

Welsh National Service of Remembrance

Llandaff Cathedral Guild of Ringers at the Church of SS Peter and Paul, Teilo, Dyfrig and Euddogwy were honoured to ring before and after the Welsh National Service of Remembrance, held in the presence of His Majesty King Charles III and the Queen Consort.

This Service of Prayer and Reflection for the Life of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was conducted in both Welsh and English, using the 1588 William Morgan translation of the bible into Welsh on loan from the National Library of Wales. The singing of Guide me, O Thou Great Redeemer (to the tune of Cwm Rhondda) and of the Welsh National Anthem at the end of the service was particularly loud and patriotic.

Because the Church in Wales was disestablished in 1920, the choice of venue and the structure of the service of Prayer and Reflection took a somewhat different form than that in England. The result was an uplifting ecumenical, bilingual, multifaith celebration with a selection of music, readings, prayers, hymns and anthems which reflect the true diversity of the Welsh nation.

Many ringers may have watched the service on TV. Here is a report on the preparation for the service and the ringing, which is probably the most important in Wales since the coronation in 1953.

Llandaff is known as “the city within a city” and is recognised as one of the oldest Christian sites in Great Britain, a place of worship since the 6th century with the present cathedral buildings dating from the 12th century. This quiet enclave with its traditional cathedral green surrounded by many church properties built from polychromatic stone experienced a significant yet temporary change immediately after the announcement of the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The Cathedral was closed for 10 days and the surrounding streets shut to traffic as Operation Dragon (the Welsh equivalent of Operation London Bridge) was activated.

There was just time to toll the muffled tenor bell for 30 minutes at midday on Friday and to fit the double muffles purchased 10 years earlier in anticipation of the service the following week. The tower captain, deputy and secretary were all away on prebooked holidays with their families so it fell to the steeple keeper to liaise with the BBC, the cathedral, the security services and to organise the ringing. Unfortunately it was not possible to ring a quarter peal as no ringing was allowed until after the main service the following week. Strangely, Sky reported that the bellringers had been practising for this event all week !

The cathedral was effectively handed over to BBC Wales who prepared for their largest ever outside broadcast, transmitting not just to the UK but worldwide. 3 large pantechnicons were secreted away behind the cathedral and by Monday morning many miles of cable were being laid, chalets were under construction on The Green and a floodlight system installed in the clerestory and in the cathedral grounds. On The Green, a large video screen was erected, crowd barriers installed, a 30 metre high cherry picker arrived, security was activated and 24 portaloos delivered.

At the same time Cardiff Council swung into action by power-washing the approach to the cathedral and the large slabbed area outside the west front, cut back much vegetation, filled potholes and tarmac in the surrounding streets, painted the lamp posts, bollards and handrails and generally did an excellent job for the ratepayers, all at no cost to the cathedral. During the week, the police lifted, checked and sealed the underground service hatches for all the surrounding footpaths and roads, decided where the snipers would be located, did a sweep of the cathedral and grounds and on the last night called me back to escort them up the Jasper Tower and the Spire and the internals of the roof structure high above the nave.

Arrangements for the ringing started on the Saturday by meeting with the clergy for an explanation of Operation Dragon over the next 10 days and how the ringers would be part of the service. The intention was for ringing to be for about an hour before the service and about 15 minutes afterwards, the exact details to be agreed in consultation with the BBC senior producer for the event. At this early stage it was not known if the service would be on Thursday or Friday, nor if the start time would be 1100 or later, these details being settled after the King's movements for the week were known and the timing logistics of getting a helicopter down in Llandaff Fields and the royal car from there to Llandaff High Street.

Despite the uncertainty on dates, 15 Llandaff ringers committed to being available and the band was settled within 48 hours, this being the cut-off time for security clearance. WhatsApp was used to collect photos, names, addresses and passport details from the ringers and these disappeared into the ether of "security" with nobody deemed a risk. We all received high quality security passes with the cathedral logo identifying us as "Bellringers" and a lanyard. This proved sufficient to get us all past security later in the week.

Over the week the producer was meeting all the "performers" for the event and walking through what they would be doing. There were the cathedral clergy, organists and choir, stewards, harpists, plus VIPs, civic dignitaries, politicians, military, faith leaders – all organised and invited by the Welsh Government, not by the Cathedral nor by the Church in Wales. Surprisingly, I was scheduled immediately after the group from Clarence House and the group from Downing Street, which was interesting hanging around for an hour watching their discussions as we all processed down the steps, around the cathedral and back up the slope to The Green where the King would do his, now famous, handshaking session with the crowds.

The ringing itself was eventually agreed with the BBC to be around 45 minutes until the car door was opened and later from the moment the royal party walked out through the west door until the "walk around" on The Green to meet cheering locals and school children. On previous royal occasions there has been a countdown from the BBC studio to start and stop the ringing at the appropriate times. On this occasion we were to decide ourselves using a monitor screen in the ringing room. Which was great when tested in the morning but didn't work quite so well when we were switched to the BBC's International channel which has no sound, nor later when the royal party experienced a tripping incident on the steps and the video was turned off showing just an external picture of the cathedral for a couple of critical minutes.

The choice of what to ring was not difficult. With only a couple of our ringers having any experience of ringing fully muffled bells and not ringing 12 bells every week since the pandemic, this was an occasion being broadcast worldwide where quality was the only parameter to consider. The decision was to ring rounds on 12 for 5 minutes followed by a 2 minute rest, repeated multiple times until the 45 minutes was completed. We agreed beforehand that ringing would be faster than normal and that nobody would slip into the trap of slowing the ringing down just because the bells were muffled. Each ringer rang the same bell throughout and we enjoyed good quality ringing and are all suitably proud of this. It was an opportunity for our newest recruit and our most senior ringer to take part.

So, how was it for the ringers ? Well, for me, it involved around 20 hours of work during the 10 days to bring to fulfilment, including checking our plans with Westminster Abbey ringers who have much experience of royal occasions. At the beginning, the dialogue with the ringers was confidential until announcements were made by the Welsh government. Our plan was meet on the far end of The Green away from the crowds and, once the band was complete, pass through security flashing our passes and passports and then walk to the cathedral, past the waiting crowds. I introduced the band to the Lord Lieutenant and the Archbishop of Wales on the west front, nodded to the Bishop of Llandaff, the acting Dean, the Canons and various cathedral stewards who know the ringers from our Sunday activities and then we walked down the steps. The main route to the tower was full of cameras so we ambled down the central aisle of the nave and turned back to the tower door. By this time the church was full, all the guests (except for the prime minister and the royal party) having been security checked at Sophia Gardens cricket ground some hours earlier then bussed up to Llandaff by coach. The ringers all looked tidy in sombre clothing, but none of us wore morning suits, hats, national dress, military clothes or medals so we didn't exactly melt into the background !

The ringing was good and, even though we were on the sound-free international TV channel, we could hear all that was going on in the cathedral. Personally, I particularly liked the harpists, the linguistically very difficult Bible reading given by the First Minister of Wales, the prayers led by so many different faith leaders, the brilliant cathedral choir, the fully bilingual service and, of course, the hwyl of the final hymn and anthem. I half expected the Welsh 15 to come running down the aisle at this point !

After it was all over the Prime Minister, guests and ringers had to wait for nearly 30 minutes for the royal party to complete their walk around and then we all milled out of the church together. All that remained was to come back later in the day, ring the bells down and reset the clock chimes. A job well done by all.

David Moore – Llandaff Steeple Keeper

Details of the ringing and the signatures in the visitor's book are here :

[Ringing World BellBoard](#)

The lavishly produced Order of Service is available here :

[HM Queen - Order of Service](#)

The full BBC recording is viewable here :

[HM, King Charles III in Llandaff - BBC iPlayer](#)

Or, with a different voiceover and interpretation, why not watch the Sky broadcast :

[King Charles attends service of prayer and reflection in Wales - Sky on YouTube](#)

For those who have not rung at Llandaff, here is a tower tour recorded during the pandemic :

[Bell Tower Tour with Pat Moore - Llandaff Open Doors 2020 - YouTube](#)