

My first year as a bell-ringer

Lorraine Brown

Tuesday 21 November 2006 was my first lesson in the art of bell ringing in the tower at St Andrews Church, after listening with interest to the ringing during 8 and 9pm on a Tuesday night and watching a viewers' video diary about bell ringing on the Countryfile programme.

I decided to have a look on the internet to see if there was anything on bell ringing in Hertford and I found the details of the Tower Captain, John Kemp (affectionately known as the Master) and telephoned him to explain that I was interested in ringing and the rest is history, as they say.



On my first visit to the Tower, there were eight ropes dangling with a colourful stripy bit in the middle, which is called the Sally and is the bit that you pull on. The walls of the tower are covered in wooden plaques showing the names of ringers who have rung peals and quarter peals going back over a hundred years. There are also lots of old and more recent photographs about ringing and more certificates of significant peals and quarter peals rung and is a fascinating working historical memorial to the bell ringers of St Andrews Church. I was taken further up the tower where the bells are housed and watched them in action and shown on a scaled down model how a bell works when you pull the rope.

Every Tuesday night half an hour before the regular ringers met for the weekly practice session, was my tutorial in bell handling with two experienced ringers, Jill and Alastair. I had no idea how challenging it would be! I felt really pleased with myself as the weeks

went on, slowly but surely mastering each part of the technique that goes into bell handling. Also learning to ring bells up and then ring them down which is a whole different matter and tying the knot in the ropes when the bells are not in use, so they do not trail on the floor.

The Hertford band of ringers ring at St Andrews every second and fourth Tuesday and at All Saints on the first, third and fifth Tuesdays. There are a few regular ringers from Ware and Barnet who regularly join us on Tuesday nights. This is the lovely thing about ringing, you can turn up to any tower's practice night and you will be most welcome.

On Saturday 6 October was the day of the annual Ringer's Outing. Everyone convened in the tower of St John the Baptist, Royston at 1 o'clock. Some people who came had not rung in Hertford for some time since moving away and it was nice to catch up as well ring together. After Royston we visited four more towers in some lovely villages near Cambridge. It was very interesting to visit the other Churches and all of them, apart from one, rang their bells from the ground floor. It was really good practice for me to handle different bells and most of them were a pleasure to handle. We finished the day in Fulbourn with a very good pub dinner, well deserved.

On Saturday 13 October I attended my first district ringing practice with afternoon tea at Tewin. There were a lot of people there from all over the district and was really nice to meet new ringers and meet again visitors to Hertford practice sessions.

Since then, I have rung at Hunsdon, and Great Amwell. I am looking forward to 2008 and progressing further with my training.

This is second in a series of articles exploring what 'goes on behind the scenes'. More are planned – if you have a suggestion or an article please contact the editor.