

## **Branch report 2020**

The year started pretty much as normal with ringing on the new six at Seacroft, with the added attraction of tea, coffee and biscuits, followed by ringing at Barwick in Elmet, with a good attendance at each.

As a change to the usual proceedings we held our AGM in February. Ringing was at Kirk Deighton with other attractions – bookstall, video, quiz etc – in the church at the same time. This was followed by a lovely tea (complete with waitress service) and the AGM in the new village hall. At the AGM [REDACTED] retired from her role as treasurer and [REDACTED] retired from the committee; [REDACTED] had been on the committee for many years, including a spell as secretary as well as being treasurer, and [REDACTED] had been on the committee for twelve years, including four years as chairman. Both were thanked for their work.

March followed with ringing at Thornhill and Horbury, although by now the Covid clouds were beginning to gather, and less than two weeks later we went into lockdown with all ringing prohibited.

There was no ringing for Easter Day in April or for the celebrations that had been planned for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day in May. Some churches opened again in July and this paved the way for an initial return to ringing – taking numerous precautions including having to ring with a mask on, 2+ metres apart. Some towers – Barwick in Elmet, Far Headingley, Horbury, Harrogate St. Peter, Kirk Deighton, Knaresborough, Leeds Cathedral, Leeds Minster, Pontefract St. Giles and Seacroft - were able to ring regularly on Sundays between July and October, albeit on a limited number of bells for only fifteen minutes, and others rang occasionally. Socially-distanced ringing or tolling of a single bell also took place at several towers for VJ Day on 15th August. Far Headingley and Horbury each rang for a funeral during the summer and Leeds Cathedral rang for two ordination services.

At Christmas, ringing was allowed 1+ metre apart on up to six bells; all of the towers that had rung through the summer except one rang on Christmas Day although most stayed 2+ metres apart on limited bells. However, Barwick in Elmet rang all six of their bells, as did Chapel Allerton, who were ringing for the first time since the lockdown began, and Knaresborough also rang six. Pontefract St Giles, Kirk Deighton and Seacroft also took advantage of the relaxed restrictions ringing five, four and three bells respectively.

More than half the towers in the branch haven't rung at all since March; many have older ringers who are at higher risk and haven't felt able to ring, at one tower the ringers are relatively inexperienced and require the support of a more experienced visitor, which hasn't been allowed, ringing at some towers is limited because of a lack of ventilation in the tower or the bells being too close together, some haven't had any services to ring for, and in one case the church's risk assessment and Covid precautions prevented access to the belfry.

Almost all bands have kept in touch with one another by phone or e-mail (and only rarely by Zoom or any other 'virtual' method); some have met, at church services or church-organised activities such as maintaining church grounds, for coffee, walks, and one group got together for some 'socially-distanced' bell maintenance, so I'm sure that we are all eager to get back together ringing too, just as soon as conditions allow. Two towers have also been approached by people who want to learn to ring; 2021 can only be better.