

Ringling to his heart's content: The journey of St Mark's Bell Ringer Michael Clark

How long have you been bell ringing at St. Mark's?

I have been ringing for about 18 months to two years.

How did you first become involved? What made you choose bell ringing as opposed to a different activity?

I first became involved when Richard Winkler was looking for interested people to start a local group after the previous group had disbanded when the previous leader moved overseas. I was interested in ringing at St. Mark's as it was a way I could help to draw people's notice to St. Mark's.

What were your early experiences of bell ringing?

Getting started was easy as I had a great teacher; Bill Perrins; who would give me



one on one lessons on a weekly basis, usually on a Friday.

Subsequently we were joined by Paul Livingston who had rung with the previous leader, but not for some years.

Richard Winkler has been a great leader with patient teaching and great organisation. There is also a weekly group practice usually on a Monday with up to six ringers and when you have developed more control of your bell, there is ringing between the 8am and 10am services on alternate Sundays. As soon as you have some experience you are encouraged to ring at weddings.

What surprised you most about learning bell ringing?

Learning to bell ring was and is a slow process for me. You start by learning to control the bell rather than the bell controlling you and then you progress to ringing with other people. There are a multitude of different methods which have developed over the course of many centuries, so there is always something to aim for.

Do you have some funny or interesting stories to share?

My first experience of bell ringing was when I was at boarding school in England. One of the duties of becoming a prefect was having to get up in the cold and dark and go to a bell tower and ring a bell to wake everyone up. It had to be rung in a particular rhythm. Of course no one ever showed you how to ring the bell and I well remember the first time I was expected to do this I had no idea what to do so I just pulled the rope and was surprised when I lost control and finished up minus a fingernail and a very bruised ego! I never tried bell ringing again until I came to St. Mark's.

From your perspective what are the joys of bell ringing?

Without a doubt one of the main joys is the community of bell ringers who come from all walks of life but seem to form a close-knit group of people enjoying their craft and enjoying each other's company.

What are the challenges of bell ringing?

The challenge and main interest is that there is always more to learn and plenty to keep you interested for many years.

What skills have you learned and/or used as a bell ringer?

As in learning any activity as an adult, you are afraid to make mistakes and make a fool of yourself in front of other people. For example one of the main sins you can commit as a learner is to break a stay which is a thick piece of timber which prevents more damage being done to the structure of the bell mechanism. The first time I rang with other people, to my horror, I managed to break a stay. This was presented to me as a trophy, but I guess the way we learn is by making mistakes and I have certainly learned from this experience.

What contribution do you think the St. Mark's Bell Ringers make to the church community and also the wider community?

The feedback from members of St Mark's has been wholly positive and I think the sound of bells is a form of worship which is an important part of why we attend St Mark's and draws attention to the central part of the church in our community. As far as I am aware there has been much positive views of the bells in the local community.

Why would you recommend someone consider joining the St. Mark's Bell Ringers

Just about anyone can do it with a little patience. Soon after starting you join a group of people who are always trying to improve their skills and enjoy each other's company and have fun. It is a way one can help to join in the worship of the church and be part of other people's great events such as weddings and sadly some funerals, and also to continue a great tradition of bell ringing which has been part of our culture for centuries.

If you are interested in getting involved with bell ringing at St Mark's Anglican Church Darling Point, want to learn more, or maybe just see some bells in action then, visit <https://stmarksdp.org/ministries/bellringers/> or get in touch via: bellringers@stmarksdp.org