

THE NATIONAL GUILD OF POLICE RINGERS

by

Richard Cowley

'Ring out the false, ring in the true, whether in mufti or in blue'

Because only Metropolitan Police officers could, by definition, join the Metropolitan Police Guild of Ringers, it was thought that a *National* Guild of Police Ringers should be established so as to cater for those provincial police officers who enjoyed the wonderful art of change ringing as a hobby. However, the National Guild was not set up in opposition to the Metropolitan Guild, but as a 'sister' society, often sharing the same society officers, and with many ringers belonging to both.

The initiative for the National Guild seems to have come from Inspector William Bottrill, 'Y' Division, Metropolitan Police, and the Ringing Master of the Metropolitan Police Guild. A Ringing Master is the ringer in overall charge of the standard of ringing during any meeting of the Guild.

Such it was, that on Saturday 24 January 1931, a large meeting of police ringers took place at Leicester, chosen for its central geographical position, and also because the Leicester Cathedral band was amongst the best bands of ringers in the country at the time. It was also fortuitous that the Ringing Master of the Cathedral band was Harold Poole, a Detective Constable of the Leicester City Police. Thus on that day, the National Guild of Police Ringers was formed, and had William Bottrill unanimously elected as the first President, with Harold Poole as Treasurer and Secretary. Harold Poole was eventually promoted to Inspector, and remained the General Secretary until 1945, when he was elected President.



The first members of the National Guild of Police Ringers, taken on the formation day, Saturday 24 January 1931, Saint Margaret's, Leicester.

DC Harold Poole, and Mrs Poole are front row, fourth and fifth from the left. Inspector William Bottrill is front row, sixth from the left.

Police Review, Friday 20 February 1931

The whole object of church bell ringing is the call to worship, which takes priority. However, such is the nature of change ringing, that the enjoyment of 'peal ringing' is also practised (*see Glossary below*), and every ringing society or guild likes to have its members ring peals, which are then recorded by the guild.

Consequently, the first peal for the National Guild was rung in Manchester, and was rung on hand-bells and not tower bells. Handbell ringing is difficult, as each ringer has a bell in each hand, and thus has to split his mind into two so as to follow the course of both of his bells at the same time.

From the *Ringling World* Friday 13 March 1931, p165

MANCHESTER

THE LANCASHIRE ASSOCIATION and THE NATIONAL GUILD OF POLICE RINGERS

On Tuesday March 3, 1931, in Two Hours and Nine Minutes

At The Town Hall

A PEAL OF GRANDSIRE TRIPLES, 5040 CHANGES

*PC William Pye 1-2 PC Frederick Page 5-6

*PC Donald Brown 3-4 *PC Joseph Wilson 7-8

Conducted by PC Frederick Page

* First Peal on handbells. First Handbell Peal rung by members of the police force. Rung as a Compliment to Mr F. H. Williams of Manchester on his recent promotion to the rank of Superintendent. He is a member of the committee of the National Police Guild.

The first attempt to ring a peal on tower bells took place in London on Saint George's Day, Saturday 23 April 1931, with ringers from the Metropolitan Police, Hertfordshire Constabulary and Reigate Borough Police. Because the ringing broke down, the essential stipulations necessary for ringing a peal (*see Glossary*) were not met, and so the peal was not recorded.

However, the first *successful* attempt to record a peal on tower bells for the Guild was not long in following :

From the *Ringling World* Friday 22 May 1931, p324, and perhaps a touch ironic that all the ringers were from the Metropolitan Police, with nobody from a provincial force, but be that as it may, this *was* the first tower bell peal for the newly established National Guild.

LONDON THE NATIONAL GUILD OF POLICE RINGERS

On Saturday May 16 1931 in Three hours and Three Minutes

At the Church of Saint George the Martyr, Southwark

A PEAL OF PLAIN BOB MAJOR, 5152 CHANGES

Tenor 15 cwt

Treble Fred Porter (Inspector, 'L' Division)

2 William Bottrill (Inspector, 'Y' Division)

3 Charles Davis (PC 'R' Division)

4 Norman Bagworth (PC 'A' Division)

5 Thomas Bannister (PC 'S' Division)

6 Ernest Gwilliam (PC 'J' Division)

7 Fred Digby (Retired PC 'L' Division)

Tenor Ernest Brett (Retired PC 'E' Division)

Composed by C. W. Roberts Conducted by William Bottrill

First Tower Peal for the National Police Guild. Rung as a compliment to Fred Digby on his retirement from the police service after 25 years. PC Digby was the first hon. secretary of the Metropolitan Police Guild of which all the above band are members. This composition is now rung for the first time.

The National Police Guild is still going strong, and has members from the majority of the British forces, and visits are made to many areas of the country. The Guild now has one sad duty which it undertakes. Over the past twenty years, the Guild has rung a half-muffled Quarter Peal for the funerals of all those officers being murdered in the execution of their duty.

GLOSSARY :

Bell Ringing has its own unique vocabulary, so, a brief explanation :

Each bell is known by a number, starting with 1 (but can be called the 'Treble') which is the bell with the highest note of the musical scale, and always rings first. This is followed by bell 2, the next bell going down the scale; followed by bell 3, and so on until the deepest noted bell (can be called the 'Tenor') which always rings last; followed immediately by 1 again, and so on. This is called 'rounds' and thus can be represented by the numbers 12345678.

A 'change' is when the bells are rung in a different order from 'rounds'. There are 40,320 different ways in which the numbers 12345678 can be arranged (for the mathematicians, Reciprocal $8 - 1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8$) without repeating any row (or 'change'). But 40,320 changes would take nearly twenty-four hours to ring (although it has been done twice - but only once under the modern rigid provisos - *see below*), which is obviously unacceptable.

So it has been decided that a **PEAL** is any number of changes above 5,000, starting and ending in rounds, without repeating any change in between, and rung continuously by the same ringers without breaks. By means of altering bells in different ways (called 'bobs' and 'singles') at times during the ringing (which is done by the 'conductor' according to a pre-ordained 'composition') it is possible to choose 5,000 or more changes from the 40,320.

In some circumstances, because a peal would be too long a time to ring, a **QUARTER PEAL** may be rung under the same provisos, but this time, only having no less than 1,250 changes. 'Half-muffled' is a mark of respect, and means that a leather pad is placed over one side of the bell's clapper, so that it gives an 'echo' effect.

There are lots of different ways to produce the different changes, and each different way is called a 'Method'. **PLAIN BOB** is the simplest method, but more complicated methods of producing changes exist, which are known by other names such as **GRANDSIRE**, Stedman, Kent, Cambridge, and Double Norwich to name but a few.

MAJOR means the changes are on eight bells.

TRIPLES means changes on seven bells, and so has the eighth bell (or Tenor) striking in eighths place throughout the peal. A Triples peal is always 5,040 changes (Reciprocal $7 - 1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7$, the maximum number of changes available using seven numbers).

And by the way, ringers call themselves ringers and NOT campanologists - campanologists is a word used to describe ringers by people who are not ringers.

(I am extremely grateful for the assistance given to me by Richard White, present Guild Secretary, and to Alan Glover, Bill Dowse and Kate Flavell - Editor)



The original lapel badge



The 75th Anniversary badge



The present day badge