## THE BELLFRAME <br> CHURCH OF ST SWITHIN KIRKLINGTON NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

## SURVEY, RECORDING AND TREE-RING ANALYSIS OF TIMBERS



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# SURVEY, RECORDING AND TREE-RING ANALYSIS OF TIMBERS FROM THE BELLFRAME OF THE CHURCH OF ST SWITHIN, KIRKLINGTON, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE 

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## SUMMARY

Dendrochronological analysis undertaken on samples taken from timbers of the bellframe at this church resulted in the construction of two site sequences.
Site sequence NBFBSQ01, containing eight samples from primary timbers, spans the period AD 1404-1669. Site sequence NBFBSQ02, contains six samples from later insertions, and spans the period AD 1567-1757.
Interpretation of the sapwood suggests felling of the primary timbers occurred in AD 1661/69 and that of the later beams in AD 1750/57.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Grade II* listed Church of St Swithin is located in Kirklington, approximately 15.3 km west of Newark (Figs 1 and 2). It consists of nave with south porch, chancel with south vestry, and west tower. Although it is thought to have its origins in the twelfth and thirteenth centurys, the church underwent comprehensive restoration in AD 1847 and then again in AD 1873 and as a result little of the original structure remains; the south doorway and possibly the core of the nave are twelfth century and the south porch is latethirteenth century. With the exception of a few of the lower, medieval stone courses, the present tower is thought to date to the seventeenth century (http://southwellchurches.nottingham.ac.uk/kirklington/hintro.php)

## Bellframe

This oak bellframe for three bells is of king-post design (Pickford Group 5.A) with straight braces (Fig 3). The king post on truss $C$ has a slot for a chiming hammer, now no longer used. There are no cut-outs on the braces of the other trusses, so it is clear that the frame has always had long heads.

There is some later bracing added to each truss consisting of struts from the base of the king-post to the top sills in an attempt to stiffen the frame. The treble bell is latefourteenth century in date, the second bell dates to the AD 1664, and the third to AD 1759.

It is possible that the frame was installed when the tower was rebuilt in the seventeenth century. It is on the Church Buildings Councils Lists of Bell fittings of Historical Importance.

## Bells

## Treble. [+ 122] SCA : MARIA : ORA PRO NOBIS : ROBERTVS :

 WILKINSON : FIERI : FECIT2. GOD [46] SAVE [46] THE [46] KING [46] 1664[53]

Tenor (i). WILLIAM REDMAN IOHN RENCH C. W. 1759 THOMAS HEDDERLY

## (ii). FOUNDER

Badge numbers are taken from the Church Bells of Nottinghamshire.
All three bells retain their canons.

All letter S's on the treble bell are reversed.

The treble was cast by an unknown founder in the late-fourteenth century. The use of the word 'feiri' on it implies that the donor was Robert Wilkinson, whose identity has not been discovered. The bell is otherwise unique. The second bell was cast by George I Oldfield of Nottingham and the tenor is the work of Thomas I Hedderly, also of Nottingham.

The treble bell is on the Church Buildings Councils Lists of Bells of Historical Importance. As such the presumption is of minimal intervention at any restoration.

## Physical data:

|  | Diameter(cm) | Weight <br> (Cwt.Qr.Lbs) | Note |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Treble. | $251 / 2^{\prime \prime}$ | c 3 cwt | D\# $(1268 \mathrm{~Hz})$ |
| 2. | $281 / 2^{\prime \prime}$ | c 4 cwt | C\# $(1100 \mathrm{~Hz})$ |
| Tenor. | $30^{\prime \prime}$ | c 6 cwt | B $(1011 \mathrm{~Hz})$ |

The clappers of the bells have caused heavy wear on the soundbows of the bells, and there is a strong risk of cracking if further ringing is undertaken.

The bells are not well in tune, with both the treble and tenor being sharp compared to the second bell. To be in tune (using the treble as datum) they should be 1268, 1129 \& 1006 Hz respectively. As the second is then flat of what it should be, the only course of action at a restoration and augmentation is some tuning of the historically important treble.

The fittings, headstocks, wheels, gudgeons and bearings appear to be of nineteenth century date.

## PRINCIPLES OF TREE-RING DATING

Tree-ring dating relies on a few simple, but fundamental, principles. Firstly, as is commonly known, trees (particularly oak trees) grow by adding one, and only one, growth-ring to their circumference each, and every, year. Each new annual growth-ring is added to the outside of the previous year's growth just below the bark. The width of this annual
growth-ring is largely, though not exclusively, determined by the weather conditions during the growth period (roughly March to September). In general, good conditions produce wider rings and poor conditions produce narrower rings. Thus, over the lifetime of a tree, the annual growth-rings display a climatically determined pattern. Furthermore, and importantly, all trees growing in the same area at the same time will be influenced by the same growing conditions and the annual growth-rings of all of them will respond in a similar, though not identical, way.

Secondly, because the weather over any number of consecutive years is unique, so too is the growth pattern of the tree. The pattern of a short period of growth, 20 or 30 consecutive years, might conceivably be repeated two or even three times in the last one thousand years. A short pattern might also be repeated at different time periods in different parts of the country because of differences in regional micro-climates. It is less likely, however, that such problems would occur with the pattern of a longer period of growth, that is, anything in excess of 60 years or so. In essence, a short period of growth, anything less than 50 rings, is not reliable, and the longer the period of time under comparison the better.

The third principal of tree-ring dating is that, until the early-to mid-nineteenth century, builders of timber-framed houses usually obtained all the wood needed for a given structure by felling the necessary trees in a single operation from one patch of woodland or from closely adjacent woods. Furthermore, and contrary to popular belief, the timber was used "green" and without seasoning, and there was very little long-term storage as in timber-yards of today. This fact has been well established from a number of studies where tree-ring dating has been undertaken in conjunction with documentary studies. Thus, establishing the felling date for a group of timbers gives a very precise indication of the date of their use in a building.

Tree-ring dating relies on obtaining the growth pattern of trees from sample timbers of unknown date by measuring the width of the annual growth-rings. This is done to a tolerance of $1 / 100$ of a millimetre. The growth patterns of these samples of unknown date are then compared with a series of reference patterns or chronologies, the date of each ring of which is known. When a sample "cross-matches" repeatedly at the same date against a series of different relevant reference chronologies the sample can be said to be dated. The degree of cross-matching, that is the measure of similarity between sample and reference is denoted by a "t-value"; the higher the value the greater the similarity. The greater the similarity the greater is the probability that the patterns of the samples and references have been produced by growing under the same conditions at the same time. The statistically accepted fully reliable minimum $t$-value is 3.5.

However, rather than attempt to date each sample individually it is usual to first compare all the samples from a single building, or phases of a building, with one another, and attempt to cross-match each one with all the others from the same phase or building. When samples from the same phase do cross-match with each other they are combined at their matching positions to form what is known as a "site chronology". As with any set of data, this has the effect of reducing the anomalies of any one individual (brought about in the case of tree-rings by some non-climatic influence) and enhances the overall climatic signal. As stated above, it is the climate that gives the growth pattern its distinctive pattern. The greater the number of samples in a site chronology the greater is the climatic signal of the group and the weaker is the non-climatic input of any one individual.

Furthermore, combining samples in this way to make a site chronology usually has the effect of increasing the time-span that is under comparison. As also mentioned above, the longer the period of growth under consideration, the greater the certainty of the crossmatch. Any site chronology with less than about 55 rings is generally too short for satisfactory analysis.

## SAMPLING STRATEGY

A total of 16 samples were taken from various timber elements of this bellframe with each sample being given the code NBF-B and numbered 01-16. Samples NBF-B01-10 were taken from timbers thought to be primary whilst samples NBF-B11-16 were from those believed to relate to later alterations. The location of all samples was noted at the time of sampling and has been marked on Figures 4-10. Further details can be found in Table 1. .

## ANALYSIS \& RESULTS

At this stage one of the samples, taken from a primary timber (NBF-A07), was found to have a very compacted growth pattern which would have been impossible to measure accurately. The remaining 15 samples were prepared by sanding and polishing and their growth-ring widths measured. The growth-ring widths were then compared with each other resulting in 14 samples matching to form two groups.

Firstly, eight samples matched each other and were combined to form NBFBSQ01, a site sequence of 266 rings (Fig 11). This site sequence was compared against a series of relevant reference chronologies for oak where it was found to match securely and consistently at a first-ring date of AD 1404 and a last-measured ring date of AD 1669. The evidence for this dating is given by the $t$-values in Table 2.

Secondly, six samples matched each other and were combined to form NBFBSQ02, a site sequence of 191 rings (Fig 12). When this site sequence was compared against the reference chronologies it was found to match consistently and securely to span the period AD 1567-1757 (Table 3).

Attempts to date the remaining ungrouped sample by comparing it against the reference chronologies were unsuccessful and this sample remains undated.

## INTERPRETATION

Fourteen samples taken from this bellframe have been successfully dated, eight from primary timbers and six from timbers associated with the later alteration (Fig 13).

## Phase I

Eight of the samples associated with the primary phase have been successfully dated. Sample NBF-B01 has complete sapwood and the last-measured ring date of AD 1660. When this sample is looked at under the microscope it is possible to see the early growth cells for the following year, indicating that the timber represented was felled in AD Spring 1661. Two other samples, NBF-B05 and NBF-B06, match NBF-F01 at $t=12.3$ and $t=12.9$, respectively. This is of a value to suggest that all three beams represented were cut from the same tree, and so these two timbers were also felled in AD Spring 1661.

Sample NBF-B04 also has complete sapwood but with a last-measured ring date of AD 1669 can be seen to have been felled a little later (AD 1669).

Three other timbers have the heartwood/sapwood boundary ring date, which in all cases are broadly contemporary and suggestive of a single felling. The average of these is AD 1653, allowing an estimated felling date to be calculated for the timbers represented to within the range AD 1668-93, consistent with a felling of AD 1669.

The final dated sample (NBF-B10) does not have the heartwood/sapwood boundary and so an estimated felling date cannot be calculated except to say that a last-measured ring date of AD 1543 gives the timber represented a terminus post quem felling of $A D 1558$ and so it could have been felled in either AD 1661 or AD 1669.

## Phase II

All six samples taken from the secondary phase have been dated. Three of these samples, NBF-B11, NBF-B13, and NBF-B16) have complete sapwood. Samples NBF-B11 and NBFB13 have the last-measured ring date of AD 1750, the felling date of the two timbers represented. Additionally, sample NBF-B11 matches one of the other samples (NBF-B12) at the very high value of $t=16.3$, indicating that both timbers were almost certainly cut from the same tree and thus demonstrating a felling of AD 1750 for NBF-B12 too. Sample NBF-B16 also has complete sapwood but with the slightly later felling date of AD 1757. The final two dated samples within this site sequence do not have the heartwood/sapwood boundary ring date but with last-measured heartwood dates of AD 1650 (NBF-B14) and AD 1700 (NBF-B15), these two timbers could have been felled in either AD 1750 or AD 1757. However, the $t$-value evidence (Table 4) does suggest that both are more likely to have been felled in AD 1750 with contemporary with NBF-B11, NBF-B12, and NBF-B13.

## DISCUSSION

Prior to tree-ring dating being undertaken on the timbers of this bellframe it had been thought that the frame might date to the seventeenth century. A number of primary timbers have now been dated to AD 1661 and AD 1669, suggesting pointing to a construction date in the second half of the seventeenth century. The tower is also thought to have been rebuilt in the seventeenth century, with completion of it possibly commemorated by the AD 1664 bell. These results would suggest that the frame was built for the new tower.

Phase II also utilises timber of slightly differing dates, with five of the six timbers thought likely to have been felled in AD 1750 with the sixth, slightly later in AD 1757. These dates suggest the use of stockpiled timber with construction occurring in the mid-eighteenth century, and possibly coinciding with the casting of one of the bells in AD 1759.

The intra-site matching of samples in site sequence NBFBSQ01 is generally very good with a number of same tree matches noted (Table 4). This suggests a single woodland source was utilised, despite timbers being of slightly different dates. There is also some good matching between NBFBSQ02 but perhaps not so consistently. Despite the two site sequences overlapping by just over 100 years there is no matching between the two groups which may suggest a different woodland source for the timbers used for the eighteenth century modification. Indeed, when one looks at the reference chronologies against which each site sequence matches most highly (Tables 2 and 3 ) it is clear that the
source for LBFBSQ01, matches sites very local to Kirklington, all north Nottinghamshire whilst those against which LBFBSQ02 matches most highly are slightly more disparate.

It can be seen (Table 1) that the trees utilised in the phase I construction were extremely long lived, with the majority likely to have been more than 200 years old at felling. Those trees representing the second phase with the bellframe, although not particularly short lived, can be seen to be somewhat younger at felling.

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Table 1: Details of samples taken from the bellframe at the Church of St Swithin, Kirklington, Nottinghamshire

| Sample number | Sample location | *Total rings | **Sapwood rings | First measured ring date (AD) | Last heartwood ring date (AD) | Last measured ring date (AD) |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Phase 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NBF-B01 | Top cill, truss 1 | 233 | 18C | 1428 | 1642 | 1660 |
| NBF-B02 | Top cill, truss 2 | 199 | h/s | 1458 | 1656 | 1656 |
| NBF-B03 | Top cill, truss 3 | 221 | 03 | 1440 | 1657 | 1660 |
| NBF-B04 | Top cill, truss 4 | 197 | 22C | 1473 | 1647 | 1669 |
| NBF-B05 | Top cill, east end frame | 209 | h/s | 1432 | 1640 | 1640 |
| NBF-B06 | Top cill, west end frame | 238 | h/s | 1404 | 1641 | 1641 |
| NBF-B07 | North brace, west end frame | NM | -- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| NBF-B08 | East post, truss 4 | 184 | h/s | 1462 | 1645 | 1645 |
| NBF-B09 | East post, truss 1 | 75 | h/s | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| NBF-B10 | King post, truss 3 | 76 | -- | 1468 | ---- | 1543 |
| Phase II |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NBF-B11 | West strut, truss 1 | 170 | 47C | 1581 | 1703 | 1750 |
| NBF-B12 | East strut, truss 1 | 146 | 18 | 1575 | 1702 | 1720 |
| NBF-B13 | West strut, truss 2 | 110 | 18C | 1641 | 1732 | 1750 |
| NBF-B14 | West strut, truss 3 | 84 | -- | 1567 | ---- | 1650 |
| NBF-B15 | East strut, truss 3 | 82 | -- | 1619 | ---- | 1700 |
| NBF-B16 | East strut, truss 4 | 98 | 24C | 1660 | 1733 | 1757 |

*NM = not measured
**h/s = the heartwood/sapwood boundary ring is the last-measured ring on the sample
$C=$ complete sapwood retained on sample, last-measured ring is the felling date $s$

Table.2: Results of the cross-matching of site sequence NBFBSQ01 and relevant reference chronologies when the first-measured ring date is AD 1473 and the last-measured ring date is AD 1669

| Reference chronology | $t$-value | Span of chronology | Reference |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Langford by Holme, Nottinghamshire | 15.3 | AD 1451-1608 | Howard et al 1995 |
| 21 Church Street, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire | 11.6 | AD 1439-1584 | AD 1467-1632 |
| Langford Manor, Nottinghamshire | 11.3 | AD 1441-1656 | Howard et al 1994 |
| Manor House, Sutton in Ashfield, Nottinghamshire | 11.2 | AD 1426-1981 | Howard et al 1989 |
| Sherwood Trees, Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire | 11.2 | AD 1443-1688 | Howard et al 1996 |
| Yew Tree Farm, Kirton, Nottinghamshire | 10.7 | AD 1403-1655 | Arnold et al 2001 |
| 5 Church Street, Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire | 10.6 | Arnold et al 2002 |  |

Table 3: Results of the cross-matching of site sequence NBFBSQ02 and relevant reference chronologies when the first-ring date is AD 1567 and the last-measured ring date is AD 1757

| Reference chronology | t-value | Span of chronology | Reference |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Wren Wing, Easton Neston, Northamptonshire | 8.0 | AD 1468-1686 | Arnold et al 2008 |
| Bolsover Castle (Riding House), Derbyshire | 7.9 | AD 1494-1744 | Howard et al 2005 |
| Bentley Hall, Hungry Bentley, Derbyshire | 6.9 | AD 1444-1675 | Arnold and Howard 2009 |
| Kibworth Harcourt Mill, Leicestershire | 6.9 | AD 1582-1773 | Arnold et al 2004 |
| St Firmin Church, Thurlby, Lincolnshire | 6.6 | AD 1599-1792 | Arnold and Howard 2010 |
| Bolsover (Little Castle), Derbyshire | 6.6 | AD 1532-1749 | Arnold et al 2003 |
| Pitchforks, Norwell, Nottinghamshire | 6.6 | AD 1624-1747 | Hurford et al 2010 |

Table 4: Matrix of intra-site matching of all dated samples, the higher the level, the greater the similarity between samples; black box = phase I timbers, green box = phase II timbers

|  |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| NBF-B01 | 1 | " | -30 | -12 | -45 | -4 | 24 | -34 | -40 | 42 | 56 | -37 | . 72 | -108 | -87 |
| NBF-B02 | 2 | 4.9 | " | 18 | -15 | 26 | 54 | -4 | -10 | -115 | 59 | -7 | -75 | -119 | -93 |
| NBF-B03 | 3 | 5.3 | 11.0 | " | -33 | 8 | 36 | -22 | -28 | -30 | -68 | 63 | -2 |  |  |
| NBF-B04 | 4 | 5.5 | 4.7 | 5.0 | + | 41 | 69 | 11 | 5 | 114 | 96 | -75 | -51 | -41 | -94 |
| NBF-B05 | 5 | 12.3 | 5.8 | 7.2 | 3.5 | "* | 28 | -30 | -36 | -149 | -143 | 36 | -74 |  | -41 |
| NBF-B06 | 6 | 12.9 | 7.0 | 6.6 | 5.0 | 11.9 | " | -58 | -64 | -177 | -83 | -43 | -163 | -181 | -163 |
| NBF-B08 | 7 | 5.2 | 7.6 | 9.7 | 4.5 | 5.4 | 7.6 | + | -6 | -74 | -68 | -105 | 20 | 30 | 20 |
| NBF-B10 | 8 | 4.4 | 3.8 | 4.9 | 5.9 | 4.9 | 4.6 | 5.6 | + | 120 | 61 | 60 | 2 | -24 | 41 |
| NBF-B11 | 9 | 3.4 | 3.6 | 3.0 | 4.7 | 3.7 | 3.1 | 3.6 | 3.4 | \% | 6 | -60 | 14 | -38 | -125 |
| NBF-B12 | 10 | 2.6 | 3.3 | 3.0 | 3.7 | 4.1 | 2.7 | 3.0 | 2.6 | 16.3 | +4 | -43 | 8 | -44 | 1 |
| NBF-B13 | 11 | 2.3 | 2.9 | 3.7 | 3.3 | 3.5 | 3.7 | 3.5 | 3.1 | 4.2 | 3.1 | + | -1 | 22 | -19 |
| NBF-B14 | 12 | 3.4 | 3.3 | 2.5 | 3.2 | 4.0 | 3.2 | 4.6 | 2.5 | 8.6 | 8.2 | 2.5 | +10 | -36 | -7 |
| NBF-B15 | 13 | 2.9 | 3.6 | 2.8 | 3.8 | 2.6 | 3.3 | 4.2 | 2.9 | 4.1 | 3.5 | 9.6 | 3.8 | + | 26 |
| NBF-B16 | 14 | 3.8 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 4.9 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3.7 | 2.9 | 4.3 | 2.6 | 8.1 | 3.1 | 2.6 | ** |



Figure 1: Map to show the general location of Kirklington, circled (based on the Ordnance Survey map with permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, ©Crown Copyright)


Figure 2: Map to show the location of the Church of St Swithin, arrowed (based on the Ordnance Survey map with permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, ©Crown Copyright)


Figure 3: The bellframe, photograph taken from above


Figure 4: Plan, showing truss labelling and the location of samples NBF-B08 and NBF-B09 (George Dawson)


Figure 5: Truss A, showing the location of samples NBF-B01, NBF-B11, and NBF-B12 (after George Dawson)


Figure 6: Truss B, showing the location of samples NBF-B02 and NBF-B13 (after George Dawson)


Figure 7: Truss C, showing the location of samples NBF-B03, NBF-B10, and NBF-B14-15 (after George Dawson)


Figure 8: Truss D, showing the location of samples NBF-B04 and NBF-B16 (after George Dawson)

End frame E-E


Figure 9: Endframe E, showing the location of samples NBF-B06 and NBF-B07 (George Dawson)


Figure 10: Endframe F (based on endframe E), showing the location of sample NBF-B05 (George Dawson)

Relative


Figure 11: Bar diagram to show the position of samples in site sequence NBFASQ01

Relative


Figure 12: Bar diagram of samples in site sequence NBFBSQ02


Figure 13: Bar diagram of all dated samples

## DATA OF MEASURED SAMPLES

Measurements in 0.01 mm units

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NBF-B01A 233
25525120220524124822718597 94 53 39 56 134103169199205135
118131181167200179154200212250213128 82 88 80 113 93 97 81 77
    90130148169132123106100118100 90 74 84 93 103 93 81 66 70 63
    9564 63 67 85 77 96 75 103113 99 97 108109104115 98104120 144
    89 70 63 61 65 82 67 69 61 63 56 60 60 51 50 71 57 55 59 59
    40 47 51 46 52 62 73 63 71 62 75 67 75 94 90 77 93 112 81 85
    50}749791105 86 80 61 60 46 71 73 74 59 71 106 67 83 53 57
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    113 85 99 70 84105111120 109 106 72 74 62 55 65 74 73 105 78 87
    120}7
    84 59 56 55 45 55 42 44 38 44 38 46 53 57 61 45 54 52 36 58
    49 56 63 52 46 74 46 53 58 47 61 62 55 55
NBF-B01B 233
259258199197248250217180105 89 53 43 63136121168201198137
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106 11514916814112210596125 97 94 72 97 88 105 85 84 61 77 65
9764667678 82 94 71 105116 93101 106107109110100100 121 145
86 72 62 64 60 80 71 65 61 65 54 59 62 49 57 71 51 59 61 50
42 51 50 49 51 63 72 67 63 60 73 70 83 87 92 76 98 107 81 83
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7376991081081009890797610195125129130 96 101 122 107 110
109 87 97 72 81 101 122 126 114 103 79 76 52 60 64 73 70 108 77 85
125 74 65 81 86 78 91 80 80 89 69 83 89 92 87 89 92 69 59 74
79 63 60 53 52 54 42 43 37 45 38 47 51 57 58 52 51 49 44 54
47 57 63 56 43 70 53 49 60 45 63 74 53 58
NBF-B02A 199
13711210313715013010010064 85 98 91 121 92 104101 99 163164141
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116 92 78 65 58 79 62 93 98 87 62 61 52 52 77 68 80 87 103 80
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48 90 120 76 81 91 84 62 67 43 61 86 84 113 88 72 59 63 35 44
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24}29~19 19 21 25 25 25 23 22 31 30 22 34 67 73 70 75 49 50
71 76 83 67 103 75 71 62 45 73 82 82 75 60 87 59 57 66 48 48
57 47 67 103 76 85 63 69 82 70 86 77 85 80 64 61 76 85 83
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13221712918815012314214714816713475133117157140191206184148
109 100 72 75 57 71 75 91 103 78 64 64 45 54 78 63 85 83 106 77
77 75104108110 80101681221351091321121131171161121218870
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