

Back to the future.

It's February 1865 and Richard Cattley is standing outside St Peter Mancroft Norwich. Imagine Victorian Norwich. Gas lights, horse drawn carriages and the incredible roar of those great bells over that fine city.

The sound of the bells inspired Richard Cattley who wasn't a bellringer. Cattley was a minor canon at Worcester Cathedral and his contribution to the future of ringing would be profound. And he probably didn't even think about it.

Cattley was an enthusiast and with his friends Gilbert Scott, Lord Grimthorpe and Gladstone's brother in law, Lord Littleton, he would restore our great cathedral.

Before 1865 there were only eight bells in the tower. Five of them are now the cloister. Cattley loved bells and with Grimthorpe he devised a plan for a new light ring of ten. That was until he heard Mancroft bells. From that moment he wanted 12 bells and the weight of the tenor got bigger and bigger.

In 1865 the cathedral had a 20 cwt eight. In 1870 it had a 50cwt 12. Cattley had a big idea and he made it a reality. Even by today's standards it's a remarkable achievement. In 1928 the bells were cast again. Local bellringers petitioned the Chapter to make the bells lighter. They were too heavy. Chapter ignored the bellringers; and the organist, Ivor Atkins, insisted the bells should be in B. And Taylor's cast one of the best rings of bells.

In 1904, the Bell News refused to publish the first peals of London S Major on handbells, because some influential London ringers had said it was impossible. In the 1930s the Central Council were asked to debate a motion to ban Simpson tuning. A few years later some ringers weren't keen on Dove's guide.

In the 1980s when we restored Leighton Buzzard church many bellringers wrote to our PCC saying the bells should go back as a light ring of 10. No. I wanted to do something better. And so did the parish.

Soon afterwards, the Bullring became a 16. And this was wrong too. The *Ringing World* correspondence was ridiculous. The same fate befell the Perth project. It took a while, no-one gave up, and what a great result. I gather that some people don't like the Strikeometer or Hawkear. Well, so what? Whatever your personal view, live with it.

Just because we, you or I do not like a piece of innovation does not make it wrong. For ringing to have a future it needs diversity and big ideas. Please can we be more tolerant and supportive. If the innovation is good it will survive, if not it will die. Darwin is a good read. ART had to contend with ill-informed and negative criticism in the RW and has done so again recently.

And so did we, when the story, by then old news, was published about our school project. Ironically everything had been in the public domain for a long time. Now the real news is that

half the money has been raised for the building; and, rightly, the tower will be the last thing to be built.

There is much one can say about ringers who oppose change and new ideas. I would just ask this: please do not be so boring. And please let our diverse opinions be positive. History shows how we react to innovation and change. Ringing needs diversity. Everything we take for granted was once new. Uniformity is a bad idea.

Was ringing really better in the past? Was there ever a time when all our bells were rung on a Sunday? Or standards better? I doubt it. Ringing by its nature and where it happens, is and always will be, a minority interest. Yes: there are issues of resources and silent bells. There's also demography, baby-boomers, the Church of England, smart phones and more. And that's ok. In many areas ringing is doing well. So take heart.

Perfection is the enemy of the good. Please don't think what we are all doing is perfect or the only way. It isn't.

ART is good and not perfect, the same can be said of Birmingham and Norwich and especially Worcester Cathedral. If we thought, we were perfect or the 'only way' we would never change or adapt. And we would fail.

Recently a vicar said to me that the only people who can teach bellringing now are ART people. Well that's not true is it, and it was clearly a misunderstanding. ART is good. It's not perfect or the only way. There are lots of good ringing teachers who aren't part of ART.

Looking to the future things will happen we can't predict. And are big things are happening now.

The CofE has just removed the legal obligation to hold Sunday services. So how will we react when our village churches want their bells rung midweek during the daytime? And how will we react when the clergy and PCCs aren't bothered if their bells are rung or not. The growing Evangelical church has little interest in ringing for services. Though they tolerate recreational ringing. Read what Angela Tilby says about the Evangelical wing of the Church of England.

And read the report on the future of our church buildings by John Inge, the Bishop of Worcester. What will the Church of England do with 16,000 churches of which 5000 have bells? And how will we contribute to these churches' sustainability? And what will we do when churches shut?

So how does Worcester work?

Each tower has its own identity and local band. We are not one large group. We help each other when asked and support each other when needed. Each ringing environment and community is different. We taught most of the new band at Barbourne and some of the new band St John's. We work local towers and ringers in the area and have become a ringing hub.

Our Teaching Centre has just been overhauled. It needed a thorough mechanical servicing and we've bought new tablets and headphones. It is used a lot and that's without marketing it.

Please note this. After 11 years our teachers are burnt out. It happens. Teaching capacity is our challenge for our future.

Teaching Centres are there to teach more than bell handling. Even some of our ringers don't get this. Ours is there to give rope time in a perfect ringing environment. So many of our ringers, regardless of their experience, use it to practice their striking and method ringing. Sometimes we have four practices a week (not all at the Cathedral) and it's still not enough. We ring lots of quarter peals and peals. And it's still not enough. Ringing is about ringing and not meetings about ringing. For example, our agm lasts about 30 minutes. We discuss our 'business' all the year round.

Two weeks ago, we had 42 ringers in the ringing room and some more non-ringing visitors. You can have too many ringers. Please don't say 'you're lucky'. It's not luck. Just hard work, esprit de corps, simple objectives and a very close relationship with the Cathedral, the other churches where we ring and the Diocese. We are a community first and bellringers second. Bellringing status is not important. We attract new recruits without advertising. And we have two schools waiting for us to start teaching again. The school project will help, and St John's Worcester will be the principle beneficiary.

How we ring is important. Good rounds is the goal. We don't push people into changing ringing until they can handle a bell properly. Handling a bell properly at Worcester Cathedral is hard. Thousands of people hear us ring and the bells are very loud. Our ringers are aware of their responsibility as public performers. We always put 'how we ring' before 'what we ring'.

What we teach ranges from bell handling to our latest plan of giving our keen peal ringers the opportunity to ring Particles. And everything in between.

We provide a safe and welcoming environment. We're a call change band who can ring advanced Surprise Maximus. Not the other way around. The bells are a challenge. We teach our young ringers to ring all the bells if they want to. Last Monday, Alice Pugh, 16 and very slight, was ringing the tenor. Alice was thrilled to bits.

We're always thinking about our future and our plans evolve. Just about every fortnight our practice is run by another member of the band. Teaching leadership (not management) is my personal goal. Our direction is clear. How we get there is constantly changing.

What works in most places doesn't work at Worcester Cathedral. Or the other way around. Another example of diversity. We make lots of mistakes and I hope we learn from them. We don't want to be perfect.

An example of the unexpected is our new bell. The first to be cast by Westley's. Who would have thought a new bellfoundry would appear last year? We took the opportunity to

innovate. The bell is a perfect match for the 1928 Taylor bells. Westley's are a welcome addition to our world.

If I could hitch a ride in the Tardis to that February day in 1865, I would find Richard Cattley listening to Mancroft bells, shake his hand and say thank you. Richard Cattley started a chain of events which means I've now got one of the best roles in bellringing.

150 years later the Mancroft ringers visited Worcester Cathedral and now they have a Teaching Centre. And as every iteration should be, it's better than ours.

Imagine if the bellringers of 100 years in the future could hitch a lift in the Tardis to WCCC, what would they say to us today?

Welcome to Worcester and please enjoy what promises to be a great weekend.

Mark Regan. 2 March 2019.