

## **TALES FROM THE TOWER**

Another month into 2020, the year that never was foreseen. There have been challenges we never expected to face, a way of life we never dreamed would come, a 'normality' that seems to have superseded the one we knew. Yet somehow, we are all adjusting and managing to cope, one way and another, and - inch by inch - recovering the good things we once took for granted but now know just how much we value..

One of those is the sound and ringing of the church bells. Sunday mornings were unnaturally quiet for months without them. (Some people, turning over for another hour's sleep, might have considered that a good thing!) But for the ringers, for the churchgoers and for those who simply like to hear them, their silence was a loss and a reminder of what life can, and ought, to be. Just as hearing them again is a message of hope that it still can be – and will, in the (hopefully not too distant) future.

They don't sound the same yet. We can still only ring in a socially-distanced way, which means every other bell as otherwise we would be standing too close to each other. And as our heaviest bell, the tenor, weighs in at 24cwt and needs two people to raise it to its ringing position, which can currently only be done by two ringers of the same family, we can only rarely ring even six of the ten. But we did manage this for VJ Day and are hoping to do so again for a wedding this month, so that at least the bells have a musical sound and some pleasantly sounding changes can be rung. Ringing can normally only be carried out in sessions of 15-20 minutes and those must be 72 hours apart. However, after some consideration it was thought reasonable for Sunday service ringing to follow the VJ Day commemoration, which was a Saturday, if the same ringers were to take part. Probably this will also happen for the wedding and the following Sunday.

Sadly, there have been some cancellations. We don't have a Tuesday evening practice at present and teaching new ringers to handle a bell is pretty much impossible. But our newest ringers have proved enthusiastic in attending our weekly Zoom meetings and the RingingRoom virtual method ringing sessions. And those of us who don't yet join in the Sunday ringing, are ready to start again as soon as we feel able.

One recent casualty is the Tavistock Deanery Ringing Festival, which normally takes place on the last Saturday of October. An informal and rather jolly day out, it consists of ringers from each tower in the Deanery which is able to take part, travelling round as a team and ringing in towers of their own choosing at whatever time they like. Occasionally, of course, two teams will arrive together at the same place, but that doesn't matter – they will each take their turn before going on to the next venue, and it's seldom that that happens also to be the same one. And we all meet together at the host tower, where a service is held (featuring the Ringers' Hymn written years ago by Tavistock resident George Grylls and sung to the tune 'Tavistock') and then enjoy a buffet tea, a raffle and a lot of chatter and catching-up.

Clearly, this was almost certainly not going to be feasible this year and David, the organiser, after consulting various ringers and the proposed host tower (Peter Tavy), has come to the reluctant conclusion that it would have to be cancelled. We could not visit the different towers, not knowing who had been into the churches and handled the ropes perhaps only minutes earlier, we could not have a large congregation for the service, we could not enjoy a buffet tea. And we wouldn't be able to sing our beloved Ringers' Hymn!

There will doubtless be more casualties of the coronavirus before this is all over. But a date has been fixed for next year's Deanery Day, and Peter Tavy are looking forward to hosting it then. More happy couples will start booking weddings and asking for the bells. We will - one day - be ringing for practice night again on Tuesday evenings and celebrating events with peals and quarter peals. It won't happen just yet, but it *will* happen, and we will get back to 'normal'. And the sound of bells on Sunday mornings is a reminder and a message of hope and certainty that we can all hear. Er – just remind me – what *was* 'normal', again?

***Donna Baker***