

# The Heritage of Bell Ringing in Hampshire

**Intro:** Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts as well as enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

**Cathy:** Hi, my name is Cathy Booth and I'm delighted to host this bonus episode for Hampshire HistBites as part of Winchester Heritage Open Days. Although I do not ring bells myself, I am the wife and mother of bell ringers, and I host a podcast about it. Today, I'm excited to be interviewing three people about traditional English bell ringing in Hampshire. The first is Chris Pickford, who was an archivist for the John Taylor Bell Foundry Museum. My first question is what do we mean by traditional English bell ringing?

**Chris:** It's the method developed in England in the 17th century of ringing bells by rope and wheel. actually ringing them full circle so they turn around 360 degrees for each ding and that was a system developed, particularly in England, but it's also about the method of ringing known as change ringing — the technical system whereby the order in which you ring the bells changes every pull of the rope, but it's possible to just ring descending scale order on bells. It's possible to ring bells in changing permutations where the change actually takes place at intervals of perhaps half a minute apart rather than at every pull of the rope and there's also different ways of pitching the bells in terms of the speed at which they ring and the intervals between them. One example of that is West Country call change ringing where the bells are run without interval. So you get an absolutely continuous sound. Whereas in change ringing the traditional method is to leave a small gap at the start of each whole pull. The whole pull is two dings. So the rhythm is very different. There are two very distinct styles, and when you listen to them, they give a very different feel. The call change ringing - and there's a northern equivalent in Cartwell ringing as it's called - having a very strong drive to them because it's perpetual, it's constant. Whereas change ringing is slightly more nuanced because you've just got this slight ever so discreet, ever so slight gap in between sets of rows.

The thing that is important though, is that in all these sorts of ringing every bell strikes at every pull so you're always ringing constantly.

**Cathy:** How did the change ringing develop?

**Chris:** We don't really know, and a lot of what's been written is possibly too focused on written evidence - a lot of stuff that happens in life and in the world never gets written down or recorded, or if it does, it's recorded by people who perhaps don't quite understand.

There's certainly documentary evidence of full sets of bells being run together in peal in the Middle Ages. But this became much more popular in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. And it's about that time, we don't know the exact date, when bells started to be rung full circle. It's really only when you get to the bell being fully up, ringing through 360 degrees, that the ringer gets complete control of the timing of the bell.

And of course, if you're ringing a set of bells, it's that ability to control the bell in relation to the others that makes ringing possible

**Cathy:** And as part of the Heritage Open Days, some lucky people are going to be able to watch some bell ringing in our towers. What should they look out for?

**Chris:** Let's start at the very basic supposing you arrive at the start of a ringing session, and then all the bells will be mouth down.

And the ropes will be safe to touch and that the ringers might actually say, just have a feel of this, but when they start ringing the ringers will catch hold and coil the ropes because the ropes will be moving fairly little. When the bells are up to ring full circle, there's a lot of movements in the ropes but when they're down and stationary, the ringers will coil the ropes in their hands so they haven't got lots of rope flapping around and the treble ringer will give the instruction to start. And that means that the bells will pull in one by one. the treble, the first bell with the highest note will start. And then the second bell will come in. The third bell will come in, the fourth bell ....

So it starts 1; 1 2; 1 2 3; 1 2 3 4; 1 2 3 4 5; 1 2 3 5 6. Now at that stage, the visitor will see the ropes not moving very much, but they're starting to flap about a bit more. And the clappers are only striking on one side of the bell. Now the idea is that they pull the bell to increase the arc of swing. And after a few pulls once all six are going - if it's a six bell tower - they will hear the clapper striking on both sides. And that means that you've got the bell swinging through a lowish arc, perhaps about 90 degrees overall you know, 45 degrees each way. And you've got the bells double clapping and then the ropes, they pull slightly harder so that the bells go higher up and eventually the ringing slows down. It's all quite frantic to start. And then it gets a bit more controlled, as the bells reach the top, the ringing spaces out, it becomes more even, and eventually the conductor will say 'stand' because the bells are ready to be stopped.

Now bells are hung with a mechanism that allows them to be left in the mouth upright position. Completely defying gravity, of course. They're actually very slightly over the balance - there's a rest and the rest is moveable so that when the bell swings one way, it will rest slightly tilting to the right when it's going the other way, slightly tilting to the left. between each pull it swings right round. Of course you won't see any of that, but you need to think in terms of that's what's happening to understand what's going on.

Now in the ringing room, there may be boards on the wall recording past performances by the ringers. But the first thing you'll see the coloured ropes with the sallies as they're called, woven in wool into the fibre of the rope and they hang in the rope circle round from the smallest to the largest – the tenor bell. And that's the basics.

**Cathy:** You said that people would see a record of the ringing that's gone on when they're in a bell tower, those are called peal boards I understand.

**Chris:** Yes, one of the things about ringing is that bells can be rung for an extended period. And the attraction mentally is that the combinations of changes available are enormous. It's a system based on sixes. So if you start with three bells - very simple maths, there will be six different ways in which you can arrange those three bells.

And of course, if you go to four bells, then you multiply that by four which gives you 24, 5 bells by 5 - 120 - and so on. And if you ring the full extent of, of changes possible on eight

bells it's 40,320, which has been rung by teams of ringers just a few times. And it takes more or less all day, 17 or 18 hours.

And from the early 18th century onwards, the peal, which is 5,040 factorial seven became a standard length for the extended performances. And these performances have been recorded - reported in newspapers, ringers themselves kept peal books with records of the peals they'd rung. And very often boards are erected in church towers when peals like that were rung for special occasions or just as an endeavour in the search for something that the local band was trying to achieve.

We know that ringing went on. There were parish ringers, ringing all the time. The church wardens' accounts record payments to the ringers for ringing for major occasions. That's part of it, but we don't often know the names of the ringers that took part.

A lot of what we know about ringing history comes from records of performances, these peal records are immensely useful in terms of giving us the names of ringers and showing us the extent to which ringers were moving around the country, going around in teams to experience bells in different churches. And it's this community activity that really does make it interesting historically. Performances have been regularly published in specialists bell ringing newspapers since the 1870s. There were pages in a church magazine called Church Bells from the 1870s onwards. And then around the 1880s, another separate publication called Bell News came into being that was devoted specifically to ringing news and reports of bell restorations, meetings of ringing associations and things like that.

And the present weekly magazine, is The Ringing World, which started in 1911. So we've got a very full record of all this performance ringing back to that sort of date. It's a lot sparser before that, but we do have a remarkable amount.

**Cathy:** Do you know any stories related to bell ringing in Hampshire?

**Chris:** One place to start looking at the heritage of ringing is about how bells were installed and why bells were installed. In 1552, 1553 there's the Edwardian inventories of church goods. And these generally show that for most parts of the country, churches usually had between three and five bells and the five bells are very often in the town churches, the bigger churches. Just a small number of sets of six bells and maybe one or two at eight. So the number of bells in churches was really quite limited. Now, from what I've already said about change ringing the more bells you've got, the more scope there is. And through the 17th century, it became quite common for parishes to be installing extra bells, to make up to five, six or eight.

In Hampshire, we certainly know of a possible eight at Winchester Cathedral as early as 1675. Definitely from 1734 onwards, Portsmouth St. Thomas', now the cathedral, acquired a ring of eight in 1703, but if you look at the rings of five and six, there were six bells at Crondall by 1616, Kingsclere 1664, and Southampton St. Michael's is an early six, 1693

But then you start looking at the inscriptions on these bells or documentation and finding out how they were gleaned. And you'll find a lot of people giving bells. There are several bells cast by the Knights of Reading around a couple of decades either side of the 1700 with rather good inscriptions. At Binstead, for example, in 1695,

*Nicholas Wheeler did then contrive to cast from four this peal of five*

so this is a local benefactor giving bells and

*Dr. Nicholas gave five pairs to help cast this peal tuneable in sound.*

So they were both trying to improve the bells, but also providing bells for recreation as well as for the ringing.

The best example from Hampshire and the Isle of Wight is at Brystone in 1740 and that's got the inscription:-

*In the year 1740 John Lord zealous for the promotion of campanalogia's art caused me to be fabricated in Portsmouth and placed in this tower.*

It actually says quite a lot more than that, but they've got a bell being put in and it says itself purely for the benefit of promoting ringing

**Cathy:** Ringers didn't just ring in their own parish churches, did they?

**Chris:** No, not at all. And even from the early 17th century, there's plenty of examples of ringers getting together to meet for practices and social activities. We know, for example, that The London Ringing Society, the College U is founded in 1637. They've got membership lists right back to the foundation. But the first member elected from Hampshire was someone from Winchester Cathedral in 1741 and people from Southampton, from the Isle of Wight, Stoneham, Alton in 1790, Romsey. So those are just some of the 18th century names that are in the College's membership books.

There are also subscription lists in some of the published textbooks about ringing. There are instruction manuals on ringing from 1667 onwards. And they obviously helped to promote the art of change ringing and the Clavis Campanalogia of 1788 has the subscription list in it, including three ringers from Alton: William Dyer, Thomas Nutley and John Putney. And that's fascinating because Alton bells had actually just been replaced and made eight in 1785. So here are some of the Alton ringers trying to get themselves up to speed with this new art of change ringing and within a very short time afterwards, they accomplished the full peal.

We don't know the names, but I'd be pretty sure those three subscribers were among the ringers who took part and they rang a peal on their own bells in 1789. The newspaper report says "this week was rung in Alton, a complete peal of 5,040 changes of Bob Majors. This is the first peal ever rung on the new bells." It was performed by the Cumberland society that place in three hours and 15 minutes. So that's three hours and 15 minutes of continuous ringing by local ringers, but very much involved in the wider network just four years after their new bells had been put in.

**Cathy:** It mentions Bob Major. Can you tell me a bit about strange ringing terminology?

**Chris:** Well, the ringing of course does have a language of its own. The obvious one to cover is the terms used for different numbers of bells. It's all based on the numbers of bells that can change. So if you have five bells, only two of them can change place at any one time. So that's called doubles. If you have seven bells, three pairs of bells can change.- that's triples.

caters (French quatorze<sup>1</sup>) for nine and cinques<sup>2</sup> for eleven bells because twelve until very recent times was the largest number of bells that were generally rung.

The even bell versions are called minimus on four bells, minor on six, major on eight, royal on ten and maximus on twelve. So if you read about grandsire triples, all that means is it's rung on seven bells, usually with an eighth bell covering behind. So the seven smaller bells are changing places all the time. The eighth bell is just keeping a steady rhythm at the back. But then the methods themselves have names. And a lot of those go back to the 17th century. Grandsire<sup>3</sup> is a method we'll ring today. It's one of the standard methods that most bands will ring. And that's the name that was around way back.

**Cathy:** So these are the sort of terms that we might see on these peal boards?

**Chris:** Indeed yes. And if ringers are starting to ring and starting to show off by ringing something to try to entertain you then they'll be ringing rounds and bells in descending order to start off with, and then a conductor will say, go Grandsire and that's when the changing starts

**Cathy:** What sort of other things would people see in the press?

**Chris:** The 18th century newspapers are very rich in reports of the openings of new peals of bells and there's an invitation to the local ringers to turn out and have a listen, but also, of course, the local townspeople. One of the things about ringing that's perhaps not obvious to people today is that ringing did have a very popular following as well. People liked to hear the bells and liked to go around and follow ringing activities.

So openings were one thing, but also competitions. Prize ringing was very much stamped on by the 19th century reformers because it was associated with drunkenness and bad behaviour, but it was a very good opportunity for ringers to get together and practice their skills There's a nice little clutch of advertisements in the 1770s, for example, of competitions at places like Odiham, where several bands of ringers got together and a match between Barton Stacey and Baughurst in 1789 which was advertised. And these were competitions, there were quite strict rules as to what was to be rung and how long for. People were allowed to try the bells out first, they had a practice session and they might win a set of hats, for example:- a set of gold laced hats was given to the best team, silver lace to the second, and felt lined to the next.

**Cathy:** You mentioned 19th century reformers, who were they?

**Chris:** Well, it started in the early 19th century when ringers got a very bad reputation for drunkenness and never going to church and all that sort of thing. And the Reverend H.T. Ellacombe, who invented the Ellacombe chiming apparatus in 1821. He was among those who campaigned for ringers to become church workers, much more part of the church and to stamp out the drunkenness. The upshot of this was the reform of ringing went alongside of the

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1 Possibly a slip of the tongue, should be quatre – French four

2 Pronounced sinks

3 Pronounced Grandser

Tractarian Movement and all the reforms in church buildings and furnishings that went on in the 19th century and the re-establishment of rituals that had rather gone into abeyance, and ringers didn't escape for all of that. They were caught up in the same reform movement. And it was as a result of that, that the ringing associations and guilds that we have today were established as diocesan guilds of ringers or territorial associations of ringers a much stronger focus on ringing for the church and the involvement with the church. Drinking in the belfry, prize ringing competitions were very much outlawed.

**Cathy:** is this where ringing rules comes in?

**Chris:** Yes, funnily enough. I mean, the Winchester and Portsmouth guild that was established in 1879, Winchester Cathedral rules were, in fact, re-drafted that very year. There's a printed copy of the 1879 rules. So a lot of the quaint old rules that you find in older belfrys but the much stricter rules for ringers that you sometimes see are a later 19th century thing associated with, with belfry reform,

**Cathy:** what sort of rules?

**Chris:** Very strict on attendance, very strict on behaviour, you know, no swearing, no violence to other ringers, also about church attendance and about the ability of the vicar to sack the ringers if the band didn't live up to scratch and so on.

Very much brought under the thumb of the church, whereas there'd been quite a lot of secular independence in the belfry before that. But ringing was different in many ways because the fact that the associations were formed and ringers were seen to be much more part of the church, in fact, ringing benefited and strengthened from it. It killed off quite a strong community culture of ringing. But the art of change ringing itself greatly benefited because the clergy and the church supported church football clubs, church boxing clubs, you know, they liked bell ringing and they encouraged peal ringing, for example, as a measure of local proficiency and activity. There are greater opportunities for ringing, then the organization of the guilds itself, you know, brought some of the more isolated bands into contact with each other and got that spirit of ringing going more broadly. so there were benefits, as well as some losses to individuality and culture, shall we say.

**Cathy:** You mentioned Ellacombe chimes. It would be interesting to know a little bit more about what those are.

**Chris:** They're hammer systems. Each bell in a set will have a hammer underneath that is raised up from the pit underneath the bell to strike the inside of the bell. The ropes all come down to a chiming rack, perhaps about a couple of feet across and they hang in a sequence. And it means that one ringer can actually chime the bells, either play a tune or ring changes on them and in the early 19th century, there's a wonderful quote from a clergyman who said he would rather encourage football on a Sunday than ringing. You know, he didn't like ringers exerting themselves in the Belfry and it was a day of rest. So chiming bells for service was felt to be a good idea. And so the Ellacombe chimes both got rid of the naughty ringers out of the belfry, but also provided a way that the bells could be sounded for Sunday services. A lot of actual ringing wasn't for services at all, it was a recreational activity

**Cathy:** Finally, what is it about bell ringing that attracts you to it?

**Chris:** Well, I've been ringing well over 50 years now and it's been a constant joy to me. Ringing itself, when the ringing is good, it's just so rewarding. And you get into a rhythm, your bell striking in exactly the right place. And you've got the lovely sound of the bells. For me, the sound of the bells is everything. During lockdown there's been a lot of people ringing on computers with bleeps going on. That doesn't do anything for me at all. It has to be real metal and the bigger, the better but the ringing is such a close knit, yet large fraternity. You know, have ringing friends all over the country, all over the world. And it's just being a part of something that is very fulfilling. I stumbled into ringing by chance at boarding school. I was getting a bit fed up with going for the compulsory run and someone said one afternoon, well, why don't you come change ringing? I just was fascinated by it, and this feeling of being surrounded by history. I suppose, I've spent my working life as an archivist, always been interested in history from way back and just something in it struck a chord in me from that first moment.

**Cathy:** Micki, you're my second guest Micki Nadal. You're the secretary of the Winchester district of the Winchester and Portsmouth Diocesan Guild of Change Ringers, what's a district?

**Micki:** If you look nationally, the main organization at the top would be the central council and below the central council you have regional groups which are guilds and associations. I'm a member of the Winchester and Portsmouth guild. It's a very large area and it's split into seven districts. Our district stretches from Preston Candover in the north, through to North Stoneham in the south of the area, east to Ropley and west to Sherfield English. It's quite a big group. And within that, we have 40 rings of bells, 38 are churches, and two are secular rings of bells.

We're very lucky because we have two fantastically good ringing masters who organize practices. The district practices offer ringers from churches with fewer bells, great chance to ring towers with more bells, ring more complex methods, but it's not just for more complex ringing. They organize practices for basic handling skills for learners. So everybody finds the level they're comfortable with and you can push yourself just a little bit further. The districts, I think, are vital to keep the small groups of ringers in small rural towers up to scratch with good ringing practice and getting to meet other people you wouldn't normally meet from other towers.

**Cathy:** And the districts also organise social events. It's a team type of activity. Isn't it?

**Micki:** It is a team activity very much and we have striking competitions where teams will come together at one church and will compete in a very friendly fashion at different levels. And there will be judges who judge blind. They sit round the back of the church, you don't know who they are. and will listen to each band of ringers and knock off points for small errors that they make, but you have different levels of competitiveness as well. So a really, really experienced band won't be matched against a learning band. Everybody gets a chance to ring at their own level, and then a nice meal and something to drink in the pub afterwards always helps.

**Cathy:** Sounds great. And you mentioned for new ringers, it's handling skills is the first thing that people have to do.

**Micki:** Yeah. Yes. It's very important. Bells can be dangerous and you need to have a really good strong footing on how to handle the bell. It may take a while. Nobody is looked down on if it takes them a little longer. And it has to be said that the younger you are, probably the easier it is to learn because young people tend to have no fear.

**Cathy:** What's particularly fun about ringing in this area?

**Micki:** We have really lovely rural churches and some of them are quite mad in their setup. I take great joy in going to some of these churches. I can name a church where if you're ringing the number five bell, you can't see the tenor because there's an enormous clock mechanism in the way.

There's a lovely church at Mottisfont. A really nice ring of bells, where if you're on the tenor, you're standing on a hot water pipe, or if you're ringing the treble, you're standing behind the font

There's a church called Leckford, which has a lovely little ring of five bells. And if you ring the number three, you're lucky enough to be able to sit on the end of a pew to ring the bell, but there's also about a church in Chilbolton, which is lovely and has a great advantage of one of the bells is actually in the bathroom. And so if you feel the need to go to the loo, it's very handy. But all these things I think make ringing, certainly in rural areas, a great joy. People are always welcoming and it makes the whole thing great fun.

**Cathy:** And do you know any stories relating to the towers in this area?

**Micki:** Well, there are various stories. One of the most recent, I think many people have read one of the latest novel by Tracy Chevallier called *The Single Thread*, which interestingly combines the bells of Winchester with the Broderers who embroidered the kneelers and the seat cushions. It does give a lot of information about bell ringing in Hampshire as well.

Basingstoke has the honour of having the first woman, called Alice White, who completed a peal. And there's also the story of the local Squire from near Twyford, who lost in the fog, heard the local bells ringing and realized he would be shortly falling into a chalk pit. So kindly left a bequest to the bell ringers that if they rang once a year, he would fund a dinner for them. Food and drink is always very important to bellringers, so I'm sure they rather enjoyed that. And I was talking to a friend the other day who reminded me of a tower where one of the bells had been left up after bell tolling. It had been left up and there was a rainstorm actually a thunder storm. And when they came back in to ring and raise the other bells, they were starting ringing and nobody thought about it, but he got an absolute shower of water over him because the bell had filled with water from the rainstorm.

**Cathy:** Is it a hobby for men and women?

**Micki:** Yes, it is. There is absolutely no difference in treatment of men or women in the towers I'm happy to say. One thing ladies do need to watch out for though is clothing malfunctions, which can be quite embarrassing. I think all of us, women have tried to go into the tower and have worn a nice skirt or a frock but they'll never do it again because they tend to get lifted up quite easily by the rope.



On social media there has been a huge amount of discussion about the type of bra to wear during bell ringing which is comfortable and which more importantly doesn't move when you do. Yeah. Watch out for what you're wearing is what I would say to women bell ringers.

**Cathy:** Can you talk me through the plans for the week of the Open Days in September?

**Micki:** Yes. This is going to be very exciting. We have a week where certain towers, all government regulations permitting, will be open to non-ringers. We're also quite excited because on Saturday the 18th, we are planning a ringing festival along the Test valley along a 14 mile stretch. We'll be open for ringers. Some will be open for non ringers to come and listen or come and visit. We have people already who are planning to drive down from London and bring their bicycles and cycle the 14 mile route while visiting all the towers. We think it's going to be great fun because they range from four or five bells up to an eight bell tower. They're all very different. Some of them have the idiosyncrasies I was mentioning earlier.

**Cathy:** And just like the people in the past, people will be able to follow the ringers and listen to the different bells.

**Micki:** Absolutely. They all have different tones. Stockbridge we're very lucky that we had our bells refurbished about five years ago and new fittings, which had been there for 120 years without change. So everything has been refitted and rehung, and we are very proud of our bells

**Cathy:** So Micki, how long have you been ringing?

**Micki:** I come from what is commonly known as a bell ringing family. My father was a bell-ringer for about 70 years. I was in bell towers, particularly in St. Mary's Marlborough before my feet could touch the ground. So I learned very quickly not to move, not to say anything, not to disturb anyone, but by listening to my dad could soon point out if someone was not a very good ringer. When I was at university, I had a very long gap of about 20 years and came back only a few years ago. It's been so rewarding coming back to it because ringers are, generally, very good people. They're very friendly, very welcoming. And we have such a lot of fun. My backache's gone, which is a plus that it's very good exercise. I think it's a great team hobby to have. We're there to call people to church, we're church bell ringers on the whole and we ring at weddings, we toll the bell for funerals, we ring for special events and it is simply great fun. It doesn't matter if you want to scale the heights of the most complicated methods. It doesn't matter if you simply want to turn up for your Sunday ringing with fairly straightforward methods. As long as you're making a beautiful sound, I think that's all we really want

**Cathy:** From the west side of Winchester to the east side, I'm now going to talk to Elizabeth Johnson, who is the secretary of the St John's New Alresford bell ringing band. She has also written bell ringing articles in the parish magazine every month since the 1980s. People are going to be able to visit the New Alresford bell tower as part of the Winchester Heritage Open Days. What will they see there?

**Elizabeth:** Main entrance to the church is in the tower anyway, the big west door. And if you look to your right, as you go through the door, you'll see a gold kind of furry bit attached to a rope. That is the chiming bell that we use for maybe eight o'clock services on an early Sunday

morning. And then you'll see a steep step ladder. And on the wall that the stepladder's attached to are several brass plates and wooden plates. Some of the brass plates commemorate bell restorations, or the rehangings, which celebrated George the Fifth's Silver Jubilee in 1936. And earlier than that, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 was celebrated with the bells being restored.

There's also one big peal board fairly recently, 1986, which records a peal for the 50th anniversary of the rehangings of the bells. There's also a small wooden plaque, which commemorates the ringing of 50 Midnight peals and New Year peals by James Sate and William Hall. And then you go further up through the mezzanine floor and into the ringing chamber.

And in front of you, you'll see eight ropes hanging down from the ceiling. They have red sallies - the furry bits that you hang on to when you're ringing - ours are all red, partly because it's St John's church and that's the colour, but other churches have any colour you like for their sallies. Traditionally, it was red, white, and blue, which is the colour of the sally that we have for our teaching bell.

The rope for that is hanging down in the corner. This is useful because our bells are fairly heavy and quite difficult for young children to handle. But the teaching bell is much lighter so that they can get the knack like riding a bike and they don't come to any harm. Then on the wall is a big bookshelf full of files of archives, photographs, and information about ringing going back as far as we can up to the present day and also teaching books, manuals on bell care and anything useful that we need.

And moving further round, there's a wooden case holding our eight handbells. These were given in memory of Harry Newnham, who was a ringer at St John's and also the station master of Alresford station. On top of this are four articles made of wood. These were made from the wood of the old bell frame when the bells were rehung in 1936. There's a lamp base and a little bowl, a little wooden ash tray. I'm not sure quite how a wooden ashtray works, but still, and a very ingenious wooden bookstand made from one piece of wood.

Then we go to the east wall where there's a window into the church. This is very handy because you can see what's going on during the service but also it's fantastic for weddings because you can exactly see when the bride and groom are about to leave the church. So the treble ringer can turn round, look through the window and say, "look to, treble's going, she's gone". So the bells ring out just as the bride and groom emerge from the church.

Also in front of this window, there's a shelf, which is where we put the computer. We use this for tied ringing practice. The bells are tied, so they don't make a noise outside, but inside they do via the computer. This is done by sensors on the wheels and on the frame, so that as the bell turns round, it triggers the sound in the ringing chamber. So we can ring quietly for as long as we like and not annoy the neighbours.

And then moving further round to the south wall, there's a big board nearly four foot wide in black with gold writing, which commemorates the first peal on the bells, which was 1824. Opposite on the north wall, there's another peal board, which is about the same size, but this one is red and gold and commemorates the second peal in 1836. And then you come back to the trap door, but in front of that is another ladder, which goes up to the clock chamber.

**Cathy:** You mentioned the peal board for the first peal but I know there's a little bit of history around the first peal isn't there?

**Elizabeth:** The present bells that we ring now were installed in 1811. The Hampshire Chronicle had a big article to say that the opening of the bells on March, 1811 will be heralded with a peal of playing Bob Major. But our peal board records the first peal in 1824. This puzzled me for years and years.

Eventually reading an article in our weekly newspaper, The Ringing World, there was a transcript of the peal book of the Isle of Wight Youths. And in there was an entry to say that a quarter peal had been rung on March the 26th 1811 and it gave the list of the ringers and they rang a quarter peal of 1260 changes of Grants Triples. So I was thrilled to bits to find out that it wasn't a first peal. It's just that historically people who don't quite understand about ringers tend to call an amount of ringing a peal when it's not necessarily the 5040 that we count today as a full peal .

**Cathy:** And there's a big difference isn't there?

**Elizabeth:** There is, a quarter peal takes three quarters of an hour and a full peal takes three hours. So a big difference.

**Cathy:** One of the peal boards was commemorating the end of World War 2, but I know there was a lot of ringing done in 2018 to commemorate the end of World War 1 in 1918. Can you tell me about that?

**Elizabeth:** In the hundredth anniversary of World War 1 St. John's ringers rang quarter peals which is the three-quarters of an hour, 1260 changes, for every local man that was killed in World War 1. We took the information from the War Memorial in St. John's church, which is on the south wall of the nave. But all the information we gathered from a book called Not Just a Name written by Glenn Gilbertson so we were able to publish in the parish magazine and in The Ringing World that we'd rung a quarter peal for a Sergeant who was killed at the Somme or a Major who was killed somewhere else. So it's recorded all these men that gave their lives. These have been published with every other piece of ringing done by ringers all over the Winchester and Portsmouth Diocesan Guild into a huge book. In fact, there are two copies of it. One has gone into the Portsmouth Cathedral and one into Winchester Cathedral. It can be viewed in Winchester cathedral as well.

**Cathy:** And online, I understand.

**Elizabeth:** So you can just look up anybody you want and see who was rung for and in fact, Alresford has 17 pages, which is quite a lot, compared with some churches, we felt we were doing something very constructive in the memory of these men that were killed, all local men.

**Cathy:** Going back in time, what were the traditions that were associated with the ringers at Alresford?

**Elizabeth:** Certainly we know that they were paid. We don't get paid now, we only get paid for ringing for weddings, but in the 1700s looking through the church wardens accounts ringers were paid, for strange things like when the king passed through, but also the town trustees paid for meals for the ringers. One of these was obviously pretty riotous. The St. John's ringers were joined by the ringers from Old Alresford. And they met in the Swan. The

licensee had gained a license up to one o'clock, but I don't think the local teetotal residents appreciated the riotous ringers and there were complaints.

**Cathy:** Thinking about other towers in the area, what other artifacts are there, that we can see nowadays?

**Elizabeth:** Certainly in Cheriton there are some lovely old cardboard boards, about three foot square with numbers on them, which is a way of ringing one of the methods that we ring:- Steadman doubles. If you know the method, it's incredibly difficult to follow these boards, following the numbers. there's different ones for each bell which tells you which bell you have to follow. And it's incredibly difficult because if you look up and then you miss where you're going to ring, but they are fantastic archives of how things were in the past.

In Titchborn, there's a set of Ellacombe chimes, and also they have a set of Ringer's rules dating from 1756.

*This is a belfry that is free  
for all those that civil be  
and if you please to chime or ring,  
it is a very pleasant thing.  
There is no music played or sung  
like unto bells when they are rung  
then ring your bells if you can,  
silence is best for every man.  
But if you ring in spur or hat,  
sixpence you pay, be sure of that.  
And if a bell you overthrow,  
you pay a groat before you go.*

**Cathy:** There is a quite lots of terminology in there that we might not understand. What's overthrowing a bell?

**Elizabeth:** That's if you break a stay and the bell goes over the balance and the rope whips out of your hand, although in early ringing, they didn't have stays So you had to make sure you kept it off the balance.

**Cathy:** Right. And the stay is what?

**Elizabeth:** Stays is the mechanism whereby a bell can be rested in the mouth upward position safely. So the bells swing round 360 degrees, and then they can rest. But if you let them go more than that, it will bang on the stay. And if you pull the rope hard enough, the bell's weight will break this stay and then the rope will whizz up round its wheel and it will have to be repaired.

**Cathy:** And it also mentions a groat - that's money isn't it?

**Elizabeth:** Yes. I'm not sure how much that is<sup>4</sup>.

**Cathy:** So now Elizabeth, what I'd like to do is ask you a little bit about your ringing. How long have you been ringing?

**Elizabeth:** I've been ringing about 65 years.

**Cathy:** And why do you ring?

**Elizabeth:** I was brought into ringing because I was brought up in a little village in Kent and unfortunately our village church, a big Kentish ragstone church was totally destroyed when a Doodlebug landed right in the middle of it.

So after the war, a brand new church was built. And this was in 1956. So as a teenager, I was the obvious choice of somebody to learn to ring. But over the years, it's proved to be a fascinating hobby. You go to all sorts of tiny churches, huge cathedrals, places that you wouldn't ever go to as a tourist. And it's taken me around the world. I've rung in South Africa, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, as well as all over the British Isles and Scotland as well. And you meet all sorts of interesting people so that's really why. It's the people and the history and the places you go, and also learning the methods, that keeps your mind in trim.

**Cathy:** Thank you for listening. And I hope you enjoyed this special episode about traditional English bell ringing. To find out more about other Winchester Heritage Open Day events this September, check out the festival website, [www.Winchesterheritageopendays.org](http://www.Winchesterheritageopendays.org).

**Outro:** We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you would like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, [www.winchesterheritageopendays.org](http://www.winchesterheritageopendays.org), click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.