

Press Release

Female bell ringers to attempt a marathon first at St Paul's Cathedral

Thursday, 2nd August 2012

As the eyes of the world fall on St Paul's during this Sunday's Olympic women's marathon (5 August), a historic first will be taking place inside the Cathedral's bell tower.

To mark the Olympic occasion, which will see the world's greatest distance runners pass St Paul's on three occasions, 13 women will be attempting their own marathon by attempting to ring the first ever full peal on the Cathedral's bells by an all female band.

Since they were installed in 1878 there have only been 92 full peals, the vast majority for great national, City or Cathedral occasions. Women ringers have taken part in some of these peals since 1972 but only as part of mixed teams.

The first ever all-female peal in the world was rung almost exactly 100 years ago, on 20 July 1912, on the much lighter bells of Christ Church, Cubitt Town, East London. At the time, the ringers' weekly journal, the Ringing World, estimated that there were only scores of women ringers while their male counterparts numbered tens, if not hundreds, of thousands.

The peal at Cubitt Town took just over three hours. Because of the greater weight of metal, this attempt at St Paul's is estimated to last around four hours.

No breaks are allowed and if anyone has to stop for any reason the attempt will fail. The start is timed for 10.30am so that ringing is well established by the time the athletes arrive in the City.

Phil Rogers of the St Paul's Cathedral Guild of Ringers, said: "St Paul's bells present a particular challenge and a full peal is something which can be accomplished only by the strongest and most experienced ringers. The heaviest bell, the tenor, weighs over three tons and the long draught of rope from the ringing room to each bell adds to the difficulties.

"Today, there are at least as many female as male ringers and they have scaled most of the heights of ringing achievement. St Paul's remains, therefore, as one of the last unconquered peaks."

The ringers are drawn from a wide area. Five of them are members of the St Paul's Cathedral Guild of Ringers with the rest travelling from elsewhere in Greater London, Bedfordshire, Bristol, Cambridge and Devon.

Ages range from 20s to 60s. Susan L Apter of St Paul's Cathedral will be conducting the performance and the tenor bell will be rung by Pauline Champion of Devon and Margaret Whiteley of Bedfordshire.

Sadly, Alison Regan of Worcester, who was to have rung the two ton 11th bell, died suddenly two weeks ago. This challenge is now taken up by Claire Roulstone of St Paul's.

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For more information please contact Ed Holmes, Press and Communications Manager,
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St Paul's Cathedral

St Paul's is the cathedral church of the diocese of London, which it has served for over 1,400 years. The current building has become a potent symbol of the life of a nation and is one of the world's most beautiful buildings. Designed by Sir Christopher Wren in the late seventeenth century, its stones have absorbed the hopes, fears, sorrows and joys of generations and stand as an enduring symbol of our communion with those gone before and those still to come. Each year nearly two million people flock to the cathedral for services, concerts, debates, educational events, performing arts and sightseeing. All are most welcome.

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