

# St Albans District Newsletter

Volume 25 Issue 2 – September 2020

## **Ring for VE and VJ Day**

By Vivian Nutton

VE Day on May 8 should have been commemorated with nationwide ringing at 11, but Covid 19 put an end to these plans. Churches were also in lockdown, but permission was given for some ringing to take place. Our vicar gave permission for a bell to be rung, subsequently extended to Christine and myself as forming a bubble. We timed our ringing to begin just after the two minutes silence, rang two bells up, five minutes rounds, and then down again. We had lots of favourable comments from Sandridge inhabitants and several local councillors, who remarked how much they had missed the sound of the bells. By the time VJ Day came round on August 15 the restrictions had been lifted slightly and we were allowed to ring three suitably distanced bells. Three senior ringers, Trevor Hawkins, myself and Christine, rang 1, 3 and 6, for fifteen minutes, suitably masked, again to the delight of the village. We later discovered that our ringing could be heard three quarters of a mile away by a group of local councillors and veterans who had gathered on the Jersey Farm Woodland Park to lay flowers at the city's memorial to the Burma Star Association. They found it very moving to hear the bells once again immediately at the end of their commemoration.

The Covid restrictions are gradually being lifted, and we rang four before an outdoor service on Sunday August 16. We shall be doing this again in September when it is expected that services will resume normally. If restrictions are eased further to allow a one metre distance between ringers, we may be able to ring five bells, but ringing the full six will not be possible for a while yet, nor will practices. It is particularly frustrating as we have one learner wanting to start, and before lockdown we're also training three ringers for St Stephen's.

## **Ringling during the Pandemic**

By Alison Evans

The last ringing of the St Michael's bells was for the morning service on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> March and when the Archbishops announced the following day that all public church services would be suspended, the vicar asked us to stop all ringing with immediate effect until further notice. I imagine the experience was similar in most, if not all, other parishes.

The next Sunday, the vicar and the curate recorded a simple Communion service which they posted on YouTube but following the announcement of quarantine restrictions on 23rd March, when it became clear that the situation would not be returning to normal for an extended period, they began to pull together a team to produce weekly online services. To minimise the risk of anything going wrong, they opted to pre-record everything rather than to go for live streaming, and wherever possible, they were keen to encourage participation by the groups who normally contribute to church services.

In our case, I remembered that we had a recording of the band ringing Grandsire Doubles which we produced to publicise our ringing for the International Organ Festival in 2017 (see District Newsletter, Volume 22, Issue 2), and this was included at the end of the Easter Sunday service, and again at

Pentecost. The vicar delivered the church's set of handbells to the Sage family so Liz and Alex, together with Eleanor (9) and Madeleine (6), produced four different recordings which were included in various services starting on 26<sup>th</sup> April.

Meanwhile, Neil started experimenting to see if he could generate recordings on his website. He set up the site in the late 1990's and used it to develop a program that could generate the blue line for any method using the notation, and when he started calling, he expanded it to be able to display touches. As a band, we have used diagrams produced this way to learn new methods which are not in the standard diagram books. He started by getting Alex to record each of the handbells separately and email the recordings to him, then he linked the recordings to the website so that, having drawn a diagram, you could click on a button to make the computer play the method. By the middle of June, he was able to send the vicar three recordings of methods on handbells, the first of which was incorporated in to the recorded service for 21<sup>st</sup> June.

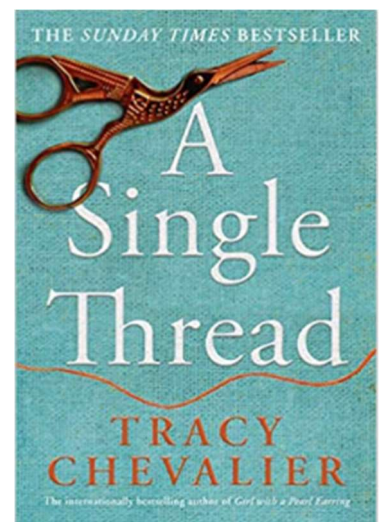
Shortly after that, we received permission to visit St Michael's to check that all was well in the belfry and to record the bells, following which Neil added church bells as an option on the website, and sent the vicar a selection of recordings of differing lengths, some Doubles and some Triples methods. Services at the church resumed on 5<sup>th</sup> July, although to start with, they were in the paddock behind the churchyard rather than inside the church. The Sages rang handbells in person for that service but since then, the recordings using church bells have been played over the PA as the congregation departs. A recording was also used during a wedding last week.

It's been a bit strange but I think it has been valuable to maintain our profile while we haven't been able to visit the church: the vicar has been very enthusiastic and we have received a lot of positive feedback from members of the congregation who have enjoyed the handbell ringing and the computer-generated recordings. The two-metre rule means we haven't been able to resume normal ringing yet, but I hope it won't be too long...

## **A Single Thread by Tracy Chevalier**

By Susan L'Estrange

Ringers should know that there is a new novel to rival Dorothy L Sayers' 'The Nine Taylors' by containing significant references to bell ringing. If you liked Tracy Chevalier's 'Girl with a Pearl Earring', you might enjoy this story about a young woman in the between-wars years, which focuses on her joining the embroidery group in Winchester Cathedral. A significant plot line is her relationship with one of the bell ringers. There are numerous and detailed references to the ringing and ringers, clearly written by someone who's done some jolly good research and had it checked – but you can just tell that she herself is not a ringer (just as foreigners can speak a language incredibly well, but they clearly aren't native speakers). There was a truly nail-biting moment when he let this complete beginner pull the sally while he was tolling the tenor before a service. (See what I mean?) And the grumpy old tower captain is obviously completely fictional.



## On The Air

By MØAYS



I remain in awe of the Ringing World people to continue to somehow find material to publish weekly. I find the material they do publish, however, increasingly difficult to absorb and I mean the technical stuff.

I had similar difficulties with the Radio Society of Great Britain (RSGB) magazine. My interest in amateur radio began as a schoolboy in the era of valve radios and only at the start of VHF radio. Towards the end of my career in banking, accountancy and corporate taxation I recognised a need to take up a hobby and 'ham radio' attracted me again. I enrolled for the Amateur Radio Licence exam course and bent my ear to the RSGB's Morse practice broadcasts to get my brain up to the 12 words a minute speed then demanded. I achieved my Class A Amateur licence and

spent a small fortune on a black box transceiver that occupied a vast percentage of my study. Whilst



Pokeyacres has a decent garden it was sufficient only to put out a somewhat modest length of the wires required for an efficient aerial. And my neighbours would certainly have objected had I a huge beam antenna mounted on an erection higher than our roof.

I did however make some good contacts with the Americas, North and South, much of Europe, rarely to Oz and NZ and Africa. My best was to the Comoros Islands which some years earlier Liz and I had visited.



As things wore on, however, Increasingly the content of the RSGB magazine became more and more baffling. The technology was simply beyond me. And the web was increasingly the means of contact. So my garden is now wire free (apart from that supporting the runner bean canes.) I shall be so relieved when we can ring again.

MØAYS was Charles Pocock's call sign.



## **The ‘Nagasaki Memorial Bell’, Minsk, Belarus**

By Lucy Hornberger

With the brave protesters of Belarus very much in the news at the moment, I was reminded of a poignant bell that we came across in Minsk last summer. The so-called ‘Nagasaki Bell’ is a monument to another injustice visited on Belarus and its people – the Chernobyl disaster of 1986 - and forms an unlikely link between ‘Europe’s last dictatorship’ and the Far East.

The bell was presented to Belarus by the City of Nagasaki and the Catholic Church of Japan in the year 2000. It is an exact copy of the so called ‘Angel Bell’ of Nagasaki’s Urakami Cathedral, an angelus bell which miraculously survived the 1945 nuclear bombing. In Minsk it is incorporated into a memorial to all victims of nuclear catastrophes – Nagasaki and Chernobyl (which although located in neighbouring Ukraine, severely contaminated about 20% of Belarusian territory), and also Hiroshima and more recently Fukushima. Buried beneath the monument are capsules of earth from these locations and also from the nuclear test sites



of Semipalatinsk (Kazakhstan) and Novaya Zemlya (Northern Russia). The bell is equipped with a rope, and visitors are free to toll it.

The monument stands rather inconspicuously in the grounds of the red brick Church of Saints Simon & Helena on Minsk’s Independence Square. The church contrasts sharply with the surrounding grey Soviet-style government buildings and is a stone’s throw from the statue of Lenin in front of the parliament buildings.

Although we didn’t have a chance to visit it, we were told that there is another memorial bell for the

victims of Chernobyl in the small town of Vetka in the far south-east of Belarus (an area particularly badly affected by fallout). The Vetka bell was deliberately cracked during casting to symbolically show that Belarus will be forever marked by the tragedy.

We found Belarus to be a beautiful, friendly country that belies its image as a cold grey ‘last Soviet state’. It is certainly a country that deserves to be better known and – once the political situation has improved - more visited.



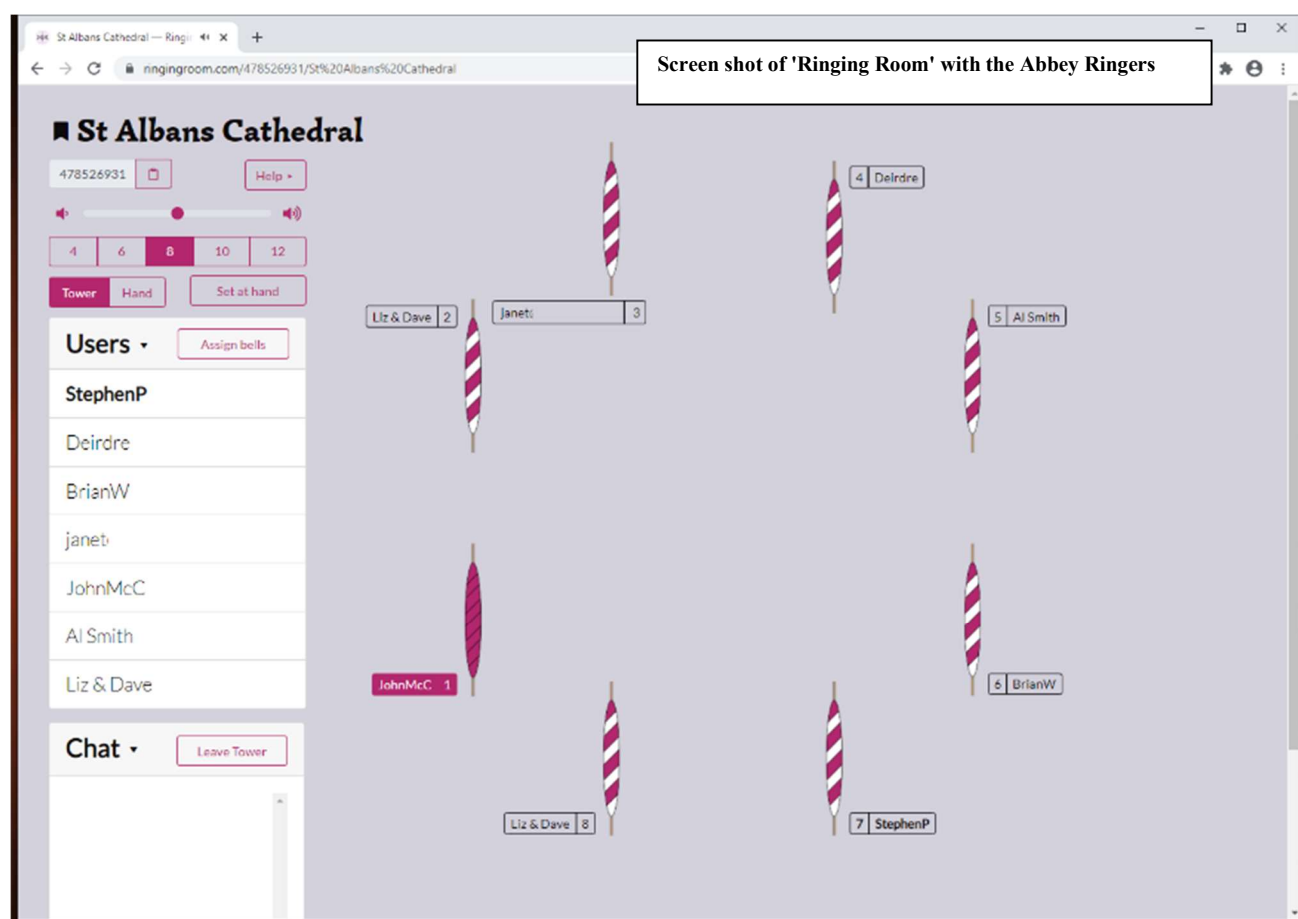
## Ringling resumes at St Albans Cathedral

By Stephen Penney

Although it was becoming clear in early March that the Coronavirus outbreak could have a serious impact on our activities, little did we expect when ringing for evensong on 15th March that it would be almost six months before we'd again see the inside of the ringing chamber.

As all non-essential social contact was stopped, and soon followed the instruction to stay at home, it was clear that any ringing at The Cathedral was not going to be possible in any form for the foreseeable future. This left a gaping hole in the weekly schedules of not only our own ringers, but tens of thousands of bellringers throughout the country and the rest of the world.

Over the past few months, many of you will have used "Ringing Room", developed by two ringers in Boston, Massachusetts. For those who haven't, Ringing Room is an online bellringing platform where ringers in different locations can join together and practice just as they would in the tower. Each ringer has a bell which they can ring with the press of the key – this rings their bell not only on their own screen but on that of all the other ringers in the "virtual tower", giving the opportunity to all try ringing together.



The St Albans Cathedral band gave this a try out on 23rd June and have been meeting online on Tuesday evenings ever since, exercising our change-ringing skills, overcoming the difficulties of

ringing together remotely, and producing better quality ringing with each session. Even if we are the only ones who can hear it!

As with our usual Tuesday night bellringing practices, we cease ringing at a certain time and continue our Zoom chat by having a drink together – catching up on what we've all been doing with our time during lockdown. This, along with a WhatsApp group, has given the band some continuity during the time we are unable to meetup in person.



We sadly lost one of our ringers, Gracie FitzSimmons, who passed away at the end of July. Gracie had been ringing with us since the early 1990s and will be sorely missed. Unable to carry out our usual tributes, such as dedicating a quarter peal to her memory, we lined the path of the North Churchyard following her funeral, and the tenor was tolled once for each year of her life.

Now that restrictions have started to ease, but with social-distancing still very much in force, we started looking into whether a return to ringing of any sort would be possible. We have adopted the guidance of the Central Council and have now resumed ringing for the Sunday morning Eucharist, ringing for our first service on Sunday 6th September.

The guidance is to only ring for one service per day, and to limit the ringing to 15 minutes. Ringers must be 2m apart, which makes using adjacent ropes impossible. We are therefore only ringing four bells (currently bells 5, 8, 10 and 12), although may be able to increase this to six in the future. We wear masks throughout each ringing session. With the majority of our band still shielding, we are grateful to ringers from other towers where ringing has not yet resumed being prepared to help us out.

It may be a very long time indeed before we are able to teach new bellringers. This will likely have a serious impact on our numbers, and a serious recruitment drive will be necessary when we are able to fully resume our activities.

Until then we will continue to review the restrictions and consider whether we can expand our activities. It is very encouraging that we have made our first step that direction.



## **News from St Stephens St Albans**

By Alison Macfarlane

At the beginning of March, St Stephen's was making good progress towards reinstating regular ringing. We had new ringers, who had been learning bell handling at Sandridge, St Peter's and Radlett. Four of them, including Cheryl Groves who had returned to ringing after having originally learned to ring with Dennis and Stephanie Willcocks at Southgate, were proposed as members of the Association at the District AGM. Cheryl's son, Tommy was enjoying Young@Herts meetings. With help from other ringers in the district, we had started holding practices although Friday, St Stephen's traditional practice night, is not a very convenient evening for the current band. I had taken over from Stephanie Willcocks as Tower Secretary and went on the ART level 2 course so I could start learning to run practices and service ringing. One of our new ringers, Richard Pether, has overall responsibility for the church building, so offered to add the role of steeple keeper to his responsibilities. We had not resumed service ringing but had begun to discuss how soon that might be possible and whether it was time to hold a long overdue AGM.



**Ringers at St Stephens**

Then came COVID-19 and the ban on ringing, followed by limited reinstatement. We have not so far attempted service ringing. There is space to ring only three of our six bells, although this could be increased to four, if the band included two members of the same family, which is possible in our case. Although our new ringers were making good progress, we were not ready for service ringing and are reluctant to attempt it now without the opportunity to practice first.

## **A Zoom AGM**

By Vivian Nutton

The annual meeting of the Association took place on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> August on Zoom. Over fifty members joined in to hear, discuss and vote thanks to the technical skills of Stuart Brant and Robert Friskney. Because of the unusual circumstances, it was agreed to extend the 1999-2000 Presidency of Claire May until next year, and the existing officers were also reappointed. Stuart Brant was elected Assistant Secretary in place of Stephen Coley who had died unexpectedly earlier this year. He was one of 21 members whose deaths since April 2019 were commemorated. Much of the meeting was taken up with a discussion of grants from the Bell Fund to Furneux Pelham, Great Amwell, Little Munden and Bishop Stortford, and, particularly, of fundraising for the Bell Fund. The Treasurer reminded the meeting that one simple and painless way of contributing to the Fund was by paying for goods online via [easyfundraising.org.uk](http://easyfundraising.org.uk) or, for Amazon, Amazon Smile. Individual gifts to the Fund could be made by standing order, even by non-ringers. After it had been pointed out that the cost of a share in the 200 club had remained the same for almost forty years, it was decided to double it to £20 a share with effect from January 2021, and also to double the prize money to £300. Because of deaths, there were now six shares available to be entered in the draw. Further details be obtained from David Gambling, [dgambling@gmail.com](mailto:dgambling@gmail.com). The final decision of the meeting was next year's annual meeting, Covid permitting, will be held in our district on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2021, with ringing in the morning and afternoon around the district and the service and tea to be held at St Michael's.

## **OBITUARIES**

### **Roger Brown (20 October 1935 – 24 July 2020)**

By Judith Titmus



Roger Brown, our Tower Captain, died on 24 July following a short illness.



Roger was born in 1935 in Knotty Ash, Liverpool and attended Liverpool Institute High School for Boys (as did Sir Paul McCartney and George Harrison). At age 9 he joined Liverpool Cathedral choir. He learned to ring at the Cathedral in 1951 when the 12 new bells were consecrated. He was 'messing about' at the church Youth Club at Woolton, when the Bishop came across the road from his 'palace' and collared several likely lads to learn. The bells at Liverpool Cathedral are the heaviest change-ringing bells in the world with the tenor weighing 82 cwt – quite a contrast to Lemsford's 6 bells with the tenor weighing just 3 cwt! Roger was honoured to attend their 50th anniversary in November 2001.

Roger moved south in 1955 and qualified as a Chartered Engineer at De Havilland in Hatfield. He rang regularly at Wheathampstead, Harpenden and Kimpton churches before joining the Lemsford band and, following Geoff Beynon's retirement from ringing, took over as Tower Captain in 2001 and kept us all in order ever since! Not only did Roger run the ringing but he was also responsible for keeping the clock maintained and ensuring the correct flag was raised on the requisite days, a duty he considered to be of utmost importance.

Roger was a Founder Member of the Fire Service Guild of Bellringers, a group of ringers with Fire Service connections whose members are based all over the UK – prior to retirement Roger having been a retained firefighter for 35 years at Wheathampstead. Hertfordshire members were due to host the Guild for their annual weekend in April this year, but much to Roger's disappointment this was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

We will miss Roger but remember him for his friendship, enthusiasm and all he has brought to the Lemsford band.

Roger's funeral was held at Lemsford on 28<sup>th</sup> August and the ringing for his service was the first time the bells had been rung since suspension of ringing during the lockdown.

Well struck half-muffled rounds and call changes were rung before the service by the Sunday service band (Judith and Ron Titmus, Bob Crocker, Emily, Rhia and Darcey Palmer). As the congregation left the church Judith tolled the tenor 84 times, once for each year of Roger's life. This was followed by open ringing of rounds and call changes in celebration of his life.

Favourable comments were made as to how much the bells were appreciated. Roger strived for a good standard of striking and I am sure he would not have been disappointed.

## **Gracie Fitzsimmons – 17 November 1944 – 31 July 2020**

By Janet Penney

Grace Cork, known as Gracie from her school days, was born in Crediton in 1944. Her parents, Ted and Betty Cork, ran the Village Post Office at Newton St Cyres and her Father, being the Ringing Master there, taught her to ring in the late 1950's. There is a record of her ringing the treble to a quarter of Grandsire Triples there in 1960. Unfortunately, her Father was less than encouraging regarding her ringing and she gave it up around the time she moved to London in 1963.

Gracie studied Literature and Languages at the Polytechnic in Kentish Town and after graduating she worked in a variety of jobs including the Harrods library and David Higham publishers, where

she became sub-editor for Homes and Gardens. After she married her second husband, Bob, and moved to Belmont Hill in St Albans, Gracie taught languages at Oaklands College.

Gracie was an accomplished musician on many instruments, including the piano, organ and accordion. She also had a wonderful singing voice and was a member of the St Albans Choral Society and the Markyate Church Choir. Gracie was an exceptionally fine artist and a watercolour of the Abbey ringing room before the 2010/2011 refurbishment, now hangs there. The ringers always looked forward to her wonderfully painted Christmas cards each year.

Gracie returned to ringing, after a break of nearly 30 years, shortly after her move to Belmont Hill and became a member of the band in January 1992. She was a very capable and reliable ringer with a natural sense of striking and rhythm. Although she was competent on all numbers of bells in the tower, her favourite choice were the back eight – both old and new - and she composed the poem below, in 1995, which will now be displayed in the belfry, alongside her watercolour.

### **On the Back Eight at the Abbey**

*by Gracie Fitzsimmons*

***The dark velvet handling of the treble  
How deep, and sweet, and soft the envelopment  
In music, history, architecture  
And time***

***When the bells  
Go round  
Near perfectly struck  
Rhythmic and timeless***

***The flow of warmth and joy  
In the working together  
Of the ringers and the bells  
On the back eight  
When the bells go  
On their appointed courses  
Till the end.***



## **Roger Gedye 1940 -2019**

By Ben Quinn

Roger Gedye died on 26th November 2019 after a relatively short illness. He was just 6 weeks short of his 80th birthday. Roger's career was spent as a teacher (of chemistry) and house master in Wellington College. Following his retirement, he moved to Wheathampstead, where he took up bell ringing at St Helens Church. He learned to handle those infamous bells and quickly became tower captain. Throughout his time at St Helens, Roger taught many people to ring, using his finely developed teaching and people skills. Roger was a most inspirational, energetic and warm person. A true gentleman in every sense of the word.



## **Stephanie Willcocks (31 May 1947 - 4 April 2020)**

By Alison Macfarlane and Paula Marshall

Stephanie Green was born on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1947 and grew up in the village of Essendon where her mother kept one of the village shops. She and her friend Paula Healing, now Marshall, were both in the brownies and sang in church choir. After Paula and her brother had started to learn to ring, Stephanie joined them in about 1959. Soon they had a band of 5 girls being taught by the tower secretary, Fred Bamford. They tended to ring the same bells and could ring Grandsire Doubles by numbers before they learned about method ringing. Fred sometimes took them on the bus to district meetings and sometimes a meeting was held at Essendon so eventually they learned what it was all about and started to attend district functions. Paula rang in Stephanie's first quarter peal on 28 February 1965 when she rang the treble to 1260 Plain Bob Minor at Essendon.

Stephanie went to Salisbury in 1965 to do her nursing training and joined in ringing in that area. She often cited the welcome she got in Salisbury as one of the benefits of ringing. She returned to Hertfordshire in 1968/9 to complete her midwifery training and start work as a midwife in St Albans. After her daughters Sandra and Amanda were born, she moved into geriatric nursing and worked as a ward sister at St Albans City Hospital and Watford General Hospital. In the last couple of years before she retired, she managed a care home in Bushey.

She probably met Dennis Willcocks, a Southgate ringer, at Essendon, as by the late 1960s he used to go to Essendon practices. Stephanie and Dennis became engaged and were married at Essendon on 27 March 1971, marked by a quarter at Essendon the next day. Although they set up house in Boleyn Drive, St Albans, Dennis continued to ring at Southgate and Stephanie joined the Southgate band. In the 1970s, she was active in the Ladies Guild of which she was a Life Member. She was secretary of its Central District from 1973 to 1977 and embroidered [its] President's stole, which she made from her wedding dress.

She continued ringing in the 1980s and 1990s, fitting it in with the demands of work, young children and Guiding, in which she was very active, including serving as District Commissioner. Bellboard shows she rang in a number of quarter peals at Stanmore and other London towers in the 1990s plus three peals. One of these was for Dennis' 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1994 and another for her own in 1997. On 27th March 2002, for their 31st wedding anniversary. Stephanie and Dennis rang their 100th quarter peal together, 1260 Grandsire Triples conducted by Dennis at Essendon.

By the time of Dennis' sudden death in 2004, Stephanie had become involved with activities at St Julian's Church in St Albans and John Mayne invited her to join St Stephen's, her nearest tower. While ringing at Stephen's, she continued with her commitments at St Julian's and her training as a lay reader. She rang some further quarters, including one at Essendon in 2009 which celebrated 50 years of ringing by her and Paula plus Stephanie's licensing as a lay reader. In 2010, she combined two of her interests by organising former guides to ring a quarter to mark 100 years of Guiding.

### **Harpenden, Hertfordshire, St Nicholas**

Thursday, 14 October 2010 in 49m (15–0–16)

1260 Grandsire Triples

1. Deborah M E Butler (Durham City)
2. Stephanie M A Willcocks (Past District Commissioner)
3. Cynthia Warrilow (Frodsham)
4. Janet L Penney (St Albans, Christchurch)
5. Deirdre R Watson (Kings Langley)
6. Rosemary E Sales (9th St Albans)
7. Jennifer V Johnson (1st St Albans) (C)
8. Katherine P M Butler (13th St Albans)

Specially arranged to celebrate 100 years of Guiding.  
First "outside" 8  
75th quarter of Grandsire Triples 7



**From Left to Right:** Stephanie M A Willcocks, Cynthia Warrilow, Janet L Penney, Deirdre R Watson, Rosemary E Sales, Jennifer V Johnson, Katherine P M Butler, Deborah M E Butler



Stephanie was elected Tower Captain at St Stephen's in 2011 after John Mayne stood down on health grounds and she set about recruiting new learners and encouraging former ringers to return. Unfortunately, though, her own health deteriorated, leading to many admissions to Watford General Hospital and her hopes of getting back to ringing faded. She was unable to realise her hope of ringing a quarter of her favourite method, Kent Treble Bob, to celebrate her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday but her family and many friends joined her for a large party. Her last few years, when she was disabled and mainly housebound were particularly frustrating for someone who had lived such a busy and active life. She caught coronavirus when she was already in Watford General Hospital in March 2020 and died from it on April 4.

## **Sheila Edmondson 1933 - 2020**

By Simon Brown

Sheila was born and brought up in Liverpool, briefly moving to Skelmersdale (at the time a small village) during the worst of the blitz. Educated at Calder High School for girls Sheila learnt to ring at St Peter's Woolton and rang at many towers in the area during the late 40's and early 50's. One of her proudest moments was to be the first woman to ring the Liverpool Cathedral bells in 1951. She also believed she was at the same church fete where John Lennon and Paul McCartney met for the very first time, although she didn't remember noticing them!

Having qualified as a Chartered Accountant, Sheila moved south in 1958 and worked first for Roses/Schweppes before moving to Mercer and Hole in St Albans where she worked for 34 years before retiring in 1993.

Her ringing continued 'down south,' first at Wheathampstead and a few years later, following a house move, she became an integral part of the Harpenden band for well over 40 years. Sheila was a strong supporter of District and County events and threw herself into all activities including peal tours, tower outings, striking competitions and of course district meetings. Along with other members of the Harpenden band she always helped provide and serve the famous ringers tea at the December district meetings. She also used her accounting skills to good effect to serve as honorary auditor for the County Association, the Parish and tower as well as numerous local social clubs, the British Legion and local Girl Guides.

She was proud to be elected as County President in 1996 and, with husband Eric acting as 'chauffeur' spent her year visiting as many towers as possible in all districts. Sheila and Eric spent much of their retirement travelling, and when possible, would 'grab' towers around the world including South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and the US.

Sheila was an accomplished ringer and, whilst not as prolific as Eric, rang many peals on both hand and tower bells including a number of 'firsts.' She was a mainstay of the Harpenden band and during the late 70's and 80's, supported and guided by the then tower captain, Alan Patterson, it was not unusual for touches of 8 spliced to be rung for Sunday Services!

Sheila leaves 2 sons (Simon and Edward - both ringers albeit lapsed) and 4 granddaughters. She will be sorely missed. RIP.



## **Hugh L'Estrange (1943 -2020)**

By Susan L'Estrange

Hugh L'Estrange started learning to ring at St Helen's, Wheathampstead in 2011 and was ringing for Sunday services in 2012. The highlight of his early ringing career was at a demo session for a group of (very) senior citizens, when he was called on to ring up the 5 and did so in four strokes. While the audience were smiling politely and clearly thinking 'next', the rest of us took a moment to pick our jaws up from the ground.

We were a perpetual band of beginners for quite a while, so Hugh didn't really progress beyond call changes before a cracked vertebra in 2014 caused him to be paralysed from the chest down. Not one to take things lying down (literally), over the next 10 months he gradually built up his strength, until one day he took hold of his walker and made his way across the room. Within six months he'd returned to ringing, but since he needed a ringer behind to support him and a ringer in front (again literally) to be ready to take the rope, we were effectively a ringer down when he was in the band, so he mainly came to practices and helped us shout at people who wandered through the ringing circle at weddings and services.

He was thrilled that he felt confident enough to go on the tower outing to Ireland in 2018 and ring at all 16 towers. On his return though, his new-found enthusiasm was quickly dampened by the challenge of our long drop and the unsteadiness of his legs, so although he never actually gave up ringing, he didn't ring again.

Although the medical profession sent Hugh home to die from his prostate cancer on four occasions, starting in 2008, he walked down the aisle under the bell ropes when he and Susan celebrated their tenth wedding anniversary with a renewal of vows service in 2018. But even the medical profession are right once in a while, and he died (not Covid related) on 4 July, five days before his 76<sup>th</sup> birthday. Huge thanks to Ben Quinn (tower captain) who tolled the tenor at his funeral, and to all the ringers who rang out on the eight for the first time since Covid closed us down:



**Left to Right:** Mary Goss, Judith Titmus, Dianne Crowder, Rob Goss (with his shirt hanging out), Chris Male, Lisa Wenz, Keith Lewin, Ben Quinn, Vivian Nutton & Ron Titmus. Rounds & Call Changes and Plain Bob Triples were rung.

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