

HEADSTOCK

The Newsletter of the
Bedford District of the
Bedfordshire Association of Church Bell Ringers

January 2018

Web Version

This version of Headstock has photographs with reduced quality.

It also has contact details of people removed.
Personal contact details can be found in your Tower's copy of
Headstock, or in the latest Annual Report.

From the Chairman

At the conclusion of another year my thanks go to my fellow District officers and our other committee members for their work throughout the year. Bob Jones has continued to serve as District Secretary, Jenny Thompson as District Treasurer and Martin Goodwin as District BRF Treasurer, a role which has continued to be combined with those of RJ Sharp Fund Rep and Association BRF Rep. Ann Desics, Anna Townsend, Sarah Ward and Barbara Woplin have again served on the District Committee this year. Maureen Hall has kindly continued to produce and distribute Headstock for us.

New to a role has been Ian Townsend who has served as District Ringing Master this year, including running the third Monday District practices at St Paul's Bedford to which all are welcome. At that practice and our normal ringing meetings things from rounds upwards are rung and all are very welcome. For the monthly ringing meetings there is usually a 'special method'. Tastes may vary as to how 'special' these are, but they are generally common or reasonably common methods that we will seek to ring during the meeting. Hopefully, with the advance notice given, appropriate revision can be done before ringing them.

We would like some input on training. A successful session on Little Bob was held this year and whilst we could make some guesses as to what future training people might like to take part in, it is also possible to try and respond to requests. Do also remember that if there is something in particular that you would like to ring it can be requested at our District ringing events, just please be certain to know any method you request. During Quarter Peal Week, it may also be possible to arrange quarters in particular methods that people wish to ring.

Alex Nash
District Chairman

Bedford District Programme of Meetings and Events 2018

This is a provisional programme, for confirmation see The Ringing World or phone the Secretary, Bob Jones.

- 20 Jan 2018: **Kempston** (10) 3.30 – 8.30 pm
Annual District Meeting
3.30 Afternoon Ringing,
4.30 Service, Tea in Church Hall
6.00 pm Business Meeting
Evening Ringing
- 3 Feb 2018: **Bletsoe** (6) 10.00 – 11.30 am
Morning Ringing
- 3 Mar 2018: **Elstow** (6) 7.30 – 9.00 am
Evening Ringing
- 3-11 Mar 2018: **Quarter Peal Week**
- 7 Apr 2018: **Bromham** (8) 3.30 – 9.00 pm
Quarterly District Meeting
Afternoon Ringing, Service, Tea
6.00 pm Business Meeting
Evening Ringing

Future Events

- 19 May 2018 Association AGM, Leighton Buzzard in the Luton District
- 16 June 2018 Ridgman Trophy, St Peter's in St Albans
to ring Stedman Caters
- 15 Sept 2018 Association Striking Contest St Peter's Cup,
Eaton Socon, Biggleswade District

Young Ringers' Events

- 7 July 2018: Ringing World National Youth Contest, London
- 23 Sept 2018 **Sunday** Young Ringers' Striking Contest

For details of eligibility and practices being held, see the Association website www.bacbr.org.uk or contact Sue Silver president@bacbr.org.uk.

Report of Bedford Quarterly District Meeting on 7 October 2017

Alex Nash opened the meeting at All Saints' Turvey by thanking Revd Jacqueline Curtis for conducting the service, and the use of All Saints, the bells and facilities. He also thanked Tim Brewster for playing the organ and all the members who had provided the tea.

It was reported that Miriam Clark had died in August. Stephen Stanford paid a tribute to her and members stood in silence to remember her.

Elstow are still waiting for the new ropes they have ordered. The BRF stood at £18,266.07 with outstanding grants of £5000 to Kempston and £348 for Elstow's ropes. Humphrey Chetwynd-Talbot of Colmworth asked for assistance with the installation of some steel mesh they had been given to keep out pigeons and he was invited to apply for a grant for consideration at the January meeting. There were no new members.

Recent events were discussed which have already been reported on in Headstock. A lack of young ringers meant it was not possible to raise a team for the Young Ringers' Striking Contest. It was suggested that the two striking contests should revert back to being on the same day.

The approval of Bell Fund grants of £3500 to Kempston and £1000 to Campton for sound control was on the agenda for the Association General Committee Meeting. It was discussed why some people are not receiving emails about Association affairs, and also about getting the website updated. Re the programme for 2018 it was requested whether there could be another course to teach teachers of bell-handling. Ian Townsend reported that attendance at the St Paul's third Monday practice was improving and encouraged ringers to attend.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are now due for payment, which has to be made before the Association Annual General Meeting on 19 May. The subscription for resident ringing members over the age of 19 is £10 per year, the rate for under-19s is £2.50.

If you are a UK taxpayer and pay the full £10 annual subscription, please consider signing a "Gift Aid Declaration" so that the Association can claim back the tax on it. A form for doing this can be downloaded from the Association website **www.bacbr.org.uk**.

Miriam Florence Clark (nee Pettitt); 15/6/1926 – 21/8/2017

Taken from a tribute given at Miriam's funeral service held at Elstow Abbey on 26 September 2017 by Stephen Stanford with insights from Tim Casterton (nephew) and Rev Stephen Smith.

Other tributes can be read on the Beds Association web site obituaries page at <http://www.bacr.co.uk/>



Miriam at Elstow Abbey in June 2015 following the service and presentation to commemorate her 50 years as Tower Captain and 89th birthday

Miriam Clark passed away on 21st August aged 91, following a relatively short illness of about 18 months that she bore with considerable fortitude. She served Elstow Abbey as Tower Captain for 50 years (from 1965 until 2015), as Churchwarden under four different incumbents for 25 of these, as a founder member and trustee of the Friends of Elstow Abbey, PCC member, and in various other capacities. Her passing marks the end of an era at Elstow during which she was very much at the heart of all matters. She will be remembered with considerable affection, not only for her stalwart support of the Church over many years, but also her determined and forthright manner and wry sense of humour that, depending on one's perspective, could be the source of some amusement. She knew how things should be done, and those who did not 'pass muster' were unlikely to be left in much doubt about it!

Miriam was born on 15th June 1926 in Great Barford, the middle daughter of Katherine and William Pettitt, who owned a farm on Bedford Hill. Along with her sisters, Norah and Mary she attended Great Barford Village School and then progressed to Bedford Girls' Modern School (later Dame Alice Harpur and now Bedford Girls' School). She attended the Sunday School at All Saints Great Barford, and later helped to run it. Her uncle Harry had a car hire business in the village and later set up Barfordian Coaches (in later years the firm became popular for ringing outings organised by local towers). She spent the war years as a member of the Women's Land Army and working on her parents' farm, a time that she remembered with considerable affection.

Miriam learnt to ring after the wartime ban ended in 1943 at Tempsford, and I believe she was taught by Reg Houghton. (Reg and Flo Houghton were stalwart members of the Biggleswade District over many years and seldom missed a monthly meeting). Her name first appears in the Bedfordshire Association Annual Report in 1946, the first report following the war. She is listed under Tempsford, alongside fellow ringers Mildred Hull (her Aunt), Berril Bull, Joan Harding, Florence Read, and Reg Houghton. (The Tempsford pre-war band had also included several notable Bedfordshire ringers. These included Eddie Jeffries, Bryan Simms, and Henry Harding; their absence from the 1946 report presumably attributable to war service). Needless to say, Miriam was well taught and knew how to achieve and enjoy good striking.

Miriam continued to ring at Tempsford until 1950 after which she became a member at Great Barford along with her Aunt, now Mildred Marshall, who shortly after became Tower Captain at St Mary's

Goldington. For much of the early 50s Miriam was the only Bedfordshire Association member at Great Barford although there were other ringers in the band; until 1957 when she moved to Bedford and her name first appears as a ringer at Elstow.

Miriam became Tower Captain at Elstow in 1965 taking over from Bob Huckle at a time when Elstow ringing was probably at its best, and shortly after the major restoration of the tower in 1964, an event commemorated on a peal board in the tower that was Miriam's last peal and only peal at Elstow. Members of the band of that period included Martyn Marriott and Kate Rivett. Martyn fondly recalls that, as the only car owner (a red Austin 1100 registration 435 JTM), Miriam frequently transported members of the band to all parts of the county for Saturday meetings and mid week practices.

A wide range of methods were rung for both Sunday services (I especially recall Oxford Treble Bob, Woodbine, College Exercise, and Single Oxford), and the Friday night practices were generally a sell-out, with barely sufficient space in the ringing chamber to accommodate everyone. This could be somewhat problematic, especially in the winter months when the centrally located paraffin heater belched fumes into the ringing room, and following installation of the ringing chamber ceiling in 1964, the bells became inaudible inside the tower and were broadcast over a home built valve amplifier system that did little to enhance their already dubious musical qualities.

As Tower Captain Miriam presided over the introduction of a large number of young ringers; mainly Wilf Taylor's cast-offs from the choir whose voices had broken and who had perhaps become a little too unmanageable to be passed off as angelic choir boys. There was also the attraction of wedding ringing fees to supplement pocket money! Most of these (including myself) were taught to ring by Bob Huckle and Martyn Marriott, and other regular visitors such as Bob Piron. It is a tribute to their efforts, and Miriam's captaincy, that eight of them still ring today at various churches across the country.

My first meeting with Miriam was perhaps not the most encouraging. I had persuaded Bob Huckle to take me to the ringing practice one Friday evening after choir practice. I would have been about 9 or 10 at the time and was keen to learn to ring. I remember that Bob received a bit of an ear bashing from this rather fearful lady – "who's that, he shouldn't be up here" – or words to that effect. (In fairness, Elstow choirboys had something of a reputation, generally not for their singing abilities, and

there were already a quite unmanageable number of them in the tower). Fortunately, Bob knew Miriam well, and I was soon on the end of a rope. It was a life-changing moment – the rest is history!

I subsequently learnt that this was Miriam's way. She could be wary of strangers or newcomers until she knew them better. Yet beneath the apparently frosty exterior, there was a different kind and generous person with, at times, a risqué sense of humour. She was fiercely competitive – she delighted at winning bowling trophies (her other principal pastime that required equally accurate striking!) and in particular the striking competition that the Elstow band won for a number of consecutive years. She was always proud at having the cup presented at the Sunday Morning service the following day, and she was equally displeased if we did not win!

Miriam was an avid reader of the Ringing World and this continued until the final few weeks of her life – there was always a pile of Ringing Worlds on the window ledge at the care home. She would follow the exploits of Elstow ringers past and present that were published there, often commenting on their exploits. She usually had an opinion, apparently critical, but kindly intended and said with a wry smile and raised eyebrows. She was very much a traditionalist and she certainly did not approve or encourage those who travelled the length and breadth of the country to ring peals on a Sunday rather than remaining loyal to supporting their local band. Ringing was, above all else, a service to the Church and the village.

Beyond this, Miriam was always encouraging – taking many of us to district meetings and practices, and for many years – until after the time that I left for university – there was the familiar small package each Christmas containing a Ringer's Diary; a subtle hint to learn a few of the methods contained within it!

Miriam began her working life in the Bedford showroom of Eastern Gas after the war, where she progressed through various accounting roles. She received a long service award in September 1967 for 25 years service and later moved to the Luton regional office from where she eventually retired. It was at Eastern Gas that she met her future husband Joseph Clark and they married at Elstow in September 1969. Sadly her married life was shortened when Joe passed away in February 1978. Joe was keen on bowling and fishing, pastimes that they enjoyed during their relatively short lives together.

I fondly recall my visits to the gas showroom on the corner of Dame Alice Street, usually to collect the tower key so that we could do maintenance work or ring the bells up in advance of a wedding; the key then, as instructed, returned through her letter box at her home in Garnith Close Kempston. She never entrusted us with it until much later – I was probably in my 30's!

Miriam served on the Bedfordshire Association Bedford District Committee for a number of years (between 1960 and 1974). Although she rang in and enjoyed many quarter peals, she rang just seven peals. Her first was at Eaton Socen on 27th December 1947; the 2nd to Plain Bob Minor with Henry Harding conducting. It was also the first peal for Lionel Clarke and Leslie Mardin and the other ringers were Bryan Simms ringing the tenor and Charles Blain on the treble. Her other peals were at Stagsden, Old Warden, Cardington, Maulden and Silsoe.

Miriam was a regular participant with the "Bedfordshire Young Ringers" a group that started in the late 40s, travelling to ringing holidays around the country, often by bicycle and staying in church halls and youth hostels. Organised by Rev Michael Stephens they still meet each year for a day of ringing reminiscing, and socialising, including recent visits to Elstow. She was also a keen member of the Bedford District Tail-Enders, a retired group for local ringers, regularly attending the monthly meetings and pub lunches until quite recently when illness prevented her from doing so.

We celebrated Miriam's 50 years as Elstow Tower Captain at the time of her 89th birthday in June 2015, with a lunch and special Evensong conducted by Rev Stephen Smith (Vicar of Cardington and himself a ringer and good friend of Miriam). Shortly after this Miriam quite suddenly stopped attending services and became very reclusive. We knew there was something wrong, but the kind offers of help and support from neighbours and friends were mostly declined or avoided and it was not until she was finally rushed into Bedford hospital a year or so later that an incurable blood condition was diagnosed.

Miriam was comfortable and very well cared for during her final year or so at Dukeminster Court care home in Dunstable. Relieved of the stress and worry of looking after herself and her bungalow she was happy and relaxed, perhaps more than she had ever been, especially enjoying the meals there – "very good, just like the Elstow Red Lion", she said. Despite the frequent hospital visits for blood transfusions, her discomfort, and failing mobility she was remarkably accepting of her

condition and never complained. She was always very happy to receive letters and visitors – Stephen Smith took her communion at Easter, and she was especially interested to know about ringing and ringers and the goings and comings at Elstow. We celebrated her 91st birthday in June - Miriam, Tim her nephew, and the care home staff – with a large cake and handbell ringing in her room – Alan Shepherd, Becky Gordon and I. Despite her by then very frail condition, she loved it and we had to ring twice! She often talked about this on subsequent visits.

Elstow ringing, as in many places, has waxed and waned over the years, but one way or another Miriam ensured the ringing continued, and there was seldom if ever a period when there was not ringing for both Sunday services, Friday night practice, and for any weddings and funerals requiring it. Although not a prolific peal or method ringer it was through commitment and loyalty at grass roots level that made Miriam the kind of person on which the foundations of ringing are built and without which it could not continue.

Miriam's funeral service held at Elstow Abbey on 26th September was attended by around 100 family and friends including many ringers. The service included the Bunyan Hymn – always referred to by Miriam as “our hymn” – and tributes by Tim Casterton, her nephew, Jenny Chance, her niece, Rev Stephen Smith, and Stephen Stanford. The service was preceded with half-muffled ringing by the local band and immediately followed by 120 Grandsire Doubles rung by a band with an average age of 78.6 years, including representatives of the “Bedfordshire Young Ringers”. She would have very much liked that! Later in the day a half-muffled Quarter Peal in Miriam's favourite methods (Single Oxford and Oxford Treble Bob), was rung by past and present members and associates of the Elstow band, and conducted by Frank Rivett who, of the band, had known Miriam for the longest time.

I will end with Miriam's words as she left the bell tower every Sunday evening; they have become legendary. She would exclaim in her scary school mistress voice, “don't forget the clock” – and as she got half way down the stairs – “and put the lights out” – and disappearing in the direction of the church – “and remember to shut the door”. How could we forget?! May she rest in peace.

Stephen Stanford
December 2017

Bedfordshire Association
Elstow, Bedfordshire
Abbey Church of St Mary and St Helena
Tuesday, 26 September 2017 (8–2–0 in G)
120 Grandsire Doubles
1. Clifford W Izzard
2. Robert R Churchill
3. Alan S Smith
4. Alan M Shepherd (C)
5. Martyn J Marriott
6. Frank W Rivett

Rung half-muffled in fond memory of Miriam F Clark (50 years Tower Captain) immediately following her funeral service; the ringers of 1 and 3 representing the Bedfordshire 'Young' Ringers, of which Miriam was a member. (Average age of band, 78.6 years, considerably reduced by the conductor!)

See also QP's in RW 5556, 20/10/17, pages 1042 and 1047.



Miriam pictured in her younger days taken at the house of
Kate and Frank Rivett's parents in Bromham c1962.
From left; Ray Fowler, Jennifer Racey, Paul Racey, John Guast,
Miriam Pettitt, Ralph Mitchell, Derek Hammond, Kate Rivett,
Frank (Bill) Rivett (edge of picture).

Tailenders' Report 2017

Our October meeting had a sudden change of venue due to a funeral at the original tower, Bozeat. Luckily Derek was able to arrange for us to ring at Grendon so that our lunch booking could stay the same.



Grendon is a lovely, well cared for old church. The six bells are rung from a gallery giving a good view of the church.

The bells are not the easiest to ring with the fifth in particular wanting to drop all the time. We persevered but did not manage to ring anything exciting.

Touches of Plain Bob doubles and minor and Grandsire doubles and a plain course of Stedman doubles were all that we could manage.

Lunch was at The Red Lion in Bozeat. The food was not expensive and the quality and portions were good. The beer was also rather nice.

Many thanks to Derek Hammond for arranging and then re-arranging the towers and lunch.

November's meeting was in the lovely eight bell tower in Sharnbrook. The back six were rung up in peal and then the



front two. We rang touches of Plain Bob doubles and triples and Grandsire triples and a plain course of Plain Bob major as well as rounds and call changes. We finished with a good lower in peal on the eight.

Lunch was at the Queen's Head in Milton Ernest where the menu was varied and inexpensive and we all enjoyed our meal.

Many thanks to Richard Hillson for organising everything so well.

It was a very cold, icy day when we met at Ampthill for our December Tailenders meeting. We rang the back six up in peal and then the front two. The bells go very well although they were loud enough to make call changes difficult. We rang touches of Plain Bob doubles and triples and Grandsire triples and a plain course of Plain Bob major as well as call changes and rounds on the eight. We then rang down in peal on the eight before going for our Christmas lunch.



This was at The Jolly Coopers in Wardhedges and it was very good value. The starters were well presented and tasty, the main courses were very generous and the desserts were also of a high standard.

Many thanks to Chris Catlin for organising the tower and meal and to all those who have arranged towers and lunches over the years.

Tailenders'
Christmas Lunch
December 2017



Tailenders' Programme for 2018

Currently no plans are known of for Tailenders' events in 2018.

Kempston Bells Project Update

The project is progressing well. We have successfully submitted the first stage faculty application and hope to place the order with the bell hangers within the next month or so. We have received several very generous offers of personal donations to cover the cost of the bells, and grants from the District and Association amounting to £8,500. We now have approximately £10,000 of the overall £45,000 to raise and we shall be making additional grant applications and appealing for personal contributions to cover this. If you have enjoyed or benefited from ringing at Kempston and wish to be associated with the project, we would be grateful for donations large or small to support the work. Please visit our website and/or the My Donate site

<https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/allsaintschurchkempstonbellsappeal>
or contact Richard Hillson. Depending on further funding, we hope to have the bells installed and the project completed during this year and in time for next Christmas. Please do take a look at our brochure and website.

Stephen Stanford

Eversholt Bells Project (Luton District)

(Information supplied by Bob at the request of the Editor)

Work started on 14th September to remove the bells and frame from the tower and they were duly transported to Loughborough. They will be completely refurbished and a new steel frame fabricated. We are going to the foundry by coach last week in February and expect them to be re-installed in early May.

Any contributions would be most welcome, please contact the Headstock Editor for details on where to send them.

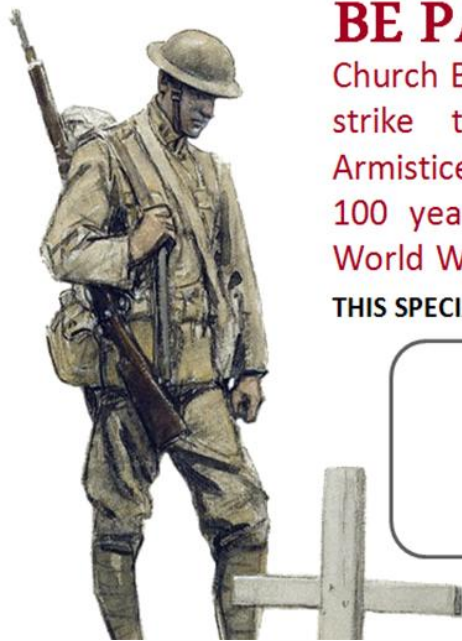
Bob Churchill

Ringling for Peace 
Armistice 100

BATTLE'S OVER



A NATION'S TRIBUTE
11TH NOVEMBER 2018
100 YEARS OF REMEMBRANCE



BE PART OF HISTORY

Church Bells will ring out & Big Ben will strike to mark the centenary of Armistice Day. Bell ringers will mark 100 years since the end of the First World War. **COME AND LEARN TO RING FOR THIS SPECIAL OCCASION. See details below:**



This year is the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I and Remembrance Sunday falls on 11th November. The Central Council of Church Bellringers would like 1000 towers to ring at 7.05 pm on Sunday 11th November to coincide with the lighting of 1000 beacons. There is also an initiative planned to recruit 1400 ringers, the same number as were killed in World War I. A .jpg copy of this recruitment poster is available from District Secretary Bob Jones.

From the Editor

If in any article the only contact details are a website or email address, and you do not have internet access, then in case of difficulty making contact please ask the Editor to make an initial contact on your behalf.

Views expressed in an article are those of its author. Articles may be edited.

Thanks to the 'regular' contributors, and especially to Stephen Stanford for his fine tribute to Miriam Clark. Thanks also to Stephen for his update on the Kempston work and to Bob Churchill for his information on the Eversholt project. Thanks to Alex Nash for another year of Chairman's reports, and to Bob Jones for his continued support. Special thanks also to the Tailenders' reporter retiring after many years of service.

The next Headstock will be distributed at the Quarterly District Meeting taking place on 7 April 2018 at Bromham. Please send your articles, announcements etc by 23 March. Your input is what makes Headstock what it is.

Maureen Hall

Email: maureensgpost@gmail.com

Headstock

Headstock is issued quarterly and is available to all towers in the Bedford District at a cost of £1 per calendar year as a contribution towards printing costs, payable in January each year. The money is not being collected at present but contributions may be given to the District Bell Restoration Fund.

Headstock is also available on the website of the Bedfordshire Association of Church Bell Ringers www.bacbr.org.uk but the web version has all personal contact details removed. If your tower does not currently receive Headstock then please contact the Editor at the address above.

