

St Albans District Newsletter

Volume 22 Issue 2 – October 2017

Ringling for the St Albans International Organ Festival

By Alison Evans, St Michael's, St Albans

The St Albans International Organ Festival has been running since 1963, annually for the first three years and every two years thereafter. It was unusual when it was launched, in that it combined organ competitions with concerts featuring different instruments and other kinds of music, with the aim of attracting larger audiences and demonstrating the potential of the organ as a musical instrument in its own right.

This year, one of the events that did not involve organ playing was a lecture on “The Bell Tower and its Inhabitants in the Mediaeval Imagination”, given in St Michael's church by Professor Christopher Page, an academic at the University of Cambridge. The Director of Music at St Michael's, who is also a Director of the Organ Festival, asked if it would be possible for there to be ringing for about half an hour immediately before the lecture. As it was a Friday afternoon, I had to enlist the support of ringers from other local bands so a big thank you goes to everyone who helped.



L-R: Janet Penney, David Hodgskin, Alison Evans, Ann Evans, Hilary Heine. Missing: Neil Evans.
Photo by Steve Hamill

Professor Page was an entertaining speaker and regaled us with a host of facts and observations. Perhaps the most obvious was that the technology of bells is ancient, involving the traditional materials of wood, metal, ropes and wheels, all made to work together by human effort. When you compare it with cathedral building or shipbuilding in which such components have largely been superseded as a result of technological advances, it is remarkable that it is still in use today. Furthermore, some of our oldest musical instruments are bells, such as those of St Bartholomew's

in London's Smithfield, which date back to before the Reformation. The nursery rhyme, Oranges and Lemons, first appeared in print in 1744 but may be much older, as most of the London rings of bells it mentions are mediaeval in origin.

He noted that bells have been used for centuries to attract attention or as warnings. For example, in the Middle Ages, lepers used to ring handbells when begging, while the Bayeux Tapestry shows handbells being rung as Edward the Confessor's funeral procession wound its way to Westminster Abbey.



Image on web site of Ulrich Harsh

In fact, life then was governed by bells, especially for members of religious institutions who would be called to various offices during the day, but even those outside would have been used to hearing bells as there were so many churches. For travellers in those times, when towns and villages were fewer and farther between, the sound of bells could often be the first indication that they were approaching a settlement. This was the case not just in England but throughout Western Europe, as bells were not adopted in eastern churches until the later Middle Ages, probably under the influence of the Crusaders. Thus, as you travelled further east, bell towers gave way to minarets and the change in soundscape signified that you were leaving Christendom.

Although we know bells to be inanimate objects, to the mediaeval mind they were like people, reflected in the fact that parts of the bell were named for parts of the human body: lip, mouth, tongue, waist, shoulder. The bells themselves were also given names. Before being put to use, they were anointed, much as a baby was baptised or a priest ordained. I know that blessings and anointing of new rings of bells are still carried out today but I had never considered how far back this tradition might stretch. It is strange to us now but bells were considered capable of committing wrongdoing and the writings of an English scholar in 1217 record that if by any chance a bell should fall and kill a man, it would be filled with thorns as a sort of penance and not used for ringing for seven years. In exceptional circumstances, bells were even said to ring themselves...

Because of the characteristics bells were considered to have, there were restrictions on who could have them. Several examples were quoted, including that, in 1293, lepers just up the road in Dunstable acquired a bell bigger than they were entitled to so the Prior confiscated it and only gave it back when they agreed to limitations on its use.

All too soon, it was over. I found the talk informative and thought-provoking, casting a different light on some aspects of one of my favourite activities. The lecture was well-attended and I hope that the performance beforehand was a good way of raising awareness of bell ringing.

FIRST QUARTER INSIDE

Sandridge, St Leonard

Sunday, 24 September 2017 in 42 minutes (6–0–18 in B ♭)

1260 Plain Bob Doubles

1. Christine Nutton
2. Callum Hayes
3. A Trevor Hawkins
4. Dianne Crowder
5. Vivian Nutton (C)
6. Richard Hayes

First quarter inside 2

Well done Callum!

RUBY WEDDING

A peal and a quarter peal were arranged and rung as a ruby wedding anniversary compliment to Judith and Ron Titmus:

Kimpton SS Peter and Paul

Sunday, 3 September 2017 (10-2-15 in G)

1372 Plain Bob Triples

1. Dianne E Crowder
2. Judith E Titmus
3. Susan J Newman
4. Kevin Horan
5. Keith Lewin
6. Vivian Nutton
7. Robert J Crocker (C)
8. Ron E Titmus

Lemsford St John the Evangelist

Sunday 27 August 2017 in 2h 17 (3-2-4 in E ♭)

5040 Doubles (6 m)

2 extents Grandsire; 8 extents each: St Simon's B, St Martin's B, St Osmond B, Eynesbury B and Plain Bob

1. David A Cornwall
2. Judith E Titmus
3. Vivian Nutton
4. Julia Pentelow
5. Robert J Crocker (C)
6. Ron E Titmus

Congratulations Ron and Judith!

A FUTURE RINGER?

By Charles Pocock

There is some lovely news from Harpenden. Our two fairly recent arrivals - Charles and Rachael Herriott - have just had their own arrival on 14th Sept namely Constance Elizabeth Herriott (Connie) at 9 lbs 9 oz. We wish them every happiness with their new baby.

SEPTEMBER DISTRICT MEETING

By Janet Penney

On the morning of Saturday 16th September, the St Albans Cathedral bell ringers welcomed both the Mayor of St Albans, Councillor Iqbal Zia and the St Albans District ringers to the Cathedral belfry.

Many bell ringers from St Albans and the surrounding area, and, some from as far away as Oxfordshire, came together for the morning to practise change ringing on the Abbey's fine ring of 12 bells under the leadership of the District Ringing Master Richard Sales. Also present were The Hertford County Association of Change Ringers president Don Salisbury and the District Secretary Vivian Nutton.

The Cathedral is fortunate in having a 'silent training bell' and the Mayor was persuaded to have a try with tuition given by the Cathedral Ringing Master, Stephen Penney and the Young at Herts Manager, Jen Johnson.

After coffee and cake the ringing ended at 12 noon and the Mayor then climbed higher up the tower to see the bells and enjoy the view from the tower roof.



MAM SODHAIL

I'm always looking for articles for the newsletter and whilst browsing Bellboard for interesting/notable peals or quarter peals, I came across one at St Peter's rung on 20 July with the heading of **1280 Mam Sodhail Delight Royal**. There was me thinking that perhaps some ringers had been walking up Mam Sodhail - a mountain (or more correctly a Munro) in Scotland - and had rung a quarter on their return to mark the occasion and I thought that there has to be a story here.... So I contacted Ann Evans and received this reply:

Hi Rob

Sorry to say there's no story behind Mam Sodhail. Simply chosen for the most interesting of the feasible delight royal methods beginning with M!

Best wishes,

Ann

Sent from my iPad

St Albans, St Peter

Thursday, 20 July 2017 in 48 mins (24-0-3 in E b)

1280 Mam Sodhail Delight Royal

1. Julie Grimwade
2. Cameron White-Spunner
3. Alan M Shepherd
4. Matthew R Johnson
5. Ann Evans
6. Claire C Nicholson
7. Andrew M Reeve
8. Stephen W Penney (C)
9. Richard A Horne
10. Richard Sales



Articles for the Newsletter – always welcome!

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