

## BETHNAL GREEN St Matthew

It is believed there was a ring of bells in 1752 at which time Francis Wood (of French extraction whose name was Anglicized to Wood) was the Steeplekeeper. His family had long and future associations with this parish.

The first peal was rung on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1785, of 5040 changes of Grandsire Triples by members of the Junior Cumberland Youths.

The church, bells and peal boards perished in a disastrous fire on a freezing cold night in December 1859. During this calamity the Parish Surveyor's son George Bainbridge gallantly rescued not only the precious parish registers but the clerical garments of the elderly Curate Timothy Gibson. A very large percentage of the surviving peal boards from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows how very popular this tower was for peal ringing by members of the Ancient Society of College Youths.

On Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> March in 1886 eight members of the Ancient Society of College Youths rang the bells to celebrate the erection of the chandelier in the tower. The installation of the chandelier and some extra lights was executed by one of the ringers Joseph West.

Tuesday June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1887 must have been a memorable day for George Cecil when he was able to ring the bells of his old parish church for the completion of the fifty years of the reign of Queen Victoria. He had also rung for her accession and coronation. It was reported that he was a hale and strong little man at the time but he felt his strength was failing making it difficult for him to take part in any more peal ringing.

Source: Fr. John Oldland, *A history of the parish and church of Saint Matthew Bethnal Green*, revised 1989, p 7; *Bell News and Ringers' Record* March 20, 1886 and June 25, 1887 p 168; *Ringing World* September 20, 1940 p 2; Association records