

St Albans District Newsletter

Volume 25 Issue 1 – April 2020

The Silent District

By Vivian Nutton

The outbreak of coronavirus has prompted the first shut-down of ringing since the Second World War. Sunday ringing, practices, meetings and the Association AGM in April have had to be cancelled, and any prediction for when we can start again is vague at best. If the present plans of the Government work, then it may be in May, but there are those who think that the virus will be with us for many months to come until some form of vaccination can be shown to work. Meanwhile, some towers have been asked to chime a bell or two on Sunday even if there is no service, just as a reminder that the Church is still open.

We do ring in close proximity to others and some towers I have noted already spray their ropes to avoid any contagion, and handwashing will be recommended even after we start ringing again.



Daily Mail 1939

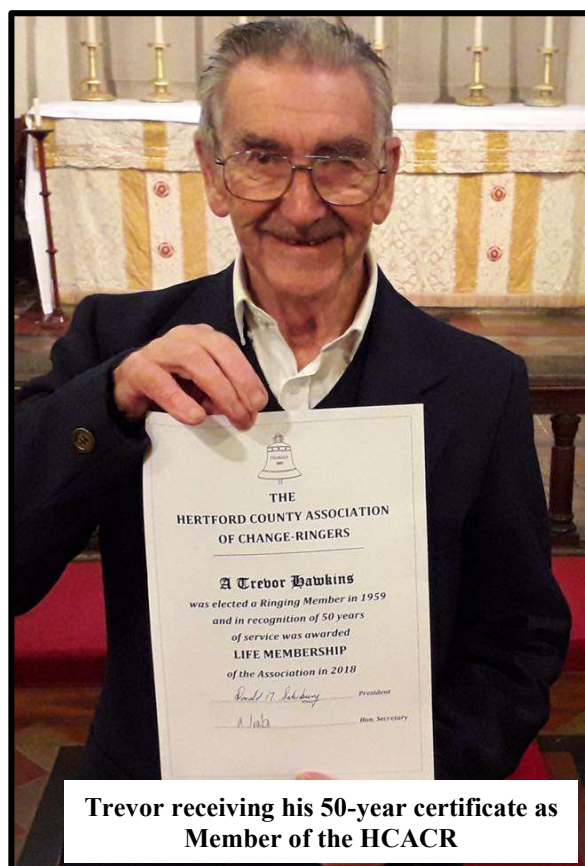
When we do, we have an opportunity to gain some new recruits by emphasising the new start, as in 1943. As District Secretary, I shall try and keep members and local secretaries up-to-date with any suggestions that come from the Association or the Central Council. Copies of the 2019 Annual Report should have been available at the cancelled Hatfield meeting. If and when I get them, I shall try to pass them on to Tower Secretaries or other members, always assuming that I can reach them during the periods of healthy exercise that we senior citizens may be allowed in any lock-down.

Trevor Hawkins at 90

By Vivian Nutton

The Sandridge congregation on Sunday, March 15, were surprised to be told that the organist and long-serving ringer Trevor Hawkins had celebrated his 90th birthday during the previous week. After school in Hastings and then in St Albans, he spent his working life in electronics with Marconi. He learned to ring at Sandridge during his first stint as organist, ringing his first quarter in 1960, and several peals with Fred Ellis of Wheathampstead before being elected a College Youth in 1964. He left for a while to be organist at St Stephen's, but returned in the mid-1970s and has continued to play and ring at Sandridge ever since. His musical achievements, which still include running a hand-chime group in St Albans and playing the recorder in an early music group, are all the more remarkable since he has been severely deaf since birth. He still continues with his electronics, repairing electronic organs in churches as far away as Yorkshire, and he carries out a considerable amount of charitable work on behalf of the deaf in Hertfordshire.

He has taught very many to ring, and continues to be a constant help to beginners, providing them with printouts and advice on basic methods, both at Sandridge and at Lemsford, where, until this last winter made evening driving difficult, he was a regular attender at practices. It was thus appropriate that at the end of the Monday practice there on March 16th, two Sandridge ringers joined four from Lemsford, including one of Trevor's 'learners', to ring a well struck celebratory quarter for him of 1260 Plain Bob Doubles.



Trevor receiving his 50-year certificate as Member of the HCACR

Lemsford, St John the Evangelist

Monday, 16 March 2020 (3–2–4 in Eb)

1260 Plain Bob Doubles

1. Christine Nutton
2. Darcey Palmer
3. Robert J Crocker
4. Judith Titmus
5. Vivian Nutton (C)
6. Ron Titmus

A ninetieth birthday compliment to A. Trevor Hawkins, organist and ringer at Sandridge, and a regular supporter of Lemsford practices.

It was fortunate that we decided to ring the Quarter Peal for Trevor after practice and not wait until the following weekend, as the advice from the Central Council of Church Bellringers that all ringing should cease, was announced the following day on Tuesday, 17th March. The bells will now remain silent until the Coronavirus pandemic is over.

Essendon is now more visual

By Colin Rees

Essendon ringers have installed TV into the ringing chamber. The reason was not that ringing had become boring, far from it. The installation is intended so visitors and learners will now be able to see the fine bells swinging in perfect synchronicity as they always do.

The job was achieved by their ever-talented ringing master, John J Ford who purloined the help of an electrically knowledgeable churchwarden Paul Wombwell and others who worked so hard to achieve the various tasks. Perhaps the most risky was perching the ladder on the bell frame and ascending, in order to screw the camera in and angle it correctly which takes 3 hands and great courage. This was done by one ringer during one of the recent storms with freezing winds blowing through the slats of the noise prevention, meaning hands froze so fast, only 6 of the 8 bells are in fine view. It is hoped that come the summer, if we are not all incarcerated on lockdown hibernation, we might try some alternative positions to improve matters, so this is work in progress. It was important not to disturb the bats as well but now, at least, we have superb pictures of the bells doing what they do and John's huge amount of work has given Essendon tower a definitive visual boost.

It's a great shame the tower is now closed like most and no one will watch our TV for goodness knows how many months. Still, the innovation is there when we are allowed back. Stay safe.

Kimpton Outing – 14 March 2020

By Rob Goss

After a drizzly drive up the M1, we arrived at our first tower Cosgrove in Northamptonshire a few miles north of Milton Keynes. By the time we arrived, the rain had stopped and it remained dry and almost sunny the rest of the morning.



After Cosgrove we drove about 10 miles north west up Watling Street to Easton Neston. The church is situated next to Easton Neston stately home and so we had to drive through the park to reach the church. We just got a glimpse of the fine Jacobean house through a gap in the tall hedge. The house was designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor who was a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren and was completed around 1700. It has never been open to the public and until 2005 had been owned by the Hesketh family but they were struggling with the annual maintenance. 'In a good year, the estate loses £500,000 and in a bad year it could lose £1.5m,' Lord Hesketh said when the sale was announced. In 2005, he tried to sell the whole estate which included Towcester racecourse but, in the

The bells went very well although were very quiet in the Ringing Chamber. What a difference when listened to outside the church! The bells were noisy and 'shouted' at you but inside they were a delight to ring. Twelve of us had gathered for this half-day outing and for Rachel this was the first time she'd rung on any bell away from her home tower.



end, the house and surrounding land was sold to Leon Max a Russian oligarch and the racecourse sold separately.

Easton Neston's eight bells are a ground floor ring accessed through their own door at the foot of the tower. We rang a number of methods but the half-course of Yorkshire Surprise Major came to grief about a lead before the end.



On leaving the tower we drove past a field full of sheep and one little lamb had managed to crawl under the fence and was running down the single-track road unable to find its way back. With 'shepherding' help from Mary and Ron, Al Smith managed to pick it up and deliver it back into the field where it ran gratefully back to Mum.

The final tower was Roade. The six ropes here came down in the chancel crossing between the choir pews. These bells went very well although rope positioning was not ideal as you have to lean back against the pew to be able to ring.

We rang rounds and call changes, Plain Bob and a course of London Surprise Minor.

Back to Cosgrove where the Barley Mow served an excellent lunch.



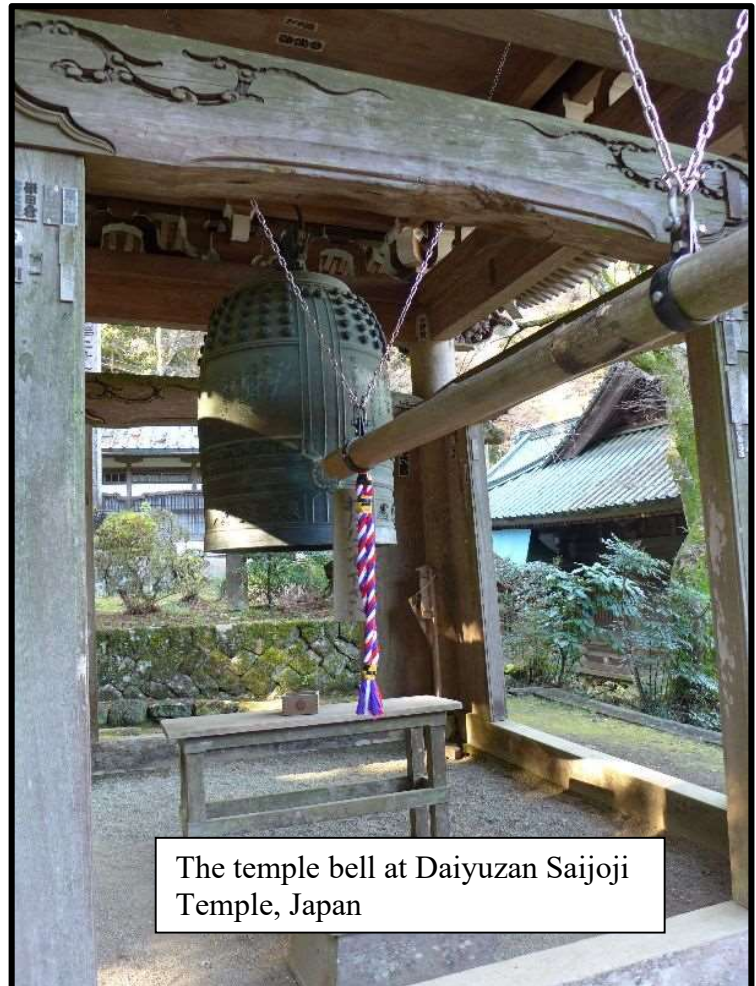
From left: Susan Hammond, Dianne Crowder, Christine Nutton, Gordon Hammond, Keith Lewin, Ron Titmus, Rachel Wallace, Vivian Nutton, Al Smith, Rob Goss, Judith Titmus, Mary Goss

Spotted in Asia – A Selection of Bells

By Lucy Hornberger

Our family was lucky enough to enjoy an extended trip to Asia in December, and as ringers we of course kept a keen eye out for bells. We didn't find many, but those we did find were rather interesting.

Our first stop was Japan where large bronze bells, usually hanging in an open-sided wooden pavilion, are a fairly common feature of larger Buddhist temples. Japanese bells don't have a clapper, but are struck by swinging a wooden log or beam at the bell. Traditionally temple bells were rung multiple times a day to mark time for parishioners and to call monks to prayer. Like church bells, they would also be used to alert people to fire, typhoons or attack. These days they are much more rarely heard, however New Year's Eve is an exception. In the midnight *Joyanokane* ceremony temple bells are struck 108 times and parishioners queue up to get a chance to ring one of the strikes. Japanese Buddhism recognises 108 earthly temptations, so each strike is believed to purge the world (at least for a while) of one temptation, thus allowing people to start the year in a purified state.



The temple bell at Daiyuzan Saijoji Temple, Japan

We came across our first bell in the grounds of Daiyuzan Saijoji, a 14th century Zen Buddhist temple in the cedar-forested hills 50 miles south-west of Tokyo. It was very peaceful when we were there, but remote though it is, the temple apparently attracts around 100,000 visitors over the New Year period! We couldn't find an answer to how old this bell is, but considering the oldest functioning bell in Japan was cast in 698AD, it could well date to the temple's foundation. Temple bells are shown great respect and the person striking them, whether priest, monk or lay person, will always bow to the bell first. The table below the bell holds a small offering box for coins. We were struck by the similarity (no doubt entirely coincidental!) of the strap to a sally!



**A bell used for striking the hours in 17th century Tokyo
(with Toby and Oscar, ringers at St Etheldreda's, Hatfield, for scale)**

Back in Tokyo and visiting the massive Edo-Tokyo Museum, we found an impressive secular time-keeping bell. It was originally located at the Shogun's castle in Tokyo, but in the early 17th century it was relocated to the centre of the city to function as a district time-keeping bell. One family of professional bell ringers was put in charge of striking it every hour (presumably both day and night), and the family had the right to levy a monthly 'bell usage tax' on every residence within hearing distance of the bell. The tax was approximately equivalent to the price of a bowl of noodles, so perhaps £4-£5 in modern money. Presumably this provided a relatively good living for the bell ringing family. Did the local residents resent the tax? Or did they see it as a useful service? And how did the ringers measure the hours in order to strike them correctly - perhaps with an hourglass?



The Santo Niño Basilica and bell tower, Cebu City, Philippines.

and the former central bell of the bell tower, now relegated to ground level.



Our next stop was the Philippines where we visited Cebu City, site of Ferdinand Magellan's ill-fated arrival in the Philippines in 1521. In 1565, just behind the spot where Magellan came ashore, the Portuguese founded what is now the oldest church in the Philippines, the Santo Niño Basilica. Outside the basilica we came across this bell, which dates to 1750, and has a rather sad story. This biggest, heaviest and most important of the basilica's bells hung (allegedly attached with a combination of metal wires and wild vines!) for several centuries at the centre of the basilica's belfry, surrounded by five or six smaller and later (19th and 20th century) bells. While the other bells were mounted to turn, this central bell was considered too heavy and so it was the clapper that swung, not the bell. The 2013 Bohol earthquake (magnitude 7.2) demolished the bell tower, and whereas it has now been rebuilt and some of the other bells restored and rehung, this great bell is no longer ringable and has been relegated to ground level.

Finally, Java, Indonesia and possibly our favourite bell of the trip – a neighbourhood bell cut from, we think, an old gas canister! It was hanging on a frame beside a bus stop-like structure labelled Pos Kamling (Security Post). We saw lots of these security posts around Java – they seem to function as local information and rubbish collection points – but only here did we see a bell. Presumably the bell

is to sound the alarm in case of fire or some other disaster? It probably wouldn't be much use, as not only would it not be very loud, it also had a large crack.



The Pos Kamling (Security Post) with makeshift bell, Banyuwangi, Java.



A close up of the bell

100th peal at Lemsford + 5,000 peals for Robert (Bob) Crocker

By Adam Crocker

100th peal on the bells at Lemsford



The church of St. John the Evangelist, Lemsford was built in 1859 although the church contained only a single bell until the current ring of six bells was installed in 1977. The first peal was rung on the bells on Tuesday 27th December 1977 and was conducted by Geoffrey Dodds who was instrumental in the installation of the ring, as well as being a loyal supporter of the tower for the rest of his life. A total of 164 different ringers have taken part in the 100 peals rung at Lemsford, led by Robert Crocker (67 peals), Adam Crocker (40 peals) and Judith Titmus

(37 peals), all of whom are or have been regular Sunday service ringers here. As the bells are light and easy to handle, it perhaps isn't surprising that seven people have rung their first peal at Lemsford, although it may surprise you to know that Bernard Taylor and Robert Crocker have both rung *two* bells to a peal at Lemsford. Peals have been rung at Lemsford to mark numerous special occasions: births, deaths, wedding anniversaries, royal occasions, to welcome new vicars and to wish retiring vicars well. There is some great continuity to some of the footnotes: a peal was rung to mark the birth of Oliver Titmus (to Judith and Ron) in 1986 and 32 years later a peal was rung to celebrate the birth of Oliver's first child, Alma. Peals have also been rung for the 70th, 75th and 80th birthdays of former Tower Captain, Roger Brown. The next instalment must be due!

Robert's 5,000th peal

On 1st March 2020, Robert became the 13th person to ring 5,000 peals. His first peal was Plain Bob Doubles at Longparish (in his native Hampshire) on 8th June 1966. Peal ringing is a team effort, and Robert has rung peals with 1,884 different ringers, including 106 first pealers. Robert has been a loyal member of the band at Lemsford since 1998 and rang his 1,000th peal as conductor there on Saturday 2nd March 2019, so it was an appropriate tower at which to ring this landmark peal. Robert has called peals on all 366 days of the year and is the only person to have rung more than 100 peals at each stage from Doubles to Maximus.



Peal band in order Treble to Tenor, Left to Right:
Judith E Titmus, Colin M Turner, Adam R Crocker, Robert J
Crocker, Nicola J Turner, Peter G C Ellis

As the band descended the tower steps, they were greeted by members of the local bands of Kimpton, Sandridge, Lemsford, Wheathampstead and Hatfield, and the party made its way to The Sun at Lemsford for refreshment, including a delicious cake beautifully decorated for the occasion.



Lemsford, Hertfordshire

St John the Evangelist

Sunday, 1 March 2020 in 2h 23 (3–2–4 in Eb)

5040 Surprise Minor (10m)

1. London, 2. Chester, Munden, 3. York, 4. Westminster, Allendale, 5. Beverley, Surfleet, 6. Norwich, 7. Cambridge

1. Judith E Titmus
2. Colin M Turner
3. Adam R Crocker
4. Robert J Crocker (C)
5. Nicola J Turner
6. Peter G C Ellis

Robert's 5,000th true peal and the 100th peal on the bells.

Robert's 1,000th Quarter peal

Lemsford, Hertfordshire

St John the Evangelist

Sunday, 15 March 2020 (3–2–4 in Eb)

1320 Plain Bob Doubles

1. Laura J Hill
2. Darcey Palmer
3. Judith E Titmus
4. Bernard P Quinn
5. Robert J Crocker (C)
6. Ron E Titmus



First quarter inside: 4

News from Lemsford

By Judith Titmus

Our three enthusiastic young learners, Darcey, Fearne and Blake Palmer are making extremely good progress – Darcey has rung three Quarter Peals of Bob Doubles inside and Fearne and Blake plain hunt the treble to Bob Doubles. We have a regular attendance of ringers from other towers which means we have stability to enable our learners to progress. Some of our other visitors also benefit as they are useful to us so get a lot of ringing!

News from St Helen's Wheathampstead

By Ben Quinn



Things were just beginning to look up.

We were nominated for an award by WDPS (Wheathampstead and District Preservation Society) and have a certificate to prove that we're officially 'preserving a traditional art in the village'. (Picture shows our Tower Captain Ben Quinn with our certificate. Since we haven't got a tower in which to display it, this is probably the first and last time we'll see it – another disadvantage of ringing from the floor.)

And, we've also got several learners at various stages – plus James Hawken (also pictured) who's recently started ringing on a Sunday. He started learning last October for his Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award, which makes him one of our quickest learners. But it meant that finally, once again we were able (on most Sundays) to ring on six. (We'd been getting jolly good at ringing without a tenor behind, and had almost got used to it sounding a bit odd.)

Funny how you so often do not realise when you're doing something for the last time. Hopefully Sunday's pre-service ring was only the last time 'for the duration' and ringing will eventually resume. (Will we have to disinfect the ropes? Has anyone ever washed their sallies??) But presumably (sobering thought) for some ringers it will indeed have been their final ring. We're not renowned for our youthfulness after all.

We in St Helen's are looking forward to the day when the bells ring out again to celebrate whatever the world is going to look like when these apocalyptic times are over. We hope that all of us will be there for that ring. And while I'm thinking positively of a bright future, I'm also seeing lots of new young people flocking to learn our traditional art. (You can't stop me dreaming!)

Stay safe. Be well.



News from St Stephens St Albans

By Alison Macfarlane

Following advice from the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers and the decision by St Stephen with St Julian to cancel all church services and most other activities until further notice, the practices arranged at St Stephen's are cancelled and no further practices will be arranged until further notice. This is particularly disappointing for the new St Stephen's band given that we were at last on the route to re-establishing ringing at St Stephen's, although still at the early stages. Thanks to the ringers from Sandridge, St Peter's and Radlett who have been teaching our new ringers, they and our returner are making good progress. Thanks also to everyone else who has come to help us. Let's look forward to the day when we can start ringing again.

Numerical Quiz from St Peter's St Albans

By Ann Evans

Multiply minimus by maximus then add triples and minor and doubles. Multiply the result by royal² and divide by singles. Change the order of your answer to queens. What is the significance of the result?

If you need a bit of help, check out some technical ringing terms here: <http://ringingforengland.co.uk/all-bells/technical-terms/>

Newsletter Celebrates 25 Years!

This Newsletter is now in its 25th year. Does anyone have Volume 1, Issue 1 from 1995?

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