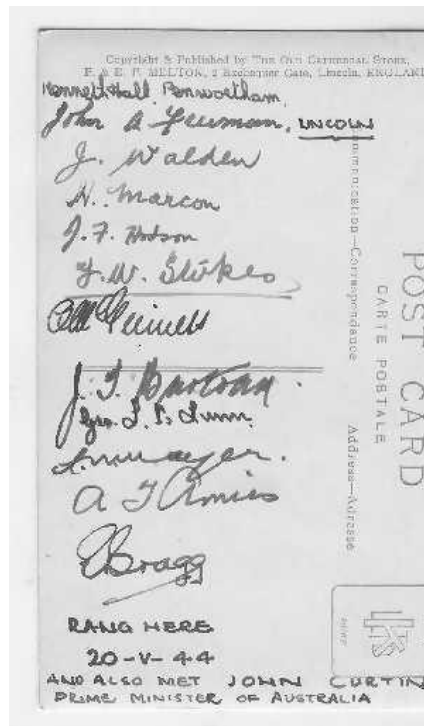


Australian Prime Minister meets Lincoln Cathedral Bell Ringers

By John R Ketteringham

I recently received from a collector a postcard depicting Lincoln Cathedral. Nothing remarkable about that you may think, but it was signed on the back by a number of well known Lincolnshire ringers. At the foot is a note which reads 'Rang here 20-V-44 and also met John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia'. At the top of the card the signature 'Kenneth Hall, Penwortham' has been inserted.



The bell ringers' signatures

At first I thought the ringers from Lincolnshire had perhaps visited Penwortham and Kenneth Hall had met them there. As there were two ringing meetings in Lancashire that day it seemed possibly that they had decided to have a days outing. I then decided to check Prime Minister Curtin's movements at that time and uncovered what to me seems a fascinating story.

The Second World was at its height with heavy fighting taking place in Italy and I was rather surprised to discover that ringing meetings were taking place. The Australian Prime Minister had travelled to England via the USA and arrived in this country on 30 April. The main purpose of the visit was a meeting of Dominion Prime Ministers. We now know that it was probably at this time that they were briefed on DDay although they were probably not given the actual date which was 6 June.



Prime Minister John Curtin talking to Station Commander, 460 Squadron,
Group Captain Hugh Edwards, VC, DSO, DFC..
Reproduced with permission from the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library Records
of Frederick McLaughlin JCPML00018/36

On 10 May John Curtin was granted the Freedom of the City of London and on 19 May the honorary degree of Doctor of Law was conferred on him by Cambridge University. Whilst in England the Prime Minister visited a number of Australian service units and from Cambridge he flew to RAF Waddington. He spent the night of 19 May at the White Hart, Lincoln and the following morning he travelled to Binbrook to visit 460 Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force. This Squadron had suffered a greater number of casualties than any other Australian unit.

The official itinerary records that the Prime Minister left Binbrook by road at 2.30 pm and was expected to arrive in London at 7 pm. However, it seems probable that the Prime Minister decided to visit Lincoln Cathedral on his way.

It so happens that the Annual General Meeting of the Northern Branch of the Lincoln Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers was taking place at the Cathedral that day. Did the Prime Minister hear the ringing and decide to climb St Hugh's Tower to investigate? Perhaps he was shown the unique Ringers Chapel and there met the ringers. It must have been quite a surprise for the ringers to meet the Prime Minister of Australia!

The card is signed by John A. Freeman (Master of the Cathedral Ringers), John Walden, Harold Marcon, John F. Hodson, Frederick W. Stokes, Charles McGuinness and Ken Mayer who were all ringers at the Cathedral. Other signatories are Leslie Lunn (Lea), A. T. Amies (Blankney) and E. Bragg. The latter was from Aldershot and as he is known to have been a Major was probably stationed in Lincolnshire. In addition to those who signed the post card the Cathedral Ringers Visitors Book contains the signatures of the following ringers who attended the meeting : Nolan Golden (St Peter Mancroft Norwich); B. Bee (Nocton, Lincoln); M. Lings (Scunthorpe, Lincs); G. F. Burton (Desborough, Northants) and J. G. Lacey (Scunthorpe, Lincs).

Including Kenneth Hall there are 12 signatures. Perhaps this was the first time that Ken Hall, who was in the Navy, had rung on 12 bells and he had asked the band to sign the postcard as a memento of the occasion.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, because of security implications, there are no newspaper reports of Prime Minister Curtin's visit to Lincolnshire. This postcard could have so easily been lost and I am most grateful to Adrian Westfield for sending it to me. I intend depositing it eventually in the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, Perth, Australia.

I am most grateful for assistance in compiling this article from Les Townsend (Master) who searched the Attendance Registers and Visitors Book of the Cathedral Company of Ringers; to George Dawson for searching the Ringing World; Emma Corbett of the National Library of Australia and David Wylie of the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library.