

Completing the circle

The third part of an article on ringing and the church

by David Grimwood

During the presentation to the CCCBR weekend at Lancaster in 2018, a suggestion from the floor was a leaflet entitled ‘Clergy in your Care’. There are various publications by skilled people offering guidance about looking after bells and their installations, but nothing for ringers taking care of their relationship with clergy.

There are often in ringing circles concerns expressed about the ‘church’. It is most important to be clear for what or whom any criticism, prejudice or praise is aimed. The Church of England is not a single monolithic entity, but is made up of thousands of local churches, all of which have their own local governing bodies, broadly overseen by bishops and archdeacons. While generalising about the ‘church’ makes for easy aunt sallies, it is unhelpful. The first step then is to identify the specific part of the church concerned, be it a local priest or congregation, diocesan committee or whatever. This of course applies to denominations other than the Church of England too.

Very often, ringers may think the primary point of contact with their local church to be the Vicar or Priest-in-charge or Minister. However, the lead church officers are the Churchwardens, accountable to the Bishop. Church Councils are responsible for the governance of a local church and congregation. So, the priest may not be the only or appropriate person to whom ringers might relate. Those who have worked on restoring or augmenting bells will have discovered the key relationships to foster in their own church setting, including local community leaders.

Yet the priest or minister remains significant within any church setting. As with GPs for example, we cannot assume that the local Vicar will know everyone in their area. Suburban parishes will know massive population growth, while multi-parish benefices can include up to ten or more churches, spread over a large area. Small congregations result in fewer services on Sundays, and not every Sunday either.

This does hinder relationships between congregations and clergy, and with ringers too (who also may be covering several towers on a Sunday). The simple fact of not seeing each other, however briefly, week by week, can create a sense of ‘us and them’ and risk ill-informed assumptions taking root.

Ringers are often out of sight from congregations, closeted in a ringing room behind a door (often with a ‘keep out’ warning on the door). Clergy and congregation may be quite ignorant of what ringers do, who they are, and what training, skill and commitment is required. Similarly, they may well be ignorant of the bonds that link ringers in neighbouring churches and across the world, which could be a revelation to congregations that often feel threatened by a tribal competition with

other churches. ‘Us and them’ works the other way too.

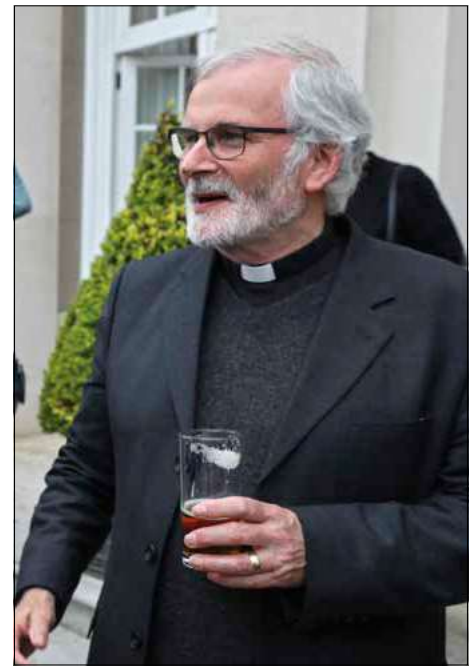
There are many simple ways to break through this mutual lack of understanding and creating personal links and friendships: inviting the congregation to join the ringers in the tower from time to time; fitting up a screen in the church with a live feed to the ringing room or bell chamber; asking for a slot in a service to demonstrate aspects of ringing; reporting (in person) to the parish AGM; inviting the vicar and/or church leaders to a practice night (and to the pub afterwards), or to any annual ringers’ meal. Ringers tend to talk in technical ringing terms, and a conscious effort is required to make talking about ringing easily accessible. My own Tower Captain said one Sunday ‘*if only those coming into church could hear the laughter from the ringing room they would want to come up and find out more*’. Other useful suggestions are including ringing in the church notice sheets, music lists, magazine and details, photos and information on the church’s website, as well as an open *Facebook* page or equivalent for a wider readership.

The conversations need to be two way, so that ringers understand the stresses and priorities for the local church members. Clergy are usually under pressure about congregational numbers and finance, so ringing may seem peripheral, even irrelevant, to them (despite Canon F8, requiring a bell to be rung before any service, a reminder which could open a conversation about ‘Why?’)

Nevertheless, awareness, support and affirmation is generally well received. Consumerism is so deeply rooted in our culture to the extent that clergy often feel that they have to deliver the goods demanded of them – exciting worship, excellent preaching, superb pastoral care, endless availability. So ringers contributing and offering rather than expecting and demanding is an important counter-cultural step to establishing a positive relationship.

In 2014, the Bishop of Dudley, Graham Usher, sent a message to the clergy of the Hereford Diocese, following a concern about safeguarding. He notes that ‘*in some places the church community, including clergy and churchwardens, have little to do with bell ringers who ring in their towers. It is also true that some bell ringers make no effort to involve themselves in the wider life of the church and for others there is a sense of entitlement to ring ...*’ He relates some suggestions from ringers:

- **get to know each other – clergy/ringers/churchwardens/people who attend church**
- **invite clergy and PCC members up the tower to visit the ringers**
- **bell ringers would welcome being invited to services or particular events**



- **invite ringers to meet the PCC, perhaps encourage one or more to be elected to it**
- **plan together an annual diary of special ringing events**
- **add bell ringers into a checklist of communication throughout the church**
- **ensure that the bell ringers are informed of the PCC safeguarding policy and changes to diocesan/national policies**
- **please appreciate/mention ringers in the church – ‘don’t forget the ringers’, ‘the ringing this morning was a joy to hear’ are much appreciated comments**
- **small touches matter eg. Giving sufficient notice of events/weddings involving ringers, or finding ways to thank and appreciate them**
- **make it your (clergy) business to know what is happening in your tower – the bell ringers are there by invitation, serving the mission of the church.**

A response to a CCCBR *Facebook* request in 2014 stated that a local ringing society’s formal aims included ‘active ringing, and ringing training and education’, reflecting a view that ringing ‘*is about education and bringing people into church that might not otherwise be there. Hence church people should see ringing as mission activity – mission, nurture and evangelism.*’ Another submission suggested that ‘*Bellringing is described as a great noise for God – the Gospel without words. Not calling people to worship (you only need one bell to do that) but it is worship itself.*’ Anecdotal evidence from Spitalfields in London shows that when the bells are ringing for a peal, the number of visitors into the church building is far greater than when there is no sound.

It is worth digging deeper into the whole business of mission, which is not about recruitment only but about faith and relationship, a way of living.

Continued overleaf

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Over the last half century, there has been debate about the professionalisation of clergy, and the pressure to be successful, resulting in less concern for and priorities of people in general. For example, a family requesting a baptism may be faced with an explanation of the service itself whereas they may want to share their hopes and fears as new parents. The responsibility of maintaining parish structures weighs heavily on many clergy, leading to an increasing need for management skills.

Ringers may not fit easily into this mindset, but need to bear in mind its presence.

The debate about the role of clergy has identified that the professional model leads to a passive laity. The priest delivers and the people receive, increasing pressure to conform and accept what is said and offered. However, the heart of Christian mission is not so much about how to govern the church (at any level) but to serve God's mission of offering, in the words of Jesus, 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10). This mission is the task of the whole church.

This mission is outward looking, with a focus on ways of living, taking part in local community activity, inviting people not part of the church into partnership. David Heywood, a writer on mission, talks about this as the 'vision of God' being expressed 'in the harmonious characteristic of the human heart' (Reimagining Ministry 2016).

Ringers may know and experience more of this insight into mission and faith than we realise, as considered in the previous article.

In building close and positive relationships between ringers and congregations, simple practical ideas can make a huge difference. But assumptions can also be challenged, and hopefully these thoughts can equip ringers for a robust debate with local church members (who may include ringers, of course!).

A Sunday by Sunday commitment, a desire to ring and strike as well as possible for the public proclamation of the Christian faith, the willingness to spend years learning and teaching new skills, the impact of ringing friendships and networks – surely something the church as a whole can acknowledge and applaud. Truly a wonderful mix of sacred and secular!

The Pub Quiz

(answers on p.636)



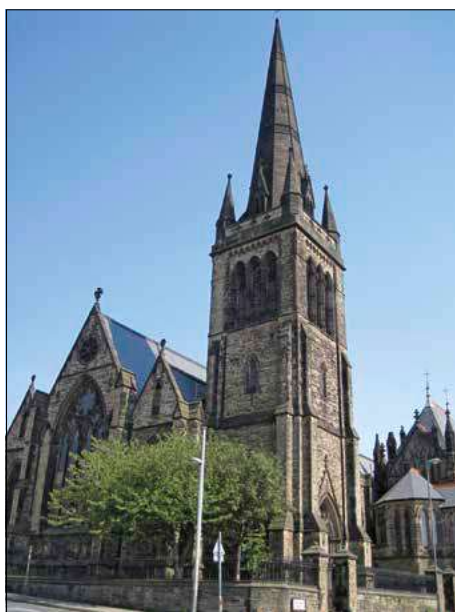
1. How many attended the Mad Hatter's tea party?
2. What type of acid is produced when milk goes sour?
3. What was the first film Bogart and Bacall starred in together?
4. Which newspaper involved Sven Goran Eriksson with the 'Fake sheikh'?
5. Which House of Commons Speaker became a saint?



Ringing World National Youth Contest

Liverpool RWNYC 2019 at a glance

The ninth Ringing World National Youth Contest is just over a week away! On Saturday, 6th July over two hundred young ringers will gather in Liverpool for a day of ringing, hosted by the Liverpool Branch of the Lancashire Association and organised by David Hull. Here are some of the details ...



St Francis Xavier, Liverpool – venue for the competition ringing

Facebook
@RingingWorldNationalYouthContest

Twitter
@rwyouthringing #rwnyc2019

Instagram
#rwnyc2019

A reminder of this year's competing teams ...

- Bath and Wells
- Bedfordshire Young Ringers
- Brumdingers
- Bucks and Berks Young Ringers
- Cheshire Cats
- Coventry Spires
- D&N Young Ringers
- Derbyshire Young Ringers
- Essex Young Eagles
- Fen Tigers
- G&B
- Go Bellistic! (SDGR)
- Kent Young Ringers
- Lancashire Lads and Lasses
- Lincolnshire Poachers
- Oxford Diocesan Guild
- Surrey Strikers
- Sussex Young Ringers
- Three Spires
- W&P Youths
- Worcester Cathedral
- Yorkshire Tykes
- Young@Herts

The judges will be ...

Chief Judge

Julia Cater

Assistant Judges

Luke Groom

Alex Riley

Anna Sherwood



The Whitechapel Trophy

... competing to join the previous winners ...

Year	Venue	Winners of the Method Ringing category	Winners of the Call Changes category
2011	London	Oxford D G	Hertfordshire
2012	Birmingham	The G & B	Sussex Young Ringers
2013	York	The G & B	Bedfordshire Young Ringers
2014	Worcester	Yorkshire Tykes	Bedfordshire Young Ringers
2015	Oxford	The G & B	Bedfordshire Young Ringers
2016	London	Bedfordshire Young Ringers	Young@Herts – Hot Buns
2017	Birmingham	Yorkshire Tykes	Three Spires
2018	London	<i>Oxford D G</i>	Sussex Young Ringers

Winners of the Whitechapel Trophy

Winners of the RW Editor's Trophy for Excellence