

Belfry Bat March 2021

One of the problems of living practically on a parish boundary is that some people have difficulty with our address. On March 2nd we received a Christmas card which had been incorrectly addressed by someone who occasionally visits us and thinks we live in Madeley. We are in fact in Madeley parish, although we live on the Keele side of an old milestone which appears to mark the parish boundary. Before our mail was delivered by van, it came from Keele post office on foot, possibly because it was closer to us than the Madeley post office at the far end of the village. This means that we have an ST5 postcode, unlike Madeley which is CW3.

On March 4th we went to Sainsbury's in Newcastle for the first time in several weeks. Click and collect has worked well, but it's not the same as being able to choose your fruit and vegetables. Also, Ro's knees have been getting better and she wanted to discover whether they could get her round with a trolley. She managed it, but was glad to get home.

There are suggestions that normal ringing will be possible from June 21st, but counter arguments that it will be very dependent on local conditions such as rope spacing and ventilation. St John's is not good on these criteria, so we will have to wait and see. At Woodlands the ropes are even closer, although ventilation is quite good.

We heard on Sunday March 7th that a friend of ours, Margaret Jones, has been diagnosed with a brain tumour and was about to be discharged from hospital to a hospice. I taught her to ring in 1967 in her first term as a Keele undergraduate. She has been a Stafford ringer for over forty years, but was forced to stop about two years ago when she began to have co-ordination problems. She died on Friday March 12th.

Our builders arrived on Monday March 15th, and made a very good start. When a skip arrived we were able to use it for rubbish not related to the build, and the area at the front of the house is already looking tidier. The scaffolding went up on Tuesday, along with the beginnings of the walls, and by Wednesday evening two walls were almost complete.

Selwyn Jones, Margaret's husband, emailed on March 17th to say that there would be only two family members at her funeral and we would be welcome to go. This will be the third restricted-numbers funeral we have been able to attend. Selwyn phoned me on Thursday afternoon to ask if I would speak at the funeral. I think it will be unusual in that we will know almost everybody there, and nearly all will be ringers.

On Friday March 19th Graham helped me take a load of metal to the scrap merchant. Remarkably, I came home with a cheque for £93, made up almost equally of lead and steel. By Friday afternoon the joists for the floor of the extension were in place, and we await a visit from the building inspector to approve what has been done so far.

Tuesday March 23rd had been designated by the Marie Curie Foundation and the Church of England as a day of reflection to mark the first anniversary of the lockdown, and there was a request for bells to be tolled at 12.01 pm following a minute's silence. While we were there, Steve Mellor and I adjusted the hands of the clock, which had slipped to about ten minutes slow.

On Thursday March 25th we went to Margaret Jones' funeral at Stafford crematorium. Nearly all of the congregation were ringers known to us, and it was good to see them and

have a chat for the first time in many months. Later in the day I received an invitation to go for my second covid jab next week.

By the end of their second week the builders had made spectacular progress, with the basic structure almost complete. Next week should see the roof on.

I heard on March 27th that there will be a service at St John's on Easter Sunday. We had already decided that it would be good to ring whether or not there was a service. We will be able to ring three bells, with the Mellors on treble, second and third.

One of the joiners was ill on March 29th, so no work was done on the extension, which was a pity as it was a fine day. But soon the weather won't matter, as the structure will be weatherproof. On the following day the fascias were fitted, and on Wednesday the guttering went up. The roofers are promised for Friday and Saturday.

Phil Gay