

Plum Country Revisited



Jimmy, Andrew Harvey, Louise, Amanda, Colin, Trisha, Francis, Eddie Hartley, Jackie, Mike, Eddie Heath, Gill, Andrew H-S, Tony, Rod, Monica, Malcolm, Charles and Jill

Suitcase packed – check. Car fuelled, oiled and watered – check. Toenails painted – check. Spreadsheets printed – check. Yes, it was time for the 29th (or was it the 28th?) annual Barnes Tour.

We assembled at the Victoria Works in Studley. Mr and Mrs Bibendus arrived to be told “You’re late! You’ve got half an hour to sample eight local ales”. After enjoying the rather fine pork pies we headed south into the Vale of Evesham.

Our base for the duration was the Evesham Hotel, which had served us well two years ago. The establishment recently changed hands and, whilst this has apparently resulted in an upturn in business bookings, we ringers could only lament the loss of some of its previous quirky charm. (Why were the teddy bear key fobs replaced by wooden pears?)

This year there was slightly more general ringing and fewer quarters and the success rate was down on previous years but Jimmy was enabled to score his first quarter and Amanda her first on the treble. A slight aberration from the usually meticulous planning occurred on Thursday afternoon when, midway through ringing on the heavy eight at Stow on the Wold, all the back-enders were despatched to a very light, easy-going five. Their attempt at 11 doubles came to naught when, as is often the way, we sailed through the more unfamiliar methods and came unstuck in the familiar.

On Friday morning the company assembled outside Tewkesbury Abbey to be counted up the stairs, all except the writer who arrived a few minutes later and realised he is probably acquiring the reputation of Private Godfrey. For Eddie Hartley it was the 61st anniversary of his very first ringing outing – starting at the same tower.

St Mary’s, Deerhurst, claims to be the oldest church in the country still in use for regular worship. Its Saxon tower has been widened at

some stage and is bisected internally by a stone arch such that the ringers of the 4th and 5th have their own separate ringing chamber (although surprisingly all six bells hang in one frame). Sadly, there was insufficient time to visit St Odda’s chapel but most of the party followed the arrows to inspect the “angel” high on the outside of the church, although some found it an underwhelming experience. This was clearly the day for antiquities, as the wooden staircase at Bishops Cleeve also claims to be the oldest of its kind. On Friday evening we were rewarded with what was probably the best striking of the week – Reverse Grandsire Triples on the lovely eight at Great Hampton.

The heavy-going eight at Chipping Campden could perhaps be described as “men’s bells”, upon which the gentlemen, following the pattern established in recent years, dutifully fired out their quarter in order to hear the ladies complete theirs in fine style. In the churchyard at Ebrington were the graves of two Lords Fortesque and those of a certain age could not help but wonder whether they ever took wine with His Excellency the Meserabian Ambassador*.

As usual we ate and drank well. The serious beer drinkers were able to reacquire themselves with the Red Lion which has become more pub-like since its reconversion from a shoe shop in 2014 but still retains the character of a micropub. The Royal Oak was again happy to feed us after Evesham practice, with locally-made faggots proving especially popular. Saturday’s buffet lunch at the White Hart, Newbold on Stour, was a carnivore’s delight with huge platters of home-cooked ham and rare beef – indeed the writer almost felt he had suffered a surfeit of beef following the excellent dinner at the hotel a few hours later.

Sunday was supposed to be a fairly quiet day but it turned out that we could, after all,

ring at Broadway (moral: if negotiations with the clergy falter, ask a local ringer) and for some there was an unexpected opportunity to ring for a civic service at Bengeworth (ringing is currently strictly limited pending further restoration work).

And finally – a return to the glorious ring at the Bell Tower. Given the available resources, Caters had been planned but in the end we settled for Grandsire Triples on the back eight and very satisfying it was too.

Many thanks are due to Mike, Jill and Tricia for their customarily thorough administration and to Chris Povey for making us welcome and pulling a few strings. And now I must go and cook those Vale of Evesham plums.

T.N.

* Michael Bentine: “The Toastmaster”.

Coughton, Warwicks. 13 Jul, 1260 PB Doubles: Mike Wigney 1, Michael de Freitas 2, Malcolm McAlister 3, Colin Friend 4, Trisha Hawkins (C) 5, Giles Dimock 6.

Chastleton, Oxon. 14 Jul, 1260 PB Doubles: Andrew Howard-Smith 1, Jackie Harrison 2, Colin Friend 3, Andrew Harvey 4, Louise Booth (C) 5, Jimmy May (1st Q) 6.

Bourton on the Hill, Glos. 14 Jul, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: Barbara Hicks 1, Mike Wigney 2, Malcolm McAlister 3, Roderic K Bickerton 4, Mary Gow (C) 5, Giles Dimock 6.

Blockley, Glos. 14 Jul, 1296 Stedman Triples: Charles Turnbull 1, Louise Booth 2, Colin Friend 3, Trisha Hawkins 4, Monica Trow 5, Gill Tomlinson 6, Tony Nunn (C) 7, Eddie Heath 8.

Woolstone, Glos. 15 Jul, 1320 Kent TB Minor: Jackie Harrison 1, Mike Wigney 2, Monica Trow 3, Colin Friend 4, Eddie Heath 5, Louise Booth (C) 6.

Great Hampton, Worcs. 15 Jul, 1260 Reverse Grandsire Triples: Mike Wigney (C) 1, Trisha Hawkins 2, Mary Gow 3, Louise Booth 4, Tony Nunn 5, Gill Tomlinson 6, Roderic K Bickerton 7, Colin Friend 8. Remembering the victims of the atrocities in Nice last night. First in m: 2,3.

Deerhurst, Glos. 15 Jul, 1260 PB Minor: Mike Wigney 1, Jackie Harrison 2, Tony Nunn 3, Eddie Heath 4, Malcolm McAlister 5, Colin Friend (C) 6.

Mickleton, Glos. 16 Jul, 1288 Grandsire Triples: Jackie Harrison 1, Trisha Hawkins 2, Mike Wigney 3, Monica Trow 4, Andrew Harvey 5, Roderic K Bickerton 6, Gill Tomlinson (C) 7, Tony Nunn 8.

Ebrington, Glos. 16 Jul, 1260 PB Minor: Jackie Harrison 1, Trisha Hawkins 2, Monica Trow 3, Mary Gow 4, Gill Tomlinson 5, Louise Booth (C) 6.

Badsey, Worcs. 16 Jul, 1344 PB Major: Mike Wigney 1, Andrew Harvey 2, Charles Turnbull 3, Francis Ring-Davies 4, Colin Friend 5, Eddie Heath (C) 6, Louise Booth 7, Roderic K Bickerton 8.

Alderminster, Warwicks. 16 Jul, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: Amanda Flint 1, Louise Booth 2, Roderic K Bickerton 3, Eddie Heath 4, Colin Friend (C) 5, Andrew Harvey 6. First away from cover: 1.

Evesham, Worcs. 17 Jul, 1260 Grandsire Triples: Trisha Hawkins 1, Gill Tomlinson 2, Mike Wigney (C) 3, Roderic K Bickerton 4, Colin Friend 5, Louise Booth 6, Tony Nunn 7, Francis Ring-Davies 8. On the back 8 for evening service.

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