



Honorary Life Member Citation

Greyabbey dedication, 2002

“When I first realised I was going to have to say something today I had a problem. Not what to say but rather how do I avoid speaking for three hours! I apologise now for any digressions I make and promise to keep them to an absolute minimum.

I intend to address you under three main headings.

1. How did we get here?
2. What does it mean now we have arrived?
3. Who do we have to thank?

Finally, as President of the Irish Association of Change Ringers I then wish to say a few words of welcome to the Greyabbey bellringers.

Here comes the first digression!

Who would have thought, even just three years ago, that anyone would use that phrase “Greyabbey bellringers” in a sentence. Yet I know the bellringing world was always aware of the three bells at St Saviour’s through the IACR and Dove’s Guide to towers with rings of bells hung for full circle ringing. As an example, I remember judging the Cunningham Cup in Holywood some eight years ago with the then Association President, Mike Pomeroy, who is here today and will confirm this happened. We were located in an unobtrusive part of the Church grounds awaiting the first team to start. Imagine our surprise when not eight, not six but three bells began ringing. At first, we thought it was a team trying their ropes. However, after some two minutes of this Mike said to me, “Don I think we should be marking this.” I replied, “Why Mike?” and he said, “I think the Greyabbey bellringers have turned up out of the blue to try and capture the cup!”

How did we get here?

Most of you will be aware that the current phase of the project has taken some two years to complete. However, I believe that the project really started with Francis Octavius Montgomery in 1871. He donated three bells then to St Saviour’s and had them hung for full circle ringing. To donate three bells is not unusual; indeed Westminster Abbey, I believe, began with three. The concept being the bells represent the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. What is significant is that they were hung for full circle ringing. He could have saved money and had them hung for chiming and one can only assume that, with his family connections in England, it was his wish that in time Greyabbey would have a ring of bells like so many villages throughout England. Unfortunately, no record exists of these bells being rung full circle. The IACR itself came into being some 27 years later and no mention is made of them ringing. The bells were chimed by Ellacombe for some 130 years.

The recent millennium caused a burst of activity in bell restorations throughout the British Isles. Simon Walker (Ringing Master of Hillsborough) and Jim Hamilton (Tower Captain of Lurgan) approached the then Rector of St Saviour's, Rev W McMonagle and gained his permission to try and restore the ring. A floor had to be put in and Jim is to be thanked for the work he carried out in having wheels made and making, himself, other fixtures and fittings to enable a test ring to be carried out. The work was of such quality that the final work done by the bellhangers was able to incorporate some of it.

Coincidentally, Peter Hayward of Hayward Mills Associates, that year was carrying out his first triennial bell inspections in the Northern District. This was as a consequence of a decision taken some years previously by the Northern District to ensure all rings of bells within it are inspected, with reports going to the Towers and Vestries involved. The idea being "a stitch in time saves nine". Peter, therefore, was asked to include Greyabbey and reported that restoration was possible and, furthermore, he suggested the addition of three more bells! This, he felt, would actually add to the stability of the tower. A Structural Engineer was asked to confirm this and when he did the work was put out to tender. Three quotations were received, and Hayward Mills received the order with the lowest quote. They also included the work to put in a new lower ringing floor and staircase. Funding was obtained from the sources I shall list later and here we are today.

What does it mean now we are here?

There are several groups of people who benefit from the completion of this project – the Montgomery family who, by their financial contribution, have been able to fulfil the wishes of William Montgomery's Great Great uncle. It is Bill's hospitality we are enjoying here today and on behalf of all of us I thank, him for it.

The IACR, which, as can be seen by the attendance here today, is very pleased to now have 16 rings of bells in the Northern District and a total of 32 in Ireland.

Greyabbey Parish Church now takes its place alongside some of the most notable Cathedrals in the land. I am thinking of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, with its tenor bell equal to 40 of the treble bells here in Greyabbey; Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, which, at 19, has the largest number of full-circle ringing bells in one location in the world. St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny, which has a fine set of bells. The historic Cathedral of St Mary in Limerick; Mt St Alphonsus, also in Limerick, with a set of ten bells believed to be possibly the finest ten-bell ring in the world. St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork, with a good set of eight heavy bells. Coming nearer to home we have St McCartin's Cathedral, Enniskillen and St Columb's Cathedral in Derry. Time doesn't permit me to list all the other rings in Ireland, however, I understand that St Saviour's, Greyabbey Mothers' Union is twinned with St Saviour's Parish Church, Arklow. The next time these Mothers' Unions meet up and do whatever Mothers' Unions do, the Greyabbey contingent will be able to say, "We have a set of bells now, too."

The village of Greyabbey will now benefit, like hundred and perhaps thousands, of villages throughout England, by having a set of bells. In England bellringing is very much an integral part of village life and, as Bishop Harold Miller mentioned in his Sermon today, are useful for

marking time through the various secular and non-secular events which occur during the year. I am thinking, for instance, of the impending celebration of the Queen's Golden Jubilee this year and the normal annual celebrations around New Year.

Finally, the entire Ards will benefit from being now included in the many tours organised by various Guilds and Associations from Great Britain, which will now include Greyabbey in their schedule. It seems obvious that in organising a tour, the sensible thing to do would be to pay visits to Rostrevor and Newcastle followed by crossing on the ferry and travelling up through the Ards to Greyabbey en route enjoying the magnificent scenery available along the way.

Who do we have to thank for getting us here?

I have already mentioned the part played by Jim Hamilton of Lurgan assisted by ringers from Hillsborough and Lurgan through their time and labours. Funding for the project was given by:

1. Heritage Lottery Fund who gave 87.5% funding towards the restoration of the original three bells.
2. The Arts Council Lottery Fund which gave 75% funding towards the new set of bells.
3. Ards Borough Council which gave a considerable donation.
4. The Montgomery family, who also provided minding in memory of William Montgomery's late father.
5. The Bell Restoration Fund of the IACR (Northern District)
6. The Bell Restoration Fund of the IACR (Executive Council).

It is also worth mentioning that Hayward Mills Associates (the bellhangers who performed the work), did not charge for the inscription work done on the new bells. Furthermore, and at no extra cost to the project, they transported away and carried out restorative work on the bell hung for timing in the belfry dated 1620 Circa and known as "Old Gomery".

I have deliberately not mentioned one individual until now, whose contribution to this project was invaluable. That person is Denise Bailie of Holy Trinity Parish, Drumbo. The project was fortunate to find Denise in office as Northern District Secretary when it was first being considered. It was she who basically obtained the participation of all the funding bodies I have mentioned. Indeed, she was so integral to the project that she was made Project Co-Ordinator when her term of office was completed as Secretary. It is correct to say that this project has virtually taken over her life in the last few years. Consequently, I would ask you all to put your hands together as a sign of your appreciation of all her efforts.

Another digression!

As I drove down here today, I realised I had got off lightly over this time. At home, with Denise preoccupied with Greyabbey I have not been asked to carry out the usual home improvements she is usually always coming up with. Now that it is completed, I have no doubt she will have a list as long as your arm! Furthermore, if I have learned anything in this time, it is

that resistance is useless. I shall now just publicly say “Yes dear” with one proviso. I look forward to reading her approach letter to the Heritage Lottery Fund extolling the virtues of a 23-year old house in Newtownards as a particularly good example of the architecture of the period and worthy of preservation for future generations to enjoy!

In conclusion, I would like, as President, to say a few words to the Greyabbey bellringers. I say this in anticipation of these applications for membership being forthcoming at the next AGM of the Northern District at Rostrevor this year on the Saturday after Easter. I have no doubt that these applications will be accepted. The Irish Association consists of some 350 members ringing now some 279 bells. They come from all walks of life and interests and are all held together by a love of ringing bells. Some see their ringing as an integral part of their Church worship while others would not, perhaps, attend Church as often as they should.

Often these people, however, will travel to ring in several bell towers on Sundays. It is interesting to reflect that whether they all know it or not, they have all been called by God to ensure His message is broadcast to the world. In an increasingly secular age this function is becoming increasingly more important and, perhaps, will make people of all religions and none, pause and reflect on the directions their lives are taking.

Like all groups of people, the IACR requires a steady influx of new people with new ideas. The office bearers of the District and Association do not possess a fount of all wisdom. Consequently, I am looking forward to seeing the Greyabbey ringers, each of whom, I believe, has a lot to offer, taking their part in the affairs of the Northern District and the Association, in the years to come.”

Speech by Don McLean, President, IACR, 1999 – 2004, following the service of dedication and rededication on the bells of St Saviour’s, Greyabbey – 9th February 2002.