

Conservation of Liverpool's Oldest Peal Board

(or 'Now You See It')

On 9th November 1800 the first Peal in the city of Liverpool was rung at the 'new' Liverpool Parish Church of St Peter (to become the Pro-Cathedral in 1880 until 1919 when demolition commenced). The Peal is formally recorded on an Illuminated Manuscript (only). To mark its fiftieth anniversary, two Peals were rung on the same date in 1850, Grandsire Caters at St Peter's (different bells by then) and Grandsire Triples (same composition as 1850) at the 'old' Liverpool Parish Church of Our Lady and St Nicholas (Pier Head). In 1699, upon Liverpool being granted its own parish, St Peter's and St Nicholas' had been appointed joint Parish churches. Formerly Liverpool fell within the parish of Walton on the Hill with St Mary as the parish church.

Despite extensive enquiries, it has not been possible to locate any of the St Peter's Peal Boards (possibly lost in the 1940 blitz on Liverpool) so the one at St Nicholas is the oldest surviving. It is this Peal Board which has been the subject of conservation, the work being carried out in the Ringing Chamber after the 1.8m x 1.0m board had been lowered to the floor by the ringers.

The intervening 160 years have not been kind, grime and discoloration of the varnish combining to render the lettering on the Peal Board all but indecipherable, certainly when viewed from the floor of the Ringing Chamber (see photo).

It was Peter Furniss, Ringing Master at the Pier Head church, who was the driving force behind this project which has been financed entirely from the ringers' Tower Fund. As might be imagined, the expense involved in conservation (£1400) was not considered by all as the best use of our funds but, at a tower committee meeting, it was unanimously agreed that application for a Faculty be initiated to take the project forward.

The progress of this conservation project, which was undertaken by Fine Art Conservator, Vanessa Andrew of Frodsham over two weeks in September 2012, was recorded both photographically and by video recordings at various stages.

Some of the photographs, reproduced here, serve to illustrate both the painstaking effort and the resultant spectacular transformation. A more comprehensive gallery of photographs may be found at fotopiaimages.com ('My Blog' then scroll down) and there is a short (3½mins) video on YouTube (<http://youtu.be/2tTNmZNzcgQ>). The Peal Board has now been hung more prominently in the Ringing Chamber as befits its historical significance.

Following wide acknowledgement of the most satisfying outcome of this project, we are now proceeding with the conservation of a second, 1875, Peal Board, this having already been incorporated in the above-mentioned Faculty. This larger board (2.5m x 1.0m) will remain *in situ* for this work.

And Now You Don't. Re-hanging the peal board involved swapping places with one including the first peal on the new bells in 1953. Our keen eyed photographer noticed evidence of old lettering under the black background on this board. Closer inspection revealed a few names which matched those on other boards who were ringing as far back as the 1840's. The age and former content of the overwritten one is now the subject of some interest!

PFH *et al*