

## Editor's Foreword – *Andy Clark*

Welcome! So here we are again and how quickly three months passes! Plenty to read about in this edition, despite Arthur try to convince us that the summer is quieter for Guild activities! Thanks as ever to all the contributors.

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## Ringling Master's Report – *Arthur Reeves*

August is always a slightly quieter month for Guild activities, with a number of people away on holidays. However, the summer did see two well-attended focus workshops – one on six bells and a Cambridge Surprise Maximus practice. Particular thanks to Phil and James Ramsbottom, who organised both events, and to those who attended and made both evenings possible. The summer months saw the usual 'Brumdingers' meet and the Moseley mid-week practice.



September has proven to be 'business as usual' in terms of a busy and full calendar. On top of the usual menu of focus workshops and practices, Birmingham played host to those who have completed Level 5 of the Learning the Ropes (LtR) scheme. Organised and co-ordinated by Stef Warboys, 18 ringers enjoyed a weekend ringing around Birmingham including at the Bullring and St Philip's. Though this was not a Guild event, the weekend was supported by many Guild members and included three local ringers who celebrated successfully completing this milestone – Mike Keeble from Harborne, Stella Tew from Moseley and Adam Knight-Markiegi from Shirley. All three have also been keen supporters of the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing, regularly supporting others to progress up the LtR scheme.

Again, though not strictly a 'Guild event', it is worth highlighting the Project Pickle Egg events which many Guild members will benefit from. Simon Linford has led on developing a pathway to learning Surprise Major methods. The next 'pickling event' takes place on 20<sup>th</sup> October in Birmingham.

I have mentioned several times over my time as Ringing Master that the Guild is only ever as strong as the active involvement of its members. I am extremely grateful to a team of people who regularly organise and co-ordinate workshops and practices. With their support, we are able to put on a far greater range of opportunities that Guild officers could provide alone. However, we'd like to keep increasing this pool of people. Hence, I have launched the 'X Practices' to help support individuals and towers to organise focus practices which support what they want to work on. The deal is that I will support getting some experienced ringers in, if others organise the focus and the venue. The benefit for towers is a practice purposefully designed for their needs! October sees a Stedman focus practice and November and December will both see a focus on ringing up and down.

I'm also aware that other towers may well host their own focus practices. Please let me know if you want me to add anything to the monthly digest which may be of interest to other Guild members.

As I write this, news is just in that the Cathedral band - comprising Guild members - came third in the first ever "Robert Smith 12-bell Contest". The podium positions were incredibly close, with only 2% separating third from first. It's worth noting that none of the ringers were current members of the 12-bell contest team. Huge congratulations to James Ramsbottom and his team on their success here. See article later in the newsletter.

For up to date information and latest calendar use the website <http://www.stmartinsguild.org/>

## 6 / 10 / 12-Bell Workshops and Events – *Phil Ramsbottom & Jonathan Townsend*

### 11<sup>th</sup> July: 6-Bell Workshop

A bit of a different workshop on this occasion as it was a return visit from some of those who had attended the June theory session in The Wellington and with a view to being able to illustrate in ringing some of the terminology learnt. Two people dropped out when it became apparent England were playing Croatia that evening, but the final score was their just reward! Special mention though to Bob and Will from Northfield and King's Norton who we'd only previously seen at the June event so thanks to you both for coming along.



### 25<sup>th</sup> July: 10/12-Bell Event

We allowed ourselves some pure indulgence on this occasion and scored a perfectly respectable quarter of Bristol Surprise Maximus at St Philip's Cathedral (see panel). Very well done to Jonathan Townsend ringing his first quarter peal in the method.

### 8<sup>th</sup> August: 6-Bell Workshop

This Plain Minor workshop turned out to be an interesting event. It was the total opposite of the previous workshop as we had three more students arrive than expected, which called for a quick change of plan! The group was split into two, with one remaining upstairs grappling with how to ring a far place method by better knowing a seconds place method (for example, ringing College Minor by knowing St Clements); with the second group in the classroom to learn how to ring Single Oxford Minor by knowing Plain Bob Minimus. This second group then joined in the fun upstairs to put into practice what had been learnt.

### 28<sup>th</sup> August: 10/12-Bell Event

This session saw a Bristol Surprise Maximus practice at St Martin's. Please see Julie Tarling's article later in the newsletter for more details on this one.

### 12<sup>th</sup> September: 6-Bell Workshop

A more advanced workshop this time focusing on ringing Bourne Surprise Minor which is Cambridge above the treble. Opinions were exchanged as to whether it's better to ring it that way or simply to learn the line, and also if it's preferable to learn as a first Surprise method. Thanks to Steve Askew for coming along from Brewood.

#### Birmingham, West Midlands

St Martin

Wednesday, 25 July 2018 (39–1–19 in C)

1344 Bristol Surprise Maximus

- 1 Matt Hardy
- 2 Mark Eccleston
- 3 Susan J Healy
- 4 Stef Warboys
- 5 Simon Linford (C)
- 6 Arthur J Reeves
- 7 Tony Daw
- 8 James P Ramsbottom
- 9 Jonathan B Townsend
- 10 Phil Ramsbottom
- 11 Michael P A Wilby
- 12 Alistair J Cherry

1st of Bristol maximus - 9

Birthday compliment to Tony Daw

### Remembering Margaret Hunt – Nicola Willetts

The journey to diagnosis began with a near faint, handbell ringing at Christmas 2016 and several consultants. Four hospitals later, September 2017 saw Margaret receive a diagnosis of Amyloidosis Myeloma, which is a very rare condition that affects kidney function predominantly, alongside bone cancer. The nature of this condition is that everything comes to a close within a year of diagnosis for many patients. Margaret lived with the diagnosed condition for eleven months, the last four of which were spent in a hospice, nursing home and hospital.

Throughout the chemotherapy, Margaret was keen that both handbells and tower bells should continue, and on some occasions, we even held handbell practice in her house. A keen ringer for over thirty years, Margaret was determined that the tower and handbells would always continue.

Margaret took on the role of tower captain just a couple of years after starting ringing. Then, with an almost repeat of the same situation, she took over leadership of the handbell ringers. In both cases Margaret looked to grow interest within church and that continues today. Margaret joined the Guild some years later, publishing occasional special tower ringing in the Ringing World.

Many people are not aware that the clocktower, housing the bells, was saved from the disastrous fire in 2007 by Margaret bringing her own set of church keys when she and Nicola attended the church consumed in flames. Finding the lead fire officer, Nicola was able to hand over the keys for them to gain access through the heavy and impenetrable doors. The handbells also managed to survive the fire, with excellent restoration by Taylor's of Loughborough seeing them back in action within months.

Margaret enjoyed taking part in ringing outings and teaching events. Preferring to ring the treble for calling, Margaret persevered in learning and teaching different methods when possible. In a similar vein, she took up the role of conductor for handbells, usually refusing to swap with someone else so she could ring. The handbells are now restricted to tune ringing, as many of the handbells sustained enough damage to render them only tuneable on one side.

Margaret's funeral, held on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018, began with all eight bells ringing half-muffled, with the tenor then tolling her age of 75. The handbells were also part of the service, with the band ringing three tunes that Margaret loved. There will be a commemorative peal arranged in the near future.



### Progress at King's Norton – Catherine Taylor

There have been a number of achievements at King's Norton this summer from those in the early stages of ringing. With two weddings booked to ring for on 25<sup>th</sup> August, we took the opportunity to attempt two quarter peals as well. The aim, with an experienced band around them, was for Will Routledge and Holly Pyke to attempt their first quarters. They went to the task with total focus. Two quarters were successfully rung, with Will ringing the treble and then Holly ringing the tenor behind, less than a year after she learnt to handle a bell. Will and Holly went on to ring in a quarter together for evening service the following day. Ann Pyke, who has also been ringing less than a year, was among the band who rang the ten for morning service on 5<sup>th</sup> August. Well done to all three for perseverance and for the infectious enthusiasm they are contributing to our Tuesday practices!

<p><b>King's Norton, West Midlands</b> St Nicolas Saturday, 25 August 2018</p> <p>1260 Plain Bob Doubles</p> <p>1 William JM Routledge 2 Catherine R Taylor 3 Graeme Lanfear 4 D Rose W Horton 5 Stephen W Horton (C) 6 Brian Wevill</p> <p>1st Quarter Peal at first attempt: Will Routledge</p>	<p><b>King's Norton, West Midlands</b> St Nicolas Saturday, 25 August 2018</p> <p>1260 Plain Bob Doubles</p> <p>1 D Rose W Horton 2 Catherine Pinnock 3 Catherine R Taylor 4 Robert Pinnock 5 Stephen W Horton (C) 6 Holly A Pyke</p> <p>1st Quarter Peal at first attempt: Holly Pyke</p>	<p><b>King's Norton, West Midlands</b> St Nicolas Sunday, 26 August 2018</p> <p>1260 Plain Bob Doubles</p> <p>1 William JM Routledge 2 Catherine R Taylor 3 Graeme Lanfear 4 Catherine Pinnock 5 D Rose W Horton (C) 6 Holly A Pyke</p> <p>A consolidation Quarter Peal for treble and tenor after their sterling efforts yesterday</p>
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### Would you like to max that? ('How many bells!!!!') – Julie Tarling

A great opportunity to practice ringing on 12-bells was offered at St Martin's on 28<sup>th</sup> August. A big thanks to James Ramsbottom for organising this, and for his boundless enthusiasm and energy in keeping the practice moving so we could make the most of the time available, and all have a try at an appropriate level for our experience. Thanks also to all the old hands for giving over their evening to support this practice, and for their help in putting us right, and offering tips on how to improve. For me, it was the second time I had visited St Martin's, with my previous visit back in April for a quarter peal of Little Bob Maximus kindly organised by Jonathan Townsend. I still found the ringing room overawing, and found the evening quite daunting. How humbling to go from being a quietly confident Surprise Major ringer and making foot roads into Royal, to spending an evening as an absolute beginner again floundering around! Rope sight and rhythm should surely be transferrable skills, but every time I add in another couple of ropes, it feels like I'm at the bottom of a very long ladder again. Just being able to stand (or rather squeeze) behind experienced ringers was really useful, but I also had my chance to ring both Little Bob and Cambridge Maximus. I gained a lot of experience in just one evening, but it is just the first step on what I think will be a long journey. Meeting, ringing, talking (and drinking) with a whole new group of experienced ringers was a really useful experience and has given me insights into how much further ringing can go (don't even mention the fact there were an extra four unused ropes tauntingly hanging in the circle!).

For up to date information and latest calendar use the website <http://www.stmartinsguild.org/>

### Picklings! *Simon Linford*

Three members of the Guild - Simon Linford, James Ramsbottom and Tony Daw - hosted the first of the 'Picklings' - regional Surprise Major practices focused on learning and ringing the Project Pickled Egg methods. This Pickling, organised in the Gloucester / Worcestershire area by Marianne Fisher, had 4.5 hours of ringing at three towers, with ringing covering the whole Project Pickled Egg repertoire.

The next Pickling is in Birmingham on 20<sup>th</sup> October, giving a good opportunity for Guild members to take part in ringing new methods and consolidating old favourites.

One method that features in Project Pickled Egg, Cooktown Orchid, is rapidly gaining in popularity. It is no more difficult than right-place Surprise Major methods such as Cambridge and Yorkshire, but with vastly superior musical potential. A good quarter peal of it was rung at Harborne (see panel).

#### Harborne, West Midlands

St Peter

Sunday, 23 September 2018 (12–3–24 in F#)

1344 Cooktown Orchid Delight Major

- 1 Tracy Stevens
- 2 Catherine R Taylor
- 3 Simon JL Linford (C)
- 4 D Rose W Horton
- 5 Janet A Horton
- 6 Tamsin Lane
- 7 Clare McArdle
- 8 Stephen W Horton

### Stedman Triples Anniversary Celebrations (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> June 2019) – *Richard Grimmett*

Birmingham has a long and proud association with Stedman Triples. Many of the most notable milestones concerning Stedman on seven bells have either been achieved by Birmingham ringers or have become possible through the ingenuity and tenacity of Birmingham composers. Here I attempt to illustrate a small part of this history with short descriptions of some early performances, thereby giving background to plans to celebrate a particular anniversary next year.

After decades of endeavour from the nation's composers, the first true peal of Stedman Triples was rung at St Giles-in-the Fields, London, in 1799. John Noonan, a Birmingham man, composed the complex peal and called it from manuscript whilst seated in the tower. Noonan was a shoe-maker and had moved to London after being paid by Joshua Short for a pair of boots. Joshua Short, incidentally, lived in Witton and rang Aston tenor to 15,360 Bob Major in 1793. The figures for Noonan's peal were published in Shipway's *Campanologia* (1816) with the comment "As it is probable the peal will never be rung again I have inserted it merely to commemorate its performance". The figures as printed do not produce a peal, but a Christmas puzzle was set in the *Ringling World* in 1975 and the mistakes were found independently by two ringers – Shipway had transcribed four singles (or S's) as 5's.

The next true peal of Stedman Triples was not until 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1819. It was rung at Shifnal in Shropshire by the St Martin's Society – our Guild's predecessor – by seven Birmingham ringers and Sam Lawrence of Shifnal. Sam Lawrence had a long association with the Birmingham ringers and is worthy of a further article in his own right. The peal was composed by Henry Cooper, a well-known Birmingham composer, who also conducted from manuscript whilst seated in the tower. Cooper's composition is based on a plan created by Thomas Edwards of Stourbridge - Edwards's peal had been rung in 1803 by the College Youths at Kensington but was later found false.

After this peal, national composers started to look for a composition only requiring bobs in pairs (known as twin-bobs) and two singles (of the type we are now familiar with). Two of these composers were Birmingham men, John Lates and Thomas Thurstans. After much rivalry, Thurstans prevailed, and his composition, which has retained its popularity ever since, was first rung at St Martin's on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1846. Thurstans died in 1858 in unfortunate circumstances and was purportedly buried in a pauper's grave – but more about this later.

Richard Jones and I are involved in a project to restore some historical peal boards currently lying in the nave of Shifnal church, to coincide with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the St Martin's Society peal. Sadly there is no peal-board for the 1819 peal of Stedman Triples, but our minds are open to the idea of rectifying this. By kind permission of the local incumbent and ringers, we are arranging a repeat performance of Coopers' peal on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2019 at Shifnal. Incidentally the bells at Shifnal were cast in 1770 and are therefore the very same bells rung to the original peal.

Richard and I think many Birmingham ringers may also like to celebrate the achievements of our predecessors, and so we will be arranging opportunities for this over the weekend of Saturday and Sunday June 8<sup>th</sup> / 9<sup>th</sup> in Birmingham. We would like ringers at all levels of learning to participate and will provide opportunities for not only peals and quarter-peals (of Stedman of course!) but also practical education sessions (perhaps including how to keep right in touches of Stedman, and calling techniques). There will be plenty of social opportunities too, including an informal event on the Saturday evening. Research has finally identified Thomas Thurstans' resting place (it transpires he was not given a pauper's funeral), and we will be arranging for a suitable ceremony to be held there over the weekend.

Please keep your diaries free for the weekend of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of June and we do hope you will join us. More details, and information on how to put your name down for parts of the celebrations, will come in due course.

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### **Robert B Smith Trophy, Melbourne – *Jonathan Townsend***

The Robert B Smith Trophy is a new 12-bell competition aimed at developing 12-bell teams across the country. The inaugural trophy competition was held on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September at SS Michael and Mary, Melbourne.



Robert B Smith (Bob) is a long-standing, highly respected and much loved Melbourne ringer. He conducted and rang in the record-breaking 18-hour-long peal of 40,320 Plain Bob Major, and has rung thousands of other peals. Bob was also a founder and director of Eayre & Smith Ltd, Bellhangers. I have the honour of scoring 5040 Stedman Triples with Bob as conductor at Penkridge in 1983.

Sadly, Bob and his wife Ruth were both too ill to attend the day's events.

Teams from Birmingham Cathedral, Leicester, Macclesfield, Melbourne (B), Reading, Sheffield, St Oulton's and York competed for the trophy. After the draw in the church, band members were either drinking, eating cake, drinking, eating fish 'n' chips, drinking, eating breakfast baps, or ringing. Hospitality and camaraderie was excellent. Oh, and ringing was pretty good too.



Front row (left to right):

- 1 Michael G Dodson
- 2 Graham R Kelly
- 3 Christine Mills
- 4 Daniel T Calvert
- 5 D Rose W Horton
- 6 Janet A Horton

Rear row (left to right);

- 7 Richard J Andrew
- 8 Matthew J King
- 9 James P Ramsbottom (C)
- 10 Alexander P Frye
- 11 Jonathan B Townsend
- 12 Philip A Ramsbottom

James Ramsbottom organised the Cathedral team and conducted the test piece of two bob courses of Grandsire Cinques, with singles halfway and end. The chancel crossing ring didn't put us off our striking; we were up against some very serious competition – most other bands seemed to have a sprinkling of national 12-bell ringers in the teams to provide a very stable and experienced base. The judges said of our ringing, "Good structure and clean roll-ups. Some of the middle bells tended to have quick handstroke leads. Slight trip in Lead 7 took a while to resolve. Overall good piece of ringing." We were delighted with third position scoring 90%. Congratulations to the winners, St Oulton (92%) and second place team, Leicester (91%). We're coming after you next year! Thanks to Richard Andrew for providing the photographs below, as part of a previous visit to Melbourne.



### **Making some new surprise ringers – Keith Whitehead**

At St Alphege, Solihull, ringing by our local band generally goes no further than touches of Grandsire Triples (occasionally Caters), Plain Bob Major and Stedman Triples. The elephant in the room is that we rarely have enough competent ringers for a plain course of Cambridge Minor (the only Surprise method we ever ring). So anyone wishing to learn is likely to face a familiar dilemma – try to learn the whole plain course diligently every week and usually end up disappointed that there isn't a band to practice with or fail to prepare and discover that there are five other ringers after all!

The step from Plain Hunt methods to Surprise methods is a huge and difficult one for most ordinary ringers. So we concentrated our efforts elsewhere, because we didn't know what else to do. Then the Ringing World published an article in 2017 explaining that you could ring one lead at a time and then switch to a different method, enabling you to learn bit by bit. A light bulb went on in my head.

After much organisation (finding the right time slot to suit everyone, gaining commitment from the competent members of the band) we ended up with three 90-minute workshops in July and August, at which the four learners (Jen Hickman, Triona Jowett, Margaret Burling and me) were surrounded by experts and mentors and, one at a time, then two at a time, rang one lead, then two. And so on. Encouragement was given to vary the start bells to overcome the problem that otherwise you end up practicing the start far more often than the end, when it's the end that needs polishing!

And strenuous efforts were made to practice on our normal Tuesday practice night too, to keep momentum going. Thanks are due to all the competent ringers who gave up their time to help us, and especially Mike Dodson, who called all the plain courses.

Are we there yet? No. We need another one or two workshops before we can consider ourselves Surprise ringers. But was it worth it? Definitely. Later on this has the potential to expand in a variety of directions – more bells (for example, Major), touches and different Surprise methods. These ambitions are a long way off but we have at least made the first tentative steps towards a new group of Surprise ringers.

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### **Brumdingers – Simon Linford**

Brumdingers has continued over the summer, to the surprise of parents used to children's activities taking a break. In fact some smaller attendances were useful to consolidate progress. Caoimhe's younger brother Cian has joined the group and rang in rounds for the first time last week. Max Earthquake has been coming regularly, supplementing her learning at Harborne, and sister Lex has had a 'taster'. So if there is a full turnout there can be as many as 10 youngsters.

Thanks are due to the valued and regular helpers - the CATS (Clare Arthur Tracy Simon) plus Malcolm Paulson and Trish Everett, who claims to really enjoy it!



### St Martin's Guild Summer Outing 2018 – Angie Wakefield

The blazing sunshine and heat of July seem a long time ago now that Autumn is here but it is impossible to report on the occasion of this year's walking and ringing excursion without making reference to just how glorious a day Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> was.

Participants were promised, "A countryside walk in the Bromsgrove and Droitwich area" and setting off from Bromsgrove Railway Station, we enjoyed 9.5 miles of footpaths, pretty lanes and canal towpaths.

An agreeable pace was established over the first (and longest) section, which led us to our first ringing of the day on the eight of St Mary the Virgin, Hanbury (12-1-5 in F#).

Then, hats and shades were donned and a fresh coat of sun cream applied and we set off again, this time on the two and a half mile stretch which stood between us and lunch at the Eagle and Sun at Hanbury Wharf. You might imagine what a thirsty lot we were on arrival!

Next, it was on to the eight at St Augustine, Dodderhill (18-2-4 in Eb), followed by the six at St Peter de Witton, Droitwich (9-2-0 in G).

There are several great things about joining in with this annual event - taking in the fresh air and scenery, grabbing towers, having a go at the day's "guest method" (Duffield Major this year) and the opportunity for conversation with those we know already and those we don't. It is also a day when the scope and diversity of Guild activity is richly represented.

As ever, huge thanks go to Mike and Cynthia Dodson for their thorough preparations and attention to detail which make the day go so smoothly.

Thanks also to Rosalind Martin and Robyn Tighe for posting some good artistic / actions photographs on the Guild's Facebook group.



## Andy Carr's 50 Years of Ringing at Northfield

Well done to Andy Carr on ringing at quarter peal of Cambridge Surprise Royal to celebrate 50 years of ringing at Northfield. Andy would like to thank Richard Grimmett and the Thursday night band for helping him to practice for the event and to Simon Linford for arranging a band and conducting.

### Northfield, West Midlands

St Laurence

Sunday, 26 August 2018 in 47m

(14–1–13 in F#)

1282 Cambridge Surprise Royal

- 1 Janet Horton
- 2 Simon Linford (C)
- 3 Sarah Vernon
- 4 Rose Horton
- 5 Catherine Taylor
- 6 Richard Andrew
- 7 Andy Carr
- 8 David Bassett
- 9 John Fielden
- 10 Jonathan Townsend

To mark Andy Carr's 50 years as a ringer at Northfield

First Surprise Royal: 3,7,8



## Planning for Remembrance – Arthur Reeves

As you no doubt are aware, Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November commemorates 100 years since the armistice ended the First World War.

The Government have suggested open ringing for 12:30, though churches will have their own commitments which may require ringing.

Whilst the Guild officers won't be coordinating ringing for all of these events, we do want to ensure that towers can ring where there has been a request (and potentially avoid some towers having ringers sat out whilst other places remain silent because they can't get enough ringers).

Therefore, can I please ask towers to contact me directly if:

1. You have a ringing commitment for the 11th November and you are struggling to get ringers (please email how many you are short\* and the time you need ringers for); or (and crucially)

2. You are available that day for ringing and would be prepared to ring elsewhere / your tower has been asked to ring and you have extras signed up who'll be prepared to ring elsewhere

We will hopefully coordinate a pool of ringers that day to ensure towers can meet the requests for this important day.

(\*By short, I mean n minus 2 except for 6 bell towers).

We are planning to ring commemorative quarter peals as a Guild that week for the five members who sacrificed their lives in the First World War.

Thanks in advance for your support here.

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### **A Life of Ringing – William Mills**

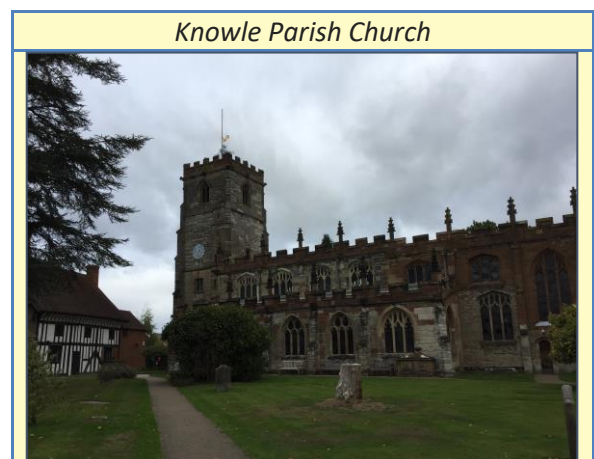
In the mid- 1960s, my job moved me to Gaydon, and we bought a house in Barford. In Barford was a church with three ringable bells which were not being rung. Living just round the corner in our small development was Peter, a bell ringer who thought that any ringable bells, even if only three, deserved to be rung; and now here were two children with Susan, who lived next door but one, who were at just about the right age to start ringing. They were just the right brew to get those bells ringing again.

All that was needed now was to teach these youngsters to ring. Besides practising at Barford, Peter would take them with him to his usual church, St Nicholas in Warwick. To give him a chance to socialise after practice I offered to transport the learners myself. Peter asked me if I had ever thought of ringing and would I like to try - well, no, and well, all right! As it happened I seemed to be able to co-ordinate my movements with those of the bell. I was hooked; I was on my way and we learnt enough to have the Barford bells rung for Christmas; that would be about 1969.

In 1970 my work took me to Berkshire. My daughter dropped out of ringing, but my son soon took it up again and I followed. He attached himself to Finchampstead and me to Sandhurst. Sandhurst and Finchampstead were in the Sonning Deanery Branch, which was among about 15 branches in the Oxford Deanery Branch, covering towers in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire.

As far as ringing is concerned I could hardly have done better than to move into Berkshire. Whereas children of say ten to twelve can take it in their stride, when you get to middle-age things take a little longer and you may not be able to reach the heights. But practice helps and the Sonning Deanery provided plenty of opportunity. It comprised about 15 towers, all ringable and all with weekly practice nights, as well as our own Sunday services and weddings. I did like to keep Thursdays free, though! Honestly, I did spend most of my spare time at home, and my work did tend to interfere until I retired.

It is the nature of societies, even individual towers, to need chairmen, secretaries and treasurers, and so it was with the



Sonning Deanery. It had been without a permanent secretary for a year or so; the place had been filled with a reluctant volunteer and it was suggested that perhaps I would be prepared to take on the job. I declined; after all, what time did I have? A living to earn, and shift work at that, walls to decorate, a loft to floor, a shower to install; no chance! Give him time, they thought. After a little while they asked me again. Meanwhile I had done some objective thinking: most of the time I hadn't got was actually spent on ringing activity, I really didn't have a leg to stand on so, in 1977, I meekly accepted the job and kept at it until 1982.

I retired in 1989 and eventually we decided to move. Our daughter had been living in the Midlands for some years so it was natural to look this way and I had usually rung at Shirley on our visits. So, back to Warwickshire; we chose Knowle.

We arrived in Knowle in 2004. On Sunday, a bright June morning, we took a walk into the village – buy a paper, listen to the sound of the bells. I had decided I would wait until practice night (Monday) before introducing myself – they would probably be much better than me, and I didn't want to mess up Sunday service ringing. A man was approaching the church; my guess that he was a ringer turned out to be true. "Come on up", he said; an invitation I could not refuse, and my ringing was given a new lease of life - converting me from an almost exclusively six-bell ringer to mainly eight bells. Although many methods can be run with some modification on my number of bells, many cannot, so I had to get busy exercising my brain learning seven and eight bell methods which had so far been beyond my reach.

So what do you need to become a bell ringer?

**Gender:** Not important, it has no bearing on the matter!

**Age:** Has a slight bearing: early teens are a good time to start, at that age it is easier to absorb things. I was about 40 when I began but I am satisfied that I won't advance much further (inertia doesn't help). On the other hand, I have known ringers in their 90s.

**Physique:** If you are not very beefy or muscular, it may be more difficult to vary the speed of the heavier bells. This happens when you are ringing in a method, but you will almost certainly be able to handle the lighter bells. Once you have your bell moving, its own weight will keep it going. Of course, this factor may be a point in its favour; we do call it the exercise, after all, there is nothing like a session of ringing to tone you up after a jading day at work or too heavy a meal.

**Friends:** Up to you. For the most part ringers are a friendly and sociable crowd. You may not be welcome to just drop in at St Paul's or Westminster Abbey, but try any of the ordinary churches in the country on practice nights and you will be asked if you are a ringer. If you are you will be asked what you can ring; if you have any sense you will be very modest about your capabilities. Save your achievements for the pub afterwards where they can't be put to the test.

**Brains:** In its upper reaches ringing can be intellectually challenging, but taken slowly and with the right teacher, it is not difficult to reach a satisfying level.

We often talk about a person being a learner but the phrase is meaningless as there is always something to learn. But fortunately there are plenty of places to rest on the way if that is where you are happy. I could have stuck at six bells but eight is much more exciting. I could have gone on to conducting or composing but I know my limits, and I have a great deal to be modest about. I think I have found a ledge to rest on where I can just keep my head above water; this is where I will stay.

## Happy 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday Birmingham School of Bell Ringing – Clare McArdle

That's something I never thought I would say... Nevertheless it has actually happened. We celebrated this milestone on Saturday 1st September with a ride on the Severn Valley Railway, ringing at two towers and a sumptuous buffet lunch.

On a gloriously hot day 30 people, a mixture of students, helpers and tutors with the School enjoyed a relaxed and sociable day out to Bridgnorth. We caught the 10:45 from Kidderminster and disembarked at the end of the line. A stroll into Bridgnorth and a ring at St Leonard's (see photograph) was followed by a buffet lunch at The Old Castle Inn. Returning to Kidderminster, the day was rounded off with a ring on the twelve.

I am pleased to say that the School is thriving – we have recently had the largest influx of new students ever, with eleven new starters since July. We even have a waiting list to join. Since its launch the School has taught in excess of 100 students, 80% of whom have gone on to pass one or more levels of the Learning the Ropes scheme. To date 130 certificates at all levels of the LtR scheme have been presented to students. In addition to teaching people to ring we have been pleased to mentor new teachers, giving them opportunities to practice under the watchful eye of some of our most experienced mentors. I think we can be justifiably proud that BSoBR has made a real difference to grass roots ringing in Birmingham. With thanks to various contributors for the photographs.

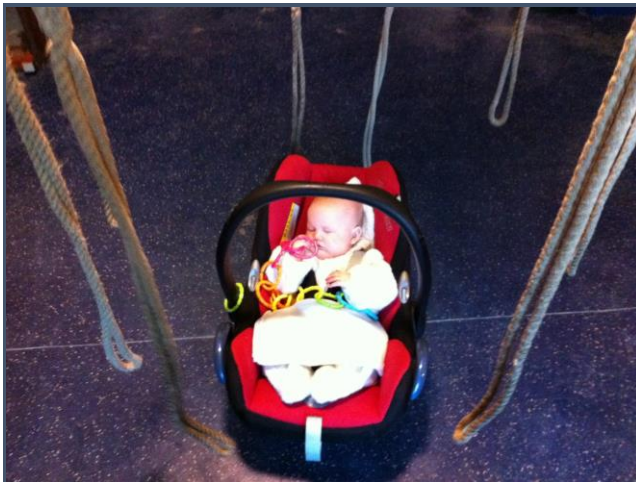


### Well done to Max! *Clare McArdle*

At the Guild business meeting on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, a very special election took place. Max Earthquake, was elected a full ringing member at the age of five. It is my guess that she is probably the youngest ever member of the Guild.

Max has been coming ringing at Harborne since she was born – her mum is one of our ringers. Max would sleep in her car seat in the middle of the ringing room (see evidence in the photograph below!) while we rang for service. She has been wanting to learn to ring since she was first able to say so – so, probably from around one year old. In July 2017, when she was still four, I agreed to start teaching her to ring. A year later she is now ringing virtually unaided – just a guiding hand from time to time. She rings with us every Sunday morning and is quite a dab hand at call changes.

She was really excited to be made a Guild member but wasn't fazed by the presentation of her certificate by the Guild Master. She has just celebrated her 6th birthday – what better present than her own Guild T-shirt. Congratulations and very well done Max!



### **New Rector at St Martin's – Stephanie Warboys**

It is only just over a year since the previous Rector, Stewart Jones' last Sunday at St Martin's. He sought a part-time role and, in a strange quirk of fate, was inducted as Priest in Charge at St John the Baptist, Barlaston, Staffordshire, where Tony Daw's mother and father ring. Three St Martin's band members rang at Barlaston for Stewart's induction and a very uplifting occasion that was.

Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September saw the institution and induction of a new Rector for St Martin's, Reverend Jeremy Allcock. Jeremy has transferred from a parish in London without any bells but has strong roots in Birmingham, having been born at the Birmingham Maternity Hospital and lived in Bearwood and Acocks Green. His elder daughter is currently studying at Birmingham University. We understand he is a proud Baggies supporter! The St Martin's band rang to celebrate the occasion as Jeremy was installed by the Bishop of Birmingham and the Archdeacon of Birmingham.

### **Amazon Smile**

And finally, thanks to Tracy Stevens for a useful reminder about the way in which you can contribute to the St Martin's Guild Bell Restoration Fund. Please see the panel below for further details on how this works.



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