

## The past and future of ringing at Broseley

by *Ginette Pardoe, Tower Captain*

### Introduction

I'm the Tower Captain at All Saints Church, Broseley in Shropshire. The ringing room there is devoid of peal boards and very little written history is readily available. I started searching to find out more about Broseley's history and stumbled across the records of 10 old quarter peals and a single peal which I submitted on BellBoard. I was then asked for the story behind them, which is how I ended up writing this article. We're currently fundraising for a bell restoration project, so we decided I'd write about the past, present, and future of the bells and ringers of All Saints, Broseley.

### Our bells

All Saints Church Broseley originally had a peal of six bells cast in 1844 by Mears. Two further bells were cast in 1949. On both of these is the inscription 'The gift of Ernest Exley J.P. 1945'. It appears that Ernest was one of the Exley family who owned the brick and tile works, William Exley & Sons, in Broseley from before 1840 until around 1940. All Saints Church was built by William Exley & Sons in 1845 to a design by architect Harvey Eginton.

Set above the other bells in a small wooden frame is a sanctus bell which was cast locally in Wellington in 1642. This pre-dates the current church by around 200 years. The sanctus bell came from a previous church on the same site, where according to Walters' 'Church Bells of Shropshire' there was also a ring of five Rudhall bells. The sanctus bell fittings are in a poor state so its rope has been disconnected to prevent any damage.

### History

The earliest mention of ringing at Broseley is from *The Shrewsbury Chronicle* on 1st November 1844. "The new peal of musical bells, cast by Mr. Meare (sic), bell-founder, London, and which have been very recently placed in the tower of the newly rebuilt parish Church, were opened on the twenty-fifth ult. By the change ringers of Shiffnal and Madeley, who rang upon them several excellent peals consisting of 720 changes each, in a very masterly style."

The next record I can find related to ringing is dated 53 years later and is from Broseley Local History Society's website. On 31st July 1897 Alfred Bagley was struck on the back by debris whilst working at a coalpit at nearby Caughley 'crushing him severely'. He was taken to an infirmary where he died from his injuries on 6th August. Alfred was 51 years old, married and had been a ringer at All Saints for some years.

In 1924 Broseley appears in the Hereford Diocesan Guild of Bellringers reports for the first time, when the tower had eight Guild members. The same ringers continue to be listed from 1925 to 1929 but with Thomas Meredith identified as Foreman. Two of the other ringers, Albert and Cyril, had the same surname as Thomas so were presumably part of the same family.

From records in the tower visitors book it appears that the bells were removed and rehung in June 1926. The next entry in the book was in



Front row left to right: *Ginette Pardoe, Jan Baldwin, Gaynor Evans, Pam Sheldon, Mel Price (aka Ding, hiding) and Suzy Roberts (aka Dong); Behind: John Maclean, Bruce Watson, Darren Swancott* (photo Patricia Marinic)

1929 when a quarter peal was rung for the re-opening of the church after renovation.

A quarter peal of Grandsire was rung in 1932, this time to commemorate a wedding taking place in Canada but involving a former resident of Broseley. This was recorded in the press as well as in the visitor book.

In 1933 it was reported in the *Wellington Journal* that John George Smith passed away in his home aged 63 years. He had been a bell ringer at Broseley for over 40 years. His father and grandfather were ringers at the same belfry before him. Up until he became ill in 1931, John had been a tile presser at Messrs William Exley and Son's roofing works. At the funeral were his brother Charles Smith and his nephew J Smith. John Smith is shown in Hereford Guild records as ringing at Broseley from 1924 to 1935. Perhaps John's nephew was also called John and was also a ringer. The ringing records include a Charles Smith who rang from 1924 to 1926, who is possibly the late John's brother.

In 1945 a peal of Plain Bob Minor was rung for the Shropshire Association to commemorate the Centenary of All Saints Church (printed *RW* 1945/1808). This was

"the first peal of any method on these bells". The only Broseley ringer in the peal was A J Garbett. The visiting ringers included W Lago, who I believe is Walter Lago from nearby Coalbrookdale.

In 1946 the band reached a size of 12 ringers for the first time in recorded history. This was also the first time that female ringers joined the band. The first two ladies were a Miss L Meredith and a Miss C Picken. They are both listed under Broseley for one year only, but they were replaced the following year by two more ladies. One of these, Miss D E Garbett, rang from 1947 to 1962 along with Arthur and John Garbett. Miss Dorothy E Garbett disappears from the records in 1963 but is replaced by a Mrs D E Morris, so presumably she got married. If so, she rang at Broseley for 20 years in total.

In 1950 a clock was presented to the church by Thomas Meredith's family in commemoration of his 60 years as head ringer. This clock still hangs on wall in the ringing room.

The local ringers appear to have been very much a Grandsire Doubles band. Even after the bells were augmented to a peal of eight, two quarter peals rung in 1953 and 1960 were both of "Grandsire Doubles with 1 and 2 leading".

In 1953 Joyce White joined the band. In 1955 she rang her first and only peal at Willey, a private estate near to Broseley. She was the first Broseley ringer to ring a peal for the Hereford Guild. Joyce White rang until 1958 then disappears from the records for two years. She returns in 1961 and rings until 1964 when she changes her surname to Probert and then stops ringing for another four years before returning to ringing from 1969 to 1971. Joyce is listed as a Broseley ringer for 13 years in total.

In 1961 Broseley was mentioned for the first time in Shropshire Association records. There were no members of the Association (because the tower came under the Hereford Guild), but they practised on Thursdays and rang Grandsire Doubles.

For 29 years from 1967 to 1997 the number of Hereford Guild members listed under Broseley ranged from zero to two. This comment appeared in the 1992 report: “We have taken the regretful decision of removing Broseley from the list of active towers. This is due mainly to 2 reasons:

1. There are no members of the Guild at Broseley, despite representations to them to join.
2. No members of Broseley tower turn up to practices held there and there are very few members of the district go. This makes it very depressing to go to Broseley especially when a member of the tower let us in only to disappear saying where to leave the key!”

In 1998 a new band had started up at Broseley. This entry appeared in the Hereford Guild report for that year: “August – we rang at Willey and Broseley and it is great to see Broseley ringing regularly again – can I remind people that they ring on Friday and, as with most of us, all help is much appreciated.” The band reached a peak of 10 ringers in 2000 and 2001. Sadly, the band then started to dwindle again and by 2005 there was only one ringer listed under Broseley. For several years the bells were rung occasionally by ringers from Coalbrookdale.

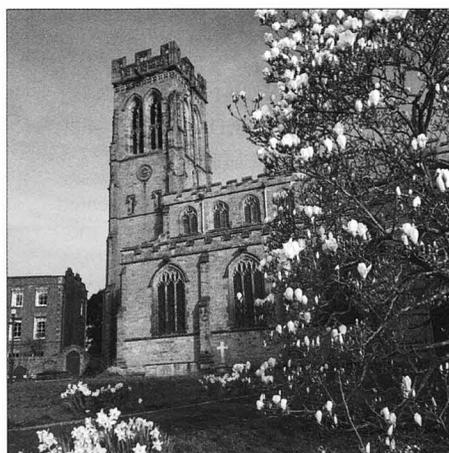
In 2013 ringing started up again at Broseley. I set up a monthly practice with another ringer with the intention of establishing a new band. We rapidly gained recruits and practices became weekly. When the other ringer was no longer able to help, I found myself teaching an ever-increasing band of learners single-handedly. By the end of 2013 I'd been asked by the PCC to take on the role of Tower Captain.

Ringers from Much Wenlock and Coalbrookdale then stepped in to help. I became an Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) accredited teacher and got to grips with safeguarding and other responsibilities in the

tower. The band slowly but surely progressed from rounds to Plain Bob Doubles, skipping call changes as these proved too difficult with a novice band.

### The current band

We rang the bells when possible during the pandemic and managed to retain all of our ringers. Two new recruits joined us on Ringing Room. We invited them into the tower as soon as we were able to start teaching bell handling again and they are now valued members of the band. Fortunately I trained another ringer to teach bell handling, because in the last few months we've gained another five learners without any deliberate recruitment activity. We've recently taken part in the Advanced Call Changes ART scheme trial which has helped fill a large gap in the band's knowledge. We now have 17 ringers, which is the probably the largest number ever and certainly the largest band since 1924. We feel this a good size considering we don't have the best peal of bells.



*All Saints Broseley in Spring*  
(photo Ginette Pardoe)

**Broseley, Shrops.** 22 Sep 1929, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: J Smith 1, J Meredith 2, A J Garbett 3, A E Garbett 4, A J Meredith 5, Chas Smith 6. Q rung on the re-opening of the church after renovation. The method is missing from the record, but I've assumed it's Grandsire. **£0.75**

**Broseley, Shrops.** 11 Feb 1935, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: J Meredith 1, W J Garbett 2, A Bagley 3, W Hartshorne 4, A J Garbett 5, J Hartshorne 6. Rung half-muffled on the occasion of the funeral of Homer H Wase. Method & exact length are not included in the records, but assumed to be Grandsire. **£0.75**

**Broseley, Shrops.** 28 Jan 1936, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: R Meredith 1, W J Garbett 2, Arthur Bagley 3, William Hartshorne 4, A J Garbett 5, J Hill 6. BROADCAST IN THE PARISH CHURCH A large congregation attended at the church on Tuesday to hear the broadcast from St George's, Chapel, Windsor, of the King's funeral service. The rector, the C. S. Jackson, presided over the gathering & at the conclusion of the service offered special prayers, followed by the staging of the National Anthem. Mr Matt. Davis played appropriate organ music during the interval of waiting. On Sunday the Parish Church bell-ringers paid tribute & rang half-muffled peals at the morning & evening services, while on Tuesday evening a Q of Grandsire Doubles, half-muffled, were rung. The ringers were:- 1, R. Meredith; 2, W. J. Garbett; 3, Arthur Bagley; 4, William Hartshorne; 5, A. J. Garbett. (Extracts from the Wellington Journal relating to Broseley & District, Broseley Local History Society 2008). **£0.75**

**Broseley, Shrops.** 9 May 1937, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: J Hill 1, W J Garbett 2, J Meredith 3, W Hartshorne 4, A J Garbett 5, Chas Smith 6. Q of Grandsire Doubles rung for service on Sunday evening preceding the Coronation of King George VI. **£0.75**

**Broseley, Shrops.** 20 Feb 1938, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: J Hill 1, W J Garbett 2, A J Garbett 3, W Hartshorne 4, A E Meredith 5, Chas Smith 6. Rung on Sunday afternoon on the occasion of the Birth of the heir of Lord Forester. Method & exact length not recorded. **£0.75**

**Broseley, Shrops.** 3 May 1946, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: W Garbett 1, R G Jones 2, A J Garbett (C) 3, W Hartshorne 4, A E Meredith 5, Chas Smith 6. A Q was rung on the Diamond Anniversary of the Wedding of Mr & Mrs Thomas Meredith of Church Street, Broseley. Thomas Meredith was for 64 years a ringer in this tower & lead ringer for many years. It is of special note that the tenor ringer was 75 years old. **£0.75**

**Broseley, Shrops.** 26 Nov 1946, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: Peter Dean 1, W Garbett 2, A J Garbett (C) 3, R Jones 4, A E Meredith 5, W Hartshorne 6. Q rung as a farewell compliment to R Jones who has left the district to take up duties at West Drayton. **£0.75**

**Broseley, Shrops.** 21 May 1953, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: David Powell 1, Graham Oliver 2, John R Garbett 3, Dorothy E Garbett 4, Joyce B White 5, W J Garbett 6, Arthur J Garbett (C) 7, W Hartshorne 8. Q rung as a Birthday compliment to ringers of 3 & 4. 1st Q for ringers of 1: 2, 3 & 4 & first Q on the bells since augmentation to 8. **£0.75**

### Issues with the bells

When our bells were augmented to a peal of eight, the two new bells were squeezed into a metal frame alongside the original oak frame. Two of the tie bolts were removed from the original frame so it can no longer be tightened correctly. Some of the ropes are drawn at significant angles from the bell chamber to the ringer which makes them difficult to ring.

Our treble has to be pulled perfectly straight to prevent the rope jumping and our 12 cwt tenor feels as if it is three times that weight. We sometimes have to ring the middle six because the treble and tenor are both difficult for inexperienced ringers to handle. The back six bells contain remnants of the cast iron staples from the original wooden headstocks which could cause the bells to crack in the future.

Our bells are also not particularly tuneful. The treble is almost perfectly tuned, but unfortunately the other seven bells are not, especially the third and fourth.

In addition we have badly worn pulleys, sliders repaired with pieces of metal, and clappers that need refurbishment or replacement.

### Bell project

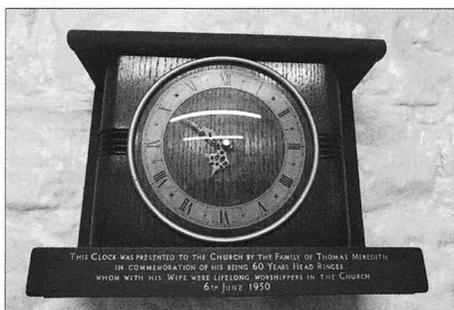
After taking advice from our Guild's Bell Restoration Fund Committee, we have decided to send our bells to have the ferrous remnants of the crown staples drilled out to minimise metal stress. The bells will also be re-tuned to improve their overall tone. They will then be hung in a new 10 bell frame. We're hoping to find benefactors for two new trebles, but failing that there will be capacity for the extra bells to be added in the future. We will also restore our 1642 sanctus bell to a usable condition. This large and rather daunting project will cost around £100,000.

### Fundraising

Fortunately we have an enthusiastic band of ringers to help us raise the money. In May we

**Broseley, Shrops.** 2 Jun 1953, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: David Powell 1, Graham Oliver 2, John R Garbett 3, Dorothy E Garbett 4, Joyce B White 5, W J Garbett 6, Arthur J Garbett (C) 7, W Hartshorne 8. A Q rung on Coronation Day commencing at 8.30am. **£0.75**

**Broseley, Shrops.** 16 Apr 1932, 1260 Grandsire Doubles: W Hartshorne 1, Jhon Meredith 2, A J Garbett 3, L Hewett 4, A H Meredith 5, Chas Smith 6. FORMER RESIDENT'S MARRIAGE. — On Saturday an interesting wedding was solemnised in Christ's Church Cathedral, Hamilton, Canada, the contracting parties being Miss Helene Wigmore, younger daughter of Mrs Wigmore of Hamilton & the Revd F. H. Wase, rector of St James' Church, Guelph. The bridegroom is the second son of Mr & Mrs H. H. Wase, of Broseley & has resided in Canada for nearly twenty years, being ordained to the ministry in 1923. The ceremony was performed by the Right Revd D. T. Owen, Bishop of Niagara, assisted by the Very Revd L. W. Broughall, Dean of Niagara, the service being fully choral. The bridesmaid was Miss Kay Wigmore, sister of the bride & the Revd Wilfred Heiderson, of Christ's Church Cathedral, acted as best man. A reception was afterwards held in the Parish Room adjoining the Cathedral & the happy couple later left for Ottawa, where the honeymoon is being spent. To mark the occasion a Q of Grandsire doubles (1,260 changes, being 10½ six-scores, each called differently) was rung on the bells of the Parish Church, Broseley, in 45 minutes by the following: Wm. Hartshorne, treble; T. Meredith, 2; A. J. Garbett, 3; L. Hewitt, 4; A. H. Meredith, 5; & C. Smith, tenor; conducted by Mr A. J. Garbett. (Extracts from Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News 1932 relating to Broseley & District, Broseley Local History Society 2007). **£0.75**



*In 1950 Thomas Meredith's family gave this clock in commemoration of his 60 years as head ringer (photo Darren Swancott)*

held a plant sale which raised £855. In June we held a fundraising event supported by Ironbridge Lions on the Iron Bridge itself. We are waiting to hear the total amount raised but we think it was around £500. We've also received grants amounting to £17,000 which has brought our total funds to date to £23,000. Other planned activities include a fancy-dress pub crawl, a gig in the local cricket club, a table-top sale, printing our own Christmas cards, letter writing and of course further grant applications.

Any donations to our bell restoration and augmentation project would be much appreciated. We have a Just Giving page for online donations ([www.justgiving.com/fundraising/broseley-bells](http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/broseley-bells)) or alternatively cheques can be made payable to 'The Broseley Group of Churches PCC'. Please email me at [gstapp@gmail.com](mailto:gstapp@gmail.com) for the postal address.

There is also the opportunity for a donor's name to be inscribed on a new bell which would be a lasting memorial for several hundred years.

### The future

We have uncertain times ahead, as we somehow need to find the rest of the £100,000 needed to complete our project. We will then have to find a temporary home for our band to keep us practising together while our bells are out of operation. We have a close-knit and local band who have already kept together through the Covid-19 pandemic, so I'm sure we'll emerge through the other side successfully.

We will hopefully end up with a set of bells that are much easier to ring and more tuneful. The two new trebles will give us more training opportunities as they will be light enough to be rung by children and could be kept silenced sometimes for teaching purposes.

### Acknowledgements

Thank you to Alan Glover for scouring the Hereford Guild and Shropshire Association records for items relating to Broseley. Thank you also to Will Bosworth for giving me the impetus to finally gather all this information together.

**Strike action by Royal Mail CWU workers may cause delays to delivery of *The Ringing World*. We hope this week's issue will be the last to have been affected.**

## 20 Years Ago in *The Ringing World*

6 September, 2002 Selected by the Editor

### Forged in Adversity – 11th September 2001

We reported in issue 4761 of the RW (p.784) that a bell was being cast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry as a gift from the City of London to the City of New York. The bell commemorates the terrible events of 11th September last year and also celebrates the special bonds between the two great cities.

The bell began its journey across the Atlantic from Felixstowe on Monday, 12th August aboard the MV Amazonite. It arrived in New York on Wednesday 21st August and was taken to Trinity Church, Wall Street, where it is being mounted (at ground level) in a special stand designed by eminent New York architect Paul Byard.

The inscription reads:

TO THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD  
AND IN RECOGNITION OF  
THE ENDURING LINKS BETWEEN  
THE CITY OF LONDON  
AND  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
FORGED IN ADVERSITY –  
11 SEPTEMBER 2001

The gift bell will be formally presented to the Church and the City of New York by the Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Michael Oliver, at a special service on the anniversary of the disaster next Wednesday. The Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, will also be travelling to New York to bless the bell and preach a sermon at the service. Both the Lord Mayor and Archbishop were present at the casting on 26th July, along with US Ambassador William Farris.

It is interesting to note that the tower at Trinity Church, Wall Street, already contains a 25cwt ring of eight Whitechapel bells. These bells were cast for the second church on the site way back in 1797. The current building – the third on the site – was completed in 1846. Alex Britton visited the tower in 1991 (RW 1991 p.1210) and reported that "the bells appeared to be hung in the original fittings, with metal stays but no wheels, presumably having either fallen off or rotted away over the years". Sadly the bells have remained in an unringable condition. Perhaps the arrival of this famous new bell will rekindle interest in a restoration of Trinity Church's change-ringing peal.

\* \* \* \* \*

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