

Getting more publicity

Ringing needs more publicity, and ringers need to come up with innovative ideas.

The story began when Stella Bianco attended the unveiling of a blue plaque in London, and heard that English Heritage (which runs the London Blue Plaque scheme) was keen to receive nominations for more plaques. She wondered whether it might be a way to commemorate a famous ringer – perhaps someone like Fabian Stedman if we knew where he lived. (Readers will know that Stedman is already commemorated with a plaque, but it's neither blue nor circular and it's not on the outside of a building – it's shaped like a bell, inside the church of St Andrew Undershaft in the City of London.) Stella passed her thought on to the Central Council PR Committee, and I followed it up.

There are nearly 10,000 plaques on buildings across the UK. Just under 10% are in the London scheme run by English Heritage. Elsewhere, there are many different plaque schemes (over 280 in England alone) operated by many different councils and local societies. Schemes differ in their objectives and also in the style of plaque (they aren't all either blue or circular). To help provide an overall picture, in 2009 the Royal Society of the Arts funded the Open Plaques project, whose website openplaques.org has comprehensive lists of plaques not just in UK but worldwide. Currently it shows 9746 in the UK. This will never be completely up to date because it relies on people submitting information on new plaques. (I checked three installed in 2014 and one of them was listed.)

Blue plaque schemes are always looking for new nominations, for example English Heritage plans to install twelve each year in Greater London. The widespread appetite for plaques could provide opportunities to commemorate ringers or ringing events, providing ringing historians can identify suitable links with buildings and providing we can make good enough cases for commemorating them.

I wondered whether any ringers already featured on a blue plaque. I couldn't find any evidence of a plaque commemorating someone as a ringer. The only plaques to known ringers that I found were Alfred White, described as 'Innkeeper, Church Bellhanger, Founder of the famous business' (see RW 15 August) and Frank Muir, described as 'comedy writer, radio and television personality' (but he only rang in his teens).

Another thing I realised while thinking about blue plaques was that they represent just one way in which ringers (or any other specialist community) can collaborate with another body to achieve something beneficial to both. That is why the page of advice now on the Council website isn't restricted to plaques, but also covers many other groups within our communities whose activities and enthusiasm we might be able to engage in order to help inform the public about ringing. As well as plaques, other possible targets are local museums, historic inns (yes really) and heritage open days, and groups worth working with include local history societies, civic societies, councils and event organisers.

For more information see: cccbr.org.uk/pr/advice If you have other ideas and would like to share them, please contact advice@cccbr.org.uk

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