

Minster miracle with new band

By Tony Goodman

If you mention ringing at Minster the first reactions you get are looks of fear and horror. Minster is renowned as not being the easiest tower to ring at, even our “ringing circle” looks like it was put in by semi-drunk workmen. The treble and tenor are next door to each other, so if you are ringing the treble you have to look back to the tenor.

I heard someone say, “I’ll help try to get the bells working better and form a band”; when I checked who said it, it was me!. Most people thought I was a bit short in the brain department, but I am like any normal psychopath.

So in September 2011 the project was started. The first task was to clean the place from top to bottom and nine sacks of rubble were removed, together with the rotten carpets. We then started cleaning the plain bearings, re-oiled them and put oil pads on the gudgeons (thanks Peter Dale). We also cleaned the sliders and the runner boards. Two stays had to be replaced; one had been a meal for the woodworm and the other had “oops” written on it!

A local heard the bells ringing and I overheard one elderly lady say, “Did you hear the bells”, to which her friend replied “yes I did - what was it for?” and the lady said “The Germans have landed!!” I did correct them; it was only me.

During the next few months I was starting to prepare training material. I said to Sheila Palmer who has a love for Minster’s bells and wanted to see them ringing, “let’s get a band going”. We now had three ringers, Sheila (now Captain), Gill (came back to ringing) and me. We also had three learners.

I had attended the one ITTS Day Course with Peter Dale at Dover so was keen to put the stuff I had learned it to practice and teach all our new learners the “Learning the Ropes” way. So I was armed with load of Blue Books and three new learners, all were adults and none had seen a bell before, so the first lesson was a tour of the bells with a talk on tower safety and conduct in the ringing room. I always say ringing must be fun and safe. I will admit it was a bit knacker teaching three from scratch in one night, but they have all come along very well and are starting to ring in rounds.

So Wednesday 13 June 2012 saw the first practice of the newly formed Minster band - the first in 20 odd years. We had a 12-year-old boy join us so I chose him as my pupil following our ITTS Day Course. I made a weekly teaching log, with lesson plans for each week that showed his progress. The lad now rings, rounds and changes and has even rung our 17 cwt tenor.



Over the weeks all our ringers progressed and then started to ring un-aided which was most pleasing. During this time 3 more joined us and we now had more ringers than bells, not bad for a village band!

We now ring for services, weddings and any other special occasions and we can say it's with an all Minster band. It may only be rounds, but as British Rail used to say, "We are getting there". We have visited other towers and have been visited by three towers; a lot more visits are planned next year.

I must admit it's very gratifying to see your learner's progress to ringers and even more rewarding to start a new band.