One of John Camp`s most recent comments on my ringing was along the lines, `No, IWD, you're not getting any better; twenty years ago you used to ring one or two methods appallingly badly, but now you ring many more methods, but equally badly`.