

A Classic Mini-Ring Restored!

This is a story about the Restoration of a very old Mini-Ring that was originally built in the late 1970s by Roger Durrant. These days almost every ringer will know of someone within a 50 mile radius who owns a transportable or a permanently sited Mini-Ring. 25 years ago it was a very different story; there were only a very small handful, and they wouldn't have been of the quality and durability of the Matthew Higby type rings of today. This Mini-Ring, which was never given a name until now, was one of the first and was made using old servants' bells, and what looks like an old school bell for the Tenor.

About a year ago I received an email from Revd Andrew Davey of Clenchwarton, Norfolk. He had recently acquired what I knew as Roger Durrant's portable ring of 8. Andrew was enquiring into the possibility of having new clappers made for them. I had rung on these bells a couple of times back in the 80s when the then "Liss Campanile Youths" rang the first Quarter Peal of Surprise Major on them. The LCY also tried to peal these bells on a couple of occasions, but were unsuccessful.



First Quarter of Surprise Major on the bells by "The Liss Campanile Youths" 9-11-86 L-R Back Row: Nick Allingham, Steve Hough, Martin Hough. Middle Row: Martin Turner, Roy LeMarechal, Mark Wilson. Front Row: Glen Poyntz, Toby Arkless.

I was very pleased to agree to make the clappers for him, and it would be good to see the bells after all these years. As many of you will know, as well as creating the infamous Liss Campanile with my brother, Martin (with its ring of 12 galvanised buckets and subsequently flower pots), I am the very proud creator and owner of "The Jack & Jill House Campanile" Gosport, with its (even if I do say so myself) magnificent 10oz ring of 8. I have also helped Ben Carey create the Midways Campanile in Stubbington with its 11oz ring of 10. In addition I have made a replacement set of clappers for "Matthew Higbys Micro Ring" 6, 7oz. One more job seemed a good idea at the time, but I had slightly underestimated the task I was about to undertake.

Andrew delivered his ring to my Dad's house in January 2007. This Mini-Ring comes in 5 pieces - the bells and fittings in their radial frame and the 4 legs. When I looked at the installation the frame looked in reasonable condition with a few loose cross braces. The wheels were definitely showing signs of age and would need some repairs.



The rather unusual clapper arrangement on the 5th, note the spoke held together with string!

The clappers were amazing in that there were 2 external clappers that were linked together in a cantilever arrangement. Some bells worked better than others, but all in all the arrangement was totally over the top – but very ingenious indeed.

I realised that the outcome was not going to be a first class job for two reasons. Firstly the bells varied in size so much, the Tenor weighs 21lb the 7th 11lb and the front 6 weigh 7 or 8 oz each. Secondly the wheels were far too large for the bells, larger than Matthew Higby uses on bells 10 times the weight. The outcome was that the bells turn too slowly for the clappers to operate properly; that has been the biggest problem with these bells all along.

I assessed the situation and put forward a package that I thought would be best. After all, the objective was to make a set of clappers that would work properly, but I would need to do a lot more to achieve satisfactory result. Firstly the bells needed tuning - the middle 6 were roughly in tune but the Treble was slightly flat and the Tenor was slightly sharp. The bottom of the wheels needed to be weighted to

achieve a decent swing to allow the clappers to function properly. At this point I had no idea how I was going to do this but I knew that a solution would eventually present itself; it usually does! Finally they desperately needed a proper set of ropes with real sallies rather than the pretend sallies that they had.



The Bells and the wheels, note the size of the wheels in relation to the bells!

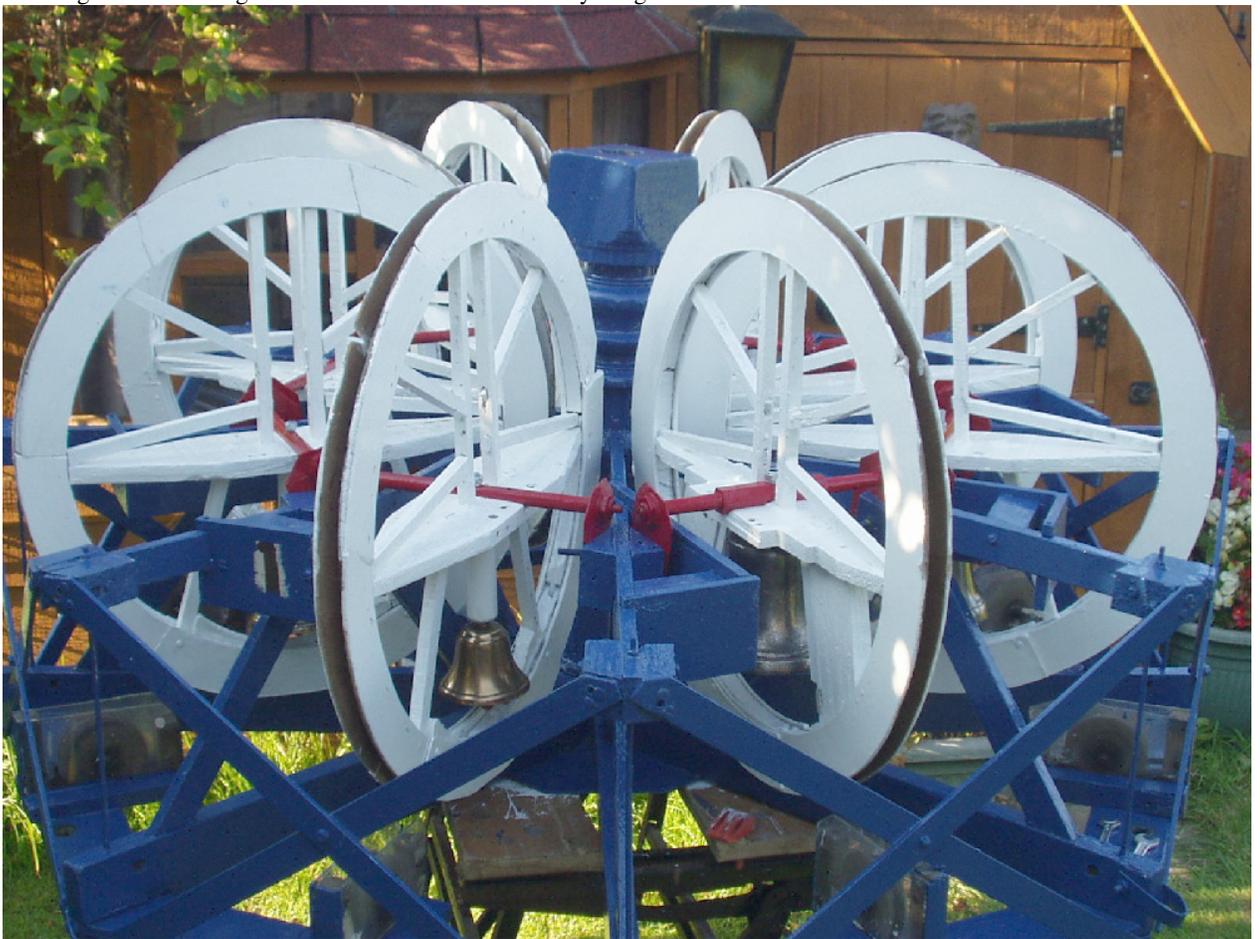
In February 07, I dismantled the fittings and took the bells to work and tuned them into a proper octave, then got my Dad to polish them up with his set of metal polishing mops, which made them look miles better than the oxidised copper green that they were. In March / April I made all the clapper components, crown staples and bell bolts topped off with locknuts and split washes. My spare evenings were spent making the sallies which suffered a setback when I lost my favourite sallie making needle in the sofa. I eventually managed to get another needle but the other one is still in the cushion somewhere!

I reassembled the bells and fittings in the frame and calculated how much weight was needed to get the bells swinging with enough momentum to not only allow the clappers to function but to aid the handling without causing so much G-force to tear the tower apart. The bad news was that it would require a significant amount of extra weight to achieve this and there was nowhere to fix this extra weight without hitting the frame. I was beginning to regret getting involved with this project at this point.

3 or 4 months passed and Andrew sent me the occasional email to ask how things were progressing. I was getting desperate! Suddenly I hit upon the idea of using lead flashing, cut to cover the shrouding at the bottom of the wheels. To my delight it worked splendidly; each wheel was fitted with 2 strips of lead on either side covering roughly a quarter of the bottom of the wheel (depending on the size of the bell) to make each bell swing at the same speed.

Just as I thought I was in the home straight I hit another problem. The clappers on the front six worked well enough but the back two were far from satisfactory. The clapper balls were made of plastic to deliver a mellow sound, which works fine on bells less than 10oz, but on the bigger bells the clappers bounced for no apparent reason no matter how they were adjusted. So I experimented with different materials, wood and lead made no difference at all. Steel was slightly better but too harsh. In desperation I smeared a bit of silicone over the balls and I was amazed by the outcome. The clappers on the 7 and Tenor went from being bad to brilliant. I tried to replicate similar clappers on the front six bells, but.... Guess what? It didn't have the same effect – The plastic balls were much better, so they went back in. This was all due to the vast difference in sizes, faced with this it was very difficult to get a decent sound balance.

The frame and fittings were then painted and things were beginning to look and sound great. By late August I had the Mini-Ring set up in my garden with the rather splendid new ropes. One Friday evening I managed to twist a few of our Ringers at Alverstoke to come round for a tryout. We were alarmed about the amount of tower movement. In fact, while trying to ring half a course of Yorkshire, some bells dropped in certain changes as the tower shook violently. It was obvious that the telescopic wooden legs were not stable enough at full extension. However it worked ok if you lowered the legs and rang the bells sitting down. We called it "The Wobbly Ring" after that!



Back in one piece!

I contacted Andrew to tell him that the bells were ready and we arranged for him to pick them up on 10th November, and we also arranged for him and Emma Southerington to ring a peal at Jack & Jill at the same time. But some of the band wanted to ring a peal on Andrew's "Wobbly Ring" as well. This meant ringing the peal on Andrew's bells in the open air. It was going to be very cold and possibly wet and windy, but we would have to take our chances.

On the day I was pleased to meet Andrew and Emma for the first time, after so many emails it was nice to put a face to the name. We rang our peal at Jack & Jill first, and a very nice peal it was too. Andrew

& Emma were very impressed by my bells, which are very different from the Higby blueprint - they are a lot lighter with stays (yes stays!) and a sweet sound all of their own.

After refreshments we put on our coats, hats & scarves (and some had gloves as well) and settled down to ring a peal on the Wobbly Ring. The bells, with their big wheels, were slower turning than Jack & Jill so we were in for a slower peal no matter how hard we tried to push them along. I had rigged up some fairy lights for us to ring by which shook as the tower wobbled. One distraction was that our neighbours were watching us through their bedroom window. Another distraction was the frequent bangs of fireworks being let off in a local garden.

After an hour or so one of the nuts that holds one of the leg supports worked loose and then fell off, shortly after followed the bolt. Fortunately the support was caught by the fairy light wire and didn't fall down and hit anyone. Unfortunately the tower did shake a lot more violently afterwards; I had to put my foot down very firmly on the leg to try and stop it shaking too much. Eventually the peal came round in 2hr 6min which was quite a respectable speed, considering. We were all very cold and in need of a hot coffee!

Andrew decided to give the wobbly ring a name at last. Henceforth it is now known as "The Rector's Loose Ring". After we had thawed out we dismantled the ring and loaded it into Andrew's car, with the actual frame going on the roof rack. It was nice to have my space back although I will miss "The Rector's Loose Ring" after so many months. I wished Andrew good luck with it, and suggested he has a metal tower made for it at some point which would no doubt improve things no end.

All in all it has been an interesting project for me, I tried to make a "silk purse out of a sow's ear" and didn't quite succeed, but at least I have restored a classic old Mini-Ring without losing too many original features.

Steve Hough

**Winchester & Portsmouth D.G.
Gosport, Hants**

The Rectors Loose Ring (at 58 Carnarvon Road)

Sat Nov 10 2007 2h6 (2lb)

5056 Cambridge S Major

Comp. C Middleton

1 Andrew J Davey

2 Stephen N Hough

3 Sarah E Hutchinson

4 Ian J Carey

5 Lizzie J Hough

6 Emma J Southerington

7 Lee Pinnington

8 Benjamin J Carey (C)

The First Peal on the Bells.

First in the Method - 5.

"You really don't have to stop even if the tower does fall down..."



The Peal Band (looking like a bunch of carol singers) L-R: Sarah Hutchinson, Ian Carey, Lizzie Hough, Steve Hough, Andrew Davey, Emma Southerington, Lee Pinnington, Ben Carey.