

## Essay for the Friends No. 16

# Change Ringers' Guides

### *Introduction*

Since 1950 Dove's Guide has been an indispensable vade mecum to those ringers whose interest lies in ringing at towers other than their own, as many as possible! These are ticked off when a ring has been obtained at the tower, and totals kept. Similarly, for peal ringers it is a useful way of keeping a note of towers where peals have been rung, for those with a particular aim in view - perhaps to ring a peal at all ten-bell towers - and how satisfying when the section is completely ticked off. But things move on, and as rings are augmented then there is a need for constant updating, and so new editions are needed. In this essay the early history of such lists of rings of bells is considered, as well as more recent developments, and some of the earlier, more regional, lists.

### *The Change-Ringers' Guide to the Steeples of England*

Just as C.A.W. Troyte, of Huntsham Court, Devon, published a ground-breaking text on change ringing, the first edition of which appeared in 1869 - for details see Essay No. 4 - so his brothers J.E. Acland-Troyte and R.H.D. Acland-Troyte produced an innovative text as a guide to change ringers.

John Edward Troyte already had some idea of change ringing when he went up to Oxford in 1867. His notebook, in the Central Council Library, states that he was elected a member of the Ancient Society of College Youths on 12 February 1867, and first rang Grandsire and Stedman Doubles in July 1867. On his arrival in Oxford he made contact with the local ringers, and continued his ringing career. In 1872 J.E. Troyte was the main mover in the foundation of the Oxford University Society and was the first master. J.E. Troyte took his degree in 1873 and, being a younger son with no prospects, immediately enlisted as a private in the army. For family reasons he also changed his name to Acland-Troyte. He was successful in the army, and within 16 months gained a commission as a sub-lieutenant. Inevitably his absence on duty abroad affected his ringing career, but in 1880 he was once again master of the Oxford

University Society for a short period.

His younger brother, Reginald H.D. Troyte, was also a founding member of the Oxford University Society. He graduated in 1874 and immediately took Holy Orders, serving his title as curate at Porlock from 1874 to 1879. In 1876 he also assumed the name of Acland-Troyte. In the late 1870s the two brothers co-operated in producing their ground-breaking book entitled *The Change-Ringers' Guide to the Steeples of England*, the first edition of which was published in 1879. As far as I can tell, there were no appeals for information in the pages of the weekly periodical *Church Bells*, the usual means of communication at that time, and first reference in that periodical comes in the issue of 11 October 1879 when the editor recommended:

'We advise all ringers who take an occasional outing for business or for pleasure to possess themselves of this very cheap issue at 1s. by our publisher, Mr. Gardner. It will tell them where to get a pull in any part of England, on what days of the week, in what method, the address of the chief ringers, and the nearest railway stations. It has been compiled by the two brothers of Mr. Acland Troyte, of Huntsham Court. An appendix contains matter of interest to all lovers of bells.'

The appendix referred to contains, among other matters, a list of Big Bells of Europe, and lists of rings of twelve and ten bells. Unfortunately the file copies of *Church Bells* of this period in the Central Council Library have been bound without the covers which contained advertising material and which may have given further information, but the preface is dated August 1879, so the publishers saw it through the press quite quickly.

In the preface the authors give an indication that the information was collected by post, and also of the inevitable shortcomings:

'But in the first issue of this kind there must be many imperfections and omissions, and we are only too conscious of it in the present case. In some counties the list of Societies is tolerably complete, but in others there is a sad deficiency, which we fear may cause inconvenience to persons trusting to and using the Guide. Should this happen, we can only express our regret, and add that it is the result in many cases of our inability to get replies to our letters and circulars.'

There was also a notice that any errors, and further information, should be sent to the Rev. R.H. Dyke Acland-Troyte, at Porlock, Somerset. It was also indicated that if the Guide proved a success, then a fresh edition would be brought at regular intervals, say every two years or so.

In *Church Bells* of 17 January 1880, there was a complaint about the

omission of a tower from *The Change Ringers' Guide*, to which the Rev. R. Acland-Troyte responded three weeks later. He pointed out that the Guide was not professed to be exhaustive, but asked that details of the tower be sent him at his address in Washford, Somerset, and asking that details of any other societies that had been omitted should be sent to him to make the next edition 'more nearly perfect than the present one.'

A letter from the compilers of the *Guide* appeared in *Church Bells* of 11 December 1880, asking for information to complete a list of Diocesan and County Guilds, and other Associations that appeared in the appendix to the first edition of the *Guide*, any extra information to be sent to the Rev. R.H.D. Acland-Troyte at Leighland Vicarage, Taunton. A further appeal was made in the issue of 14 May 1881, saying that they thought that the time had come for a new edition to be offered to the exercise: by this time the Rev. R.H.D. Acland-Troyte was the incumbent at Winterbourne Down, Bristol. This second edition duly followed, the preface being dated January 1882. It was welcomed in an editorial in *Bell News* on 3 June 1882, which pointed out that there were over 600 churches listed where change ringing was practised. It also suggested that the price (1s. 7d.) would lead to a loss on the part of the compilers, and predicted 'a quick and ready sale'. Unfortunately no further editions were published, and we can only

speculate on the reasons for this. Certainly at this period J.E. Acland-Troyte was busy with other literary work. In 1881 an anonymous book entitled *Through the Ranks to a Commission* was published, of which he is known to have been the author. This book received a very favourable review in the *New York Times* of 2 May 1881, and was republished as recently as October 2008. Also, J.E. Acland-Troyte was married in October 1882, and would no doubt have turned his attention to other responsibilities. In 1904 he published a work entitled *A layman's life in the days of the Tractarian Movement: in Memoriam Arthur [Acland] Troyte*. By this time he had changed his name just to Acland. It is also worth mentioning that there is a family tradition that he had also had a major part in the writing of the book on change ringing, credited to his eldest brother. He maintained some interest in change ringing and was master of the Salisbury Guild from 1904 to 1901. He died in 1932 in his eighty-fourth year.

The Rev. R.H.D. Acland-Troyte was vicar of Winterbourne Down until 1884, and the following year took up a post as chaplain in Pau, in

south-west France, where he ministered until he retired to Taunton in 1922. There is nothing to suggest that he took any further interest in change ringing before his death in 1932.

### *The Ringer's Guide to the Church Bells of Devon*

In 1887 a pamphlet was published in Exeter, entitled *How to learn Change Ringing without an Instructor*, the author being Charles Pearson of Whitestone, Devon. On the last printed page of the pamphlet there was a notice from William Pollard & Son, Exeter, stating that there would shortly be published a book by the same author, entitled *The Ringer's Guide to the Church Bells of Devon*. This pamphlet was reprinted the following year, when it was stated that the latter book was then ready. On its title page, Charles Pearson was said to be 'Formerly Assistant Master of Charterhouse School, and since Government Inspector of Education in India. Member of the Guild of Devonshire Ringers.' Its preface was dated October 1888, and the book was based on Ellacombe's works, and intended to give Ellacombe's results in a popular form. The first part of the book, some 97 pages, dealt with the history of bells and bellringing, and was followed by an alphabetical list by parish of the church bells of Devon, giving the founders and dates of the bells, abridged and updated from Ellacombe's list. This was followed by a listing of towers containing three or more bells, categorised by the number of bells in the tower, but giving no indication of the weight of the tenor of each ring. A supplement to *The Ringer's Guide...* was issued in 1900, with updated lists, details of bell work that had been carried out since 1888 being added in. A further supplement was published in 1927, the updating being done by the Rev. Maitland Kelly, the Rev. E.S. Powell, and Thomas Laver, the latter being the general secretary of the Guild of Devonshire Ringers. This supplement not only gives an estimate of the weight of the tenor of each ring, but summarises the work done by the different firms of bellhangers and bellfounders since the previous supplement of 1900.

To round out the lists of the rings of bells in Devon, the Guild of Devonshire Ringers published a short guide, listing the rings from six to twelve bells, together with an estimate of the weight of the tenor and a comment about the 'go' of the bells. This list is undated, but internal evidence suggests that it was published c.1947.

### *Some Particulars of the Principal Rings of Bells in the Eastern*

## *Counties*

This was the long title of a booklet, written by the Rev. W.C. Pearson, vicar of Henley, Suffolk, and published in 1910. It gives the details - founders, dates, diameters and weights - of the rings of eight or more bells in Norfolk, Suffolk, Huntingdon and Essex. In the preface, dated 16 November 1910, Pearson tells us that its principal object was to give reliable information about these rings, as peal reports often had the incorrect weight of the tenor. At the end is a short appendix summarising the 100 peals that had been rung at Henley since they had been augmented to a ring of eight bells in May 1902. The 100th peal was rung on 3 December 1910, so if indeed the booklet was published in 1910, as stated on the title page, the printers must have got a move on!

The name of the Rev. W.C. Pearson is well-known in book circles, having put together one of the most extensive and important collections of books on change ringing that ever existed, and he is worthy of an article in his own right.

## *Dove's Guide*

All this is, of course, leading up to the story of the publication of Ron Dove's *A Bellringer's Guide to the Church Bells of Britain*. Ron Dove was born in 1906, and learnt to ring in Burton-on-Trent in the early 1920s. After school he initially worked in a bank in Stafford, but the ringing bug having bitten, he was glad to take up an opportunity to work at Gillett and Johnston's foundry in Croydon when this came up. In 1934 he moved to work for Potts of Leeds, and stayed there for the rest of his working life, retiring in 1971. It was during his time at Croydon that he developed his interest in compiling a reference book on all rings of bells, and the first edition was finally published in 1950, after nearly 20 years work. The publisher was Will Viggers, already known for publishing other material relating to bellringing. In the foreword, Dove stated that his object was to provide a reliable book of reference for ringers visiting a strange district, and to assist 'the increasing number of ringers who organize ringing tours and outings'. He made reference to the fact that he had been negotiating for the publication of a work on the lines that he had adopted as early as 1934, but had given up the idea. In 1949 a suggestion had been made that the Central Council should embark on such a project, and after Dove had discussed the idea with the proposer of the idea,

and getting his agreement, he offered the manuscript to the Central Council. However, a decision was made to publish it privately. He also said that he only became aware of the existence of the Acland-Troyte brothers' book *The Change-Ringers' Guide to the Steeples of England*, when his own was ready for printing, and pointed out the difference between the 600 entries in the earlier book, and nearly ten times that many in his own.

An announcement of the publishing of the book was made in the *Ringling World* on 14 April 1950, and the following week there was a eulogistic front-page article, which concluded:

'This is very good value for the charge of 5s. in this handy book, and we hope it will have the popularity it deserves.'

There was little correspondence about the guide - a letter from Wilf Box pointing out a small error, another pointing out that this was an isolated error in the huge amount of information published, and another commending the book and suggesting that the opportunity might be taken to publish another book giving lists of ringers, along the lines of the directories compiled by the Bristol United Ringing Guilds nearly twenty-years previously.

The second edition was published in 1956, and was welcomed by a front-page article on 11 May 1956. In this it was said that the guide had been an instantaneous success, but delays in producing a second edition had been caused by difficulties in the printing industry. Also, that the binding had been improved, necessary in what was likely to be a well-thumbed book. Interesting new features included a list of postwar losses of bells, and transfers of ringing peals. Cost was 6s. 6d. for a standard edition with cloth back and stiff board sides, 9s. 6d. for a library edition with full cloth case, and 12s. for a standard edition interleaved with plain paper. Postage was 6d. for a single copy of

either of the first two versions, but 9d. for an interleaved copy.

Other editions followed, each being updated and corrected if necessary. The third edition was published in 1962, fourth edition in 1968, fifth edition 1978, sixth edition 1982, and seventh edition in 1988. This latter edition was published jointly by W.H. Viggers and the Seven Corners Press Ltd. In 1994 the eighth edition was published by Seven Corners Press Ltd. alone, W.H. Viggers having died in the interim, although involved in the preparation of this edition. In the foreword, written by Wilf Moreton, it was mentioned that up to that time 34,000 copies of the guide had been sold, and that 6,000 copies of this edition had been printed.

Meanwhile, after the sixth edition of Dove appeared in 1982, when computing was at an earlier stage of development, John Baldwin began preparing the data for electronic handling. His initial results, which were limited by the technology of the time, were not approved of by Ron Dove. Also, in 1986 John Baldwin published a companion to Dove called *Where's That Tower*, in which was given the map references of all towers in Britain. As a spin-off from this, in 1990 John Baldwin, with Ron Johnston, Graham Allsopp and Helen Turner, published *An Atlas of Bells*. The map references were offered for inclusion in the eighth edition of Dove, but Ron Dove was of the opinion that this lengthened the guide too much, and this information was not included. After this edition, it was agreed that the publication of a ninth edition should be undertaken by the Central Council, and this was undertaken by John Baldwin and Ron Johnston, and published in 2000. It included map references, even more useful in these days of sat-nav! Unfortunately, there were a few glitches in the computer type-setting, not picked up at proof-reading stage, and a few inserts had to be provided to cover these. The title was now the rather grandiose *Dove's Guide for Church Bell Ringers to the Ringing Bells of Britain and the World*, and the title page states that it was compiled by John Baldwin and Ron Johnston. A foreword was written by Ron Dove in August 1999, and he lived long enough to see the publication of the ninth edition at the end of 2000, for he died in March 2001 at the age of nearly 95. His records show that he had rung at 5326 towers, all with five or more bells. It seems increasingly likely that the ninth edition of Dove's Guide will be the last printed version, as concurrently with preparing the information for printing, it was also published on a web-site at the beginning of 1999. This has the advantage that it can be easily and quickly updated, but the disadvantage that it can be only accessed via the internet. No more taking Dove when tower grabbing, and marking off a new tower on the printed page!

### *Holdings of the Central Council Library*

The Central Council Library holds copies of all the items discussed above. Our only copy of the first edition of *The Change-Ringers' Guide to the Steeples of England* is yet another book that came originally from the collection of the Rev. William Meredith Morris, a noted collector discussed in last year's Essay. Morris had the book rebound in hard covers by a firm in Tonypanyd, and it was only when I was collating it

for this essay that I noticed that pages 86-90 are missing. The Library is now in the market for another, perfect, copy! The second edition (one copy held) has no provenance, and is in its original covers, which are paper laid on card.

The Library holds one copy each of the 1887 and 1888 printings of Pearson's pamphlet *How to learn Change Ringing without an Instructor*. It is possible that there were later printings, and should anyone have information on these I would be very interested to hear of them. On the other hand, the Central Council Library holds three copies of *The Ringer's Guide to the Church Bells of Devon*, two in their original decorative green cloth, and another that came from the Rev. Meredith Morris's collection. The latter copy has also been rebound, and bound in at the back is the 1900 supplement, the only copy of that supplement that the Central Council Library holds. The Library has a single copy of the 1927 supplement, on the back of which is an advert for the original printing of 1888. This advert says that it had 151 pages, which appears to be the number of pages in the prelims and main text added together, less a couple of blank pages, i.e. the number of printed pages. The fact that it was still in print nearly 40 years after publication suggests that the original print run was quite long, and this no doubt explains why the book is not scarce, unlike the supplements.

The Rev. W.C. Pearson's booklet was published in red paper covers, and there are three copies in the CC Library, although it does not turn up that often, and I do not have a copy in my own collection.

Dove's guide is a collector's item in its own right. The Library holds copies of each of the editions. The soft covers on the First edition are likely to be dilapidated, but the Library copy is good, as is a copy in my own collection. Of the next five editions, the Library holds a library copy of each, complete with dust jacket. Laminated covers started with the seventh edition, and up to the eighth edition the books were a similar height, but the later editions were not so deep. The seventh and eighth editions, with their smaller size and laminated covers, were particularly suitable for slipping into a pocket. The ninth edition is to somewhat larger format, now A5 and definitely not pocket sized! Also, in view of the very large number printed, it could be in print for many years.

THE  
CHANGE-RINGERS' GUIDE  
TO THE  
STEEPLES OF ENGLAND

*With an Appendix, containing information on many subjects  
interesting to the Exercise*

COMPILED BY

J. E. ACLAND-TROYTE

AND

R. H. D. ACLAND-TROYTE

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INSPECTION OF EACH TOWER IN 1864 AND 1865.

BY

CHARLES PEARSON, M.A.,

*Formerly Assistant Master of Charterhouse School, and since Government Inspector  
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GEORGE BELL & SONS, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

EXETER :

HENRY S. ELAND, HIGH STREET.

WILLIAM POLLARD & Co., PRINTERS, NORTH STREET.

1888.

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TO THE  
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CHURCH BELLS OF DEVON,

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The Guild of Devonshire  
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A SHORT GUIDE

TO THE

Church Bells of Devon

Rings of Six—Twelve Bells.

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*The Student of Bell History is referred  
to the Works of Ellacombe and Pearson.*

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ABBREVIATIONS USED —

G—Good order.      FG—Fairly good.      M—Moderate order.  
P—The Bells go badly.      B—The Bells have suffered from the Blitz.  
R—Bells under Restoration.      W—Ecclehard ring.

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CHURCH BELL RINGERS

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TO THE  
CHURCH BELLS  
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AND RINGING PEALS OF THE WORLD

*Compiled by*

RONALD H. DOVE

RINGING MASTER, LEEDS PARISH CHURCH

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