

The Essex Association of Change Ringers

Founded 1879

President: The Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Chelmsford



Word Count: 1429

TITLE: All The Bells - 21st July & 27th July 2012

Concept

Work No. 1197: All the bells in the country rung as quickly and as loudly as possible for three minutes by Turner Prize-winning artist and musician Martin Creed is a London 2012 Festival commission. Date/Time - 8.12am on Friday 27th July for 3 minutes on the opening day of the Olympics.

EACR View

We are going to give this a go in the spirit of generating some excitement in the run up to the London 2012 Olympic Games. As part of the Cultural Olympiad, this concept meets the criteria of utilising a great British tradition – full circle change ringing on church bells has been a cultural tradition in Great Britain since C17th.

Change Ringing is a team sport, a highly coordinated musical performance, an antique art, and a demanding exercise that involves a group of people ringing rhythmically a set of tuned bells. Normally speaking this is achieved through a series of changing sequences that are determined by mathematical principles and executed according to learned patterns.

Our attempt should stimulate some interesting debate in the local community because we will be using some pretty impressive and loud instruments in an unusual way. Church bells confirm our faith in the Church of England and we usually ring them to call people to worship or to celebrate other local and national celebrations. For visitors from other countries and cultures to our shores, hearing church bells being rung on Sundays, practice nights and for weddings will be part of their cultural experience during their time in the UK.

What we are going to attempt to do, and the very audible nature of it, will vary greatly from what people are used to hearing from church bells. In terms of the unusual sound we are going to attempt to make and the early time of day at which we are going to do it on the day, there is the potential for the church and bell ringing community to receive some complaints from people living near the church. That is not something any of us wants, so we will be treading very carefully. The best way to avoid any difficulties is for us to tell everyone what we are doing, put some notices up in the church porch and signposts in the local area.

Challenges - 21st July practice session

The Tower Captain at St Mary's, Little Baddow is on holiday, as are several members of the local band. So we have had to arrange a special band of ringers, which is made up of people who don't normally ring together on a weekly basis. As a result our individual ringing styles and abilities need to be taken into consideration and we have to be able to gel on the day on a set of bells we are not familiar with – hence this morning's practice.

Notes to Editors:

1. Further information may be obtained from Tracey Southgate, Public Relations Officer, 4 Sweden Close, Dovercourt, Harwich, Essex. CO12 4JU. Tel: 01255-507357, Mobile: 07883-543753, Email: pro@eacr.org.uk.

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This practice session has involved numerous emails and phone calls, every day over a 10 day period. I have received a tremendous amount of support from ringers based in and around Chelmsford, particularly Wendy Godden, who is the local tower captain and Jo Elliott who is the Secretary of the Chelmsford (SE) District of EACR. She and her husband Ken are here taking part, as are Brian Patmore, John Everett, Graham Snow and myself.

The Rector is on holiday and we need the churches' permission to be able to do this – we have had to ask one of the church wardens to speak to the rest of the PCC and they have given their consent. Because all the local ringers are away we have had to make special arrangements with Malcolm Breeze, one of the Church Wardens to meet us with a key in order to let us in.

To be consistent, we wanted the ringers taking part in today's practice to be able to be available on 27th July also – this again has been a major stumbling block because of ringer's work commitments, family obligations and summer holidays. But we have finally got there.

Firing (loud)

Firing is a technique used to get all the bells to sound simultaneously like canon fire – hence the term 'firing'. It's traditionally used for ringing at weddings and I recall an acquaintance of mine saying it's a nice trick to play on wedding photographers. You can just imagine them taking forever to line up the perfect photograph, getting all the guests in the perfect position, all smiling etc and then the bell ringers fire the bells – it frightens the living daylights out of them! That aside, it is incredibly difficult to get right and requires a lot of practice to get it to sound effective. The difference in sound when getting it right or getting it almost right is quite significant. It should sound like gunfire when you get it right. The problem is that the bells vary in size from the heaviest to the lightest, and the time it takes to get a large bell to turn and have the clapper strike the lip of the bell will be longer than that for a lighter, smaller bell.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6NiDUpM078>

Ringling Down (at speed)

There are 2 ways of ringing a church bell, 1 is by chiming it and the other is the full circle method. The bell is hung mouth downwards or in the 'down' position when chiming. When chiming a bell, the rope is pulled a short distance and then 'checked'. The bell swings through a small arc and hits against the heavy clapper. When chiming, the speed is relatively controllable and the sound is fairly quiet.

For full circle ringing, first the bell needs to be 'rung up'. Starting from chiming, the angle of swing on the rope and wheel is gradually increased until the bell is swinging into a full circle through 360 degrees. The bell is balanced mouth upwards (set). The bell is then ready for ringing and in its most dangerous state. The bell rope should then only be touched by someone who knows what they are doing. When we finish a ringing session, we have to reverse this process, ring the bell down so the mouth is hung downwards and the bell is

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back into the checking position. The bell is then made safe (down). If someone was to pull on the rope without really knowing what they are doing, they can't come to much harm, and no damage to the bells or fittings is possible. For health and safety, and insurance reasons, bells must be rung down after each session. We can ring a number of bells down together in sequence (peal) to make a bit of music while we are carrying out this practical task. We normally do this at a steady speed, fully under control and to strike the bells well. You will be able to hear the bells strike more and more quickly as they go 'downwards' because they are now swinging in a smaller and smaller arc, not the full 360 degree arc.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cc2KiMGQ5V0&feature=related>

3 minute time restriction

We need to practice to determine how we can achieve ringing in rounds for a few strokes, firing for a few strokes, ringing back in rounds for a few strokes and then ringing the bells down – all in 3 minutes. It's quite a challenge – hence the practice! Once we've determined what to do, when and for how long hopefully we can meet the objective next Friday!

Ends -

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