

### **Editor's Foreword – Andy Clark**

This was another quarter where I thought we'd be light on things to put in a newsletter. I was definitely wrong, and actually a lot has been happening, which is great to see. My own foray into virtual ringing continues, and I'm continuing to join a weekly practice on Ringing Room, and do the odd quarter peal. As others have said, it is a bit like learning to ring again!

Thanks to all those who contributed to this edition, and hopefully before long we will return to our more traditional content around tower outings, weddings, and all those other things that were once taken for granted!

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### **Ringing Master's Report – Phil Ramsbottom**

When I joined the St Martin's Guild in March 2013, other than becoming a Sunday service ringer somewhere I had no other ambitions or aspirations whatsoever. I occasionally did a bit of teaching when the opportunity arose, but apart from that, nothing. I'm not quite sure how it happened and it certainly wasn't part of any particular plan, but I now find myself writing this newsletter article in the capacity of Guild Ringing Master. It's probably worth mentioning here that should any of you be expecting to read something matching the high calibre produced by my predecessor Arthur, you might like to think about lowering your expectations.

Taking on this role at this time is rather akin to running a pub that's not able to sell beer. That being said, during last year, among other events, the Guild started a programme of Wednesday night online talks and presentations, all ringing related, and these continue to be well attended and received. A few entertaining 'nothing at all to do with bell ringing quiz nights' have also been thrown in for good measure which have also proved very popular. The Wednesday night sessions will soon be coming to an end as we begin to focus our attention on returning to ringing and thanks must go to Arthur for arranging all these.

The more theory-based Saturday morning sessions, which were also started around the same time, had been enjoying a sabbatical and were given a revival with a six-week run at the start of the year. Three of the sessions were repeats from last year along with three new ones which were: basic theory and jargon; Cambridge Surprise Minor; and bob calling for beginners. With the intended smaller audiences there was much improved participation and interaction between those present. I'd be happy to run any of these again, even for a very small group should anyone so wish, and these needn't be on a Saturday morning. Please get in touch and we'll see what can be arranged. Any ideas for new material would also be welcome, be it a particular aspect of ringing or maybe a method you'd like to know more about.

In these strange times, Ringing Room has, I feel, proved to be an interesting substitute for the 'real deal'. Some of you have taken to using it regularly and extensively which is fine, others have preferred not to get involved which is fine, and there are those who sit somewhere in between which is also fine. The groups I've rung with generally felt that even sometimes elementary ringing on eight bells using the platform is noticeably more difficult to grasp than method ringing on six bells so tended to stick to ringing on lower numbers. It was also thought not ideal to have too many ringers in the tower as one might in the real world. This was counteracted though by simply setting up another group and these totalled six in number at the last count. Handbell ringing has also been part of the Ringing Room activities' scene within the Guild. I feel certain that members who have wanted to at least experience online ringing in this way have now done so – though I could be wrong.

Whilst we're on the subject, there was a handful of submissions to Bellboard of Ringing Room performances in recognition of the Henry Johnson Event which was good to see. Thank you to everyone involved in these.

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

Whenever possible I've been encouraging members to post their various achievements (and failures, no shame in that), onto social media and mainly the Guild Facebook page. It demonstrates to the World (or at least those who read it) what an active and diverse Guild we are. The St Martin's Guild has traditionally been known and admired for its massive output of high-end peals and its success in a particular competition held in late June – and long may these achievements continue. These days however, in addition to this, the Guild recognises the need to work on more grass root matters such as the recruitment, training and development of new ringers which is equally as important as everything else that we do. Facebook and social media in general can be a great place to post and exchange ideas. This brings me to the newsletter. Not everyone sees social media, whereas the newsletter is circulated to all Guild members and is thus an excellent platform by which to tell the Guild what you've been doing and maybe what has or hasn't worked for you. Can I therefore please ask that during the coming three months you could think about making a few notes of some of your ringing related activities, be it personal or at local tower level, and send Andy Clark a few lines about it. It doesn't matter if you think it's not very newsworthy, others will enjoy reading it and maybe try out for themselves whatever it is you may have been doing. Your article doesn't need to resemble the Gettysburg Address – just a few lines, brief and to the point, will be perfect.

I'm sure most of you are aware that had we been in more normal times, I would have been reporting on the usual bi-weekly cycle of 6-bell workshops and higher number events which had proved popular until the axe fell last March. These will of course return just as soon as we are able but will in future be just two of the features in a month of weekly activities. One of the new additions will be a regular rounds and call changes workshop. As well using the opportunity to work on all elements of call changes there will also be the option for those who wish to have a 'bell handling check-up/refresher' to keep your bell handling skills in tip-top condition and prevent any bad habits from creeping in. Engaging the services of others to run these events is also included in the plan.

There is a Guild Business Meeting coming up on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May. This will be an online event starting at 10:00. Included in the day will be the annual bake-off and a series of workshops/presentations. The focus of these will be preparing a return to ringing and will include sessions on risk assessments and safety checks, exercises to get us back into shape for ringing and how towers could use the BRF. There will also be opportunities within the day to opt in to certain workshops. To gauge interest, could you please complete this form: <https://forms.gle/cNHLQQnmHfDvXyGP7> There is space to offer your own suggestion/request by clicking the 'other' section.

In closing I'd like to thank everyone for their collective support of the Guild during these last difficult and strange three months (and beyond). I realise sitting at home in front of a screen is on the face of it somewhat easier than having to travel to support a Guild event. But that's not the point. The Guild has held events but only because you, the Guild members, have supported them and for which you all deserve a huge thank you. Maybe the next newsletter will contain a few articles which make more familiar reading? Let's hope so but we will just need to wait and see.

### The 100 Club – Clare McArdle

Please see the table for the Q1 results. Well done to the winners and thanks to all for participating!

January	1 <sup>st</sup>	75	Vicky Wilby	£54
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	84	Richard Andrew	£16.20
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	56	Charlie Linford	£5.40
February	1 <sup>st</sup>	45	Sarah Vernon	£54.50
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	43	Rowena Shipley	£16.35
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	6	Janet & Steve Horton	£5.45
March	1 <sup>st</sup>	76	Tom Horton	£54.50
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	73	Michael Wilby	£16.35
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	13	Ruth Shepherd	£5.45

### Recognition for the St Martin's Guild – Arthur Reeves & Clare McArdle

Since 2016, the Association for Ringing Teachers (ART) have recognised individuals and groups through their annual ART Awards. There are a broad range of awards open to all ringers. It is a rigorous process with a formal application and a judging panel. With so much talent out there, it is competitive and awards are highly sought.

Vicky Wilby generously nominated the St Martin's Guild for the Inspiring Leadership in Ringing award. This award recognises that 'leadership breeds success, moves us forward and helps a wide range of endeavours to flourish at individual, tower, regional or national level'. The application focused primarily on the work the Guild has carried out throughout 2020 including bringing ringers together with weekly training opportunities, our use of social media and the re-designed website to improve communication, the 'big social' events including the bake-off and photo competition as well as more one-to-one efforts to ensure members have been supported through this difficult period.

Ringers from across the World met online in March for a highly uplifting evening. It was remarkable to listen to all of the wonderful work that individuals and groups have carried out in spite of the fact that physical ringing cannot go ahead. The evening was led by Stephanie Warboys, the ART Awards Leader, along with ART's chair, Lesley Belcher, and the judging panel.

We are delighted that the St Martin's Guild was recognised as joint winners in our category. In her acceptance speech, Clare highlighted that this award recognises a large group of people: from the leadership of Guild officers (both past and present) to members and non-members who turn up and support. Our Guild really is only as strong as its collective membership. As well as the awards, over £2,000 of award money was generously distributed to the various winners too and we have £250 to put to good use.

You can read Vicky's application here: <https://ringingteachers.org/recognition/awards/2021-winners/St-Martins-Guild>

And more about the ART Awards here: <https://ringingteachers.org/recognition/awards>

## National Day of Reflection – Sand Cooper

What a privilege it was to be able to toll a bell for the Marie Curie National Day of Reflection, on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March. The bell ringers supported the event by tolling the 10<sup>th</sup> bell once for every 1000 lives that have been lost in the UK, within 28 days of a positive COVID test. We participated by marking the end of the minute of silent reflection when the bell was tolled slowly, 126 times. The Church of England partnered with Marie Curie, to mark the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the first lockdown with a national day of reflection, to support those bereaved and hope for a brighter future. It was really humbling to see the support that the tolling received with several members of the Solihull band and parish standing and listening from the churchyard whilst the bell was rung.



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## Remember to Check your Bells (*on behalf of Alison Hodge, Stewardship & Management Workgroup leader*)

Please remember to check your bell installations before you ring your tower bells again.

There is guidance available on the CCCBR website for ringers preparing to return to ringing, including but not limited to topics such as checking the bells and preparing risk assessments.

Please see: <https://ccabr.org.uk/resources/stewardship-and-management/>

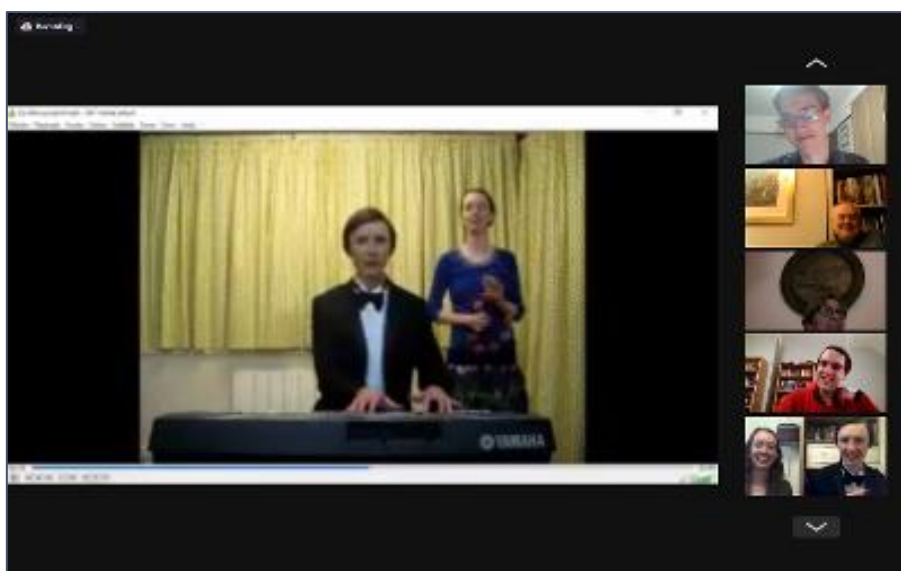
For up to date information and latest calendar use the website <http://www.stmartinsguild.org/>

### Report of the 133<sup>rd</sup> Henry Johnson Dinner – *Richard Pullin*

The Henry Johnson Dinner was held on Saturday 27th February 2021. Due to the current emergency this took the form of an online 'after dinner' event, much like the College Youths dinner in November 2020. Attendees were welcome to recreate the set courses at home for themselves and even to dress for dinner. Online events have become something of a new normal in the Guild, as a weekly program of talks and tutorials are given on all aspects of our art. The visiting ringers who gave talks were kindly invited back to be a part of this online dinner.

The event was conducted by Clare McArdle, Guild Master, who welcomed the 100 or so attendees. Clare said that though we obviously all would have preferred to gather in person, the online event was still a nice substitute. In fact, Clare went one step further by pointing out that this online event – the 133<sup>rd</sup> Henry Johnson Dinner in a row – was to be viewed as a celebration of how ringers adapt to their situation. So there we have it: a potentially negative situation turned into a positive celebration; and how appropriate for such a viewpoint to come from the St Martin's Guild, itself an example to all territorial associations of how to adapt and evolve in changing times. For a long time the St Martin's Guild ringers have been at the forefront of ringing and ringing innovation: in composition and method design; in striking; in the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing; in unrivalled efficiency in management and organisation; as a thinktank of fresh ideas to meet modern needs.

James Ramsbottom and Casey McLellan then performed a pre-recorded (I think!) musical duet. A very entertaining and uplifting performance (see screenshot below), bringing hope to better times ahead. I think the words 'as you swing to the left and swing to the right, remember the curfew must never ring tonight' was etched on our minds for some time afterwards! We then took the opportunity to congratulate the couple on their engagement.



Mark Eccleston, Guild Archivist, gave a very interesting talk on Henry Johnson himself, particularly with relation to the annual dinner. Johnson was a celebrated ringer, conductor and composer, and reportedly a much-loved and respected personality of his day. His compositions were praised by his peers for 'an originality and special merit'. The first of the annual dinners was held in 1889 to celebrate Johnson's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, since which not a single dinner has been missed. Amazingly the 1955 dinner was the last to be attended by someone who knew Johnson. Mark's talk was full of information that would be difficult to find elsewhere, thanks in part to work done by a local historian to find out more about Johnson's life.

Clare then gave the toast to the memory of Henry Johnson. Often this is done in silence, but this year the same words were used as those spoken at the 1921 dinner.

This year's handbell touch was a video and photo compilation of the Brumdingers' online and handbell ringing activities since the pandemic. We enjoyed some call-changes on 16 (impressive!), an excellent course of Bob Minor on handbells (containing only one adult), and even Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star! The photos of churchyard handbell ringing were a reminder of the freedom we had back in the summer of 2020 when life almost returned to a semi-normal. Well done Brumdingers and keep up the good work!

Janet & Steve Horton were to have chaired this year's dinner, had it been held in the normal format. Hopefully that can go ahead in 2022. For this year's online event Janet was the main speaker and regaled us with a feast of anecdotes from previous Henry Johnson dinners, with a few University of London stories thrown in for good measure. One that stood out with distinction was the UL 'Lindarella' pantomime, in which Janet played Prince Charming and Steve was an ugly sister. The titular main character is now a well-known ringer in the Bedfordshire area. Given that our current historians are researching Henry Johnson, we can but wonder what the future historians will make of our own time. As Janet put it, the things we remember most about these events tended to be what went wrong.

More seriously Janet spoke to the memory of Andrew Stubbs, who was a much-loved friend to so many of us and a huge supporter of ringing in Birmingham and elsewhere. A true gentleman who will be greatly missed.

In keeping with the positive spirit of this online event, Janet ended by paraphrasing Doctor Who: 'Every HJ Dinner is the last dinner'. A great message, though I don't recognize the Doctor Who reference. Is it from the Steven Moffat era, Janet?

Clare McArdle then concluded by giving well-deserved thanks to all those who made this positive and uplifting event possible. With the hope that ringing – and social events like these – will return in the not-too-distant future, it does feel that the tide is starting to turn. The event ended with a compilation of photos from previous Henry Johnson dinners, showing lots of familiar faces smiling and enjoying themselves.

And with that, the dinner ended by the click of a button. Suddenly I found myself back in my own home again with no memory of how I made the journey back. But then again, similar experiences have been reported after ringing dinners long before 2021. Long may it continue.

## 100 years ago...

**Menu for the 1921 Commemoration Dinner.**  
Including seven speeches, four quartettes, one duet, a song, and three handbell selections!

### **Brumdingers – Simon Linford**

I am using 'Brumdingers' in the widest sense here. It was originally a term used for Thursday evening practices at Moseley but has become a bit of a generic term for young ringing in the Guild. Certainly not having to get to Moseley on a Thursday evening has widened participation! Although Ringing Room kept the whole group going through the first lockdown, screen fatigue has now reduced online participation down to the younger ringers. They have continued to make very good progress particularly with their handbell ringing – we are going to have a generation of ringers who understand methods from having rung them on handbells before they are able to ring them in the tower. Both Thomas and Matthew Healy have rung Bob Minor in hand, Elizabeth Wilby is probably not that far off ringing a quarter peal, and Susan continues to surprise. Elliot Daniel has come back and is plain hunting all pairs. So there is a lot to look forward to when we can get out and ring handbells in the churchyard shortly.

Young ringers are able to benefit from Government guidance on supervised children's groups in out-of-school settings, which from 12<sup>th</sup> April enables groups of 15 to meet including indoors. The detailed guidance is still to be seen but the Brumdingers should be able to ring at some of our well-ventilated ground floor rings very shortly. The Youth Contest is in early September, and that could be target for getting us back up to speed for an enjoyable outing to Worcester. One thing that will no doubt be a surprise will be the change in height! Some of the Brumdingers might have put on a few inches and I am sure Orson will be putting at least three knots in the rope. They will also be a year stronger so I am looking forward to seeing what they can do.

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### **BSoBR Handbells – Janet Horton**

The BSoBR Handbells group has continued to meet online during lockdown. We currently have two weekly groups: one working at Level 2 and one working at Level 3 of the LTR scheme. What does that mean I hear you say?

The Level 2 group is having a go at ringing touches of Plain Bob Minor. Personally, I find it quite hard to call Bobs whilst actually ringing a pair of bells using Ringing Room. This is because I use the left and right keys to ring, and you call a Bob by pressing 'B' – which is nowhere near the arrow keys. So whilst we have three people ringing, another person is needed to call the Bobs and the others present follow one of the pairs and help us all stay right. We tend to ring the same touch as that gives us a chance to do some work on it between sessions. We have also taken a look at Forward Minor in preparation for Level 3 and, when we can, we sneak in a bit of Kent or Little Bob as well.

The Level 3 group is currently looking at Kent and Oxford Treble Bob Minor. Here the emphasis is looking to build on what we have done previously; so we are looking at the ways that Kent and Oxford are similar.

There is scope for us to start a Level 1 group if there is any interest. All you need is a PC or laptop. Unfortunately a 'phone or tablet is not enough. You need to have a big enough screen to be able to have Ringing Room and Zoom open at the same time, and you need to have a keyboard rather than a touch screen.

## **The 'Friday Tappers' enter the CCCBR's Virtual Call Change Ringing Festival – Richard Andrew**

It all started with an email from Phil Ramsbottom to us all in mid-March saying that he'd been asked if he could put together a band to ring some call changes via Ringing Room on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April. I naturally assumed that it was likely to be a session to help out some newcomers to Ringing Room to get some experience and find their feet, although I was slightly puzzled that Phil hadn't mentioned a time on the day.

A couple of days later all was revealed in another email from Phil in which he owned up to having been 'a tad economical with the truth'(!). He told us that the CC President (Simon Linford) was arranging a Ringing Room call change striking contest and felt that the St Martin's Guild ought to enter at least one team for this and had asked Phil to arrange something if possible.

So our team was as follows: Andrew Brown (team captain), Keith Whitehead, Casey McLellan, Mike Dodson, Richard Andrew and Sarah King.

We all ring together in regular Ringing Room sessions on Tuesdays and Fridays, so met one of the entry criteria for the competition that we should be a 'Band that is ringing regularly together in Ringing Room or Ding'. The next thing to consider was – what should our team name be? I came up with the idea of arranging the initials of our first names into something like 'MARCKS' which gained some support. However, Andrew came up with several suggestions, one of which was 'Friday Tappers'. Phil liked the sound of this one as he felt this described what we actually do each week, so we agreed to go with this as our team name.

Having discussed things on our next regular ringing session, we decided to meet up in Ringing Room for a practice on the Thursday before the actual striking competition. The test piece was going to be 'the first section of the established Devon call change peal 60 on 3rds, called back into rounds at the half-way point' and we could choose to ring either with the traditional closed handstrokes for this, or alternatively open handstrokes – we opted for the latter as this was what we were all used to doing. On the Thursday practice we had a couple of run throughs of the test piece and among other things this highlighted issues both with the opening section and also the closing section; in both of which a certain amount of confusion was readily apparent! We therefore made a point of practising these to iron out the issues. Apart from this, Andrew was concerned as to whether his internet connection would hold up on the day, as he has endured a number of problems with it dropping out in recent months. We agreed to turn off our own videos while actually ringing, so as to reduce the level of input into Andrew's connection and this seemed to improve things.

It appeared that 16 teams from across the country had been entered for the event, including the Brumdingers, so this meant that the Guild was now represented by two teams. As there were going to be two judges of the contest, it was decided that on the day there should initially be two heats of eight teams each with one judge allocated to each heat. Each team would ring in their own regular Ringing Room tower. The top two teams from each heat would then go forward to the final, in which both judges would adjudicate. On the main Zoom meeting for the event, Simon Linford introduced the two judges, who were Ian Avery and Paul Pascoe and it turned out that they had both had a good grounding in ringing Devon call changes in the early part of their ringing careers and had also judged numerous striking competitions, so were obviously well-suited for the task.

We had been drawn to ring in the penultimate slot in Heat 1, so we duly convened at the appointed time and rang through the piece and inevitably had a few trips here and there – par for the course, and as Keith said, it wasn't brilliant, but it wasn't too awful either, so reasonably representative of our usual standard of ringing as a group! Also, Andrew's internet connection had held up, so this was another positive.

So we went away reasonably satisfied with our effort and awaited the results of the two heats from the judges. We were placed 2<sup>nd</sup> out of the eight teams in Heat 1, so therefore were one of the four teams who qualified to go through to the final. Oh NO! We were going to have to summon up our resources and ring again, something which I don't think any of us really thought we would have to do! Worse still, we were drawn to ring in the first slot in the final, so had to try and get our team together as quickly as possible. Where was Mike? A quick phone call to him from Keith sorted things out, and so we were ready to go again. We managed to complete our piece with an effort roughly similar to our first attempt, although perhaps not quite as good.

We then awaited the judges' final verdict and found that we had been placed 3<sup>rd</sup> overall – a very creditable performance. Phil was obviously pleased – he emailed us all to say it was a brilliant result and well done! Another point worth noting is that both Casey and Sarah said that it was their very first striking competition, so well done to both of them as well! Also, a big thank you to Andrew Brown for ably captaining the team and guiding us successfully through the changes – as he said himself, it wasn't easy!



## **A year's reflections: Wednesday nights – Arthur Reeves**

In many ways, it is incredible to reflect that we have sustained a year's online programme of training. When we began to put the first schedule rather hurriedly into place in March 2020, unsurprisingly we didn't really have a plan. Back then, perhaps rather naively, I thought we'd be looking at a three-month plan before a proper return to ringing. I very nervously kicked off proceedings with a quiz night; I remember designing the quiz to be as technically straightforward as possible. Back then, we led training sessions twice a week. I do remember being very nervous before each session began, not fully understanding how the technical side of Zoom worked, what would happen if the speaker didn't turn up or indeed whether no one else would! Ros Martin helped calm my nerves by navigating me around Zoom in those early talks, which I am very grateful for.

The original talks were designed very much with a ringing training focus. In mid-May we ran an evening which took a different approach with a panel discussion of four different ringers. With pre-submitted questions, they discussed a broad range of topics. This made me realise that there was clearly an appetite to widen the remit of our talks which we did to include tower stewardship, handbell ringing and the art of composing. As the summer months began, I did begin to worry that interest was waning. Whilst audience sizes were always healthy, numbers had begun to reduce. With this in mind, and with the enthusiasm of some of our speakers, we began to advertise more widely. Numbers began to rapidly increase. In July, we broke Zoom. This was for Julia Cater's talk on how to ring big bells. We knew interest was high and did begin looking into increasing audience capacity, but the cost was excessive and prohibitive. We warned Guild members to log on early. I remember logging on at 18:45 and seeing audience numbers exceed 100 by 18:50. I can't pretend it wasn't more than a little stressful. Following this, we began a simple pre-registration form for talks we wanted to publish widely. We've also now established an e-list for non-members who want to receive regular updates of the talks.

A month off in August gave me time to properly organise the next series of talks. This time, I really did expand the topics of talks. I pulled in a lot of favours from friends and acquaintances (and indeed owe an awful lot of people a pint when restrictions allow!). Again, I was worried we wouldn't sustain the interest or indeed the supply of talks available. We also decided to focus our attention on one weekly talk. Alison Hodge, in her role as workgroup leader for the Stewardship and Management workgroup of the CCCBR, approached me to ask whether we would partner with the Central Council and run some talks: I readily agreed and Alison has been instrumental in organising a number of our sessions, for which I am very grateful.

When the December lockdown was announced, I planned to run the series until March 2021 – a full year. However, our reputation seems to have preceded us and I had a significant number of offers of talks. So many in fact I was struggling to timetable them in! Audience numbers are routinely between 40-50 people now, so interest is clearly still there. Our current schedule takes us up until 19<sup>th</sup> May. With the current roadmap in place, this feels a good time to bring the programme to a close. However, we will clearly keep this under review and in the long term I do see a place for regular, though less frequent, online talks.

On reflecting over the last year, our technical skills across the Guild have improved significantly. I'm also amazed, and relieved, that not one talk has been interrupted by serious internet issues (though we've been close!). All of the talks have been unique and remarkable. I never fail to be impressed by how much time speakers clearly put into preparing their talks; they put some of the paid trainers I have engaged with to shame. We've had everything from robots to bikinis!

I'm very grateful to all those who have spent a considerable time putting their talks together and joining the Guild to deliver their session. Thanks to Mark Eccleston for updating our website in such a timely manner. Thanks also to Alison Hodge for organising several talks and to Clare McArdle for leading on the rare occasions I have been at Governor's meetings! And thanks to all who have tuned in – without an audience, there would be no talk. We now have a wide archive of training resources available free online. We will re-organise this into topics at some point to create an online library:

<https://stmartinsguild.org/teaching/training-and-resources/>

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### **Guild Bake-Off – Tracy Stevens**

It's that time of year when we ask you to 'Get set – Bake'. Yes, it is time for the St Martin's Guild annual Bake-Off!



The Bake-Off is for Guild members and their families to bake something of their choice, take a photo, email the photo to [smgcb@gmail.com](mailto:smgcb@gmail.com) then sit back and eat the bake. It's that simple. I'm not aware of any flour or yeast shortages this year, so no excuses...

This year the standing committee have agreed to support the Trussell Trust. The Trussell Trust supports a nationwide network of food banks and together they provide emergency food and support to people locked in poverty, and campaign for change to end the need for food banks in the UK. Did you know that every nine seconds someone receives an emergency food parcel?

To whet your appetite, please watch this trailer: <https://youtu.be/eJebFSxoelQ>

This year, again, there will be both adult and junior competitions to win the coveted 'star baker' apron. The competition is anonymous so please take a photo of your bake on its own and email it to [smgcb@gmail.com](mailto:smgcb@gmail.com) by Friday 30<sup>th</sup> April.

The voting this year will take place live at the Guild business meeting on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May at 10:00. Prior to the meeting, the bakes will be displayed on the website so you can have time to make an informed choice of your adult and junior bake winners.

There is no obligation to donate to bake or vote, however, we hope you feel as strongly as we do that the Trussell trust is one of many charities that deserves our support. Please do get involved by baking and / or donating and make sure your vote counts on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May. Please follow this link to make your donation today: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/smg-bakeoff>

## **The Development of Covid Guidance – *Simon Linford (with CC President's hat on)***

Much of the work of the Central Council goes unnoticed, but not the development of guidance for ringing (or not) during the pandemic. I thought I would share some of the process that has gone on behind the scenes.

The very first guidance was that on the most fateful day in March last year when the message went out that we had to stop ringing. It's the sort of announcement where after you write it you want someone else to hit the 'send' button, or do it with your eyes closed. It must have been E.H. Lewis in 1939 who last had the task of announcing that ringing had to stop (he was President for 27 years!). Not a great thing to have to do.

Fortunately one member of the CC Executive, Phil Barnes, is a recently retired Medical Director of an NHS Trust and so was able to start thinking about what Covid would mean for ringing. He got a second opinion from the Master of the Essex Association, Dr Andrew Kelso, who is currently a medical Director at a London hospital. Together they wrote the first very comprehensive paper 'Ringing and COVID-19: What are the risks and what might we do about them'. I think it's fair to say that at that point the outlook was pretty bleak.

During that long first lockdown we knew we had to start working out how to get ringing going again. Mark Regan found that there was a Covid guidance group appointed by the House of Bishops and it was them that we needed to talk to. Via his connections he got a name, and the first meeting was set up between the CC team and the 'House of Bishops Recovery Group'. It was two people – Rev Dr Mark Betson, and Brendan McCarthy who despite being neither English nor a member of the Church of England was their 'national adviser on medical ethics and health and social care policy'. He must have been having quite a quiet life before this came along. It's fair to say they knew nothing about bellringing and were fascinated by it.

The strategy we adopted was just to get service ringing going. Recreational ringing could follow but we knew we had to link ringing and worship. Over the course of our fortnightly Zoom calls with Mark and Brendan, which they claimed they looked forward to (presumably as we made a difference from them having to do battle with the RSCM), we learned something of the difficulties of issuing guidance at a national level. Mark and Brendan were having to deal with, and be consistent with, many different aspects of church life, from the clergy, paid Cathedral choirs and organists, to weddings, funerals, etc. All would be trying to find exceptions and interpretations of the law for the benefit of their own activity. Then Brendan and Mark were reporting into the Places of Worship Taskforce, their equivalents in at least six other faith groups, making sure that if the CofE for instance was allowing 30 people to go to a Sunday service, then 30 would be allowed at the Mosque for Friday prayers. Once there was consistency across the Places of Worship Taskforce, that guidance then needed to go to MHCLG, where they would check consistency of places of worship guidance across all other activities – sport, performing arts, hospitality, etc, and make their judgements of economic importance. Responses from them weren't exactly instant, as you can imagine how many different activities they were trying to be consistent across.

In that first development of guidance, what was difficult was managing ringing expectations while not actually knowing what the Church's process was or how long it would take. Do you publish something that is work in progress, or wait and have people think nothing is happening? We had a few setbacks, for instance when we had said we needed the Director of MHCLG sign off but then it didn't come – we found out that they didn't actually need to give positive feedback. Then on another occasion as we were trying to reduce distancing to 1m+, the MHCLG director referred the ringing guidance to Public Health England.

That was when we found that in the corridors of power PHE mandarins really were discussing whether bellringers stood in a line or not!

So it was a long and painstaking process, with some attempts at more leniency getting knocked back, but generally we played the line of trying to win Mark and Brendan's trust so that we could get to a place where we wouldn't have to get minutiae approved. We were very mindful of a need to develop a closer relationship with the Church as it was clear that in the upper reaches of the Church of England bellringers are not universally appreciated. We were also trying to balance having guidance that was permissive enough to enable some ringing, and not just be ignored. We knew that if it just broke down and became apparent to the Church that ringers couldn't be trusted to follow guidance then ringing would just be stopped. That made us very unpopular for a while when reports of bands ringing all their bells were reported to us as if we were some sort of police force.

But for every one person who thought they knew better because of what they had read on the internet, or who thought the Central Council was in no position to tell anyone what to do, there were 100 who really did want guidance and/or to be told what to do. Although the criticism on social media was painful and will be remembered for a long time, the quiet messages of support behind the scenes were numerous and invaluable.

In the summer we added another ringing medic to the team. David Pouncey was a recently retired GP and ringer from Stroud, who brought valuable experience of General Practice (GPs think differently from hospital doctors), and of working on pandemic control in Africa. He also had the perspective of ringing in a rural band, which Mark, Philip and I didn't really have. We also needed to spread the load a bit as lots of towers thought it was quicker just to email us about their own tower's arrangements rather than try and interpret the guidance. It probably peaked at 10 emails a day like that. But we answered them all.

Then just to load on an additional layer, we got criticised for being too England focused. This was fair but England is 97% of towers and we needed to start somewhere. So now I have a network of helpers in Wales, Scotland and Ireland who advise on local differences and deal with local queries.

We are nearly at the end now, with a roadmap out of this. I am looking forward to not having to write guidance, not having to look at social media from behind a cushion, and of course meeting up with Mark and Brendan for a pint to reminisce about old times.

Are there any positives from this? Well, the Central Council has never had such a high profile! Mark Betson has turned out to be a very useful person to know and we are getting embedded into discussions on church closures, festival churches, etc., and have generally given ringing a far higher profile in the upper echelons of the Church. On balance though it is work I could have managed without!

## **The social value of the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing – Adam Knight-Markiegi**

Your day job and wider activities don't always overlap. But they have for me when I recently carried out an evaluation of the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing, where I learnt to ring.

A social researcher by day, I wanted to apply – and hone – my evaluation skills to the world of ringing. I've therefore carried out what's called a Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluation of the School's activities over 2017–2019. This aims to quantify the outcomes generated by the School, seen through the eyes of those involved or affected.

I interviewed 33 people, from students and former students to the School's leadership team, its tutors and helpers as well as home towers. Using a range of surveys, I also gained 55 responses from a good mix of people involved or affected. Thank you if you were one of these.

### **Skills, connectivity and wellbeing**

The SROI is all about outcomes, what changes as a result of an activity. Three key themes emerged across different groups from the School: developing skills; belonging and connectedness; and personal wellbeing.

Developing skills is obvious. It is a 'school', after all. Students valued learning to handle a bell and progressing quickly into change ringing, faster than they would just at a local tower. But tutors also improved their teaching skills, while helpers picked up techniques to take back to their home towers.

#### ***'The only way to start ringing' (student)***

Maybe it's obvious to you but ringing is a social activity. All groups spoke about feeling connected and part of something bigger through their involvement with the School. For students this started with bonding in a small learning group but then spread to joining and feeling part of a local band. Tutors identified with the School and enjoyed the camaraderie. Helpers liked meeting learners and felt part of something bigger, a strong motivator for them to help at the School.

#### ***Fun was the 'overwhelming feeling' (parent of child student)***

Those involved in the School also revealed changes to be do with wellbeing. This included a positive feeling from tutors and helpers, such as when a student finally got something. The leadership team were rightly proud of the School's fame nationally. Students, tutors and helpers also enjoyed the social side and pleasure from ringing, boosting their happiness. We may take this for granted, felt more acutely over this past year of missed ringing. Since a large proportion of the School's students start ringing as they move towards retirement, ringing can become an important activity to fill their time.

#### ***"I think I have become a little braver in general" (student)***

Some other outcomes don't fit neatly into these categories. These include the importance of serving your local church community for some students, or making local bands more sustainable for home towers. Unanticipated things have come out of the School too, including a quarter peal rung and conducted entirely by former students and the return of ringing to Brierley Hill.

## Valuing the School

The SROI goes further than identifying changes. It seeks to quantify and value these outcomes. It then shows these as a social value ratio, which can be used to compare the School with other SROI studies or use as a baseline to improve upon in future.

The table below shows the top five outcomes by their social value, as assigned through the SROI evaluation. This combines the weighting given to outcomes through the surveys and uses established wellbeing values to monetise them. It also accounts for how many people experienced the change and how much of the outcome was down to the School rather than other things, like local practices, visiting other towers, etc.

Stakeholder	Outcome	Impact Value	% of Total Social Value
Tutors	Sense of belonging	£65,858	15%
Helpers	Socialisation	£58,608	13%
Students	Formed new relationships	£32,570	7%
	Learnt to handle a bell safely	£30,348	7%
	Happily occupied my time	£29,681	7%

An SROI evaluation also demands an equal approach to monetise the inputs going into the School. Since most of the time is gifted free of charge by the leadership team, tutors and helpers, I've used the cost of equivalent paid roles for this time (college managers, lecturers, teaching assistants). In total over the three years, the inputs amounted to about £50,000. The £5 fee paid by students for each lesson made up just 15% of this, with volunteer input making up the lion's share (four-fifths).

Pulling the two values together reveals that the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing created almost £400,000 worth of social value. Real and nominal investment of some £50,000 leads to a social return on investment of 8.95. In other words, for every £1 put into the School, £8.95 of social value was generated during 2017–2019. This compares favourably to other SROI studies.

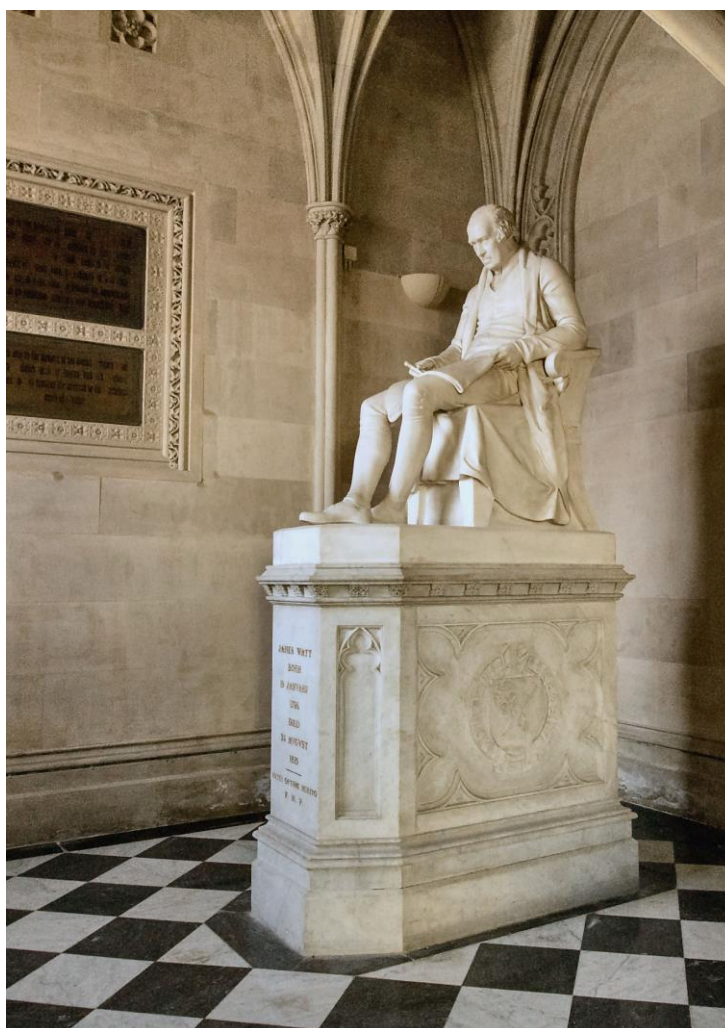
The point of SROI evaluations isn't really about providing this ratio. It's about understanding how activities change and affect people. The real value is using the results to generate more social value. I'm pleased that the School is already using the findings to help plot a way to come back even stronger once Covid restrictions allow. As one student said, it's about improving from a 'very good position'.

### Handsworth History – *Richard Postill*

Handsworth has an interesting history. The Parish Church of St Mary dates from 1160 although the present building is a result of major alterations especially in 1820 and again in 1870. The present ring of eight was cast by Taylors in 1955 with a 15cwt tenor. The chief claim to fame for the Church is its association with luminaries of the 18<sup>th</sup> century who were part of the Lunar Society. This met on the nights of a full moon in order to facilitate travel and often met in Soho House, the home of Matthew Boulton. Other members of the Society included Josiah Wedgwood, James Watt, William Murdoch, Joseph Priestley and Erasmus Darwin. Boulton and Watt worshipped at St Mary's and have memorials there.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century William McGregor, chairman of Aston Villa football club, was instrumental in founding the English Football League. He is buried in the churchyard (see photograph overleaf).

Those of us who are of a certain age will recall the singing duo Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth. Webster Booth and his two brothers were choirboys at St Mary's.



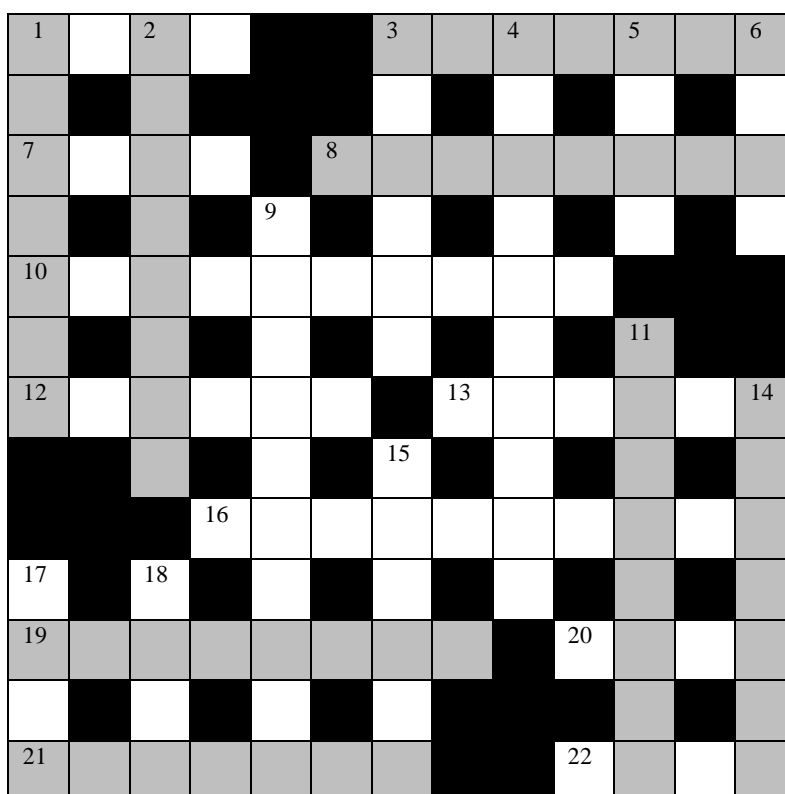


### Guild Puzzle – by Anonymous Contributor

Answers to be entered in the greyed cells are ringing towers within the St Martin's Guild. Clues for these entries are (mildly) cryptic and are clued in alphabetical order of their answers – solvers must work out where each fits in the grid.

If you need a bit of help, all the towers can be found on the St Martin's Guild website:

<https://stmartinsguild.org/our-guild/towers/>



Clues - Across		Clues - Down	
1	Band; type of window-frame (4)	3	Muses (6)
7	Lazy (4)	4	Suggested an alternative way (10)
10	Ones licensed by bishop for church duties (3, 7)	5	Long journey (4)
12	Per annum (6)	6	Require (4)
13	Juicy bits of news (6)	9	Eating this should help keep you fit ( 6, 4)
16	What might be used to go through Cheshire? (10)	15	Flag (6)
20	Pound (4)	17	Ruffian (4)
22	Scheme (4)	18	Release (4)

Towers (cryptic, in alphabetical order of answers)

No brats! (anagram, 7)
Striking lake (8)
Heartless ecological fellow (7)
Bra on her (anagram, 8)
Okay, sell! (anagram, 8)
Old hens (anagram, 7)
Temple? Or Bassey? (7)
Soil spread over city in Yorkshire (8)

Solution Overleaf

# Solution to the Puzzle!

1 S	A	2 S	H			3 B	A	4 R	S	5 T	O	6 N
H		E				R		E		R		E
7 I	D	L	E		8 B	O	L	D	M	E	R	E
R		L		9 H		O		I		K		D
10 L	A	Y	R	E	A	D	E	R	S			
E		O		A		S		E		11 S		
12 Y	E	A	R	L	Y		13 S	C	O	O	P	14 S
		K		T		15 P		T		L		H
			16 C	H	E	E	S	E	W	I	R	E
17 T		18 F		F		N		D		H		L
19 H	A	R	B	O	R	N	E		20 Q	U	I	D
U		E		O		O				L		O
21 G	R	E	N	D	O	N			22 P	L	A	N

## Cryptic Tower Clues – Explanations:

No brats! (anagram, 7)	Barston
Striking lake (8)	Boldmere
Heartless ecological fellow (7)	Gr(e)en Don
Bra on her (anagram, 8)	Harborne
Okay, sell! (anagram, 8)	Selly Oak
Old hens (anagram, 7)	Sheldon
Temple? Or Bassey? (7)	Shirley
Soil spread over city in Yorkshire (8)	Solihull