

35 Years and counting!

On the 11th March 1972 I rang my first peal at Bathampton, Somerset, Plain Bob and Grandsire Doubles were the methods under the watchful eye of Charles G Jones. I remember it very well, especially how tired I was at the end but how pleased I was to achieve my very first peal success. The invitation to ring at Bathampton had come only a few days earlier whilst at a Chippenham Branch meeting at Grittleton where a small number had assembled for the practice, including Charlie who was a visitor. During the course of the evening, it was established that we were one ringer short for a course of Cambridge Minor and I was asked if I had ever looked at the line. I admitted I hadn't but Charles said that he would 'talk me through' the method to enable the other ringers present who knew the line to be able to ring the course. He then proceeded to do just that, ringing his own bell perfectly whilst telling me exactly what to do and when to do it. Afterwards he asked me if I had ever rung a peal and if not, would I like to ring one at Bathampton the following Saturday? Little did I realise that, by saying 'yes' this was to be the start of my peal ringing career.

I rang several more peals with Charlie and Patricia Freeland (who were eventually married) in the early 1970's, mostly of Doubles and Minor and mainly on relatively light rings of six but it was always an enjoyable experience and we had some good ringing. In the late 1970's and early 80's Shipton Moyne and Tetbury were the main towers where the more advanced ringing took place in the Chippenham Branch and I was fortunate to be able to participate in peals of Surprise Major under the guidance of Don Excel who was the Tower Captain at Tetbury. Also during this time I rang my first peal (Cambridge Royal) with Tony Peake and Anita O'Brien from Swindon who were prolific multi-method peal ringers and formed a peal ringing relationship with them that still continues today.

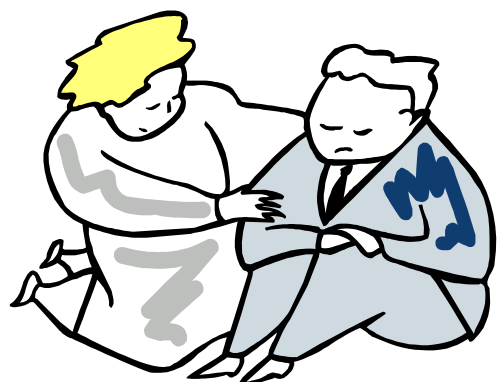
In 1988, our son Benjamin was born and in the same year we moved from Wiltshire to the Portsmouth District. Strangely the 1988 is the only year in the past 35 that I did not ring a peal, probably due to the pressures of moving to a strange area and the responsibilities of fatherhood.

The 1990's saw most of my peal ringing being done with Tony Peake and his band. I became a regular member of the 1st Saturday peal band at East Ilsley during which I rang, and continue to do so, many new surprise major methods for the first time.

At the time of writing I have rung 537 peals ranging from Doubles to Maximus and beyond and have conducted 68 peals.

In both 1997 and 2002 I thought about ringing a special peal to mark the 25th and 30th anniversary of my first peal but never got around to organising anything. In fact it wasn't until the beginning of March that I realised that the 35th anniversary was fast approaching so I hastily decided to get a band together to attempt a celebratory peal. Fortunately, in 2001 we had our own mini-ring of bells installed so securing a tower is never a problem for us. I decided to attempt a peal of Grandsire Triples, J J Parkers 12 part composition, one which I have called several times before in the 1970's and which would not present a problem to the band that I had assembled. Both my wife Sarah and son Ben were in the band together with five other friends.

And so it was, we set off into changes at 19:05 on the 11th March 2007, 35 years to the day of my very first peal. We immediately struck a good steady beat on the 16lb mini-ring with near perfect striking and the first 10 parts of the peal swiftly passed without the slightest of hesitations. Shortly after the start of the 11th part and with less than 20 minutes to go I became aware that the tenor was clipping the end of the change and a quick glance revealed that the ringer was in some distress with the colour gone from her face and looking decidedly ill. As she swayed at the end of the rope I decided that 'stand' was the only sensible thing to do and as I set my bell I managed to catch her before she fell to the floor. She soon recovered from the faint and I will not repeat the first word she uttered when she realised what had happened.



Within the course of a few seconds, the outcome of the peal had changed from almost certain success to failure and it just goes to show how fine the line is in peal ringing terms. Ironically, as well as it being rung on the 35th anniversary of my first peal it would also have been the 35th peal on the bells and my 35th peal with one of the other ringers.

I am often asked what it is about peal ringing that I find so enjoyable. For a board surfer it's to 'ride the perfect wave' but for a ringer it's to ring the 'perfect peal'. By this I mean, no method mistakes, no hesitations and each bell struck perfectly in time with its' relationship to the others. I have made many good friends through peal ringing over the years, rung some exceptionally good peals at some great towers, and have pushed my method learning abilities to the limits on many an occasion.

If you have not yet attempted a peal, then my message to you is 'have a go', who knows you may just get hooked like I did 35 years ago.

Ian Carey