

What is it like to be a bell ringer?

I started to ring as a teenager after being in the Church choir. My sister and some of her friends learnt at the same time. We had a lot of fun going to practices at other churches and we used to ring twice on every Sunday.

Then I went to University and joined the Ringing Society, but to be honest, they were so much better than me that I gave up for a while. Then I decided to go to a church near to my Hall of Residence where they were pleased for me to join the band, and I got much better at ringing. I started to ring quarter peals (which take 45 minutes non-stop ringing). I remember the first one, worried whether I would get too tired or need the loo. Fortunately, there were no disasters and although it did seem like a long time, I felt a real sense of achievement when it was over.

When I got a job I moved to a new town where I didn't know anyone. So I went to the local ringing practice and again they were keen for me to join them, and before long I was asked to ring in a peal. This took 2 hours and 50 minutes, which really seemed a long time, and afterwards I ached all over! Since then, I have rung lots of peals and I enjoy them now. The rhythm and concentration induces a sort of meditative state that is soothing and relaxing, despite the physical exertion.

My job took me all over the country, and I found that whatever town I was in, the local band of ringers was very welcoming, so I always felt at home wherever I went.

Now, I have settled down. I met my wife through ringing and we ring together on Sundays and on Practice Night. That is a really good way to work up a thirst for the 'second half' of the practice at the local pub! We go on outings with the rest of the ringers, and we



An old peal board at St Martins' — I did *not* take part in this peal!

have even been on a ringing holiday where we rang at forty new towers in a week.

As a hobby, it is very inexpensive as we don't need to buy special clothes or equipment, or pay huge membership fees. We even get paid for ringing for weddings! But we do give a lot back in kind, maintaining the bells, cleaning the tower, and organising events, even fund-raising for the Bell Restoration Fund of the Ringers' Guild, which provides financial support when major work is needed on bells in the Guildford Diocese.

Am I bored with it after all this time? No way! There is so much more for me to learn and accomplish – but I take consolation in the fact that lots of ringers keep going into their eighties, and some into their nineties, so I still have some time left even now!

Anon.