

TALES FROM THE TOWER

CHRISTMAS BELLS

There are certain occasions through the year with which bells are particularly associated - weddings, Remembrance Sunday, the special Church feasts such as Easter and, of course, Christmas. And these occasions are as important to the ringers themselves as they are to those who hear them.

I have always felt it a particular privilege to ring for a wedding, to help celebrate a couple's commitment to each other at the start of a new chapter in their lives. It's always seemed especially important to give of our best - and even more so now, when weddings are so often recorded and DVDs of the occasion sent all over the world. We don't want some relative or friend in Alaska or Puerto Rico cringing at the sound of the bells and turning the sound down on their player!

Remembrance Sunday is more poignant than most, not only because of the lives we commemorate that day, but because out of respect for them we ring the bells half muffled. The sombre notes seem to emphasise the beauty of their tones as well as the sadness of their message. For some like myself, old enough to remember wartime, it is an even greater privilege to be one of the ringers on that occasion.

Christmas is completely different. Christmas Day is a day meant for joy and celebration, and the sound of the bells should convey this happiness to all who hear them. I'm sure the emotions of the ringers themselves are somehow transmitted through the ropes to the clappers as they strike the bells above. I've always felt they sound different on Christmas Day.

As a young teenager, I used to walk the couple of miles to our local church to ring for the 7 am Communion service on Christmas morning. Yes - 7 am! (There was also an 8am service immediately following.) That meant ringing at 6.30 am so I would leave home at 6 and walk through the dark streets and lanes. But it was never completely dark, nor lonely, for in almost every house I passed a bedroom light was on and I could hear whistles being blown, new squeaky toys being squeaked and cries of 'He's been!' all along the way.

Nobody, as far as I know, ever complained about the early morning ringing. They were all up and about anyway! Who sleeps late on Christmas morning?

Last Christmas was darker and quieter than any I remember, even in the days of war. I hope this Christmas will be brighter and happier for everyone.

Listen to the bells and enjoy them and all that they mean on Christmas morning. And a happy Christmas to you all.

DONNA BAKER