

BAILIWICK

Let's return from the depths of music theory and look at something far more straightforward – the cow bell. Traditionally hung around the neck of cows they allow farmers to locate their stock (provided their land isn't too large) as well as provide hours of amusement for children attempting to make it clear that the strange four-legged creature they have drawn in art class is a cow and not a giraffe!

Cows have been domesticated by humans for over 10,500 years – about the same length of time that humans have been living close together. However, the earliest example of anything approaching a bell to help find bovines is some 5,000 years more recent. And it's here that I hear my first cries of disbelief. “But that predates both the bronze and the iron age!” you announce. And you would be right, for this period lies firmly in the area of the neolithic era: the *New Stone Age*. Metallurgy hadn't been invented.

The earliest cowbells were made of pottery and have been discovered in Africa. Metal bells didn't appear until 4,000 years ago, in China, and not to Europe until about 1,500 years ago when monks began casting bells. The first metal cow bells are about 2,000 years old although the earliest written evidence of them comes from Germany in the fifteenth century, where the term *bellwether* is to be found (though literally this means a bell tied to a sheep rather than a cow, the inference of using a bell to locate domesticated animals remains the same).

Over time, bells of different pitches were used for different animals, the higher pitches being for smaller animals (because the bells were smaller and easier for them to carry).

Their use as a musical instrument can be dated back to 1904 when Gustav Mahler used them to give a country feel in his Symphony No. 6, and Richard Strauss, the same year, utilised them in his Alpine Symphony.

The advent of jazz music saw the cowbell being utilised as a percussion instrument, though a set of tuned cowbells can be used by a team of

gifted musicians to play virtually any tune.

It's often the case that an item designed for one use can find itself used in other ways. Perhaps God has a way that we are to be used to spread the Gospel that we have not yet discovered.