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# Devon Calls

## Early 2021

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## Craftsman's Art and Music's Measure all Combine at a Dorset Workshop!

On Friday 23 October 2020 I ventured into neighbouring Dorset, courtesy of my faithful Metro (well it's actually a Rover 100 Knightsbridge). I had planned to meet Andrew Nicholson at his premises in St Swithin's Rd. Bridport. Andrew, apart from being a ringer himself, is a well known bellhanger and engineer having first established Nicholson Engineering Ltd in 1981.

I was warmly greeted by Martin Lloyd one of the senior members of the team. Andrew then

appeared from his office with a welcoming smile on his face. For anyone who doesn't know Andrew he is a large man; the kind of man that at a glance one would assume played rugby, although I don't think he ever did.

I was invited into the main part of the workshop and was immediately struck by the number of bells standing on the workshop floor. With so much metal and machinery around it reminded me of the kind of



Andrew and the bells for Samoa

environment that the late Fred Dibnah, steeplejack, mechanical engineer and latterly TV personality would have felt at home in. Later I discovered that Andrew had actually had the pleasure of meeting Fred on several occasions.

"Are you busy?" I asked Andrew. "Very busy" was his reply. This surprised me as I had thought given the impact that the Corona Virus is having on businesses, and the worldwide recession, anything involving work with bells

would be particularly badly affected. Not so it seems

and looking around I was left in no doubt. Standing in the corner of the workshop was a steel bell frame partly assembled. I was told it is being assembled to house a peal of bells destined for Samoa! I wasn't quite sure whether what I was hearing was correct. "Yes" confirmed Andrew "to Samoa." I realised then that he was referring to the Polynesian Island situated in the South Pacific. I was keen to know more.

**COPY for "DEVON CALLS" is always welcome and we rely on you to submit articles**

**Deadline for next edition - 13th June 2021**

**We would be very interested in including "Letters to the Editor".**

**Articles and letters should be sent to the Editor: Colin ADAMS - [devoncalls@devonbells.co.uk](mailto:devoncalls@devonbells.co.uk)**

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## Nicholson Engineering - continued from page 1

Andrew explained that this “exciting project” is destined for a brand new Roman Catholic Church currently under construction; it will eventually be capable of seating two thousand people! The church will have five towers and a total of five bells will be installed, all in the main central tower, four of which will be swung using linear motors. The largest bell to be installed weighs 21cwt and will be in the key of Eb. The fifth one to be hung is an old Sanctus bell from a previous church. The completed order is scheduled to leave Bridport and be shipped to Samoa within the next few weeks. A member of staff will travel to Samoa later to carry out the installation. I found it amazing to discover that a small company in the little Dorset town of Bridport has received an order for bells from across the other side of the world.

The workshop is well equipped and additional equipment has recently been added, including two vertical boring machines designed for tuning bells. These machines were purchased from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London when it closed in 2017 and since coming to Bridport have been rebuilt. Since the closure of Whitechapel orders for casting new bells are often placed with The Royal Eijsbouts Bell Foundry at Asten in the Netherlands but clappers are forged at Bridport. Andrew told me that the town of Asten has “a fantastic bell museum and a carillon,” a point worth keeping in mind should anyone with an interest in bells think of going to Asten. If a church specifies that a peal of bells must be cast in the UK then the Westley Group at Newcastle-Under-Lyme is generally used.

Given that The Royal Eijsbouts Bell Foundry is often used for casting bells I asked him what the impact might be on this collaborative relationship when the UK leaves the EU single market and customs union on 31 December 2020. His response was, “Hopefully, other than increased paperwork, we shall largely be unaffected, but we shall see very soon!”

The Bridport workforce is capable of handling orders from one single bell up to any number. In terms of weight a bell up to a maximum of eight tons, which is roughly the size of the Bourdon Bell ‘Hosanna’ at Buckfast Abbey, can be handled safely.

Later, relaxing in his office I was able to ask Andrew how it all began. He told me that when he was young he lived very close to the Parish Church of St. Martin in Dorking, Surrey and he became fascinated by the sound of the bells. He made an enquiry about learning how to ring which led to him being introduced to Patrick Cannon who was the Ringing Master. It was an introduction that was to have a lasting effect. He is someone who is clearly blessed with a musical ear as he went on to become a chorister at Guildford Cathedral. He attended

the Royal College of Music where he trained as a classical musician and extended his repertoire of musical skills by training as a clarinettist and trombonist; a mixture these days he said, which would probably be frowned upon.

1973 brought a move to Dorset that ended his ringing for several years. Later he met a young lady who happened to be a ringer at Bridport and he took the opportunity of going along with her for Evensong ringing. Whilst sitting, watching and listening there was suddenly a loud noise from above. It was later revealed that the tenor clapper had broken! He offered to take the clapper out and repair it back at his workshop. From this point he gradually found that he was being called upon, informally, to undertake other work on bells. This was carried out from a small workshop which he had in Lyme Regis.

From this modest beginning came an opportunity in 1993 to move into much larger premises at Bridport. Initially the workforce consisted of just Andrew and Tim Whitehead as engineer. Later they were joined by Martin .Lloyd, and this trio still forms the backbone of the workforce to-day, along with a number of other key personnel. Gradually over the years, and in response to an increase in workload, staff numbers have increased to the extent that there are now fifteen people employed. Ten are full-time and five are part-time. With an annual turnover of approximately three quarters of a million pounds it would appear that Nicholson Engineering is doing very well, despite the extremely challenging times in which any business currently exists.

Each member of the team has different areas of expertise. Andrew undertakes the initial visits to a church following a request received for a bell installation to be inspected and reported on. Martin is the Works Manager. He deals with a good deal of the design work and prepares detailed drawings whenever a major project is undertaken. Nigel Taylor (ex-Whitechapel) designs the profiles for bells which are to be cast and deals with bell tuning. Ian Hasam, who is another ex-Whitechapel employee, and Tim Whitehead are both bell hangers. Reg Mckenzie originally joined the company as a bellhanger, but these days handles much of the fabrication work despite being well past normal retirement age.

Clearly the company has come a long way since completing its first Devon project on the bells at Stokeinteignhead. As Andrew sat at his desk, I asked him if he would like to tell me about some of the other projects in which he has been involved. Before answering he slid open the doors of some very large cupboards next to him. “These” he said, “contain the records of work completed on approximately three and a half thousand churches.” Then he spoke of the satisfaction arising from the challenge of transforming peals that were regarded as being of poor quality; giving the peal of twelve bells at the Church of The Holy Cross at Crediton, as an example. This was a church that was crying out for a good peal of bells and thanks to the foresight and ingenuity of the late Howard Egglestone the project eventually got underway. Andrew designed the whole installation and the company removed the old ring and installed the new one which was cast at the Whitechapel Foundry. Ringers from far and wide know that the town of Crediton has a distinctive peal of bells



*Newnham treble being cast at Royal Eijsbouts*

## Nicholson Engineering - continued from page 2

of which it can be proud and one that is befitting of its magnificent church.

Other notable Devon projects which he cited were the peals of six at Bishopsteignton, Stoodleigh and Stoke Canon. Again these were peals not known for their tonal quality, but which have since been transformed. More recently work has been completed on the bells at Kingskerswell where an augmentation took place. There has also been the installation of a new ring at St. Winnow in Cornwall. Here the ring consists of ten bells with a tenor weighing just 4 cwt. The old six remain in the tower attached to chiming hammers. Andrew went on to add what a splendid team of people local ringers are to work with, adding that this is invariably the case wherever we go.

I asked him about projects that he had undertaken further afield. With his usual enthusiasm he began with St. Margaret's, Ipswich which he considered to be a project that went really well and Upper Sheringham, Norfolk where a new frame and fittings have been installed. These are peals upon which he said, "The new tuning technique was used and as a result the bells have been transformed."

Apart from the major task of providing bells for the island of Samoa I asked if there were any other projects planned for the UK's churches. "Yes" he said. "Work is in progress on an exciting project to provide eighteen bells for The Church of St. Mary, Stafford. Fourteen bells will be hung for full circle ringing. In addition there will be a practice dumb bell and three clock bells installed."

I felt we had covered a lot of ground and I didn't want to overstay my welcome but, before leaving, I felt I must ask a couple of quick questions. I began with "Have you any hints or tips that might be useful for anyone contemplating work on bells?" "Try not to compromise" he said. "Do the best you can for your church. Keep in mind that poor quality bells may be incapable of being re-tuned and poor quality fittings can only be replaced."

We were coming to the end of a most interesting visit, but I just wanted to know what really keeps him so involved with church bells? He thought for a moment and said - "I am reminded of what Dorothy L Sayers said in the foreword of her book *The Nine Taylors*. "In an age of the uproar of the internal combustion engine and the wailing of the jazz band, who should be so sensitive to the one loud noise that is to the glory of God."

Finally I asked, "What about your own philosophy and the way in which you see your contribution towards the fabric of a church?" His reply was straight forward and honest. "We become part of the history of every church we work in. It is an honour and a privilege to be invited to undertake work within them and we value and respect every job we do. It is also a privilege to have the opportunity to meet and to work with

some really splendid people who combine and work hard to make sure the nation's bells are rung."

Standing on the front steps of the premises just before I left I caught sight of a large vehicle with a protective cover over it. It reminded me of those days when new models would stand in car show rooms ready for the day of release. Noticing my curiosity Andrew went across and removed the cover. There in all its glory was a "real" Rover, a white 3.5 litre P5B Coupe 1971 model looking absolutely pristine and in showroom condition. Restoring the car is a hobby of his and

what a magnificent job he has done – the Rover looked brand new.

Driving home several thoughts came to mind. One was that it must have taken a great deal of courage by Andrew to set himself up in business, especially in the field of bell hanging where work is not guaranteed and cash flow might be uncertain. Added to this is the considerable time and effort required to climb church towers, negotiate a safe way around the bells and their fittings (particularly someone the size of Andrew) make notes and then

provide a written quotation. Even after all this has been done there is no guarantee that the time and effort spent on the exercise will lead to a contract being fulfilled.

It was a round trip of 90 miles and the Rover 100 went like a dream! I had travelled through parts of East Devon and West Dorset which contain some of the most attractive scenery in the Southwest and in the autumn sunshine it looked superb. During the journey I was reminded of a comment made by the historian the late Professor W.G. Hoskins in relation to the landscape of the West Country. He once said, "Wherever you go in the West Country, whether it be uphill or down dale, it isn't long before you come across a church tower; they are such distinctive features of our landscape."

Arriving home I sat in the car for a few moments reflecting on my morning's visit. The words of the late Fred Dibnah, who was born and brought up in Bolton, came to mind when, in that lovely Lancastrian accent of his, and whenever he had completed anything, would turn to the camera and say "Did yuh like that?" Yes Fred, I did because ringing has always been a successful antidote for me throughout my life and the visit to Nicholson's Engineering provided a much needed boost in these most difficult of times.

References:

SAYERS Dorothy L. (1934) *Forward. The Nine Taylors. Gollanz.*  
HOSKINS W.G. CBE. FBA. D Litt. 1908-1992. *Historian of Devon, Exeter and the English Landscape. Born - Exeter. Personal reflection.*



Welcome bell frame

# Editorial

Welcome to this edition of *Devon Calls*. As I write we are in the midst of another lockdown, the third, and the coronavirus vaccination programme is being rolled out at speed. The hope is that this will break the chain of transmission and, if it does, some semblance of normality will return. Quite when this will be remains to be seen.

The first official lockdown began on 23 March 2020 and for the first time since the outbreak of World War II bells across the nation fell silent. There have been exceptions; this issue contains accounts of the efforts made by some ringers to enable the sound of our church bells to be heard; a message of hope during these most difficult times.

A record number of articles have been submitted this time. Perhaps lockdown has provided people with much more time in which to sit, reflect, gather their thoughts and write them down. Whatever the reason thank you to all those who have contributed to this edition.

In keeping with Government advice and guidance, coupled with that issued by the Central Council of Church Bellringers, some ringing did take place to mark VE Day 75 on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and VJ Day on 15 August 2020. One well known Devon team came up with the novel idea of gathering local members of the community together to "Ring out for Peace" on VE Day with handbells. A few teams kept with tradition and managed to ring over the Christmas period and we include a report of a unique form of ringing which took place just over the border in neighbouring Somerset. One team even rang in the New Year by candlelight! Congratulations to all those who participated in any of these events.

Special thanks go to Geoff Hill for his article. Geoff, and his family, went through a pretty torrid time last year. He is now recovering from a serious illness yet in spite of this he still managed, with the help of his wife Valerie, to provide a fascinating account about Lamerton Church and its bells. We hope 2021 will be kinder to Geoff and his family.

If you haven't submitted an article yourself yet I urge you to do so for future editions. It doesn't have to be lengthy, just

something to let us know about the kind of activities, past and present, that has taken place or is planned to take place at your tower. Why not have a go and send something in? If Geoff can, so can you.

The magazine features Obituaries to three ringers who have over several decades shown an outstanding commitment towards bellringing. A fourth, Robin Burnham, who once rang at Dartmouth St. Saviours and latterly at St. Eustachius, Tavistock, sadly passed away at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth, on Christmas Day 2020. An Obituary to Robin will feature in the next edition of *Devon Calls*. We extend our condolences to the families of each departed ringer.

Once this crisis is over I suggest the two organisations - The Guild of Devonshire Ringers and The Devon Association of Ringers - get together and plan a collective memorial service for those who have passed away during the current crisis. These past members were denied a traditional 'ringers' funeral service and we owe it to them to provide an occasion where we can pay them our final respects.

Our advertisers must be going through a difficult time at present. Please give them your full support as soon as this current crisis subsides. Also if you can think of a business or an individual who might be interested in placing an advert in *Devon Calls* please let me know.

As always I am grateful to Colin and Elinor who are our two proof readers. There has been a great deal of material to read through this time, but they have, as always, been willing to carry out the task which they do quickly and efficiently. The diligent way in which they scrutinise articles not only keeps me on my toes but contributes significantly to the quality of the magazine. My thanks also to James our Technical Editor for the time and effort which he spends setting out the pages. Even at one stage starting to do so at 6.00 a.m.!!

Let's hope our churches will survive the economic impact of the pandemic and that ringing will return again sometime soon.

*Colin Adams*

## John Staddon - Publicising the Devon Association of Bell Ringers



*John Staddon*

Despite being of sound mind, body, and soul I volunteered at the Devon Association AGM in 2020, to offer my services as the Association's Publicity Officer. I am John Staddon, currently the Captain at Alphington in Exeter. I learnt to ring in my early teens at St. Andrew's Kenn, where my late father was a ringer and a churchwarden. Although there were about 10 of us teenage boys who learnt together, only myself and Marcus Tape, the current Captain at Kenn, are still ringing bells.

I trained as a teacher, my first post being at Bideford Secondary School. I was also able to ring at the church. In 1975, on moving to Tiffield in Northampton, a former approved school, I took small groups of boys to learn to ring at

Easton Neston church on the estate of Lord Hesketh, where he ran his Formula One race team with, James Hunt, his driver.

On returning to teach in Exeter I continued my ringing at Kenn with my father. In 1997 I was able to join the group, now affectionately known as the Ringkly Ringers, with whom I have enjoyed much ringing around Devon. To further this enjoyment of ringing together, in 2001 I organised the first of over 25 week-long tours, though these have been postponed because of Covid. Over 400 towers around England and Wales have been visited. I continue to coordinate the monthly Ringkly meetings where other Ringkly Ringers from across Devon volunteer to organise the towers and lunch venues.

For some time in the late 90s, the only ringing at St. Michael's in Alphington was for Sunday Evensong services. Early in 2000, Charles Conibear, one of the ringers, who had also been

## Publicity Officer - continued from page 4

one of the pupils when I taught in Bideford, proposed that I should become the Tower Captain. I accepted, but only on the condition that we had a regular weekly practice, and to teach more people the art so that ringing could be provided for Sunday Matins services and other church worship. This has happened and over 25 ringers have been taught. Several now also ring at other churches, some have had to stop for health reasons and unfortunately a few have ceased to ring altogether. However, we now have a strong team totalling 18 (three are missing from the photo taken in March 2020) who regularly attend Wednesday practice evenings. Our Alphington ringers support at least ten other towers, on both practice evenings and for church services.



*Alphington ringers*

*Back row L-R Paul Bowden, Tim Raddon, Charles Conibebear, Paul Ramsbottom, Cliff Wilson, Nigel Bateman, Lewis Withecombe.*

*Front row L-R Herb Piper, Chris Piper, Helen Bowden, John Staddon, Barbara Philipson, Deborah Jones, David Wills.*

*Missing from the photo. Sara McIntyre, Marcus Tape, Sandra Ragalsky.*

I became Secretary of the Kenn Deanery a few years ago and have since been organising monthly evening ringing in the towers of the Deanery, publicising this to over 120 Deanery Ringers for whom I have email addresses. All the 17 Deanery towers are rung in rota.

Another group known as the SERs (originally the Saturday Evening Ringers) started over 40 years ago, was suffering through lack of enthusiasm early in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In 2006 to prevent it from dying I agreed to take over the coordination and publicise its monthly, by now Friday evening, meetings. Since then, each month a different ringer commits to organising the venue, anywhere in Devon, ringing for about 2 hours and finishing with a meal at a local pub nearby. Each

month I now email almost 50 ringers, from across Devon, and although we just ring call change we have several ringers who join us and enjoy socialising both during the ringing and after at the pub.

As the new Publicity Officer for the Association, I would welcome any and all information that can be shared with all the towers in the Association, their ringers and any others interested in hearing about Devon Call Change ringing. Events can be shared in Devon Calls and on the Association's website <https://www.devonbells.co.uk>. I have also been able to produce, from information contained in "The Bells of Devon" directory produced by Tim Bayton, email addresses for a vast number of the towers affiliated to the Association. I hope to be able to email regularly about events and items of interest and continuing to promote Devon Call Change ringing and its importance to our churches and the wider community.

Please email me using "Devon Association of Ringers" in the title box. My email address is [littleanchorlovers@gmail.com](mailto:littleanchorlovers@gmail.com). It's our house name, but also became the stamp we used to record in the boxes during the many happy hours walking on Dartmoor, with boys from Northbrook Community Home (School) here in Exeter, hunting for Dartmoor Letter Boxes (google it !).

I would ask those individuals who have affiliated to the Devon Association to please email me with their email addresses, so that I can include them in everything I publicise by email.

Please note, for security, that all emails I send will be contained in the "bcc" section, so not shared with any others who receive them.

*John Staddon*

## The Bells of Alphington and their Ellacombe Chimes

When our church had extensive renovation work performed six years ago, with the installation of a large gallery across the tower end of the nave into the ringing chamber and the main entrance to the church becoming the door under the tower, we had the foresight of requesting moving the Chime Ropes and their controls up into the Ringing Chamber. This has been of great advantage in calling the congregation to services as it has not been possible for our ringers to ring the bells for every Sunday service. The reason is that our regular band of 18 Wednesday evening practice ringers are committed to supporting ringing in many other towers in the Kenn Deanery on Sundays, including Kenn, Ide, Whitestone, Exminster, Kenton, Powderham, Exeter St Thomas and Woodbury.



The inventor of the Ellacombe Chimes, the Revd. Henry

Thomas Ellacombe, was born in 1790 in Alphington where his father, the Revd. William Ellacombe, was the rector. In 1831 his brother Richard became the rector until 1851. Henry was ordained in 1816, and first became the curate at Bitton in Gloucestershire. He later became the Vicar there in 1835. It was here that he invented the Ellacombe Chimes in 1821. He moved to Clyst St George here in Devon in 1850 where he remained until his death in 1885 but was buried in Bitton church yard. Bicentenary Celebrations for the invention of Ellacombe chimes are planned for 26 June 2021. (*Please see details in "Ellacombe Chimes Bicentenary" inside this issue of Devon Calls*).

Alphington bells are normally rung in peal by our Bellringers for services on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays each month. They are chimed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays and occasional 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday when our ringers are ringing for Sunday services in other churches. Whilst there was no ringing at all during the first lockdown in 2020, when "Clap for the NHS" started in April, the tenor bell was chimed every Thursday night. As the church had started to hold Sunday services by "zoom" for

## Alphington Ellacombe Chimes - continued from page 5

some time it was proposed to chime the bells before them. This started in May, and has rung out to the residents of Alphington every Sunday since. Paul Ramsbottom, living next to the church who started this, found a long list of hymns that could be rung on the chimes. During December this included many carols which was a delight for the zoomed Carol Service

and also during the "Pop Up Services" held and organised by our Vicar, the Revd. Mike Partridge, to out of doors venues around Alphington. Since July, Paul and I have been chiming on alternate Sundays and in September when church services started again at Kenn I also rung the chimes there before going on to Alphington.

*John Staddon*

## Ellacombe Chime Bicentenary



Should we in Devon celebrate the invention and installation of Ellacombe Chimes in our bell towers? There are many reasons why we should and commit to ringing the chimes in all the towers in Devon that still retain and maintain their Ellacombe chimes, on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at 11am.

Rev. Henry Thomas Ellacombe, invented the Ellacombe chimes when he was the vicar of Bitton in Gloucestershire. However he was a true Devonian, having been born in Alphington, Devon in 1790, where his father was the vicar, the Rev. William Ellacombe whose wife Hannah was an heiress to the Farringdon estate. Henry became a curate at Bitten in 1817 until 1835 when he was made the vicar. He returned to Devon in 1850 as the vicar at Clyst St George where he died in 1885. Although his funeral was held at Clyst St George his body was taken back to be buried at Bitton.

During his years at Clyst St. George Henry not only dedicated his life to his parish and church but also to bellringing. Ellacombe chimes have been installed in churches around the world. It is thought that, currently, there are 427 in the UK, 14 in the USA, 12 in Canada, 11 in Australia, 6 in Asia, 4 in Ireland and 6 in New Zealand.

During his years at Clyst St George, Ellacombe published many books on bell ringing, most being printed at his own expense. In one he reports the details of his visits in 1864 and 1865 to 452 towers in Devon together with the inscriptions on all their bells. He referred to the poor state of many towers. He was not in favour of bellringing competitions where profits were made, though he reported that in 1848 Bellringers were paid 20 shillings to ring before and after weddings. In today's money it equates to almost £120. He favoured method ringing and in 1874 was an instigator of the establishment of the Guild of Devonshire Ringers. He is also responsible for erecting a school house and master's residence in 1860 in Clyst St George.

To celebrate the Bicentenary, Bitton Bellringers are organising that Ellacombe Chimes are to be rung on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at 11 am. starting in New Zealand and then progressing around the world at 11 am in each country's own time zone.

*To support these celebrations and for more information about the event see...*

[www.bittonhistory.org.uk/ellacombe-chimes-bicentennial](http://www.bittonhistory.org.uk/ellacombe-chimes-bicentennial)

and

[www.bittonhistory.org.uk/.../Chimes-Leaflet.pdf](http://www.bittonhistory.org.uk/.../Chimes-Leaflet.pdf)

*John Staddon*

## DCBRF Report Presented at Devon Association AGM 14th November 2020

During 2020 the Fund has again been actively involved with 13 towers at some stage in their restoration projects. In addition to these, seven further towers have requested a grant application form, though have not as yet completed and submitted them. Interestingly this exactly mirrors our activity in the previous year.

Due to the coronavirus restrictions we have been unable to carry out any quinquennial bell inspections this year, our only tower visits having been to check out the finished works at Kingskerswell, Holbeton and Bradford.

Again due to the restrictions we were unable to hold our usual two face-to-face meetings this year. Instead, all urgent business for our meeting planned for April 6<sup>th</sup> was dealt with by exchanges of emails between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> April. Our meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> November was a virtual meeting using the "Zoom" facility. Similarly we have not met with our financial advisors this year, though have kept in touch by letter.

The bulk of our financial assets remain in the form of the investment portfolio purchased from the William Smale Bequest, and continue to be managed through the Discretionary Portfolio Service of Cathedral Financial Management Ltd of Exeter, the value of the portfolio currently standing at £326,993 having hit a low of £302,618 at the end of March. The continuing benefit of the investment portfolio is in the dividends received which have amounted to £7,882 for the first three quarters of the year, unsurprisingly significantly lower than in the previous year.

Our other income has been much reduced when compared to last year as was to be expected, and indeed would have been even less had not the proceeds from the 2019 Annual Draw and the Doddiscombsleigh/Dunsford Competition been received too late to be included in the previous year's accounts.

At the beginning of 2020 the liquid assets of the Fund stood at

## DCBRF - continued from page 6

£44,928. Since that time two grants totalling £7,750 have been paid. £6,000 went to Holbeton for turning, tuning and rehanging the six bells with mainly new fittings; also maintenance of the bell-frame and replacing the supporting steels of the upper frame; and £1,750 to Bradford towards replacing the cracked treble side-frame and some of the steels, and overhauling the bearings, clappers and pulleys.

(Between the Devon Association AGM in November 2019 and the end of that year, the following grants had also been paid: £2,200 to Northam for scraping down and repainting the bell-frame, treating all woodwork with preservative, servicing bearings, and overhauling and re-bushing the clappers; £7,500 to Kingskerswell for recasting the old third bell (now the fifth) and rehanging the six bells in a new frame with all new fittings – augmentation to eight and the provision of a new ringing floor lower in the tower did not form part of the grant; and £5,500 to Woodbury for rehanging the fourth, fifth, sixth and tenor on new canon-retaining headstocks, work to the clappers, chiming hammers and pulleys, re-roping the second, fourth and seventh bells, and painting the bell-frame.)

We had expected to see the completion of at least three other projects this year, though delays caused by the coronavirus restrictions have clearly had an impact on this.

Income during the year (excluding that from the investment portfolio) has amounted to £8,576, including £3,453 from the Guild and its Branches, £916 from personal and miscellaneous

donations, £564 in memory of John Stook of Plympton and Roy Berry of Topsham, £3,050 from the Association following the 2019 Annual Draw, £200 from the 2019 Doddiscombsleigh/Dunsford Competition, £235 from various individual towers, and £150 following tower inspections and talks. Tax refunds following gift-aided donations and bank interest make up the balance.

At present the liquid assets of the Fund stand at £54,043.

Grants agreed this year include £9,000 to Milton Abbot towards a complete rehang of the six bells in a new fabricated steel frame, and £900 to Shaugh Prior towards cleaning down and repainting the bell-frame and sub-frame, dismantling and galvanising some of the steels, refurbishing the clappers and repairing a cracked bell-pad. An application for financial help with installing external sound control at another tower was declined.

At our Zoom meeting on November 14<sup>th</sup> 2020 we agreed grants of £5,700 East Anstey for a complete rehang of the six bells, £2,400 to Butterleigh for the conversion of the derelict ring of three into an electronically-operated fixed chime, and £1,900 to Dunkeswell for repairs to and repainting of the sub-frame and improving access to the ringing room.

Assuming that all of the agreed grants are taken up, the uncommitted liquid balance of the Fund stands at £13,043.

Ian Smith

## Introducing The Devon Rural Archive

I am delighted to have this opportunity to introduce the Devon Rural Archive (DRA) to you all, and many thanks to Colin for allowing me to do so. The DRA is an independent heritage centre dedicated to the study of our county's buildings and landscapes, and it is based in the grounds of Shilstone House near Modbury in South Devon. Here at the Archive we have a growing reference library of historic documents, maps, images and books as well as a special collection of artefacts, and unpublished material that together make the DRA an invaluable resource for Devon's historians.

In addition, the Archive holds a number of journals, periodicals and other publications produced by Devon groups, just like the Devon Association of Ringers. Our collection includes a complete run of the Transactions of the Devonshire Association; the newsletters of the Devon Gardens Trust and the Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society, to name just a few. We are always keen to welcome other publications to our shelves and hope that this will soon include *Devon Calls* too. So, if you are spring cleaning, or simply downsizing, then please do consider donating your back issues of local publications to the DRA where they will be catalogued, cared



for and preserved for posterity, while being made available to visitors like yourselves for detailed study.

If you are planning to study the history of your own home, village, town or indeed any of Devon's buildings or landscapes, there is no better place to begin your research than the Devon Rural Archive. Our unique collection and our expert team will help you unlock the secrets of your home or locality.

The Archive is funded by the Fenwick Charitable Trust (registered charity number 1007957), and in normal circumstances is open to the public on a Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 11am and 3pm (excluding Bank Holidays). There is no charge for using the resources, but owing to the current COVID-19 restrictions booking is essential. For more information, or to book an appointment, please call 01548 830832.

**Abigail Gray,**

Curator and Resident Archaeologist

Devon Rural Archive, Shilstone, Modbury, Devon PL21 0TW.  
01548 830832 [www.devonruralarchive.com](http://www.devonruralarchive.com)

## Three Rings of Bells in One Tower - Lamerton

The tower at St Peter's, LAMERTON is the oldest part of the church and has been dated from Edward III's reign (1312 - 1377), the rest of the church dating from Henry VII's reign (1457 - 1509). The church and tower are constructed, basically, of local Hurdwick stone. The remains of the Hurdwick quarry can still be located only two miles away from the church. The rest of the building consists of a small percentage of local granite.

The bells from this period could well have been cast by the Exeter Foundry which thrived under a series of different owners for a long period. In the year 1553, during the reign of Edward VI, an inventory of church bells across the country was ordered. In Devon a ring of 5 was the greatest number and there were only 35 churches possessing this number of bells, LAMERTON being one of them.

Lamerton was a much bigger Parish in those days incorporating much of what is now Brentor and the church of St Michael de Rupe, on the Tor. It was also part of the powerful Abbey of St Rumon's at Tavistock that also contained 5 bells. There are no records about who cast the LAMERTON bells at this period however Robert Norton cast the beautifully inscribed tenor bell at All Saints, Dunterton, so perhaps it was his work at Lamerton too. In the next 150 years work on the bells were carried out and a Pennington inscription appears on the intermediate chamber wall dated 1706. The Pennington Family of nearby Stokeclimsland had a profound influence on bell ringing in the West Country -and countless churches in Devon and Cornwall commissioned their work. Many still possess their bells today. Milton Abbot has a complete ring of 6, and the 5 heaviest bells at Sydenham Damerall were also cast by them in 1779.

In the year 1844 a new ring of 6 was cast by Pannel of Collumpton and it is believed that much of the metal came from the old ring that had existed in the Lamerton tower. Pannel's bill for the bells and hanging was £600. These bells were slightly heavier than the present ring because records of their diameters show they were slightly bigger. The Revd. Henry Ellacombe, in his record published in 1865, describes them as (poor bells) and records show that some work had been done on them. By 1870 this peal of bells was badly in need of restoration and an estimate for their repair was obtained from Messrs Mears and Stainbank of Whitechapel, London, who agreed to do the work for £336. The restoration of Lamerton church in 1876 cost £1369 3s 9d. Just over £100 was left over and as this fell short of Mears and Stainbank's estimate the project of restoring the bells was shelved. The ringers were disappointed, but no-one knew what was in store!!!!

Just over a year later on a wild and windy moonlit night of Monday 19th November 1877, disaster struck when a raging fire broke out and the recently restored church burnt down. A small paraffin lamp, that was specially made for the organ, overturned between 9pm and 10pm and ignited the new two

manual organ. Everything was soon alight and it became evident that the church was doomed to destruction. The flames had also reached the tower through the large open archway between the church and tower and burnt all the woodwork. The heat was so great that the large Pannel Tenor Bell fell intact whilst the front 5 completely melted.

Fortunately, the church and tower, although completely gutted, were left standing. The Bells' Project was now given priority. The Diocesan advisor on bells and belfries was asked to visit

and William Bannister of Devonport came to Lamerton. On his advice estimates were obtained from Mears and Stainbank, John Taylor & Co of Loughborough and John Warner & Sons of Cripplegate, London. Warner's estimate for casting and hanging the new ring was £500 and the contract was given to them. Some of the old metal was salvaged from the debris and this together with the old tenor bell was sent up to London and reused in casting the new ring. On the new Tenor bell the bell founders placed a suitable Latin inscription "E Flamma Resurgimus" (We rise again from the flames). Thus implying the 6 bells and not just the Tenor, and on the other side the names of Mr T Roskilly and Mr J Ellis, the church wardens, and the date 1878. Ironically, Mr T Roskilly was my wife Valerie's Great, Great Grandfather!!! The other 5 bells all bear the date and the Founder's name around the crown. The work of hanging them was carried out by Mr S Hill who was sent down by Warner's especially for the job.

The work completed; the new bells were inaugurated during the Harvest Festival service in the autumn of 1878 in the partly rebuilt church. At the close of the service several "touches" were rung by Mr Bannister and his team of Method Ringers from Devonport and also by the active team at Lamerton with "Call Changes." Everyone was later entertained at a public tea in what was then the School Room, during which the Devonport Team rang their set of Handbells.

The bells have always been well maintained but in 1965, after 87 years of continuous use they were re-hung by Messrs Mears & Stainbank. The old clappers were removed, and new ones installed on independent crown staples. Roller bearings were also installed, and the bell wheels and ground pulleys replaced with new ones. In 1976 due to the very dry summer, the wooden part of the frame needed some work and this was carried out on advice of Messrs Arthur Fidler of Bow. The metal part of the frame which supports the treble bell was made by Nicholls Mathew & Co of Tavistock in 1878 and is as good today as it was then. Sadly the firm is no longer in existence but their name does appear on the frame. Further work was carried out in the late 1990s by Peter Bazeley's firm. The musical ring also contains a set of very playable Ellacombe Chimes which were restored in memory of Mr Arthur G Hill, the writer's Father.

And so, the Warner bells remain today, rung regularly by a dedicated team of ringers - their efforts proclaiming that St Peter's Church is very much alive



# What will be the effect of the pandemic on ringing?

Now that the Regulators have approved a number of vaccines the scientists are predicting that life may continue as before with many people being vaccinated by Easter 2021. Ringing has been suspended since March 2020 and has not yet resumed with all bells ringing. The likelihood is that ringing will have been suspended for about 14 months or more. What will be the effect of the pandemic on ringing?

## **Bell ringing banned during WW1 and WW2**

In comparison World War 1 saw ringing after dark being banned for about 2½ years (March 1916 – November 1919) with some easing towards the end, whereas in WW2 ringing at any time was banned for over 3 years (June 1940 – June 1943) apart from a couple of days.

## **Mixed gender activity**

WW1 is well known as the spur for many women to enter the labour market to keep production and services going while men were away fighting, and many women also took up ringing. Women had undoubtedly rung much earlier in history, but it is generally accepted that the war was a turning point for more widespread women ringers to turn it into the mixed gender activity that we have today.

## **Revival after the Wars**

Ringing didn't really recover after WW1 and it suffered hugely because so many ringers had been killed during the war. Also, disillusionment in society caused a decline in organised religion and recruits to bellringing were drawn mainly from within the Church where members of the congregation were fewer. The revival after WW2 was stronger because more ringers were recruited from outside the Church and fewer ringers had been killed during that war. Since the 1970s the number of ringers has been slowly declining as older ringers are not being replenished. Although retention rates locally are good, a small reduction compounded every year means that over a long period of time numbers will become very low.

## **No teaching possible during the current Pandemic**

The pandemic has meant that the older ringers have not had the regular exercise of ringing and that the opportunity to teach the art of bell ringing to new recruits was not possible due to self distancing rules. We look forward to people of all ages wishing to take up bell ringing, an art peculiar to the British, so that bell ringing can continue long into the future.

## **Many ringers have kept up their interests during the Pandemic**

Many ringers have kept up their interest by following many varied events on Zoom. Use was also made of chat rooms for

talk and ringing rooms for simulated ringing, both of these were provided over the Internet. Remote ringing has taken place and some handbell ringing has also taken place where the ringers were able to self-distance in an outside environment when the rules permitted this particular activity.

## **What happens when ringing returns?**

Will ringing bounce back as it did after the two World Wars? No doubt that the Church will be encouraging, however, in many towers a large proportion of ringers are aged over 70. Hopefully all of the ringers will return to ringing with renewed enthusiasm as soon as ringing is allowed.

## **New recruits of all ages are welcome**

New ringers are needed. Many churches have a good number of talented and experienced ringers of a wide and varied age group. We do need more people to learn the art of bell ringing and the young (aged 8 upwards) learn very quickly and can become very proficient within 12 months. The older potential bell ringer (aged 50 and upwards) is likely to take longer to learn the art but are usually able to ring competently within 12 months. With new recruits we hope that service ringing and ringing for national events can continue. The sound of bells ringing is deeply rooted in British culture. Almost everyone in Britain lives within hearing range of bells. It is important to ensure that each village, town and city can continue to play its part in ringing out the church bells.

## **What will your New Year's Resolution be?**

With a New Year's Resolution people may wish to consider the benefits of taking up the art of bell ringing. Learning new skills and keeping fit and active while having fun can have many benefits on people's mental and physical well-being.

## **Will ringing return in 2021?**

Ringing is likely to return in 2021 and hopefully soon after Easter. People may wish to see if bell ringing would suit them. If you know of anyone who is interested, please let your local tower captain know. Tower captains may wish to liaise with their local branches of the appropriate ringing society or with the Devon Association of Ringers where plenty of help and experience is available if required. Nationally the Central Council of Bell Ringers and the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) have been working together to identify what might be needed when we can return to ringing. For further information see the Central Council's Website at [ccbr.org.uk](http://ccbr.org.uk).

*Michael Webster*

# Pandemic Ringing in 2020

## Kingsteignton



Photo - Tony Atkin

Sadly, no ringing has been possible at Kingsteignton since last March. We are disadvantaged in the present climate by having a ringing chamber upstairs, with a small window and therefore, poor

ventilation. We have on numerous occasions attempted to ring some bells and in fact we so nearly managed it on Christmas morning. However, like on other occasions, having

got some willing volunteers from one or two households prepared to ring, sadly it coincided with a time when new government restrictions and lockdowns came into place. The residents living around the Church have heard the bells however - albeit a recording played through some fairly hefty speakers. Somewhat of a compromise I guess but, like Church services being held via Zoom, whilst not quite the real thing it's better than nothing. Here's to 2021! With the vaccine getting rolled out a.s.a.p. and all being able to get back to the real thing! Well done and congratulations to those towers and ringers where ringing has been possible.

**Ian Avery**

## Combeinteighhead



Photo - Paul Hutchinson

At Combeinteighhead the upstairs ringing chamber is tiny and the one window offers very little ventilation. Like our sister tower at Kingsteignton, ringing has not generally been possible since March. The Grant household does contain three ringers and so we rang for half an hour on Christmas Day trying out various combinations of three bells. The church warden and congregation were very appreciative

and loved hearing the bells again. Sadly services are now cancelled and we have no idea when the bells will be heard again. Hopefully sooner rather than later!

**James Grant**

## Paignton



Photo - Tom Jolliffe

We started 2020 with high hopes of being able to improve on 2019 which had been a great year for us. Sunday morning and Tuesday evening ringing at Paignton continued with good attendances and improvements in ringing. Our learners and improvers are getting better and better. As a result we were able to reintroduce regular Sunday morning ringing at Babbacombe for a couple of months whilst the bells at Paignton were out of action.

We were looking forward to our first trip of the year which began with an outing to London. This was followed later by one to Cornwall and then one to Birmingham.

Early on the 17th January we set off up the M5 with many of us travelling by minibus, ably piloted by Johnny Lagdon who had organised the whole trip. Our first tower was Tewkesbury and what a fantastically well cared for, easy going, set of bells the huge tower holds. After lunch we rang at Great Hampton, another cracking tower. It was then on to The Bell Tower at Evesham.

The following morning we made the short trip to Pershore. Our first ring of the day was at St Andrew's. From there we made our way back across the road to the Abbey and gazed up at the ringing chamber high above which resembled something like a cage! We climbed up the steps to the ringing chamber suspended high above the nave of the Abbey and what an experience it was. After lunch our next tower was Cheltenham which has a brand new peal of 12 bells and was well worth the visit. Our final ring was at Painswick that proved to be an appropriate end to a great trip.

Late January, February and early March saw a return to regular ringing. Then came Lockdown and ringing ceased, to be replaced by a series of quizzes and keeping in touch by using Zoom.

Sunday ringing at Paignton restarted on the 26th July after a risk assessment and a check on the bells. Big thanks go to Vashti, our vice-captain, for her work in making sure we were compliant with the regulations and maintaining safety. Ringing is now very different, we all wear masks and apply hand gel before climbing the steps. We apply hand gel again on entering the ringing chamber. The bells are now left up (it's not easy trying to raise a 21 cwt. tenor wearing a mask!) and we only ring for fifteen minutes, and with a team of pre-selected ringers. This is done to limit the number in the tower. We continued to ring on Sundays until lockdown Mk2

## ***Pandemic Ringing in 2020 - continued from page 10***

began.

We were able to ring on VJ Day, 15th August by making sure we had the same team that agreed to ring on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> and therefore staying within the guidance. We hosted a competition in November which raised money for Bloodwise which is a blood cancer charity.

On 23rd December the bells were serviced by Taylors of

Loughborough.

I'm pleased to say Paignton's bells rang out on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and on Sunday 27th December.

Everything is now in place for us to ring out again in 2021!

*John Kelly*

## ***Sampford Courtenay***

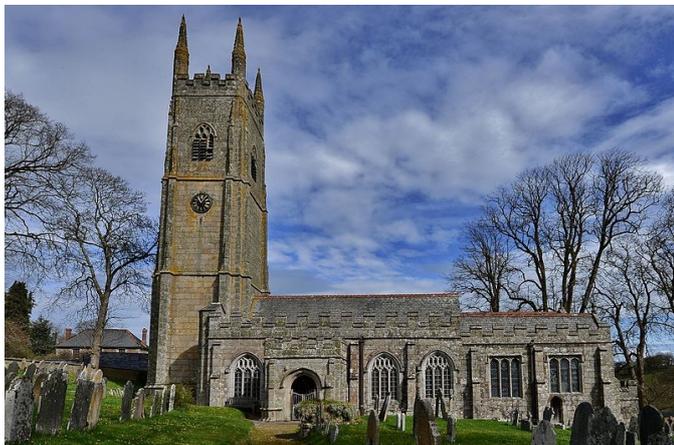


Photo - Michael Garlick

At Sampford Courtenay we have been ringing throughout lockdown due to the fact that we are a family unit.

It all started when a huge character of the community passed away (not from Covid 19) and made a request for the bells to be rung at his funeral. Had it not been for the Corona virus restrictions the church would, no doubt, have been full of mourners. I went to the Rector and church wardens asking if we (the Squire family) could ring for the funeral. We were 5 ringers all in one family so it didn't affect anyone else. This

was agreed and subsequently we were allowed to ring for Sunday services too.

We have rung every week for Sunday services. Sometimes it would be just four of us, occasionally when the lockdown eased, we managed six, along with Stuart and Nicola Bennie and Tower Captain Joe Stoneman.

Over Christmas we had a rota system in place to give as many ringers as possible a chance to ring as rules were relaxed again for services.

Being told we couldn't ring for New Year at Sampford Courtenay (for fear of crowds gathering), instead we rang at St Mary's, Honeychurch in candlelight. It was a lovely and very special memory to have and something small to cherish after what has been such an awful year.

We are now back to ringing as the Squire family again. We rang four bells in early January due to one of the family moving out and therefore no longer being part of our bubble.

*Karen Squire*

## ***Stoke Gabriel***



Photo khaosproductions

### **First Lockdown begins**

The first Lockdown was first advised on 16 March 2020 and then actioned by Boris Johnson on 23 March to control the spread of the virus. People were to stay at home so as to protect the NHS and save lives.

The last time we rang at Stoke Gabriel was on 15 March 2020, the 3rd Sunday in Lent. We were not to know then that all

ringing events and social occasions would be cancelled for the rest of the year and into the new year of 2021!

The Archbishops of Canterbury and of York on 27 March 2020 ordered all church buildings to be closed, even for private prayer and this included the priest offering prayer in church on their own.

The Archbishops explained that the Church of England was called to model the very best practice and must, therefore, lead by example by staying at home and demonstrating solidarity with the rest of the country at that particular testing time.

The above statement may explain why some church clocks had stopped. Many have to be manually wound every 6 days or so to keep them running and, as the church remained shut, the clocks would not have been wound up.

*Continued on page 12*

## ***Pandemic Ringing in 2020 - continued from page 11***

### **VE Day - 75th anniversary on 8 May 2020**

The chimes of Stoke Gabriel church were rung by Norman Betts, the Verger, on VE Day just prior to 11am when the nation observed 2 minutes silence to remember and thank those who fought for our freedom. A video of the chimes of Stoke Gabriel ringing out was posted onto the church's Facebook page.

The UK Government had marked this day as a Public Bank Holiday and it was fantastic to see such community spirit as many marked the day at home in their own ways bearing in mind the lockdown restrictions. There were endless pictures of neighbours having socially distanced street parties. It's that community spirit and personal resolve that we can hold on to at times such as these.

### **Relaxation by the Church of England**

On July 4th the lockdown was relaxed slightly and the House of Bishops allowed services and ringing provided they were Covid secure and following a local risk assessment. The bells and their fixtures and fittings would have to be checked after such a long time of not having being rung. How many churches did return to services and ringing the following Sunday?

The 16 August 2020 marked an historic occasion locally at Stoke Gabriel as 3 of the 6 bells were rung while observing social distancing of 2 metres, wearing a mask (which had become mandatory from 24 July in most enclosed public spaces and shops), sanitising hands and ensuring maximum ventilation within the ringing chamber while recording ringers' attendances and restricting time in the ringing chamber to 15 minutes. This was the first time that the church bells had been rung, other than chimed, since the lockdown first announced 16 March 2020.

On 16 August 2020 we were also able to join in and ring out for peace to mark the 75th anniversary of VJ Day on 15 August, when there were many ceremonies held throughout the world. We were COVID secure and adhered to one person for one rope (otherwise a 3 - day gap was required).

Horace Clements at 91 was keen to start as was John Knott at 79 and myself, the Tower Captain. Others helped including Sam Massey, Anthony Prowse and Andrew Horton. It gets very tiring ringing up, top ringing, changing on 3 bells and then ringing down. We did learn to ring a little slower for changes as the weeks progressed and yes breathing is a little bit more difficult while wearing a mask.

Guidance was being published weekly on the Central Council's website ([ccabr.org.uk](http://ccabr.org.uk)) and I eagerly waited for each Monday's updates.

From September 14th 2020 the rule of six was introduced and as from 14 October the 3 Tier system came into effect. We went to Tier 1 which allowed us to ring as before (3 bells) and if in Tier 2 or higher ringing would have to stop again.

When in Tier 1 the Church of England Recovery Group did state that ringing may be possible where you are one metre plus from another ringer. Locally this would allow us to ring

four bells, however, we did not progress to that stage straight away.

### **Second Lockdown**

The Second Lockdown came into effect on 5 November 2020 when we were required to stay at home again. This meant that ringing with more than one was cancelled and we relied upon Norman to keep the chimes going. Churches were closed except for private prayer and for broadcast worship.

### **Remembrance Sunday and onwards**

Probably for the first time since WWII the bells were not able to be rung on Remembrance Sunday although Norman did ring the chimes as he had been doing every Sunday when permitted.

The Devon Association AGM was held via Zoom on 14 November 2020.

On 2 December 2020 we moved from the second lockdown back to the Tier system and we were moved to Tier 2. Bell ringing is only permitted while in Tier 1.

The Devon Ringers' Carol Service was held by Zoom on 12 December 2020 and this wonderful Service is now available on YouTube. Congratulations to all who helped in any way.

### **Special exemption for Ringing over Christmas**

There was a special exemption for ringing for services over Christmas. We could regard ourselves as if in Tier 1 and this meant that we could ring. We were invited to ring the four bells (1, 3, 5 & 6) on Christmas morning for 15 minutes for the 10 o'clock service. It was a tremendous feeling of satisfaction in keeping with the tradition of ringing on Christmas morning.

### **Ringing out the Old and Ringing in the New Year**

The church bells ringing over the New Year is certainly a tradition in the UK. As we were not able to ring, Norman rang the chimes to ring out the old year and to ring in the new. There would have been no need to worry about waking people at midnight on New Year's Eve as this year there were plenty of fireworks going off and this was supplemented by the horns sounding from the Cruise Liners moored in Torbay. However, the chimes were heard and can be witnessed on the church's facebook page.

### **Third Lockdown**

On 4 January 2021 we entered our third lockdown and this suspended the Tier system. Ringing now continues on the chimes courtesy of Norman without putting himself or any others at risk. Bell ringing remains cancelled as we are required to Stay at Home unless there is a reasonable excuse.

The pace of returning to ringing will disappoint many bell ringers who are missing the activity that is so much part of our lives. The Church is also missing the contribution that bell ringers make and wants ringing to resume. The Church is however very sensitive to the safety of its volunteers and the relaxation of restrictions will not necessarily be as rapid as in certain other settings where other factors are under consideration. We welcome a start on the road back to normality!

**Mike Webster**

**Kenn**



Photo - John Staddon

When the Covid lockdown was imposed in March 2020 we had to stop our ringing at Kenn, as did other towers, because we could not safely ring the bells together. The decision was based on the advice given by the Central Council for Church Bellringers, on sanitising bell

ropes, entering the tower and ringing chamber, and wearing face masks, etc. We were also required to follow all the Government's restrictions, especially to keep two metres apart at all times.

However, when the church started to hold regular services again, I suggested to the Churchwardens that I would use the Ellacombe chimes to ring the bells before these Sunday services. This started in September and has been much appreciated by the congregation, including over 100 who attended the outdoor Christmas Carol Service on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning.

Early in November we were fortunate to get Simon Adams from Taylors Bells to inspect the ring of six. While this was the first inspection since the bells were quarter turned in 2000, his only advice was to have all the clapper weights reduced at their foundry and then refitted with new bushes. The cost, being very much less than expected, is being covered in total by the 16 ringers who have been ringing regularly at Kenn during the past few years. It is hoped to have all the work completed in time to ring peals together, once all Covid restrictions are removed.

**John Staddon**

**Eggbuckland**



Photo - Chris Downer

When I stood outside the parish church of Mold during a ringing trip last February, the Flintshire town's High Street was bustling and I was proud to see people stopping to listen to some lovely Devon call change ringing coming from the pleasant 10cwt peal of eight. I was already looking forward to our next stop, Gresford, on the outskirts of Wrexham, which uniquely has two separate peals of bells in one tower, a light six hung below the original heavy eight. After that we all relished some refreshment at

the Trevor Arms in the picturesque village of Marford where we had pre-ordered our lunch. Certainly, what could not have been further from any of our thoughts was the prospect that all our nation's churches, shops and pubs would be shut down within a month and over fifty of our citizens would have lost their lives in a global pandemic. Otherwise, I would doubtless have taken more delight than usual in those cherished activities which were so easily once taken for granted.

As we all know a national lockdown soon followed and church bells across the land were silenced for the first time since the Second World War. Ironically, 2020 marked three quarters of a century since the end of that conflict and Eggbuckland had registered for the 'Ringing Out for Peace' event as part of the VE Day 75 celebrations. This was planned for 7pm on Friday May 8<sup>th</sup> 2020, which had been designated a national holiday, but it soon became clear that places of worship would remain closed on that day and all planned public commemorations were cancelled. However, people were encouraged to participate in key events such as the two minute silence, the Nation's Toast, the Queen's Speech and a singalong to 'We'll Meet Again' from their homes.

Dave and I have lived in Clearbrook for over forty years, a little moorland hamlet which possesses not only a strong community spirit but also a fine set of handbells, which usually make their annual appearance in the Autumn preparation for Christmas carols. It seemed to me that here was the perfect opportunity to participate in "Ringing out for peace" on some handbells instead and I set about cajoling five other ladies from neighbouring homes to join me. We varied in age from those in their seventies to a teenager soon to leave home for university and some had never handled any sort of bell in their lives.

During April each was given a pair of bells, running up through the village in sequence and asked to practice getting a sound out of them. At first, we attempted to ring together from our respective houses using the digital platform 'Zoom', a challenge in itself. The resonance of twelve bells sounding from six different devices seemed to render the audio inadequate, although this could possibly have been due to some user error! We took to practising in the street following "Clap for Carers" on a Thursday evening, standing in a line outside our homes and staying far enough apart to be safe. This measure meant we couldn't necessarily hear all of the bells and had to use our eyes as much as our ears to strike in place. It proved to be a fun and an enjoyable experience and something we all began to look forward to for a bit of social and mental human interaction, much like every other bell-ringing practice night but without the mandatory visit to the pub!

Some of you may recall that the afternoon of 8th May was blessed with sunshine and beautiful blue skies and most of Clearbrook's residents came out of their houses, socially distanced of course, to raise a glass of bubbly at 3pm to thank "those who gave so much". Dave set up some speakers in our loft and blasted out a few classic wartime songs and Churchill's famous wartime speech. It all created a lovely atmosphere and, although it was a shadow of the occasion it should have been, I think everyone was just pleased to sit in the sunshine for a while enjoying a drink and some old fashioned teatime

## ***Pandemic Ringing in 2020 - continued from page 13***

treats while waving and calling greetings to their neighbours. At 7pm the lady ringers assembled and delivered a number of rounds, reversals and even a few 'Queen's' on the twelve handbells. It may not have been the peal I would ideally have liked to have rung to mark the occasion but it was the best we could do in the circumstances and I was very grateful to all those who joined me and helped make it possible. Later I sent away for six engraved commemorative coins for each of us as a 'thank you'. These were just a few of the thousands of pieces of merchandise which had been specially produced for the occasion, most never to be purchased, perhaps they'll prove a rare collectible in years to come!

In July it was a huge relief to see lockdown restrictions eased and churches open again for Sunday services but the limiting recommendations for bell ringers meant that for most of us it was still not possible to resume normal ringing. Our vicar wanted the bells to be heard and the ringers felt it important to get them turning again so at first we tried ringing three alternate bells for around fifteen minutes. It felt good to be going through the motions again but even turning the tenor in

on three bells doesn't take long, isn't exactly melodic and soon becomes rather monotonous. We decided that unless our fellow ringers wanted to participate in this way Dave and I would go in and rise and lower all six bells in pairs, not very tuneful either but at least getting all the bells into regular action. We continued ringing for services in this way with the exception of the festive period when the tenor only was chimed for Midnight Mass and the Christmas Day services were moved online.

With the appearance of a new Covid variant and another rising wave of infection, it seemed that we had won the first battle with coronavirus but not the war. Since the announcement of a third lockdown ringing has been suspended once more and bells are silent again. But with vaccinations now in full swing let us hope that before we reach VE Day 76 we will all be able to resume normal ringing and that our bells will be properly heard across the land once more.

***Hilary Trout***

### ***Sampford Arundel***



*Photo - Sarah smith*

Hello fellow Devon Bell Ringers.

Greetings from North of the border – 'All Saints' Rockwell Green, Somerset.

Colin asked if I would give an account of our recent ringing activities here in the border area – here it is!

On the run up to Christmas we had regressed to a few spartan service rings only – comprising of volunteer ringers operating a rota system to ring bells one, three and five – this was the only combination of bells that were more than 'one metre plus' from each other; so with all four belfry windows open, hand sanitiser applied, ropes pre cleaned, (no swapping of ropes allowed), masks applied and the log book filled in, we rose and settled into

rounds and then into called changes – not having rung bells for so long it caught us out at the first call! I then quickly learnt that shouting through a mask steams up your glasses... (Oh! The loneliness of command...)

On Christmas Eve, Jill Cook from 'Holy Cross', Sampford Arundel (only half a mile from Devon), asked if the Bells could be rung for their Midnight Mass service (at 10pm or midnight in Bethlehem). In the absence of a volunteer band and due to a tightening of restrictions, leading me to doubt that we would be Covid-19 compliant, I came up with a plan that would see all six bells rung with no restriction on ringing time – and not contravene current ringing guidance; I planned to ring all six by myself and strike the 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' Nursery rhyme:

6622112, 3344556, 2233445, 2233445, 6622112, 3344556.

This is a training exercise recommended by the Ringing Foundation (ART) to improve bell control – only this time there would be only one learner not six!

To complete the evening, I decided to cycle the two miles cross country in the dark along unlit country roads on that cool crisp evening – I was rewarded with a beautifully



presented Church, a star lit sky – and no cuts or bruises.

The bells had developed a bit of a reputation over recent years – bells mysteriously holding up by themselves – briefly – before coming back down a short time later.... this not surprisingly put a lot of ringers off, but I have always had time for these bells as their note and tone are unique and distinctive. (The fourth and fifth date back to the late 1400s cast in Exeter, later lathe tuned by Mears

& Stainbank.) During the Tower's recent refurbishment, that

## ***Pandemic Ringing in 2020 - continued from page 12***

included work to the roof, it was discovered that the roof supports had weakened and dropped down far enough to just contact the travelling stays of the treble and bell three – mystery of the pausing bells solved! – I digress....

I rose each bell and then turned them over to get their measure – the ropes were all on the short side in the cold and damp. I noticed the ringing chamber's white walls had turned a lovely bright green around the window – proper lime mortar.

I rang each bell a few times more before pausing and then, daring myself to launch into my set piece, trying to strike as slowly as I could between whole pulls to camouflage my dashing between the (hopefully correct) ropes – I could ill afford any bum notes! To my surprise I progressed far enough into the piece without error not to abandon so was emboldened to continue to the end. Although I made a few errors I was far from ashamed at my effort, so much so that I encouraged myself to perform it again! Mission accomplished I rang them down and chimed the five-minute bell to service, all of which took about half an hour.

Quite content with my achievement I cycled into the darkness

with the very distinct Orion Nebula overhead.

For our Advent service at 'All Saints' Rockwell Green on 27<sup>th</sup> December - again due to Covid -19 restrictions and with discussion / agreement of my fellow ringers we stood down as a band of three ringers – and I repeated the 'Holy Cross' performance and although I didn't hear any 'encores' I wasn't heckled either!

Even though Church Bell ringing is limited and restricted at the moment, people do appreciate them when they are rung. Word did get back to me and from unlikely sources that the sound of bells is appreciated and welcome – especially in these turbulent times.

A YouTube video of my one-man ringing can be watched here <https://youtu.be/5PZjbQA9B-M>.

Best Wishes from your friend across the Northern Border.

*Jon Kimber*

## **Obituary - Neil Holloway**

Neil was born in August 1952, and for the early years of his life he lived with his parents, David and Dorothy (known as Gwen), and his older brother Martin, in Newton Abbot. While in Newton Abbot Neil was an active member of the church choir, becoming Head Choir Boy and, when the family moved to South Brent to take over running the village Post Office he was keen to continue this activity. However, the South Brent choir also had female choristers which Neil had not been used to and, in a short while, at the age of 15, he was invited to try his hand at bellringing instead. There began a 50-year bellringing career in which Neil was both inspired by those around him and inspired other ringers as a leader and teacher.

Neil often referred to his early days in the tower. A group of similar-aged lads all learned to ring at the same time and there was a contest to see who could get South Brent tenor up in



the fewest pulls. Neil's record was 15 from bell down to setting up – not an inconsiderable feat for 13cwt! This early training stood him in very good stead as he frequently raised heavier bells in peal. Neil shared a very close friendship with some notable ringers of yesteryear; Jack Rhymes, Pat Johnstone and Ray Mugridge all supported and influenced Neil very much, and their greatest pleasure was to go out as a group and explore new towers, treating the locals to the very best ringing they could produce. The excursion for Pat's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1993 took them to Buckland-in-the-Moor and Ugborough where, on the notorious old eight, Neil rang the 7<sup>th</sup> in a peal that has become the stuff

of legend, a peal that made even those heavy-going, tuneless bells sound musical.

Neil's other great joy was competition ringing and nothing pleased him more than to do well in a competition with his

## ***Neil Holloway - continued from page 15***

friends around him. I often heard him say that the Devon Association Six Bell Final, "Devon Day," was a day like no other and nothing could match the thrilling atmosphere of competing (literally) for the biggest prize in Devon bellringing. Neil was in a Ross Shield winning South Brent team on three occasions; at South Tawton in 1995, Salcombe in 1998 and Dunsford in 2017.

Neil was a committed team member and became the Lord Chief Speaker (Tower Captain) of the ringers at South Brent at various times between 1993 and 2001. Throughout his ringing career he coached and taught other ringers. Neil had the happy knack of explaining things in very few words, but also understood when people needed more detail and was happy to expand on every bellringing topic.

Neil had been ringing for nearly 25 years when I first rang with him at South Brent. One of my earliest ringing memories is ringing as a family with Neil, my dad Martin, and my grandad David for Evensong every Sunday. From that time on, Neil became a quiet mentor and was always a source of advice and feedback. He taught me how to judge, and my first occasion judging was with him at the Devon Association Novice Competition when I was 17. After that we judged together quite a few times, including for the annual South Brent competition, and discovered we usually marked within a few faults of each other. A great confidence-giver, I remember Neil saying to me one day when visiting Pinhoe; "This'll be good. You on treble, me on tenor. Let's get them away." And we did have a fabulous 8-bell rise, right up to the point Neil whacked his elbow on the fuse box when we were halfway up. And even then we didn't stop! Neil wasn't going to let a minor injury get in the way of good ringing.

When not ringing Neil exercised the same commitment and skill in other pursuits. Professionally he was a talented engineer and his jobs as an Electrical Mechanical Engineer, a Technical Sales Rep', Electromechanical Fitter, Maintenance Engineer and, in later years, as a self-employed Precision Engineer all benefitted from his eye for detail and love of getting things just-so. He was also a taxi driver and a qualified coach driver, which meant that he was the driver of choice for many ringing trips and outings. Neil and Heather dedicated whole days to doing practice runs together, so that South Brent's annual coach outings always went without a hitch. His technical skills were also greatly appreciated by local ringers as he helped engineer and fit different pieces of bell apparatus, especially the more vital bits of clapper mechanism.

Neil was a wonderful musician and taught himself to play bass guitar and the double bass. He was in many bands over the years and was able to play almost any genre; jazz, dance, rock and classical were all represented in his extensive repertoire. Not content with just playing music, Neil and Heather took jive lessons together and Neil again applied his uncanny sense of rhythm to bring music to life on the dance floor.

In 1985 Neil had seen something that gave him yet another interest – a microlight flying overhead. He joined a local Microlight Flying Club and obtained his Class D Private Pilot's Licence, then built his own microlight including carving and laminating the wooden propeller. Pat Johnstone was delighted with this hobby of Neil's and asked to be taken up

one day. Neil flew her across the South Hams and down a stretch of the South Devon coastline before heading home, a flight that Pat talked about many times. Neil extended his love of flight to designing and building model aircraft too, which again required him to obtain special licences and learn new skills.

Despite Neil's many other interests, he will surely be remembered most for his love of motorcycles. He rode a 250cc bike back and forth to his first job in his teens but in the late 1990s he indulged in a big, modern Yamaha touring bike and passed his motorcycle test. However, Neil preferred classic bikes and undertook several restoration projects over the years, all of which required a large amount of research, sourcing and repairing of parts, and in many cases Neil made parts that could no longer be obtained. In all, six new-looking classic bikes left Neil's workshop, and he won prizes with them at shows. Neil preferred not to get them dirty but he did occasionally rock up to a summer ringing competition on one of his creations. I once hitched a lift on the back of his 650cc BSA Gold Flash which, being a bike with character, didn't like idling or going slowly. I had to hang on very tightly when Neil opened the throttle to overtake a campervan that was unsuccessfully trying to get out of Widecombe-in-the-Moor. Neil taught me to ride my little 125cc Yamaha around the back of their cottage at Brent Mill when I was 21, mostly by using bellringing analogies to get me to let the clutch out properly.

Neil had found his little piece of paradise on the edge of South Brent when he and Heather restored an old bungalow and gardens. With wonderful views of Brent Hill, he had his own custom-built workshop and a field from which he could fly his beautifully crafted models.

Neil's plans for a happy retirement were curtailed by the diagnosis of lung cancer in spring 2020. Despite the cancer being advanced, Neil endured all the treatments recommended in the hope that he could have a little more time at home with Heather. When his condition seriously deteriorated in October, Neil asked to be taken home from hospital and it was there that he passed away aged 68.

Neil was cremated at Weston Mill Crematorium on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020, having been taken there from South Brent in a motorbike and sidecar hearse, escorted by a convoy of classic motorbikes including one of his own which was ridden by a trusted friend with Heather riding pillion. We would be grateful that, if anyone wishes to make a donation that they make a contribution to St Luke's Hospice in Plymouth in Neil's memory.

Neil Holloway: a brilliant ringer, biker, engineer, pilot, musician and friend who was held by all in the highest regard. He has, in his own words, finally lost all his revs.

***Victoria Tucker***

### ***Acknowledgement***

*My grateful thanks to Neil's wife Heather for her valuable help in compiling this Obituary.*

## A Tribute to Roy Berry

4<sup>th</sup> October 1925 – 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020

Roy Berry passed away at the beginning of September at the age of 94 after a short period of ill health. Roy was the Captain of St Margaret's Church, Topsham, for over 60 years before his retirement only a few years ago.

Roy learnt to ring as a boy of 12 at Clyst St George. He had been a member of the choir, but, once his voice broke, it was suggested that he should give ringing a try instead! However, the war intervened. First, the church was largely destroyed by enemy action; an event Roy himself was lucky to survive as he was asleep in his bed just yards from the church (incendiary bombs were found in the garden!). Secondly, he soon became old enough to

serve in the RAF, which he did for a number of years. Upon returning in 1947, he married Lilian, and they moved to Topsham. Despite working long hours as a baker, Roy was persuaded to return to ringing at Topsham by his friend, William Wills, and he found he enjoyed both the ringing and the company there. Not long after that the previous Captain, Walter Gibbons, passed away and Roy took on responsibility for the tower. Roy captained the Topsham band for 62 years. During that time, he served four vicars and taught scores of ringers, many of whom still ring across the country and will often drop in when visiting Topsham, sharing stories and speaking very fondly of Roy. He also supervised a major overhaul of the bells in 1994. Perhaps Roy's greatest achievement was the fact that he maintained a band of at



least six ringers to ring the bells at Topsham for all of those years; Roy was always particularly proud of this.

Topsham is a Guild affiliated tower but Roy also kept close ties with the Devon Association and rang with them for many years. He also enjoyed travelling around the country with the Police Guild of Ringers, having volunteered as a special constable and served for nineteen years. In his later years Roy, and his friend David Row, also enjoyed ringing with the Ringkly Ringers. Roy hung up his rope at Topsham in 2015 but always enjoyed hearing how the tower and ringers were doing. He also continued to attend the branch practices around the area

whenever he was able, ringing a little and chatting a lot, often to the frustration of the ringing master!

Roy's dedication to many hours of teaching, practising and ringing as well as maintaining the bells and the clock have fostered a strong ringing tradition that continues in Topsham. He leaves behind a huge legacy in the town, where he became one of the oldest residents, as well as in the church and particularly in the bell tower. His years as captain have not only kept ringing alive and thriving in Topsham but secured the bells as a central part of Topsham life. He will be remembered fondly by all those who knew him, ringers and residents alike.

**Matt Pym**

## Obituary - Cliff Wilson.

12<sup>th</sup> January 1940 – 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020

It was an honour and a privilege to be asked to say a few words about Cliff at his funeral service on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020. He was such a popular and well respected member of the Exminster, St. Martin's band of ringers. He was also well known at nearby Alphington and Kenn; two towers to which he lent his support for several years. It feels strange standing here saying these words when it was only on 15 February this year that I stood up and spoke about him during a get-together to celebrate his eightieth birthday. It was one which he shared with two other local octogenarian ringers – David Wills and Lewis Withecombe.

Cliff actually learnt to ring at Tedburn St. Mary in 1973. Apparently he came into ringing quite by chance. His niece

wanted to learn to ring but as her parents were not supportive she approached Cliff. He took her along to the church where they met the Tower Captain, the late Jack Wroth. Whilst there Cliff was invited to have a go which he did and from this casual introduction he went on to ring until he reached the age of eighty. Sadly the onset of illness prevented him from continuing

I first met Cliff many years ago at one of the ringing competitions in which the Teburn team were competing. He was a Tedburn ringer through and through and he always loved talking about the good times he had whilst ringing there.

When he retired from farming he and Marion moved to Exminster and it wasn't long before he joined the Exminster

## Cliff Wilson - continued from page 17

team. Never one to push himself forward, just after he had moved into the village one of the ringers caught sight of Cliff standing near the church listening to the ringing. It happened to be on one of our regular Thursday practice nights. During a break in the ringing I went outside and invited him in. He was very polite saying that he only came down to listen, but after a little persuading he came in and had a ring. He clearly liked us because he came regularly afterwards. Sadly he rang his last peal in March this year – just before the national lockdown was announced by the Prime Minister.

Initially Cliff rang the tenor whenever we rang the back six bells. Tedburn St. Mary is a six-bell tower and he usually rang the tenor there. It wasn't long though before he was willing to try his hand at eight-bell ringing; again he rang the tenor. Being a strong ex-farmer he was well suited to the tenor, even though the tenor bell at Exminster is much heavier than the one at Tedburn.

Cliff proved to be a competent, loyal and faithful ringer. He rarely missed a practice night or ringing for Sunday services. He could always be relied upon to ring for weddings and funerals and for any special events in the Christian calendar. Not only this but due to his competitive nature he was always willing to be included in the competition team. By so doing he showed that he was keen to travel and ring at many of the towers across the length and breadth of the county. Ringing in this way brought him in touch with many other like-minded ringers. I am sure they would all wish to be included in a general message of sympathy to Marion and her family.

Cliff also supported ringing at Cheriton Bishop where Marion is the regular organist. Ringers there will undoubtedly feel his loss whenever they resume ringing. There were times on a Sunday morning when he would leave ringing at Exminster just before the last peal in order to chauffeur Marion to Cheriton Bishop. Although it would have been much easier for him to forgo ringing at Exminster when he was scheduled to go to Cheriton - he never did.

Knowing Cliff and ringing with him has given us all great pleasure. He made a significant contribution to the team with his tireless enthusiasm for ringing and his willingness to help with the maintenance of the bells. Not only this, but he was always willing to share his experience with anyone new to the art, even though his teaching skills were not always refined!



Cliff certainly knew hardship; he was taken ill when quite young and it was a long time before his condition was eventually diagnosed and treated. He was born into a farming family and from an early age he came to know all about hard manual work, long hours, exposure to the different seasons and what it means to live with uncertainty. Added to this was the challenge of farming on steep land and on soil that could become wet, heavy and sticky. Cliff knew what it meant to persevere and to not always expect immediate results. He was a survivor who had developed the knack of getting on and dealing with life's problems. He wasn't a Barley or Beef Baron and he didn't deal in today's "currency" of distorted values and one up-man ship. He wasn't the pushy type, but more like the kind of person who would make for the

background in a group photograph.

Cliff was a humble, modest man with a caring nature. He had been married to Marion for fifty three years and they were a devoted couple. They brought three children into the world and saw them grow up and lead independent lives. The family mourns the loss of Cliff the husband, and father. We the ringers mourn the loss of Cliff as a ringer and a great friend.

The following words by Cliff's brother featured in the Order of Service booklet.

We worked together for nearly 60 years.

First with father and then in partnership.

Cliff saw to taking cattle to market.

He was also the ploughman, spread the fertiliser,  
did the grass seeding and delivered hay and straw.

I did the combining, bailing and hedge trimming.

We had our ups and downs but on the whole we worked well together.

Farewell dear brother.

John.

A Memorial Service to Cliff will be held as soon as 'normality' returns.

## Shaugh Prior Restoration Work

Ryan Trout has kindly supplied us with these photos of the work at Shaugh Prior. Ryan tells us that most of the frame and work to the bells at Shaugh have been completed, just a few alterations to make. Taylors have sorted out the odd struck bells and made a number of the bells easier to set. Ryan and his father, Roger, will be completing the rest of the frame work.



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