

The Chester Diocesan Guild of Church Bell-Ringers

Chester Branch

Wednesday 14 November 2018

As promised a long time ago, one more Newsletter for you; and then after I stop being Branch Chairman there will be no more from me. What my successor does – if I have one – is something I just cannot say.

AGM

First of all **I remind you that it is our Branch AGM on Saturday at Tattenhall**. Ringing at 14.30, then the usual service (16.00), tea and business meeting. Just the AGM this year, and no longer the two separate meetings, something I never understood to be really necessary. I should like to think you'll want to carry on ringing for a little while after all the talking, but that does not seem to be the pattern any more. A shame, because surely that is the most important thing we do. That is what we are all about, isn't it? – ringing bells.

This, then, will be my last meeting as Chairman. You have absolutely no excuse for saying you did not know about it, because I have been telling you for some time now I would resign this year; and I did announce it at last year's AGM at Tarporley, although the Minutes that have been circulated do not accurately reflect what I said. I am actually very relaxed about a successor. If there is one I wish her (isn't it time we had a 'her'?) or him every success. The Branch can function perfectly well without a Chairman, though; Wirral Branch does.

Treasurer is more critical, however. It is always vital for you all to know exactly what is happening to your money. Carolyn has done an excellent job over many years now, and she has earned a rest from the job. I do have an idea how to proceed if nobody comes forward, but all sorts of things might have been happening recently of which I have no idea.

We are always on the look-out for new people to join the Branch Committee. One thing which strikes me as very important is that we have a good spread of representation across the whole of the Branch. We stretch from Backford to Tushingham (although the latter tower has never been in union with the Guild), and from Dodleston to Tarporley. I suspect some towers have not had people serving as officers or Committee members for many years. Without looking it up I couldn't be certain, but I'd wager there might be a tower in our Branch which has never had any representation on our Branch Committee. Think hard about that: it is vital we do not continue to be run from the same handful of towers; and we also need to have a good gender balance, and a proper mix of ages and ringing experience.

As for me, I do not have to stay on the Committee. What I need to do now is concentrate hard on the Guild Archives.

Try to see that at least one person from your tower, therefore, attends the meeting on Saturday.

CENTENARY OF THE ARMISTICE

I do not intend to write a long Newsletter, but I cannot not write about our ringing over the Armistice Weekend. We have all, I am sure, in our different ways remembered the Fallen of WW1 over the last four years by ringing bells. The peal of Cheshire Regiment Alliance at Old St Mary's in September 2014, to commemorate the many soldiers of the Cheshire Regiment who lost their lives at Mons, was the beginning. I also know we have rung for two of the three Branch ringers who lost their lives in the war, and ringing for the third one is planned on Sunday. At Tarvin it was wonderful that four members of the family rang to remember James Wright, the great-uncle of Tarvin ringer, Christine Threadgold. I wrote something for the family and it should be appearing on the Guild website soon.

It was over the last weekend, however, that we all did something quite wonderful. The list of performances on BellBoard goes on and on; but I know that even if you are not there that means nothing. All the bells in our Branch rang, many several times on Sunday. I do hope that the new ringers of 2018 will also have had the opportunity to ring. You will all, of that I am quite sure, have appreciated the power of bells. Never forget they have a very strong message, something a choir or an orchestra cannot imitate. Half-muffled ringing is particularly moving. We have all done our duty magnificently, and we must all be proud we have remembered those people who gave their lives, and have rung not a message of celebration but one of peace.

Chester ringing was very special, and I know quite a few of you reading this worked very hard at the Addleshaw Tower on the Saturday – when no fewer than seven quarter peals were rung. We had many people coming to see what we were up to. There could be some recruits emerging, but above all there will be a large number of people who have learned much about ringing church bells. One of these was the MP for Chester, and he was genuinely interested in what we were doing. He stayed a long time.

Some of the quarter peals have been dedicated to particular servicemen who fell in action; and I am pleased that some Branch members have been able to have a special footnote for their relatives. You might also be interested to know that one of the quarters was dedicated to the grandfather of the Honorary Consul of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Did any of you manage to see the names of the Chester Fallen projected onto the Castle Walls? An inspirational idea, and a very powerful one. This constant scrolling of names – all somebody's son, husband or beloved – was a strong reminder of the sheer number of those who lost their lives. We were able to complement the strong visual impact perfectly with the tolling of the tenor bells of Handbridge and Old St Mary's. Once more an example of how the bell can strike deeply into any listener's emotions.

I was pleased to see the two Chester ringers – Harry Jones and William Thomas – amongst them.

AND FINALLY

Whatever your abilities, whether you ring in many churches or just your own, whether you ring peals and quarters or just ring rounds and call changes, never forget you are important, and are doing something that is very special. I have written this several times already in my Newsletters, but make

no apology for repeating it. We are the ‘Ringing Isle’, and we should all be proud of what we do to give those mighty lumps of bronze hanging in our towers their true voice.

Keep ringing, keep practising. Never be complacent, but always strive to improve. Try hard to visit other towers – you will find it works wonders. Sticking with one tower was probably more acceptable in the past, but I feel that nowadays we should try to work together. Clustering – a concept I am not airing for the first time – must be good. Even if just two towers co-operate that can be very effective. Above all think of your new members: ask yourselves constantly whether you are truly inspiring them and offering them every possible way to move forward.

We shall keep offering you a programme of events; we shall offer various training schemes and practices. If you feel they are not for you; if you feel that ringing your own bells on Sundays is quite enough, that’s your choice. You are still doing your duty, and releasing the power of the bells in your community – but there is a whole lot more out there!

QUIZ

I asked a question in the last Newsletter about the tapper in our Branch. I wonder if anybody knew who he was?

Before I come to that let us look at what a tapper did. It was a rather eccentric activity. There are undoubtedly people who can do it today, but I have never seen it done. A set of little bells – handbells would be the obvious choice – are hung on some kind of frame. The tapper then has a small hammer – wood would work – and proceeds to tap something out on them. Tunes are obviously possible, but the tappers invariably tapped out changes. They must have had a good ear for music.

There is much more to be written, but let me tell you who ‘our’ tapper was. He was James Moulton (1863-1909), and was clearly a very clever ringer, both on tower bells and handbells. He was particularly active at Old St Mary’s, after the bells had been augmented to eight; and he also rang several handbell peals in the ringing room of St Michael’s (yes, there used to be bells there!). This account taken from *Bell News* of 6th February 1888 gives you some idea of his capabilities. Note the term ‘fairy bells’. Are we amongst the little people here? Was some elf or goblin guiding his hand? I’ll leave you to be the judges of that.

‘On Monday evening, February 6th, at his residence, 31 Duke Street, Mr. James Moulton tapped on his musical box of fairy bells a date touch of Treble Bob Major (1888 changes), in 1hr 6 mins. Afterwards he tapped a course of Grandsire Cinques, followed by a course of Double Norwich Court Bob Major.’

You know, somebody ought to write a book about these old Chester ringers. What do you think?

I’ll see you on Saturday.

JDA Thursday, 15 November 2018