

Middlesex Bell News



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Silent Easter in Context

by Steve Coleman

Did you ring on Easter Sunday?

I imagine not, because none of us did. On the most important Sunday of the Christian calendar we all stayed at home. Ringers have been ringing on Easter Sunday for over a thousand years but this year the Government – albeit for very good reasons – made it illegal. So how rare was that?

The Second World War

Illustration removed

Well, the last time it happened was in the Second World War. Since ringing was banned from June 1940 until just before Easter 1943, there were *two* silent Easters. Indeed, there was almost a third. In 1943 the War Cabinet met on the Monday of Holy Week and decided to lift the ban for Sundays only. But to do so legally would have needed Parliamentary legislation, and since Parliament wasn't sitting that wasn't possible. So in order to ensure ringing on Easter Sunday, the Home Office issued a pretend *Order in Council* in the hope that no one would notice that it had no legal basis. Fortunately, no one did, and ringing took place throughout the country.

Church bell ringing then became legal on *any* day of the week from 27 May 1943 – although ringing handbells outdoors remained illegal until 1945.

The Civil War

Illustration removed

But going back further, during the period of *The Commonwealth* – that's the time in the 17th century

when Oliver Cromwell was in charge – there was supposed to be no ringing on Easter Sunday either. That was because ringing was seen as sufficiently secular – and sufficiently enjoyable – that it was inappropriate for *any* Sunday. The Puritans weren't much in favour of people having fun at any time – and certainly not on a Sunday – so they banned it.

Indeed, in April 1644 they passed a law to ban it. That law was called, *An Ordinance for the better observation of the Lords-day*, and it banned ringing along with other innocent pleasures. Importantly it said:

“... no person or persons shall hereafter upon the Lords-day, use, exercise, keep, maintain, or be present at any wrastlings, Shooting, Bowling, Ringing of Bells for Pleasure or Pastime, Masque, Wake, Church-Ale, Dancing, Games, Sport or Pastime whatsoever ...”

Of course, it's entirely probable that *some* people in *some* churches – and particularly on Easter Sunday – rang anyway. And since one bell was normally rung to announce the start of the sermon, Easter Sundays can't have been *completely* silent. And if you're wondering what the sermon-announcing bell was all about, people then thought the sermon was the best bit of the service, so they went in for the sermon only.

Illustration removed

The Plagues

But coronavirus isn't the first worldwide pandemic. Quite apart from the so-called *Spanish* flu of 1919, there were the Black Death plagues of 1348 and 1665. In the 1348 plague a third of the population died, and huge numbers died in the 1665 plague too, particularly in London. But social distancing – albeit operated very punctiliously by many – was entirely voluntary, so ringing continued.

And all that means that this Easter was only the third entirely bell free Sunday in over a thousand years. And that surely is remarkable.

Bell News is very grateful to Steve Coleman for providing our members with this historical survey. Steve's inimitable books continue to be available at £14.95 post free at <http://www.ringingbooks.co.uk/>.

The Keltek Trust in our area

Stephen Jakeman, Bell Restoration Officer writes:

The Keltek Trust is a wonderful organisation whose website at <http://www.keltektrust.org.uk/> states: “**Conservation by Re-use:** Helping churches acquire surplus and/or redundant bells to be hung for English-style full-circle bell-ringing”. Their website is well worth a visit, including up to date news. So far the Trust has been involved in the relocation of eleven bells to six towers in the Association & Guild's area.

The first was in 1995 when an ex-Bishopstoke, Hampshire bell was put to use as one of the clock bells hung dead at Limehouse. This is one of the bells which sounds when we are ringing.

Others are included in the new installations at Hampstead (2005) and Kilburn, St Mary (2012) – two visionary schemes from Michael Roylton-Kisch. At Hampstead four superb Gillett & Johnston bells came from the redundant church of St Luke, Cowley, Oxford, and now are hung as the 1,3,5, and tenor. At Kilburn two bells came from Prittlewell, Essex and one from High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire.

Service bells are now at Fulham (2014) and Westminster St Stephen (2016). The latest activity (2019) was the 5th at Harlington, ex-Lindfield, Sussex, illustrated here.



Grants from the Bell Restoration Fund

Stephen Jakeman, Bell Restoration Officer writes:

Given the total lack of any tower bell-ringing to report on, members might be interested in some information on grants made from the Bell Restoration Fund (BRF) - after all, the BRF features at virtually every Association or District event, predominantly fund-raising but also in the awarding of grants.

The BRF as we know it today started way back in 1952 when a 'Bell Restoration Fund' was established to provide financial support towards bell restoration projects to towers in and around the Association's area. In 1980 it became a registered charity. The BRF Treasurer is now Chris Weavers from Aldgate, co-opted until we can hold a meeting to formally elect him.

To date grants totalling over £314,000 have been made to some 79 churches (including three cathedrals) across three continents. This is a significant figure and its contribution towards ensuring that bells are safe to ring should not be underestimated, crucially by providing the necessary infrastructure to teach and train.

Details of grants made with summaries of the work carried out for the BRF will be placed on the website and this should make interesting reading. The first recorded grant in 1952 was to St Margaret, Uxbridge for 5 guineas (£5.25). Grants have naturally increased over the years and two grants of £20k and three of £15k have been made since 2002 - something of which the membership can be very proud.

These grants depend upon continual fund-raising activities at grass roots level, supported most effectively by the '200 Club', initiated by Stuart Robinson (ex St Augustine, Kilburn) and now run by Lucy Chandhial of the same tower. Details at: <http://www.bellringing.london/200-club/>

A VE day talk

The Great War Memorial Book of Church Bell-Ringers

Aveline Pérez de Vera describes a talk by Alan Regin OBE



To distract us from missing VE day ringing on 8 May, MCALDG organised Alan Regin to talk about his research on the CCCBR Rolls of Honour. Twenty of us watched this fascinating photo-rich talk which started with the beautiful calligraphy of the Rolls but encompassed much more as we meandered through social and ringing history.

We followed the trail of a half-dozen WW1 ringers, and it soon became apparent how important it is to keep good ringing records. In sleuth mode, Alan took us on an entertaining journey to uncover the resting places of mystery men appearing in post-peal photos, including the ubiquitous Pye brothers, the ever-smiling Bert Prewett, and the impressively moustachioed Robert Stabbat. We met pub owners who hosted hand bell peals, saw annotated church postcard collections (“these bells go well!”), learnt of 12-hour peals (18,027 Stedman Caters) and saw rare photos of submarines in 1906!

The recent reports on commemorative peals rung for these fallen soldiers – some even by audience members – brought the story full circle. And did you know the scrolling decoration of the Rolls intertwines barbed wire and bell rope? It goes to show that sometimes a little further exploration can reveal what's right under your nose.

Debbie Malin

A tribute by Stephen Jakeman



Debbie learned to ring at Tottenham but living in Hackney her teaching naturally moved there. She became a loyal and dedicated member of the band, attending neighbouring practices, District, and Association events.

Capable of ringing competently on standard methods and more, Debbie was acknowledged for her accurate striking. She was also a competent conductor calling one peal and many quarters. She supported teaching and training, from basic handling right through to standing behind at surprise major practices. Her quiet and unassuming nature belied her very capable teaching skills and she was welcome wherever she went.

Debbie's first peal was at Hackney. She rang 108 including Stedman Cinques, Yorkshire Maximus and covering on the tenor at Aldgate. She rang over 1,700 quarter peals and date touches. Debbie's bell skills extended to musical handbell ringing with the Whittington Ringers and Loughton Handbell Ringers. She also organised the Hackney Handbell Ringers for their regular Christmas appearances.

Not unsurprisingly Debbie also found herself as volunteer labour on bell repairs and restoration works. By trade Debbie was a weaver for over four decades producing work to the highest possible standard for clients such as Windsor Castle.

She will be greatly missed by many people at many towers but leaves behind wonderful memories and cherished friendships.

R.I.P.

Stephen Coley, 1964 – 2020

Tracey Coley provided this tribute:



Stephen learned to ring at Ottery St Mary in Devon at the age of 16, and was hooked! On 28th December 1987 he rang his first peal (5,040 changes of Grandsire Triples, J J Parker's 12 part) in 3 hrs 7 minutes at Ottery. He came to London to work and joined the Middlesex Association. This was when he first encountered Tracey at St John of Hackney (although she doesn't remember it, and yes she did tell him this!). Stephen's home tower was Holloway. He joined the band in 1987/88 becoming Tower Captain in 1989.

He rang his second and final peal at Hackney on 28th April 1990, (5040 of Plain Bob Triples), his first in the method, in 3 hours and 2 minutes. Having met Tracey properly on a canal holiday in 1990, Stephen joined the Hackney band in 1993, and he and Tracey married in 1994. They rang quarter peals together but never a peal. In 2000 Stephen was elected Chairman of the Middlesex Association, a post he held until 2004.

In 2005 Tracey and Stephen moved to Hertfordshire, where they rang at St Mary, Standon. In 2006 they joined the Hertford County Association where they served as district representatives and served on the Bell Restoration Committee. In 2013 Stephen was elected County President.

In January 2019 Stephen was diagnosed with a brain tumour. After an operation, chemo and radiotherapy at Addenbrookes, on 3rd April 2020, he was advised that no further treatment would be given. On 22nd April he died of an undiagnosed pulmonary embolism. Stephen had remained so positive throughout his treatment, refusing to give up hope. Although his death was sudden and unexpected, he had been saved from the decline that the tumour progression would have brought.

He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

The Annual Report

Jill Wigney, Report Editor, writes:

The Annual Report has now been printed and the PDF has been emailed to every member for whom we hold an email address. Any member who did not receive it, but who would like the PDF version emailed to them, should please email me (Reporteditor@bellringing.london). I am currently in Devon, but when the restrictions have been lifted, and I am back in London, I will distribute as many as possible of the paper versions by hand. Any which I cannot get delivered will be available for collection at the next general meeting, provisionally set to be the deferred AGM on 10 October. If any member would like a paper version posted to them, please send a self-addressed C5 envelope with a large letter stamp on it to me at 117 Valetta Road, London W3 7TB.

Idle thoughts of an idle ringer

Lucy Chandhial muses on lockdown life:

Naively I thought the instruction to work from home was an opportunity to spend a couple of weeks in London, a London full of opportunities for bell ringing, socialising, long walks and cultural exhibitions.

Within four days it was obvious that London would also be restricting activities, we agreed to stop bell-ringing practices and then the church closed. Within ten days we were in Lockdown Lite and life was all about Skype calls, WhatsApp messaging and phone calls.

I moved the church clock forward the hour with agreement from Fr. Amos to track how quickly it gains time as my only trip to the church (answer: 3 minutes a week). On my way home from Sainsbury's I heard the new chimes at St John the Evangelist in Kensal Green and was proud that the Middlesex Association BRF had supported the restoration of the single bell alongside the new chime of six.



Credit: John McArdle

I joined Zoom sessions led by Adrian Sweeting with an aim to understand surprise minor methods in a new way. He tells us we now have the theory to ring 41 spliced. I'm sure I need lots more practice at simply becoming aware of where the treble is while I'm ringing, when the half lead happens and the patterns of dodging pairs meeting at different points within the method.

Then we tried RingingRoom.com and, with lockdown extended for at least another three weeks, I decided to try zoom and ringing room with the Kilburn band. Our first virtual practice was well attended but the ringing was not to its usual standard. However, we quickly augmented to ten bells (as you can in a virtual world) and Jess called us to roller-coaster. We will now continue weekly practices with zoom and ringing room for the catch-up as well as the ringing practice.

I can't judge yet whether we will change the way we live in the long term or simply be grateful to, eventually, get back to normal.

RingingRoom creators – three cheers !

Interview with Leland Paul Kusmer

RingingRoom didn't just happen, of course. Leland and his partner Bryn Marie Reinstadler ring in Boston MA, and started to build RingingRoom in early March. Both are self-isolating, while looking after a 9-month old for a friend. Leland recently completed a linguistics PhD at Amherst while Bryn continues a PhD in computer science at MIT.

By late April 1,000 individual ringers had used RingingRoom, and in the last month 12,000. This may be about a quarter of all active ringers worldwide.



Leland attended Bradfield in 2015, ringing a first QP at South Hackney, and met many Association ringers, returning to Bradfield in 2019. On 27th May Janet Betham set up a Zoom meeting with Leland and others from the Association to discuss the app, which is undergoing continuous development.

Changes made recently include password reset, and enabling login directly from the ringing screen (a listener can **view** the ringing page and listen without logging in, but must log in to **ring**). Improvements planned will include a chat room, and possibly video interaction so that Zoom will become unnecessary.

To make these improvements Leland believes that it will be necessary to set up user accounts, and require all users to have an account. This will make it possible to identify a Tower Captain to control such matters as 'entry' to the ringing screen and rope assignment, and will enable a ringer to delete unwanted tower records.

There are no current plans to make RingingRoom subscription-based; Leland said that there are problems with that. Ringers to date had been generous with donations, and for the moment the developers have enough money to provide the required servers in the US and the UK and infrastructure. However, see <https://ringingroom.com/donate> to make this most useful learning and training tool sustainable in the long term.

Network delay can present a difficulty with ringing, both 'in-country' and across the Atlantic.. Ringers using the app tend to ring more slowly, and may hear 'firing' on their computer which others ringers in the 'room' may not. With a bit of practice ringers adapt. Leland and Bryn recently rang a QP of Yorkshire Surprise Major.

RingingRoom requires practice, but it works and is fun !

Ringling at home

Roger Booth writes:

Although we are unable to ring in our towers at present, many people have been busy behind the scenes developing various ways to practise ringing at home, and there have been some very rapid advances.

The basic principles are the same, whether you are using Abel, which is perhaps the most popular computer application, or mobile apps such as Mobil (now available on iPhone or Android). There is also a new web app RingingRoom, based on the latest remote gaming technology, where several people can practise ringing together over the Internet. Many bands are trying this out and virtual practices can be great fun.

To many using these apps may at first seem daunting. However, ART has put together a series of YouTube videos, starting from first principles, breaking down the myths, and introducing things in easily manageable steps. There are also some tips, such as slowing the ringing right down to start with, or using the 'wait for me' command in Mobil.

Whether you are pressing the 'J' key on your keyboard, or tapping the bell in the bottom right-hand corner of your screen, the videos start with how to ring rounds. The videos explain how to count your place and pick out your bell, with exercises which you can try at home. The videos go on to set out the concept of the open handstroke lead, as well as the theory of call changes. There is also an introduction to rope-sight, covering and plain hunting. The exercises will also prepare your newer ringers for ringing with others on Ringing Room.

The videos can be downloaded from the [ART YouTube Channel - Abel Playlist](#).

Abel and Mobil can be downloaded and purchased from <http://www.abelsim.co.uk/>.

Ringing Room can be downloaded free from: <https://ringingroom.com/>.

Listening skills

Listening skills are something that many people have difficulty with, and the videos will not only help your band make good use of the current period by developing their theoretical knowledge and skills, but they will also be of tremendous use in helping us teach the many new ringers that we hope to recruit once regular ringing resumes.

Tom Hinks of Lewisham District has been running online listening skills training, and has kindly extended access to Middlesex ringers. His most recent course

took place on 30th May. See MCALDG emails for future courses, or email hinks_thomas@yahoo.co.uk

Even if you do not aspire to methods, ringing really well-struck call changes is a very worthwhile end in itself, and something that not only members of the general public, but also ringers in the black zone, the pinnacle of method ringing achievement, also appreciate.

Ringling for VE Day

Caspar Kennedy writes:

On the 75th anniversary of VE Day, 8th May, twelve of us gathered on Zoom and in RingingRoom with Sonia Field in charge. Starting with rounds on 12, we moved on to Call Changes on 10, attempting crosses as a precursor to Queens.

On the handstroke the bell icon went from a thick sally to a thin rope. There seemed to be a long time between hand and back stroke and we often came in too early for the call change. We then tried roller-coaster, on 10 again, this time with a

change of personnel, and this finished off very well. Next we rang Queens proper and then moved back into rounds which was pretty. Sonia said she was ringing in silence so she will never know how good we were! We finished off with rounds on 12 with everyone ringing.

PS *Sonia comments:* favourite quote of the morning was from Caspar when assigned to the tenor...'I think I need a box'. Doh!!



Courtesy Jane Ralley

Hurrah for modern technology!

Jo Harris on Plain Hunt online training

On 19th April, despite the Covid-19 Pandemic, six of us were able to 'meet' and 'ring' together thanks to the use of Zoom and RingingRoom. Led by Sonia Field, we had a really useful training session covering the theory of Plain Hunt in depth. For some participants this was a newish venture, for others a useful refresher.

Perhaps the most useful thing, however, was the chance to meet up with ringing chums and have a laugh as we got to grips with the technology – especially that of Ringing Room.

We look forward to the day when we can put the training to use in a real tower. We are meeting again next week; this is a training group which will continue to thrive despite the difficult conditions at present.

Please pass on the address of the Pimlico Learners' Page to anyone who might be interested, including non-members of the Middlesex Association.

RinginRoom score

Report on the survey:

But how do ringers like RinginRoom? In order to find out, Bell News asked those on the MCALDG mailing list to take a short survey. 66 people responded, 44 from N&E, 19 from S&W, and 3 from elsewhere.

Q.1. Use of Abel or Mobel before lockdown.

52% hadn't used either, the rest had.

Q.2 Use of Zoom to meet other ringers

75% had used Zoom during lockdown, 25% hadn't.

Q.3 Use of RinginRoom

71% had tried it, 29% hadn't.

Q.4 Use of Zoom with RinginRoom

63% had used these apps together.

Q.5 Rate your experience of RinginRoom

23% enjoyed it, 26% said it was OK but not easy to get a band to use it, and 19% thought it wasn't a lot of use. 7 people hadn't tried it.

There are some anomalies in these results. For example to Q.3 29% responded that they hadn't tried RinginRoom, yet for Q.5 all but 9% managed to rate it. The design of the survey is probably the cause of the problems, the questions not being structured sufficiently clearly. It may be worth circulating a more carefully designed survey ahead of the next issue of Bell News in order to see whether, with more experience of using RinginRoom, ringers develop a more favourable view of its use.

It appears from comments made by those using RinginRoom that the user interface is not as clear as it might be. For example, the ingenious pair who built the app had not originally included a Password Reset facility, so that anyone who forgot their password could neither log in nor re-register. Unstable internet connections have caused problems, and some users have taken time to learn how to re-size screens, switch between screens, and so forth.

It is, however, clear that groups persisting with RinginRoom and Zoom do get used to the technicalities and find that enjoyable ringing can be achieved. Barnet have rung leads of Little Bob, and several other towers have successfully rung call changes. As with Abel/Mobel, faults in striking become painfully obvious !

Lockdown learning

Peter Blight writes:

The Pimlico Learners' Page <http://ringing.info/plp/> contains a list of links, some to new material, some to web resources, for people who want to continue learning. New links are added every week or so and emails announcing the updates are sent to those who have asked to be notified.

N&E quiz

Bell News sports staff report:

On 16th May, in place of the District striking competition, 12 teams of 6 took part in a Zoom-based quiz covering a wide range of topics in 8 rounds. Helen Porter orchestrated this complex exercise and presided with apparent calm over technical problems, allocating teams into separate 'rooms' for consultations, and adjudicating appeals.

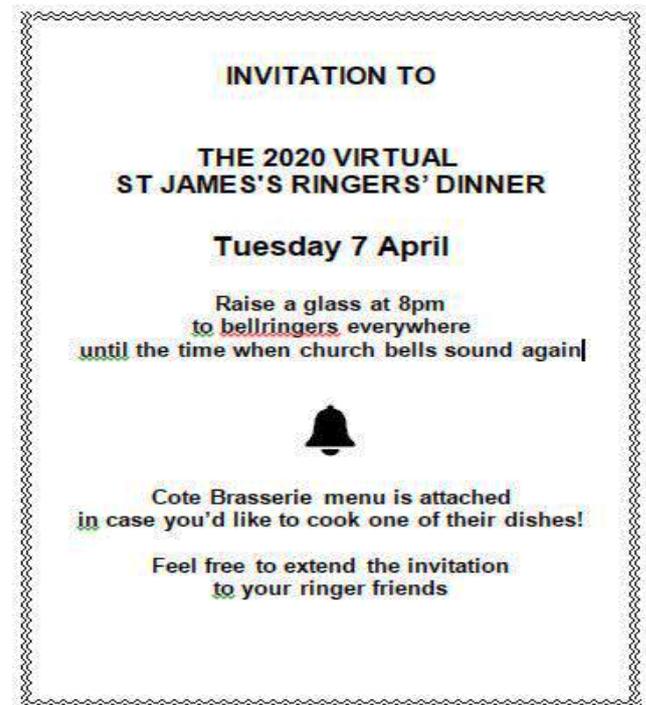
Kenton, our welcome guests from across the border in the South and West District, was the overall winner, with Aldgate (the short-odds favourite to win the cancelled striking competition) the winning team from the District. All those taking part enjoyed the novel experience.

Many thanks to Helen for her considerable work in the planning and management of this enjoyable event.

How to socialise with Zoom

Ginny Johnson tells us:

Islington St James's have traditionally held their annual ringers' dinner on the Tuesday of Holy Week. This year of course things were different, and instead they celebrated with a virtual dinner.



Twenty or so were invited, and there were enthusiastic RSVPs from those planning to cook up their own versions of the Cote menu, everyone toasting ringers and friends far and near, including some who had moved away to the country this year. A small bonus was that there was no restaurant bill to try and decipher at the end of a convivial evening !

Handbell enthusiasts in Burnt Oak

David Smith reports:

On Tuesday March 3rd Sonia Field and David Smith gave a talk to the Friends Together Women's Group in Burnt Oak about bell-ringing.

David started with a presentation about making percussive noises generally, then moving on to the ringing of bells, whether in the Buddhist tradition (with a bell hung dead and a movable striker),

Illustration removed

the European style (with moving bells mounted on wheels but with limited swing, giving little or no control of the frequency of the ringing), or the English full-circle ringing. He went on to talk about ringing overseas, in Australia and at the recently-opened 12-bell tower in Singapore:

Illustration removed, see

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/bell-ringers-bring-fresh-appeal-to-st-andrews>

This part of the proceedings ended with a demonstration of Plain Bob Minimus on handbells, after which Sonia led a very successful lesson on handbells and call-changes -



featuring massive audience participation. The highlight was when one of the ladies successfully called Queens back to rounds with no assistance and no errors!

They were a very enthusiastic audience, the expected one-hour talk ending up by popular demand at nearer to two-and-a-half hours. A good time was had by all.

Handbells at home

Martin Clode writes:

If you are a couple of ringers living together during lockdown, with ringing suspended and a set of handbells in the house, what are you to do?

Initially we started ringing on Wednesday evenings to replace the Hendon practice night. We started off trying to ring touches of Plain Bob. As many of you will know, all touches of Plain Bob Minimus using conventional calls are false but it was still good practice for us.



We then progressed to ringing the 3 Bob Minimus methods: Plain, Reverse and Double. By this point we had started getting a bit more obsessive and ringing most evenings. We soon added Reverse Canterbury and Single Court.

5 extents (plain courses in minimus) gives you 120 changes, a nice round number to start putting a quarter peal together, 10 x 120 gives you 1200 changes + an extra 120 (one course of each of the 5 methods) = 1320.

Our lockdown challenge became ringing all 11 of the Minimus methods in Diagrams. On Sunday 10 May, after a few failed attempts over the holi-day weekend, we got our quarter in 11 methods. The trick seemed to be to start with the methods we were having most trouble with.

If anyone wants to follow some of our landmarks you can find them here <https://bit.ly/35OFda1>

And finally ...

Martin Clode completes his account:

If anyone can explain why Canterbury and Reverse Canterbury have got their names the wrong way around, I would be grateful.

When I am half way through (Reverse) St Nicholas, trying to remember that Reverse Canterbury changes at the lead-end and Canterbury changes at the half-lead does my head in!