

Ringling for Peace

Armistice 100



As a tribute to the 1,400 bell ringers who lost their lives during the First World War the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers is hoping that 1,400 new campanologists will be recruited this year in time to take part in 'Ringling for Peace' on 11th November. The idea is for bells across the country – in cities, towns and villages - to ring out in unison to mark the centenary of Armistice, just as they did to celebrate the end of the war in 1918.

The aim is for as much ringling (and noise!) as possible to take place, but there will be set times as well. 'Ringling for Peace' is also included in the 'Battle's Over – A Nation's Tribute' schedule of events which includes the lighting of beacons. However, in Buckland Filleigh the church bells will be chiming in the evening, and everyone is welcome to come up to St Mary's from 6.30pm onwards. Keep you ears pinned back, too, during the day for bells ringling in nearby parishes!

Buckland Filleigh Bell Ringers in the First World War

It is particularly poignant that the bells will be heard in the parish on 11th November. Prior to the First World War the church was lucky enough to have a lively and accomplished team of bell ringers. At the dedication of Shebbear Church bells in 1906 after re-hanging, a ringling competition was held between ringers from across the district: Buckland Filleigh was awarded the palm for the best peal. It was obviously an enjoyable event as the vicar, in his sermon that evening, 'apparently appealed to the ringers present to remember that bell ringling was not an amusement, but work for God'!

I expect somewhere in St Mary's records are the names of the parish ringers, but two of them were William Badcock (who later rang at Shebbear) and Frank Newcombe. Frank died unexpectedly in January 1915 while serving with the Royal North Devon Hussars (Yeomanry) in Exmouth. This extract from 'Bradford Jottings' (*Devon and Exeter Gazette*, November 1915) reflects on his untimely death and the impact the war had had on the Buckland Filleigh ringers (the writer was describing the patronal festival at Bradford Church):

...Under ordinary conditions the church is half-filled by ringers from surrounding churches; but several bellringers are engaged in more serious things than bell-ropes, and as is the case with Buckland Filleigh, most of the ringers are with the Colours; one first-rate ringer – the late Mr. F. Newcombe, who was whip in Mr. Scott-Browne's Hunt staff, having lost his life while in the North Devon Yeomanry. Very keen on ringling was the Buckland Filleigh set, and more than once when returning from a cricket match, I have known them stop their brake when opposite a church, and send one of their number to the Rectory for permission to ring a peal. This was always readily granted, and I have stood in the church with the Rector, and enjoyed listening to their fine change-ringling. Merton, Dolton and Beaford, and other recur to memory. When peace is proclaimed, we trust that the ringling we shall then hear, will to some extent, compensate for the silence of the towers at present.

The ringling of church bells was restricted throughout the war, but with so many men away serving King and Country the number of ringers was very depleted (women did not ring!). There is no record of whether the bells at Buckland Filleigh were rung on Armistice Day, or how many of that merry band engaged in the gentle pastimes of bell ringling and cricket returned to the parish and rang again. But they can all be remembered – especially Frank Newcombe – when the bells sound once more from St Mary's tower on the Armistice Centenary.

