

“Ring Out” at Frome Festival – A ringer’s perspective



The festival poster’s artwork by illustrator Sholto Walker is a celebration of Frome’s wonderful churches and this year’s Ring Out project

When my friend, the composer Helen Ottaway, curator of the “Ring Ring Bell” project in London (2012), asked me for some help with another project, as she knew I was a church bellringer, I didn’t know quite what to expect. A year or so later and with funding in place (National Lottery Heritage Fund, thanks to National Lottery players, Frome Society for Local Study and Frome Town Council, The Mayor’s Fund 2022), Helen’s “Ring Out” project truly began its epic journey to fruition.

Helen is curating a 10 day mini-festival of ringing within the auspices of the Frome Festival, and making special reference to the Cockey family who were Frome-based bell founders in the late 16th and early-mid 17th centuries. Today, they are more recognised for their distinctive lamp posts that adorn the town.

Using my local bellringing grapevine, we have brought on board many towers and ringers from the Frome Branch of the Bath and Wells DACR, and also from the nearby guilds of Salisbury and Devizes. Many meetings, phone calls and emails later there are now a series of activities, workshops and ringing across the area, suitable for all ages and abilities.

Throughout the Festival, practice nights have been highlighted as times for the public to come and hear the bells ringing – perhaps, joining two pastimes together, by sitting out in a local village beer garden in the evening listening to the bells ring out. What could be more evocative of an English summer evening?

There will be recorded carillon tunes composed by Helen and members of the community announcing the hours in Frome town centre. A few other ringers and myself,

together with Alastair Goolden from Artmusic have spent many hours raising and lowering bells in local churches in order for them to be recorded individually, for use in this carillon. My arms can certainly attest to that after a morning zipping around the Somerset and Wiltshire countryside from church to church – thirsty work!

The Charmborough Ring is coming to the town park on the first Saturday of the Festival. There will be workshops at a local arts venue involving learning to ring on a simulator and dumbbell; composing tunes for handbells, and listening skills and rhythm in the bellringing context.

A new method, Frome Festival Treble Place Major, has been composed especially for the Festival and will have its inaugural performance at Marston Bigot on 15th July, kicking off a day of open towers.

There are talks and walks and even the local book club has a programme on Frome FM (<http://frome.fm/programmes/talk/on-air-book-group>) featuring books with ringing



A bell founded by William Cockey, currently awaiting tuning before return to Nunney church

as the theme. Dorothy L. Sayers’s *The Nine Tailors* is a ringers’ classic which I must admit I hadn’t read, but it sounded so interesting I bought a copy and found myself embroiled in Lord Peter Wimsey; and an extended peal of Kent Treble Bob Major – nine hours! – as well as a murder (?) and some stolen emeralds. Other books featured in the programme are *The Silver Thread* by Tracy Chevalier and *The Bell* by Iris Murdoch.

As part of the “Ring Out” project, visits to Matthew Higby’s workshop have been arranged - well recommended and a fascinating insight into all things bell restoration.

The last day of the “Ring Out” project culminates in a performance of a new composition by Helen, combining bellringing and instruments and featuring local musicians. I count myself to be extremely lucky to be involved in this project and at such a special time in ringing history. I took over the Tower Captaincy of my local band just over a year ago. As well as the usual practices, service ringing, weddings and funerals, we are in the process of augmenting one of our three towers to eight bells, hopefully to be finished by September. We have also rung especially to mark the death of The Queen and for her funeral, the accession of King Charles III, and most recently, the Coronation. Ringing has not had such a high profile in public life for many years. “Ring Out” will be the cherry on the cake!

‘Ring Out’ is created and produced by Rook Lane Arts Trust and Artmusic for Frome Festival 2023 (7-16 July at various venues around Frome, Somerset). For more information visit www.fromefestival.co.uk/ringout

“Ring Out” those bells!

MARY HOOPER
TC Postlebury Ringers

On this day – 7th July

1751: John Holt conducted “The Original” for the first time from the manuscript at St Margaret’s Westminster. It was considered to be too difficult to ring and to conduct so he just sat in the ringing chamber and called the bobs.

1812: An advert in the Ipswich Chronicle announced that “On Tuesday next, the 7th of July, being the first day of the Ipswich Races, will be opened at St Mary-le-Tower, Ipswich, a peal of ten bells, two trebles being added to the former eight, provided and hung by John Naunton.”

1975: An attempt for 25,923 Stedman Caters at the Bell Foundry, Loughborough, was called round after five hours and 50 minutes after 11,127 changes had been rung. Robert B Smith was the conductor.

Taken from *On This Day* by William Butler (Central Council Publications, 2017)
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