

# "CROWN BOB" — & JAMES PLATT

By CYRIL A. WRATTEN

ONE of the most notable advances in change-ringing during the past 50 years has been the development of Spliced. Although the idea of joining more than one method into a touch is almost as old as change-ringing itself, it was not until 1911, when a peal of Minor in 14 methods was rung at Edenham in Lincolnshire, that it began to attract general interest.

The brothers E. Banks and H. Law James are generally accepted as the originators of modern "spliced", which differs fundamentally from the "Crown Bob" of the 18th and 19th centuries in its requirement that spliced extents and peals should be true. Recent research has, however, shown that many of the principles developed in the 1910s and 1920s, and in particular those concerning the splicing of Minor, had already been realised and utilised half-a-century earlier, and that by the end of the 1850s true 720s of Minor in more than one method were being rung. That this was so was entirely thanks to a single man—a still rather nebulous figure named James Platt, of Saddleworth Fold, Yorkshire.

## THE ORIGINS

Until Platt arrived on the ringing scene—and indeed for a number of years afterwards—the only form of splicing in anything approaching general practice was Crown Bob.

This had first appeared in print as early as 1702, in the first edition of the J. D. and C. M. "Campanalogia Improved", and consisted of consecutive leads of Oxford Treble Bob, College Pleasure and College Treble Bob. By repeating this sequence of leads four times a touch of 360 changes was obtained. By the late 1720s Benjamin Annable, at least, was aware of its falseness, and in the 4th edition of the "Campanalogia", published in 1752, the figures of the touch were omitted, the introductory remarks—"Now the practitioner being perfect in these three peals [i.e., Oxford T.B., College Pleasure and College T.B.], he may proceed to the next following; which is to ring an Eightenscore without a Bob, as followeth,"—being left to hang tantalisingly in mid-air.

Nevertheless, the falseness of the arrangement was not apparently generally realised. The touch was even doubled by singles, as at Newport, Isle of Wight, in 1793, 720s of Crown Bob at Wilby, Suffolk, in 1734, and at Cambridge in 1783 may have been similarly obtained. As late as 1851 the original 360 was being rung in Yorkshire, at Bingley.

The band here, however, were more venturesome than most, for they tried joining other methods in a similar way, albeit probably no less falsely. On August 17th, 1849, they rang "a 'Crown Bob' on the 'Three Flowers'," and on November 16th, 1851,

"the company went successfully through various 'Touches' on some of the most intricate peals, including 'Snappers', and after that rang two 'Crown Bobs' on the following arrangements: Oxford, College Pleasure, College Treble, and Violet, Tulip, Primrose. . . . The latter portion of this feat (that is, the two 'Crown Bobs') is admitted by the best judges to be a most severe test, and is rarely attempted where the performers are all members of the same company."

## JAMES PLATT

Such then was the situation when James Platt turned his attention to splicing. Of the man himself little is yet known. He lived and rang at Saddleworth, a 6-bell tower on the moors not far from Oldham, and, according to Morris's "History and Art", died at the age of 72 in September, 1858. Although he composed some peals of Treble Bob Major in addition to his pioneering work on 5- and 6-bell "peals", there is little evidence of his ability as a practical ringer. Certainly all his known theoretical work dates from the last 15 years of his life, and during this period he did not participate in any of the peals rung by the Saddleworth company nor in any with that at Glossop, a neighbouring tower with which he also had connections. He did ring a 720 of Plain Bob Minor at Saddleworth in 1845, but even this was on the treble.

It is not known what made Platt become interested in joining methods together, but it may well have been the first peal of Hudson's New Light Major, rung at Sheffield on March 21st, 1843. This was basically Kent T.B. with a lead of Oxford T.B. in each course keeping the tenors out of the slow. The idea at once became a "seven-day wonder" in the Midlands. A 7,200 was rung at Castleton in September the same year, and the following January a 5,040 of Oxford and Kent Treble Bob Triples, composed by Thomas Day, was rung at Shifnal in which "by the union of the two original methods, all additional place-making is avoided".

James Platt took Hudson's idea and turned it to Minor. On October 22nd, 1843, "the celebrated ringers of Saddleworth, Yorkshire, rang a true peal of treble bob, consisting of 720 changes, in twenty-five minutes, on their sweet-toned bells. In this peal there is neither bob nor single when the treble dodges before the third and fourth places are made both in the Oxford and Kent treble bob methods. This is the first peal ever rung in this method on six bells. . . . The peal was composed by James Platt, and conducted by Ralph Broadbent."

It is clear from the description that this was a 720 in what is now generally known as the Worcester Variation of Treble Bob, a form of "splicing" that was rediscovered

by the Rev. E. Banks James just after the end of the First World War. It was given its present name when a 720 of this arrangement was included in a peal at St. Nicholas', Worcester, in September, 1919, although a single 720 had been rung at Tichfield, Hants, a few months earlier.

For the next five or six years Platt experimented with single method extents. In March, 1844, Ralph Broadbent called a 720 of Bob Minor of his at Saddleworth, in which there was a single at each lead, "four different singles [being] made use of in this peal". The figures of this 720 are interesting. Singles were made in 1256 (a), 1236 (b) and 1234 (c); the fourth "single" required third's and fourth's places to be made as the treble passed from 2nds to lead, followed at the next change by a "normal" 1256 single.

Repeat four times.

A year later the Glossop company rang another of his 720s of Bob Minor, this one having only six bobs and six singles as though to balance the multiplicity of calls in the earlier extent. The same day (March 7th, 1845) they also rang 720 Oxford Treble Bob which he had composed. This was "rung without a bob, when in the treble dodges before there were 15 sixth places made instead of fourth places", an original form of three-bell shift which does not seem yet to have been resurrected.

His next production, however, has had very recent echoes in the columns of "The Ringing World". Holt's arrangement of Bob Minor to give extents without a single caught his eye, as it did Frank Blagrove's not long ago, and he set to to elaborate the idea. The result was a regular three-part with 18 calls in each part, "the treble assisting in making bobs". This Platt himself called from the treble at Saddleworth on September 28th, 1845. A contemporary report says (rather disdainfully, one feels): "In Mr. Holt's peal, the in and out of course changes are only changed twice: in this peal they are changed 24 times."

Some idea of the thoroughness with which Mr. Platt investigated such a simple method as Bob Minor can be gauged from his calculation that "a true peal can be rung of Plain Bob Minor, with making only two singles, one in the middle and the other at the end of the peal, in 30,968 different ways." He later estimated that, by changing the in and out of course as Holt had done—only twice in an extent—the 720 could be rung in 60,000 different ways.

[To be continued]

**DRAYTON, NORFOLK.**—On March 11th, 1,320 Plain Bob Minor: D. E. House 1, Margaret A. Bunton (first quarter) 2, M. P. Cubitt 3, Carole A. Patey 4, G. H. Pullin 5, Janet House (first Minor as cond.) 6.

**STEEP, HANTS.**—On March 15th, 1,260 Doubles (seven methods): Mandy Roberts 1, Sally Stacey (first in seven methods) 2, Carol Stacey 3, D. Hetherly 4, B. Walton (cond.) 5, A. Betsworth 6.

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## TREBLE BOB METHODS

Platt's originality was not, however, to be confined to plain methods. The Saddleworth company, like the others in this part of the country at that period, were Treble Bob men. When the tower of Saddleworth Church was to be rebuilt in 1846 the "farewell" peal they rang in the old tower contained, it is true, one 720 of Bob Minor—an unusual occurrence in Yorkshire then. But they also rang seven more extents in as many different Treble Bob methods to make it up to a 5,800.

It was therefore almost inevitable that Platt should turn to "Crown Bob", and equally certain that his quest for originality and his thorough, searching approach would not allow him to content himself with the simple running-together of methods, as was happening only 20-odd miles away at Bingley. The latter was the approach of the skilled practical ringer, but James Platt was first and foremost a theoretician, a seeker after truth in composition rather than after complexity in ringing for its own sake.

The outcome of his endeavours was reported in "The Era", a Sunday sports paper, on March 18th, 1849:—

"In Sunday last the junior company of ringers, Saddleworth, Yorkshire, rang a true and complete peal of Yorkshire crown bob on their musical church bells. The peal consists of 720 changes, and is composed out of three different treble peals, viz., Oxford, Violet, and New London Pleasure, and is the first peal ever rung in this method. The ringers were stationed thus:— Ben Broadbent (conductor) treble, Cornelius Holden 2, Samuel Brierley 3, Charles Buckley 4, James Buckley 5, George Mallalieu tenor. The peal was composed by James Platt."

Here we have a record of what was probably the first true spliced 720 ever rung—spliced, that is, as distinct from the "combined" Kent and Oxford six years previously. Since a plain lead of Violet is simply a bobbed lead of New London Pleasure, it would today be considered a 720 in two methods rather than three, but that in no way diminishes its significance.

Although the figures of the extent have been lost, there is every reason for accepting it as true. All the methods have the

same work below the treble, and Oxford can consequently be inserted into a 720 of Violet/New London Pleasure by means of a simple six-lead splice, as shown below.

23456	New London
52364	Violet
65432	
36245	New London
43652	Oxford
— 64352	Violet
56234	New London
35642	
43526	Oxford "
54632	New London

35426  
Repeat twice.

Judging from Platt's later work, it seems highly probable that he would have been aware of this form of splice and would have made use of it on this occasion.

It is also of interest that this splicing of what came to be called "regular" and "irregular" methods into the same extent pre-dates by over 100 years modern work on this type of splice (although, of course, this reflects no special credit on James Platt: the division of methods in this way into regular and irregular is itself a recent development).

Platt's next known step in this field was to produce an extent in seven methods. But before doing so he made a characteristically novel excursion into the world of Doubles. On June 24th, 1849, virtually the same band as had rung the "Yorkshire crown bob" three months earlier rang at Saddleworth

23456	British Queen	British Queen	British Queen
46532	Oxford T.B.	Oxford T.B.	Oxford T.B.
54263			
25346	Holmfirth "Surprise"	Holmfirth "Surprise"	Holmfirth "Surprise"
— 32546			
— 53246	New York "	Nelson's Victory	Glossop Delight
46325			
25634	London "Scholars"	Liverpool "	New Kirk "
34562			
62453	" "	" "	" "
— 53462			
	British Queen	—34—16—12—16—12—3	6ths 46532
	Holmfirth Surp.	—56—16—12—16—12—1	6ths 42635
	New York	=Sandal	
	Nelson's Victory	—56—16—56—16—34—1	6ths 64523
	Liverpool	—56—16—12—16—34—1	6ths 64523
	Glossop Delight	—56—16—12—16—34—5	6ths 35264
	New Kirk	—56—16—12—16—12—5	6ths 35264

As his starting point Platt took a standard three-part 720 of Oxford Treble Bob, with the third as observation. British Queen he inserted into the first course of each part by using a three-lead splice, with 3, 4 fixed: Holmfirth Surprise, on the other hand, has the same changes in a lead as Oxford T.B., and consequently only required a lead-for-lead substitution. The six remaining methods all have the same changes in a lead and are in addition course-splicers with Oxford, and these he arranged to occupy the second, complete, course in each part.

Thus, by 1858 at the very latest, James Platt had already used all of the now standard techniques for splicing Treble Bob Minor — lead-for-lead, course-for-course, three-lead and, it seems highly probable, six-lead splicers. He was 50 years ahead of his time, and as generally happens in such a

case his ideas were not widely acknowledged, either at the time or by succeeding generations. Fifty years after his death his work began to be duplicated by those who came after; unknowingly they followed in his footsteps, and unknowingly posterity has credited them with blazing the path that we follow today.

The story of James Platt's life and work is even now by no means complete. None of his notebooks have come to light, and the only records of his doings that have been found have been in small paragraphs in contemporary newspapers. Is it too much to hope that even now some more light may yet be thrown on the man who, perhaps above all others, deserves to be called the father of spliced ringing as we know it today?

[Concluded]

## KENT A.G.M.—continued

There was a ballot for the election of representatives to the Central Council. Elected were Messrs. P. A. Corby, S. Jenner, I. H. Oram and C. A. Tester. Elected as other members of the committee were Miss D. E. Colgate, Mrs. O. D. Tester, Dr. D. H. Niblett, Messrs. T. Cullingworth, W. H. Dobbie and N. J. Davies.

Before the proceeding ended the chairman mentioned the presence with them of Mr. E. Barnett, the oldest member, who joined the Association in 1897. In the comprehensive vote of thanks moved from the chair thanks were accorded to the Tonbridge District officers, particularly Mr. Richard Hayes, who made local arrangements very efficiently and provided ballot papers, and to the Sevenoaks School.

Ringling followed in the many towers available.