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Devon Calls

Early 2022

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A Surprise Birthday Ring for Ian Avery

The Kingsteignton and Combeinteignhead band recently managed to surprise the Kingsteignton Captain, Ian Avery, on his 70th birthday.

We started the morning, a Sunday, with ringing at Combeinteignhead with a bare six ringers, including Ian, who was under the impression that many people were away or unavailable that day. After a very enjoyable ring at Combe, we made the short drive to Kingsteignton for our second service ring of the morning and Ian, still thinking we were short on numbers, was rather taken aback when eight bells pulled off and rang a very nice peal as we were walking up to the church.

He probably suspected something was up when we were met at the base of the tower by some of our band who are sadly unable to come up and ring with us at the moment. However, Ian's face as he entered the ringing chamber was a picture as he was met with a chorus of "Happy Birthday" sung by almost the



entire band, including some people who have now moved away or are only able to come occasionally. Ian's wife, Sue was there, his sister, Sandra, had decorated the ringing chamber especially for the occasion and a 70th birthday cake was sat, temptingly, on the table!

It was a very busy ringing chamber that morning. I counted 15 ringers standing out whilst another 8 were ringing the bells, and this was in addition to Sue, two young children and Henry the dog.

The whole thing had been arranged by Mike Mears

who ran the ringing for the morning. There were several short peals and everyone rang at least once. Two of the more notable peals were one consisting of Ian and his extended family (his brother and sister, niece and nephew with their spouses and a great niece) and another made up entirely of ringers taught by Ian in the last few years.

COPY for "DEVON CALLS" is always welcome and we rely on you to submit articles
Deadline for next edition - 12th June 2022

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

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Ian Avery - continued from page 1



The ringers for the family peal



Enjoying the cake!



Some of the band, note the overflow onto the tower stairs!



Ian found time to blow out the candles during a break in the ringing which was over all too soon. Ian, being choir master, organist and church warden in addition to tower captain, is a very busy man and obviously left promptly to take part in the service. The rest of us less busy mortals managed to squeeze in a slice of birthday cake before a more leisurely exit.

Ian was, as he himself later said, lost for words and it was a memorable way for us all to mark his special birthday.

Addendum

A couple of weeks later we repeated the exercise for Colin Avery's 60th birthday. This time it was a Friday evening, and we had a more leisurely ring in the appropriately decorated ringing chamber and with yet another birthday cake. There were possibly even more people present as we were joined by Simon, Eleanor and Charlie Linford. Simon is the President of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers and has a strong interest in Devon style call change ringing which he is actively promoting outside the County.

After the ringing we all decamped downstairs where a poem specially written about Ian and Colin was read aloud before a framed copy was presented to each of them.

James Grant

photos by Yolanda Burgoyne

Val and Geoff Hill's Golden Wedding Anniversary



L-R Jess Evans , Mark Lovell , Kathy Hayes, Kath King , Bill Blowey , Val and Geoff Hill , Will Dawe

Sue Dawe was also present but missing from the photo.

Val and Geoff Hill were married at St Peter's church, Peter Tavy, on the 9th of October 1971 . To celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary Lamerton bellringers surprised them with a peal of 60 on 3rds .

Geoff and Val came down to the church to listen, bearing cake and a celebratory drink!

We wish them all best wishes for many more happy years together.

Kathy Hayes

Editorial

The coronavirus pandemic has had, and is still having, an impact on ringing. We were beginning to think that the infection rate from the Delta strain was beginning to subside, and then the Omicron variant struck compounding the problem and making any return to ringing impossible - at least for most of us.

However, it is important that we do not lose sight of being able to return to ringing regularly this year which, given the tremendous success of the vaccine programme, seems possible.

In spite of the difficulties in trying to ring whilst at the same time ensuring safety is maintained and the risk of transmission reduced, 2022 will be a "special" year. As you know this is the year in which H.M Queen Elizabeth celebrates her Platinum Jubilee.

How many teams rang on Sunday 6th February 2022 to mark the 70th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession? It would be nice to be able to list those towers that did in the mid-summer edition of *Devon Calls*. So, if your team rang please get in touch.

For the Platinum Jubilee four days of celebrations are planned to take place between Thursday 2nd and Sunday 5th June 2022. The Central Council of Church Bellringers has made a request for collective bellringing to coincide with the Service of Thanksgiving at St. Paul's Cathedral on Friday 3rd June. So far no specific time for the service has been given but it is expected that it will take place in the morning.

On 12th January 2022, Mr. Mark Elvers on behalf of the Central Council produced the following statement. *"After the Bank Holiday Weekend details of the ringing that took place for both the Accession Day and over the Jubilee Weekend will be collated and presented to Her Majesty with the grateful thanks of the bellringing community for her unique service to the nation and commonwealth"*.

Let's all make a big effort to ensure that Devon's call-change teams feature. So please send your details to the Central Council by contacting Vicki Chapman the PR Officer (pro@cccbr.org) and also by contacting us here at *Devon Calls*. In spite of the fact that call-change ringers are capable of producing quality striking, by and large we tend to be a modest group of people. Modesty aside, I propose we make a concerted effort to ring. As a suggestion, how about making one of the peals "The Queen's peal" (which consist of 48 changes)? If you are unfamiliar with these changes please get in touch.

I have always enjoyed the company of ringers. One of the pleasant tasks about being editor is that it enables me to keep in touch with people. Sometimes I am given the honour and privilege of being able to listen and make notes on a ringer's lifetime of ringing. This time the focus is on Don Roberts of Torquay and his 68 years of ringing. Not many can aspire to Don's record but all stories are interesting and worth recording.

At last November's AGM an elderly ringer, who clearly struggles with his mobility, was present. He comes every year and usually plucks up enough courage to stand and say something pertinent, as he did on this occasion. He is Mr. Roger Morley of Paignton. Full marks Roger for taking the trouble to attend. You are such a good example of someone who, in spite of the odds, makes an effort and is keen to make a contribution to our organisation – well done to you and people like you.

My grateful thanks to all those who have taken the trouble to submit articles for publication in this edition. I'm sorry if your article hasn't appeared, but we will do our best to incorporate it in the next edition. I am indebted to Elinor and Colin for the time which they have devoted to the task of proof reading.

Colin Adams

Devon Calls – Annual Report, November 2021

Copies. Three copies of the magazine have been published over the last year; this was achieved in spite of the restrictions imposed on ringing as a result of a series of lockdowns due to Covid 19. The Early 2021 edition contained 20 pages; the Mid and Late editions contained 12 each. 148 copies of the magazine were printed on each occasion. Printing costs for the three editions (excluding inserts) amounted to £549.00.

Receipt of copy. People have been very good in submitting articles. Contributions from ringers in the East of the county would, however, be most welcome as would news of activities taking place amongst young ringers.

Advertisers. Currently six organisations advertise in the magazine. Mendip Ropes were dropped because they were not forthcoming with their fees. Attempts to offset the printing charges by attracting a few more advertisers is ongoing. The advertising fee is £15.00 per annum.

Photographs. Tentative links with Douglas Young of Devonchurchland have been established. Douglas has kindly given permission for the use of the photographs from his excellent collection of Devon's churches to be used in the

magazine. In exchange he has asked for information on Devon's bells. This will provide an additional dimension to those descriptions on church buildings he has already produced, as well as being of use to any future projects that he has in mind.

Thanks. As ever, I am grateful to Dr. Colin Barnes and Elinor D'albiac, our two proof readers, for all their hard work. They spend a great deal of time freely and conscientiously combing through each article making corrections and suggestions. James Grant similarly works hard gathering up the articles and photographs and setting them out on the pages. It is James who makes the magazine attractive and easy to read. My thanks also go to Christine Ley who deals with the distribution of the magazine. Following collection of the magazines from the printers the package is handed across to Chris, normally at Crediton which is a convenient meeting point. She packages and posts the magazines; a task which she completes very quickly. I am fortunate to be working with a very good team of people who help to make the production of *Devon Calls* such a pleasure.

Colin Adams

The Church of St. John the Baptist, Ashton

The pretty village of Ashton sits on the western slopes of Haldon, only a few miles from the distinctive landmark which is Haldon Belvedere (Lawrence Castle) built in 1788. The parish consists of two villages, Higher and Lower Ashton.



Ashton Church

photo Devonchurchland.com

The church of St. John the Baptist is situated in Higher Ashton. It is a building with many interesting historical features. Some are depicted here but many more can be seen by going to - <https://devonchurchland.co.uk>

The church has a peal of six bells. Sadly these have not been rung since the late 1950's mainly due to the poor state of the bell frame. According to J. G.M. Scott in Towers & Bells of Devon Volume Two "the back five [bells] are by John, Christopher & William Pennington and the treble added by

John Pennington III and Christopher IV of Stoke Climsland, hung for ringing in a 19th century oak frame, with elm headstocks and plain bearings." In spite of the bells being rung up until the late 1950's Scott noted that, "Harry Stokes in 1913 wrote that the frame was unsafe and not worth using again." It has remained untouched ever since.

According to Janet Deem in her excellent account on the success of the Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund there are "406 rings of bells in the Exeter Diocese (which covers the whole of Devon) of these just 24 remain unringable." Ashton's, like Bigbury's, is amongst them.

Considering all the historical features contained within and around the church arguably a case can be made for its bells to peal once more. A feasibility study should be undertaken whilst people with a desire to prevent the decline in the number of unringable peals in Devon are still around.

References: Scott, J.G.M. Mack, F. Clarke, J. (2007) "Towers & Bells of Devon" Vol. 2. Ashton, St. John Baptist, The Mint Press, pp 13-14.

Deem, Janet. (2021) "Devon Calls" Mid 2021 edition. Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund and the Association. Swiftprint, Dawlish, pp 7-8.

Colin Adams

Our Newly Elected President, Mr. Keith Bavin, Introduces Himself

A few words to introduce myself to those who have not yet come across me during my time ringing in Devon.

I was born in Folkestone during the war. When I was six years old my family moved to Ramsbury in Wiltshire. It was there that I joined the church choir and during the time I became aware of the sound of the bells. Being curious, one day I wandered into the ringing chamber when Harry Watts, who was the

Tower Captain, said, "you ought to learn to ring m' boy" and at the age of twelve I started. Although Ramsbury was a Method tower we only rang call changes as we weren't very good.

In 1965 I moved to Devon with my wife and her brother to start farming at East Anstey. Previously I had worked in what was known at the time as a Building Society for five years.

Someone told the locals at East Anstey that I could ring. As word caught on I found myself drawn in to ringing for Harvest, Christmas and Easter, which was the only time they could muster a team. By the 1970s we were ringing and teaching learners at East Anstey - and ringing badly on Sundays!

I later became friends with the late John Pugsley who was the Tower Captain at Molland and he invited me to join them



L-R John Warne, Chris May, Jennifer Rowlandson, Chris Hughes, Cathy Thorpe, Keith Bavin

during practice nights. This was because Henry Dart, who rang the tenor, was no longer available as he was involved in taking his children to local gymkhanas.

After about twelve months of practising with Molland I got the push to ring a heavier bell when one of the ringers, the late Edgar Cole, said "try him on the tenor, John" and the rest is history. I took over ringing the tenor from Henry in the late 1970s and found that I had joined a very good team which included, Wally Snell, John Warne, David

James, and Barry Petts. It soon became obvious to me that if anything was wrong with the striking it was usually my fault.

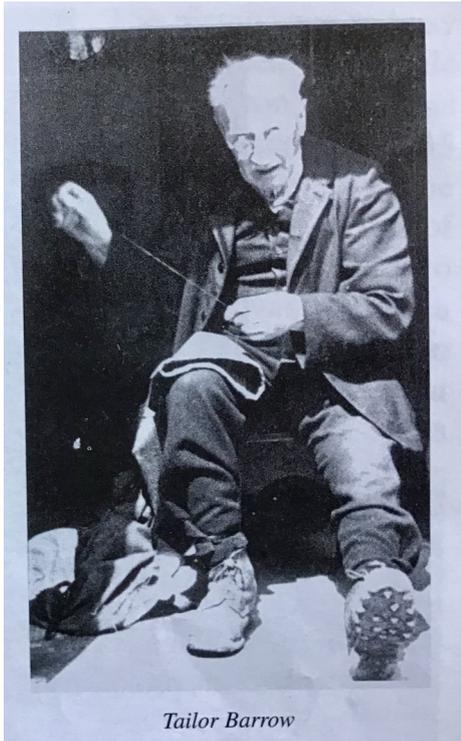
I spent over twenty years ringing with Molland. I was fortunate to be included in a team which twice won the Devon Six-Bell final, and to be amongst the top five Devon call-change teams competing in competitions most weekends.

Whilst ringing for Molland John Warne and I managed to get East Anstey going. When ringing eventually stopped at Molland we concentrated on East Anstey and began to enter competitions, and with a great degree of success. The photo shows just how successful we were; our best year being in 2015.

Keith Bavin

William 'Tailor' Barrow, 1873 -1967

Since appealing for information on the late William 'Tailor' Barrow in the *Late 2020 Edition of Devon Calls* I have been in touch with Reg Yeo of Barnstaple and Bev Gould of Loxhore. Both knew Tailor quite well. Bev was taught to ring by Tailor who was the Tower Captain at Loxhore, back in the 1940s and early 1950s. He remembers being told by Tailor how important it is to keep your feet close together when ringing and to keep the rope tight, "as stiff as wire." Apparently, Bev's late father knew Tailor as he rang with him, and he could recall the occasion when the team came a very close second in a Six-bell Devon Open Competition; being denied first place by just a fraction of a mark.



Tailor came from Bratton Fleming. At one time he lived in the Lodge at Cott which is situated on the drive leading to Arlington Court, once the home of the Chichester family. He then moved to Loxhore Cott. He was a tailor by trade and worked from home. Apparently he used to carry out his tailoring by sitting on a settle just inside the front door; presumably to get the best light. The settle which he used is now in The Pyne Arms pub at East Down. Sadly, he and his wife lost their only son Francis William in the First World War. This had a profound effect on his wife who withdrew into herself. Tailor, however, carried on with his business working from home and maintaining his enthusiasm for bellringing. He was mainly a treble ringer and able to ring and call the changes on both six and eight bells. Bev Gould said that Tailor had one very distinctive characteristic; whilst ringing, as the rope went up on the back stroke, he would simultaneously rise up on his toes. Bev also remembers when he was a young ringer that whenever ringing was planned Tailor would invariably arrive at their house all ready to go, long before the family had finished their dinner; much to his mother's annoyance.

It is known that he used to cycle regularly from his home at Loxhore Cott to ring at Barnstaple Parish Church, a distance of six miles. Reg Yeo, living at Loxhore Cott at the same time, remembers regularly collecting Tailor and taking him to ring at Barnstaple on the back of his Triumph motorcycle.

So, we now know a little more about the man who donated 'The William Barrow Cup' which is competed for at the Devon Association 8-bell Competition. If you are able to add

anything further please get in touch with me. I am particularly keen to know where he learned to ring and who taught him. Also, would the current holders of this cup please take a photo of it and send the photo to me, as I would like to know when it was first donated?

The following verses were sent to me by Bev Gould. The initials RT appear at the foot of the last verse. Unfortunately, I am unable to find out to whom this refers.

With grateful thanks to Bev Gould and Reg Yeo for the information which they have kindly provided.

Tailor Barrow : Bellringer (1873 – 1967).

*Raised and schooled in *Bratton, my great uncle Will
Was apprentice to a local tailor,
And in Ninety Eight he courted and wed
Emily Pugsley, daughter of Loxhore Mill
Their life began at "Oakdene," Loxhore Cott.
A cluster of dwellings on the banks of the Yeo
Where to the music of waters flowing by
Will began his tailoring at home.*

*Gentleman farmers, with their ladies and sons
Called to choose their cloth and be measured up;
Their workers, the infantry of the land,
Were fitted out with course shirts, with smocks and breaches,
All scissored, stitched and pressed by hand.
Emily gave birth to their only child
A son whom they christened Francis William,
Known to all the village as "young Frankie."*

*Each Sabbath, clad in their Sunday best,
The trio climbed the sunken lane to St. Michael's Church.
There Will became a bell ringer; he tolled tenor
And in time became the captain of the jolly band.
At Advent, Christmas, New Year, Easter, Whit and Harvest
Their peals rang out across the wild Exmoor land.*

*When the Great War came in Nineteen Fourteen,
Still only a lad young Frank was keen to go,
A conscript in the Somerset Light Infantry.
News came that he was missing, and much later
That he was dead.
Twenty five young lads left Loxhore for that war,
Five, of whom Frank was one, did not return.
Today a white stone bears his name in Flanders.*

*No words describe the anguish felt by Emily and Will.
Their idyll had been shattered.
Emily withdrew into herself and rarely left home.
But one cannot feel that he stabbed his needles
And tolled his bell with far more vigour and passion.
I met him but once forty years later
And that day, at eighty five, he had cycled in to
Barnstaple town, proud of his fitness
And with a gleam still in his eye.*

*Bratton Fleming.

RT

Colin Adams

Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund

Today's giving – tomorrow's ringing

Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund – (Charity Number 276490) Annual Report

During 2021 the Fund has been actively involved with 14 towers at some stage in their restoration projects. In addition to these, a further eight towers have requested grant application forms, though have not as yet completed and submitted them.

With the easing of coronavirus restrictions, we have been able to restart our quinquennial bell inspections and this year have carried out a long overdue inspection at Musbury. We also paid a return visit to Yarnscombe, following up our quinquennial of 2016. Inspections of completed restoration work have been carried out at Axminster, Shaugh Prior, Pilton and Dunkeswell.

Due to the restrictions then in force, our March meeting was conducted using the "Zoom" facility, whereas we were able to revert to our normal face-to-face format for our November meeting. Later in November the Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary and Secretary-elect met with our financial advisors to review recent performance of our investment portfolio and to discuss future strategy.

One major change in our ranks is that James Clarke, having resigned as Consultant on Bells and Clocks to the Exeter DAC at the beginning of the year, chaired his last meeting in March and has now been replaced by his successor David Hird, the change formally taking place on 1st July. Furthermore, the secretary, Ian Smith, expressed a wish to stand down from that position and will be replaced by Janet Deem early in the new year.

The trustees have paid due regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit. The aim of the Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund remains to provide financial assistance to churches in the County of Devon and Diocese of Exeter for the purpose of restoring, maintaining and improving their bell installations, so as to ensure their continuing use both for religious purposes and for the ongoing development of the cultural art of English church bell ringing. Though bells are housed predominantly in premises of the Church of England the practice of church bell ringing is open to all regardless of age, creed or culture; and being a very public instrument may be heard by all.

The bulk of our financial assets remain in the form of an 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 as at 31st December 2021 standing at £361,840, having almost regained its value prior to the covid lock-down. The continuing benefit of the investment portfolio is in the dividends received which

have amounted to £8,095 for the year. As was to be expected, this was significantly less (by about 40 per cent) than the income received pre-Covid, and it is difficult to see this recovering in the immediate future.

A significant portion of our income normally comes as a result of the activities of the two Devon ringing societies. Clearly, on account of the continuing Covid restrictions, this was anticipated to be much reduced, as has indeed been the case. Though activities have been gradually increasing, it is difficult to see income from this area getting back to anything like normal for some considerable time. The trustees have therefore continued to take initiatives to offset this, and again a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the work of the DCBRF was made prior to the 'virtual' Devon Ringers' Carol Service in December. Members of the two societies have again been encouraged to use AmazonSmile for their on-line purchases, nominating the DCBRF as their chosen charity. Also, the links on both societies web-pages to the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) Donate service have proved quite lucrative.

At the beginning of 2021 the liquid assets of the Fund stood at £59,479. Since that time five grants totalling £7,950 have been paid. £1,200 went to Ermington for cleaning down and descaling the sub-frame and repairing where necessary, and also repainting all the ironwork of the frame and fittings; £900 to Shaugh Prior for sand-blasting and galvanising some of the frame's cross-bracing, repainting the rest of the frame, sub-frame and headstocks, re-facing the clappers and repairing the cracked bell-pad on the fourth bell; £950 to Axminster for overhauling the bearings, re-profiling the clappers and fitting new hinge pins and bushes, new pulley sheaves for the third and tenor bells, and new runner boards for the treble, second and third bells; £3,000 to Pilton towards cleaning down and repainting the bell-frame and support grillage, repairs to the treble, seventh and tenor clappers, removal of old crown staple stumps, servicing the bearings, sliders and runner boards, and turning the second and fourth bells; and £1,900 to Dunkeswell for descaling, treating and painting the beam ends of the frame foundation and inserting new padstones, also improving the access to the ringing room and bell chamber.

Income during the year (excluding that from the investment portfolio) has amounted to £7,520, including £4,212 from the Guild and its Branches, £395 from Devon Association towers, £919 via the CAF Donation Buttons, £1,400 from other donations and fundraising, and £425 from tax refunds and bank interest.

Having taken off administration expenses, the liquid assets of the Fund currently stand at £66,930.

Grants agreed this year include the £950 to Axminster (as mentioned above); £6,250 to Bigbury towards a complete rehang of the six bells in the existing frame, but on completely new and re-positioned supporting grillages; £5,300 to Ss Philip and James, Ilfracombe towards rehangng the eight bells with new or refurbished fittings in the existing strengthened bell-frames, the upper frame being provided with new steel support beams; and £8,100 to Hatherleigh for rehangng the bells in a new steel frame. (At Hatherleigh, as part of a major church re-ordering scheme, a new ringing floor will be provided some eleven feet higher in the tower which, together with an improved rope circle, will make the bells far

easier to ring.)

Assuming that all of the agreed grants are taken up, the uncommitted liquid balance of the Fund stands at £13,980.

Committee Members and Trustees for 2021-2022

Secretary: Janet Deem (from January 2022), 7a, Salterton Road, Exmouth, EX8 2BR (01395 272444; dcbrf72@gmail.com), James Clarke (Chairman – until June 2021), David Hird (Chairman – from July 2021), Elaine Grant, Mary Mears (Treasurer - dcbrf@1appleparth.co.uk), Graham Sharland, Ian Smith (Secretary – until January 2022), James Steer.

Ian Smith

The Devon Association of Ringers and the Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund

This year will be the 50th Anniversary of the Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund (DCBRF) Set up jointly by the Guild and the Association in 1972, the fund has helped countless Bell restoration and repair projects down the years, and that is in the main down to you, the ringers, and all those ringers that have gone before us. The Guild have supported the fund by means of their annual Quarter Peal week, and the Association has for many years held the Annual Draw which in the past has often raised a considerable amount of money. It is written in our constitution that the association 'shall actively support the work of the DCBRF', however the pandemic has meant that for two years now the Association has been unable to hold the draw and contribute to the fund in the usual way, a loss to the fund in excess of £6000 based on recent draw income.

The committee have been actively considering ways in which we can overcome this situation. Having canvassed opinion among fellow ringers, the general consensus is that the draw, if reinstated, would more than likely fail to produce the income it previously has owing in the main to a drop in numbers of active teams since the pandemic, as the distribution and collection of the tickets was largely facilitated by the competition 'circuit' which at the present time shows no signs of making a comeback.

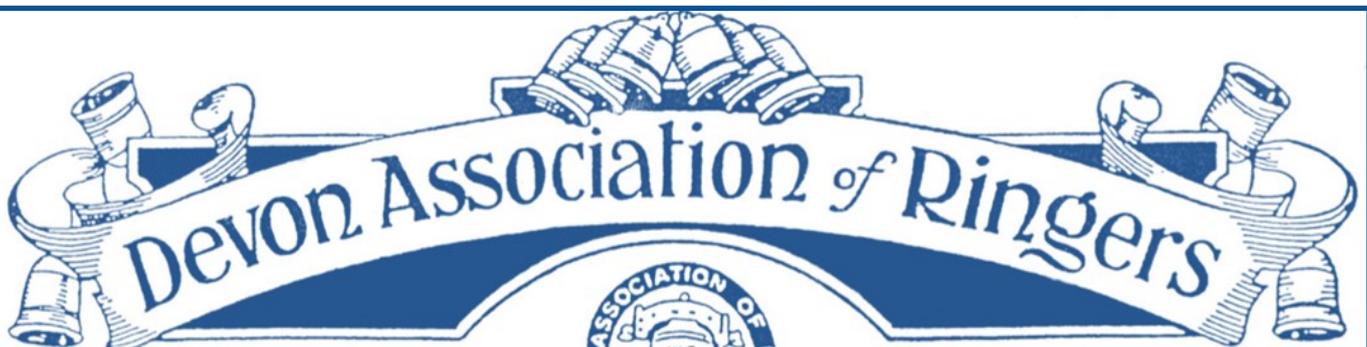
Most County ringing organisations around the country now fund their Bell Restoration Funds directly from their ringers, the contribution being a percentage of their individual

membership fee. As the Association does not have individual membership this is currently not an option for us, but the idea of Ringers making a direct contribution to the DCBRF rather than by means of an Annual Draw is widely supported among Ringers who have been canvassed. It would also eliminate the cost of the Draw license and printing, not to mention the groans of despair when Ringers were handed their books of Draw tickets to sell!

The Association, that's us the Ringers, need to address this situation and find a solution so we can continue to support the work of the DCBRF, from which we all benefit when restorations and overhauls on our bells in Devon are undertaken. In the meantime, the committee would like all ringers to consider giving a voluntary contribution to the DCBRF in lieu of the Draw and would be keen to hear your views on the possible inception of a direct contribution scheme as operated elsewhere. The DCBRF value highly the support the Association has given over the last 50 years, its now up to us to continue that support and do our bit to ensure we keep the bells of Devon ringing for future generations.

You can contribute directly to the DCBRF very easily by going to the Devon Association website and following the link to the DCBRF where you can donate safely online.

Graham Sharland



We are looking for an individual to undertake the role of Hon Secretary for the Devon Association of Ringers. It doesn't matter if you are young or old, experienced or new to ringing, please do volunteer if interested. Advice and support in the role can be given.



For more information please contact either the Chairman, Ian Avery chair@devonbells.co.uk or the acting secretary Rachel Avery hon-secretary@devonbells.co.uk

Treble Gone!

The ringing career of Mr. Don Roberts – B.E.M.

I doubt if there isn't a ringer in Devon that doesn't know Don. His reputation is not just confined to Devon but extends beyond and across the wider world of ringing. Neither is it confined to ringing. He has been a member of the Oddicombe Swimming Club since the age of 7 and at 15 years old was the junior breast-stroke champion of Devon. He has also led highly successful water-polo and swimming teams in Torbay, and he still swims regularly even now, but that's another story. Don is also a very keen genealogist and for over 36 years he has been researching his family tree. His 4 times great grandfather on his mother's side, John Lyle, was one of the ringers of Launcells who rang for the accession of George IV in 1760 and again for his Golden Jubilee in 1810. As John Lyle did not die until 1832 it is pretty sure that he rang, aged 84, for the coronation of George IV in 1821!

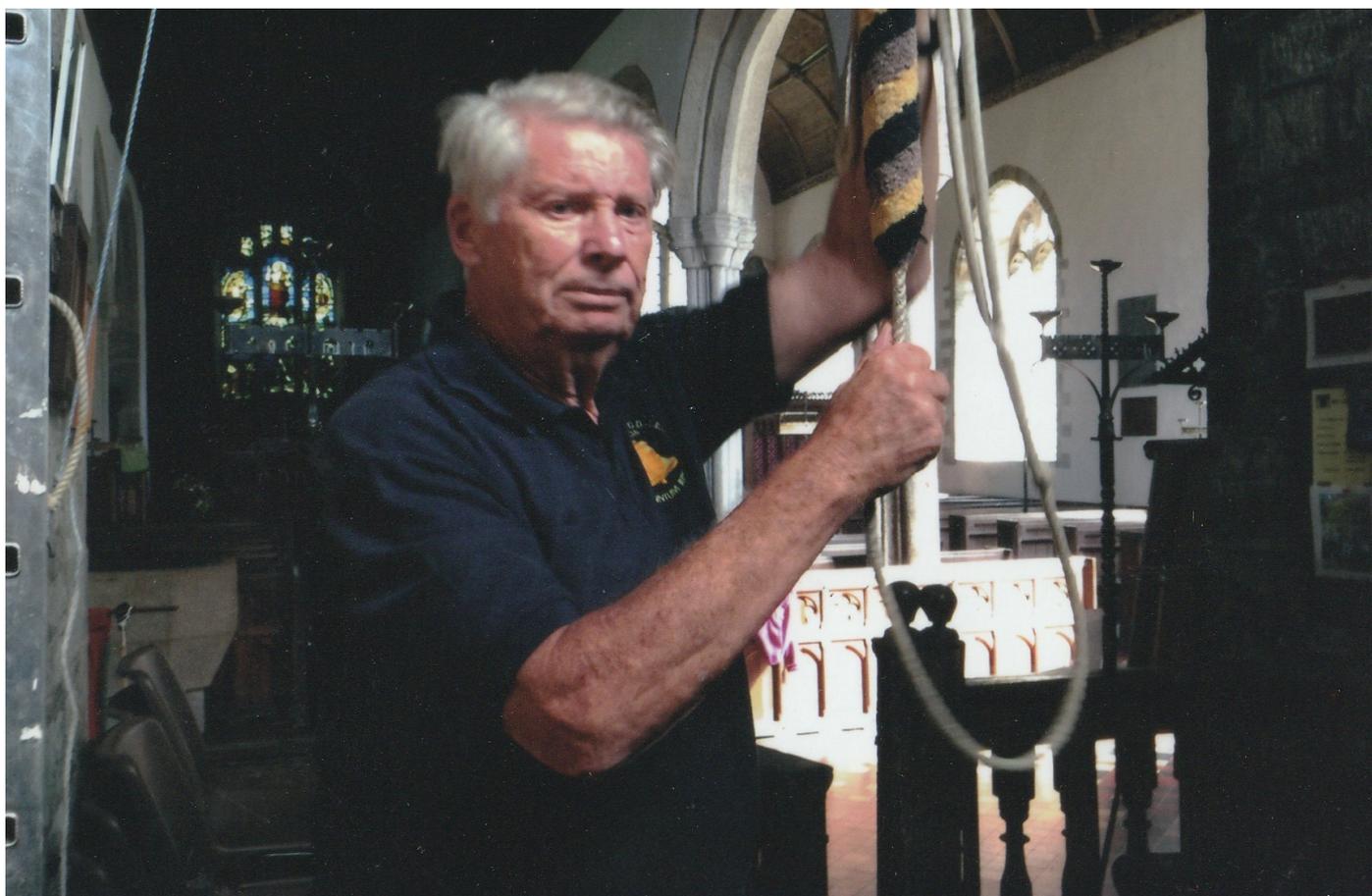
On 13th July 2015 it was announced that he was to be awarded the B.E.M. for services given both to swimming and bellringing.

In view of his long association with ringing, both as a Method and call-change ringer, and because he is such a meticulous record keeper, I felt it would make an interesting feature in Devon Calls to invite Don to provide an account of his ringing career. Not only this but I didn't want to overlook the opportunity, as well as being given the honour and privilege, of being able to record 68 years of ringing - and Don didn't hesitate to oblige. Shortly after asking him, I received just over four pages of A4, all beautifully hand-written, detailing his career and the people he had met along the way. It is gratifying to know that a lasting record of one of Devon's most distinguished ringers has been made.

I'm sure you will find his account as interesting to read as I did when transcribing it.

Thank you, Don, for being so willing to share your 68 years of fond memories with us.

Colin Adams.



I was born in Ellacombe, Torquay; a parish with a church having tubular bells, but my grandmother lived in Babbacombe. As a child my mother and I would walk to see granny Thirza at least three times a week. My mother told me that on several occasions I would hold up my finger and say 'mummy bells' as we passed All Saints Church, I was only about three years old when I made these observations. Little did I know that I would eventually become a ringer and learn to ring at All Saints.

In 1937 I became a boy chorister under the eminent organist and choirmaster Mr. Ernest W. Winship, who taught me a love of singing and music. As a chorister we sang Matins at 10.00am, it was a service which only lasted half an hour. We then had twenty-five minutes outside on the green before the Sung Eucharist at 11.00am. It was at this time that we heard the eight bells raised and I remember the jumble at the start before getting into rounds, for the top ringing and subsequent call changes. In those moments I didn't have any ambition to

Don Roberts - continued from page 8

become a ringer, but my father told me that two of the ringers were the brothers, Bill and Bert Payne, whom I knew to be the drivers of the Torquay Borough Council steam rollers and that, I believe, did finally influence me to become a ringer knowing also, that my mother's cousin, Percy Lyle, was a regular ringer at St. Mary Magdalene, Upton.

Ringling was suspended during the war and when it resumed at All Saints two of the pre-war ringers dropped dead in the belfry in quick succession so the others decided to retire. So the bells were silent again between 1946-1952. In 1953 the Vicar, the Revd. Ronald Arthur Hodgson-Bate, was keen to get the bells ringing again and he located a young lady called Wendy Turnbull, who had recently moved to Babbacombe from Hurstpierpoint in Sussex. She was a ringer and she was prepared to teach members of the church youth club to ring. The lessons were given on Saturday evenings from March to June 1953 when a total of nine young people became competent at ringing. At 22 years old I was older than the other nine, and at that time I was studying for a degree in chemistry at Exeter University, but I always came home at weekends to enjoy the lessons and to continue as a chorister. I finished University in June 1953 and being proficient in bell handling, I attended practices at Cockington. The band, under the leadership of Alf Wills who was an outstanding teacher and treble ringer, excelled at call-change ringing. Along with John Kelly of Paignton we honed our skills of call-change ringing during practices at Cockington. I was always fascinated by the fact that two of their ringers, Bill Plimsoll and George Langworthy used to walk over the fields from Marldon to ring at Cockington.

My ringing ended abruptly when on 17th September 1953; I was called up to do National Service and posted to Catterick Camp to join the Royal Signals. At No 7 Training Camp it was like a prison and we were not allowed out for ten weeks. On Passing Out I was posted to No 4 Training Camp and by a wonderful coincidence, there were in my barrack room, two other bellringers; Martin Pring who rang at Knowle in Bristol and Carole Pudwell who came from Oxfordshire. We were allowed out at weekends in uniform and on Sunday evenings we would walk to St. Mary's Richmond, where we were welcomed by the local band to ring for Evensong. I could only ring call-changes on the eight bells, but my two friends amazed me by standing in for Grandsire Triples and Kent Treble Bob Major of which I knew nothing.

I was later posted to Aldershot having passed the War Office Selection Board to become an officer. I remember going to St. Michael's Church Aldershot, a lightweight peal of eight, where I was incapable of ringing the light second bell in place, which exposed a serious weakness in my skill as a bellringer. I did much better on a visit to Farnborough though before being posted back to Catterick where I received my commission as a 2nd Lt. in the Royal Signals. From there I was posted to Lemgo in Germany and put in charge of No 4 Construction Troop with three sergeants and fifty-four men, which meant no ringing for eighteen months. I did, however, take with me the Lancashire Association Ringers Handbook. When there was slack times and in the evenings, I studied the Scientific Methods in that book and became aware of the Theory of Methods and compositions. I mastered the transposition of lead ends for all

the standard Methods and the calling places for Stedman Triples, knowing all the time that my theory was well ahead of my practical. My two years National Service came to an end in September 1955, and I accepted a post of junior science and maths teacher at Trowbridge High School in Wiltshire.

Being in Trowbridge gave me an excellent chance to learn Method ringing. I regularly attended St. James, Trowbridge, a twelve bell tower, for two services on Sundays and practice nights. I also went to practices at North Bradley where Fred Slatford and Laurie Hitchins were so very patient with me. I finally mastered ringing the treble to Grandsire Triples and from there on I progressed rapidly. In the time that I was away from Babbacombe the other youth club members, who had learnt with me, benefitted from two experienced ringers who had come into the area. Bill Simmonds, who hailed from Caversham and Reading had joined Bembows shop-fitting business in Torquay. Bill came to Babbacombe after a short spell in Plympton where he rang regularly with Bill Lavers, and Bob Southwood, who worked as a dental technician prior to ordination. The other was E. Maurice Atkins, having retired from the Patent Office in London and who was the long time Captain of the Ringers at St. Augustine's, Kilburn. So it was when I came home to Babbacombe for Christmas that I rang the fifth to a quarter peal of Grandsire Doubles on 31st December 1956. This peal was conducted from the tenor by Bill Simmonds, the rest of the band being those who learnt from the youth club.

On 19th May 1957, having returned to Trowbridge, I rang the sixth to a 1260 peal of Grandsire Triples on the back eight at St. James conducted from the second by Gilbert Harding, who was an outstanding ringer in the Salisbury Guild. Gilbert, always smartly dressed, used to drive around in a Triumph Mayflower car. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Penn were also prominent ringers at Westbury. During this time, I taught the organist's son, Michael Arlett, to ring (he was my first pupil) and I was proud to ring the sixth again in a peal of 1260 Grandsire Triples with my pupil ringing a perfect treble.

In September 1957 I returned to teach at my old School, The Torquay Boys' Grammar School where I had been head boy in 1948/9. I lost no time in resuming my ringing at All Saints, Babbacombe and soon after I was made Captain. By this time most of the original youth club learners had gone away, but we were blessed with experienced ringers coming into the area on retirement. These included Arthur Garbett, a company secretary of a tile company in Broseley where he had learnt to ring as a boy. William Wayman a retired police officer from Mangotsfield, Herbert Spencer, Charlie York and Bob Edden. All were regular attendees at practices. Captain Poyntz and Dr. Gent came over from Teignmouth and John Read, ex-RAF, came all the way from Galmpton to join us.

With this array of outstanding ringers, and the ever present Bill Simmonds, progress with method ringing was outstanding and the quality of the ringing was a joy. At the same time I was determined NOT to neglect our call-change ringing.

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Babbacombe rang in the Devon Association 8 bell competitions for several years such as in:

1960 at Berry Pomeroy where Witheridge were the winners with 64 faults.

1961 at Chittlehampton where Torrington were the winners with 21 faults.

1962 at Upton where Barnstaple were the winners with 48 faults.

1963 at Torrington where Witheridge won again with 66 ½ faults.

1964 at Chagford where Witheridge amassed 162 faults to win. Kingsteignton came second with 181 faults.

In those years and for many years after Babbacombe entered Deanery 6-bell competitions and other invitation competitions. On 8th December 1965, we lost the final of the Brian Phillips Knockout competition to West Alvington -27 faults to 46 and on this occasion, we had Roy Stickland on the treble.

Amid all this action I was busy teaching new ringers drawn mainly from the Grammar School and the church. These included Peter Lock and Dirk Aldous, who later became Chief Constable for the County of Dorset. Adam Van Dornick and Simon Wheaton. Pam and Valerie Stephens and Brian Castle also presented themselves for instruction, as did my youngest brother, Gregory Roberts, who was still at Primary School. All these ringers went on to serve the band for a good many years. Of the original youth club learners Royston Blackler became Master of the Bristol University Guild of Change Ringers and afterwards was a prominent ringer in Nottingham. In further years some excellent lady ringers were taught at Babbacombe and stayed to become life-long ringers: Mavis Hawkins, Vivienne Smith, Catherine Chambers, Janet Winkles and Katherine Head.

In 1963 the bells at Babbacombe underwent a full restoration and on 4th November 1963, we rang the first quarter peal of Stedman Triples on the bells conducted by Bill Simmonds with Bill Lavers on 3rd, John Perkins 4th (a Babbacombe boy who later became an eminent geologist) and Peter Shipp on tenor. Peter was one of the original youth club recruits. Four years later on 27th November, I conducted the first quarter peal of Erin Triples, on the bells with Keith Fursdon (who had learnt to ring at Tor Mohun and was taught by Bill Harvey) ringing the 4th, and Frank Shepherd of Brixham ringing the 6th. In all between 31 December 1956 and 16 February 1975, a total of 117 quarter peals had been rung which included a peal of 1974 Grandsire Triples rung to mark the centenary of the Foundation of the Guild of Devonshire Ringers in 1874. I composed and conducted this performance which took 77 minutes. In the same year I conducted a 1260 peal of Grandsire Triples in which my daughter, Caroline, rang her first quarter on the treble. Early in 1975, when I knew that the Reverend Michael Malsom was to be inducted as the Vicar of St. Marychurch I got his permission to attempt a restoration of the 8 bells that had been silent since the bombing of the church in 1943.

On 15 March 1975 Bill Simmonds, John Murray, Gordon

Martin, Caroline (16) and I began the work of restoring the bells at St Marychurch back to working order. On 26th March after many hours of patient and difficult work all eight bells were capable of being rung. For a blow-by-blow description of the restoration see -*The Ringing World No. 3380 published 6th February 1976.*

On 18th July 1975 the bells rang out for the Reverend Malsom's Induction. This band consisted of Don Roberts treble, Keith Fursdon 2nd, Bill Simmonds 3rd, Bryan Tuckett (my life-long ringing friend) 4th, Ian Avery 5th, Gordon Martin 6th, Richard Groves 7th and John Kelly tenor. After the service the crack team from Kingsteignton rang the full Queen's peal in splendid style causing parishioners listening outside the church to cry with joy. I was privileged to ring the tenor for this peal, but it was very physically demanding. Some weeks later we replaced the worn gudgeons on the tenor with a new pair made by Instrells Engineering at a cost of £11.88. From then on the tenor went well.

On 27th July 1975 eleven recruits from the parishes of Babbacombe and St. Marychurch started to learn on tied bells at Babbacombe and by December three of them were proficient enough to ring on Christmas Day. Prior to that on 17th December the first quarter peal consisted of 1260 Grandsire Triples rung in 52 ½ minutes with George Retter on 5th and Frank Mack on the tenor. Caroline Roberts rang a good treble in recognition of her outstanding efforts with the restoration. Ringing continued for Sunday morning services into 1976 with regular help from George Brewer, Jim Balsdon and David Taylor from Upton.

A note in the Attendance Book shows affiliation to the Devon Association of Ringers to be 50p! The local band at St Marychurch began to be quite good at call-changes and entered many competitions between 1976 and 1983; the winter knockout proving most enjoyable. As Captain I had the task of getting judges for these encounters, these included Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Martin (Stoke Gabriel), Mr. and Mrs. Norman Mortimore (Marldon), Bill and Ian Avery (Kingsteignton), George Daw (Ipplepen), John Bell (Brixham), Raymond Squires (Marldon), John Kelly (Paignton), and Harry Bardens (Bigbury). The continuing love of call-changes was shown on 15th September 1980 when I called 210 changes on Queen's, and followed this on 8th June 1981 with 338 changes from rounds in 45 minutes, sponsored for the Centenary of the Church of England Children's Society.

On 20th April 1987 work began on a total restoration of the eight bells at St. Marychurch and by 3rd May the bells were conveyed to Taylors of Loughborough accompanied by ringers Colin Barr and Martin Mansley. The bells were re-tuned and hung in a new metal frame and dedicated on 8th November 1987. The Queen's peal was rung after the service. On 9th February 1989 two new trebles were cast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry and delivered to St. Marychurch on 11th March 1989. The new ten were rung for the first time on Easter Sunday 26th March 1989. On Trinity Sunday of that year 1259 Grandsire Caters was rung in 49 ¼ minutes conducted by Martin Mansley. Tim King rang the 9th in this quarter which was his 24th quarter on the bells of St. Marychurch; and he was one of the original band trained at Babbacombe.

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Late in 1994 I started to teach a band at Upton, Torquay, at the request of the vicar, the Reverend Gerry with a view to ringing the eight bells at Upton for the Millennium in 2000. Tied bells were used to teach individual ringers, and when all were proficient the bells remained tied whilst the band perfected round ringing and then call-changes. Finally, the ties were taken off and with the help of David Taylor and Bill Taylor (no relation) all eight bells were rung in good style. Ken Dowell (Churchwarden) rang tenor, his wife Rosemary (Church Secretary) rang the 2nd, and Christopher Mountford (Sidesman) rang the 7th with David Godsave on the 5th and Simon Tuckett 6th. Peter Clements, having heard the bells ringing, offered himself for instruction. He learnt very quickly and has now given service at Upton for twenty-five years excelling in both call- change and Method ringing.

At 12 noon on 1st January 2000 Upton's Millennium ringers complete with relevant T-shirts rang the Queen's peal on eight followed by a near faultless 60 on thirds in twenty two minutes.

On 8th March 2003 the band rang in the Devon Association Novice competition at Christow and with 21 faults came 2nd.

More new ringers were taught at Upton and the team came 4th at Holcombe Burnell with 33 ¾ faults.

On 14th March 2009, in the same novice competition, Upton won at Lydford with 20 ¾ faults with two novices ringing.

The following year at Rewe with Rachel Tuckett and Rachel Fine as novices Upton beat 18 other teams to win.

In June 2003 I had the good fortune to be invited to become a member of a group of outstanding Method ringers, led and organised by Tim Bayton. We rang quarter peals on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of every month of the year. This association lasted 14 years and in this period I rang quarter peals for 167 different methods in 99 different towers, in which Tim conducted 240 quarter peals for me.

I finally called it a day following difficulty in locating Whitestone Church on a dark winter's night.

In my long ringing career I have rung 34 full peals of 5,000 or more changes, 730 quarter peals, of which I have conducted 247. I have rung 155 quarters on St Marychurch bells, 130 on Babbacombe's bells, 26 at Upton and 24 at Kingsteignton. I have rung in 1035 different towers with 5 or more bells and rung in all the Devon towers - a total of 371. No 370 was Widworthy, a 5 bell tower, and No 371 was Combe Raleigh, a peal augmented to 6 in 2017. I have rung in all the Cornish 8-bell towers except for Pillaton. I have rung all the peals on islands around the UK except Alderney which now has 12 bells, and have single-handed rung 14 bells in excess of 35 cwt. and quarter peals at 48 of the 84 Devon 8-bell peals.

Of the 34 full peals of 5,000 changes some are very special to me, notably:

A peal of 5,000 changes of Plain Bob Royal rung on the back ten at Buckfast Abbey in 1960. This peal in 3hrs 38 minutes was conducted by John Jelley with Bill Simmonds ringing the 41-cwt tenor, and my best-ever pupil Peter Lock on the treble.

A peal of 5,040 Grandsire Doubles rung at Tor Mohun in 1963 in 2hrs 39 minutes to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the Torquay Boys' Grammar School by a band of former and present pupils conducted by myself.

A peal of 5040 Stedman Triples rung at Holy Trinity Buckfastleigh in 2hrs 50 minutes conducted by the master Stedman conductor John Pladdys. This peal was the nearest to perfection that I have ever rung.

A peal of 5076 Grandsire Caters conducted by Michael Mears and rung in 3 hrs 5 minutes on the bells of St Marychurch, Torquay to mark my 80th Birthday. This peal was so enjoyable and the striking throughout was outstanding.

In January 2015 I rang a peal of 5040 Grandsire Doubles at Kelly with Geoff Hill on the treble. This peal conducted by Fergus Stracey was to mark the 150th anniversary of the first six score of Grandsire Doubles rung in the county of Devon and on these bells in 1865. I had called the same peal at Kingskerswell on the 100th anniversary in 1965 with John Kelly ringing the tenor.

In terms of favourite rings, which is always a difficult question to answer given the many splendid rings in our county, I particularly like: Crediton (12), St. Marychurch (10), Tiverton St. Peter's (8), Modbury (6) Bishopsteignton (6), and Sourton (5). I have also rung on some wonderful ten-bell peals outside the county, the best being Westminster Abbey and St. Mary's, Beverley. Also outside the county, the most outstanding 8 is the 27 ½ cwt octave at St. Stephen's, Lower Elswick, Newcastle.

Over the years I have really enjoyed ringing in call-change competitions in my beloved Devonshire. I have rung in The John Scott 10-bell, the Devon Association's 8-bell and Novice competitions, the South Devon 8-bell, the Inter Deanery, The Ipplepen Deanery, The Devon Historic Churches Trust (Beric Bartlett) Festival, The Gilbert Shield, The Brian Phillips Knockout, The East Portlemouth Challenge Bowl and The Stan Blackmore Memorial competition.

During my career I have witnessed and been part of a closer integration between our two organisations, where once they were separate and insular. This closer relationship has been helped by call-change ringers broadening their experience of ringing and learning to ring Methods and equally by Method ringers willing to participate in call-change ringing. The formation of the Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund and the coming together of the two organisations for the Annual Carol Service each year are but two good examples of the strength of the relationship that now exists, and for the benefit of both.

From what I have written I cannot imagine my life without ringing. I have had unending joy in being able to ring both Method and call-changes to a reasonable level and to the best of my ability.

Don Roberts

Newton's Unsung Heroes

The following is reproduced from the local Newton St Cyres magazine, 'Newton Wonder'...

Our series on Newton St Cyres volunteers working behind the scenes continues with a trip up to the top of St Cyr and St Julitta to meet the church's volunteer bell ringers. And a motley group of enthusiasts they are too. Words and pictures by Ann Quon Cordingley.

It's Monday evening and the sound of church bells echoes across the rooftops of Newton St Cyres. Up in the church bell tower, Mark Bertam is calling out to eight bell ringers who are pulling on lengths of thick rope.

"One to two, one to four, three to two," Mark shouts. It is practice night and Mark, the session's group leader, is calling out the changes. "Each bell has a number, and you call two bells that follow each other. There are lots of combinations of peals," he says.

Normally, Monday night practices are held in Stoke Canon, where Mark is the tower captain, but tonight they are in Newton St Cyres. "This is the most accessible tower where we don't have to go up a small spiral staircase to get to the room where we ring," Mark says.

There are about 4,000 churches with bells in Britain, and of these, 400 are in Devon alone. "We have more churches with bells than any other county in the country," says Mark. Bell ringers, called campanologists, number about 40,000 throughout the country.

Tonight's group is a motley gathering of enthusiasts who come



Halcyon Pughe

Halcyon Pughe is one of the newcomers. "I'm an L-plate learner and have been learning for about two months," she says. A retired nurse and midwife who moved to Newton St Cyres from Exeter two years ago, she breeds, shows and judges wirehaired dachshunds as a hobby. She joined the group at the behest of a very persuasive Mary Quicke. "She said, 'you would love to learn to ring bells, wouldn't you?' and I said, 'as long as I don't have to be musical, that's fine. And now I love it, just love it, it's great.'"

Simon Tempest Brown is also new to bell ringing and a

Quicke recruit. "I was a chorister for most of my childhood, so bell ringing was never something I considered doing," says Simon, who lives in Thorverton and is studying environmental science. "I'm kind of hooked really. Bell ringing is under threat because people are no longer taking it up as a hobby. It's one of those aspects of country life that I want to see continue."

For Juliet Bell, who supports families with young children who are struggling to cope, it is the history of bell ringing that appeals. "It's a tradition that's been pretty much unchanged for centuries," she says. "We are doing something that has been going on for 600 years."

"Some of the bells we ring are centuries old," says Jenny Codling who has been ringing bells for over 20 years and is tower vice-captain at Tedburn St Mary, where she lives. She is partner to Mark and works as an accounts manager in Exeter.

At Stoke Canon, the bells date back to as early as 1641, while Newton St Cyres' are from as early as 1733. "In St Petrocks in Exeter they are 500 to 600 years old, and you can still ring them," says Mark.

Church bells are described as the soundtrack of historic and momentous occasions, calling people to worship, to celebrate, to wed, to mourn, to battle, and in times of crisis, to come together.

"When my mother and sister-in-law died, I was just so happy to be able to come in and toll the bell," says Mary Quicke. "When the Duke of Edinburgh died, I came in and tolled the bell 99 times. I think it's great that I can make that contribution to the community. And there's the mischievous thing of naffing off the atheists. If people are really anti-church and think the bells are horrible, that just amuses me."

Church bells are associated with weddings. At Newton St Cyres, if the wedding is for a couple the church doesn't know, then there will be a fee, which is used for the upkeep of the bells, not for the bellringers, who are volunteers. "We have to make sure the bells are in a fit state to be rung, so we do a bit of bell maintenance, or what I call bell yoga," says Mary.



Mary Quicke

condition and, occasionally, find new recruits.

A few in the group have just started, while others, like Mark, have been ringing for most of their lives. "I have been doing this for 45-plus years," he says. "I started when I was 11 or 12 years old. Nobody in my family was a ringer, only me. There was an advert in the local church magazine and I turned up. I haven't stopped since."

Newton St Cyres - continued from page 12

Bell ringing has also become a way of socialising and bringing people together. "I love that side of it," says Jenny. "We all enjoy it and we all enjoy socialising and getting together. After 20 years or so, it's become my way of life. I just look forward to ringing bells wherever I can."

When lockdown forced the closure of churches, bell ringing and practice came to a halt. But with lockdown lifted, things are picking up. "We're getting back into it, practicing and learning again," says Mary. It may take some time, but she is determined to get back to the pre-Covid schedule. "My aim is to get the bells rung for the four Sundays of the month at Newton St Cyres, Thorverton, Brampford Speke and Stoke Canon," she said.

Mary started learning the art of bell ringing at the age of 12 at the parish church. "The vicar was the very distinguished bell ringer, John G M Scott, who has written textbooks about Devon bells. Bell ringing was a very male thing back then and he was very keen his daughter, Rebecca, should do it. So I started learning with her. I stopped learning at the age of 15 because I was a very stropky teenager. But I came back to it 43 years later."

That's because Pita Burt, the secretary of the parish church, got talking to her about the bells. That inspired her. "There was this extraordinarily ancient craft which has been going on pretty much in the same way since the 15th century. It's sociable and requires a minimum level of musicality. It's quite physical which is enjoyable, and it's got its intellectual bit. It's an ancient craft that must not die on my watch."

In the old days, all towers would have their own group of bell ringers. But with not enough ringers to go around, they started ringing in other churches. Newton St Cyres is part of the Netherexe parishes, a community of 10 churches in the Diocese of Exeter, that serves Brampford Speke, Cadbury, Newton St Cyres, Rewe with Netherexe, Stoke Canon with Huxham, Thorverton and Upton Pyne.

While bell ringers from Netherexe parishes will ring at each other's churches, they also ring outside the group and help each other out. "Chris Roe comes from Cadeleigh, which is not part of Netherexe, so I help him at Cadeleigh and he helps me out," says Mary.

"If there is a special occasion like a wedding, then every member of that tower who can ring will, and if they can't, they will get someone from a neighbouring tower to help out," says Chris Roe, who runs an agricultural contracting business and is the tower captain in Cadeleigh.

He is also proof that you don't have to have a musical touch to ring bells. "I'm not musical but I've always wanted to play a



Jenny Codling



Mark Bertram

musical instrument – this is the nearest I can get to doing it," said Chris. "What I find most satisfying is hearing the bells ringing well and you can hear them hum. It's a lovely, lovely sound. And when it goes wrong, it's horrible."

Jenny and Mark don't play any instruments either. "You learn technique. It's repetition," says Mark. Both keen bell ringers, they have taken several bell ringing courses and share their knowledge with others.

There are different styles of bell ringing, with the most common being 'rounds', where bells are rung repeatedly in sequence, and 'call changes', where bells are called by a leader to ring in a different order. Like scones, jam and clotted cream, Devon has its own style of call changes. "It's called Devon call changes, which is unique to Devon and we are very good at it," says Mark.

"We learn patterns," says Jenny. "That's how we ring the bells. We usually have a caller who will call where the bells have got to go – behind each other or in front of each other."

To keep things interesting, the group came up with a call change called 'vegetable stew', where each bell is named after a vegetable instead of a number. "Number one might be potato, number two might be tomato. And it makes you concentrate, so rather than getting used to the numbers, we call it differently. It makes it fun, and if it goes wrong, that's a vegetable stew," says Mark.

On average, with practice once a week, it takes about six months to learn the basics and ring in a group. "You've got to take the bell up, then you've got to control it, then rest it and then there are things like bringing the bell down so that it's down at rest," says Halcyon. "So all those things we've got to achieve before we can be included as part of a group."

"We just let everyone take their own time," says Jenny. "There is no pressure. We aren't forcing people to be able to ring quickly. Everyone goes at their own pace. Some people learn a lot quicker, some people take ages, but it really doesn't matter. Simon was saying he hopes to be ringing by Christmas and he probably will, as will Halcyon and Juliet."

While you don't have to be musical, bell ringing is physically demanding. "You need upper body strength, and you need technique and rhythm," says Halcyon. The bells at NSC weigh anywhere from a quarter to two thirds of a ton, so having some strength does help. But technique is what really counts. "You are controlling a massively heavy bell and it's a technique that I think as learners you begin to appreciate. It's mastering that, and then you get to a stage where you get to be included in a group, and that is absolutely wonderful."



Back Row Mark Bertram

Second Row L-R Juliet Bell, Simon Tempest Brown, Ed Sanders, Eric Henley, Sandy Harrison, Jenny Codling, Russ Cummings

Front Row L-R Sheila Jefferies, Mary Quicke, Halcyon Pughe, Colin Prentice, Chris Roe

Not all bells sound the same, according to Eric Henley who lives in St Thomas and is a bell ringer of 51 years, "some bells are easier to ring." "It's funny, but if the bells are heavier, say over a ton, they are actually easier to ring than lighter bells. Not because of the weight but because they are more reliable in the way the rope comes down."

You don't have to be religious to be a bell ringer. "It's a group of people who gather and come and do it for fun," says Mark. "There is a religious aspect to it, of course, but you don't have to be religious. In fact, many bell ringers who ring on Sundays don't stay for the service and slip out the back door."

If anything, bell ringers have a reputation for having fun and being mischievous, and this group is no exception. They enjoy each other's company and go on outings together, as well as with other groups. On one outing, they took the steam engine from Buckfastleigh to Totnes. "We got on the train at Buckfastleigh and went to Totnes and rang the bells there. Then we came back to Staverton and rang the bells there and then back to Buckfastleigh on the steam train and rang the bells at the church there. It was wonderful," says Jenny.

It seems you are never too old to be a bell ringer. One-time Newton St Cyres resident Reg Bray was famous for ringing

until the age of 102, having learned the art during the First World War. He appeared in the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest active bell ringer, and longest serving ringer at any tower for more than 90 years.

Will any in the current group be ringing until Reg's ripe old age? "This is my life," says Mark. "I wouldn't know what to do if I didn't have this. I will be doing this until I die."

Says Mary: "What I really want is not to be the last captain of this tower, and that we aren't the last generation of bell ringers."

Ann Quon Cordingley

New bell ropes for St. Andrew's Chardstock



L-R Rikki Johnston, Derrick Goff (Tower Captain)

After three years since the original decision was taken, we have at last hung a new set of bell ropes. These were purchased from Malcolm Brown Bellropes of Chedworth, Gloucester. We were able to achieve this as a result of a fund raising event which took place at Chardstock Community Hall on Friday 10th November 2018.

The old ropes were beyond repair, so on the morning of Tuesday 7th December 2021 four of us consisting of; Tower Captain Derrick Goff, Susan Bray, Rikki Johnston and Jason Hill met at St. Andrew's Church on what was a rather stormy day (storm Barra had just arrived!). A baby monitor was used during the operation to remove the old ropes and install the new ones. This enabled those working in the bell chamber to be kept in touch with the person in the ringing chamber who was attaching the new ropes. The wind and rain from storm



Jason Hill

Barra blowing through the louvers was quite deafening and at the same time we all got rather wet.

On Sunday 19th December 2021 at St. Andrew's Church, an evening service of Christmas readings with carols took place which included the blessing of the new bell ropes. Tower Captain, Derrick Goff gave a reading. The Reverend Geoffrey Walsh then gave a short talk on bells and their

relationship, before proceeding to the back of the church to the ringing chamber accompanied by some of the ringers. At this point the congregation turned to face the back of the church. At the blessing each bell was chimed and then the carol "Ding Dong Merrily on High" was heartily sung.

We are very grateful to The Reverend Geoffrey Walsh for taking the service and for blessing the new ropes; it was a very special moment. We are also grateful to everyone who gave their support, thus enabling us to continue to ring the bells of St. Andrew's for many years to come.

Susan Bray

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