

St Albans District Newsletter

Volume 31 Issue 1 – May 2025

Kimpton Half Day Outing 29th March 2025

By Rob Goss

Although this was nominally the Kimpton outing, only two ringers (Ron Titmus & Keith Lewin) from Kimpton tower were able to make it this year. Organised by Judith Titmus (Lemsford) we were joined by ringers from Hatfield, Welwyn, North Mymms, Lemsford, Wheathampstead and Sandridge. The first tower was **Hatfield Broad Oak (17 cwt, 8)**, a huge church in a small village northeast of Harlow. We arrived to find we were locked out. Apparently, the Tower Secretary had not told the Tower Captain (who knew the combination code on the lock) that we were due to ring.

Whilst waiting we were able to look around **St Mary the Virgin**, Hatfield Broad Oak. The building was originally part of a **Benedictine Priory** founded in 1135 by the de Vere family, the Earls of Oxford. The effigy of the third Earl, Robert de Vere (died 1221), lies in the centre of the chancel. The current church is all that remains of the priory, which did not survive the dissolution of the monasteries. Hanging in the church is a huge chandelier.



In due course, the Tower Captain arrived, and he went up to the belfry to check that the clock hammers had pulled off correctly as the hammers didn't always pull clear. There was some debate as to whether we were allowed to ring all eight bells as they'd had reports of falling masonry – but by this time we only had 10-15 mins left so all eight bells were rung with no issues however we did find them tricky.



Ringling at Hatfield Broad Oak

The next tower was **Sawbridgeworth (24 cwt, 8)**, and those who found Hatfield Broad Oak tricky certainly found these bells very difficult to strike well. The 2nd is rung by standing in a low recess (almost a cupboard) and the 5th is rung from a very high box, needing a step to get up on to it. We struggled to ring anything respectable here, and so we were quite glad when it was time to move on to Harlow. But these last two towers at least gave many of the group some good experience ringing on slow turning, heavy bells.

At **Old Harlow (18 cwt, 8)** and Bob Crocker was pleasantly surprised to find that these bells had been re-hung comparatively recently and so we enjoyed some good ringing here.



Ringling at Old Harlow

Last tower of the day was **Harlow Common (12 cwt, 8)** where the bells are rung from the porch with no heating. Fortunately, Judith had chosen a fine sunny day, so it was pleasant standing waiting to ring outside albeit a bit noisy.



Outside Harlow Common church:

Left to Right: Rob, Keith, Judith, Laura, Julia, Ron, Sonya, Mary, Ben, Bob, Rosemary, Andrew, Vivian, Christine, David, Dianne

Lunch at The Horns and Horseshoes on the edge of Harlow Common rounded off a very convivial half day outing.

Wow, what a night!

By Julia Saltmarsh & Andrew Sherlock

Practice nights at St Mary's North Mymms have been... shall we say, *quiet* lately. With ringers in short supply, sessions are often cancelled, Sunday service ringing is a bit of a scramble, and we've been relying on borrowed bellringers for weddings.

But **Wednesday 9th April 2025** that was something else entirely.

We'd planned a proper practice for an upcoming Quarter Peal of Plain Bob Minor with a covering tenor. It's been a fair while since the local team tackled all six bells—longer still since we danced with singles and bobs. Let's just say a little mental WD-40 was needed to loosen the gears.

And then, perhaps just really good luck, a former local got in touch. He'd grown up in North Mymms, schooled locally, spent time in the church—and had recently learned to ring. He asked if he could pop in and have a go. Of course, we said yes. One more ringer? Absolutely. Two? Even better.

The quarter peal team from Hatfield and Lemsford showed up as planned. Then another Lemsford ringer wandered in. Then—because clearly we were having a “bell party”—two more ringers joined us on a whim.

By the time the dust settled, we had **14 ringers** in the tower. Yes, **FOURTEEN!** Our core team of 5 were backed by 9 visiting ringers—every single one competent, cheerful, and very, very welcome.

We rang **all 8 bells** for most of the evening. Even when we dropped to Doubles or Minor, we had covering tenors filling the tower with glorious sound. And the grand finale? We lowered all 8 bells together—and the final chime rang out in Queens.

A huge thank you to all the ringers who joined us—you know who you are, and we're still smiling about it.

And to anyone else who'd like to come along: we love visitors! Just drop us a message first to check we're ringing on that Wednesday—we'd hate for you to show up and find just an echo.

Tower works at St Michael's, St Albans

By Alison Evans

The bells of St Michael's, St Albans, rang out on Easter Sunday after three months out of action while works were carried out to fix the leaking tower roof.

It is known that St Michael's has long had a tower at the western end of the church, and it is thought that the first tower was built in the 13th century. The tower is believed to have been remodelled in the late 15th or early 16th century. However, in the late 1890s, the church was extensively remodelled to designs by Lord Grimthorpe, a barrister, architect, clock maker, authority on bells and astronomy, and local resident. As a clockmaker, he invented something called a double three-legged gravity escapement, and worked on a number of notable clocks, including one for the Great Exhibition in 1851, The Great Clock at the Palace of Westminster (1852) and the clock for St Paul's Cathedral (1892). Grimthorpe built a vestry on the site of the former south aisle, demolished the west end of the church and west tower, lengthened the nave and built a new northwest tower to his own design. The new tower was surmounted by a weathervane on an oak spike at the apex of a pyramid-shaped gable but, over the years, rain had been leaking into the building where the spike met the roof structure, causing damage to the spike itself, which was split, as well as rotting of the roof timbers.

The church authorities originally intended not to replace the oak spike. In the correspondence about this aspect of the work, reference was made to the spike being a Hertfordshire spike, although, without understanding the reasons, I had understood it not to be a "true" Hertfordshire spike. I have since looked into this and found that, according to Wikipedia at least, a Hertfordshire spike is essentially a miniature spire rising from a church roof, its base hidden by a parapet. The base of ours is not hidden by a parapet and it looks more like a flagpole than a spire. Nevertheless, the planning authority determined that, although Grimthorpe has a poor reputation in relation to his interventions at St Albans places of worship and the spike detail is "idiosyncratic", his work is part of the historic development of the church and the spike formed part of the unique historic and architectural interest of the building which, if lost, would be permanently lost, resulting in some harm to the interest of the building. Therefore, the application to remove the spike was rejected.



St Peter & St Paul's at Kimpton has a Typical Hertfordshire 'Spike'

Accordingly, the plan to remedy the problems involved removal of the spike and the roof, repair and refixing of the tops of the existing rafters, fabrication and installation of a new steel collar for the apex of the roof with a housing for a new oak spike, restoring the spike and the weathervane, replacing the gutters and refitting the roof tiles.

As well as on the outside of the tower, scaffolding was put up inside the bell chamber which meant we were unable to ring until the work was complete. The last ring before the work began was on Sunday 19th January and we were told that the planned duration would be eight weeks. Not long after it started, however, the church newsletter was advising that everything should be completed by Easter. Builders!



Scaffolding on the outside of St Michael's



Scaffolding inside the tower

In the event, the bulk of the works were completed about a week before Easter so, as soon as we were able, we visited the tower for an inspection. There were a lot of dead flies and ladybirds to be removed from the ringing chamber and the bell chamber was extremely dirty, with dust and bits of builder's debris all over the place but, fortunately, professional cleaners have been booked to remove this. The main concern was that the clock hammer wasn't working properly, and we couldn't inspect it properly or fix it until the scaffolding was removed, which did not take place until the Wednesday of Holy Week. The church authorities had decided not to stop the clock while the works were in progress, only to stop it from striking, and it turned out that the rope on the clock hammer had stretched, presumably on account of having been under tension for so long. Fortunately, we were able to adjust it to ensure it was moving freely and then shorten it so that the hammer was safely clear of the tenor to allow us to ring.

We hadn't rung together as a band for the duration of the works, so it was good to be back in our home tower, especially on Easter Sunday. We are very grateful to all the bands who made St Michael's ringers so welcome at their service ringing and practice nights while our bells were out of use.

Quarter Peals

North Mymms St Mary
Saturday, 19 April 2025 in 46 mins

1260 Plain Bob Minor

Plain Bob Minor with Tenor cover

1. Dianne E Crowder
2. Julia E Saltmarsh
3. Judith E Titmus
4. Andrew G Sherlock
5. Mary E Goss
6. W Robert E T Goss (C)
7. Ron E Titmus



Left to Right: Ron Titmus, Amanda Sherlock, Julia Saltmarsh, Judith Titmus, Dianne Crowder, Rob Goss, Mary Goss, Andrew Sherlock, Adrian Sherlock

To recognise and celebrate the Sherlock Ringers at North Mymms. Celebrating in 2025, Adrian Sherlock's 90th birthday (75 years a ringer at St Mary's), Andrew Sherlock's 60th birthday (49 years a ringer at St Mary's) and Amanda Sherlock retiring from ringing after 69 years at St Mary's.

Kimpton St Peter and St Paul
Tuesday, 11 March 2025
1320 Plain Bob Doubles

1. Rachel A Wallace
2. Judith E Titmus
3. Mary E Goss
4. W Robert E T Goss
5. Robert J Crocker (C)
6. Ron E Titmus

Rachel's first quarter peal.
Rung for the 90th birthday of Robin Wells.



The band in order right (Treble) to left (Tenor).

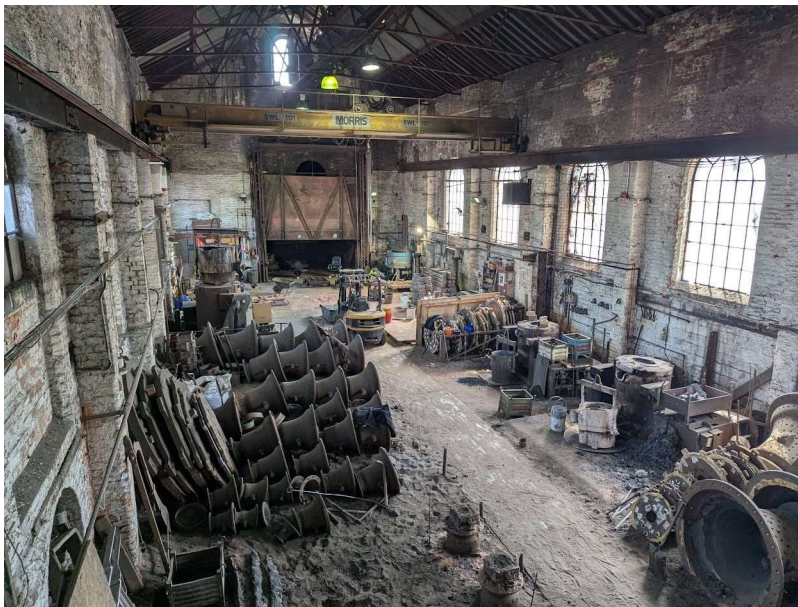
Trip Report: Young@Herts visit to the Loughborough Bell Foundry

By Toby Hornberger

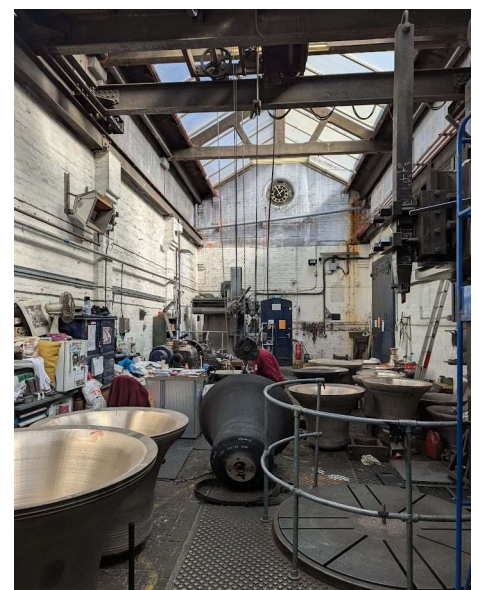
On Thursday 10th April the Young@Herts youth ringing team made a long-awaited visit to the John Taylor & Co Bell Foundry in Loughborough. There were around 30 of us in total, with many members of the Young@Herts team plus parents and younger and older siblings. Everything was excellently and tirelessly organised by the Young@Herts Boss, Jen Johnson.

Upon arriving and finding parking outside the bell foundry, which is now situated in the midst of a suburban neighbourhood, our group was split into two to be a more manageable size for touring the foundry which is still a fully working industrial site.

We began by entering the bell foundry's workshop through the newly renovated visitors' entrance. Once inside, we were shown a variety of bells that are currently awaiting tuning or having repairs done to their canons/crowns. We learnt that the bells of St John's Royston, where we have recently rung with Young@Herts, were recast here in Loughborough after the devastating fire of 2018. Heading deeper into the foundry we got to see the enormous wooden 'table', reminiscent of something from the tales of King Arthur, upon which bell wheels are precisely constructed. In a further room we saw the machines which are used to fine tune bells using a technique that was rediscovered and perfected in the 19th century here at the John Taylor Foundry. Arriving in the huge, atmospheric casting hall, we saw a couple of still cooling bells – destined for Pembrokeshire – cast only a couple of days previously and still buried beneath sand.



Casting Hall



Tuning Room

The tour ended with a short film showcasing the history of Taylor's Bell Foundry (which dates back to 1839) and featuring some of the many famous bells that have been cast here (such as the 'Big Joe' bell of Birmingham University's clock tower, York Minster's 'Big Peter' and St Paul's Cathedral's 'Great Paul') before meeting up with the other half of our group in the Foundry's interesting museum. We then enjoyed an hour of ringing on the foundry's small but pleasant campanile ring of 12 - which is apparently the most pealed ring in the world! After this, the whole group went to Pizza Express for a tasty lunch before continuing on to ring at two more towers in the vicinity of Loughborough: St Mary in Woodhouse and St Paul in Woodhouse Eaves. It was a really good day and very exciting to finally get to see a working foundry in the company of a knowledgeable guide who is also a keen ringer. Big thanks to Jen for organising the visit!

Congratulations!

Jen Johnson who runs the Young@Herts was joint winner (out of 17 nominations) in the latest ART Awards, in the "inspiring ringer" category. Jen has run the Young@Herts for many years and does a truly tremendous job organising and inspiring the young ringers of Hertfordshire. She was nominated by Lucas Williams and Tommy Groves (ex Y@H captains) and she has won £200 which she plans to use for a few Y@H outings in the future.

Also congratulations to Lucas (the new county webmaster) who has also won an ART prize for Birmingham University ringers (he is the current master), for recruitment and retention! A great result for the Hertfordshire ringing!

Forthcoming Events – Dates for Your Diary

Saturday 17th May

St Albans District Practice

10:00 – 12:00, Lemsford (6) All welcome.

Friday 23rd May

County Surprise Practice

19:00 – 20:30 Hunsdon (8)

Special Method Rutland & Cornwall. A dedicated practice for people ringing from treble bob up to surprise major. Please confirm intention to attend via trainingofficerhcacr@gmail.com

Saturday 24th May

County 10-Bell Practice

19:00 – 20:30, Watford (10)

A 10 Bell practice that will include everything from rounds up to surprise. Please confirm intention to attend via trainingofficerhcacr@gmail.com

Friday 30th May **County Meal**

This is the 3rd Annual County Meal that will be taking place, with no ringing required. There will be three courses (all dietary requirements catered for) and light entertainment. Please email Kevyn Hopkins-Hall on secretaryeastern.hcacr@gmail.com to reserve your place

FURTHER AHEAD:

Saturday 28th June

Coburn Trophy

The county's inter-district 8-bell ringing competition, this year being held at North Mymms.

October

County Training Weekends

Once again, this year the HCACR Committee are offering the county training weekends. Booking details will be coming out shortly, and if you wish to book on to these, I would do this once you receive this as we have been oversubscribed. The courses that will be available are:

- 4th & 5th October – Plain Hunt Doubles
- 11th & 12th October – Plain Bob Minor
- 18th & 19th October – Plain Bob Doubles



Editor Rob Goss