

Essex Association 58th Annual Dinner 2012

The 58th Essex Association Annual Dinner was held in the Crystal Room of the County Hotel in Chelmsford. The venue is conveniently situated within a few minutes walk from the train station and a couple of minutes from Chelmsford city centre making it an ideal location for an Essex-wide dinner.

Brian Meads, the Master of the Association, welcomed all those present, although fewer in number than in previous years, and asked the Revd Vernon Ross to say Grace. We then sat down to a splendid three-course meal with the first class service, which lived up to all expectations.

Once the dining was over it was time for the toasts. The Master began proceedings by proposing the Loyal Toast. After a short break he then proposed a toast to the Church and began by quoting George Burns who said "The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible".

Brian then cantered through his highlights of the past year and his visits to all Districts and all parts of the County and fondly recalled his invitation to the Kirby Le Soken Annual Christmas Curry at the Last Viceroy of British India in Frinton-on-Sea! Brian said he had again attended four of the six annual district meetings in January and was fascinated by the differing styles of running meetings. He went on to say how much he appreciated the work of all the District officers. At this point he presented Fred Bone and Colin Chapman with certificates for their 20 years of tutoring on the Essex Ringing Course. He summed up by saying that everyone had their own special relationship with the Church but it was the people that made it come alive.



Colin Chapman receiving his Essex Course long service certificate from the Master



Fred Bone receiving his Essex Course long service certificate from the Master

The Revd Vernon Ross replied on behalf of the Church. He had been invited to speak at this year's dinner as Priest-in-Charge of St Christopher's, Willingale, the Association's newest ring of six bells.

In the Spring of 2012 the sound of bells ringing were once again heard in Willingale after a 50-year absence when the £78,000 restoration project at St Christopher's including grants from the National Lottery and the Essex Association, was completed. Local volunteers built the new oak frame, a mezzanine floor and the new wheels. Prior to the restoration, the church had four bells, all four of which have been retuned, and they were augmented to make a 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt ring of six with one bell from Prittlewell and a new treble.

The parish of Willingale with Shellow Bowells (yes it does exist!) is a fairly small rural village with a population of approximately 483. The main part of the village is clustered around two churches with the remainder of the properties in groups, scattered over a wide area. The church of St Christopher sits in the same churchyard as the church of St Andrew. St Andrew's is not used on a regular basis and is in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. Whilst not unique, two churches in one churchyard is a rarity.

The Revd Ross began by saying that he was in fact Priest-in-Charge of Fyfield, Moreton, Bobbingworth and Willingale which meant he had four ringable towers in his Benefice. He then told the story of the Bishop and the New York City taxi driver arriving at the Pearly gates and being admitted to Heaven!

He spoke about the project at Willingale and thanked the Association for their grant and the advice they had freely given and recalled the

days when the many locals involved in the project had been served bacon rolls in a local barn on cold and frosty mornings. The project had brought the community together and enhanced village life and those involved had developed new and useful skills.

The perception of bellringing, he said, was a bit like church – old fashioned and not relating to modern society. However he felt it could be an Olympic sport as it provided good physical and mental exercise and was probably one of the only ‘sports’ which could be undertaken from 10 years old to 70! He went on to say the church in Willingale was alive and well and the partnership between bells and church was a powerful combination.



The Revd Vernon Ross with the Master looking on

Philip Gorrod, Chairman of the Suffolk Guild of Ringers, having found a handy pillar to lean on, proposed a toast to the Essex Association.

He began by saying that the geographical boundaries between Essex and Suffolk were largely ignored as both counties had their “eccentrics, odd-balls and downright weirdos”. He mentioned his childhood memories of watching Colchester United at Layer Road including the famous win against Leeds United on 13th February 1971! Philip then spoke about a recurring dream he had since accepting the invitation to speak at the Essex dinner that he was going to speak at the annual dinner of the Grimethorpe and District Association where the ‘In Memoriam’ list was longer than the list of current members!

Philip then referred to a particular informative, interesting, witty and seminal literary work he had researched for this speech - the Essex Girl Joke Book - whereupon he regaled us with the story

about the Essex girl and the can of Heinz Tomato soup! Having upset any Essex girls present, Philip then told a joke about David Sparling, Colin Chapman, Brian Meads and David Rothera all arriving at the Pearly Gates. He certainly knows how to win friends and influence people!

Philip ended by saying the Essex Association was one of the foremost ringing societies around today but despite all our best efforts ringers were still so little understood and were on a par with Morris dancers and train spotters all best described as “a quaint but harmless bunch of nutters”. However, it was very gratifying to see that not one but two bands of Essex youngsters had entered the Ringing World National Youth Competition in Birmingham this year.



Philip Gorrod after hearing it was last orders at the bar or beating a hasty retreat after having given his speech!

It was then back to the Master who proposed the toast to the Guests by formally welcoming Vernon and Francesca Ross and Philip Gorrod and Maggie Ross – but no relation to V&F apparently! In preparing for this part of the proceedings, Brian said he had Googled “Vernon Ross” only to discover that he was supply pastor for Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Pottstown, Philadelphia. He quickly realised this could not be the right Vernon Ross and went on to find the correct one. Brian then moved on to Philip Gorrod, a chartered accountant by profession and a Cumberland, who he had first come across on a Welsh Quilts Bellringing Weekend!

So the formal proceedings of the evening ended, the speeches sweepstake was won and the raffle was drawn. Peter Rayner of West Ham had to

be the luckiest man in the room as his tickets came up seven times although he honourably asked for six redraws! The Master admitted that he was colour blind and required some guidance with the ticket colours. Some confusion then arose when the Master called 238 white (when only yellow, green and pink tickets had been sold). However it transpired that some old tickets had been inadvertently left in the drum! Thank you to all those who generously supplied prizes and to those who bought tickets on the night.



A table of revellers from Writtle

Our lady guests were presented with beautiful orchids and one person on each table took the table decoration home.

So, with time left to catch up with friends, another excellent and enjoyable Essex dinner drew to a close and a good time was had by all. The Essex Association wishes to thank all attendees and guests and the County Hotel for looking after us. We look forward to being back again next year on the 5th October for the 59th Essex dinner.

Andrew Brewster
Association Treasurer