

## **BELL RINGING FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II**

No-one had to ask for whom the bell tolls, but quite a number of people commented upon – and one or two came to watch – my tolling of the tenor bell following the death of Queen Elizabeth. It will come as no surprise to hear that the ringing of bells was covered in “Operation London Bridge”, the detailed document setting out the protocol to be followed upon the passing of the Queen.

Depending upon the time of the formal announcement, a bell was to be tolled for one hour – in this case, as the announcement was made after 1800, the designated time was noon the following day. A bell was also to be tolled for the hour preceding the funeral. Strictly speaking, a bell is tolled every minute as you may have noticed was Big Ben during the TV coverage of the funeral, however in a village context I felt this was too long an interval – the significance of occasional dongs being missed – and so I tolled at 30 second intervals. There was some disagreement as to whether the bell should be tolled for an hour, or whether it should be tolled 96 times, once for every year of the Queen’s life. I hedged my bets and tolled for an hour on the Friday and 96 times prior to the funeral.

You may have noticed that the bell was fully muffled ie with a leather muffle attached to both sides of the clapper. This was likely to be a once in a lifetime experience for many since the only time a bell is fully muffled is upon the death of a sovereign. During the period of national mourning, bells were to be rung either fully or half muffled, and many towers which had enough muffles rang fully muffled but with the tenor half muffled, which gave an ethereal tolling effect throughout the ringing. This gave rise to a number of weddings on the Saturday being accompanied by half muffled ringing, which must have felt rather odd for the happy couple – almost as odd as the bride going out to the Beatles song “Yesterday”, which I heard at one wedding I rang for!

Following the proclamation of the accession of King Charles III, bells were supposed briefly to be rung “open” (ie with no muffles), but given the effort involved in muffling, unmuffling and then muffling again, not many towers rang “open” on the Saturday morning.

Immediately after the funeral, you may have heard the fully muffled 10 bells of Westminster Abbey start ringing as they commenced a peal attempt – unfortunately lost due to a miscall by the conductor.

You may also have heard the Sevastopol Bell sound at Windsor Castle – another rare sound as this bell is only rung upon the death of a reigning monarch. This bell, hung in the Round Tower, is one of two bells seized by the British following the fall of Sevastopol in 1855 which had been hung in the Church of the Twelve Apostles in the monastery of St George, used as an Allied hospital during the Crimean War. Both bells are heavily ornamented with religious images in the Russian style. They were cast by Nicholas Samtoun of Moscow, probably in the mid-eighteenth century, and each weigh around 17.25 cwt. Having been inspected by Queen Victoria, she decreed that one should be given to Aldershot Barracks and the other sent to Windsor Castle. It is not “rung” as such (ie with rope and wheel) but struck by an external hammer. This bell has gained the nickname “the Raven Bell” ever since Sir Owen Morshead, Royal Librarian from 1926-1958, once remarked that it sounded “like an old raven croaking”! Given the popular association between ravens and death, it is perhaps rather apt.

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