



# Bristol Rural News

Gloucester and Bristol Diocesan Association of Church Bellringers

The Newsletter of Bristol Rural Branch Bellringers

No 274

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## Headlines

- 1 ALL RINGING EVENTS CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE
- 2 2020 RINGING ROADSHOW CANCELLED

June-July  
2020

## Editor's Note

Since the last newsletter, we have been in lock-down so no ringing at all, no calling people to Church for services, no pints in the pub after practice, no pub lunches on outings, no catching up with the latest gossip, no peals or quarter peals. I expect you like me are missing at least some of these things, otherwise why would we ring?

The government is starting to make the first steps towards lifting some of the restrictions: let's hope that this process can continue without a resurgence in the number of Covid-19 cases. Sadly, of course, ringing involves a group of people having to operate together in close proximity and commonly sharing bell ropes. This makes it very difficult to think about restarting until we are much further down the path of getting back to normal. However, people are starting to think about what might be possible at some stage in the future and we will ensure you are informed of any changes in the current total banning of ringing. Any changes will be in line with government advice, with additional guidance coming from diocesan authorities and the Central Council.

In the meantime, keep safe and brush up on your ringing homework!

Chris Greef

## Association AGM

This year's G&B AGM, which would have been held in the North Cotswold Branch, was cancelled. There were some changes in the Association committee, as Steve Coleman writes:

In the absence of our AGM, here's what changed - and if you could forward this to your members I'd be very grateful.

Hugh Evans retired as Chairman after twenty splendid years during which he visited every Branch at least twice each year. And since he couldn't say it in person, he sends this message to everyone.

"As I retire after twenty years as your chairman, may I take this opportunity to thank you all for the support you have given me. I have travelled many miles to many meetings and have enjoyed meeting you all. You have always made me feel welcome at every event, be it an

evening practice or the more traditional ringing, service, tea and meeting.

A highlight was to be able to present a cheque at a dedication service, knowing that another ring of bells was restored and ringing again. Perhaps in future the emphasis must be on recruitment and retention of ringers. I ask you to give your support to Roger, our new chairman, whom I know is most enthusiastic as regards training of young people."

And our splendid new Chairman - elected unopposed - Roger Haynes of the Chippenham Branch sends this message.

"In this strange time of government imposed "lockdown" where church ringing is not happening as it would be seen as a gathering of people, it is with trepidation that I pick up the office of Chair from Hugh, thank you.

For those of you who do not know me, I have been ringing most of my life. It all started at Northfield in Birmingham - they were an 8 when I learnt to ring there, before moving away with my job. It was not long before I picked back up the reins and was asked to become the tower captain at Colerne, in the Chippenham branch.

Here I have held office as the Chairman and more recently the Management Committee Rep. for the last few years. I also help Ian and Carole Bucknell organise the youth team for the RWNYS.

I'm much looking forward to meeting you all at your Branch meetings."

(Note - Roger also takes over as Safeguarding Officer).

Also, Angela Newing retired as a Central Council Representative after a great many years extremely valuable service, not just to the G&B but to ringing nationally. Richard While of the Cheltenham Branch was elected unopposed in her place.

Steve Coleman

PS And I am sure we in the Rural Branch would all like to wish Hugh well in his retirement, thanking him for all his support over the years. We also look forward to meeting his successor Roger.

Chris Greef

## Silent Easter in Context

Did you ring on Easter Sunday?

I imagine not, because none of us did. On the most important Sunday of the Christian calendar we all stayed at home. Ringers have been ringing on Easter Sunday for over a thousand years but this year the Government – albeit for very good reasons – made it illegal. So how rare was that?

### The Second World War

Well, the last time it happened was in the Second World War. Since ringing was banned from June 1940 until just before Easter 1943, there were two silent Easters. Indeed, there was almost a third. In 1943 the War Cabinet met on the Monday of Holy Week and decided to lift the ban for Sundays only. But to do so legally would have needed Parliamentary legislation, and since Parliament wasn't sitting that wasn't possible. So in order to ensure ringing on Easter Sunday, the Home Office issued a pretend Order in Council in the hope that no one would notice that it had no legal basis. Fortunately, no one did, and ringing took place throughout the country.

Church bell ringing then became legal on any day of the week from 27 May 1943 – although ringing handbells outdoors remained illegal until 1945.

### The Civil War

But going back further, during the period of The Commonwealth – that's the time in the 17th century when Oliver Cromwell was in charge – there was supposed to be no ringing on Easter Sunday either. That was because ringing was seen as sufficiently secular – and sufficiently enjoyable – that it was inappropriate for any Sunday. The Puritans weren't much in favour of people having fun at any time – and certainly not on a Sunday – so they banned it.

Indeed, in April 1644 they passed a law to ban it. That law was called, An Ordinance for the better observation of the Lords-day, and it banned ringing along with other innocent pleasures. Importantly it said,

“... no person or persons shall hereafter upon the Lords-day, use, exercise, keep, maintain, or be present at any wrastlings, Shooting, Bowling, Ringing of Bells for Pleasure or Pastime, Masque, Wake, Church-Ale, Dancing, Games, Sport or Pastime whatsoever ...”

Of course, it's entirely probable that some people in some churches – and particularly on Easter Sunday – rang anyway. And since one bell was normally rung to announce the start of the sermon, Easter Sundays can't have been completely silent. And if you're wondering what the sermon-announcing bell was all about, people then thought the sermon was the best bit of the service, so they went in for the sermon only.

## The Plagues

But coronavirus isn't the first worldwide pandemic. Quite apart from the so-called Spanish flu of 1919, there were the Black Death plagues of 1348 and 1665. In the 1348 plague a third of the population died, and huge numbers died in the 1665 plague too, particularly in London. But social distancing – albeit operated very punctiliously by many – was entirely voluntary, so ringing continued.

And all that means that this Easter was only the third entirely bell free Sunday in over a thousand years. And that surely is remarkable.

Steve Coleman

## From the Radio

Gary Crisp drew my attention to the following item, which he heard on Radio 4's In Touch, a regular magazine programme for the visually impaired. Gary was particularly intrigued by the possibility of doing a PhD on bell ringing.

We recently told you about a new musical featuring the life of Nicholas Sanderson. He was a blind boy from Barnsley in the 18th century who was a mathematical genius, a kind of Stephen Hawking of his day. Well the musical has naturally had to be postponed but for one listener it brought to mind another blind unsung hero of history.

My name's Gareth Davies, I'm currently completing a PhD at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge and I've been researching bell ringing in the 17th and 18th centuries in Cambridge. In particular, I've been looking at the extent to which the ringers ran it as a business and sometimes made significant amounts of money from their activities.

I just happened to be listening to In Touch last week when the item about Nicholas Sanderson, the Cambridge mathematician, came up and my ears pricked up immediately because he was one of the 18th century characters that I'd briefly been writing about in my research. He wasn't a bell ringer himself, as far as I know, but he was interested in the theory of bell ringing. And in one of his publications he posed some questions for students, he was interested in them working out how many different combinations of 12 bells could be rung in total and how long it might take for those to be rung if they were rung continuously. To which he correctly identified the answer as being somewhat over 479 million and about 45 years.

I had no idea, until I heard the programme, that Sanderson was actually blind but it made an immediate connection for me to one of the Cambridge ringers at the time, John Ingersoll, who rang at the Church of Great St Mary's, where the leading church bell ringers of the time met, was entirely blind himself and he rang in a number of very difficult bell ringing performances.

We don't know a huge amount about Ingersoll's background. It would seem he was probably born in about 1710 and we don't know where Ingersoll learnt to ring. It wasn't usual for them to teach people at Great St Mary's, so he must have already been a ringer before he joined the society there. But clearly when he did join, he was already extremely skilled in it.

So, there are three things that most people who take up bell ringing need. One is a certain amount of physical coordination, the second is good listening skills and the third one is usually the ability to pick up visual clues from the other ringers. Now if you have any of those faculties missing it makes being a ringer much more difficult. But what's extraordinary about Ingersoll is not just that he managed to become a bell ringer but the things he were ringing were at the very forefront of difficulty in change ringing at the time that he was doing it. And if you imagine he's ringing a bell that probably weighs 10 or 12 hundredweight, he's ringing it for nearly four hours continuously, you have to catch the rope at the right time, you have to let go of it at the right time, you have to listen for your place amongst all the other bells and if you go wrong you don't have the visual clues that sighted ringers have to help you to get right again. So, it was quite remarkable performances that he was putting in. We know he died in 1777 and as was the custom amongst the ringers in Cambridge they immediately rang what they called a dumb peal, in other words with the bells muffled, for his death.

The bell ringers in the 18th century in Cambridge were a pretty remarkable lot, they included the professor of fossils at the University and various other notables, including James Gifford, who was twice mayor of the town. But it's notable that every time a performance was published in the local newspapers, with John Ingersoll in it, it was Ingersoll that they drew attention to. Clearly, they were all very impressed with his ability, they wanted the world to know about it. So, for me, he's one of the more remarkable ringers, not just in Cambridge, but probably in the whole country in the 18th century.

### **A Couple of Links**

Today's Ringing World (1 May) sees the launch of a YouTube competition that will run from now until Christmas. Details can be found here <https://cccbr.org.uk/youtube-competition/>, where there is also a link to a YouTube video on how to make a YouTube ringing video!

This is one of those occasions when I hope you can help in the distribution of this message, whether via your association email list, websites, or personal contacts. This competition could be of particular interest to those ringers who do not use traditional media for their ringing news, particularly young ringers.

The CC Comms and Marketing Group have put together

this short video which was shared on social media yesterday and has been picked up by quite a few Dioceses and other organisations. It explains why there is currently no ringing of church bells.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2Qo1wK9yNw>.

Simon Linford (President - Central Council)

### **Far-cited outings**

All outings have been cancelled until further notice.

### **Ringling Books Available**

Tony York has some books and badges available at cost as below. Please contact him if you are interested:

The One per Learner Book (the little yellow book, ideal for learners for logging progress in early stages) - £1 each.

Ringling Circles (gives the blue line and details of what happens at calls for some standard methods) - £3 each.

G&B badges - £5.

Tony York

### **Ringling Homework**

A message I received from Simon Tomlinson in the City Branch:

I have received a few emails from people asking if there is anything they can be doing at the moment to keep the grey cells turning over. Whilst it is a bit hard to ring a bell there a number of excellent apps out there that can help you learn methods and ring them in simulation. Some you could try include:

Methodology:

A free app for Android devices that contains most methods and lets you practise ringing them

Blueline:

Another free app for Android devices that is similar to Methodology

Mobel:

A low cost app for Apple devices and PC with a very good simulation function

There is also some good reading material on the Central Council website. In particular they have collated a series of articles that were written by the Education Committee and published in the Reigning World between 1999 and 2007 covering pretty much every aspect of ringing so why not have a look:

<https://cccbr.org.uk/resources/learning-development/>

### **Branch Ringling Achievements**

Not much to report this month except the following:

"I did not think it was right St Georges Day should pass without ringing, so I decided to have a few minutes on my handbells with some rounds and plain hunting on 4 with 2 in each hand."

Bill Liebow

Well done, Bill!