

The Belfry Bat

We have decided not to go to Sainsbury's for the time being in recognition of the tighter lockdown. Home deliveries will be enough for us and Lindsay for the time being, but we may try *click and collect* which is available at the Nantwich store. It was good to wake up to a green world on January 12th. With the increased amount of internet shopping, we're becoming accustomed to some unusual packages, but on January 12th I received the most remarkable one yet. I had ordered a pair of small hinges, one and a half inches long, which arrived in a jiffy bag 14" x 11". Were they afraid an appropriate size package would get lost in the post?

On Friday January 15th I received a phone call from our GP inviting me to have my first covid vaccination on January 21st. Good progress! On Sunday Steve Mellor phoned with the sad news that Peter Hough has died. We knew he had some health issues but it was still a shock. His occasional help in the belfry was greatly valued and always made a difference, and we will miss his contributions to this magazine.

On Thursday I went for my vaccination, very straightforward, just like the flu jab. The snow on Saturday was not a surprise, as it had been forecast. I went to Madeley at 9.30 and had to drive carefully. My daughter phoned from Sheffield on Sunday morning to tell us she had been woken in the night by two badgers fighting in the street. Better in the street than in her garden!

There has been a huge amount of internet-based activity in the ringing community since the first lockdown. I have already mentioned keyboard ringing between people in different locations, which I have not been doing, but I have been enjoying a range of talks organised by several ringing societies. The most prominent of these is the St Martin's Guild, based in Birmingham, which has put on a weekly talk for the last few months on a variety of topics which can be watched live on zoom or later on their internet site.

There are a number of ringers who have used their professional skills for the benefit of ringing, most obviously mathematicians and computing professionals. Less obvious is Christopher Pickford, a historian who has worked as an archivist and who in retirement helps at the Taylors museum in Loughborough. He has given two talks so far, with more to follow, on nineteenth century bell-founders, beginning with Whitechapel who had a near-monopoly in the 1830s and following up with Taylors who then overtook them by becoming very innovative. Both did work at St Johns – it has recently come to light that Whitechapel supplied the new bell frame and fittings when the church was rebuilt in 1870, at a cost of £171, and Taylors re-hung the bells in 1955. Three of the bells in our garage ring of eight were cast by Whitechapel, one in 1837 and two in 1848. In 1860 Taylors supplied a new ring of twelve for Worcester cathedral, and as a result did a lot of other work in the county, which will be the

subject of a talk by Chris on January 29th, and he will also be doing a talk on the Birmingham founders of the late nineteenth century.

Whitechapel and Taylors concentrated entirely on bell work, but a number of other firms branched out into bells from a background in brassfounding and general engineering. One of these was John Warner, who moved into bell work in 1850 and became almost as important as Taylors for fifty years. One of their early jobs was casting the quarter bells which go with Big Ben, and in 1907 they supplied the bells for St Lukes, but by this time they has passed their peak and ceased bellfounding in 1921. I have several small bells cast by them.

As one would expect, the metal-based industries in Birmingham also produced some bellfounders, one of whom, Charles Carr of Smethwick, had originally been a brassfounder in Cheadle and later Fenton, where the very undistinguished ring of eight was supplied by him in 1899. Another Birmingham firm was James Barwell, who in addition to church bells cast large numbers of servants' bells. I have collected quite a lot of these over the years, and two years ago had enough to make ten of them into a tuned set of hand-bells.

The most important of Taylors' innovations was the rediscovery in the 1890s of true-harmonic tuning, in which the five principal components of a bell's note are correctly aligned in relation to each other. This had originally been discovered by the Hemony brothers in the Low Countries in the seventeenth century, but it was a closely guarded secret and died with them. Taylors were equally careful - it took thirty years for Whitechapel to catch up, and this enabled Taylors to become more and more dominant in the industry as the twentieth century progressed. The tenor bell of our garage ring was cast by Taylors, as a clock bell for a colliery, in 1902 and is a good example of their high quality with bells of all sizes.

Monday January 25th dawned bright and clear – a good day for tobogganing! On Tuesday Ro placed a click and collect order with Sainsbury's for collection next week, and we offered Lyndsay the chance to add to it. The overnight rain on Wednesday took away the last of the snow, hopefully the very last. But more is forecast for Saturday. I went early for the paper in order to avoid it, but I needn't have bothered as nothing materialised – the forecast was too pessimistic.

Phil Gay