



The Sound of Our Village: Bell Ringing in Devon

In Devon, church bells are part of the landscape. Bells don't just belong to the church building; they are part of the village. Long before watches, radios, or mobile phones, bells were how people knew the time, marked important moments, and felt connected to one another.

For centuries, bells have marked the rhythm of daily life. They ring for services, weddings, funerals, feast days, harvests, royal events, and times of crisis.

Devon has a unique history of call change ringing. Call changes are spoken by a conductor and the focus is on listening, rhythm and even striking, rather than learning written patterns. Each ringer is responsible for their own bell, but the ringing only works as teamwork.

But maintaining a team of ringers has its challenges. During the First World War, many towers fell quiet as ringers went to war. Memorials in Devon churches list names of men who once rang the bells and never returned. During the Second World War, ringing was restricted, but on VE Day bells rang freely again. More recently, COVID-19 stopped ringing from taking place, as it did many other activities, and many towers ringers did not start back up again.

Ringling remains a traditional pastime but has many benefits. It is a physical activity that, like learning to ride a bike, opens up a world of possibilities once learned. It is a wonderful aerobic activity. It helps tone muscle, concentrate the brain and gets you out and about to other churches, meeting new people. You don't need to be able read music, be strong, or have any prior experience. You just need a willingness to learn and to be part of a team.

Just as importantly, it is good for the mind. Ringling requires focus, listening, and being present. For many people it offers a welcome break from daily worries and the rush of daily life.

For individuals, it is also an accessible activity to try. There is no charge to learn or to take part in regular practices. Ringling for weddings and special occasions also brings in funds that help support the wider life of the church and tower.

If you have ever enjoyed hearing the bells, wondered how it all works, or thought you might like to give it a try, we would love to hear from you. New ringers are always welcome, and training is provided at a gentle, supportive pace. There is no pressure and no obligation — just an open invitation.

If you would like to have a go or even just to come and watch, please do get in touch.

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