

BOOK REVIEW

The Voice of the Church: Bells and bellringers in the life of the Church of England

The Guild of Clerical Ringers
Max Drinkwater, Anthony Ellis,
Jonathan Rose, David Grimwood

Paperback, 76 pages, A5 (148 × 210mm)
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As this book is aimed at both the ringing community and leaders of the church, we solicited reviews from a representative of each group: The Right Reverend Nigel Stock, former President of the Suffolk Guild whilst Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich; and Chris Kippin, lifelong ringer, former Master of the College Youths and a church organist.

Review by the Rt Revd Nigel Stock

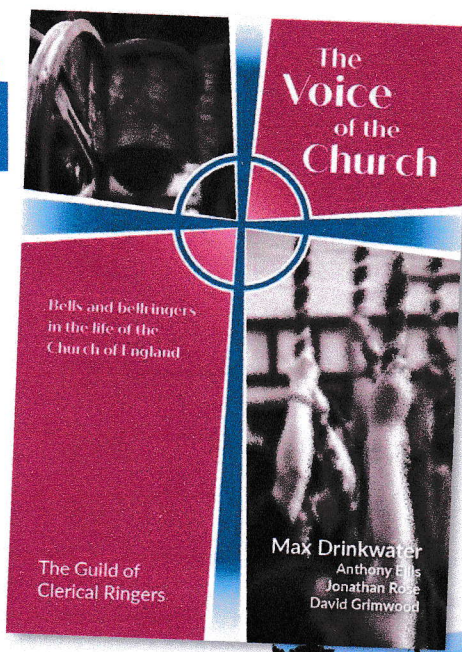
This excellent publication is produced by The Ringing World and authored by four ordained ringers who are members of the Guild of Clerical Ringers. It is a wise and thoughtful work that combines theology, history and very practical advice. The unique perspective of the clerical ringer is the ability to understand the viewpoint of both ringer and clergy in the shared space of the Church building.

It is appropriate that the authors fully understand the fact that many ringers are not church attenders and that many regard ringing first as an all absorbing hobby. All ringers, however, contribute to the life of the church, and indeed the very sound of bells intimates that there is life in the Church!

The section on the history of ringing, and how it evolved into the art of change ringing distinctive to this country will encourage a wider understanding of the precious heritage we have in the towers of our churches. The way that bells have interacted in the liturgy of the church is well described. The medieval church used the ringing of the bells at particular points of the liturgy, sounding out to a wider world what was happening in the worship within the building. The use of bells as a call to worship developed later.

There is a very helpful reflection on ‘soundscapes’ and how much bells add to the location in which they are situated. They provide a reassurance and sense of continuity and hope that is appreciated by a far wider constituency than the local congregation. The way in which God is praised by music and sound in the Bible is outlined, also the spiritual resonance that bells offer within a ‘soundscape’. I particularly liked the phrase and idea of a ‘sonic parish’!

However there is also a recognition by the authors that not everyone appreciates the sound of bells. There is good advice in the booklet about dealing sensitively with those who have such difficulties. This is not a new phenomenon. I was once fortunate to be the incumbent of a parish in the North East which had a very fine ring of bells and a very capable band of ringers. The bell tower was built in the Georgian period. There was I commend this publication wholeheartedly, and can only concur with the authors that “Change ringing is something to be celebrated, nurtured, discovered and promoted.”



Review by Chris Kippin

Once in a while, a book comes along which you wonder why no-one has ever written before. This is such a book. It sets out to portray ringing, in all its facets, to the clergy, who ultimately control the bells on which we pursue our hobby, and to help ringers understand how ringing fits into the life of the church, and the benefits ringing can bring. Over the years, ringing seems to have become more detached from church life, occasionally deliberately, more frequently through a drifting away of ringers from the church, and maybe through a lack of interest or understanding on the part of our clergy. It's easy to think that there was once a golden age when all ringers attended the services for which they rang, and choirboys gravitated to the belfry to learn to ring after their voices broke, but I suspect that such an age never really existed. I'm sure there are still churches where ringers play an active part in other aspects of church life, and equally those where the bond between ringers and church is quite tenuous.

The authors of the book are members of the Guild of Clerical Ringers, led by Max Drinkwater, and assisted by Anthony Ellis, Jonathan Rose and David Grimwood, names familiar to many of us by their contributions

to ‘Thought for the Week’ in the Ringing World. They have co-opted some big guns too, Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans, also a ringer, has written the foreword, and there's an endnote by Andrew Rumsey, Bishop of Ramsbury (no, that isn't a misprint).

After an Introduction, the rest of book is divided into five chapters, which cover the distinctiveness of the sound of change ringing, and the way in which that sound is received by the general public, ie the spiritual impact of the sound. Further chapters consider the spiritual and theological aspects of bells, the ringing community and how bells can themselves be a resource within a church and local community. Each chapter also includes a separate reflection on one aspect of that chapter's contents, with one exception written by other ringing clergy. There's a list of suggested further reading, a comprehensive list of references and endnotes and a good index. The inside covers contain ‘Ten tips for church leaders for good engagement with bellringers’ and ‘Ten tips for bellringers for good engagement with church leaders’, both very sensible lists. There are many attractive illustrations. Some ringers may even recognise themselves. The book is well-produced, in A5 format and spine bound.

Why should you buy this book? I think it's thought-provoking, for both ringers and clergy. It's informative – I certainly learnt things I didn't know – and entertaining. It covers an important topic in a very readable way and doesn't preach. The relationship between ringers, clergy and the church community in our parish is very good, but I shall buy one for our Rector, just to remind him. And I shall certainly buy one for our curate, who is shortly to depart for his own living in south Shropshire where he will have the care of a ring of six and a ring of four.

Chapter 2 - 'The Voice of the Church': A Spiritual Impact on a Public Soundscape

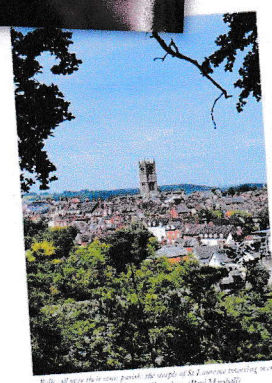
The previous chapter explains what makes the sound of change ringing so distinctive. It also noted that it is made recognisable and then associated with the life of the church and that of the community in which one finds it. This chapter explains the way in which that sound is received, and the impact that the sound of change ringing has on some of those who hear it.

Distinctive Purpose

When the Church Bell described at the beginning of the previous chapter, was used in practice, it was as part of the opening ceremony of the Church's services. The programme that accompanied the opening ceremony, written for a specific audience, included the precise details of the bell.

Bells ring out the changes of one day. They call us to work, to pray, to worship, to learn, to share and to create, to learn to come together. Almost everywhere in Britain lives within a bell's sound.

Most all bells in the world of freedom and peace since 1945. Since all bells in the world of freedom and peace since 1945. Since all bells in the world of freedom and peace since 1945. Since all bells in the world of freedom and peace since 1945.



Bells across the country from the south of St Edmundsbury, the town of Ipswich in Suffolk. (Paul Mansfield)



NOTICES

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Display adverts start at £36 for a ninth page. Options in colour or black and white.

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We can help **design** your adverts in house. Free for small and simple options.

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Other advertising options include loose leaf inserts and the Ringing World Diary and Calendar.

For more details:
advertising@ringingworld.co.uk
notices@ringingworld.co.uk
 01264 366620

CORRECTION

We apologise to Bishop Nigel Stock that his generous review of The Voice of the Church suffered a misprint last week. The final paragraph(s) should read:

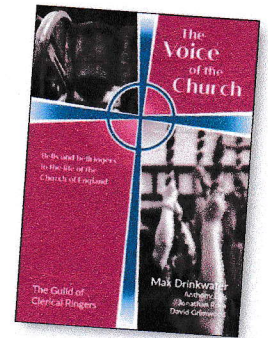
However, there is also a recognition by the authors that not everyone appreciates the sound of bells. There is good advice in the booklet about dealing sensitively with those who have such difficulties. This is not a new phenomenon. I was once fortunate to be the incumbent of a parish in the North East which had a very fine ring of bells and a very capable band of ringers. The bell tower was built in the Georgian period. There was a record in the parish history of an objection lodged against the faculty to build the tower. The canny local objectors stated it would be cheaper to buy every resident a "well regulated timepiece" to tell them when the service was, rather than be summoned by bells!

In recent times bells have rung out on momentous national events, marking the death of a long reigning and much loved monarch and celebrating the crowning of her successor. Those occasions of ringing have a wide appreciation. It is the hope of the authors that the sound of bells can be a bridge between the church and the wider community, a sound inviting people to greater spiritual awareness. A telling sentence in their conclusion is; "This can only be done if church leaders recognise that many ringers stand on that bridge themselves, often willing to support the life of the church if not personally committed to a life of faith." The tips for good engagement at the front and back

of the book for both clergy and ringers are very helpful.

A fine example I have encountered of the way bells can offer solace and support to a community and demonstrate pastoral care occurred during the last serious Foot and Mouth outbreak in the UK. I was in an area where the dairy herd had been devastated in a previous epidemic, and to avoid a repeat of that there was a very severe lockdown on dairy farms. As the weeks wore on the strain on farming families became greater. In order to show solidarity with them, and to ensure that they were appreciated and supported, it was agreed that the church bells of the diocese would ring out at a certain time. The farming community was informed by phone and email, and they were also assured that they would be prayed for at that moment. It turned out to be an enormous morale boost for those families. I don't suppose every farm was within earshot of bells, but the vast majority were. What other sound would have been capable of conveying so much?

I commend this publication wholeheartedly, and can only concur with the authors that "Change ringing is something to be celebrated, nurtured, discovered and promoted."



Wanted

ROBERT WELLS cup bells (RW inside) and **JAMES BARWELL** house bells (B and a number on top). Len Porter 01865 763932 nbrs.fan@lycos.com 2126

Announcement

Robert B Smith 12 Bell Trophy

Entries are invited for the fifth Robert B Smith 12 Bell Competition taking place at Birmingham Cathedral Church of St Philip on Saturday, 23rd September 2023.

Details will be updated on the website and entry is via the 'contact us' link on the homepage at <https://rbs12bell.org.uk/>

(Entry is limited to 8 teams due to timings at the Cathedral so there may have to be a draw.)

Test piece Erin 2127

For Sale

Set of 'Diatonic 12' on 18G with added F natural.

Believed to date back to post WWII and restored in 1993 by Len Porter. £2,000 ono as in excellent condition. Contact Elizabeth Lees 07969 841350 for more information. 2129

Weekday Meetings and Practices

VETERANS AFTERNOON Debenham Suffolk, Wednesday July 12th . Bells 2pm, tea 4.30pm. All welcome. Jenny Scase 01728 860323 debenhamsuffolkbells.org.uk 2128

75 Years Ago in *The Ringing World*

18 June, 1948

Selected by the Editor

Belfry Gossip

The Exercise will desire to join with us in extending our congratulations to Mr. C. F. Johnston, director of Messrs. Gillett and Johnston, Ltd., bellfounders, upon appointment in the King's Birthday Honours List as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.

To those questioning tenor weights, Mr. Denis A. Bayles states that Messrs. John Taylor and Co. give the weight of St. Stephen's, Newcastle-on-Tyne, as 27 cwt, 2 qr, 8 lb. This tenor has been reported as 30 cwt.

Kidlington is another case of a shrinking tenor. In Morris' book it is given as 27 cwt. A tablet in the tower records it as 26 cwt, but nowadays it is regarded as 23½ cwt. 'Believe me,' writes Mr. Alan R. Pink, 'it is all there!'

* * * * *

*If your bells or your ropes or your frame,
 Are unmusical, fraying or lame,
 Just give us a shout,
 We'll soon help you out,
 With some expert advice on the same.*

sminf@cccbr.org.uk

Central Council
 Stewardship and Management Workgroup
 Tower infrastructure

Yorkshire Association of Change Ringers

DIAGRAMS

The new edition of DIAGRAMS is now available from John Mitchell, Cobblers House, Roecliffe, Boroughbridge, York, YO51 9LY.

Price £12 including p&p.

A4 version (loose leaved, spirally bound) £25

Cheques please to 'YACR Snowdon Books'. Any enquiries to books@jmanorhouse.co.uk (Sorry; there is no discount for multiple purchases)

All surplus proceeds to YACR Bell Repair Fund

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