

PICTON

# Love for pastime rings bell

ENGINEER REIGNITES PASSION

Andriana Simos

AFTER discovering girls and motorbikes at the age of 15, Picton's Doug Cooke lost his love for bell ringing.

It took 50 years for his passion to be reignited and today it is as strong as ever.

Mr Cooke, born in a small village in Worcestershire, England, took up bell ringing at the age of 10 with instruction from his experienced father.

After losing interest in the practice as a teenager, the design engineer recaptured his passion for bells during a holiday in Perth in 1969.

"I went to the bell tower on the banks of the Swan River, pulled on the bell rope and the lady who worked there

asked me if I had been a bell ringer," Mr Cooke said.

"She encouraged me to get back into it and gave me a list of all the bell towers in Australia."

Mr Cooke was surprised to learn there was a ring of six bells at St James Anglican Church at Menangle.

"I went up into the ringing chamber and met the bell ringers. They said practise was on Wednesday nights and they would love to have me along," he said.



Doug Cooke (right), with tower captain Roy Craddock at St James Anglican Church in Menangle, has an enduring passion for the sound and practice of bell ringing.

Picture: ROBERT POZO

As an engineer, Mr Cooke has also played a part in designing the new bell tower in Bowral's Uniting Church.

The 73-year-old said he was most proud when the bells rang for the first time at Christmas.

"I felt proud that I had been involved in the process," he said

Mr Cooke has taken his

bell ringing skills to other countries and he encourages younger people to take up the art because he says it brings "joy".

"Last year, I visited Canada and the US and had the pleasure of ringing in Boston at the Advent Church and at the Catholic Cathedral in Toronto which has 12 bells," he said.

"I have also run the bells at weddings, funerals, Christmas and New Year's Eve. It is a very good exercise not only for the body but also the mind, as you advance and start to learn the various methods."

Even after all these years, Mr Cooke will continue to ring his beloved bells for as long as he can.

## THE BELL TOLLS

- In the Middle Ages, it was believed that the sound of a bell could disperse thunder
- Bells used as a call to wake, feast, fight and work
- Church bells are uncommon in Australia, with about 60 churches featuring bells, compared with England's 5000 churches with installed bells

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