

MONMOUTH BRANCH NEWS



LLANDAFF AND MONMOUTH DIOCESAN ASSOCIATION OF CHURCH BELL RINGERS

Number 122 August 2020

Forthcoming Branch Events:

Association AGM - 12 September at 1600 via Zoom. Pre-register here:

<https://www.llanmon.org.uk/contacts/2020-agm-registration>

All other Branch and Association practices and events are on hold until further notice due to Covid-19 pandemic.

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Ringling restarts on a limited basis

In July, Welsh Government allowed places of worship to open and to resume holding public services again, albeit subject to strict social distancing and hygiene measures. Around the same time, the Central Council of Church Bellringers had been working with the Church of England and Public Health England to determine how ringing could restart in a safe and practical way. A comprehensive set of guidance notes and risk assessments have been produced as a result. Our Association Officers worked with colleagues in the Church in Wales to ensure that this guidance was also adopted in Wales and to ensure that ringing and ringers were included as part of the Church's plans to restart services in Wales.

The full set of guidance and risk assessments are available here:

<https://cccbr.org.uk/coronavirus/>

The key points are as follows:

- Ringing sessions are limited to 15 minutes in duration;
- Social distancing of 2 metres should be observed at all times;
- Strict hand hygiene should be observed on entering, leaving and whilst in the tower - no sharing ropes between people who are not in the same household;
- At least 72 hours should be left between ringing sessions;
- Anyone displaying any of the coronavirus symptoms must not attend ringing;
- A full risk assessment should be carried out before ringing restarts and this should be approved by the incumbent.

If any tower would like a copy of the risk assessment used at Llandaff Cathedral and at Rumney or would like any further information then please contact me at:

master@llanmon.org.uk

Within the Branch, I'm aware that ringing has restarted at the following towers:

Caerleon
Llanedeyrn
Rumney
Shirenewton

Newport Cathedral have had a risk assessment approved but have not yet rung.

Matthew Turner

Association Master's Mutterings

Firstly, I hope that everyone is safe and well. The most important news of the past few months is that limited ringing for services has been allowed to resume. This must be strictly controlled at present to ensure that all hygiene and social distancing measures are complied with but it is a step in the right direction. The Central Council officers deserve credit for working with the Church in England to pull together a comprehensive set of guidance and associated risk assessments. Locally, our Association Officers have been liaising closely with colleagues in the Church in Wales to ensure that ringing was included in guidance provided to clergy and parishes for reopening church buildings and also to ensure a common approach with the Central Council guidance.

At Rumney, we began ringing again on 16 July and we've had many positive comments from members of the congregation and other local people regarding the bells, which is good to hear. It may be some time before ringing returns to normal but at least now some bells are able to be sounded for services. If anyone would like any advice on restarting ringing then please don't hesitate to speak to either John Vesey or myself and we would be happy to help.

Although there are no Association events taking place at present, the governance of the Association needs to continue. The Association Officers have had regular catch-ups over the last few months to ensure that everything is kept ticking along. We broke new ground back in June when the first Association Management Committee to be held online was held. This worked extremely well and made us wonder why we hadn't done it previously! Whilst there are a lot of benefits to meeting in person, online meetings also have advantages particularly in terms of cutting the travel time involved and not having to sit in a cold room for 2 hours! I would hope that future meetings of the Association

Management Committee feature a mix of both online and in person meetings.

We will also break new ground in September with the Association AGM being held online on Saturday 12 September at 4pm. It is important that members pre-register so that they can be sent the necessary links and instructions on how to access the meeting. You can register for the meeting here:

<https://www.llanmon.org.uk/contacts/2020-agm-registration>

The agenda and minutes of the last meeting are also available at the link above. Please do attend the meeting if you possibly can. There is important business to discuss and, given the current situation, it is important that there is a good representation from members.

I look forward to seeing many of you on 12 September.

Matthew Turner

Branch Master's Mutterings

Well, this time next week I'll be back at work for the first time (properly) for over 5 months. I'm certainly looking forward to the social interaction but a little anxious over how things will pan out with the schools.

Over the past few weeks it has been lovely to see some towers be able to ring for Sunday services, albeit for most towers on fewer bells and for only 15 minutes. Shirenewton have been innovative and set up their tower so that three bells can be rung socially distanced in their normal ringing room, whilst the other three bells are run socially distanced from the ground floor.

Here at Rumney, we have been very fortunate to be able to commence ringing for Sunday services on a rota system for our ringers. With a tower measuring just over three metres by three metres, keeping a two metre distance at all times can be challenging, but manageable. Matthew and Adam measured distances between all the bells and we can ring three bells socially distanced, or four bells if three Turner's (me, Matthew and Adam) ring the back three bells.

We prepared a detailed risk assessment and liaised with our Parish Priest before commencing ringing. We have to follow strict rules such as each ringer only ringing one bell (no swapping of ropes), hand sanitising at the bottom of

the tower, in the ringing room and before we leave, windows and doors open and leaving at least 72 hours between each session of ringing.

It can seem daunting initially, carrying out all the preparations and some people have been a little nervous about ringing after such a long break, but it has been worth it!

If any towers are considering recommencing ringing, it is imperative that the correct Welsh guidance is followed. If you have any concerns or are unsure please ask for help. Matthew Turner has a template risk assessment available for use and is more than happy to assist.

Debbie Turner

Chair's Chat

Hello Readers. I've had to think hard about what to say to you this time around, especially as there has been no recent Branch activity to talk about, nor any plans for Branch activity in the near future. But because of this absence of activity I felt it more important than ever to be in touch with you in this Newsletter.

The Editor requested items about what we have done during lockdown, and you may read about some of mine unless he has applied the editorial blue pencil on the grounds of it being too boring! There has been just a little ringing, as locally, nationally, and even internationally groups of ringers have engaged in hand bell style electronic ringing using Ringing Room or Handbell Stadium. For those of you who want to stay in touch with each other as a group, Zoom is a suitable computer/ipad/iphone application, and the Branch Committee asked for details of it to be circulated, perhaps in this Newsletter. However, there is no need to apply such modern communication systems, and I doubt whether it is beyond the capability of any of our Tower Captains to telephone their ringing teams at intervals during lockdown to enquire about their health and wellbeing. If they don't have their numbers, then shame on them! It is a vital aspect of leadership to look after the welfare of those being led.

You may know that ringing has resumed at a few places. Only taking place for short bursts and with all the necessary safeguards and precautions. These have been widely circulated on the web, and the Association Facebook page, which is available to anyone. Frankly, at my great age and in my medical condition I intend to be cautious about my return to the tower.

However, for those of you younger and fitter, I wish you well, and hope that you may soon have a safe, healthy and happy return to our beloved bellringing.

Peter Bennett

Training Coordinator's Talk

As previously expected, due to the ongoing Covid restrictions, the last Branch training event scheduled for Saturday 18th July did not go ahead.

The next Branch training date is for scheduled for Saturday 17th October. Under the current ringing restrictions, it would not be possible to hold this event as it stands. If there any signs that the restrictions could be changed between now and the end of September, then I will look to put a training event during October. However, with current increases in Covid cases and local lockdown measures being considered in areas at short notice, I am not sure that we will be able to offer training in October. We will see.

Ringing Room continues to be a potential option for some training, but since suggesting this in the last newsletter, I have not had any requests along that line of training.

However, if anybody is interested in trying this as a method training option, then let me know.

Andrew Phillips
MonmouthTraining@llanmon.org.uk

Damaris Gurney

It is with much sadness that we report the death on 15th July of Damaris Gurney, aged 78, of St Mary's Abergavenny, and Llantilio Pertholey. Damaris had not been feeling too well for the last couple of years and was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in early 2019 followed by a diagnosis of Dermatomyositis in mid December 2019, both conditions that affected her balance and muscle strength so that she was only able to ring for very short periods at a time. However, she received the news with optimism and some relief that at least a diagnosis meant suitable medication to relieve her symptoms.

In 2018 she had found increasing difficulty handling the ropes confidently at St Mary's Abergavenny where she had learnt, so stopped ringing there, and transferred to St Teilo's Llantilio Pertholey. However, she continued to come to St Mary's practices where she enjoyed being

helpful in 'standing behind'. Prior to her illness she also regularly attended practices at Gros-mont, Llantilio Crossenny, Skenfrith and Blae-navon plus a few attendances at Tredunnock.

Tragically, over Christmas 2019 she developed other symptoms which finally led to a diagnosis in February 2020 of terminal stomach cancer. Until then, as long as she was physically able to do so, she turned up for practices and Sunday service at Llantilio Pertholey, albeit only able to ring for very short periods but was always willing to 'stand behind' at practices. Even a week before her death she was still getting a little exercise, and enjoying looking into her garden from her downstairs bed.

Damaris never ever moaned or complained about her illnesses, but got on with doing as much as she could with determination, and underplayed any deterioration. As recently as early June she apologised for not replying to an email, saying that there had been a 'bit of a slide'. Fortunately at the beginning of 'lockdown', her very capable granddaughter came to stay and looked after her until other members of her family were able to join them when travel restrictions ended, and were with her at home when she passed away.

Her funeral was held on Saturday 25th July at 2.30pm at St Teilo's Llantilio Pertholey, the Funeral Director of her choice being Craig Brown of Blaenavon. Due to 'social distancing' rules, and restrictions of numbers in churches it was a graveside service for family members, but over 15 ringers also attended, standing suitably 'distanced' around the churchyard, while Gwyn Sayce tolled a single bell.

God Bless, Damaris, and rest in peace.

Val Deisler

Colin Hewlett

I'm sorry to report that Colin Hewlett of Redwick sadly died on Tuesday (25th August) after being unwell for some time. Colin was a stalwart of ringing at Redwick (and other towers within the Magor Ministry Area) and a faithful member of Redwick church and later the evening congregation at Undy. Also for many years an active ringer with the Forest Branch of the G & B Association. A true gentleman who will be much missed. He had a particular fondness for Grand-sire Doubles and loved nothing better than calling a 120 of Grandsire. Prayers and condolences are with Jan, Sian and family.

Richard Jones

What I did in lockdown

The Editor has invited us to write about what we have done in lockdown, so here goes! I have been researching my family history.

My curiosity was aroused about eight years ago, at the funeral of one of my old aunts. I was chatting to a second cousin from the other side of the deceased's family, and we spoke of our respective grandmothers, who were sisters. There was also a third sister, and our mutual great grandparents. We wanted to clarify some details about them, and would have liked to have spoken to the deceased's sister, who had attended the funeral, but gone home rather than join the wake. So there it lay, and I had hoped to contact the absent sister to establish the facts, as she was the last surviving person of that generation.

But it was not to be, mainly due to my laziness, and sadly she died in December 2018 at a great age, with no descendants. After her sparsely attended funeral, I offered to advise another second cousin of the death, which I eventually did by means of a letter with a Christmas card last December. But bingo! This cousin was a mine of information, introducing me to people whose existence was news to me, and now I have been able to draw up a family tree of the three sisters, their parents and descendants which is almost complete.

But that was not all. The above was all about my mother's family, she being an only child, as I am. This whetted my appetite for more research about my father's family. I joined Findmypast, one of a number of companies offering such services, and through them I was able to examine Census records from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Father came from a large family, all born and brought up in a hamlet called Newnham in deepest rural Warwickshire. My Bennett grandparents were married in 1895 and produced nine children. They were assiduous in having them all baptised at Aston Cantlow (6 14cwt, as you ask!). One of my cousins has an interest in this matter too, and she had learned from her mother (the youngest child, born 1916) that one of the siblings had died young. However, I was shocked and saddened to learn firstly that my Aunt Maud died in 1902 aged 5 and also that my Aunt Ethel died in 1904, aged just 15 days. Shocked to realise that these little girls are indeed my aunts, although they died long before I was born, and saddened to recognise

the perilous state of life in the early 20th century.

I didn't stop there, and I have established data about all four great grandparents and six of the eight great great grandparents on the Bennett side of my family.

However my cousin and I are mainly intrigued by our mutual grandfather. His ancestry is rooted in Birmingham where he worked as a bicycle polisher according to the 1901 Census, and it's our understanding that he commuted on a weekly basis to work in Birmingham. His parents were born in Birmingham and married there, yet his younger sister was born in London. As a youth he lived with his widowed grandfather, so we remain curious, and with more work to do.

Overall, this has been an interesting and intriguing exercise, which is not over yet. The search has to be widened and pushed back further into the past. The earliest date so far identified is a lady born in 1800. Do I recommend it? Only if you are curious and prepared to accept whatever you discover.

Peter Bennett

Couch to 5K - Lockdown Handbells Update

It is now just over 3 months since I wrote the first article detailing our experiences of attempting to ring handbells as a family during this period of lockdown, so this is a brief update on our progress. Couch to 5K has been our shorthand for attempting to work through a structured progression for our handbell ringing, taking our inspiration from the NHS running programme of the same name.

At the end of the last article we had just completed Adam's first quarter peal in hand which was Stage 7, having worked our way up to it through the previous stages. This spurred Catherine on and she rang a course of Bob Minor on the trebles the next day. Not long after this we took delivery of a copy of Tina Stoecklin and Simon Gay's new book "Change-Ringing on Handbells" and found it very helpful in thinking about our progression. We would certainly recommend this book to other handbell bands and there are a plethora of videos available on YouTube from the Association of Ringing Teachers and others that are helpful. We consolidated Stage 7 with a further quarter of Plain

Bob Minor to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day.

Around this time it was great to see other family bands score their first quarter peals. On Jersey, the Read family, scored quarter peals of Bob Minor involving all members of the family on 10 May. The Sonning Common handbell band featuring members of the Ellis family scored a quarter of Bob Minor on 12 May. They have since gone on to score several quarters of Bob Major featuring the full house of all four family members, including 9-year old Dominic - a great achievement.

In terms of our own family, I think it's fair to say that interest in handbells has waxed and waned throughout the period. What we have found is that our time for practice has been compressed due to home working and home-schooling and also all of the other activities that we're involved with, such as choir, bands, dance and music lessons, restarting online. Nevertheless, we have tried to keep persevering although our progress has been a bit slower than previously. The South Wales handbell ringers have also started meeting online twice a week utilising Handbell Stadium and Ringing Room, the first distributed quarter being scored on 14 May. Having scored a couple of quarters on 5-6, the next steps saw Adam take hold of 3-4 and progress through successively longer lengths until we scored Stage 8, a quarter of Bob Minor on 28 May. It was good to ring this quarter in memory of Christine Lucas on the day of her funeral. Christine had rung at Rumney with us in her later years and Debbie had also sung with her in the Rumney choir.

Having done this, the question then arose as to where do we go next? Catherine had mostly lost interest by this point so that ruled out progressing to 8-bell ringing. Richard Herrissier of Jersey had sent through some notes which suggested a progression in a number of stages working towards Oxford Treble Bob. We took advice from this and also from Tina and Simon's book and launched ourselves into St Clement's.

Stages 9 and 10 were various increasing lengths to build confidence before we attempted and scored Stage 11 - a quarter of St Clement's. This was Adam's first quarter in the method. We agreed that St Clement's is a great method for handbells as it introduces a number of useful concepts in terms of method structure and is a good progression from Plain Bob. Soon after this, and following some more work with the squared paper and coloured pens,

we scored Stage 12 - a plain course of Oxford Treble Bob.

Whilst the project has been loosely titled "Couch to 5k", the focus has been around building a broad competence through a structured progression rather than necessarily ringing a 5040. Having said that, it remains a personal ambition to ring a peal. I just need to persuade the other family members of the benefits of this and at present I'm struggling somewhat! My birthday on 28 June was a good opportunity to extend our range and, after some intense negotiations, we agreed upon and scored a half-peal of Plain Bob Minor. We discovered that a half-peal is quite a nice length to ring comfortably and would recommend it to other bands. The half-peal became Stage 13 and had the added bonus of lending itself to a Bon Jovi quote in the footnote.

Since then, we've been consolidating our St Clement's and rang two quarters of mixed minor (720 Plain Bob and 540 St Clement's) before Peter Bennett encouraged us to go for a quarter of spliced and provided a suitable composition. We duly scored this quarter of spliced on 28 July, which was Adam's first ever quarter of spliced.

So that's where we've got to so far. As before, it has been enormously rewarding and we've enjoyed our handbell ringing.

Matthew Turner

Caerleon

Members of St Cadoc's Caerleon bellringers rang for 15 minutes at 11:02 on August 15th for the anniversary of VJ day.

It was 3 bells only, socially distanced, but people in the village appreciated our efforts.

Julia Jones

Llanedeyrn

As soon as Ringing Room became available the band embraced this new type of ringing and quickly adapted to this technology and combining various video conference apps to speak to each other and simulate what we were used to in the tower. Anyone who has used Ringing Room will tell you it is very different from the real thing, but when you have nothing else we found this was an excellent way of keeping the band motivated and together. Llanedeyrn is a 6

bell tower, but we found it easier to ring on 8 bells as it kept the band busy. As a new Tower Captain with a new band it is difficult to conduct and ring at the same time and early on I found this even more of a challenge on ringing room. Having 9 in the band made it easier for me to conduct and allow the band to do a mix of ringing to match our ability. Moving to 6 bells enabled me to join in more and conduct whilst ringing Plain Hunt, more challenging call changes and Advanced Plain Hunt. It wasn't possible to continue ringing other methods as at best we had the ability to ring on the treble, No 2 and tenor. We have always relied on experienced ringers to ring on the inside bells whilst we gain experience. The aim of ringing room was to enable all our ringers to keep the band alive and enjoying what we are doing. We have tried to mirror our usual ringing week at Llanedeyrn and ring at 7pm on Wednesday evening and at 9am on Sunday morning. After the main practice Sam holds a quiz over Zoom and we have an online drink.

On Sunday 26th July Llanedeyrn was given permission to commence ringing. Our Risk Assessment had been accepted and we were able to ring 4 bells as Martin, Amanda G, John & Amanda S were in the same social bubble. Every ringer regardless of the long absence did a brilliant job and it was like riding a bike. There were a few complaints of sore forearms, but I am sure every bell ringer will get used to this again. We are aiming to ring twice a week in the tower. Once with 4 bells and once with 3 bells. We are still going to keep up ringing room as not all of the band can ring in the tower as we have 2 recruits who hadn't completed level 1 – Learning the Ropes. It is also different only being able to ring on 3 or 4 ropes and we miss having the many experienced ringers who have been with us over the last 2 years. We hope we can return to normality soon, but until then we will do the best we can with what we have available. Sunday services are due to start in September at St. Edeyrn's Church and we will start to ring before the service instead of in the late afternoon.

We will be ringing on Saturday 15th August for the 75th Anniversary of VJ Day and look forward to celebrating this historical day as we missed VE Day due to lockdown. It's great we have retained all our bell ringers who are keen and eager to advance. Ringing Room has helped us to do this, but the dedication of all ringers at Llanedeyrn has been a pleasure to witness.

Martin Gilbert

Rumney

We recommenced ringing on Sunday 16 July and have rung every Sunday since. The reaction from the congregation and our neighbours has been overwhelmingly positive so it's good to know that our efforts are appreciated.

We have continued to meet on a Monday evening using Zoom to keep in touch and using Ringing Room to keep our hand in with ringing. In recent weeks we have met face to face in gardens, socially distanced, now that the restrictions on groups meeting outdoors have been relaxed. It was certainly good to meet up before the nights draw in.

One of the ringers at our tower is a Breeze Women's ride leader for Brisith Cycling. Breeze has been set up to encourage more women to get on their bikes and offers bike rides of varying difficulties across the UK. More information can be found on their website letsride.co.uk.

The other Monday at Rumney get together (socially distanced in a garden), we were talking about excess pounds gained over lockdown. So Jane Dumont-Jones suggested (and persuaded by Wendy!) a bike ride. Thankfully, Jane picked a gentle route for us and we opted for a Sunday afternoon when the roads are a little quieter.

We had a lovely ride from St Mellons to Tredegar House and back again. On the way back we stopped at the Mason's Arms in Marshfield where we were joined by our cheerleaders, Zoe and Lesley. A good afternoon was had by all and we are planning our next adventure.

Debbie Turner



Socially distanced ringing on six at Shirenewton

Like all church rings we ceased ringing for any occasion at the start of lockdown. During April the cessation of ringing allowed for certain outstanding works to be carried out which included removing all the clappers for painting with the special rubberised paint for our recently acquired Big Wilf's Muffles, then refitting them. Also addressed was the lack of emergency lighting in the ringing room and improving the lighting in the belfry. This latter work was carried out by Simon Lockhart who also positioned a CCTV camera in the belfry so in future a monitor in the church will be able to show the bells in action. After this flurry of activity lockdown continued and the only sound made was the hourly strike of the clock bell which slowly lost time (the ringers normally regulating the clock) so by the middle of July it was 10 minutes slow!

As restrictions on lockdown began to ease, emails began to fly as to when the church could be opened. After a couple of attempts, final permission was given for the 25th of July but significant restrictions were to be followed including:-

- No hymn books or other paper-based service materials.
- No organ or singing.
- Family groups can sit together, but all groups must be two metres apart.
- Wearing face coverings/masks advisory
- People who are shielding should not attend

No specific mention of ringing was made but the 2 metre rule would restrict ringing to a maximum of 3 bells. Then a request came through that we should ring the bells on 15th August for VJ day so starting up ringing had to be planned. Conveniently a sample pro-forma risk assessment for ringing was received from John Vesey. A modified risk assessment was prepared specifically for Shirenewton based on the pro-forma and booted off to the PCC Secretary on 29th July which included a note we might attempt to ring 6 bells within the rules (more of that later). An enthusiastic "go ahead" was received the same day.

Now for those unfamiliar with the history of ringing at Shirenewton, the original 5 William Evans' bells were installed for full circle ringing in 1756. Ringing was originally from the ground floor central nave but the installation of an organ in the early part of the 19th century required the construction and panelling of an upstairs ringing room duly fitted with gas lighting. The ring was augmented to 6 and this arrangement pertained

even though the organ was eventually repositioned in the North West corner of the church. Ringing ceased during the 1960s and the bells became unringable. With the announcement of funding through “Ring in the Millennium” scheme restoration the ring was completed by the end of 1997 with the ringing reverting to the ground floor position. The original specification of the restoration included rope guides with the church but these were never commissioned as, I believe, it was considered they would be unsightly. The relatively light bells thus proved to be tricky to control even for experienced ringers and especially for novice ringers. Therefore, a plan was hatched to restore the upstairs ringing room which included reconstructing the ceiling as this had been demolished during the restoration project. However, not all ringers agreed and after lengthy negotiations it was concluded that upstairs ringing should be the norm but on special occasions (Christmas, New Year and Easter) ringing would be from the nave.

Now it had been suggested before, almost certainly in jest, that we could ring half the bells upstairs and half down. Now social distancing made this a desirable aim. So on Friday 31st July at somewhat short notice we managed to entice 6 ringers to the church for a short practice to check the feasibility of this aim. Bells 1, 3 & 5 would be rung from the nave (photo 1) and bells 2, 4 & 6 from the upstairs ringing room (photo 2). To aid those upstairs the ropes passing through the ringing room of bells 1, 3 & 5 were marked with coloured insulating tape to indicate sally and tail end positions. A short video of this very first practice can be viewed on the L&MDACBR Facebook Group. Although the quality of the rounds overall is not high, occasional rows are of good quality and practice makes perfect. The following Sunday the 6 bells were again rung and we will be starting up regular albeit much shortened practice sessions from now on. The intention is to ring the 6 bells for VJ Day and who knows – if restrictions continue we may attempt some change ringing.

Mike Penney



The downstairs ringing room



The upstairs ringing room

Our favourite ring of 8 - all due to our ringing predecessors.

The Association Facebook Group has been used extensively during the lockdown period with members sharing old photos, sharing updates from the Central Council and a variety of “guess the tower”-type competitions. Inspired by similar competitions on the national Bell-ringers Facebook Group regarding rings of 12 and rings of ten, I ran a competition to determine our favourite ring of eight. The term “favourite” was deliberately used to bring an element of subjectivity to the proceedings, recognising that a range of elements contribute to how we view a ring of bells - e.g. the bells themselves, comfort of the ringing room, ease of parking, proximity to good pub etc.. There were no prizes to be won; the main aim being to stimulate some good-natured discussion.

In order to shape the competition, using organiser’s privilege I selected eight Llandaff Branch and eight Monmouth Branch rings of eight. Following a draw and series of knockout polls,

Ebbw Vale were adjudged to be our favourite ring of eight.

After the competition, I was reflecting on how lucky we are to have such a plethora of good rings of eight in the area. The 16 towers that made it into the competition were:

Aberavon - cast 1893 by Taylor's
Bassaleg - cast 1901 by Warners retuned 1964 by Taylor's
Blaenavon - cast 1948 by Taylor's
Caerleon - cast 1953 by Taylor's
Caerphilly - cast 1910 by Taylor's
Caldicot - cast by a variety of founders but retuned by Gillett and Johnston in 1913
Cowbridge - cast 1722 by Evans of Chepstow and retuned 1935 by Taylor's
Ebbw Vale - cast by Taylor's in 1937
Llantilio Crossenny - cast by Whitechapel in 1977
Merthyr Tydfil - cast 1893 by Taylor's
Monmouth - cast in 1706 by Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester and retuned by Whitechapel in 1982
Penarth - cast 1935 by Taylor's
Pentre - cast 1889 by Taylor's
Pontypridd - cast 1913 by Taylor's
Radyr - cast 1910 by Taylor's
Usk - cast by Taylor's in 1925

What is immediately obvious from this list is, firstly, what a great collection of bells there are here (and there were several other towers that didn't make this list that could feel a bit hard done by). Secondly, it is noticeable how many were cast by or had major work done by Taylor's of Loughborough. Lastly, many of the rings here were cast at the end of nineteenth and into the first few decades of the twentieth century.

This all got me thinking about why this should be so. I think there were a number of factors that coincided to allow the installation of such a large number of rings of bells around this period. Firstly, the coal industry was still very profitable in this period and there was a good supply of wealthy benefactors to call upon to fund bell-related projects. Secondly, there was a boom in church building in South Wales during the Victorian period with many new churches being built to serve new communities, or existing churches being expanded to serve the rapidly growing communities that were a feature of South Wales during the Victorian period.

The final factor was undoubtedly the enthusiasm and energy of the Association at that time and, in particular, that of the Secretary - John W Jones. By way of illustration, David Llewellyn kindly provided me with extracts of all the references to ringing in South Wales from the Ringing World of 1911 and some of the highlights include:

14 March - dedication of the new tower and bells at Caerphilly - *"The bells, a ring of eight (tenor 13 cwt). are by Messrs John Taylor & Sons, Loughborough, and are a beautifully sweet toned ring, reflecting the highest credit on the founders."*

Easter Monday - first meeting of the Association to be held at Radyr.

19 May 1911 - note of the proposed restoration of the bells at Lower Machen - *"After being silent for many years, the bells of Machen Church, near Newport, Mon., are to be taken in hand for restoration. There is a peal of six in the tower, and several months ago it was decided to rehang them. Just as the work was about to be commenced the honorary secretary of the Llandaff Diocesan Association (Mr. J. W. Jones) intervened and suggested that it should be deferred so that a special effort might be made to complete the octave. This, as reported in a previous issue, it has now been decided, shall be done, and a treble and tenor are to be added, the contract having been secured by Messrs. Llewellyns and James, of Bristol."*

[Note - this intervention by J W Jones to persuade the local authorities to have an 8-bell ring is a common feature of this period.]

28 July - Association meeting held at Caerleon. In the report of the meeting it is noted that *"through the persistent efforts of the Association, the authorities at Radyr have seen*

their way to have the ropes lowered to the proper ringing chamber, instead of the ringing having to be done on the floor immediately under the bells. The tower is now an ideal place for peal ringing."

4 August - Dedication of the new ring of bells at Llanbradach. *"The bells are by Messrs John Taylor and Co., who are entitled to congratulations upon the excellent work put into this ring, the tone and "go" being perfect."*

[Note - the bells at Llanbradach were transferred to Kingstone, Herefordshire after the church at Llanbradach was closed and demolished in the 1980s. They are a lovely ring of bells and would probably have featured in the "favourite ring" competition if they were still within the Association's area.]

20 October 1911 - Association meeting held at Aberdare. The report notes that "the Hon. Secretary explained that he had carried out his instruction in reference to St. Fagan's Church bells. He read the correspondence with the Earl of Plymouth, who had promised to inquire into the matter as regards the rehunging, and hoped the matter would soon be put right."

[Note - this never happened and the bells at St Fagan's were scrapped in 1986. The second survives as the service bell in the Pritchard Tower at Llandaff Cathedral.]

22 December 1911 - dedication of the restored and augmented bells at Lower Machen.

Coincidentally, the Ringing World printed a mini-biography of J W Jones in the issue dated 22 September 1911. In the article it states that he was born in Tidenham, Gloucestershire on 5 December 1865 but moved to Caerleon two years later. He learnt to ring at Caerleon in 1888, taught by Evan Davies who became the first Master of the Association. The article records his various peal ringing achievements, his involvement with All Saint's Newport and also notes that "Teaching new bands is, indeed, a pet hobby with Mr. Jones. He has voluntarily given his services as instructor at a great many towers in his district during the past twelve or fifteen years, and at the present time has two new bands in hand at Caerphilly and Llanbradach. Moreover, Mr. Jones is always on the alert to secure the rehunging, where necessary, and the augmentation of bells, and several eight-bell towers in the Llandaff Diocese owe the possession of the two trebles to his energy and persuasion. Mr. Jones possesses several presents, which he much cherishes, from towers where he has taught, and which have been given him to mark the ringers' appreciation and thanks."

John Jones died on 21 April 1956 at the age of 90. His obituary in the Ringing World records that:

"During his 46 years as secretary of the Association he carried out his duties with vigour and enthusiasm, and many towers in the district can thank him for their early instruction; he must have travelled many hundreds of miles in doing this service. For many years he was a member of the Central Council and was at the time of his resignation the oldest member. A friendly man, he was loved by all who came in contact with him. Mr. Jones was a great traveller and visited most parts of Great Britain, ringing in nearly 700 towers. He rang over 500 peals, mostly in the standard methods. As a boy he joined the Great Western Railway at Newport, and was a storekeeper in the engineering department at Newport. In his younger days he was a very good cricketer and played for Monmouthshire in the Minor Counties Championship. For many years he saw every England-Australia test match in this country."

So at the next opportunity we have to ring on some our magnificent rings of 8 bells, lets try to remember to say a "thank you" to our ringing predecessors, and John W Jones in particular, who did so much to leave us with so many wonderful rings of bells in South Wales.

Matthew Turner

<p>Want to find out what's going on?</p> <p>To receive copies of the newsletter by email and emails giving notifications of Branch events then head to:</p> <p>https://www.llanmon.org.uk/mailling-lists</p> <p>and subscribe to Association and Monmouth Branch-related mailing lists.</p> <p>Another good source of information is the Association Facebook Group which is available here:</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/groups/LlanMonDACBR/</p>	<p>Thanks to following contributors to this Newsletter: Debbie Turner, Peter Bennett, Martin Gilbert, Mike Penney, Val Deisler, Julia Jones and John Hopkins.</p> <p>THE DEADLINE FOR MATERIAL FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER IS 1 NOVEMBER 2020.</p> <p>Articles should be sent, preferably by e-mail, to Matthew Turner:</p> <p>monmouthnews@llanmon.org.uk</p>
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Review of 8 bell towers in the knock out competition

Like many members of the Association, and indeed some non-members, I enjoyed taking part in the knock-out competition staged by the Master to determine the favourite 8 bell tower of the 16 put forward for consideration. I suspect that some people voted in accordance with what they saw as the quality of the bells, but for me it was a opportunity to review my half century of ringing in the area, including the various projects and performances in which I have been happily engaged, and the people with whom I have taken part. However, I've looked a little closer at the towers concerned, using my trusty 2019 Association Annual Report. (Thinks, have I been watching too many of Michael Portillo's railway journeys?)

The 16 towers involved were 8 from each Branch, a tactful and pragmatic choice, and all but three of the towers announce a Practice Night in the Report. 8 towers, 4 from each Branch, have less than eight members of the Association listed in the Report, including one tower from each Branch with zero members. Now I KNOW that there are ringers about who are not members, of them, some will be learners not yet being considered for membership, and otherwise there are probably no more than a handful of competent ringers in our area who are not members. The four towers in the Monmouth Branch with more than 7 members have either 8 or 9. All four towers in the Llandaff Branch are in double figures, from 10 to 14.

All of the above figures are taken from the Report. They are factual, and subject to any counting errors on my part are accurate. But I've gone on to do a more subjective assessment. Based on information gleaned from various sources, not least idle gossip, I've considered the capabilities of the various bands of ringers involved. Now, I ALSO KNOW that many ringers attend practices at more than one tower, and such visitors can make a huge difference to what happens on practice night, but according to my subjective assessment, of the 16 towers only 9 are able to ring rounds and called changes on their full peal of 8 bells with their regular band. Furthermore, as we are in an area with a method ringing culture, I'm sad to note that I believe that at only five of those towers are the local bands able to ring Grandsire or Plain Bob Triples. They are all in the Llandaff Branch.

Wake up! What are we going to do about it?

Peter Bennett



LLANDAFF



MONMOUTH

2020 Association Annual General Meeting - 12 September

The Association's 2020 Annual General Meeting will be held online (via Zoom) on Saturday 12th September 2020 at 16:00hrs.

The 2020 AGM Agenda and the draft 2019 AGM Minutes are available on the Association's website at:

<https://www.llanmon.org.uk/contacts/2020-agm-registration>

Practice Meeting

Officers are keen to ensure that members are able to participate in the AGM and to minimise any democratic deficit that might occur due to the AGM being held online.

In order to help ensure that the AGM goes as smoothly as possible and that all those who wish to "attend" are able to do so, there will be a "practice" get-together on Sunday 6th September 2020 between 16:00hrs and 17:00hrs. This is to ensure that connectivity and technical/procedural issues for joining the AGM itself are ironed out beforehand. Officers will be available both online and by telephone during this session to assist those who might not be familiar with video conferencing via Zoom.

2020 AGM Pre-Registration

It is necessary to pre-register for the AGM to enable the sharing of Practice and Meeting links by email (rather than making them publicly available and hence open to abuse) and to help ensure that voting at the AGM is according to the Association's General Rules, i.e. by Voting Members only.

Visitors are welcome to attend our AGMs in normal circumstances and are equally welcome to attend this one.

To Pre-Register, please complete the Form which is available at:

<https://www.llanmon.org.uk/contacts/2020-agm-registration>

Monmouth Branch Dinner - January 2021

Following from the success of the Monmouth Branch Dinner held in January 2016, the Committee have agreed to hold another Branch Dinner in 2021. Currently the proposed date of the Dinner is Saturday 30th January 2021 at the Three Salmons Hotel, Usk.

As of today (30-Jul) the Welsh Government has announced that pubs can open indoors from the beginning of August. I shall therefore be contacting the Three Salmons after the opening date to discuss the options as to whether they think that the original date of 30th January is a goer, probably with a vastly restricted number of attendees compared to normal, or whether we look to go there later in the year when it might be possible to seat more people. I shall report back in the next Newsletter.

In the meantime, pencil 30th January in your diaries in case the event still goes ahead on that date. Should the date of 30th January go ahead, I will let it be known where and how more details and tickets can be obtained.

Andrew Phillips