

# Ringling for the 300th anniversary of Fabian Stedman's death

## Press release

Church bells will ring out across England and the world on Saturday 16 November 2013 to mark the 300th anniversary of the death of Fabian Stedman, who was a pioneer of the art of change ringing.

Stedman was born in 1640. at Yarkhill Herefordshire, and apprenticed to a master printer in London where he became influential in the early London ringing societies, first the Scholars of Cheapside, and then the Society of College Youths, of which he became Master in 1682.

In 1668 Stedman published the first book on change ringing, *Tintinnalogia*, which was a joint effort with Richard Duckworth who wrote much of the content. Stedman later wrote *Campanalogia*, which was published in 1677.

In later life he became auditor to Customs and Excise for the Crown. He died in 1713, and was buried at the parish church of St Andrew Undershaft in the City of London on 16 November 1713.

Publication of these two books was Stedman's most significant contribution to the development of the art of change ringing, but he is better known to modern ringers as the author of a ringing method that bears his name, and which will feature in much of the special ringing to commemorate his death. The ringing will include peals (over 5000 changes, which take around 3 hours to ring) and quarter peals, as well as short performances of 300 changes, some of which have been specially composed for the occasion.

Special commemorative events are planned for Yarkhill, Stedman's birthplace and at several towers in the City of London, where Stedman died.

Kate Flavell, President of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers said: "I'm delighted that ringers around the world will be marking this event, and helping the public to be more aware of this important part of our heritage. English change ringing is unique and this is almost entirely due to Stedman's influence. He is often called the father of change ringing and his wonderful method is rung frequently all over the country and beyond, where change ringing English-style is rung."

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## Background information

### About change ringing

Change ringing is a unique form of performance art that requires a special blend of physical and mental skills. It provides intellectual stimulation, modest physical activity and social contact. Change ringing on tower bells developed in England around the end of the sixteenth century, and spread from initial centres like Cambridge, London and Norwich. Worldwide there now are over 40,000 active ringers and around 6,000 towers with bells hung for change ringing. Many are in England, but there are several hundred towers with active bands of ringers across the rest of the British Isles, the Commonwealth and the USA.

Bells hung for change ringing swing through 360 degrees when rung – mouth up to mouth up – and they strike once on each swing. Typical bells weigh between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton, but some are lighter and many weigh well over a ton. Each bell is controlled by one person on the end of the bell rope some way below the bells. The special way that the bells are hung means that only modest effort is needed to ring them in accurately timed sequences. In perfect ringing each blow is accurate to a few hundredths of a second.

The essence of change ringing is that the order in which the bells strike continually changes, with one or more pairs of adjacent bells in the sequence swapping places at each change. Variations on this simple process enable the creation of enormous variety in performances. For example, there are 5040 different orders in which 7 bells can be struck, and even more on higher numbers.

In the late 17th century the key principles of change ringing were being developed, and ringers were making the transition from 'plain changes', where only one pair of bells swaps place at once, to what they called 'cross peals', where several pairs swap at the same time – the form of ringing that is normal today.

Change ringing is practiced on different numbers of bells from 4 to 16, with the most common being 6 and 8. The 'gold standard' performance is a peal, in which over 5000 different sequences are rung without any repetition. It takes around 3 hours, and is rung with no 'music' or other aids – everything is worked out from memory. Around 5000 peals are rung each year. Quarter peals, which take 40-50 minutes, are more popular, with around 13,000 rung each year.

For Stedman's tercentenary some special performances with 300 different sequences of Stedman (the method) have been composed, which take about 10 minutes to ring, and will be rung in many towers. Some ringers will mark the event by ringing 'back-dated Date Touches' of 1713 different sequences of Stedman, which have also been specially composed.

## About Stedman the man

Fabian Stedman was the second son of the Reverend Francis Stedman, and he was baptised at Yarkhill Church on 7 December 1640. At the age of 15 he went to London and was apprenticed to a master printer, Daniel Pakeman. While in London he became a bellringer, and it is as a ringer that he is remembered, later being dubbed 'the father of change ringing'.

Stedman joined one of London's early ringing societies, the Scholars of Cheapside, and was their treasurer in 1662. In 1664 he was accepted as a member of the Society of College Youths, which survives today as one of two premier worldwide ringing societies, and the longest established. In 1667 Stedman became the first steward of the College Youths' and in 1682 he became Master.

In 1668 Stedman published *Tintinnalogia*, the first book on change ringing. Prior to that ideas about the practice and development of ringing would only have been exchanged by word of mouth and hand written documents. *Tintinnalogia* was a joint effort between Richard Duckworth who wrote much of the content and Stedman who compiled and completed it. There was a second edition in 1671. Stedman wrote a second book, *Campanalogia*, which was published in 1677. It covered developments that had taken place during the intervening decade and also included compositions from centres of ringing outside London. Other authors produced more comprehensive books as ringing continued to develop in the 18th century, but Stedman led the way.

Little is known of Stedman's later life. He appears to have dropped out of ringing, and he changed jobs to become auditor to Customs and Excise for the Crown. He died in 1713, in his early 70s. He wrote his will on 17 October and died a few weeks later (the exact date is unknown) and was buried on 16 November 1713 at the parish church of St Andrew Undershaft in the City of London. The church has a bronze plaque in his memory, donated by the Ancient Society of College Youths in 1983. See: [Picture](#)

## About Stedman the method

The method 'Stedman' was one that he described in *Campanalogia*. It is well loved by modern ringers, and can be rung on odd numbers of bells from five upwards. By convention, odd-bell methods are usually rung on an even number of bells with the tenor bell (lowest note) striking last every time, which gives a distinct musical effect. Stedman is a 'principle', where all the working bells follow a similar path through the sequences, unlike most methods where the treble (highest note) has a simpler repetitive path. The structure of Stedman makes it amenable to compositions of enormous diversity and musical content.

## About the ringing community

Bell ringers form a close-knit extended community that shares a common skill and heritage. This is reflected in the universal welcome and opportunity to ring with them that ringers around the world offer to any visiting ringer.

Most ringers belong to the band at the tower(s) where they regularly ring for church services. They also belong to the ringing society covering their area or country, each of which has from a few dozen to a couple of thousand members. The societies are affiliated to the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, which represents ringers worldwide, and provides many services to the ringing community.

Ringers commonly describe their community as 'The Exercise', a term coined in the 18th century when the young gentry took up ringing because of the physical effort required to perform with the bells installations of the day. That is no longer true, apart from very heavy bells, thanks to engineering advances in modern bell installations. The most strenuous physical exercise for most ringers is walking up the belfry stairs before they ring. Ringing itself is all about skill, poise and finesse, not about brute force.

## Special places

[St John the Baptist Yarkhill](#), Herefordshire has a modern ring of 8 bells and an active band of ringers. The tower also houses four 17th century clock bells, three of which were cast during Stedman's lifetime. Current plans for Yarkhill include the development of a ringing teaching centre named after Fabian Stedman. Celebrations planned to commemorate the tercentenary include a visit from the Stedman Society at the end of September and a peal of Stedman Triples on Thursday 14th November, two days before the anniversary of his burial, and likely to be close to the time he died.

[St Andrew Undershaft, City of London](#), has six bells dating from the 16th and 17th century but they are no longer hung for full circle English Style ringing. It also has a [plaque in Stedman's memory](#). Commemoration of the tercentenary will be marked by ringing at other towers in the City of London. Planned peals include Stedman Caters at St Dunstan in the West, and two peals of Stedman Cinques at St Magnus the Martyr, and a possible peal on handbells at St Andrew Undershaft.

## Further information

Central Council of Church Bell Ringers: [cccbr.org.uk](http://cccbr.org.uk) Stedman's tercentenary: [cccbr.org.uk/stedman](http://cccbr.org.uk/stedman)

About change ringing: [cccbr.org.uk/changeringing](http://cccbr.org.uk/changeringing) Discover Bellringing: [bellringing.org](http://bellringing.org)

Ringling towers (all) [dove.cccbr.org.uk](http://dove.cccbr.org.uk) St Andrew Undershaft: [london.lovesguide.com](http://london.lovesguide.com) Yarkhill: [yarkhillchurch.org.uk](http://yarkhillchurch.org.uk)