

We have been able to ring at least five bells on Sunday mornings, often six, and in the evening regularly all eight to quite a high standard. We have an abundance of visitors on a Monday night, sometimes making our numbers between 15 and 20, which is quite a lot to ensure everyone has enough 'goes', but it's lovely to have a thriving practice when many towers near by struggle to ring at all.

The District Striking Competition was held at Ash-by-Wrotham in March, and despite missing two regular members of our team we managed to win back the trophy. We therefore represented the Lewisham District in the County Competition in September but it was on the slightly tricky bells at Seal, and again we were missing Nick Wilkins and John Barnes. We did our best but we didn't win! At the Call-Change Competition in November at Horton Kirby we did manage to win, and we haven't won this one in a while, so we were thrilled.

There were 5 peals on the bells last year, including two to celebrate weddings of people related to the band – on 28th May one was rung to commemorate the forthcoming nuptials of Nick's daughter Melanie at Farnborough, and on Saturday 28th September a band of friends and relations rang to celebrate the wedding at St Martin's that day of Richard Barclay to Stephanie Rueff, Karen's niece and my goddaughter. On Christmas Eve we rang one of Yorkshire in memory of John Barnes, which had been the method he rang for his last peal at Chelsfield, more of which shortly.

Of the fifteen quarter peals this year, some notable ones included one rung on 7th June as an 80th birthday compliment to Ann Blatcher, long time ringer and secretary to the band, and one on 30th July in memory of Nicholas Martin, one time tower captain here, who named the method Chelsfield Surprise Major at a time when it wasn't possible to ring it here because it was only a 6 bell tower. On 21st and 30th October quarters were rung in memory of John Barnes. Many of the rest were first quarters in method or as conductor for members of the Kent Young Ringers which is a very positive thing.

At the start of September, along with the church, we once again took part in the Heritage Open Days weekend, and at the end of September we had a lovely outing in and near Folkestone. For this year's Ringers' Sunday in October Neil Jones, Tower Captain at Rochester Cathedral, spoke about their 20 in 21 campaign to rehang and augment the Cathedral bells in time for their centenary in 2021. It was really interesting to hear about the history of the bells at 'our' Cathedral.

And so to John Barnes, who we sadly lost in October. A huge part of our ringing lives, our longest serving ringer, a well-known and respected figure in the exercise, and a loyal member of this congregation since the 1960s. He was part of our band for as long as all of us have been ringing, and we miss him a lot. I'm very glad that between us, his family and his other ringing friends I think we managed to ensure his funeral represented the man we knew and loved. We are considering a way of remembering him permanently, both in the tower and in the wider ringing community.

Philippa Rooke, April 2020