

KV Articles – March 2017 – Giles Woodforde writes ...

Peal of Bells

On Palm Sunday, a peal of church bells will ring out over Kidlington rooftops. Ringing isn't normally allowed on Sunday afternoons in Lent, but this year Kidlington rector Felicity Scroggie has made an exception for a very special occasion.

Palm Sunday falls on 9 April, and the date marks the 100th anniversary – to the day – of the death of Raymond Judge, who lost his life fighting with the Canadian forces at Vimy Ridge during the First World War. His body was never found, but he is remembered both on the Vimy Ridge memorial, and on Kidlington war memorial.

As a teenager, Raymond was a Kidlington bell ringer before he emigrated to Canada. That's not surprising, for the Judge family has supplied Kidlington with a whole dynasty of ringers – their achievements are recorded on beautifully painted "peal boards" hanging in the tower of St Mary's Church.

The Judge family bell-ringing tradition continues to this day. The Palm Sunday peal has been organised by Raymond's great nephew Chris Turner, who first learnt to ring at Kidlington in 1966. Chris's brother Martin had also hoped to ring on Palm Sunday, but, alas, a broken ankle has got in the way: "Whilst he might just be able to, slowly, get himself up the tower, he can't stand up for 3.5 hours," Chris laments.



Picture above: Chris Turner and his daughter Charlotte point out Raymond Judge's name on the Vimy Ridge Memorial.

3.5 Hours? That's the time it takes to ring a full peal, with each ringer working throughout in a controlled manner to produce constant variations

in the sounding order of each individual bell – it’s nail-biting stuff, for any serious error can result in the whole peal grinding to a halt.

Each set of peal variations is called a method, and given a name. On Palm Sunday, a brand new method will be rung, and, most appropriately, it will be called “Vimy Ridge Surprise Major.”



Giles Woodforde is a long-time resident of Kidlington Village and was once a familiar voice to listeners of BBC Radio Oxford. He is best known as a feature writer and reviewer of the Performing Arts for the Oxford Times newspaper.

Articles are invited on any Kidlington-related subject. Address your article's copy to the advertising editor: louise.lloyd@kvoice.co.uk and please include a recent photograph of yourself with a brief summary of your connection to Kidlington village.