

A correction (and a bit of interesting history)

My 2017 update on Ringing for Public Events (p1284) included a misleading statement that ringing in November 1917 to mark initial success in the battle of Cambrai) was the only time that ringing was allowed during 1914-18 war. That is incorrect. First there was a typo – 29th should have been 23rd (the correct date that has been on the Things to Ring For web page since last May). Second and more seriously my fact checking wasn't thorough enough and I was misled by the information that I was supplied, not to mention the preponderance of websites that repeated the same over simplified statements. Some research revealed a more complex, and interesting story.

A few days after the start of World War One the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) became law. Its aim was to prevent any actions that could help the enemy or be prejudicial to the war effort. Its powers were very general but it gave sweeping power to the military authorities to commandeer property or production and to make Defence Regulations that prohibited any activity considered undesirable.

Ringing wasn't initially affected, but in October 2014 John Harley Bridges Hesse (later a Central Council member and the first Master of the Guildford Diocesan Guild) suggested that ringing should finish before dark because an aviator had been able to hear Weybridge bells from some distance. Some ringers began to impose their own curfew. The College Youths ended evening practices and others followed suit.

But it was well over a year before the night time curfew on ringing was made official. Regulation 12 covered the 'Control of Lights and Sounds ... between such hours, within such area, and during such period as may be specified in the order'. Regulation 12a was about lights after dark and regulation 12b (introduced in March 2016) stated that: '... the ringing and chiming of bells and the striking of clocks audible at such a distance as to be capable of serving as a guide for hostile aircraft shall be prohibited between the hours between which lights are so required to be extinguished or obscured ...'. This applied '... in any area in which an order made under Regulation 11(a) or Regulation 12 requiring lights to be extinguished or obscured is in force'.

So ringing wasn't banned (as some quite authoritative websites imply) but it was simply not allowed after dark (from half an hour after sunset to half an hour before sunrise). A lot of ringing continued. Over 200 peals were rung during 1916 & 1917 and there was much commemorative ringing for the fallen. Ringing meeting continued, commonly with 'no ringing after dark'. The restriction curtailed evening practices for much of the year, and in the winter it made service ringing impossible, which caused a lot of concern.

During the winter of 1916-17 the Metropolitan authorities relaxed the rule to allow ringing until 9pm and ringers around the country asked for similar concessions, many of which were granted. Following this success, in the autumn of 1917 ringers were encouraged to ask for similar concessions and to share their experience in *The Ringing World*. A few authorities said that the earlier concession was still in place, some agreed to renew it but many refused. Air raids on moonlit nights had increased and the authorities were concerned that on dark nights aircraft would be able to home in on the sound of bells. One ringer was sceptical that a crew two miles up would be able to hear ringing over the noise of the engines, but the authorities clearly favoured caution.

By mid November the pressure from ringing societies and church authorities for evening relaxations led to a national statement that the restriction would remain in the eastern counties but that local commanders had the discretion to extend it until 9pm in other areas.

This announcement was published in *The Ringing World* on 23 November – the day on which the Battle of Cambrai began, so the decision must have predated any news from the battle by at least several days. Two weeks later a letter from the Northern Command was published with details of permitted times at different places within its area. This was in the same edition as the 'victory ringing' (for Cambrai) which had taken place the week before.

So was 'the ban lifted' to celebrate the initial gains at Cambrai in November 2017? The 'ban' had never applied during daylight, in many places it had been partially relaxed long before the battle, and a more general selective relaxation appears to have been in place for the rest of the war. There is no evidence of a temporary lifting of restrictions.

The most significant aspect of the ringing for Cambrai (as David Underdown notes in his letter) was the upsurge in public demand for ringing. The Editor reported these demands the week after the battle began and over the next couple of weeks there were reports of a lot of 'victory ringing' (a rather premature description) and there must have been much more that wasn't reported. So it seems the event was accompanied by a lot of special ringing, even though there is no evidence of a 'ban' being lifted for it.

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