

## REPORT OF THE WHITCHURCH WALLOPERS, MAY 2021

Covid has curtailed our hand bell ringing activities for the past year, until now.

We hope to resume practice in late June when our team of nine ringers hope to congregate in the garden of 21 Swanston Field on Sunday afternoons.

We have been privileged to have as our mentor and coach, Carol Wheeler who is famous and known as 'Carol of the Bells' and able to ring 24 bells as the incredible one woman bell-ringing ensemble. Carol has graciously graced us with her presence and experience, as our coach and mentor. Carol has demonstrated and taught us many techniques like damping the bells to articulate the tune and has an eagle ear and eye for mis-hits. Just before the covid crisis, absorbing practice, allowed us to grow in confidence, with the ability to read music with two bells, one in each hand for the two adjacent notes. The requirement being to count each numbered bar carefully and ring on the beat. We are now members of the Hand bell Ringers of Great Britain.

During the covid slack time, foam cushions and covers have been made and new interesting music has been selected and carefully arranged for each ringer in ordered files. To assist reading the music, the left and right hand bells have been colour coded for ease of identification. We have a couple of experienced ringers who can manage four bells two in each hand, positioned at 90 degrees, allowing the appropriate bell to be struck as the flapper mechanism only rings in the plain parallel to the swing.

Our three octave bells are arranged in chromatic scale. The treble high octave bells are smaller and lighter, whereas the lower octave bells are larger and heavier. The bells were fabricated at the Whitechapel foundry, London, which unfortunately closed a couple of years ago after four centuries of manufacture, including Big Ben and the Liberty Bell in America. The hand bell section still survives though, and hand bells are manufactured in Bromley, Kent. We are thinking of adding a new and exciting dimension to the quality of our sound with additional chimes that resonate. I also know that hand bells are a particular favourite of Queen Elizabeth, as she paid a surprise visit to Whitechapel and purchased a set of hand bells for a centenary church celebration in Canada.

Of course we need to renew our practice again to regain our confidence and expertise in order for us to perform at concerts. Christmas time is popular, particularly when we rang at the Ferryboat with kind permission of Graham Dednum as carols seem to go well with bells. But as we have a large repertoire of songs, live concerts will be our goal, to entertain and raise money for charities.

If anyone would like to give hand bell ringing a go, please contact me. One of our members has also bought an additional set of hand bells from Whitechapel and this would make it easier for a newcomer to learn how to participate alongside an experienced ringer. It is all rather fun and no one minds dropping the occasional clanger. Although like vintage wine and a good woman, hand bells must be handled with gentle, tender and loving care.

Peter Ferguson, 20 May 2021

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