

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITIES

SOCIETY OF CHANGE RINGERS



2025/26 Annual Newsletter

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Members active - 26

(Attended more than one practice night throughout the academic year)

Frank Agar, Rob Carr, Isla Casserley, Chris Faulkner, Charlotte Holiday, Oscar Hornberger, Megan Johnstone, Nikolai Komar, Lewis McEwan, Connie Lupton, Molly Mullaney, Oliver Mumberson, Ioan Normington, Lydia Redman, Edmund Roberts, Lizzy Tennant, Aby Thomas, Amanda Veitch, Harry Wake, Louisa Webster, Ben Wigley, Ben Williams, Lucas Williams, Heather Wilkinson, Fraser Wood, Jimmy Yeoman

2025/26 Committee

Master	Lucas Williams
Deputy Master	Ioan Normington
Secretary	Nikolai Komar
Treasurer	Ben Williams
Steeple Keeper	Oscar Hornberger
Social Secretary	Ben Wigley

2026/27 Committee

Master	Nikolai Komar
Deputy Master	Rob Carr
Secretary	Charlotte Holiday
Treasurer	Ben Wigley
Steeple Keeper	Fraser Wood
Social Secretaries	Oliver Mumberson, Louisa Webster

Year in Review

Nikolai Komar

There has been quite a lot of turnover at BUSCR over the last year. While our active members may have modestly increased from 24 to 26 since the last newsletter, 14 of those joined the society in September. We have benefitted greatly from existing ringers joining the society, though we have still taught 5 of those from scratch - as with last year, teaching remains a priority, as we've also hosted three ART courses at Edgbaston since the start of September.

In many ways this year has been a matter of building on last year's foundation. We still worked tirelessly on recruitment, running a stall situated just outside the student Guild every day in Freshers Week and running four taster sessions over those first two weeks. We still worked hard to train those we recruited, through extra handling sessions week-on-week across the Autumn. We still organised many of the same socials, including the Halloween quiz, pancake practice and end of year BBQ, alongside several trips to Selly Oak's Dilshad's.

On top of this, however, we've added fortnightly Monday away practices to our repertoire, booking towers across the West Midlands to provide a more advanced session for several of our ringers. This has been paired with a busy quarter peal schedule to ensure as much progress as possible. One member even emerged with the revelation they were bored of Dilshad's being the default meal out; they subsequently organised a Christmas meal at The Bell in Harborne, with a quick ring at St Peter's beforehand. This year has been about making additions wherever possible, and tweaks wherever helpful.

Perhaps the biggest addition in the last year has been the launch of the Rehang Project, which has provided a much longer term challenge for the society, on an immense scale; it's an initiative that has to continue to be built into all our activities in order to be feasible. Amidst the perennial admin that comes with the Rehang however, it's even more important to emphasise the success we've had with socials, quarters, peals and outings. That is why we're here, after all.

Particular thanks must go to Lucas for all his initiative and planning in the last year. This includes the organisation of the joint-unis outing and launch of the Rehang Project in particular, the latter of which he will continue to lead. Most of our achievements simply would not have otherwise been possible. We are immensely grateful and can only hope that the rest of us can continue to show such dedication towards the success of the society following his graduation this summer.

Edgbaston Rehang Project

Charlotte Holiday

One of the privileges of ringing at St Bartholomew's is that we inherit a remarkable set of bells. From our time as students, we all know what a joy they are, and for many of us, the tower became far more than just a place to ring. Like many ringers before us, however, we have discovered that enjoying lovely bells also brings a responsibility to maintain them. As is often the case with historic installations, the bells themselves are in excellent condition, but many of the components around them are now showing signs of one hundred years of service to us all. Through routine maintenance, and inspections and discussions with professional bellhangers, it became clear that a programme of restoration would be needed if we are to preserve the installation for the next century.

The project began last summer with a number of important improvements. After a clapper seized during a peal attempt, seven clappers were removed and overhauled by John Taylor & Co as soon as was possible, ensuring reliable operation and reducing further wear. At Christmas, new tail ends were fitted to the bell ropes and proper lighting was installed throughout the belfry. Improved lighting has transformed the tower as a working environment and brought it up to a much safer standard for routine maintenance. None of us will miss the joys of head torches!

Attention is now turning to the next phase of the project. During ringing, the main bearings of the sixth and seventh bells have started rumbling and squeaking, indicating wear within the bearing assemblies. To prevent further deterioration, both bells will need to be raised from their pits and stripped for detailed inspection, with worn components replaced as necessary. We will also be correcting a long-standing issue with the third bell rope, where a misaligned floor boss is causing unnecessary rope wear and affecting the handling of the bell.

What began as a relatively modest maintenance exercise has gradually revealed the scale of the work required across the tower. Inspections have identified early signs of corrosion on the bell frame, worn roller wheels and damage to sections of the belfry floor. None of these issues are immediately critical, but all are the sort of problems that become significantly more expensive if left unaddressed for much longer.

As a result, we have embarked on a major restoration project to celebrate the bells' centenary in 2027. The proposed works include repairs to the belfry floor, conservation and repainting of the bell frame, replacement of worn fittings, improvements to sound control and a number of smaller enhancements that will improve both the longevity and ringability of the bells which BUSCR have enjoyed for so many years.

To launch the project last month, we rang quarter peals of St Bartholomew's Bob Doubles and honoured months of preparation by naming our own method - www.Edgbastonbells.org

Surprise Minor. Over the next year we are planning many more fundraising events, including an attempt at the Three Peaks Challenge, involvement in Birmingham's Heritage Week and hosting handbell workshops!



The St Bartholomew's Doubles Band

Many BUSCR alumni amongst us will remember learning to ring at Edgbaston, attending evening practices, or using the society to build up to joining the wider Birmingham ringing scene. Those experiences are only possible because of investments of time and energy into maintaining these bells. The current restoration project is our turn to do the same.

As we approach the centenary of the bells, our aim is clear: not merely to keep the bells ringing today, but to ensure that students arriving at Birmingham decades from now will inherit the same exceptional bells that we have all been fortunate enough to experience.

Please see <https://edgbastonbells.org/> for more information about the project and how to support it.

Socials

Louisa Webster

While back-to-back QPs and multi-hour handling practices are effective bonding strategies in themselves, the numerous socials that were held throughout the year were undoubtedly the best way for members to build friendships. Socials this year spanned a variety of distances- ranging from a foggy hike in the Malvern hills to a spring picnic in the park just behind one member's house.



Optimal hiking conditions

However, a firm favourite was BUSCR's outing to Coventry, which was combined with a pizza and ice skating (not at the same time). The slightly complicated process of ferrying everyone around the West Midlands due to lack of public transport in places (thank you Nikolai and Lucas) was well worth the wobbly ice-conga line and skating races (which involved absolutely no cheating whatsoever). Consensus agrees it's a definite repeat for next year. Other socials this year consisted of curry nights, bowling, board game evenings, halloween quizzes and pancake making



Coventry Ice Skating

(and eating). The incredible line up of weekly baking for Friday practices deserves a mention in here too, and of course the post-practice pub trips! I'm sure you can all imagine our delight when the Joe's Spoons opened on UoB campus not too long ago.

I for one have loved being part of BUSCR the past year and only have my friends to thank for making it such an enjoyable and welcoming experience! I am very much looking forward to what the next year brings (I'm already getting the pub crawls and bouldering trips locked in) and of course welcoming the new cohort in September. See you all soon!



End of year barbecue

Outings

Oliver Mumberson

Throughout each year, we aim to do outings as regularly as possible, usually to locations surrounding Birmingham that are easily accessible by train. We approached the start of the year with a relaxed and social outing to ease in new recruits, and end it with our longest outings to a couple more towers, allowing those new recruits a chance to show off all they've learned over the year.

Our first outing of the year was to Coventry in early December. The main heroes of this outing turned out to be the two members of the society with cars – who spent much of the day carting the rest of us to and from Birmingham International – as well as our youngest unofficial member, Nikolai's 9-year-old brother. In true festive fashion, we spent the morning ringing at two towers and the afternoon discovering who had a secret talent (or lack thereof) for ice skating, which to this day has remained one of the most commended social events, and one that may well become a tradition.

In the new year, as part of our 71st Annual Dinner weekend, we headed off towards Redditch for three towers, this time an outing dedicated wholly to ringing. Whilst this meant we had to endure the bells of Redditch's St Stephen's, we were also treated to Northfield, a tower which has often been described as one member's favourite tower in Birmingham. Though the outing may have been outshone by the evening's dinner, this meant that we were

joined by many BUSCR alumni, giving many of those learning more advanced methods a unique chance to ring a higher-quality touch on higher numbers.

Towards the end of the semester, in early March, we headed off to Warwickshire. Some rather unfortunate availability from several towers meant that this outing was more walking-heavy, however we still visited some of the most beautiful churches so far, including an exclusive view of Warwick castle and the surrounding countryside from the top of St Mary's.

The week after, we took part in an outing



The group atop St Mary's

consisting of a collection of university ringing societies from around the country. This incredible day saw the coming together of over 40 students from York to Southampton, and even included a cultural lunchtime break trip to the museum and art gallery. We were lucky enough that this was organised by our very own, and so held on our home turf, Birmingham City



Over 40 students in St Martin's!

Centre, therefore giving many a chance to ring on St Martin's 16 bells, as well as the renowned Birmingham Cathedral.

During the Easter holiday, an extra outing to Ben's home towers in Swindon was organised: a four tower outing, of which the middle two proposed some unique challenges to the band's day. In Rodbourne we were joined (and repeatedly attacked) by quite the hoard of ladybirds, while Chiseldon was delightful... until a rope snapped. A post-outing BBQ was also arranged, which was unfortunately timed quite spectacularly to end just as the rain stopped. Nonetheless, these hiccups didn't stop it being another enjoyable and successful outing!

Our final outing of the year took us across Shropshire, visiting an array of charming towns such as Wellington and Shrewsbury. However, apparently five towers wasn't enough, as some members of the band opted to 'ring' a 120 of bob doubles, performed on the train home using only

imaginary handbells and the band's best "bong" noise.

This year has seen some of our most successful outings so far. A special thanks to everyone who has organised one of this year's outings, especially given the added challenge of working around difficult train schedules and the tremendous quantity of emails that have to be sent! In the coming years, we aim to keep this up and explore both new places as well as renew already visited towers with a new band of recruits.



Annual Dinner

Ioan B G Normington - extract from the Ringing World Spring 2026 Issue 56



I had the honour of giving the Master's speech this year (Lucas, the Master at the time had fobbed it off on me) and while a bit nerve-racking, it was good fun. The theme for the speech, taken from a more creative previous Master, was an award ceremony for the society. The main reason behind this was that we had decided to renew the Master's award, an award for the biggest commitment to ringing and the society as a whole, which had been ended when a previous Master had left it in a pub while drunk.

As an aside, I had that story confirmed to me by said Master in the gents toilets, who then followed to offer me a drink of a mystery liquid from a water bottle he'd gotten from below the sink, assuring me that it was "30% proof". Alongside the Master's award, we gave out a number of different awards, ranging from the most southern award for one of our York-based members and most impoverished student, for a member whose family property portfolio went from 14 to a mere 9 in the current climate.

The Master's speech was followed by our wonderful guest speaker, Charlie Linford, who had recounted some stories from her time ringing with BUSCR and what the letters from "BUSCR" actually meant. After the speeches and food, we had a raffle to raise some money for the Rehang Project. While I did manage to get out with a bottle of vodka and some aftershave, a personal highlight for me was Michael Parker gleefully taking a bottle of wine, only to be crushed when he sat down and realised that it was non-alcoholic. After all the speeches and food, a number of us departed the venue to enjoy the night elsewhere.

After a failed attempt to get 23 people into a karaoke bar for free by Lucas, we all headed to mine and Lucas' house to enjoy the evening further, where I think the last guest left at 3am. The afters included (I think) a puzzle, several drinks, some twister and a game of Wolverhampton Monopoly.

The day after the dinner, we had some more ringing with two quarters (well done to Fraser for ringing two quarters in one day for the first time) and a first peal of Stedman Cinqes for Rob. Overall it was a great weekend and a very memorable time!



A (deputy) master at work

Steeple Report

Fraser Wood

It's safe to say that this year has been a successful one for BUSCR, and that success is certainly visible in the tower maintenance that has taken place this year. It can't be denied that long steeple keeping sessions can sometimes be arduous, but the noticeable improvements in all areas of the tower make them very worthwhile.

This year, after a 3-year long effort, new lighting was finally brought to the Belfry, making work there far less treacherous and much easier. On top of that, it is also far cleaner, with much of the rubble and gunk that had accumulated up there being removed over multiple sessions. This improved environment made our vast efforts in stay indexing and adjustments far more pleasant.

The middle room has also seen a lot of progress. Many items that lived there

unused have been removed, providing more room for maintenance and storage. We have purchased storage boxes to ensure resources like spare stays, extra ropes and society archives don't suffer in damp conditions. Furthermore, plans in place for next year include constructing a proper work bench to make future maintenance simpler, and purchasing a higher quality set of tools for the society that can live in the tower permanently.



The belfry with the new lighting in place

Finally, the ringing chamber has seen a rework, in which peal boards have not only been added to, but meticulously rearranged into a more organised and visually pleasing layout. As well as this, most of the holes that have appeared in the walls have been filled in and old wall

fittings (like those on the board displaying the old clapper) have been replaced and reinforced.

The great social environment that has been fostered in the society has truly made steeple keeping all the more enjoyable this year and I'm sure next year it will be just as so.



New peal board arrangement

Treasury Report

Ben Wigley

Our accounts for the 2026/27 committee year started off with an opening balance of £2,566.68. The start of this year has already been filled with around 30 student quarter peals at St Bartholomew's, with the standard donation being £2 a rope. This has raised a substantial chunk for the

accounts, providing us some more cash on hand for any routine tower costs that might occur. In addition to this, we were joint winners of the ART "Band or Cluster of the Year" award, which further funded us with another £200.

A big part of the treasury has been finding cost-effective solutions to tower maintenance. We noticed, for instance,

that we had various stays in the middle room which could not be used in their current state due to inaccurate measurements or not being drilled. We therefore put time into sawing, drilling and planing these so they could be used as viable spare stays, saving us significant money on ordering new stays. Any money that can be saved is even more significant in the context of our Rehang project.

Phase 1 of the Rehang project involved upgrading the lighting in the belfry so we could see when doing any maintenance work on the bells, which was supported by the St Martin’s Guild with a hugely beneficial £222 grant.

For phases 2 and 3, our Rehang project fundraiser aims to raise up to £45,000 to complete various works in the Belfry. While this is a huge amount, the works also intend to save the society money in the long term. Repainting the frame, for instance, would stop it from rusting and physically deteriorating, which would be much more costly to repair than the cost of repainting. Meanwhile, the plan to convert the Hastings stays would make broken stays massively cheaper to replace. Wherever possible, we have directed our funds towards the Rehang and we are currently organising various fundraisers (see p14) to make this possible.

Quarters and Peals

‘BUSCR Firsts’ 2025/26

	Quarters	Peals
Autumn Term	26	
Spring Term	28	2
Summer Term	20	2
Totals	74	4

52 of these performances took place at Edgbaston, with several others taking place at local towers, particularly Moseley St Anne’s, or on quarter peal outings. These also included first quarter peals for 4 ringers recruited in September and first peals for 5 ringers, 4 of whom were recruited and taught by the society in September 2024, alongside 2 first peals as conductor.

Conducting a first Peal - [5040 Minor \(6m\)](#)

Rob Carr

“
...[T]he news that I would be conducting was met with, well, little interest at all really. But, successfully completing the peal definitely was a rewarding moment, not just as the conductor but as part of a team that had developed significantly over a short period. It turns out that “measured interest” can, with enough Wednesday evenings, become something rather more substantial, and this felt like a particularly strong example of what consistent practice and collective effort can achieve. I very much appreciated how smoothly the attempt went. Being able to concentrate almost entirely on the calls and my own line was a blessing. I had always expected that I might forget a call, or attempt to put someone right incorrectly, but thankfully neither materialised.



The band, featuring 3 first pealers!

Ringling a first peal - [5040 Plain Bob Triples](#)

Charlotte Holiday

“
...By late May, practice quarters had been successful and band placement was confirmed. Only the small task of scoring the peal remained... Leading up to BUSCR's Ringing Fest, I'd organised



The (best) band photo

the outing to Shropshire, helped coordinate towers for the ten quarter peals, and had to learn some of the methods for those - particularly www.edgbastonbells.org Surprise Minor - so thoughts about peals were pretty much zero. Having scored five quarter peals the day before

the first peal, I knew that I was capable of ringing for the required time, albeit with breaks to drive between towers after each. Of course, as Wednesday morning rolled round, pre-peal nerves set in on the drive to the church but I needn't have worried. The peal was scored comfortably, with everyone focussing on each piece of work until hearing those favourite words: "this is all." Grins broke out amongst the band, pleased that the preparation had been worth it for myself and Lewis to score our first peal at first attempt. The band photo was also a particular highlight, an idea Lucas had posted in the band group chat the week before. Despite heavy rain during most of the peal, we managed to catch a window of sunshine to head up to the roof and get the drone in position. As a slight BellBoard addict myself, noticing the peal appear as an 'other highly rated performance' and seeing it as the featured performance for over a week was hugely gratifying. Thank you to all who gave us a like!

Ringling a first Quarter

Heather Wilkinson

“ ...I am not entirely sure what a quarter-peal is, but sometime in March I spent 45 minutes ringing a tenor sporadically in time while someone said 'Bob' at various intervals. I am also



First Quarters for four ringers!

not entirely sure who Major Bob is, nor why bell-ringers like him so much. Maybe he can explain to me what a quarter-peal is? Afterwards I had some rather large blisters which I have decided to blame on delicate hands and not shoddy technique. Despite having heard church bells all my life, it had never occurred to me that there was a group of people dedicated to ringing them in implausibly elaborate ways. After being roped in, I was surprised to find a whole secret world tucked away in church towers; where bells (alongside old boats and trains) are one of the few objects in the English language which still have a gender; where 'Hunting' is not something involving guns and cruelty to animals (although anyone who has heard my attempts at a Plain Hunt may consider it cruelty to humans). Many thanks (and apologies) to the infinitely patient bellringers who have taught and rung with me. Any incompetence is entirely on my part and does not reflect their incredible teaching and ringing abilities. Overall it has been a surreal pleasure to learn the ropes of bellringing.

Upcoming: The Three Peaks Challenge

Ben Williams

The fundraiser we've decided to take on for the Rehang this summer is the Three Peaks Challenge. The challenge is to climb the highest mountains in Scotland, England and Wales in under 24 hours. Those being Ben Nevis (Scotland), Scafell Pike (England) and Snowdon (Wales). It's a grueling challenge that 60% of people fail to complete in 24 hours, and requires strong endurance, careful planning and a fair amount of determination to complete.

The planned date for our attempt is Saturday 29th August. We are aiming to complete the peaks in the order listed above, beginning with Ben Nevis. Our journey will start on Thursday evening, when we will drive most of the way to Fort William before stopping overnight at a service station. After getting some rest, we will resume the drive on Friday, where we hope to ring a quarter at Tulloch to help promote the event on BellBoard, before spending the night in an Airbnb in Fort William (4km from base camp).

We will need to get our rest in, as we will be starting the hike up Ben Nevis bright and early in the morning. After completing Ben Nevis, we will drive to Scafell before finally finishing with Snowdon.

To prepare for the challenge, we have all started to put in some serious time on the cardio machines in the gym, and day trips to the Chilterns have been planned. We are also planning to attempt Scafell Pike on 1st August as a practice climb, giving us a chance to test our fitness and pacing before the full challenge later in the month.

You may be wondering who is taking part, and how this challenge came about. It all started, as many good BUSCR ideas do, in the pub after a Friday practice night, where various fundraising suggestions were being thrown around. Somebody mentioned the Three Peaks, which was met with a few enthusiastic agreements. Later that night Lucas had already made a group chat and started planning and polling for dates. The 4 people taking part are: Ben Wigley, Ben Williams, Tommy Groves and Lucas Williams. The knowledgeable among you may be wondering why Tommy, a Bristol ringer, is helping us out. The answer is that much of BUSCR are apparently indispensable at their summer jobs.

If you'd like to help us in raising money for the Edgbaston Bells Project, we will send out additional information on how to support this fundraiser in the coming weeks!

Mailing List and Annual Dinner

The 2027 Annual Dinner will take place on *Saturday, 30th January* - save the date! More information including venue, ticket price, and a form to sign up will be sent out via the Mailing List in due course.

If you have received this newsletter you are on the mailing list! We are likely still missing a lot of contact details, so please forward this to all your BUSCR colleagues.

Send us a message to be added to the list: buscr.committee@gmail.com