



# Bristol Rural News

Gloucester and Bristol Diocesan Association of Church Bellringers

The Newsletter of Bristol Rural Branch Bellringers

No 278

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## Headlines

1 All Branch ringing events cancelled until further notice

February-  
March  
2021

### Editor's Note

Still no sign of tower ringing, but at least vaccination is underway. The G&B Association AGM (which was to be held in the Rural Branch) will be a virtual affair and as this newsletter is being distributed the G&B on-line Winter School will have started. I hear that over 700 people have enrolled, so clearly ringers have not lost their enthusiasm. Plenty have tried virtual ringing on Ringing Room too. Let's keep going until we can meet in person!

Chris Greef

### Almondsbury Peal Board

Readers may recall a report on the first peal on the Almondsbury bells following re hanging. The peal, of

Grandsire Triples, was rung on the 4th January 2020. A peal board has now been installed and this is its story as

We hung the Peal board and although it's taken us almost a year to do it, it's still something that's worth celebrating. The reason it took so long to get the Peal board done was that initially we had planned to use parts of the old timber head stock from the tenor. Steve Crane took on the task of slicing up the headstock to start the process but unfortunately in so doing it was realised that there were too many holes and that the elm was not good enough to make a satisfactory Peal board and the idea was reluctantly dropped. Fortunately Nigel Waters our ABRP Funding Manager was having some work done at his house in Almondsbury and he was able to convince his carpenter to take on the task of quickly making us a high quality board. I think it was a labour of love as Neale Hake made a superb board with mahogany moulded edging. We knew that it would take 3 months to get the painting and signwriting done and that we were the last in the queue as the work was to be done by Maggie Willans and it was to be her last commission before retirement. After many to-ings and fro-ings with the artwork we finally got a definitive design and Maggie did not disappoint as she produced a wonderful example of her superb work.

Gerry Annis

### Ringling gaffes on film

Over the Christmas break I watched too much TV including the film 'Bridge of Spies' where the early scenes are set in Berlin at the point of division at the end of World War II. As the camera pans around the post war devastation it reveals a typical Germanic church for a few seconds - with a great peal of eight. Since it was set in the Soviet zone we can be certain that this wasn't supposed to be British serviceman keeping their hand in whilst away from home....!

I can't be the first to spot this error, but does anyone know the real source of the ringing soundtrack and what other film/TV ringing gaffes have you spotted?

Gary Crisp

### Keep 'em clear!

I found this article in a recent edition of the Bitton Parish



History Group magazine. It paints an evocative image of ringing in a past generation, and the author clearly understands his subject:

The moon was just floating clear of the black Cotswold skyline as we climbed into the narrow spiral staircase and followed the fleeting lantern upwards. It was Frank who carried the lantern and he had little concern for those who followed. So we followed in the dark holding on to the banister of old bell ropes and feeling with our feet for the eighty-five worn and narrow stone steps that led to the ringing chamber. We could hear old George, who had an electric torch, puffing away behind us "in his own time" as he called it, and behind him was Stan Spare who always followed George up to make sure he didn't fall. George was eighty-three.

We youngsters climbed breathlessly into the ringing chamber where Frank, already anxious to get going, called for volunteers to tie on the muffles. The younger of us volunteered and soon we were away again up the narrow stairs, past the empty chamber where the bell ropes only could be seen, to the bell chamber. Here the great mute bells hung mouths downwards. The lantern flickered and we worked mainly by touch, clambering among the great oaken beams, reaching through the huge wheels, disturbing bird lime and dust. To each bell clapper we secured the muffle of leather, tying the thongs round the shank of the clapper. We took care that the muffles were all on the same side of the clappers. Just occasionally someone would hit the side of a bell and the great resonant note would echo around the walls before escaping out through the louvre's into the moonlight. Frank checked that all was well, that the ropes were in the wheel runnels and that the stays were all firm and set. Now we descended to the ringing chamber where a second lantern had been lit and already, in spite of the cold, coats had been removed. George was there, red in the face, but with determination written in his eyes.

Tom opened the window. We listened. "There she is," said Tom. We listened. Over the elm-lined hill from ten miles away came the faint cry of the Doynton treble. "Like a bird crying, ain't she?" asked Tom. We made a point of listening for Doynton every New Year's Eve. Other sounds came to us. The screech owl in the wych elm; the distant noise of a train; the rumble of the engineering worms; the crisp crackle of footsteps on the gravel below. "Here's old Fred bringing the beer." Tom spoke irreverently of the Vicar, who was indeed bringing the beer to the foot of the tower, there to leave it before climbing up to join us. "Let's give him an earful," someone said.

We untied the ropes and took our places in the circle. There were ten of us and only eight ropes. Two sat out in the deep window bays. The lanterns stood on the centre platform. The door to the stairway was closed and Frank said: "Let's raise 'em." The treble rope snaked as the first

pull was made - each rope snaking in turn. Up in the bell chamber the wheels began to swing and the bells with them. Then the treble started to strike, the unmuffled side of the clapper, making contact with the bronze — "Dang" — two pulls later Number Two joined in - "Daing," and then Number Three joined with a "Doing." Soon all eight were striking. The pace quickened for the bells were swinging through gradually increasing arcs. As they rose higher the striking became more distinct until at last all eight, including the huge tenor, were swinging the full 358° arc. For a minute or so the bells rang in sequence - rounds - the crisp, clean notes of one sequence contrasting vividly with the muffled, kettle-drum roll of the next. "Set," shouted Frank and the eight bells were dexterously balanced - now mouths upwards - on their oaken stays.

The Vicar was at the door and he was let in. "Good evening, Sir," - "Happy New Year to you." - "Sharp frost tonight." - "Could hear Doynton just now and Keynsham - Wind's in the wrong quarter for Dundry." "Just gone half eleven," Frank broke in. "Let's have 120 Doubles." We took our places at the ropes. "Will you call, George?" George nodded his head and nodded it again to Tom on the treble. "Treble going, treble gone." The treble rang out and soon the rounds were going evenly. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8, and then muffled: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8. Suddenly George called: "Go Grandsire" 2-1-3-5-4-7-6-8, 2-3-1-4-5-7-6-8, 3-2-4-1-5-7-6-8,.... The red, white and blue sallies flickered up and down in the lamplight, now almost disappearing through the ceiling, now dancing by the ringers' chins. The shirt-sleeved arms were tensed to control the bells as the huge wheels high above over swung their arcs.

"Bob," called George. Two ringers exchanged significant glances — their bells were to "dodge" in the sequence. "Single," called George. There was a momentary pause as Eric forgot what bell he should follow, and the rest held their bells in check until it was obvious to him that he should lead. For one round there was confusion. George scowled. "Keep 'em clear," he grunted. Now the sequence came right again and twenty changes later the bells came into correct numerical order. "Stand," called George, and suddenly all was quiet.

The ropes were temporarily looped to keep them off the floor. When Tom opened the window again the rest of us hastily put on our coats. Yes, there was Doynton - five bells calling crystal clear in the night air. The moonlight flooded across the tombstones and the yews loomed blacker than ever. "Close the window, Tom." Frank, whose hands were gnarled and crippled with arthritis, took a rope again. "Another 120," he urged. "Here, Eric, you take the treble this time." "Treble going, treble gone." It was eight minutes to twelve when we stopped again.

Four of us hurried up the tower to remove the muffles. Carefully we untied the thongs for the bells were delicately balanced, mouths upward. Two of us climbed further up the tower and out through the tiny door in the

assembled at the ropes again. George's great turnip watch hung on the wall ticking off the seconds to midnight. "Fire 'em," shouted Frank. Simultaneously the eight ropes were pulled, and simultaneously the eight bells rang. Twelve times the bells fired in unison and then Frank called "Rounds" and away they came clear: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8. On the roof of the tower we had watched the shapely shadows thrown by the tracery of the parapet shiver as the building shook to the firing of the bells. Now rhythmic cadences made the tower sway and the whole stonework became tremulous with the rhythm. Away across the hams over the silver ribbon of river, past barn and farm, up the sloping escarpment the sound went, beating a rude cacophony on the nearby yews, but whispering a sweet melody through the thin bare elms on the skyline, and drifting ever further and further to the very stars. Frost and moonlight combined to give the world a cloak of silver unreality. The bells, released from their muting, shouted joyously down the moon valleys of the night.

It was the New Year. The world was beginning again. So we thought as we climbed down the stairs again into the arrogant din of the bell chamber. With our hands over our ears we paused to watch the tumbling bells, the swinging wheels, the hammering clappers, the snaking ropes, lit by the streaks of moonlight drifting in the louvres. And then we went down to the ringing chamber.

"Better take 'em down now." The bells were gradually lowered. At each stroke the swing was checked, an inch or two of rope gathered in. The notes quickened as the swinging became shorter. For a moment there was a jumble of sound and then they came clear still swinging sufficiently to strike the clappers on the bronze. The tenor stopped — then Number Seven — Number Six, 5-4-3-2-1, 4-3-2-1, 3-2-1, 2-1, 1, silence. The ropes were tied back. No one spoke.

The Vicar stepped forward and read from the plaque on the wall: "Oh Lord, grant us that those of us who have been called to Thy service be worthy of our calling. Keep us, we beseech Thee, under the protection of Thy good providence, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." Down the tower we tramped, George last of all. Out we came to the moonlight and the beer. Cold it was as we sipped at our pewter pots and wished each other "Good health".

We never assembled again as a band of ten. Within a week George lay beneath the wych elm and a few months later Frank, too, was dead. So the muffled peals rang out for them, but there was to be no muffled peal for Eric, shot down over Germany at the close of the year. For the year we had heralded was 1939, the year of the Second World War, the year that began in the glamour of moonlight and ended with the total discrediting of any light at night.

Jim Allen

**Footnote:** The bells were to sound the start of an invasion by Germany. They did not ring again until

dispensation allowed them to celebrate victory at El Alamein.

### 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.

Tony York