



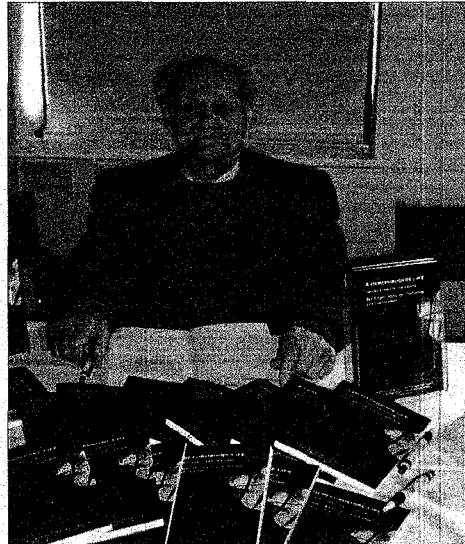
BOOK REVIEW

Evans, L. 2006

A Herefordshire life.

The life and times of
Leslie Evans, Bell Ringer,
Musician, Craftsman and
Countryman

Saxon Press, Eardisland. Price £12.00.



Leslie signing copies of his book at the recent book launch in aid of St. Michael's Hospice

The 20th century witnessed the greatest and most abrupt changes ever to have occurred in human history. At the start of the century, human and animal muscle power, rushing water and wind, plus a limited amount of steam power, were the forces that drove the British economy. By the end, little use was made of muscle power, horses were essentially playthings, water was seldom used to drive machinery, wind power was almost forgotten (apart from its growing use in electricity generation), and steam power was similarly essentially an historical memory.

Leslie Evans, born in 1912 and still, happily, alive today, has lived through these tremendous changes. He has witnessed two terrible World Wars, seen railways superseded by tarred roads over which rush machines powered by internal combustion engines, heard the water-mills of his youth (which ground corn for the local inhabitants), fall silent, and witnessed unbelievable changes in the class structure and religious behaviour of British society.

In Leslie's youth, "there was no social security and very little by way of pensions." When his parents moved to Eardisland from Mansel Lacy in 1924, "there were no stock lorries to bring cattle ... we [drove] our cattle from Mansel Lacy, a thing that would be impossible to do today because of the traffic." His father was a skilled craftsman who made farm and other wagons, as well as smaller two-wheeled carts. He also repaired water-mills and made furniture and, of course, coffins.

Leslie's youth was that of ostlers, horses, cricket, the church choir (which he joined in 1924), learning to play the organ and, at Eardisland, to ring bells. The band at Eardisland

in the 1920s had not yet advanced to change-ringing, so Leslie cycled every week to Kimbolton to learn Scientific. There, under the tutorship of Frederick Jaine, he made rapid progress and was soon ringing peals.

I first became aware of Les Evans when I looked at the peal records in my home tower of Glasbury. There, before the Second World War, his name appeared, as it did in the neighbouring Talgarth records. In his book Les describes how he and William Preece of Staunton on Arrow, cycled all the way to "Talgarth on one Saturday to ring a peal there in the afternoon ... On the Sunday we went to Glasbury and rang another peal there ... on the Monday we rang a peal in Brecon ... We cycled back home on the Tuesday morning". How times have changed!

In the 1950s, the bells at Eardisland were rehung as an octave and, during the incumbency of the Revd Rock, a highly talented change-ringing band developed. Leslie tells of some of the peals they rang, and of how, in 1952, he stood in the then record of five peals of Minor rung by one band in one day (at Llanfihangel Rhydithon). Not only was Les a ringer, but he used the woodworking and other skills he had learnt from his father, to make bell-frames and hang bells. For many years he worked in association with John Taylor and Company, and in his book he tells of his work at Madley and other towers.

Les is one of the great characters of the ringing world, and we are fortunate that he has now given us a record of life in Herefordshire during the 20th century, of his work as a craftsman and farmer, and of his contribution to village life as an organist, chorister and bell-ringer. *A Herefordshire Life* is a book that will give readers great pleasure and that will introduce those born in the past 50 years to the hard, but also perhaps more leisurely, way of life of an age that has gone, when the horse and the bicycle ruled the roads, when bells were hard to ring and needed real muscle power, and when change-ringing was still being introduced into the countryside of Herefordshire.

COLIN A. LEWIS

Available from St Michael's Hospice, Barmestree, Herefordshire HR1 4HA for £12 plus £1 p+p. The author has donated all proceeds to the Hospice.

PUZZLE CORNER

Plenty of Ringing in Bradcastle

There are four towers in Bradcastle, each with a different number of bells and each with a different practice night. Here are some facts about the four ringers (all from different towers) having a drink together in the pub last Friday evening, and about the four churches.

The only one of the four available for mid-week wedding ringing is the chap from St. Peter's who is an OAP, everyone else works full time. Paul is a chef; the butcher, who supplies him with meat, rings at the 10 bell tower, and Mr. Anderson rings at the 8-bell tower. Neil rings at the 12 bell tower and Owen rings at St. Nicholas'. The dentist's practice night is Tuesday, All Saints does not practise on Wednesdays and Martin Davison is not the butcher. The 6-bell tower practises on Mondays.

If Mr. Collins rings at St. James, where does Mr. Brown ring. What is his first name and the evening he goes ringing?

ANGELA NEWING



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Compiled by David J. Herschell
The Bell News and Ringers' Record
Saturday July 28, 1906

1.

Referring to the figures of a new method called SCIENTIFIC TRIPLES, composed by John Carter over two years previously, which had first been published in the previous week's issue, "Plain Speaker" wrote in his "Notes and Comments" column: "I see Mr. Carter has 'been at it again,' as the ringers of the black country say to him when he is on the war path. 'Scientific Triples,' eh! John. Well, I thought you ringers were under the impression that all Triples are scientific. But then events travel so fast nowadays that sometimes we don't know where we are, as they say. The Birmingham composers have always had the name for producing things startling, and this 'Scientific Triples' is another instance. A 'puzzle for the puzzler,' we are told. And the study of this method is supposed to give brain-power to people of a 'scientific' turn of mind. It may be so. But there are minds not always scientific, who would benefit by a little enlightenment about this new method, with its scientific name. You have startled the Exercise, John, by your latest. I see you composed it in March, 1904. I expect you had the idea that it was too scientific to be given to the world, but you have been persuaded, I was about to say solicited, to publish it. Ah! a friend of mine wasn't far out when he said to me after perusing the figures: 'He's a cute un.' Ring the ting-tang, John."

(NOTE: *Scientific Triples* can be found on p.58 of this year's *Ringing World Diary*.)

2.

Plain Speaker also wrote: "Last week a circumstance at ST. CLEMENT DANES was mentioned. It was alleged that a discarded steeplekeeper had been keeping a dog in the belfry. Not a very inviting place for the purpose. And I hear the dog objected to his surroundings. A dog - and a good dog too - I have seen in this steeple. The late George Stockham, when steeplekeeper, used to bring his dog with him on practice nights. This animal was a knowing blade. As soon as ringing commenced he coiled himself up to go to sleep under a bench, but directly rounds came, he got up, walked round, and barked! This dog deserved to have had a careful training.

"Some years ago there was a complaint about a steeplekeeper keeping pigeons in this same belfry, and I fancy my condemnation in this paper procured their removal. These birds are a great nuisance almost anywhere, and in a building like a church tower they should be strictly kept out by all means. The ordinary fowls of the air are bad enough if they are kept out of the tower, but to make a special habitation within for pigeons is positively criminal, and the perpetrator should be penalised."

Wicken and Time Team

Ringers may be interested to hear that the bells at Wicken, Northants were recorded as part of a *Time Team* archaeological investigation filmed in the village last week. The programme is scheduled for broadcast sometime during January to March, 2007.

ANDREW SPENCER
Buckingham