

## In the border country: *The Barnes Summer Tour 2019*

name and change. Each company was to ring 12 whole pulls of round ringing, and then a six score and the whole pull and stand; then 12 whole pulls of round ringing and a 6 score, and then 12 whole pulls, and go on for the 2 peals, one whole pull between each peal; the same at the end.'

Fourteen bands entered for the competition, one being a mixed band, pretentiously designated 'All England', and practice took place on Monday morning. The draw took place on Monday afternoon and competition ringing began at about half-past two. Because of the time constraints, six bands rang on Monday with the other eight bands ringing on Tuesday. The band from Saddleworth was the favourite to win, their ringing being the most free from faults, but about ten minutes from completing the test ringing they 'blundered' and so broke down. The reason for this was given:

'One of their own men not being able to come with them, his place had been supplied by another man who was not used to them.'

Two other bands also broke down, and the competition ringing was completed at about half-past six on Tuesday evening. The judges, all from Holmfirth, awarded the first prize of £8 to the band from Calverley who had 497 faults, the second band, from Ecclesfield, having 826 faults, so apparently a convincing victory. But there was dissatisfaction with the results, and the report concluded:

'Many of the ringers and their friends, as is usual on such occasions, expressed loud dissatisfaction with the judges' decision when it was given against them, but there is no reason to consider the result as unfair. Considerable drinking and disorderly conduct was prevalent among the lower classes, but hardly of a nature requiring the active interference of the police.'

### Conclusion

These few reports hint at the seamier side of prize ringing, with possible disturbances, but no reports of this have so far been found. What they do show is that prize ringing was popular in the North of England, not just for the ringers but for the populace generally. There is also the remarkable fact that generally these competitions took place over a couple of days during the week, and yet the ringers were most likely working men who could ill afford to take time away from work. There must be an interesting line of research here!

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After two consecutive visits to Suffolk, the annual Barnes Summer Tour set off for uncharted territory in the west. The White Lion at Wilton, a lovely pub in a picturesque setting on the banks of the Wye, proved to be a most agreeable meeting point.

Our base was the Green Dragon Hotel in Hereford. Some people found the ubiquitous, if appropriate, green décor a little depressing. Others found the lack of staff on duty frustrating and took to pinging the reception bell with alarming ferocity. Breakfast was buffet-style which, whilst not a guarantor of quality (think congealed scrambled egg), can be quite useful when one has to be at a tower 10 miles away by 9.15. [As an aside, it never ceases to amaze me how many different mechanisms there are for operating a shower – every hotel has a unique system designed to alternately scald and freeze the unwary guest.]

Food-wise, the Spread Eagle proved very accommodating. By day two the serious drinking contingent had located the Beer in Hand micro-pub, where the ale and cider were excellent but the pizzas, good though they were, emerged from the kitchen at the rate of two or three per hour. Saturday's dinner was at The Den, which had a varied menu and an interesting wine list; unfortunate the ambience was not conducive to the customary speeches and post-prandial rendering of Flanders & Swann songs.

Getting Mike and his wheelchair into non-ground-floor towers has been a feature of these trips for some time, but this year there was the added complication that he had broken his right leg, which necessitated it being splinted and projecting horizontally during ringing. Thanks to the youthful vigour of Peter, Mike arrived in the ringing chamber at Hereford Cathedral (while most of us were groaning at the notice saying "50 steps, only 168 to go") but the wheelchair stubbornly refused to pass a pillar in the clerestory. Undeterred, Mike managed to ring the treble sitting on a pile of boxes with a steady hand on either side.

Usually Mike's fame goes before him but for once he found himself in his wife's reflected glory when greeted with "Are you related to the Jill Wigney who rings handbells?" The handbell band were up at the crack of dawn every morning, taking breakfast as soon as the doors opened and then away to the first tower to attempt a quarter before us lesser mortals arrived.

While most churches in the area have a fairly plain west tower, with or without spire, Pembridge's 17cwt five are housed in a curious building in the churchyard. At its broad but irregular-sided base, a low stone wall supports a sloping roof on top of which is the wooden bell chamber carrying another sloping roof surmounted by what looks like a smaller replica of the previous stage with a weathervane on top. Since the internal structure is entirely timber, these are not the

easiest of bells (probably particularly so in hot weather). A stentorian conductor is essential.

Names provoked some discussion – is Weobley pronounced "Wee-blee" or "Webb-lee"? (We gathered from a local that the latter is correct.) Parking at Madley, one couldn't help noticing the very long sign identifying the road opposite as "Pennyplock and Rosemary Lane". After ringing the fine 10 at Leominster, some of us paid homage to the birthplace of the late Stella Shell, tower grabber *par excellence* and a regular on this tour for many years.

The village of Clyro lies just across the Welsh border. The Baskerville Arms, formerly the Swan, may have been frequented by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – he apparently stayed at the nearby Baskerville Hall, from whence he drew his inspiration for the hound of that ilk, albeit changing the setting to Dartmoor. Be that as it may, the friendly staff served us a sumptuous buffet including home-made scotch eggs.

The "go" of the bells in some places left much to be desired. Indeed, I found myself wondering at one point whether masochism is a necessary component of a ringer's psychological make-up. And then I noticed the scythe leaning against wall and began fervently hoping that the grim reaper wasn't planning to return for it before the end of the quarter. Designated methods were often downgraded, to the extent that more than one remark was heard along the lines of "Why don't we just save time and energy by starting with Plan B?"

But sometimes the best is kept till last. Grandsire was brought round in fine style on the splendidly sonorous bells of Ross on Wye and we went on our way rejoicing and thanking Mike, Jill and Trisha for another memorable excursion.

TONY NUNN

(See quarter peals and photos on p.831)

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