

## News from the Belfry

If you read the News from the Belfry last month, you will notice that it was the men who were ringing at the Tower Outing and not the women. Whilst change ringing dates back to 1612 it was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century that women began to take up ringing. For almost three centuries change ringing was a male activity. It was thought that only physically strong men were able to handle the poorly cast and unwieldy bells. Women started to ring in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century once bells became easier to handle. However, ringing expert and author Steve Coleman dismisses this idea, attributing the all-male bands to the patriarchal structure of society at the time and to women not being given the opportunity or time outside of the home to become ringers, rather than a lack of physical strength.

Miss Alice White of Basingstoke was the first woman to complete a full peal in 1896 and in 1912 the Ladies Guild of Change Ringers was formed. Records show that in the 1920's St. Mary's Church Appledore in Devon had an enthusiastic team of ringers including a Ladies team! Nearly unheard of in those days! In 1926 the Illustrated London News featured an article entitled "The Belles of St Clements" and deemed the sight of female bell ringers of unusual and significant interest to dedicate a whole page to them, including a photograph.

Not all ringers are members of a ringing association. There were no female ringers at St Peter's registered with the Essex Association of Change Ringers between 1895 and 1939. I do not have records from 1939 onwards. Of course there may have been unregistered or visiting lady ringers. Our current band of ringers at Saint Peters naturally includes the fairer sex!

If you are interested in learning to ring the bells at St. Peter's please contact our Tower Captain, Janice Spalding, on 01621 892197, come along to our Friday practice at 19.45 hours or visit:

<http://greattothambellringers.org.uk>.

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