

## **Bellringing Update.**

There was an unnaturally sombre atmosphere in the St.Mary-le-Tower ringing chamber as we “lowered” the bells to their “down” position for what we suspected would be a long break from ringing. It was Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March and the full lockdown had just been announced by the Prime Minister.

We’ve all missed ringing but I think we’ve missed each other more. When we ring, we ring as a team (we use the word “band”). Modern technology enables “virtual” ringing, but it’s just not the same as a band of 8, 10 or 12 ringers ringing together on the super bells that “The Tower” is blessed with.

The gradual easing of restrictions enabled us to recommence service ringing on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July. Social Distancing Requirements meant that we were only able to ring 4 bells but after 4 months of nothing it was surely sensible to begin by (as it were) dipping our toes back in the shallow end! Besides, we now must wear masks and many of us are still struggling with steamed up spectacles despite all the various tips supposed to prevent this. My own severe myopia means that it’s a close call between steamed up spectacles or no spectacles at all. I’ve opted for the latter which means I just see blurs ringing the other bells. It makes me listen more though, which is no bad thing.

Distances between our ropes are sufficiently tight that we are prevented from ringing all the bells but, with couples from the same household not required to socially distance and therefore able to ring adjacent bells, we can manage 6 bells now, in 3 pairs. We had to choose precisely which bells to ring quite carefully as we were keen to ring permutations that were still pleasing to the ear. I hope you agree that we have succeeded. The 2 combinations we use for 6 bells are 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12 with 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12 (1 and 12 being next to each other) as the alternative. It all depends who is able to ring and whether we have a couple capable of handling the two biggest bells in the tower of 25¼cwt and 35¾cwt the latter of which is about the weight of a Ford Galaxy or a Javan Rhinoceros (I checked...).

Increasingly, we are including more of our ringers on the rota though including a singleton means we must reduce to 5 bells. A reduction in Social Distancing Requirements (when it eventually comes) should open up more permutations and hopefully enable us to ring more of the bells and we are all looking forward to that. Currently a maximum of 6 ringers may ascend the tower on a Sunday morning with masks, hand sanitiser, rope sanitiser and a strict regime of who touches what when we are there, but many more of the band show up just for a chat.

Throughout the 4 months of silence we still met regularly online on Sunday mornings and often again during the week, perhaps with the inclusion of a quiz. I think we are all feeling rather “zoomed out” now though and most of us will readily grab any opportunity for face-to-face social interaction – suitably distanced of course and complete with masks and steamed up spectacles. We have been gathering in Christchurch Park on Sunday mornings where there are frequently at least 12... sorry, “two groups of six” of us (ahem) though nobody is quite sure how far apart two groups of six have to be not to be counted as a group of 12... answers on a postcard please...

Jonathan Williamson