

Belfry Bat 65

On Sunday August 1st I went to the Cheshire showground to dismantle the mobile belfry. Fortunately the forecast rain did not materialise - there is only one thing worse than putting up the belfry in the rain, we don't like to pack it up wet. For Monday's croquet Ro played instead of me, as I needed to be at home for the visit of our computer doctor. She enjoyed it and felt no ill-effects. Wednesday saw the return of garage ringing, and we managed to ring a peal. After the long lay-off it was rather curate's egg, but we were pleased to ring it. At St Johns in the evening we had to work hard as there were only six of us, but we had a useful practice.

The Whitmore practice on Thursday August 5th attracted eight ringers, including four from Whitmore, which was very encouraging. On Saturday I rang for a wedding at Madeley, and went there again on Sunday morning, when we did some very good ringing. We had visitors on Monday afternoon, so didn't play croquet, which was a pity as the threatened rain did not materialise. On Wednesday I went to Loughborough Bell Foundry to see progress on the new mobile belfry. The bells have been cast and tuned, and the treble had been hung in a position where it could be rung. It had been made to handle like a much heavier bell, so that the complete set will be easy to ring. Completion is scheduled to be in time for the belfry to be in use next summer. While there I collected a clapper ball to be used in the construction of a wooden-shafted clapper for the Madeley tenor. In the evening, in spite of it being the holiday season, we had seven at the practice.

August 14th was the weekend of our family party, held for the first time at my nephew's house near Welshpool. For a variety of reasons the attendance was lower than in the past, but it was an enjoyable weekend. The value of the party was confirmed by the fact that we saw relatives we hadn't seen since last year's party.

There was a good turnout for croquet on August 16th, and the rain held off just long enough. On August 18th we set out for our summer break in Suffolk. We normally stay with Ro's sister in Bury St Edmunds, but she, like us, is having an extension which has turned her house into a building site, so we booked four nights in a Premier Inn, which turned out to be very comfortable. The main purpose of the trip was to catch up with family and friends who we hadn't seen for a long while, and we made good use of the time, with two visits each day.

The cathedral at Bury has an excellent ring of bells hung in a detached tower. A ring of ten was cast in 1785 by Thomas Osborn of Downham Market, who was the best bell founder of that era. His bells have the shape to produce good harmonics, and with slight tuning are almost as good as modern bells. In 2011 two additional bells were installed to produce an excellent twelve. Bury is one of only four cathedrals in this country where the bells are hung in a detached tower, and they all have different origins. In mediaeval times it was quite common for cathedrals to have a detached tower for the bells, as many of the attached towers were potentially unstable. The term *bell house* was used to describe these buildings. The only one of these to survive is at Chichester. The one at Salisbury was demolished in the eighteenth century because it spoilt the view, and the one at Bury, the oldest, known as the Norman Tower, was part of the abbey, most of which was demolished in the sixteenth century. The adjacent church of St James became a cathedral in the nineteen twenties and was given a central tower as a millennium project.. The detached tower at Chester Cathedral was built in the nineteen seventies because it was thought that the central tower was no longer strong enough, although an alternative story is that Dean Addleshaw wanted to leave a legacy named after him. The fourth example is

Coventry, where the tower is all that remains of the cathedral destroyed by bombing. At St David's cathedral the bells are hung in the gatehouse.

The following week was Staffordshire Show week, and on Tuesday I went to the showground to erect the mobile belfry. Before I went I received a text from the builder to say that the roofer would be coming the following day to begin work on the garage roof. Wednesday at the show went well, and by the time I got home the garage had a new roof. On Friday the builders were back to lay paving slabs at the back of the house, and in the afternoon I took Ro to Stafford hospital for her appointment with an orthopaedic surgeon. This was originally arranged for October, but was brought forward at two days' notice. There was a good outcome – Ro is now on the waiting list for a new knee, and might have one by Easter.

There are no masses at Keele chapel during August, so on August 29th we went to Chesterton, conveniently timed so that we could go straight on to ringing at St John's. There were seven of us, and we rang quite well. In spite of Monday being a bank holiday, croquet went ahead as usual, but I chose not to play as there was an odd number.

Phil Gay