

Belfry Bat January 2022

We met five on January 2nd, and found the ropes to be very stiff, as we had turned off the heating on Christmas Eve. January 5th saw our busiest practice for quite a while – eight of our own band plus three regular visitors, and we were able to ring things we hadn't managed for several weeks. In the morning our regular Wednesday peal attempt had been at the St Oulton Campanile in Derbyshire, where the peal was lost through a mechanical failure, a rope becoming disengaged from its wheel.

Friday was a sad day, when we rang for Angela Studd's funeral. The church was full, and we were pleased with our ringing. Later in the day it was confirmed that Michael Wilshaw, one of our Wednesday band, had tested positive, which upset our plans for next week. He can be replaced on Wednesday, but on Thursday we had planned a peal and quarter peal to mark the sixtieth anniversary of his first peal, which was rung at St John's. So an alternative date will have to be found when he is well again.

Wednesday January 12th was so cold that our ringing in the morning was affected. We lost the peal after about half an hour when my hands became too cold to hold the rope. But we were pleased to ring a quarter peal to celebrate Rowena's seventy-fifth birthday. In the evening seven of our band were joined by two regular visitors for a very good practice.

The following Wednesday saw us fail to ring both a peal and a quarter peal in the morning, and a depleted but very useful practice in the evening. I have been teaching a learner from Madeley to ring, with daily lessons, and after his fourth lesson he came to the Keele practice and rang with a band for the first time. On Saturday January 22nd we introduced him to Madeley bells, and the following day he rang there for Sunday service with three other Madeley ringers, the first time for quite a while that Madeley has had Sunday ringing with its own band.

On Monday January 24rd I went to Swynnerton to look at some bell wheels. I had been aware for several years that the wheels in the bell installation there were getting somewhat dilapidated, but hadn't yet got round to offering to help renovate them, so I was pleased when in November I was approached and asked for my help. The work required an archdeacon's certificate rather than a faculty, but I was a bit nervous as to whether I would be considered suitable to do the work. But the DAC bell advisor is a friend of mine, and he said he was happy, so permission was granted. Doing the work as DIY will save the parish at least a thousand pounds, as they will have to pay only for materials, mostly timber. The wheels had already been removed, and were stored in the vestry, which meant I was able to renew my acquaintance with the magnificent larger-than-life statue of Christ which is said to have been taken there from Lichfield cathedral for safety in the seventeenth century. I was pleased to discover that the wheels were in better condition than I had feared, so the work will be relatively straightforward.

Tuesday January 25th was the Silver Jubilee of the ordination of our friend Fr Philip Griffin, formerly catholic chaplain at Keele, and he invited us to a celebratory mass at his current parish in Stourbridge. The large church was full, the local congregation augmented by visitors from his previous parishes. Three of our most experienced ringers were absent on Wednesday, but we still had a very good practice. The nine who were there included Ben, a first-year student ringing with us for the first time and Jake, the Madeley learner who continued to make spectacular progress. On Thursday I went to a funeral at Shenstone near Lichfield. John Daubner was an engineer who was a major contributor to the mobile belfry.

Sunday ringing on January 30th started a bit late because of the road closure, but eight of us managed to do some good ringing.

Phil Gay