

# *Oxford University Society of Change Ringers*

## **ANNUAL NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 1997**

A happy New Year to all our members in this the Society's 125th Anniversary year. To celebrate this special date, we are holding a Buffet luncheon in New College as well as the annual dinner, and are publishing our History at the beginning of the year. Inside, you will read all the details of these events.

The History will be ready for delivery in early January, in time for the 125th Anniversary Dinner. It is certainly a blockbuster, a hardback with over 470 pages and 80 illustrations. John Spice has managed to pack in just about all the printable facts he could muster in three years' research, with wads of personal reflections from throughout the post-war period. There are even appendices listing all the peals, tours, dinners etc., and all the most noteworthy peals throughout the 125 years are printed in full detail. This book is uniquely comprehensive for the history of a ringing society, and splendid value. More details follow in this newsletter.

**If you have not already done so, please order your copy as soon as possible.**

Of personal interest are the marriage of Roy Latham, the death of Bill Leese and the appointment of Tina Stoecklin as Editor of the Ringing World.

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## **New Officers**

At the AGM held on Monday, December 2nd 1996 in Exeter College, the following Officers were elected:

President	Andrew Stubbs
Senior Member	Dermot Roaf
General Secretary	Peter Giles
Master	Chris Rusby (Lincoln)
Resident Secretary	Duncan McBurnie (Exeter)
Librarian	Fiona Anderson (Pembroke)
Treasurer	Philip Livermore (Exeter)
Steeplekeepers	Ann Hornby (St. Hugh's) Peter Elliot (Oriel)

All the Vice Presidents were re-elected except Stephen Ivin, who wished to stand down. We thank him for his contribution over thirty-four years in this position. Those continuing in office are: Peter Border, John Camp, Paul Mounsey, David Brown, Ian W Davies, Donald Niblett, Robert Bruce, Wilfrid Moreton, Dermot Roaf, Betty Robbins and John Spice.

Peter Niblett continues his three-year tenure as our sole Central Council representative.

## **Bell Restoration Fund**

The Treasurer and the Senior Member are trustees ex officio, and two others are elected annually. These are Mark Shepherd and Chris Rusby. Mark Ainsworth and Alex Byrne have been elected as Auditors.

An order is about to be placed with Whitechapel Bell Foundry to refurbish the Society's set of 12 handbells. Although this cannot be paid for by the BRF, most of the money has now been found, substantially from profits on the Dinner account.

## **Life Members**

The following have become Life Members:

Tina Stoecklin	Wolfson
Sarah Mackie	St. Catherine's
Catherine King	LMH
Ashley Law	Corpus Christi

Adrian S Woodcock	SEH
David R.A Pearce	SEH 1957-60
Kate Barker	St. Hilda's 1976-79
Michael C Below	Merton 1981-84
Stewart Gibson	Brasenose
David Hamlin	Keble 1977-80

## **Meeting Dates in 1997**

The Society's business meetings are held on Mondays, and take place in the Quarrell Room in Exeter.

TGM dates - the first Monday in term. Jan 20th, April 28th, Oct 13th.  
AGM date - Monday, Dec 1st.

## **1997 Annual Tour**

Negotiations are still in progress to find an organiser for the Tour next Easter. An announcement should be made at the Dinner. If you miss it, please watch the Ringing World, or ask me nearer the time.

## **Society Ties**

The number of ties has plummeted to thirty-seven, and at this rate stocks will last just five more years. They are still just three pounds. Hurry, hurry, hurry!

## **Address List**

The Address List is available on request either on paper or diskette using Amipro. The orders for the History are proving a useful means of correction, but letters still come back marked 'unknown'. This the current list of 35 lost members:

Anthony Townsend, David James, Melanie Milan, Andre Gren, Lance Hewson, Mrs EJ Dunn, James Townsend, James Mumford, Amanda Lees, Rosemary Clark, Simon Plackett, Ted Martin, John Preston, Paul Mills, Martin Petchey, Luke Heaton, Robert Galloway, Julie Sheard, Margaret Salih, C Turnbull, D Drummond-Tyler, Hugh Hill, Frances Fielden, Charlotte Stockley, Andrew Loveland, David Jenkins, Simon Martin, Gerald McLlone, Colin Parker, Paul Crane, Philip Petchey, Ewan Harley, Melanie and Peter Tribble and Nicholas Robinson.

Please help me out where you can.

## **125th Anniversary Dinner, 1997**

This year's Dinner will be held on Saturday, February 1st at New College at 7.30 for 8.00. Tickets will be £30.00, or £24.00 without wine. The menu has yet to be decided. We hope this will be bumper event as it is the 125th Anniversary. Last year New College gave us an excellent meal, but the speeches were entirely lost through poor acoustics. This year the college has promised to provide an adequate speaker system, so we can be enraptured by the eloquence of Nigel Herriott, Mark Regan and John Spice.

Please order your tickets from Dorothy Barton, St. Hugh's College, Oxford OX2 6LE in good time, making cheques payable to 'OUSCR Dinner Committee', and stating your seating preferences and any special dietary requirements.

## **125th Anniversary Luncheon**

As an additional celebration of the Anniversary, a buffet luncheon will be held in New College on Saturday May 17th, 1997. Tickets are expected to cost about £18.00 including wine and will be available from the General Secretary. Extra wine will be available at the buffet. Please order by May 1st.

It is planned to have ringing before and after the lunch:

St. Thomas	10.30 - 11.30
New College	2.30 - 3.30
St. Mary Magdalene	3.45 - 4.45

Final details will be published in the Ringing World, or please ask the General Secretary.

## Newsletter Account

The cost of printing and posting this Newsletter will be about £160, the same as the previous two years. The Newsletter account will stand at about £760 after this letter has been sent. I thank Christine Clayton, Ian Davies, Chris Johnson, Mike Harrison, Bruce Wakefield, Jenni Dodds, Chris Beckett, John Ellams, Bob Perry, Kate Barker, David Darby, Nigel Maggs, Wilfrid Moreton, Liz Barber, Stewart Gibson and David Hamlin for their contributions, which totalled £149.00. If you wish to contribute, please make your cheque payable to `Mr P Giles` or `Post Office Counters`.

## Members` News

On Saturday July 13th, an event occurred never expected by any of the OUS members present: the blessing of the marriage of **Roy Latham**. Roy has been working in the States for many years, and in November 1995 married Eileen, an American, in Las Vegas. This year, they returned to England and a blessing was held for their English friends and relations in Westbury. Roy has been highly conspicuous on the Tour since an undergraduate, and recently Eileen seems to have enjoyed the event too. We wish them every happiness for the future.

**Tina Stoecklin**, as most of you will have read, has been appointed the next Editor of the Ringing World. We all wish her well in Guildford next year, and hope the 'Comic' goes from strength to strength under her leadership.

Of our new Life members, **Michael Below** started learning to ring whilst an undergraduate at Merton in the early eighties. Unfortunately, other engagements meant that once he had moved on from rounds he could not make the more advanced practices. **David Hamlin** is at RAF Cranwell near Sleaford, and rings at St. Giles, Lincoln. Last year he rang his first peal, for VE Day.

**John and Joanna Horrocks** now have three children, and Joanna has read for an O.U. maths degree and then a PGCE. She is now teaching part time, but has done little or no ringing for some years. John is Managing Director of a large printing company based in Watford producing consumer magazines such as the Radio Times. He is a regular member of the band at Berkhamsted. They have recently moved to Feniton in Devon.

**John Ellams** is now semi-retired and has the leisure to travel around for his ringing. He attends the Central Council and Hereford Course regularly, and

keeps in touch with Wilf Moreton and Robin Woolley. This year he has attended the Dinner and the Tour. He is intrigued by the expression 'sub-IWD standard', and recommends WD40 as a corrective.

**Jenni Dodds** (nee Taylor) is ringing at Great Parndon, near Harlow, and married to Angus, who was taught to handle a bell at the end of his final year at Oxford by Ian Gardiner, but never joined the OUS. **Elizabeth Barber** is now treasurer of the St. Peter's, St. Alban's, band, but is unable to ring much on Saturdays as she is now largely responsible for the family's music retail firm. She hopes to have scored her first handbell peal for twenty years by the time this is published. **Bob Perry** is on the Central Council's Peals Analysis Committee, and is PPC Secretary at Truro Cathedral. **David Darby** recommends the editor to use his spell-checker. **Christine Clayton** moved to Welwyn Garden City eleven years ago and no longer rings, but looks forward to reading the History when it appears.

**Ian Davies**, following up the comments of previous letters, asks '..can it really be true there were worse ringers than I? I think not'. For the last five years he has been a 'grade 1 Freelancer' copy-editing chromatographic literature and working from home. This has its disadvantages, like 'nipping out at any time to ring a peal with retired gentlefolk, the unemployed, and a few skivers like myself'. Although now a prolific peal ringer, he has kept the old charm, as evinced in some recent comments: 'I see from the Comic you're now ringing with x and y'. 'They're the only \*\*\* in the country capable of keeping him right', and Lawrence Haines, on a rare occasion when IWD put someone else right: 'Amazing, Idub. I can remember decades when you had no clue where you were, let alone anyone else'.

**John Lonsbrough** has moved to Bicester, which makes it easier for him to get into Oxford. He now rings regularly with the OS at Lincoln College and elsewhere, and has won a canal holiday in a raffle. At the end of 1995, he conducted two quarter-peals, one at St. Thomas with the OS to mark fifty years of being a method tinger, and the other at Woughton on the Green for his fifty years of belonging to the ODG. He has written notes on his ringing career for his branch newsletter, from which these extracts may be of especial interest to the OUS:

... By then, Hitler's war had begun, and students were allowed to study only what the Government considered to be helpful to the war effort. They changed my subject from Chemistry (at which I was brilliant) to Engineering (at which I was not so good) with little time to spare, resulting in my having to take an extra Preliminary Examination with no preparation. Consequently I achieved a failure, which would normally have meant cancellation of my university

place, but in the extenuating circumstances I was allowed to retake after some coaching. For this, I was asked to choose a tutor from a list of names which meant nothing to me, so I picked out the shortest name, and in due course I commented on some (to me) unusual objects on the gentleman's mantleshelf. 'Ah', said he, 'we will discuss those next week'. (*John Spice and his handbells of course.*)

... On VE Day Oxford went mad. Almost the whole population was dancing in the streets, buses were hijacked, the Canadian soldiers made bonfires of just about everything they could lay their hands on (which included the vile-smelling rubber paving blocks of Cornmarket Street), and of course we rang all the bells all day. A peal was rung at the then difficult-to-get Carfax Tower, but was later withdrawn as false...

*Wilfrid Moreton writes:*

... a curious happening at the Salisbury CC meeting. I had a phone call from Ronald Briggs to ask if we could meet. After my spell on the continent in 1945 I went to India and met Ronald and Tim Boydell whom I knew in 1942 in the Tank Squadron of the STC in Manor Road. I had some handbells and taught them to ring Bob Minor and we rang a peal of it. I credited it to the OUS though they had not been elected. No one queried that. A year later back in Oxford I tried to get Tim to ring, but after one successful practice he did not pursue things. I never met Ronald Briggs again.. he never rang after he came home but he reminded me that we rang handbells riding in a Victoria in the streets of Poona. Typical OUS behaviour? It must have been done sedately as all of us were commissioned.

He also tells us about the late Rev. Sam Jones, who died about six years ago. He OUS secretary in 1928 and taught John Betjeman to ring.

## **The OUS and the Dorothy L Sayers Society**

*Jean Pailing writes:*

The OUS 's long connection with Doroty L Sayers was further strengthened in November 1995 when the Oxford University Society of Change Ringers was elected to Honorary Membership of the worldwide Dorothy L Sayers Society. This was in recognition, first, of the fact that DLS herslef was made an Honorary member of the OUS in 1940 and secondly, of the support that members of the OUS have given to DLSS functions in the last few years by ringing appropriate bells on appropriate occasions.

The fact that Dorothy L Sayers and bells have an obvious connection has prompted a few ringers in the organisation to form a band but it is, as yet, a rather small and somewhat inexperienced band. This means that we have to call in outside expertise on important occasions and who but the OUS should provide this expertise? The members of the DLSS were most impressed by the ringing which preceded their programme at St. Cross Church on the 8th October 1995, the anniversary of Lord Peter Wimsey's marriage to Harriett Vane in that very church! The band, needless to say, was augmented strongly by OUS ringers.

I have recently discovered that I bear the august title of 'Bellingringing Coordinator' for the DLSS, so if I phone you for help on any occasion, please hear me with sympathy: until our band is established we *need* you.

On the other hand, if you would like to join the DLSS yourself, please let me know and I shall arrange details to be sent to you.

Jean's address is 9 Adcock Walk, Orpington, Kent BR6 9SY.

## **The Society's History**

Thanks to donations, we have been able to print 500 copies instead of the planned 300. When these sell, they will contribute a large profit to the Society's BRF. More immediately, we have now taken just over 100 advance orders, and if yours is not among them, we would very greatly appreciate it as soon as possible as we need to sell over 240 to break even.

Please send cheques, for £30.00 per copy including post and package, and made payable to 'OUSCR History', to the general secretary as soon as you can. I may be bringing your copy to the Dinner to save postage, so do not worry until after then if you still haven't received it. I shall also bring some extra copies for impulse buying.

## **Some Reflections on being a chronicler of the OUSCR**

*John Spice writes:-*

Since the middle of 1993 I have been much concerned with the history of the OUSCR. As I write, I am awaiting the final proofs, and those who have ordered their copies of the book should receive them soon after this newsletter arrives. Putting the book together has been an absorbing task, but it will nevertheless be something of a relief to see the back of it, and to transfer a considerable mass of material from our house to the OUS archives.

Readers may remember that over four successive years (1988-91) I contributed an account of the wartime Society to this newsletter. At that time I hoped that others might continue the story, and my sister did indeed contribute her recollections to the 1992 newsletter. However, no-one else seemed inclined to do anything, and by that time I had begun to put into shape what could be established about the Society in its earliest days. The result of these efforts appeared in the 1993 and 1994 newsletters, and by then I had decided that, *faut de mieux*, I would myself take on the task of writing the whole History.

Since that time, you, the readers of the newsletter, have been at the receiving end of requests to return questionnaire forms (this exercise finally elicited an approximately 50% response, which I suppose isn't too bad), to lend photographs and term cards, and to contribute recollections. And I have had to struggle hard to keep a growing pile of paper in some kind of order.

As members will know, all the early records of the OUS have long been lost. Various documents, photographs, and a few old reports somehow found their

way into the 'archives' and, surprisingly, were there when I investigated the contents of the two boxes. This was a piece of good fortune, for on several occasions in the past, Miunute and Masters' books and other records have 'gone walkabout'.

In 1944 I advertised for sets of the Ringing World and Bell News, and this put me in touch with the Rev. E V Cox, who helped to stimulate my interest in the pre-war Society by supplying details of the 1903 revival. After that, W H Fussell offered me complete sets of both the Bell News and the Ringing World for £20, but only on condition that I also took off his hands a complete set of Church Bells. This comprised about thirty bound volumes, each measuring roughly 18" by 12" by 4"! Although I now have only the vaguest recollection of having done so, I must have gone through the earliest of these volumes (which pre-dated the Bell News) for items about the OUS. At all events, on looking through some old ringing papers about ten years ago, I came across a list of references. By then I no longer possessed my pile of old Church Bells volumes: they had gathered dust in the garage for some years, and during the 1970s I sold them to someone in the Midlands for £10. So I had to go to the Bodleian in order to look up these references. And this was not too easy: the Bodleian has Church Bells on microfiche, but the viewers which it provides are extremely primitive and place a great strain on the eyes.

However, I do still possess a complete set of the Bell News and the Ringing World (although I am about to dispose of them) and this was an enormous help in writing the History. It meant that I could go through them systematically, at my own convenience. As a result, I shall be placing in the archives a complete list of references from both journals, which relate to the OUS and its members.

Very few life members of the OUS have refused outright to contribute their reminiscences of the Society. Many people sent them without being badgered by me. Others, I fear, were at the receiving end of a good many letters and telephone calls. In the event, I feel satisfied that these contributions cover the last half-century tolerably well, and that taken together they give reasonably accurate pictures of the Society at various periods.

Similarly, I feel fairly satisfied about the photographs. It was an unexpected bonus to find so many pre-1940 groups in the archives. In fact, I managed to assemble group photographs for almost every year between 1940 and 1970, except for the period 1951-56 during which, as far as I have been able to determine, only one group photograph was taken. And after 1970 there seem to have been only amateur efforts, of which I managed to track down about half a dozen. I wish now that I had begun to collect photographs

systematically a couple of years ago: some of these gaps might then have been filled. As it was, several of the photographs turned up at the last minute and had to be inserted at proof stage. Also, if I had started sooner, there might not be so many blanks in the identifications.

As for the photographs of towers, at first I aimed to include only the six main towers - those which appear on the dust-cover of the book. Andy Ward kindly supplied a few - including that of Mary Mag, taken from the roof of the Randolph. But I could not find any member of the OUS able and willing to complete the set - particularly because I was informed that taking good pictures of church towers was not at all easy, and needed a professional approach. I eventually tracked down an undergraduate who was a keen photographer. He had a camera with an assortment of lenses and all kinds of other features. I spent an afternoon driving him round Oxford, and Roger Abbott spent another. I wanted to include photographs of a few other relevant towers in addition to the six, but couldn't decide where to stop. So in the end I decided to go the whole hog and put in all the Oxford towers, as well as a few more. Of these, I took the photograph of Drayton church myself, using a 35-year-old Kodak Retinette without any refinements. And having compared the result with the pictures produced by the undergraduate, I'm not at all sure that these are so very much better than mine!

I managed to keep fairly well to my self-imposed writing schedule, except that I had hoped to have completed the Ms about a year ago so that I could have spent six months or so polishing it up. As it was, it went to the publishers in rather a hurry at the end of June 1996. I bought my microcomputer (a Research Machines 480Z) in 1983, and since then it has done sterling service, meeting all my needs for word-processing and for several other applications. One of the latter has necessitated the conversion of CP/M text files to a modern format by a London software firm. So at an early stage I told Carnegie Publishing that they would be receiving CP/M disks. They assured me that this was quite alright: in the past they had used a one-man firm to carry out similar conversions. In the event, however, this one-man firm (located, as far as I could discover, somewhere near Spurn Head) was quite unable to cope, and the disks had to go to the London firm after all. Had it not been for the resulting two-week delay, you might well have had your copy of the book in time for Christmas.

I suppose that the subsequent rate of progress of the book has been about par for the course - the publishers only mislaid one photograph and put one other in the wrong place. However, they needed a good deal of prodding before they succeeded in setting out peal statistics to my satisfaction. Also, since submitting the MS I have not ceased to think of alterations and additions and

to find mistakes, both factual and typographical. It is too much to hope that the book is now free from all errors. At any rate, though, those who read it can enjoy themselves by pointing out the mistakes and inconsistencies in future issues of this newsletter! And I feel fairly confident that the book should serve as a reasonably accurate starting-point for those who set out to bring the story of the OUS up to date in time for its second centenary celebrations in 2072!

## **William Leese**

John Spice writes:

Those who knew William Leese will have been saddened to read in the Ringing World of his death, at the age of 77. In writing that brief obituary I confined myself to summarising the facts of his ringing career, because few ringers nowadays have ever met him, and it seemed more appropriate to deal properly with his contribution to the OUS in this newsletter. Nevertheless I was very pleased that Bill Gibbons subsequently sent in his own tribute, and I was greatly touched by the letter from the Aberdeen ringer PJS which appeared in the same RW.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Society could not have achieved what it did during the war years if William Leese had not been in residence for the first part of that period. As I have told in my account of the Society, just enough members with an aptitude for and an interest in handbell ringing returned to Oxford in October 1940 for the foundations of a successful handbell band to be laid. And a year later, when Bill Gibbons departed, just enough handbell ringers were left to ensure the continuance of this new tradition of OUS handbell ringing. William was thus vital to the existence of the OUS as a significant body on both occasions: had he not been there, and had he not been a talented and enthusiastic handbell ringer, there is no doubt at all that the story of the Society at that period would have been very different. Anyone who wants chapter and verse for this assertion need only read the relevant portions of my account of the Society. As well as ringing with the OUS, William and I spent much time together during vacations, in the course of which we met most of the handbell ringers in the South-East, and rang peals with many of them.

William's direct involvement in OUS affairs necessarily diminished as the demands of his clinical course increased, but even after he had left Oxford he frequently joined in OUS handbell attempts. Most notably, he took part in the record peal in 21 plain major methods early in 1945 and, three months later, in a peal of Stedman caters - the only OUS handbell peal of Stedman for over forty years. In 1974 the band which had rung 21 methods met again, but the years had taken their toll: all that could then be managed was a peal of Kent TB Major! This must have been almost his last handbell peal: as far as I know,

he rang only one more. In all, he rang 34 handbell peals for the OUS.

His first 'house' job on leaving Oxford at the end of 1943 was near Edmonton, where John Thomas had a flourishing handbell band. And during the next few years William rang many handbell peals with this band, including the first on fourteen bells - Plain Bob Fourteen-in.

The circumstances of the ban on ringing and of his medical career meant that he never became as proficient on tower bells as on handbells. I do not have the details of his peals, but I do not think he rang more than a dozen or so in the tower. A few of these, as I said in the RW obituary, were with the Guild of Medical Ringers. After the 1950s William did little ringing but, as shown by the letter from the Aberdeen ringer, he never lost interest completely: indeed just before he entered the hospice in which he was to spend the last month or so of his life, he ordered a copy of the OUS History.

William was a delightful companion. He was self-effacing, but had a great sense of fun, with the medical student's somewhat sardonic outlook on life. He was my Best Man, and a godfather to our elder son. He spent his professional life as Chief Medical Adviser to the Mobil Oil Company. He married a fellow-doctor, and their family comprises a son and a daughter.

