

St Albans District Newsletter

Volume 26 Issue 1 – February 2021

Editor's Note: No Tower Bell Ringing for what seems like forever and so I asked my regular contributors (and others) for articles under the general subject of 'Alternative Hobbies'. A great response – so thank you for all those who took the time to write about what they do during this Pandemic when they can't go to the Tower or the pub...

Daily Dancing and Dilapidated Buildings

By Julie Lloyd (Ridge/South Mimms)

I have been ringing two evenings a week on Ringing Room – Aldenham on Wednesdays and Ridge/South Mimms on Fridays. While it doesn't help with bell handling, it does help with learning the methods. I'm now far more proficient at ringing 6 and 7 bell methods, whereas before I was mainly ringing simple Doubles methods. It has also been a great way to keep in touch with the other ringers, as we have all become friends over the years.

What with working from home, I'm in the house pretty much all day at the moment, apart from my daily exercise walks from home. Here are some of the other things I've done at home during 2020 that I may not have done otherwise:

- **Daily dancing** with an online group to two tracks at 1pm and 7pm on weekdays (Since April) – keeps me moving and gave me a new social group.
- **Trying new recipes.** I watched Jamie Oliver's "Keep Cooking and Carry On" and cooked several of the meals, and also baked bread for the first time in years. One of the bell ringers also recommended The Hairy Bikers' "Mushroom Bourginon Cobbler" which was delicious. I even tried Nigel Slater's lentil stew, having never made a lentil meal before, and it was very tasty!
- **Singing:** I joined Gareth Malone's online "Great British Home Chorus" and submitted some recordings of my singing (Alto parts) to be included into the collaborated choral performances. It was great to hear the final recordings, with thousands of voices singing together.
- **Gardening:** I took lots of cuttings of plants from my garden, and most of them seem to be getting through the winter (so far!)



- **Cards:** I made all my Christmas Cards and I have also made some birthday cards and cards for other occasions.
- **Dilapidated Building:** To cheer up the kids next door, we collected stones on our walks and then painted them bright colours and left them by our gate, where passers by can stop and look. This gave me the inspiration to board up a broken window and paint a mural on it on a nearby dilapidated building, which several neighbours stopped and thanked me for, as it turned an eyesore into something quite pretty.
- **On-Line:** I have done a couple of online courses with Futurelearn, which is a free learning resource I would really recommend – there are so many different topics to choose from.
- After having read the MIND charity's five ways to mental wellbeing, I've always tried to keep it in mind: Learn; Keep Active; Socialise; Give; Be Present.



Anne's Astronomy

By Anne Pegum (Barnet)

I have an alternative hobby and I have had it for much longer than Bellringing. Since the age of 12/13 I have been a keen amateur astronomer. I started by taking my Girl Guides badge in Astronomy and passing with flying colours. That started an interest which I have never lost and I am still just as much in awe of the night sky as I was then. More recently I gained a GCSE in Astronomy, passing with an A grade and only missing out on a 'star' because clouds prevented me testing my homemade sundial properly.

Highlights include the night sky in Hawaii after a thunderstorm with so many stars that it was impossible to pick out any constellations, watching Comet Hale-Bopp go circumpolar as we flew back from America overnight and the Milky Way seen from the beach of a small town in Portugal with really good 'night sky friendly' lighting. I still have not worked out which telescope to buy but I will one day.





COLLECTING GOSS

By Rob Goss (Hatfield)

In 1858, aged 25, my great-great-grandfather William Henry Goss, left his post as Chief Artist and Designer at Copeland Pottery in Stoke-on-Trent and set up his own company in the same town. The company had small beginnings but in 1880, his son Adolphus (my great-grandfather) joined the firm.

With the introduction of the Bank Holiday in 1871 and the improvement of the railway system, he realised that there was an ever-increasing number of day-trippers journeying by train to all parts of the British Isles and he thought that a souvenir of the holiday would be a saleable commodity. Adolphus was interested in history and ancient artefacts and he came up with the idea of manufacturing bone china models of Roman urns, vases and ancient pottery decorated with coats of arms of the popular towns and villages from all over the country. Adolphus became the firm's travelling salesman and toured the country visiting museums and places of interest and sketched and photographed ancient pottery and buildings of interest. Photography was in its early stages in the 1880's and his use of this technology for manufacturing was almost unheard of at the time. The exceptionally fine bone china came to be very sought after and the company prospered and were employing



A Typical piece of Goss china with the WH Goss 'goshawk' symbol on the underside together with a description of the item.



several hundred people by 1912. However, the advent of the First World War had a profound effect on the Goss China Company. Young male employees enrolled for war service and many female members went to the munitions factories or for nursing. Collectors did not pursue their hobbies and day trips on the train to places like Skegness and Blackpool diminished severely. So the firm lost their staff and their customers.

Goss China Ltd responded by making models of military items including shells and tanks but sales never matched the heyday of the first decade of the 20th century.



A Goss 'cottage'. Models of famous houses, lighthouses and other buildings were made including this one (Samuel Johnson's birthplace in Lichfield).

It sells from between £2 on Ebay to >£100 depending on the item – but you have to be careful buying on Ebay as there are some 'lookalikes'. I have a small collection now and always look out for WW1 tanks, the Goss cottages and the Goss lighthouses.

One piece I do have is a model of a 1782 'jack' given by the Alderman to the Lincoln company of Ringers. – see below (this piece is about 120 mm high (much bigger than most of the Goss china).

So if you go into an antiques shop anywhere in the country – most of them will have heard of 'GOSS CHINA'!

The company finally went bust and sold up around the time of the General Strike in 1929 when they could not get coal from Derbyshire to fire the ovens or clay from Cornwall. The site is now owned by Portmeirion and the old Goss bottle oven is still there as a listed building. There is still a 'spoil heap' behind the old oven and many years ago Mary and I got permission to have a scrabble in the soil and, together with our two children who were then aged about 8 and 10, we found a few broken pieces of Goss china.

Very little Goss china was handed down through the family. My grandfather (Adolphus's eldest son) was an Engineer and had no interest in heraldic china. My father (an Engineer in the Army) started collecting a few pieces after he retired. I started collecting Goss china about 25 years ago and whenever Mary and I visit a new town, I often pop into an antiques shop and see if they have any Goss china.



A Medical Caution from 500 years ago

By Vivian Nutton (Sandridge)

As many of you know, we academics never stop working even in lockdown. Just before everything stopped last year, I decided to take up again a long-abandoned project and write a history of medicine in sixteenth-century Europe. Since I have been prevented from visiting libraries, I have had to rely on my own resources, including fifty years of notes and xeroxes, and what I can access on the web. Peal-ringers and back-enders may be interested in a report I found there on an unexpected health-benefit from ringing. Writing on the French disease, modern syphilis, around 1550, Antonio Musa Brasavola, a medical professor at Ferrara in Italy, described how the head bellringer at the cathedral, Doro Batano, claimed to be cured of extremely severe pains in the joints by very vigorous and prolonged sessions of pulling on the ropes of the great bell (*Examen omnium loch*, Lyons 1561, p. 503). Brasavola sensibly cautioned that such exercise, although helping the joints to move easily, did not always cure the disease and might even lead to more aches and pains in those who were unused to it. I have yet to find any author repeating this advice, which may be relevant to when ringing returns after the long gap.

News from OZ

By Les Weeks

A little over 14 months ago I rang at SS Peter & Paul in Kimpton for the last time and guessed that it would probably be my last ringing for some while. I guessed right for, although I made a half-hearted attempt to visit my nearest bell tower, I've yet to pull on a sally since, and this has nothing to do with Covid19 (which hadn't been invented 14 months ago).

That nearest tower is at St Patrick's RC cathedral in Bunbury, a town a little smaller in population than St Albans, 150km south of Perth in Western Australia and about 60km north of Busselton (about the size of Harpenden) which is where Barbara and I now live. The day I went to visit, partly by accident, there was a full-size Catholic funeral, with all the trimmings, taking place. I'll try again, with a bit more planning, in the next month or so.

So, what was it that drew me away from the Kimpton tower (steeple keeper for 25 years), my beautiful 100+ year old wooden sailing boat, the renown Kimpton BWP (if you don't know ask anyone from Kimpton!), plus a variety of other groups and interests? Well, of course, it's family. An only child (daughter) who left home to undertake a PhD scholarship 16 years ago and never returned. She's now an Aussie citizen and we have a 19-month-old granddaughter.

Gone are the days when you could get to, and stay, in Australia for £10 (i.e. The Ten Pound Pom). In those days the country needed people and encouraged

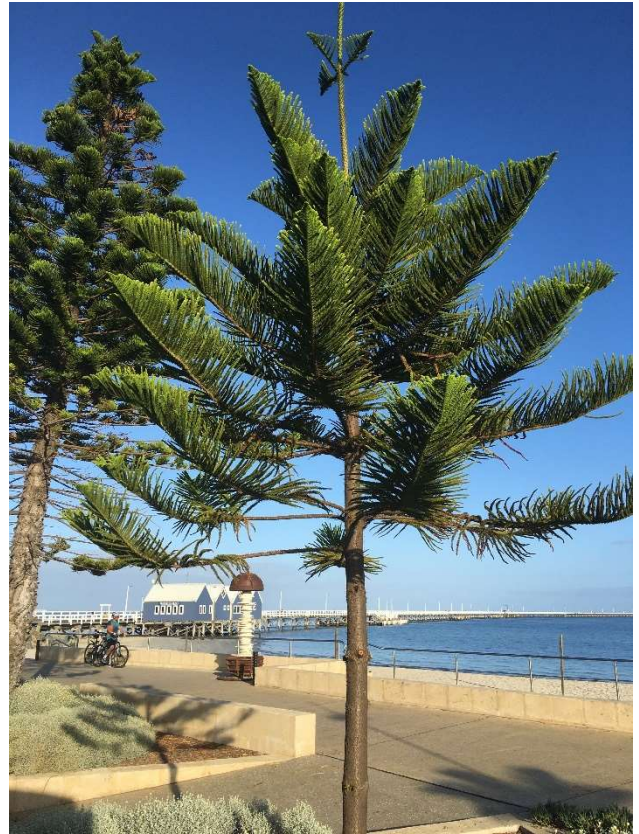


immigration. But now, with a total population of about three times that of London, they're a bit fussier and with that fussiness comes lots of form filling, waiting and, of course, money. Our visa application is being processed within a quota system with all likelihood of us not receiving Permanent Resident status for 30 years! But they let us stay whilst they're working on it.

We live in Western Australia (WA) which, although the largest state, has just 10% of the population (approx. 2.6 million). Most of the larger cities lie to the east – Sydney, Canberra, Brisbane, Melbourne, etc. - with Perth (WA's capital) being nearer to Singapore than Sydney. Australia is a big country!

Life here has been pretty much normal as we're in probably one of the safest places in the world at the moment; there have been no community transmitted cases of Covid in WA for seven months. That could change, but we're an island within an island and our state border opens and closes to other states as their Covid problems rise and fall. Australia has been very good at keeping

the virus at bay by generally refusing visitors from overseas. In hindsight, didn't we time it well. Like all retired people we have trouble fitting everything in. Grandparent duties are a pleasure and our granddaughter, Margot, is, of course, beautiful and it's lovely to be able to step back and watch her develop – something we never had time to do with Rebecca as a baby. We live just 400m from the beach and we walk the coastal paths and visit the beautiful hardwood forests and countryside (Margaret River area for the wine buffs) nearby. Barbara plays tennis more days than not and I'm a member of the local Men's Shed. We have also both got to know lots of people through volunteering; we both work shifts at the local Historical, Art and Culture complex and I am training to be a Tower and Radio operator for the local Volunteer Marine Rescue Group (very similar to the RNLI). I'm also a volunteer on the iconic Busselton Jetty (have a look on Google) and am training to be one of their train drivers for which I'll be paid!! Which, in a strange and convoluted way, brings us back to the beginning – every time I move the train, I have to ring its bell!



St Albans District Annual District Meeting

By Vivian Nutton (Sandridge)

This year's Annual District Meeting had to be held on-line on 16 January. Eighteen members attended from 10 towers as well as the County President, Claire May, who presided. This year's officers are: **Ringin Master** (and representative on the County Bell Fund) Richard Sales; **Secretary** Vivian Nutton; **Treasurer** Janet Penney; **Assistant Master**; Alison Evans; **Newsletter Editor** Rob Goss; **Committee Members** Anne Pegum and Ben Quinn; **Independent Examiner of the Accounts** Charles Pocock. Both Secretary and Treasurer have announced that they will be stepping down at the end of the year. Anne Pegum has kindly volunteered to be Treasurer of the District as well as Secretary and Treasurer of the Debenham Bell Fund but we still have vacancies – see page 10 of this newsletter. Given the present restrictions, no ringing meeting is likely in the immediate future, but probably last year's uncompleted programme will be rolled over. There was considerable discussion

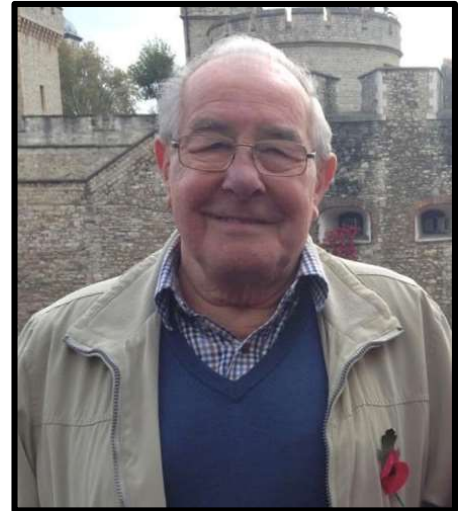
about progressing during and after lockdown by going into the Ringing Room. Stuart Brant, the Association District Secretary, is helping to coordinate this (details from Tower Secretaries). A successful meeting has been held in the Ringing Room with Young at Herts, and young ringers are asked to contact me or Jen Johnson for details of how to join. The Association Annual General Meeting is scheduled to take place at St Michael's but this is now likely to take place on Zoom on 25th April. Details will be sent out later.

John Gubbins (7.9.1930 – 7.12.2020)

By Andrew Sherlock and all the North Mymms Ringers

John learnt to ring at St Mary's North Mymms in the early nineties with Jack Partington. Both John and Jack had been very good and long-standing family friends with Ian Baldwin who had been ringing for some time at North Mymms, and Ian suggested they come along and learn.

John was a regular and reliable member of the band until ill health prevented him from continuing to ring. John was happy to ring rounds, call changes, grandsire doubles, bob doubles and occasionally the tenor behind. He was a very upbeat and enthusiastic member of the band. John's funeral service at North Mymms on 21st December 2020 was the first time the bells had been rung for 9 months and 1 day. The band rung 4 bells (treble, 3, 5 and 7) before and after the lovely remembrance service. The family were particularly pleased that the bells were able to be rung for the service. John was a true gentleman who will be sadly missed by St Mary's bellringers.



Hartford Hundred Group Wood Yard.

By Colin Rees (Essendon)

The HH group is comprised of five churches in rural Herts, most bellringers will know of Essendon. It has a unique advantage over some other group Parishes, in being able to claim, no one with an open fire or wood burner will go cold this winter.

With many tree surgeons running out of logs, the HH woodyard was formed some 6 years ago from one person collecting logs from the side of the road, to a staff of 2, both born in 1944, running a very profitable charitable operation, the proceeds of which go directly to support the churches.



The early days were not without hiccups. Challenged by a Police Community Support officer when out collecting, the principle was asked first, "are you known to us?". Naively, he replied, "I have never seen you before in my life!", not having ever been stopped by police before.



When questioned about having obtained permission from the landowner, the response was that the wood was dead, it was by the side of the road and who did the officer think it belonged to, to be able to ask? The response was brutal. Unless it was replaced, a proper police person would be called and an arrest for theft would ensue. It was duly unloaded, to be re-collected the following day. A letter was written to the local MP who replied with a scathing letter regarding the use of PCS officers' activities which was encapsulated in plastic, now to be carried at all times. Advice from a barrister said one could rely on the Law of abandonment but it's risky. Any future police person complaining will have lots of reading to do.

The woodyard has had its strongest performance during the virus crisis as people are locked up at home and so use more logs. Stocks ran low, the rain meant collecting from kind donors had to be suspended and matters became dire until a local church donated an ash tree and others suddenly

revealed, in one case, a 30-year-old stash of old logs stored for one Christmas and forgotten.

Log deliveries have ranged from Enfield, Hatfield, Hertford and Welwyn Garden as well as within the HH group. During 2019, total contributions came to £1100. In 2020, £4000 was donated in return for high quality, mainly dry, superior logs and volunteers have not stopped. Do a jigsaw, read the paper? You must be joking! Stay safe. Roll on the vaccine. Thanks NHS.

Sandridge Flower Festival – October 2020

By Christine Nutton (Sandridge)

Editor's Note – this item got missed and should have been included in the last Newsletter...!

The overall theme for the Festival was "Words - Poems, Titles, Quotations etc". In the end I chose something which, while not great poetry, seemed to have various helpful messages about the



community, and how the bells are for everyone, town and country, high and low etc.

Since October I've continued to visit the church twice a week - just as in the old ringing days - but now on Tuesdays and Saturdays to tend and arrange the flowers for the day after, when the Church is open for private prayer or people seeking a moment of quiet. So flower arranging has

become my alternative hobby in recent months, and for Christmas I was also able to organise a whole team to decorate the whole church as usual, in a socially distanced manner.

Volunteering at an Alpaca Paddock

By Oscar Hornberger, age 17 (Hatfield)

Many people are surprised to discover that just on the outskirts of Hatfield there is a field of Alpacas! About 2 years ago a local woman and her daughter decided to start 'farming' alpacas (not to eat but for their fleece of course) as a kind of hobby/small business, and called themselves 'Meadow Field Alpacas'.



The herd in summer

I go twice a week to help out with feeding, training them to be more comfortable and friendlier around people, training them to walk with a halter, and just general assistance. It's been great a great way for me to get out of the house during lockdown (it's animal care, so classed as essential) and it's good experience for me because I want to study Animal Management at college from September.

At the moment there are a total of nine alpacas, 6 females and 3 males.

The two 'babies' (now 2 years old) of the herd are two very handsome boys called Merlin and Prince. Alpacas are really good mothers and look after their babies really well. But the 'babies' are nearly as big as their mums now, and are separated off from them, although they can still touch noses over the fence. The boys are very energetic and do lots of running around and play fighting with each other.



**Merlin & Prince –
before shearing**



Merlin & Bronte after shearing

Every spring it is time for all the alpacas to have their annual haircut – in other words shearing. They go into shearing incredibly fluffy, some of them barely being able to see with so much fur around their faces, and come out looking like completely different animals! Alpacas have to be sheared otherwise they get very uncomfortable in warm weather and can get serious heatstroke. Each alpaca produces 2-3 big sacks of fleece, which will be used for textiles or made into various products sold by Meadow Field Alpacas, such as alpaca fur pompom keyrings and alpaca for bird nesting material (which the birds really like – we have some in a bird feeder in our garden). Several of the alpacas that have particularly good quality fleece have the best parts of the fleece sheared separately to be kept and entered at Alpaca Shows.

Sadly, Meadow Field Alpacas isn't currently open to the public because of Covid19. But after the lockdown has eased it will be possible again to book to go on a 'Meet and Greet' with the alpacas, and maybe do some alpaca walking (if we've managed to properly train them by then!).

You can read about the alpacas and see lots of great photos on the website: <https://meadowfieldalpacas.co.uk>

There's also a Facebook page at:
<https://www.facebook.com/meadowfieldalpacas>

St Albans District Vacancies

In 2022, the St Albans District is looking to fulfil the following roles:

- **Secretary**
Fantastic opportunity to carry out a KEY ROLE in the running of the St Albans District.
Rewards are extraordinary.
- **Two Committee Members.**
Guaranteed 2-3 hour shift about once a year.

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