

A Bell Ringer's Tale

Ringling the Bells

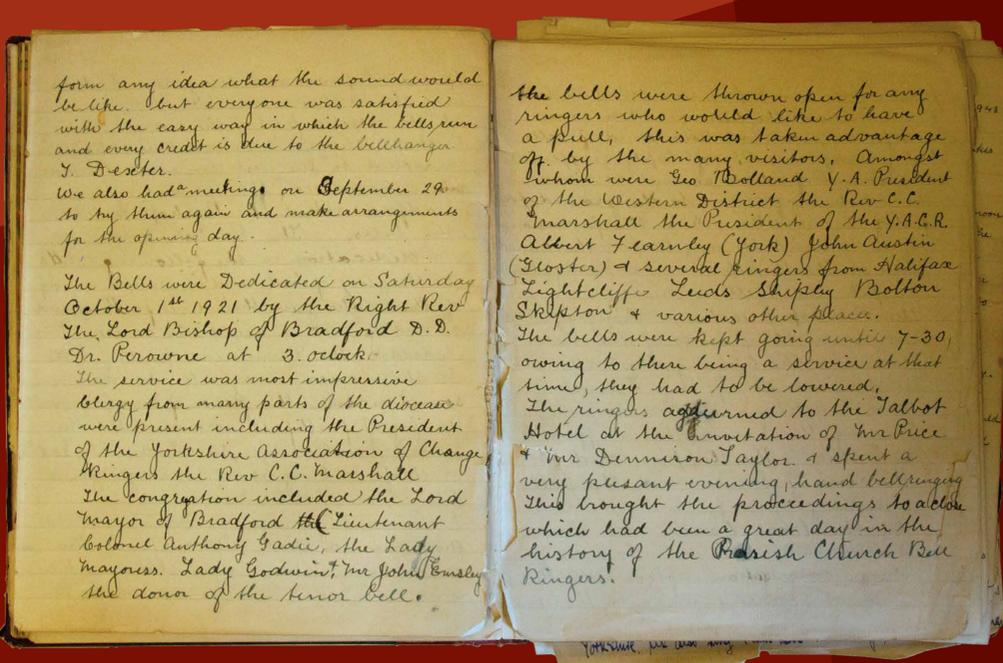
Church bells are believed to be the largest and the loudest musical instruments in the world. The tradition of bell ringing is very old. In Bradford, once there was a peal of bells in the tower, a group or 'band' of people were needed to ring them. These bell ringers were originally men and very often bell ringing was a pastime and a skill that was passed down through a family from generation to generation. Bands of bell ringers usually had a secretary and kept a log of their activities. This is how we know so much about them.



The ringing chamber in the Cathedral's tower is used by the bell ringers. It is directly below the bell chamber and the striped bell pulls hanging from the ceiling are used by the bell ringers to chime the bells. The walls of the ringing chamber are decorated with photographs of former bell ringers and plaques with instructions for ringing popular and familiar peals.

Joe's Journal

The story of the World War I Memorial Bells is also the story of a Mr. Joe Hardcastle and his love for the Cathedral bells and bell ringing. Joe was a bell ringer at the Cathedral for 60 years, starting his bell ringing career at the Parish Church of St Peter around 1888, aged 18. He became secretary of the band of bell ringers in 1907. He kept a detailed journal spanning 44 years, until he retired due to an accident in 1951. Joe's journal is a 'bell ringer's tale'; it tells the story of bell ringers and bell ringing at the Cathedral and explains how the World War I Memorial Bells came into existence, developing from an idea into a reality.



These pages from Joe Hardcastle's journal record his thoughts on the dedication of the World War I Memorial Bells on Saturday October 1st, 1921.

Joe worked in a foundry in Bradford. He was born into a bell ringing family in Halifax and his father J.H. Hardcastle was a well-known Yorkshire bell ringer. In 1903 he was presented with a silver mounted walking stick, loving cup (a fragment of this may be seen in the display cases near the South Door) and framed photograph (now hanging in the ringing chamber) as a 'thank you' for his contribution to bell ringing. J.H. Hardcastle died in 1904. Joe's younger brother Jim was also a bell ringer for a period of time. Joe's journal tells us that on the 1st September 1900:

"Jim Hardcastle was elected member for the term of six months, depending on paying attention and him wanting to continue."

Entry in Joe's Journal, dated 1st September 1900.



J.H. Hardcastle, 1903



Group photographs of bell ringers at competitions and on days out decorate the walls of the ringing chamber.

Bell ringers were paid for ringing. Because he was a teenage bell ringer, a junior, Jim received a reduced amount of pay. He was often late and sometimes didn't turn up! A bell ringer who missed a practice, or a Sunday morning or evening when the bells were rung, received a fine. Jim was no exception and he was often fined! Joe explains in his journal that the fines were put into a 'kitty' and the money used to fund bell ringers' outings, such as the day out in the Dales on the 25th July 1908 when the bell ringers went to Skipton, Gargrave and on to Bolton Abbey where they had a very good dinner!

Joe's Journal explains that the bell ringers took part in competitions, both at the Cathedral and elsewhere, they used hand bells to practise and as part of social evenings and meetings, most of which were held in a room at the Talbot Hotel in Bradford.

Ringling through the War

Joe's Journal gives an insight into life at the Cathedral, both before, during and after the First World War. The band of bell ringers were all too old to enlist, but they did help the war effort. They struggled to find new male ringers during the war and as a result Joe admitted the first female bell ringer to the band in 1916; she is recorded as Mrs James Cotterell (her first name was Emily). The bells continued to ring during the First World War. On at least two occasions they rang in memory of men who had died in battle. They also rang out across the City to welcome peace and announce the end of The Great War in November 1918.