

TALES FROM THE TOWER

Easter has come and gone, and with it the chance to ring the bells again, if only a few of them still. I had the pleasure of being able to join in at last on Easter Day, when we could ring six of our ten bells - the full ten have not been heard for over a year now - and then again, unexpectedly and sadly, when we gathered a team together at just a few hours' notice to ring half muffled for the death of the Duke of Edinburgh. Phil and Jane also walked in on the day of the funeral to toll one bell, as requested all over the country.

Making important announcements is one of the age-old functions of bells, whether in churches or not. Their sound carries over many miles and when there were very few other means of transmitting information, bells have always played a major part. They could announce natural disasters such as floods, notably on the east coasts, invasion - during the first part of the Second World War the normal ringing of church bells was forbidden because they were designated as a warning of just that - and, of course, the death of a monarch or senior royal. And they have always been a joyous sound for happier occasions - important births and marriages and civil as well as religious occasions.

It's a wonderful thing, when you come to think of it, that this marvellous sound, the largest musical instrument of all, requiring a band of people to create it, is not just restricted to the high and the mighty. We can all enjoy the sound but we can also all enjoy using church bells to make our own announcements - we can have them rung for our own weddings, modest though they may be, and even, occasionally, for baptisms and funerals. (Usually, we ring only for the funeral of a fellow-ringer, but it has been known for someone to ask to have them at their own or a loved one's funeral.)

So when shall we once again be able to ring regularly, for services and our own practices - which we are going to need, before we regain the standard we enjoyed pre-Covid? I think I ask this question every month but the answer does seem to be creeping nearer. 17 May is the magic date when we are permitted to ring again regularly, still only up to six bells, but for as long as 45 minutes (broken into shorter periods as far as I am concerned!) and perhaps even on Tuesday evenings as well, with only six allowed in the tower at any time it is going to take some organising but Phil has nobly agreed to take on this task.

And then there's the question of safety. Many of us have been 'double jabbed' but some not jabbed at all. Perhaps testing is the answer here. If ringers who have not yet been, or wished to be, vaccinated against Covid, are willing to take a test before coming to the tower, would that be sufficient to allay the concerns of those who might still feel vulnerable?

Perhaps by next month we will have the answer. We will surely, by then, have heard the bells ringing out again on Sundays and even on other days too. Practices - weddings - visiting ringers.....Can we really be close to returning to normal?

I hope so. And I wish everyone well as we step cautiously into our - hopefully - post-Covid future.

Donna Baker