

**ED VAIZEY WRITES...**

We have all read about water shortages in the south east, and the need to save water. Our part of the world is threatened by a huge reservoir precisely for that reason. So I have decided to do my bit. I recently called in Thames Water to give me some pointers. They discovered I had been wasting up to 300 litres of water a day! That amounts to 100,000 litres a year – enough to provide water for 500 homes for a day. Rapid action has now been taken to stem the flow. Following the survey I have already fixed a dripping bathroom tap, saving 252 litres of water a day. Lesson: don't ignore a dripping tap! And I have installed water-displacement devices in the cisterns of my two loos – meaning I use less water when I flush, saving 30 litres a day.

I have recently conducted a survey of local businesses. I was surprised by the gloomy mood of local firms. Top of the list of problems was recruitment and transport difficulties.

I would like to see the government doing more to help small businesses. Especially those that invest in new technology. The full results of the survey are on the website or I would be delighted to send anyone interested a copy in the post.

Please contact me at House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA, 0207 219 6350 or vaizeye@parliament.uk.

The Website is [www.vaizey.com](http://www.vaizey.com) and has up to date news of my local and parliamentary activities.

**I HAVE LOST MY DONG!**

*It can happen, the only remedy is to ring down and start again.*

Yes, this is another article about the ancient art of bell ringing. The last time I wrote about it I had only been ringing for a few weeks but was so captivated by the whole business I had been moved to write an article for the MADNews. That was two and a half years ago, so am I still hooked? Oh yes.

The initial wonder and amazement about the whole process has now been replaced with a certain familiarity. No longer is it a challenge to catch the bell rope at every stroke as it whizzes past you. The basic movements become learned reflexes just like riding a bike and it is quite possible to ring with your eyes closed; indeed there are many blind ringers.

I am not the fastest learner when it comes to physical skills but thanks to the patience of the rest of the band I have gradually improved to a level where I can make a difference between there being just silence or being able to preserve the traditional sound of an English Sunday morning. Whatever your level there is always some new challenge to meet, or in my case many challenges all at the same time. You wouldn't believe how difficult it can be just to count up to five when your mind is on other things like who to follow next.

It is very important to keep your bell sounding at exactly the right time after the one before. Even just a few hundredths of a second will make an audible difference. Although it is the simplest pattern in which to ring the bells, ringing in "rounds" can really sound bad if the spacing between successive bells is not even. Ringing rounds is where all the bells follow each other in the same sequence over and over again from the highest pitch to the lowest. Ringing rounds is how the bells at Marcham are rung up at the beginning of a session and rung down again at the end.

You could just keep on ringing in rounds but it would start to sound a bit boring after a minute or two. So now you need to vary things a bit and there are two ways to do this: either by "change" ringing or by ringing a "method". Either way, the bells are now swapping their places in the sequence, two bells at a time.

"Change" ringing is the simpler way to swap the sequence of bells; the bells only swap places when the ringer in charge

calls the "change". Only two bells can move at any time so there is less to think about. Typically at Marcham the bells will swap places and stay in their new sequence for a number of pulls of the bell rope before the next change is called. Ringing a "method" is still way too difficult for me, typically all the bells will be constantly weaving an intricate pattern round each other and the sequence may continue without an exact repetition for many pulls. You will hear method ringing typically on our Monday practice night or for a wedding when the ringers are doing their best to impress.

When you can ring a method you can enter the "big league" and start to ring quarter peals or even peals when the sequence will continue without repetition for over an hour! The latest peal attempt at Marcham was rung very recently (during the evening on St. Valentines day) by a group of ringers from Swindon. The attempt didn't succeed as there was an error in the calling but as you can imagine ringing a peal is quite a challenge even for experienced ringers.

Next time you hear the bells see if you can spot if they are being rung up (the first minute or two, when they will ring in rounds, at first very rapidly and then increasingly more slowly as the bells are rung higher and higher). At the end of the ringing session you will then hear the bells rung down, this time the ringing will again be in rounds and getting faster and faster. You can also listen out to hear if the bells are ringing the same sequence over and over again or if a method is being run when the sequence is constantly changing.

I should also explain how you can "lose your dong". When the bell is rung up, its bell mouth faces up and the clapper is lying against one side of the bell. As the bell sweeps round the clapper hits the side of the bell but sometimes it happens that as you ring the bell up the clapper decides to lie on the wrong side and this make quite a difference to how the bell sounds.

Whether the above sounds like a foreign language or if it brings back fond memories then Marcham is always looking for new ringers, complete beginners or experienced and all ages 8 to 80. You are more than welcome to come along and find out more about us. We will be saying goodbye to two experienced ringers soon so now would be a good time to come along and swell the ranks and help to keep the ancient tradition alive. Is there a catch? The only one I can think of is getting hooked on bell ringing, admittedly you need to do your turns at getting up for 09:30 on a Sunday morning but it soon becomes a pleasure to show off how good you are, you don't need to stay for the service. Skilled youngsters also find the idea of getting paid to ring at weddings quite attractive.

If you would like to learn more you can call me on 391460 to hear about it from the beginner's perspective or I can put you in touch with the tower captain who can tell you how you can join in too.

**BOB ANDERSON**

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE THIS MARCH!**

Did you know that there are over 3,000 voluntary organisations in Oxfordshire? Each of them is run by a management committee of enthusiastic and committed volunteers.

Maybe you could make a difference as a management committee volunteer? It's a chance to put your time to good use, work as part of a team, learn new skills, and try something new. If you're interested, come along to one of our 'volunteer recruitment evenings' in March. It will be a chance to meet people from local groups who are looking for new committee volunteers. For more information call Alan Foulkes at OCVA on 01865 251946.

Didcot 16 March | Oxford – 23 March | Bicester – 29 March