

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

## A new book from the Guild of Clerical Ringers

One of the peculiarities of ringing is that as ringers, in most cases, we share our space with another group or organisation – usually a share. We share physical space in our churches, including a shared responsibility to maintain the bells, ringing chamber and tower so that they are fit for our purposes. We share ideological space too, which shows up in debates about when and why we ring. And we share the space that we occupy in public perception too because when a passer-by hears the bells and looks to the source of the sound, they will most often see a church.

To share that space effectively, we need to foster good relationships between all those who use it or have a stake in it. Most obviously, it requires ringers and church leaders to work well together with a mutual understanding of how the other side likes to think and work.

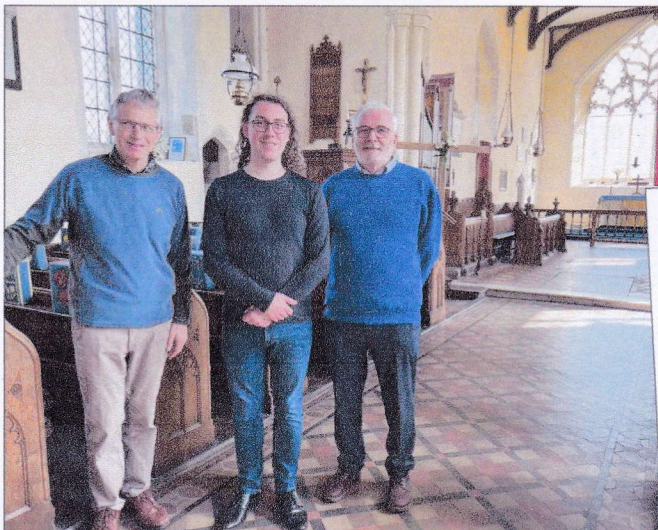
To help explore our understanding of this shared space, and to encourage people to form good local relationships, *The Voice of the Church: Bells and Bell Ringers in the Life of the Church of England* is available now from The Ringing World shop:

[bb.ringingworld.co.uk/rw-shop.php](http://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/rw-shop.php)

With practical advice and suggestions for good working practice, the book looks at some of the history and theology of ringing and introduces ringing theory and society in the context of the church.

The book might help ringers think about the place of ringing in the church today, and how we should relate to those who have some oversight for the spaces we occupy. It should also help church leaders understand something about ringing, what it is and why we do it, especially those who otherwise have little knowledge of it and what it involves. The inside front and back covers contain handy “Ten Tips” for good engagement with each other for church leaders and bellringers respectively.

The book’s four authors, Max Drinkwater, Anthony Ellis, Jonathan Rose and David Grimwood, are all ringers who are also



L-R: Jonathan Rose, Max Drinkwater, David Grimwood at the Clerical Guild’s recent Eastertide tour

Max Drinkwater, Anthony Ellis, Jonathan Rose, David Grimwood

£7.00 – Paperback  
76 pages, A5 (148 × 210mm)  
ISBN 978-1-7395991-6-4

Published 2023 by The Ringing World.

Written by ringing clergy (familiar names from our Thought for the Week column), this new book explores ringing’s history, theology and society, and its relationship with the Church of England. It gives tips for good relationships between ringers and church leaders, and encouragement for this art and its profound and lasting impact on the public soundscape.

### 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 is a sound that is easily recognisable and often associated with the life of the church and that of the community with whom it is associated. This chapter explores the ways in which that sound is received, and the impact that the sound of change ringing bells can have on those who hear it.

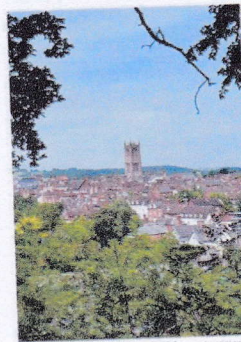
#### Distinctive Purpose

When the Olympic Bell, described at the beginning of the previous chapter, was cast its purpose was to be rung as part of the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. The programme that accompanied the opening ceremony, written for a secular audience, described the purpose of bells as follows:

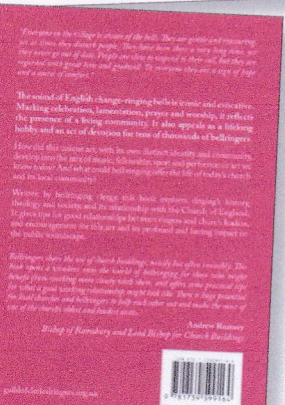
Bells ring out the changes of our days. They call us to work, to pray, to rest, to arm, to love and, in times of crisis, to come together. Almost everywhere in Britain lives within a town, parish...

Almost everywhere in Britain lives within a town, parish...

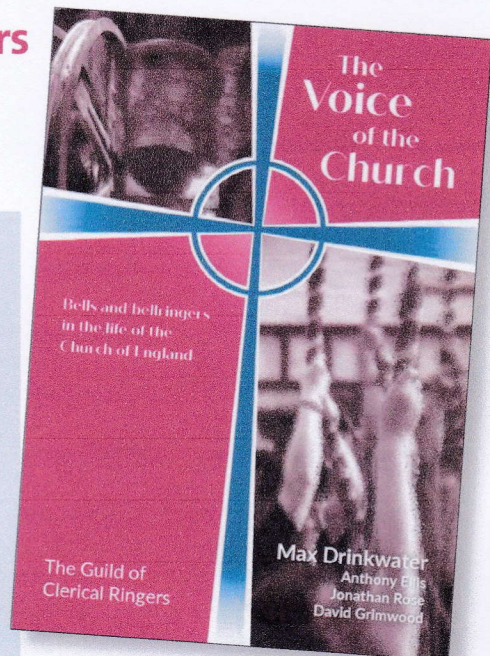
...where all bells are the sound of freedom and peace. Throughout World War II all of Britain’s bell towers were silent, so the only sound when they could ring in the peace. The idea of a ‘town, parish’ is an engaging one. Famously, the sound of the bells of St Mary le Bow Church in Clerkenwell, London, have long been used to define a true Cockney, and there is other



Bells will soon then come pealing the night in St Lawrence ringing over the town of Ludlow in Shropshire. (Paul Marshall)



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ordained in the Church of England and are members of the Guild of Clerical Ringers. They, therefore, have a vested interest in both sides of the relationship and hope that the book will be made accessible and become popular with both ringers and non-ringing church members and leaders. The Guild recognises that it has a role to play in facilitating good relations between ringers and the church at all levels, and this book is one resource to help that. We will be providing copies to clerical training institutions and other colleagues in ministry.

This book could spark a conversation with a local vicar or churchwarden: ‘Have you seen this new book about ringing and the church?’ Or even better, ‘Here’s a copy!’ It is available now, ahead of Bell Sunday on 14th May (or another Sunday nearby), when churches are being encouraged to celebrate the contribution that ringing and ringers make to the life of the local church. The book might offer some ways of following up conversations and questions that begin on Bell Sunday.

*The Voice of the Church* is an exploration of the distinctive context in which we practise our unique art and could be a valuable read for anyone seeking to preserve and promote the place of ringing in the life of our local communities, today and in the years to come.

Available now – buy your priest a copy for Bell Sunday!  
[shop.ringingworld.co.uk](http://shop.ringingworld.co.uk)