

Coming soon in the belfry

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Readers may have seen in the diary that on September 9th there will be a bell-ringing competition at All Saints. The purpose of this article is to explain what that means and what happens.

The background to this is that for many years, the ringers in Hertford were known as the "Hertford College Youths Society of Change Ringers". I do not know why this particular name was chosen since I suspect few went to college and most were not youths! Nevertheless, the Society was formed in September 1767 and this September there will be a whole series of events to mark the 250th anniversary. I hope to write a further article about the history of the Society for a later issue of the magazine.



Events based at All Saints are:

- 3 September 5.30 pm
Quarter peal attempt;
- 5 September 7.30 pm
"Open Belfry" – we would like you to come and observe our practice night. Some of the Society's old books will also be available to view. There will also be the opportunity to sign up for a "taster" session for potential ringers.
- 9 September 9.30 am
Striking competition and display of some of the Society's books.

So, what is a striking competition? When we are ringing we always try to ensure that each bell sounds correctly in its own place and does not ring at or too near the same time as any other bell. In other words, each bell should be clearly heard in its own place.

This is much harder than it might seem. In a striking competition, bands endeavour to ring a piece as well as possible; all the ringing is heard by independent judges who decide which band has done best.

To maintain their independence, the judges cannot see or be seen by the ringers and do not know until results are announced which team is ringing at any given time. For the competition at All Saints, the judges will be in the upper room above the entrance to St John's Hall.



The winners will obviously receive the trophy – in September's case, the Essex Trophy. This trophy, which is always competed for on 10 bells, was presented by Frank Lufkin, a very well-known Essex ringer, and is competed for by bands drawn from the home counties (when a group of ringers ring formally they are known as a "band").

Competition ringing has a rich history; local newspaper archives have many stories of bands of ringers competing for monetary prizes in the 17th and 18th centuries. More recently there is a national competition on 12 bells as well as a competition for young (under 18) ringers in which Hertfordshire bands have always done well. At a local level, there are competitions on six and eight bells.

While the competition is going on, there will be a small display in the church – I am arranging to borrow from the County archive a number of items deposited there and which tell something of the history of the Society. Obviously, it will not be possible to open the tower to visitors until after all teams have rung – when the number of entries is known, this time will be announced.