

From *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 23 1930 (p. 6)

SAFFRON WALDEN.

A Town of Bells.

(BY C.G.K.)

In the county of Essex, about 41 miles from London, is the fascinating old town of Saffron Walden, for many reasons interesting, since it is the proud possessor of the ruins of an old castle, some really fine old timbered houses, a most comprehensive museum, some mounds claimed to be the remains of a very ancient battlefield, and a magnificent old parish church with a fine peal of bells.

Of all these, the bells make by far the most lasting impression on a visitor, specially if it happens to be the month of June, and more fortunate still, the 27th day of that month, for on that day the bells ring from early morn till late at night, with only a few short intervals of silence.

I chanced to be in Saffron Walden on that day last year, and as I was staying quite close to the church, heard the bells to their full advantage—and disadvantage.

Early in the morning their pealing commenced, charming me with its merry music. At noon the bells were still ringing up in their lofty steeple, but now their merry music no longer charmed me. It had changed to a mechanical monotony, and I found myself thinking, talking, walking in time with the bells. At 9 o'clock the banging, jangling clatter of the bells was still disturbing the evening calm, and I fully realised by now, why, on that day, so many of the regular inhabitants of Saffron Walden made appointments in distant places. So taking my bicycle, I peddled as speedily as I could away from that nerve-shattering uproar.

HOW THE CUSTOM BEGAN.

That annual disturbing of the peace is not the passing whim of some aggravated bellringer, nor the premeditated protest of an over-taxed ratepayer, but the fulfilment of a request in the will of a grateful man. This is its origin :

Very many years ago, one of the leading residents of Saffron Walden lost himself in the woods which then surrounded this old town. Round and round he wandered, growing more and more weary and despondent as the approaching night hastened on. Suddenly a dear familiar sound reached his ears, the bells of Saffron Walden; and getting his direction from them, he found his way home. As a mark of gratitude he left in his will a sum of money, in perpetuity, to have the bells rung all day on the 27th June, and he requested also, that two guineas be paid annually to the rector who was to preach, on that anniversary, a short commemorative sermon.

And so, fine though the bells are, and proud of them though the townsfolk may be, there is at least one day in the year on which they lose their deservedly high place of favour, for on account of them Saffron Walden is, on that day, a far emptier place at noon than it was at dawn.