

Alverstoke Bell Ringers' Annual Outing 23rd September 2006

Our coach arrived early on a beautiful sunny morning, and we were soon off to our first ring, All Hallows at Whitchurch. A very pretty Church dating around 1360, although it was enlarged and the tower heightened by the Victorians in 1866. They also added a spire to the square tower. It originally housed eight bells, but in 1999 two more were added for the millennium. This ensured that our first tower was a challenge to our more novice ringers, who are more used to ringing on the eight bells of Alverstoke. Everyone grasped the opportunity to ring here, partly because it was our first tower, and partly because the bells were so easy to ring, although the fourth had to be rung from a wobbly box, and the tenor was difficult to set first time. Even so we were able to ring three leads of Kent, Stedman, and some rounds. After 45 minutes here, it was back on the coach to our next tower, St Michael & All Angels, Highclere.

This was a more modern church, built by the Fourth Earl of Carnarvon in 1870. It has eight bells, although on arrival we were given a note from the Tower Captain explaining that one of the ringers had found problems ringing the 7th Bell, so maybe it would be better if one of our more experienced ringers was put on it. On reaching the ringing chamber however, the bell rope for the 7th was nowhere to be seen. Our intrepid Captain went up into the bell chamber to inspect, only to find that the 7th had gone full circle and taken the rope up with it. Added to this was the fact that the rope was tangled around the fittings of some of the other bells, all of which had been left up for our visit! Undeterred our Captain yelled down instructions for three, four and eight to be lowered, untangled the rope and passed it back down the hole into the chamber, enabling us to ring all eight with someone holding the 7th on the balance at the end of each method. Our ringing time was cut a little short, but at least everyone was able to participate in either rounds and Call Changes, Bob Triples, Cambridge and an attempt at Double Norwich. Maybe for future outings a toolbox should be included!

After a wholesome pub lunch at the Swan Inn, it was on again to St Nicholas at Newbury, a large church in the town centre. Originally there was a Norman Church on this site, but the present building dates from the 16th Century. We were met by one of the ringers who kindly allowed us to climb up on to the tower roof, which afforded wonderful views over the Kennet and Avon canal and the countryside beyond. The tower housed ten bells, which had a lovely sound we really enjoyed ringing rounds and call changes, Plain Hunt, Stedman and half a course of Cambridge. All too soon our time was up and we were back on the coach to our next tower.



St Matthews Church at Midgham was our next stop. It has a ground floor ring, which was well timed as some of our group were beginning to flag by now! This was a very light six bell tower, so our new ringers had to adjust to the different weight. They rose to the challenge though and managed very well, ringing Rounds, Bob Doubles, Cambridge, and Stedman with a variable cover! There was some amusement when the envelope containing our donation would not fit into the church donation box, so it was decided to balance it on the spider, which would give someone a nice surprise next morning!

Stratfield Mortimer was next on the list, but unfortunately off the ordinance survey map. Our driver ended up eastbound on the M4, but we took the next available exit and eventually found the signs. Fortunately we were only ten minutes late, which meant we still had time for everyone to have a turn at ringing the eight bells. We managed rounds, Bob Triples and half a course of Superlative. These were slightly different to ring due to being hung on plain bearings, but none of our ringers had any difficulty. The Church itself was built around 1869 and is noted for its inscribed Anglo-Saxon tombstone, and an octagonal tub font basin thought to date from the 12th century. Our intrepid band was ready for refreshment, so we travelled on to the White Hart at Sherfield on Lodden for a delightful tea. I wonder who spotted those delicious smoked salmon sandwiches hiding right at the back of the furthestmost platter?

Suitably refreshed, and with two more towers to go, it was a short drive to St Andrews Church at Sherborne St John, a small six bell tower, the church dating from the 14th century. The ringing chamber was accessible through a trap door, which had to be lowered again in order to ring the bells. It was a tight fit to squeeze everyone in, and ringing was 'cosy' to say the least, but we managed to ring rounds and call changes, Stedman, and Cambridge. One of our more experienced ringers was caught out when his bell rope got caught against the beam above, causing him to miss his sally not once but twice!

Our final tower was St Michael's in the centre of Basingstoke. We found the church nestled in amongst all the modern town centre buildings, with church cottage right next door. It dates from Tudor times and is the oldest building in Basingstoke. There has been a place of worship on the site of St Michael's for over 900 years, although the present building is around 400 years old. This church has eight bells similar in weight to Alverstoke, which will maybe explain why our efforts here produced the best ringing of the day, despite our tiredness. Our ringing here included round and Call Changes, Plain Bob Triples, Yorkshire, and the best touch of Stedman heard for a long time.

Our ringing finished at 8.00 pm and our driver delivered us safely back to the Parish Centre by just after 9.00 pm. Everyone agreed that once again the outing had been a resounding success, and thanks were delivered to the organisers for a very smooth running day.

Carole Pym