

## The bells of Clifton - Part III

by David Cawley

### Emmanuel Church

Its tower still stands in Guthrie Road, sandwiched as it were between its collegiate neighbour and All Saints, the Anglo-Catholic shrine, to which Emmanuel Church was built as an Evangelical counterpart. Almost all the Clifton churches were of the latter tradition, none more so than Christ Church (the present Parish Church) and the building of All Saints filled the Vicar with horror. Whatever the ritualists were going to do at All Saints was literally to be matched on the other side of the road! If the former were going to put up a Gothic masterpiece in the one area of the parish devoid of churches, then the Protestant tradition would erect another only a few hundred yards away. So it was: and Emmanuel Church, tower and all, was complete by 1869. All Saints, as we have seen, was not finished until 1872 and it was to be 50 years before it got its own tower. Emmanuel was the work of John Norton who had a prolific Bristol practice. He loved spires and was singularly unlucky with them: at Bodminster his great Church of St. John the Baptist never received its spire, nor did the neighbouring St. Luke's, whose bells now ring at St. Paul,

Southville: both of Norton's churches having now gone. On the edge of the City, St. Matthias-on-the-Weir (demolished 1950) showed alarming signs of its tower subsiding into the River Frome: building stopped at the second floor level; and St. Peter, Clifton Wood we have already met. But at Stapleton, to the east of the old City boundary, he succeeded: his graceful spire there is a landmark from the M32 and guides one to Bristol's finest 19th century Parish Church. Emmanuel was to receive a spire 202 ft high: perhaps fortunately, only the design stage was reached.

Emmanuel Church, Clifton, was an attractive, if rather routine, 'grand' Parish Church, Norton's answer to Street's, All Saints. Both had massive naves giving an uninterrupted view of the east end. Each had lean-to aisles, at Emmanuel terminating in transepts and at All Saints in lofty chapels. All Saints' great chancel emphasised the Sacrament of the Altar, while Emmanuel's polygonal apse was a backdrop to the Ministry of the Word preached from a lofty pulpit and read from a massive eagle lectern. All Saints, like the Queen's daughter, was all-glorious within. The huge bareness of Emmanuel's nave led into the chancel, surprisingly rich for the tradition.

Thomas Luckock at Emmanuel. Betjeman's poem "Clifton", long reported to be composed in All Saints was surely (as 'Mrs. Battlecock' would have recognized) composed in Emmanuel.

"... we do not kneel to pray  
We leave that to the Ritualists".

To match all, each church had but one bell. All Saints by Warners and Emmanuel by S. Hale of Bristol.

In 1882 William Webb, a parishioner, turned his Vicar's attention to this poor provision which could have done little to complement the magnificent tower. Webb had been impressed with the new ring of six which Taylor's of Loughborough had cast for nearby Stoke Bishop. T. G. Luckock had been equally impressed by Taylor's ring of eight at St. Peter, Bourmoumouth. His enquiry to the founders elicited this reply on 25th August 1882:

"We are honoured by the receipt of your esteemed favour and in reply thereto respectfully submit to you estimates for peals of bells similar to the peal of 8 at St. Peter's Bourmoumouth and to the peal of 6 at Stoke Bishop. We presume that the tower is large enough to be hung on one level (sic) and that there are beams or a floor to carry the bellframe. Any further information you may require we shall be pleased to give and earnestly soliciting the honour of your valued commands.  
We beg to remain, Revd. Sir,  
Your most obedt. servants,  
John Taylor & Co."



The ringers of Emmanuel, c.1950. (l. to r.) Frederick Wilson; Charles Rawlings; Frederick Dixon; H. S. Gregory (Master, on tenor box); Frank Hansford (Bristol); Fred Leaker (Bristol); William Bonner; W. W. S. Gregory.



The second peal, 29th June 1963. (l. to r.) William Abraham; Michael H. Gregory; William F. Bonner; Antony W. T. Cleaver (Conductor); P. Leslie Pearce; Richard J. Bowden; Revd. Roger O. Fry; Revd. David H. Sansum.

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A quarter peal was rung at Taunton for the 60th birthday of Jean Arscott. Her husband Leslie was unable to take part in the ringing prior to a surprise party as he is recovering from a hip replacement operation.

Taunton, Somerset, (S George, Wilton). Mar 5, 1260 Grandsire Triples: Sophie Arscott 1, Charlotte Boyce 2, Carol Bond 3, Ian Woollen 4, Peter Leigh 5, Ray Arscott (C) 6, Fred Sage 7, Fred Mills 8. £2

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Christchurch Cathedral, New Zealand. Due to construction of the new Cathedral Visitors' Centre, access for visiting ringers is now more difficult. For those who wish to ring at the Cathedral, please get in touch with me beforehand. I work at the Cathedral, so feel free to drop in or ring (03) 366 0046(W) or (03) 355 4509(H).

CHRIS OLDHAM

Master

Each church was fitted up to accommodate a fine organ and each had an excellent choir. Ancillary provisions, such as halls were paralleled in one as in the other. The Ministry of Richard Randall (later Dean of Chichester) at All Saints was equalled in devotion to that of

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A quarter peal was rung at Crondall to celebrate the Golden Wedding Anniversary on the 12th March of Mr. and Mrs. Les Mellins. They have both rung at Crondall for many years and were married in All Saints Church. In 1963 Mr. Mellins became joint captain with Mr. Arnold until retiring in 1983 since when they have continued to give their support and still do much for the church and the village.

Crondall, Hants. 12 Mar, 1260 P.B. Doubles: Mary Potter 1, Sarah Jacot 2, Mark Jacot 3, Penny Gaskill 4, Mike Munro (C) 5, Mike Kelly (1st C) 6. £2

The estimates outlined were:

New peal of 8, tenor 20 cwt, total 83 cwt (Bourmoumouth)	£707.12s.0d.
New peal of 6, tenor 13 cwt, total 51 cwt (Stoke Bishop)	£461 6s.0d.

Ellacombe chiming apparatus at £2 per bell, (exclusive of beams, floors or masonry).

Despite the exuberance of adjectives and the earnestness of the custom solicited it was well over a year before Taylors were to hear again from the Vicar, who by that time had secured the offer of one bell from William Webb and three from the family of Jane Dod who had died in June 1883. He himself undertook to give the treble in memory of one of his own family and the parish were to give the tenor. In order to meet matters halfway a ring of 6 was to be costed out, the tenor somewhat between the two for which the previous estimates had been sought. Taylors, writing on 14th November 1883 were not slow in expressing approbation:

"This will be a considerably better peal than the Stoke (sic) although we are much surprised to hear the criticism of your Churchwardens on that peal because as a matter of fact the Stoke bells are thicker in proportion to their diameter than is usually the cause with bells of that weight. At the time they were put up we received very flattering letters upon them ... Should we be honoured with your valued order you may rely upon us doing our utmost to turn out a peal second to none for their weight. ..."

The estimate was carefully worked out per bell:

"Treble Bell	£ s. d.
to weigh about 6 cwt and to be charged for at the rate of £6.5s. per cwt	37.16. 0
Fittings and frame for Do as specified in estimate of August 28th 1882.	21. 0. 0
Carriage about	2.15. 0
Chiming Apparatus	2. 0. 0
	<u>£63.11. 0"</u>
(Second Bell 7 cwt etc.	69.17. 0
Third Bell 8½ cwt etc.	79.16. 0
Fourth Bell 9 cwt etc.	82. 0. 0
Fifth Bell 12 cwt etc.	101. 7. 0
Tenor Bell 16 cwt etc.	126.11.0

Although no order had been given, Taylors were requested to send a plan for the frame which arrived dated March 13th 1884 showing four foundation beams the ends to be built firmly into the walls, but not included in the estimate. They add:

"Our men are now fixing a peal of six bells at Iron Acton and one will be passing through Bristol in a few days on his way to Dulverton, and we have instructed him to call and take particulars of the tower".

It would be their first visit and a timely one as well, for on 24th April a revised plan is sent out with the statement that the tower is "rather less than quoted" and stressing the advantage of English Oak for the beams and the necessity of building the beams in firmly. The figured drawing follows four days later showing that the beams are to be fixed below the level of the bell-chamber windows: advising a floor three feet below the beams in addition to that already there; and earnestly soliciting "the honour of your valued commands".

By this time the builder was getting his oar in; a man who clearly had views on where to put bells. All the previous letters were in the hand of J. W. Taylor II but he being "from home" a youthful E. Denison Taylor had to acknowledge two letters of 12th and 14th May, begging to state:

"the advantages of placing a bellframe on the beams instead of a sheeted floor are very great. In the first place you get the bell-frame firmly on the beams without the interference of a floor packed between them. Also when a frame stands upon a floor there is always a thumping and rumbling noise when the bells are ringing which is heard all over the church. Furthermore all rubbish and dirt which naturally accumulate in a church tower drops through onto the floor and are easily brushed clear away - whereas in the other place this accumulation gets into the separate pits and the weather in time converts it into a kind of manure and rots the beams and sills of the frame".

Mr. Denison Taylor further states the necessity of the floor for safety in access, and states that it is immaterial whether the beams are fixed in the walls or located by packing upon stone corbels. On 28th May the question of securing the foundation is resolved by placing trimmers between the beams. Hereford oak being recommended. The chiming manual is suggested to go in the porch of the tower and "there should be a case to protect it from being interfered with by strangers".

Clearly the parish were impressed by the attention and Taylors were delighted on 6th June 1884 (despite not having an order) to quote for two trebles:

"They will make a great improvement to the peal. There being no room to hang them on the same level as the others separate beams will be required to carry their framework. Particulars shall be prepared so that they may be sent at any time:



Emmanuel Church Clifton, 1865-1976.

2ft. 2½in/	4 2 0	£. s. d.
2ft. 3½in.	5 0 0	
	9 2 0 at £6.6s.	59.17. 0.
Clappers	30/-	3.0
Hangings	£7	14.0
Ropes	10/-	1.0
Frame		15.0
Fixing		3.0
Carriage £4.		36. 0. 0.
Chiming Apparatus at £2		8.0. 0
		<u>£103.17. 0</u>

Exclusive of beams to carry the bellframe".

By 17th June the back six were ordered and the draft inscriptions (which subsequently appeared) are sent for approval: and it is suggested optimistically that Mr. Voisey (the builder) sends the necessary plans "so that we shall be able to arrange for the trebles".

Mr. Voisey was not yet finished with his queries on the beams and from Loughborough comes on 11th July the assurance that it does not matter whether the beams are built in (as Taylors would like) or standing on corbels:

"If Mr Voisey decides otherwise, there is an end of the matter, but we trust he will allow the beams to be tight between the walls and the ends. We hope our explanation is now satisfactory - it is our desire to make everything as simple and clear as possible".

Mr. Voisey, finding things neither simple or clear and far from being satisfactory, states that the letter of 7th July contradicted that of 14th May. Not so, said the founders on 17th July and having reiterated what they had previously stated they go on to speak of the frame for the trebles. Quoting the frame at Worcester Cathedral ("all one one level, except for the large bell which does not swing") and Stoke Bishop ("not made by us, nor were the bells fixed by us") they add:

"We have frequently inspected those placed by other firms in the upper tier standing on a lower tier but they very soon get out of order and shaky and cause the smaller bells to have a greater strain upon the tower than the larger ones - and we have thoroughly decided to give preference to a frame thoroughly detached from the lower one. Our position now as bell founders and bell hangers is the highest ever attained by any one and we must uphold it. To do this we must not undertake which we know cannot be satisfactorily and substantially completed ... We are sorry about your decision about the trebles but if the tower is as weak as Mr Voisey

thinks there may be some risk in putting them up - we propose it may be best not to have them - we are quite sure it would be the safest way to hang them".

This broadside had the desired effect on Mr. Voisey! On 7th August the two trebles were ordered; on 20th, Mr. Luckock invited to Loughborough to see them cast "on Tuesday next. We hope to start fixing in about ten days after. We shall be very proud to show you round our Works. The six bells can be heard then and their fittings and framework are complete".

The casting proved a success in every way, only the second requiring appreciable tuning and the fifth being a maiden bell. The details of the bells given below show the weights of the bells as recorded in 1976, slightly lighter than recorded in 1884 and considerably more than those published in the tower (the tenor was always reckoned as 16-0-15):

Bell	Diameter	Inscription	Weight Cwt. qr. lb.
Treble	26½in.	JOHN TAYLOR & CO. FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH 1884 (Waist) GLOBUS IN EXCELSIS	5 0 7
Second	27½in.	JOHN TAYLOR & CO. FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH 1884	5 1 2
Third	29½in.	JOHN TAYLOR & CO. FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH 1884 (Waist) IN MEMORIAM T.G. MORTIMER LUCKOCK, M.A. OB. NOVEMBER 12TH 1880	5 1 18
Fourth	31in.	JOHN TAYLOR & CO. FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH 1884 (Waist) WILLIAM WEBB	6 0 18
Fifth	34in.	JOHN TAYLOR & CO. FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH 1884 (Waist) THE GIFT OF J.W. DOD IN MEMORY OF JANE DOD WHO DIED JUNE 29TH 1883	7 0 20
Sixth	35½in.	JOHN TAYLOR & CO. FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH 1884 (Waist) ELIZA DOD	8 1 2
Seventh	39½in.	JOHN TAYLOR & CO. FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH 1884 (Waist) JOHN WOODWELL DOD	11 0 21
Tenor (F)	44½in.	JOHN TAYLOR & CO. FOUNDERS LOUGHBOROUGH 1884 (Waist) T.G. LOCKOCK, M.A., VICAR WILLIAM SPARK SAMUEL JONES J CHURCHWARDENS	15 3 20

The two largest had flat crowns, the front six having canons. All were fitted with independent staples. The records show careful grading of the timber stocks, wheels, bell hangs etc. The frame itself, of 'saw-pit' type for the six larger bells was only just squeezed in, even with gallows-ends to the pits, the two trebles hanging at right-angles above. The work was completed on 14th October 1884. The only criticism, which lasted throughout the life of the bells, was that they caused the tower to rock considerably more than Taylors' assurances seemed to anticipate. The two trebles, right up in the vast louvres, did not at first match the others. Advice was given to close the louvres in their vicinity, with entirely successful results.

The Dedication appears to have been a very low-key occasion. There was indeed a special service, conducted by the Rev. T. G. Luckock. At the time appointed he together with J. W. Dod, who had given three of the bells and William Webb the originator of the scheme and donor of the fourth, proceeded to the tower where, after appropriate prayers, the tenor alone was sounded. In the afternoon, however, there

(continued overleaf)

was a wedding when for the first time (the newspaper reported) the occasion was given to "Put the bells to ring out their clear crisp and tuneful note". Possibly the ringers were from St. Andrews, the old Parish Church, but details are not recorded.

Early days were punctuated by protests from neighbours: not surprisingly when one sees that the bells hung only just below the enormous louvres (the two trebles right in them). To assist in maintaining the peace, a Seage's 'silent practice' apparatus was installed and one feels that the Ellacombe Apparatus was extensively used. Thomas Gilbert Luckock died in 1892, still in office, his ministry of 25 years being commemorated by two stained glass windows.

A new century saw the ringers placed upon a new footing and the 'Rules of the Emmanuel Ringer's Guild' still survive. It is of the usual format and reveals that at the time the bells were rung for half-an-hour for Sunday evensong; also for Mattins at Christmas, Easter and Whitsun and special occasions; and for practice on Tuesday evenings. The festival ringing was paid being "equally divided among the members taking part". The rules exclusively stated that they were to be "An Association of Church helpers who are members of the Church of England, banded together by rules and a common consent of the Glory of God and the promotion of really successful ringing".

The rules stated that there should be no special occasional ringing without the consent of the Vicar: three of them had set a precedent for this and no doubt the volume of sound was a contributory factor. What was so special about 3rd August 1913 is not known, but on that date the first peal on the bells was successfully rung and later recorded on a handsome board in the ringing chamber.

Careful examination of a photograph reveals that it recorded 5040 Grandsire Triples, the ringers being:

Samuel Popham	Treble
George Tomkins	2nd
George Tudball	3rd
Alfred Reeves	4th
(Not on photograph)	5th
Edgar Guise	6th
George Condwick	7th
Charles Rawlings	Tenor

Conducted by Edgar Guise

Vicar	Canon Hemmings
Churchwardens	J. G. Rudman
	A. C. Rogers

Other peals on the bells were to follow – but not for a further 50 years! On descending from the ringing chamber (the access being external) the band had to escape from a very hostile audience who had been subjected to three hours; ringing on very noisy bells for the first time. Canon Hemmings was obliged to restrict activity to that prescribed by the rules.

Following the Second World War and the destruction of the old Parish Church with its light eight, Emmanuel belfry naturally attracted the ringers of Clifton. Under Mr. H. S. Gregory the bells were to enter probably their most active period of life. Sixty years of moderate use and no war damage had left them in tolerably good order as is clear from a report by Mr. Albert Hughes of Whitechapel following a visit in July 1945. Recalling his visit to the Parish Church in 1936, A.A.H. recommended fitting ball bearings and new pulleys; the bell frame being in excellent condition and requiring only tightening and all ironwork painting. The bells were accordingly dismantled new gudgeons and ball-bearings fitted to the headstocks, new pulleys supplied, the crown-staples and chiming

apparatus adjusted, the ironwork painted and tightened throughout, and the bells rehung at a cost £179.0.0. in April 1948; eight new ropes were supplied for £28.15.0d. Apart from the tower 'roll' the bells were in first-rate order for the extended use to which they were to be put. All who remember them describe them to the writer as a fine ring tonally, though by no means the easiest to strike or to ring with ease, owing to the movement of what was virtually a detached tower with the bells a long way up in it: as one ringer put it, one "had the impression of being at sea".

The ringing chamber was cleaned up and adorned with some fine framed records of quarter-peal performances on the bells (as at the Parish Church). Although the benefice was suspended in 1953, the full round of services was maintained by successive Parish clergy. 1963 was the fiftieth anniversary of the controversial first peal: on 29th June of that year as the Revd. David Sansum records (RW 24.6.88):

"There must have been advanced ringers of the region who would have given their eye-teeth for a peal at such a rare tower and it puzzles me how that I was preferred before them ... the attempt at Grandsire Triples was successful. I rang the treble and first knew, in that now-forgotten tower, the strange euphoria which stems from the satisfactory completion of 5040 changes".

Another cleric in the band was the Revd. Roger Fry: the peal was conducted by Tony Cleaver; Michael Gregory, grandson of the tower captain gained his first 'inside', and "such well known Bristol stalwarts as Leslie Pearce, and Richard Bowden were in the band". What the band did not know, that ten years later to the day, Emmanuel Church was to be closed. Four further peals were rung on the bells, namely: 3rd October 1964: Plain Bob Major, 9th January 1965: Rutland Surprise Major, 8th January 1966: London Surprise Major, 16th January 1971: Yorkshire Surprise Major.

The destruction of next-door Anglo-Catholic All Saints in 1941 gave the Diocesan Authorities what they felt was a heaven-sent opportunity to regularize the anomaly of the two adjacent churches. Despite their different traditions, Emmanuel and All Saints were good friends: following the bombing, Emmanuel made the building at once available to All Saints for both 8am Low Mass, and for a later Sung Mass – the only request being that Incense should not be used! A temporary All Saints was formed next to the ruins and a promise given that rebuilding would be permitted. When in 1953 draft schemes were produced for removing All Saints; transferring Emmanuel Church to that Parish to be its replacement Church; and accommodating the Emmanuel parishioners at Christ Church, the response was of amazement at brokeh promises and of faithlessness bordering on illegality. All Saints supported its neighbour in the latter sentiment whilst Emmanuel equally supported the Saints in their disappointment. For this they were not forgiven. The case was fought and won in the House of Lords. The new All Saints was consecrated in 1962: in 1963, Emmanuel was made a daughter church only in the new parish of Christ Church. It was only a matter of time before redundancy came. The bells were last rung for the closing service, ten years after the second peal, and even then the band was 'one' short. A quarter 1272 Cambridge Minor was rung by: Michael Gregory 1, H. Muirhead 2, R. E. Taylor 3, S. A. Dye 4, P. J. Dye 5, A. J. Cox (C) 6, R. J. Moore (Cover).

The church became formally redundant in 1974 and it was hoped to convert it into a concert hall for Clifton College. That institution

was unable to meet an offer for the building by Bristol Old People's Welfare by the end of the one-year minimum 'waiting period' and it was sold for conversion into flats. In fact the Redundancy Scheme published early in 1976 provided for demolishing the whole of the church excepting the tower (in which it was proposed to place a chapel). All the fittings except the bells were removed, some to new homes, but many, including the memorials and glass, were eventually destroyed. The fine organ was sold, no doubt for the use of its best parts elsewhere. The chapel idea came to nought, owing no doubt to the total lack of interest shown by Christ Church in the building; in the circumstances it was decided to incorporate in the lofty ringing chamber two further flats. All the 'paraphernalia' was removed and laudably the records most recently installed were saved.

At the time, City ringers were actively concerned with the rescuing of the not very special ring of eight from St. George Parish Church, also being demolished. These bells, an octave by Llewellyns and James, were transferred to Warmley, where the six old bells (by Mears) were sold as a chime to the U.S.A. The contractors had reached a point where a decision about Emmanuel's fine octave was required, and the Diocese instructed Arthur Fidler to remove them. Even then, the (unofficial) view of the Bristol City Branch was:

"bearing in mind the number of silent towers in the area, the wisdom of proposals to install them elsewhere might be questioned".

Christ Church did not want them, the ringers were indifferent. Arthur had been saddled with eight bells with no prospective home, and there was no C.C.C. Redundant Bells Rescue Fund to save them. Although many of the fittings were used elsewhere, the bells were sold on to the Whitechapel Foundry who broke them up and bought the metal for £3,086.

The tower stands today foursquare, the two flats just fitting the old ringing room. Above, the silent chamber is intact. It is itself a lofty room and would have made an excellent bell chamber but the Victorian age like bells large, high up and loud! In the bell chamber, as if waiting for the contractor's arrival, Taylors' fine frame stands intact, bearing plates and rollers *in situ*, with Mr. Voisey's beams supporting it, testimony, all of it to good and substantial craftsmanship. But the bells have gone beyond recall except for a tape-recording (of Stedman Triples – what else?) by the late Albert Tyler, which survives to bear witness to what we have lost: for what fine ringing it is, and what fine bells they were.

(Concluded)

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The writer would like to thank all those who have assisted in the preparation of these articles especially Mr. John Williams and his staff at the Bristol Record Office; the ministers/owners of the buildings referred to; John Taylor Bellfoundry and Whitechapel Bellfoundry for access and permission to publish from their private archives; Chris Pickford for sundry pieces of useful information and to the many Bristol ringers especially Nicholas Bowden, for their friendship and assistance.

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