

TALES FROM THE TOWER

Once again, we are still ringing in a limited fashion - just six at a time, hands sanitised, face masks on, and for no longer than 45 minutes at any session. Remembering the days when we could just drift in and out as we pleased (more or less, while keeping in mind that we were, after all, a team) it all seems to have been almost unbelievably casual. How could we have taken our wonderful art so blithely? How could we have taken it so much for granted? Will we ever return to those halcyon days?

Well, probably we will - because that's what human beings do. We value most the things we have most rarely or most little of. I expect it's what happened after the war, when the ringers who still remained (many, especially the younger ones, were lost either in the fighting or from other causes) gathered themselves together, remembered their half-forgotten skills and began to teach them first to handle a bell and then to move on either to call changes or to method ringing. And very successful they were too - by the time I began my ringing career, in 1951, there were many very accomplished ringers around, ringing full peals of three hours or more, and quarter peals of 45 to 55 minutes. I was soon achieving such heights myself - although the heights I reached were never great ones. A 'useful ringer' is more or less my claim to fame. (More or less useful, that is!)

That's what will happen now. We haven't been five or six years away from our bells and the bells themselves have not been neglected. Ringers old and new have been kept together via modern technology - Zoom, a word that once meant no more than a sudden rush, has been a lifeline in so many ways. We've kept in contact with each other; some of us have actually learned more via the wonders of RingingRoom, and we're now ringing again, sporadically it is true, since we in Tavistock are operating a rota - but we are ringing. And so we will soon be back, ringing the full ten and perhaps able to attend whenever we like - every Tuesday for practice and every Sunday for services. We are already being asked to ring for weddings.

And not just for weddings. On Saturday, 3 July we will be ringing for the memorial service of our much loved and respected past ringing captain, Robin Burnham, who passed away last Christmas. I am sad not to be taking part in this myself as I knew Robin and experienced his kindness, but I know that those who do ring for him will do so with good memories and a good heart.

This is what bells are for. To celebrate, to mourn, to mark time passing and time to come. This is why it is such a privilege to be able to ring them.

DONNA BAKER