

How pristine was my Sally?

Wales, Wales! The land of the poets and land of the free. Indeed, containing as I do some elements of Welsh blood, I always find it a thrill to re-visit the land of my fathers with all its Celtic charm. How wonderful then that Eddie and Trisha should suggest South Wales as the venue for the 2006 Barnes Summer Ringing Weekend. Weekend? One often wonders why we still refer to it as such when it now stretches to being just short of a week: it appears to grow every year.

Tuesday 11th July dawned bright and cheerful. In our contingent of cars, we hurtled down the M4 to begin the ringing proceedings at Defynog. After lunch we travelled on via Llandovery and Llandeilo to what turned out to be the highlight of the day: a visit to Llanarthne, a marvellous little 4-bell tower nestling to the west of the Black Mountains. The bells were hung in the order 1, 2, 4, 3, thus immediately challenging us, but whilst Tony was raising the 2 its rope suddenly snapped, causing some rather sharp intakes of breath. After quick repair work, it promptly broke again, and then again We began to think at this point that it might be an idea to curtail the ringing here slightly. I would like to point out that this little church is potentially very beautiful but, sadly, parts of it are crumbling and in urgent need of repair. Whilst plans are underway to raise sufficient funds to renovate it, one feels like appealing: if there is anybody out there with several hundreds of thousands of pounds to spare, please take note.

The following day took us to Pembrokeshire and a visit in the afternoon to St David's Cathedral. Unfortunately the tenor bell had no clapper, the staple having been despatched for repair, but we rather ingeniously got around the problem by having Philip strike the tenor (to Grandsire and Stedman Caters) from the Ellacombe. After this, a respectable quarter of Stedman Triples was scored on the Dorian 8. It sounded reasonable but somewhat unconventional as the roll-ups and tittums changes didn't come out at all as one would expect.

After these antics, we were welcomed to a sumptuous tea provided by Canon Michael Hart (with assistance from Michael Uphill and Chris Carroll, to whom we thank for the invitation) in his back garden. It is interesting to muse how life moves on: not so long ago we were merely a bunch of bellringers who attended these trips; this afternoon we suddenly realised that the party had become infiltrated with small children and dogs. It was entertaining to see Suki the Jack Russell chasing 2-year-old Daniel Hughes around the lawn and flower beds, both of them vying for custody of a tennis ball, whilst 18-month old Georgina Smith fearlessly patted and stroked Paddy the greyhound-cross, albeit he stood taller than she. Add to the party Michael Hart's two spaniels and we had most



Outside St Catherine's, Baglan, on Friday July 14th 2006 - back row (l-r): Philip Pratt, Jeremy Cheesman, Eddie Heath, Andrew Howard-Smith, Eddie Hartley, Adrian Udal, Sheila Cheesman; middle row (l-r): Trisha Hawkins, Monica Trow, Tony Nunn, Gill Tomlinson, Sarah Percival, Lucy Bricheno, Stella Shell; front row (l-r): Phaedra Sawbridge, Yuen White, James White, Jill Wigney, Mike Wigney, Ann Crocker-Smith, Mark Smith & Georgina Smith

delightful company, although as always when canines are present, a considerable portion of our scones and biscuits had to be shared with these (seemingly) poor hungry souls.

There was a quick trip to ring at Haverfordwest before Wednesday's schedule ended. There, a door from the ringing chamber opens on to a spacious section of roof. This was ideal for Suki to run around, although we again drew our breaths when she suddenly dashed into the ringing chamber on her long lead, wrapped it around James' ankles (whilst ringing) and then ran out again. Perhaps even more astonishing, though, was seeing Maximus Bibendus allowing himself to be photographed outside a Temperance Hall, and this has to be the closest he's ever been to one!

Thursday dawned, and we had an exhilarating sail to Caldey Island. The heat was intense. Unprepared as ever, Tony and I sailed with no sun cream and at the end of the day were suffering from sunburn and were closely resembling lobsters. My colleagues, prior to my departure from the office, had been trying to convince me that it would do nothing other than rain ("never does anything else in Wales"), and perhaps I'd subconsciously taken their words to heart! However, the visit to Caldey was otherwise uplifting being, as it is, full of celtic history and possessing a most tranquil atmosphere. Handbells, courtesy of Mike Wigney, were rung in the tiny ancient chapel of St Illtyd. It was also an experience to be transferred on to the island on a curious German amphibious vehicle, the likes of which I'd certainly never been on before. The island had the site of an old water mill which had an intriguing series of ponds: evidently the islanders in the days of yore had made the most of their one tiny stream. All this was followed by a ring on the lovely 8 at Tenby, which rounded off a memorable day. Sheila, however, had to miss the pleasures of the afternoon and return to London overnight for a dinner, and there were some dramatic moments when her train broke down at Tenby - almost before her journey had begun! After frantic texts and phone calls she was picked up from the station and ferried to a rendezvous in the middle of nowhere, where Jeremy collected her and whisked her off to Swansea and the next train to London.

Then came the morning of Friday 14th, which soon turned out to more closely resemble Friday 13th. Though it shames us all to admit it, we were the perpetrators of no less than 3 broken stays that morning. How disgraceful! Are we really experienced ringers? Needless to say, this led to a general air of despondency over lunch, and left us wondering whether we should pack it all in and start knitting cardigans for a hobby. Our spirits were restored in the afternoon, however, when an acceptable quarter of Glasgow was scored at Newton Nottage.

On Saturday our ringing took us out via Neath, Aberavon and Llanelli and we finished with one section of the party scoring a quarter of Cambridge Minor at Laugharne, whilst others went in search of Dylan Thomas's boat house, situated along the River Taf. At the same time, one or two members of the party went in search of his grave, and were somewhat amused to find an empty whisky bottle had been placed on top of it. As always, the party tucked into a splendid meal on the Saturday evening; this was held at the Drover's Arms in Carmarthen. The party had had to be split over several accommodation venues, but the contingent that stayed at the Drover's received a very warm and friendly welcome from the landlord, who was most keen to draw our attention to the new "power showers" that had been fitted in some of the rooms. Invigorating stuff! He kept good humour prevalent throughout our stay, but was never more amused than to see Christine order black pudding for her breakfast, having earlier declared herself a vegetarian on her registration form.

Sunday took us to Llansteffan and Swansea. Lunch was followed (at least for some of us) by indulging in a little paddle in the sea. We had to walk a long way out to reach it as the tide had been ebbing for a while. It had also become very muddy and murky, so perhaps this wasn't as good an idea as we'd initially thought.

Two further towers on Monday and it was, sadly, time to return to London. It is, of course, very difficult to convey in words the party's heartfelt thanks to our unstinting organisers: Eddie Hartley and Trisha Hawkins. Having organised these trips for 18 years, Eddie now has all the planning tactics sorted to a tee and, with Trisha's more recent assistance in arranging some of the social aspects,



Maximus Bibendus outside a Temperance Hall

we urge them each year to never even remotely consider relinquishing the task. So to Eddie, Trisha and all the South Wales towers that made us so welcome we all say: dioch yn fawr.

GT.

Llandovery, Dyfed. 11 Jul, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: Christine Northeast 1, Edmund Hartley 2, Phaedra Sawbridge 3, Sheila Cheesman 4, Jeremy Cheesman (C) 5, Andrew Howard-Smith 6.

Carmarthen, Dyfed. 11 Jul, 1344 Double Norwich CB Major: Trisha Hawkins 1, Gill Tomlinson 2, Sheila Cheesman 3, Edmund Hartley (1500th Q) 4, Monica Trow 5, Christine Northeast 6, Tony Nunn 7, Jeremy Cheesman (C) 8.

Llandysul, Dyfed. 12 Jul, 1284 PB Minor: Phaedra Sawbridge 1, Edmund Hartley 2, Trisha Hawkins 3, Andrew Howard-Smith (1st inside to m) 4, Gill Tomlinson 5, Tony Nunn (C) 6.

Cardigan, Dyfed. 12 Jul, 1296 Cambridge S Minor: Christine Northeast 1, Mark Smith 2, Sheila Cheesman 3, Mike Wigney 4, Philip Pratt 5, Adrian Udall (C) 6.

St David's, Dyfed. 12 Jul, 1260 Stedman Triples: Adrian Udall 1, Christine Northeast 2, Monica Trow 3, Gill Tomlinson 4, Sheila Cheesman 5, Philip Pratt 6, Jeremy Cheesman (C) 7, Tony Nunn 8.

Pembroke, Dyfed. 13 Jul, 1260 Grandsire Triples: Andrew Howard-Smith 1, Trisha Hawkins 2, Mike Wigney 3, Monica Trow 4, Jason Hughes 5, Edmund Hartley 6, James White (C) 7, Phaedra Sawbridge 8.

St Florence, Dyfed. 13 Jul, 1320 Spliced S Minor (3m): Adrian Udall 1, Mark Smith 2, Gill Tomlinson 3, Christine Northeast 4, Philip Pratt 5, Tony Nunn (C) 6.

Pen-Y-Fai, Mid Glamorgan. 14 Jul, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: Sarah Percival 1, Edmund Hartley 2, Mark Smith 3, Christine Northeast 4, Adrian Udall (C) 5, Andrew Howard-Smith 6.

Coity, Mid Glamorgan. 14 Jul, 1260 PB Minor: Stella Shell 1, Lucy Bricheno 2, Trisha Hawkins 3, Eddie Heath (1st inside to minor) 4, Tony Nunn 5, Gill Tomlinson (C) 6.

Laleston, Mid Glamorgan. 14 Jul, 1260 Mixed Doubles (2m): Phaedra Sawbridge 1, Maryanne Roach 2, Andrew Howard-Smith 3, Adrian Udall 4, James White (C) 5, Eddie Heath 6.

Newton Nottage, Mid Glamorgan. 14 Jul, 1280 Glasgow S Major: Lucy Bricheno 1, Gill Tomlinson 2, Jill Wigney 3, Sheila Cheesman 4, Mike Wigney 5, Mark Smith 6, Philip Pratt 7, Jeremy Cheesman (C) 8.

Dyffryn, W Glam. 15 Jul, 1272 London S Minor: Monica Trow 1, Mike Wigney (C) 2, Francis Ring-Davies (1st in m) 3, Sheila Cheesman 4, Jeremy Cheesman 5, Philip Pratt 6.

Neath, W Glam. 15 Jul, 1260 PB Minor: Maryanne Roach 1, Edmund Hartley 2, Trisha Hawkins 3, Adrian Udall 4, Eddie Heath 5, James White (C) 6.

Aberavon, W Glam. 15 Jul, 1250 Lincolnshire S Major: Mark Smith 1, James White 2, Monica Trow 3, Maryanne Roach 4, Gill Tomlinson 5, Cathy Cheesman 6, Tony Nunn 7, Peter Valuks (C) 8.

Laugharne, Dyfed. 14 Jul, 1320 Cambridge S Minor: Peter Valuks 1, Francis Ring-Davies 2, Tony Nunn 3, Cathy Cheesman 4, Lucy Bricheno (1st as C) 5, Philip Pratt 6.

Neath, W Glam. (outside The Castle Hotel) 15 Jul, 1260 PB Minor: Lucy Bricheno 1-2, Jill Wigney 3-4, Mike Wigney (C) 5-6.

Gorseinon, W Glam. 16 Jul, 1260 Grandsire Triples: Sarah Percival 1, Lucy Bricheno 2, Edmund Hartley 3, Trisha Hawkins 4, Sheila Cheesman 5, Francis Ring-Davies 6, Jeremy Cheesman (C) 7, Eddie Heath 8.

Michaelston-Y-Fedw, Gwent 17 Jul, 1260 Mixed Doubles (3p/m): Stella Shell 1, Edmund Hartley 2, Monica Trow 3, Tony Nunn 4, Gill Tomlinson (C) 5, Trisha Hawkins 6. £30

Tail Ends

"Viewgot acne?" I heard this voice beside me as I sat on a low wall balancing an A to Z and *Dove's Guide* (Third Edition) on my knees. It was perishingly cold, so that my eyes were watering and I couldn't focus properly on the books. Besides, my grey worsted trousers, newly bought from Meakers of Piccadilly, were very poor insulation, my backside was frozen and my knees were shaking, making discerning anything in the books well nigh impossible. Anyway, what a thing to ask a complete stranger on a Saturday afternoon, and I had no mirror to check on the state of bacterial invasion on my blue face.

I stood up, looked around, and there was a five-foot tall anorak with steam rising from a gap between the turned-up collar and a knitted cap with a pom-pom on the top. A puff of steam was accompanied by the voice; male, young. "I've got wunnovem" it said, and a mittened hand pointed towards the green cover of *Dove*.

"Are you a ringer?" I asked.

"Yer."

"Whereabouts?"

"Yer."

"What is your home tower?"

"Acne."

Ah, now all was becoming clear even through the tears. Hackney.

"No, I haven't yet rung at Hackney. Nice bells?"

"Yer. Warevyrung then?"

I decided to lead with my highest card.

"Southwark."

"The twelve?"

"Yes."

"The tenor?"

"Yes."

"Cor!"

The anorak suddenly became quite chatty and asked what I was doing in East London on a wintry Saturday afternoon. I explained that, new to London, I was exploring the district, marking down where the ringing towers were. He thought that was a rather odd way to spend a Saturday, so I thought it best not to tell him that I had spent every Sunday of my first winter in London walking every street and alleyway of the City, grid square by A to Z grid square. But the only thing that impressed this animated anorak was that I had rung the tenor at Southwark.

Again, I thought it best not to tell him the full story. Only a day or two after moving to London, I had a surprise phone call at work from Jack Euston, who had been given my name by a ringer I had met at Leatherhead. Jack had a wedding the following Saturday at Southwark. Was I available? It was very convenient, because I was working that Saturday morning and could nip across to Southwark in time for ringing, and I had already become a tower-grabber. Yes! Yes!

When I arrived at the tower, the band was assembling and the bells were already up. Apparently it was an important wedding, because the twelve were to be rung. Could I ring Stedman Cinques? No. Better ring the tenor then.

The ringers pulled off in rounds. Well, eleven of them did, but I had never rung a bell of 48cwt or anything like that weight, so I was doing a pretty good impression of a monkey climbing up a rope, but the bell would not budge.

"Rock it off" someone yelled. I think I got the message and, with the luck of the novice, the tenor came off on the right stroke. To me,

ringing that bell was like hauling up a sail single-handed on a square-rigger and I certainly made very heavy work of it. Luck remained with me, and I even managed to set the bell. But it was not a pretty sight.

"I think you need a lighter bell" said Jack during the wedding. "Take the treble." So, on the signal, we pulled off into rounds. The treble, I thought, was a breeze after the tenor, until Jack shouted "Get ready to fire them!" I knew what firing was, but I had never done it. Would it be boom-tink or tink-boom? The angel of bellringers was with me that day: maybe the firing wasn't perfect and I certainly was a bit slow going back into rounds each time, but the other ringers didn't seem too upset. Afterwards, Jack approached me. "What are you doing next Saturday?" Alas, I had to decline his offer, as I was committed to meeting my second-cousin for the first time in Bristol. However, I was able to enjoy the company of ringing with Jack on many occasions later.

And I didn't get "Acne" for another three years. And I don't recall ever meeting that anorak again.

WALTER KNIGHT

Turramurra, N.S.W. 2074 Australia

Guildford D.G. Striking Competitions

Three teams, representing three of the Guild districts, entered the 8-bell inter-District Striking Competition which was held at Bagshot on the 30th September. The judges were Robin Walker, a former Farnborough ringer who now resides in Worcester, and Claire Redstone of Tewkesbury, a former Yorktown ringer. The competitors were able to take advantage of the newly completed church hall, where refreshments were served. The results of the competition were: 1. Guildford Cathedral 2. Farnham District 3. Old Woking. The 8-bell trophy was presented to the winning team by Robin Walker and the Guild Secretary presented tokens of thanks to the judges on behalf of the Guild.

On the same morning three other teams, representing two of the districts, met at Pirbright for the inter-District 6-bell competition. As the ground-floor ringing room can be closed off from the church, those present were able to mingle in the church while the competition was taking place, and also wander through to the parish room where excellent refreshments were served by local ringers and friends. Judge Ben Constant, from Basingstoke, made helpful comments before giving the results: 1. Chertsey District 2. Holy Trinity, Guildford 3. Cranleigh. Ben presented the 6-bell trophy to the winners, and was assured by the Guild Master that his token of thanks would be forwarded to him – the original plan for all the results to be given at Pirbright was abandoned due to the low number of entries, and his token was in Bagshot with the Guild Secretary!

Despite the low turnout the morning provided enjoyable ringing and a chance to socialise with ringers from other Districts.

JUDY COUPERTHWAITHE /
ANNE ANTHONY