

2015 - A year of ringing, history and first peals



2015 is a special year for ringers everywhere, as we mark the 300th anniversary of the first recorded true peal by John Garthon's band in Norwich on 2nd May 1715. The St Peter Mancroft Guild is marking the event with a project to install a Ringing Teaching and Heritage Centre, which will transform teaching in the area and help to inform the wider public about the rich heritage of ringing. Ringers everywhere will wish them well. See: mancroftapeal300.co.uk

Anniversary ringing – We hope that as many ringers as possible will ring something special during the weekend of 2nd/3rd May. Bands that can't ring a peal could try to ring a quarter peal or shorter performance. Date touches of 1715 or 300 will be particularly appropriate.

Why it is significant – The peal at Norwich was a high point in a whole series of advances in change ringing that took place in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a lot of which we take for granted today. For example, our modern concept of a peal dates from that era. In the seventeenth century a 'peal' simply meant any ringing performance, and ringers aspired to ring 'true complete peals', which we call extents. This had been achieved on four, five and six bells long before it was achieved on seven. After ringing the extent on seven it became clear that ringing extents wasn't a realistic way forward on higher numbers, so ringers standardised on a peal as a performance of 5000+, ie about the same length as an extent on seven.

A peal of Plain Bob Triples (which they called Grandsire Bob in 1715) might not seem too exciting to us, but we look back on it with the benefit of a further three centuries of progress. Our predecessors 300 years ago were breaking new ground. They couldn't get a peal composition from a book, they had to work it out for themselves. They couldn't run the composition through a computer program to prove it, they had to do it laboriously by hand, with the attendant risk of mistakes. Ringing an extent of Triples was a difficult problem that took ringers a long time to crack, with several attempts during previous decades. We can't be sure none succeeded but the first of which there is a clear record was in 1715.

Imagine yourself in the tower on 2nd May 1715, attempting to ring a peal that will be not just be your first but first for all the band, including the conductor. That alone would have piled on the mental pressure, quite apart from knowing that if you succeed you would make history. They did succeed, and their names are recorded for posterity.

First peals – We would like ringers to celebrate this key event with as many modern ringers as possible ringing their 'first' during the year. Something like 160 ringers currently ring their first peal each year. It would be a fitting tribute if we could increase that figure to 300 in this 300th anniversary year. Doubling the number of first pealers is an enormous challenge. But is it any more of a challenge than the challenge those Norwich ringers faced in 1715?

• If you haven't yet rung a peal, could you do so during

2015? If you're not sure take advice – it might not be as hard as you think. Talk to someone who organises peals. Think about ringing several quarter peals as a 'warm up'.

• If you are a tower captain, could you encourage any of your ringers who haven't yet rung a peal to do so? Help them to prepare and if necessary put them in touch with peal ringers who could help them.

• If you are a peal ringer, could you help someone to ring their first peal? Encourage anyone you think might be up to it.

Publicity – There is another, equally important task that we would like ringers to undertake in 2015 – to generate a lot of publicity for ringing. Our predecessors were quite good at that. Their ringing performances (and other news about them) were reported in the newspapers along with everything else that happened in the community, and they rang for community events more than we do today. Modern ringers are well connected with each other (via *The Ringing World*, newsletters, websites, e-mail, Facebook, etc) but we are less well connected with the public than we were. Ignorance about ringing is widespread (not helped by false images in adverts) mainly because real ringers and the ringing they do are largely hidden.

We need to change that so the public can see ringing for what it is – a skilled, rewarding activity. Recruitment and retention would be much easier if non-ringers saw ringing as a high status activity.

The public loves heritage, and this anniversary gives us an opportunity to highlight the heritage of ringing. When people discover what ringing is about they are invariably impressed. We have a wonderful story to tell, so let's make sure people hear about it.

• If you are a tower captain, could your band do more to publicise ringing during this special year? Tell the public about ringing and tell them about your performances before the event so they will know why you are ringing – not just afterwards.

• If you are a society officer, could you co-ordinate ringing publicity in your area? Get individual bands to contribute. Contact local press and broadcasters and exploit social media.

• Even if you are none of the above, could you talk to your friends about ringing? Explain why it is special, explain the heritage behind it, explain the skill and the satisfaction it gives. Encourage them to take a look.

The Central Council PR Committee will be developing national publicity under the heading **FirstPeal2015**, which will have its own section of the website at: cccbr.org.uk/firstpeal2015. All material generated will be there, along with supporting information about ringing and about the anniversary year, for ringers to re-use or adapt for use in local publicity. There will also be compositions for date touches of 1715 and 300 in various methods. Advice on other aspects of ringing publicity on the Central Council website at: cccbr.org.uk/pr/advice

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