

In the Cradle of the Industrial Revolution – The 21st Barnes Summer Tour

The feast is set, the guests are met, may'st hear the merry din. It was Thursday lunchtime in the Three Horseshoes at Alveley and a comprehensive buffet awaited an assortment of ringers who arrived at random intervals, though possibly not in an entirely unpredictable order. Refreshed after the journey, they adjourned to the nearby church where, in accordance with the normal 'leapfrog' policy, most had a quick ring and departed, leaving six to fail to open the quarter peal score sheet with London Minor.

Tea in Bridgnorth was sandwiched between ringing at Telford's 'new' church of St Mary and the imposing red sandstone tower of the now redundant St Leonard's. The spiral staircase at Stockton is steep and uncommonly narrow, rendering the wheelchair reassembly job out of the question. Your correspondent, who considers himself to be of merely portly build, squeezed into the ringing chamber with some difficulty, thinking it must have been a long time ago that Colin Turner grabbed this one.

And so to the Valley Hotel in the Ironbridge Gorge which was to be our base for the duration. Most of the party found time to visit one or two of the museums and Christine, who was *hors de combat*, probably did them all. For some reason the Tar Tunnel seemed particularly popular (reminiscent of a horizontal tower perhaps?). The chips in the Victorian Town (fried in beef dripping and only a penny three farthings in local currency) are to be recommended. Those who stayed a little longer even managed to climb the Wrekin.

Several unusual methods featured on the programme. Original Major was ticking along nicely at Broseley until the second part end failed to come up. Spliced Plain Bob Major and Grandsire Triples was scored at Berrington but Double Grandsire at Edgmond wouldn't go and was changed to the single variety, as was the Stedman Triples at Newport albeit for a different reason - the bells were rather loud and the treble ringer was not confident that he could fine-tune his hearing aid to pick up any instruction that might be forthcoming from the conductor (Stentorian bobs no problem).

As usual, we ate and drank well. Cream teas are not as readily available in Shropshire as in the West Country but Home Farm, Attingham, offers large slabs of home-made cake and ice cream from their own Jersey herd. Saturday's Dinner at the hotel lived up to expectations and the Indian food at the former Ironbridge Police Station, while not cheap, was certainly above average. The Golden Ball proved worthy of a second visit, both for the quality of the beer (good selection of well kept local ales) and the food; although at the other end of town, it was fortunately within walking distance of the hotel.

Sadly, news of a sudden bereavement on Sunday morning meant that our organisers, Mike and Jill, had to leave early and a slightly subdued band met later at St Mary's, Shrewsbury, determined nevertheless to achieve a quarter of caters. Evensong ringing followed with the locals on the superb twelve at St Chad's.

Monday is always a bit of an anticlimax and with our depleted forces, Erin Triples at Shifnal was perhaps over-ambitious but Plain Bob at Albrighton fared no better. In between there was general ringing at Tong with a chance to view the Great Bell (and in some cases hatch plans for a return visit on St Bartholomew's Day). The tour officially ended with lunch at the Foaming Jug, Codsall, where disappointment at the meagre quarter peal total was somewhat allayed by a wonderful pint of 'Ubu' (Purity brewery).