

Simon Barley

Memories of 1940s and 1950s - campanology

The project received two letters from Simon Barley. Simon is over 80 years old, but clearly has a very accurate memory of his life at The Old Hall in the late 40s and early 50s. Simon's parents were Maurice and Diana Barley.

Maurice Barley was an academic who produced a History of North Muskham in 1947, with the North Muskham Local History Group of the time.

The 1947 history document can be found in the Village History pages on this website.

In this letter, Simon re-calls how he learned campanology in the church.

Dear Capturing Memories Project,

My brother and I began learning campanology in about 1951, or perhaps 52. I think Ron Milnes (or Ronnie, as he was then) and Mark Lewis joined a little later.

The adult ringers were Charlie Copp, whom we helped each Friday night – practice night – to wind the two trains of the clock; two large weights on wires which needed a few minutes of quite heavy exertion for hauling up. Charlie usually rang the tenor covering [technical term!], leaving the more complicated change ringing on the lighter five bells to Fred Hooper, Bill Midwinter, Harry Cloxton (who rowed across the river from Holme), Alan Muddell and some others who came from Newark. Fred was partially sighted (nystagmus, I think in retrospect) and later married one of the Miss Streetons, perhaps Kathleen. He was a very experienced ringer, who could conduct complicated methods. Bill Midwinter lived at the Grange, but quite soon after moved to Newark; he continued to come to practice nights on the bus, catching the 9pm when we finished. Harry Cloxton seemed a large

presence (he had a big moustache, I think) but he did not remain a member of the band for long. Two elderly ladies came quite often from Sutton on Trent – Miss Kathleen and Miss Grace Burchnall; Sutton had 8 bells and they practised on Wednesdays; I was sometimes allowed to cycle over if I had finished my prep.

Alan Muddell was a retired farmer who lived with his wife Norah in Edgefield House at the north end of the village; my parents became good friends with them and we children were instructed, in the manner of the times, to address them as 'Uncle Alan and Auntie Norah'. I never felt comfortable with that idea and, although we referred to them as such in our family, I don't recall saying it to their face – even then I was very aware that they were not in the least sense my Uncle and Aunt! He had considerable difficulty in learning to ring; he always rang the 4th bell (we lads changed about to any of the bells). Getting his head round the complications of change ringing was not easy for him – but he did once. To his huge satisfaction, he managed to complete a full peal.



Bell Ringers Outing to Duffield

Mr Muddell had had considerable experience in local government, and was chairman of the Trent River Board, which did reparative work on the river after the big floods of 1947, when water filled the marsh between the banks and the village, and even appeared in the dairy of the Old Hall. I recall paddling to get to the bucket of eggs which were preserved, in those days of shortages and rationing, in isinglass. The Muddells were great supporters of the



church, and always sat on the left of the centre aisle about four rows from the front: Mrs Muddell was tall and sang hymns loudly, keeping up the momentum of the hymns, which tended to drag too slowly in the hands of Mr Thurston, the organist. We ringers occupied the back row just by the south door and used to watch closely for Miss Corbridge, on the opposite side of the church, to nod off during the sermons and awake frequently with a jerk of her head.

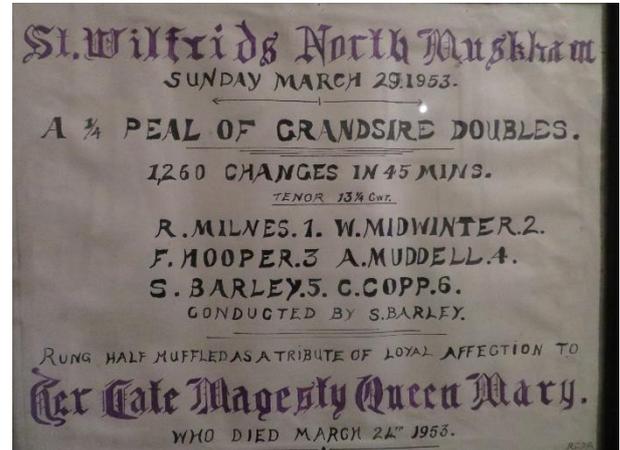
I remember a few big occasions in bell-ringing. One was in 1952, when we rang a fully muffled (that is, with both sides of the bell clappers covered with a leather shield) peal of 5040 changes for the death of king George VI; it took over three hours, as we rang noticeably more slowly than usual. For the Coronation, the following year, we certainly rang something special, but I can only remember that I went on my bike to several churches that Bank Holiday of rain. These churches which did not normally have the bells rung, included South Muskham, where the three bells were rung for that one and only time, and Rollestone, near Southwell. We rang longer peals and quarter peals (1250 changes, taking about 45 minutes) quite frequently. Living as I now do, near a church with a clock that strikes the quarters, I sometimes wonder what the very close neighbours of the church thought about our activities at St Wilfrid's.

All best wishes,

Simon Barley

2019

Grandshire Peal for Funeral of King George IV 1952



A Peal of Bells 1953

