

Bits and Bobs from The Belfry (actually, we are not 'from' the Belfry at the moment!)

Covid 19 has altered so many aspects of our lives; the bells in churches across the country stopped in lockdown for the first time in peacetime. You will have heard the church clock strike the hour as that is done automatically. Some churches have been able to start some ringing again from July. The safety guidance is the same for the whole country for the resumption of ringing and we are not lucky. Our small belfry is not well ventilated, and our bell ropes are close together; to meet current guidance just two bells or three (if we have ringers from the same household available) can be rung. Tony measured down to the last mm to check the exact spacing between the individual ropes; the combination of bells we can ring in this way is not musically very pleasing.

So for lockdown most of the summer, we had a little holiday from our usual commitments but kept in touch to support each other. For me personally (I grew up in a ringing family) it is the first time that Sunday mornings have not had a ringing slot! It felt very odd! After pouring over various documents to make risk assessments, and with agreement from the Church, we have resumed a shorter fortnightly practice using the church handbells. The enthusiasm for this has grown and we are delighted that one ringer from St Peter's is joining us ('as it is such fun and I can learn a lot!'). We are not tune ringing as the superb existing handbell group does. We are using the handbells to replicate the sound of church bells. The good thing about this is that it is accessible and people can pick it up fast. We have been delighted to be joined by two 'newbies'. The rule of six nearly scuppered everything but luckily we have an electronic calendar and a good email network so I can see who is intending to come; we welcome all and don't like to turn people away so we simply make two separate groups at different times. The strategies to reduce risk are becoming second nature although we chat a lot less which I miss!!! Since early September we have been welcoming the church congregation to the Sunday service by ringing outside at the foot of the tower; people have been very complimentary indeed and on a few occasions we have had 10 bells ringing. (2 per ringer!) If you are around after 10 am on a Sunday, do drop by and listen, at 2m distance! As the autumn progresses we will be more wrapped up! If it is wet, we won't risk getting the handbells wet, so you will hear two of the tower bells instead. If you are interested in joining us or finding out more, please be in touch. I am planning to ring a single half-muffled bell to mark remembrance on 11th November.



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