

Belfry Bat December 2021

There were only six of our own band at practice on December 1st, but we were visited by regular visitor Howard Smith from Newcastle and monthly visitor Denzil Spencer from Betley, and we had a good practice. Earlier in the day we had once again failed to ring a peal in the garage, although we got further than with previous attempts, just beyond half way.

On Saturday I went to the North Staffs Association's AGM at Eccleshall. It had originally been scheduled for Stafford, but the bells there are not yet back from the bell-hanger. It was her first meeting for our new president, the archdeacon. On Sunday we didn't have enough ringers available to make helping at Madeley possible, which meant that we could stay at Chesterton after mass for a craft fair. There was no ringing in the garage on December 8th, but in the evening we had six at the practice and did some good ringing.

On Saturday we were shocked and saddened to hear that Angela Studd had died. She was a mainstay of St John's and a good friend to the ringers, and living within earshot of the bells part of our appreciative audience. There were seven at Sunday ringing, and we rang quite well.

December 15th was the day chosen for our Wednesday band Christmas lunch, and the original plan was to ring two peals, one in the garage at the other at St John's. But the re-introduction of restrictions made us cancel the St John's attempt because ringing a peal wearing a mask is not really feasible. So we had ringers to spare, which was just as well as there were a couple of withdrawals. In common with most recent weeks, the peal in the garage was lost, but we rang a good quarter peal, and lunch at the Offley Arms was good. We didn't get home until four o'clock, and I was quite glad that we didn't have enough to practise in the evening.

The following Wednesday was our final practice of the year, as we had agreed not to ring in Christmas week. There were five of us, including Josie Martin, just out of isolation after returning from Kenya. While there she visited Kilifi, one of the most isolated bands of ringers in the world – the nearest tower is Harare Cathedral, more than 1100 miles away.

We were up early on Christmas Eve, with plenty still to do in readiness for the arrival of the family. We went to the first mass of Christmas at 3 o'clock, where Ro had been asked to read. In the expectation of a high turnout, places had to be booked in advance. At St John's later, our two family visitors made up for the absentees, and we had some good ringing. On Christmas morning I helped at Madeley, ringing two with Josie Martin. After lunch five family members did five minutes ringing in the garage. On Sunday morning my daughter Sally came to Madeley with me, her first ringing for four years, and enabled us to ring three very nicely.

On Tuesday December 28th we rang a peal in the garage. It was Glasgow Surprise Major, on the 75th anniversary of the first time it was rung to a peal. The band was five of our Wednesday regulars, augmented by son and daughter-in-law Simon and Tina and Anthony Cotton from Derby. When Glasgow was first rung it was the most difficult eight-

bell method yet invented, and it is still considered one of the hardest. Some of us were ringing it for the first time in quite a while, so the ringing took a while to settle, but it improved noticeably and we were pleased with the result.

We didn't attempt another peal on Wednesday, and we have no tradition at St John's of ringing the new year in. Rowena and I are usually fast asleep by midnight, so our next ringing will be on Sunday morning.