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Fifty of the Best from Scarborough

by

Andrew Jackson, Scarborough Sub-Aqua Club

Editor's Note: Joan Elliott, Bell Collectors of the British Isles, submits this article with permission from the Scarborough Sub-Aqua Club located in North Yorkshire, UK. The club is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The photographs are credited to Carl Racey (SSAC), who is the Vice-Chairman of Scarborough Sub-Aqua Club; and in his reply, he says "With divers, their bells are so connected with the ship, the circumstances of the loss and its place in history, hard to separate all that. Discovering a shipwreck, then finding and recovering the ship's bell, means a lot to the diver(s) involved. I think mainly for this reason, not many shipwreck bells are bought and sold. I have seen the odd one on eBay, these are often from ships, which have been scrapped or decommissioned. Prices are affected by size, type of ship, and the history."



The Scarborough Sub-Aqua club displays 50 magnificent bells in the first photograph. The next five photographs are close-ups of the bells pictured from their salvaging expeditions.



The last three pictures are of the Scarborough Club House and some of the bells that they have salvaged from the depths of the sea.

The custom of marking the passage of time at sea by striking a note prob-



ably began with the ancient Chinese who are known to have struck a gong onboard ship. British records suggest that our custom of carrying bells on sailing ships dates back to the 13th century. One of the earliest recorded mentions of a shipboard bell on the British ship "GRACE DIEU" in 1485.

On these early sailing ships, the bell was mounted in a structure resembling a church belfry with a roof shaped like a pagoda. This indicates religious connections and indeed in the Royal Navy, it was the custom to baptise a child under the ship's bell; sometimes it was even inverted and used as a font.





Royal Navy vessels traditionally had the bell hung on the quarter deck. It was used in conjunction with the half hour glass. Every time the glass was turned the bell was struck, once at the end of the first half hour, twice at the end of the first hour and so forth, eight "bells" signifying the end of a four-hour watch.



Crews in the old days regarded the bell as the spirit or soul of the ship. They claimed that it always rang when the ship sank, and, if it rang when all else seemed well, then it foretold pending disaster.

Bells on board ship were also developed as a warning device. In 1858, British Naval Regulations made it mandatory to carry a bell for warning purposes and maritime law still requires it today. The warning bell was hung forward within easy reach of the lookout on the forecandle. Most keen bell enthusiasts will recall the Titanic disaster and the lookout in the crow's nest on the foremast with his warning bell and telephone.

The Titanic warning bell was recovered as part of the controversial salvage of artefacts and opinions differ on the rights and wrongs of such actions.

Today, there are many steamship bells recovered by amateur divers from the numerous wrecks of the 20th century



that surround our coastlines. The bell remains the single most important item on a wreck divers wish list for the simple reason that it usually identifies the ship immediately. Scarborough Sub-Aqua Club members have been recovering ships' bells for 40 years, and it is a club tradition and one that the club has declared in full in the recent wreck amnesty.

There will be those of you out there that consider this to be piracy, and you are entitled to your opinion. We at Scarborough Sub-Aqua Club are proud of our roots and the history that we have pulled together and re-told. Many of these bells are on public display in our clubhouse, others are in private collections but all are back in human circulation. We are merely the temporary guardians of these artefacts; and what matters most is that as long as they exist, the history of the ships will remain of interest to someone and their stories will be told. The people who recovered these bells are now also a part of that history.

So what better way could Scarborough Sub-Aqua Club come up with to celebrate 50 years of BSAC than to photograph 50 bells belonging to the club membership and their friends?

[Collins...Continued from page 6]

bell organization is a happy family—try to visit another chapter if you are traveling. Mary and Walter are season ticket holders to women's national basketball association games and never miss even one!

"Bellologist" is given as occupation on the name tag of our own **Terry Mayer** (New York) at Rotary. Terry is always creating ways to spread the word about the ABA. At a recent Rotary meeting, Terry sat next to the director of a performing arts center of a college in Erie, and immediately engaged him in a discussion of bells. Terry suggests we all contact a local college and offer to give a talk on bells; have a bell display; hold a contest with a financial reward for a paper on bells in history, or any other aspect of bells.

Terry also suggests putting our bell knowledge on DVDs and making them available through the Internet to other bell collectors who don't know that ABA exists. We all need to tell others about our informative and friendly society.

Guess who wrote this letter! "Have been busy with bell programs, lunches, tea parties, concerts, tree trimming parties, political dinners, and blood drives. Gave three bell programs this month to a friend's chapter of Beta Sigma Phi, the Presbyterian women, and a second grade elementary school..." Who else but **Lenore Hammond** of Arkansas. Lenore and

Curtis had their bell museum in Eureka Springs for many years and brought in many members for the ABA.

"You remind me of a friend named Paulette Detwiller that I lived with in a dorm in 1960," said **Luida Shearer** to **Paulette Morse** (both of Pennsylvania) at the Collins Christmas party. "That's me!! You're Luida!!" After almost half a century, bells reunited former friends. Paulette and three girlfriends recently followed Audrey Hepburn's example and stood in front of Tiffany's in New York City having their breakfast of rolls and coffee. After having fun trying on jewelry priced at thousands on the ground floor, Paulette found one of Tiffany's annual holiday bells with ribbons, holly, and pinecones on the top floor. Guess which floor Paulette's purchase is from!

[Watrous...Continued from page 21]

Manufacturing Co., the same year he started the company with E.G. Cone.¹ Three years later, in 1898, there were from ten to fifteen employees with E.J. Rich President; J.C. Wells Secretary and Treasurer; and Directors, S.W. Wardwell, E.J. Rich, J.C. Wells, and L.O. Wells.

John C. Wells married Lucy Barton, a teacher and painter, in 1902. According to his granddaughter, Drucilla Wells, electric wire was strung from their house at 36 North Main Street to the one-story shop, now converted to apartments.

Photographs of the turtle and single duck bell toys are by Robert K. Watrous of toys in his collection. The photograph of the duck team and rider bell toy are by Paul Cole of a toy in his collection. Thanks to Jeff Bell for some of the Wells and Climax company history.

¹ *Penny Press Special Illustrated Edition Supplement, Middletown, Connecticut. M.DCCC.XCVIII*

Historical Records of ABA

The Historian keeps and preserves historical records of the ABA and has a complete file of all of *The Bell Tower* issues, published books on bells, and researched articles by members. When requested, the Historian will loan these materials or send copies, with cost defrayed by the requestor. Please contact.

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