

TALES FROM THE TOWER

Here we are in April - another month into 2021 and another month nearer to the easing of lockdown. Well, it has to stop sometime, doesn't it? Pandemics always do (historically) come to an end at some point. So far, at least....

With freedom beckoning enticingly on the horizon, talk in the virtual Zoom tower which is all most of us have known for a whole year now has turned to Easter ringing. Will it be allowed? How many ringers will be able to gather in the tower and how long can they ring for? Will it be the same as at Christmas? Is it *ever* going to be the same again?

Yes, of course it is! But maybe not just yet...

Guidance from the official ringing body, the Central Council, seems a little vague at the moment and perhaps that's inevitable. No two ringing chambers are alike – some are on the ground floor, some high in the tower, some reached by a maze of narrow walkways and spiral stairs with dangerously crumbling stone steps, some in the body of the church, in the chancel or nave. It's not possible to offer a blanket guidance for so many different situations. So, apart from a general reminder about social distancing, ventilation and so forth, it seems to be left mainly to the tower captain and incumbent to work out.

Our own current thinking seems to be that we may be able to ring five of the bells, standing two metres apart except for two bells which are rather close (I am speaking of the ropes and therefore the ringers here) so would need to be rung by two members of the same household. Or we could ring a lighter six, which would be in a minor key so sound a little unusual to those passing by but would allow the more ancient and feeble members of the team, such as myself, to ring. (Some of us haven't rung for a year now and may well have lost upper-arm muscle, despite hours of waving tins of baked beans to music. The spirit is willing but the locked-down muscle may be weak.)

Talks are being held even as I write, and quite possibly as you read. What the smaller, village churches with their more confined spaces will do is yet another matter. Even those lucky enough to have two ringers in a household will probably only be able to ring two bells for Easter.

Whatever is decided, we all hope very much that Easter will be welcomed by the sound of church bells; and that, before the year ends, we may be ringing more normally and more regularly again. We just cannot wait!

Donna Baker