

Crimson Toes, Intruders, a Gnu and Grandsire Caters

It was that time of year again, when stout men gird their loins and ladies paint their toenails for the annual Barnes Summer Tour. And so we returned to Market Harborough (an ideal base for ringing around South Leicestershire and North Northamptonshire - according to the Dove website there are no fewer than 328 towers within a 20 mile radius) and the tried and tested hospitality of the Three Swans Hotel.

One of the delights of a comparatively leisurely tour is the opportunity to explore the various churches. Unusual features stick in the mind, although it's not always easy to recall where one noticed something, for example the list of Rectors in which the three incumbents during the Commonwealth are labelled as "Intruders" and the re-instatement of their immediate predecessor noted with obvious satisfaction. This area was of course the scene of some of the bloodiest conflicts in the Civil War, as we were reminded by the historical displays at Naseby, but there can be little doubt where the aforementioned parish's loyalties lay.

Bands divided along gender lines on Friday morning. Fortunately the gentlemen managed to fire out Cambridge Minor at Arnesby in time to listen to most of the ladies' performance on the majestic eight at Wigston Magna – a fitting tribute to the memory of the band who rang the first all-ladies' peal exactly 100 years ago and of Alison Regan, whose untimely death a few days earlier had robbed the Exercise of another outstanding lady ringer.

As usual we ate and drank well, although some of the party rebelled against Pizza Express, opting instead for a few pints in the Admiral Nelson, a lovely little back street local, followed by a curry. Of the lunchtime venues, the Baker's Arms at Blaby was particularly noteworthy. Saturday's Dinner seems to have lost some of the formality of earlier years although the Tower Captain impressed us by saying grace in Latin. But how did we come to be singing "I'm a Gnu" over coffee? *

On Sunday morning most of the party attended the early Communion at St Dionysius (although the clergyman appeared at times to overlook the "traditional" designation and lapsed into the modern Gloria and Credo with which he was clearly more familiar). There were whispered snippets of conversation: "Who are all these people?", "They're *bell ringers*", "Oh.". Your correspondent, being accustomed to stewardship by standing order and avoidance of the plate by being in the choir, failed, as he usually does in a strange church, to find any money for the collection (but made amends later).

After service ringing, the rest of the day was spent in Northampton, which boasts some very fine churches indeed. The Holy Sepulchre is, at its heart, a Norman round church (probably built by Simon de Senlis, Earl of Northampton, on his return from the First Crusade) albeit later extended along more conventional lines. To do justice to the fine ring of eight, we abandoned Double Norwich for Grandsire Triples but a sudden dropping out of the hunt caught people unawares and that was that. St Peter's is another Norman church, possibly the best example in the country, with some interesting carvings including the character with his hands back to front.

We had been remarking on different styles of churchmanship during the week and nowhere was this more apparent than in the stark contrast between All Saints and St Giles. The former has a cafe and the coronation chicken sandwich is to be recommended although, unless you are uncommonly

hungry, one of these “doorsteps” with filling more than an inch thick would probably suffice for two. At St Giles they were tuning up the guitars for the evening’s worship and we had to pick our way between the accessories of the crèche (including a rocking cow) to get to the tower. Surprisingly Grandsire Caters went rather better on the heavier, old-style ten than on the new installation at All Saints. Perhaps we were just getting used to the composition but it was, along with some fine ale in the Wig and Pen, a satisfactory conclusion.

[* The memory has been jogged: it was the appearance of the dessert wine which prompted someone to mention “Have some Madeira, m’ dear”, a discussion about that unusual figure of speech, the zeugma, ensued and one thing led to another...]