

The Quarterly Newsletter of the St Martin's Guild - issue 44

Editor's forward:

Welcome to issue 44 of the Newsletter and thanks for all the submissions. They range from the HJ Dinner to the 12 bell eliminators via a poem, ringing for a King and jubilant dancing ringers. Whilst it's lovely to be reporting on more general events that tend to end up in the Ringing World, I wondered if there are budding report writers and photographers out there who could document more of the numerous more local events that happen. If there are, please feel free to make any submissions, at any time, for the next edition.

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The 135th Henry Johnson Commemorative Dinner.

So glad I went along...

I'm ashamed to say that it's some 25 years since I attended a St Martin's Guild, Henry Johnson dinner, and even then I didn't stay for the whole event. I was dispatched in a taxi halfway through because my husband was babysitting my niece - she was screaming with teething pain. I had to go home to comfort them both!

So, it was with some excitement that I donned my glad rags to meet up with the booted and suited diners and guests in sparkly dresses, bow ties and dinner jackets at the Burlington on the evening of the fourth Saturday in February, for the Henry Johnson Commemorative Dinner - chaired by Julia Cater in an unbroken series of 135 dinners since 1889.

There were 82 assembled ringers, guests and friends and when we first arrived it seemed they were all crammed into the fairly small bar. There was time to squeeze through, grab a drink and catch up with ringers from other towers and even to collar Simon Linford for more details of Bell Sunday (hope he didn't think he was getting a night off!) We then went through to dinner and were seated with others from towers local to us.

MENU	PROGRAMME
<i>Served to table</i>	Welcome
Whipped goat 'cheese' & heritage beetroot, candied walnuts, watermelon (vegetarian, gf)	His Majesty the King Proposed by Julia Cater
Char-grilled vegetable terrine, braised leeks, Strathdon blue cheese (vegetarian/vegan)	The memory of the late Henry Johnson Proposed by Julia Cater
Braised beef bavette, horseradish mash, seasonal vegetables (gf)	Interval
Butternut squash & goat cheese risotto, parmesan, roasted pumpkin seeds (vegetarian/vegan, gf)	The Church Proposed by Julia Cater
Raspberry classic crème brûlée, shortbread biscuits (gf)	Handbell ringing
Chocolate cheesecake (vegetarian/vegan, gf)	Health of the guests and visitors Proposed by Rachel Mahoney
Coffee or tea	Continued prosperity of the St Martin's Guild Proposed by Simon Linford
	Health of the Choir Proposed by David Hall



Casey McLellan, Jimmy Yeoman, Oliver Bates,
Michael Wilby and James Ramsbottom

Julia was joined at the top table by Eleanor Linford, our very proud new Guild Master, complete with chain of office.

After dinner there was, as usual, handbell ringing. To someone who doesn't ring two in hand, watching handbell ringing never disappoints and it's always fascinating. A huge shout out goes to Casey McLellan who had only recently come to the art and yet held her own ringing Cambridge Royal alongside Jimmy Yeoman, Oliver Bates (conductor), Michael Wilby and James Ramsbottom. Thank you to them all.

Rachel Mahoney proposed a toast to the health of the guests and visitors. Some were invited guests of Julia. Some took me down memory lane. The Lichfield contingent included ringers from Abbots Bromley and Mavesyn Ridware. I'd rung at Lichfield as a teenager and sometimes, having rung at the Cathedral for evensong, we'd dash over to one of these towers to ring there too. And whilst not visitors, Rachel welcomed Maurice and Margaret Edwards, both life members, who had travelled back to be with us. I'd known them when I was a learner at Solihull and they would come to support our band. So, it was lovely to catch up with them again.

Simon Linford proposed a toast to the continuing prosperity of the St Martin's Guild. Whilst he assured us that he had no CCCBR Presidents stump speech, he was both entertaining and appreciative of all that St Martin's Guild has achieved - referring to the well respected Birmingham School of Bell Ringing and its many volunteers and the programme of workshops and the familiar

emails telling us 'the fun starts at...' The theme here, though, of course, being that we have built an environment for excellence with experienced ringers 'sending the elevator back down' to encourage and develop the skills of others. We have much to be proud of in and around Birmingham.

David Hull spoke about the long time he had known Julia. There was lots of laughter as he recounted stories from their past and their friendship was very apparent, even if Julia barely noticed David when they first met! The jokes came thick and fast to the point where the audience started to see cause for laughter even where it wasn't intended! On a serious note though, we were very grateful to Julia for chairing the dinner. Her ringing achievements are well known. As a role model for women in ringing, she is inspirational and so much appreciated, not least for her pioneering ringing of large bells. Thank you to Julia for keeping the flow of the evening but also taking time to visit each of the tables. We remembered together her lockdown training session for the Guild when she came to our zoom screens to talk us through 'How to ring big bells'. It's well worth a watch and is still available on the Guild website.

Oh, and the food? Well that was great too and we were all very well looked after. A big thank you goes to Clare McArdle who pulled the event together for us. At the end of the evening 5 of us shared a taxi home and chatted appreciatively about the evening we'd had together as our kamikaze taxi driver headed south!

Sand Cooper



Simon Linford, Rachel Mahoney, Julia Cater,
David Hull

A poem

Me and my brother,
we are a team,
getting into ringing,
we are very keen.

Our first ring,
it was at Aldridge,
how nice they are,
I have to acknowledge.

Getting to the church,
opening the gate,
me and my brother,
me and my mate.

Ringin in the belfry,
Dad giving me a prod,
learning a new method,
can't get it wrong.

A mob of people,
down in the church,
the rope jumping around,
while I sit in my perch.

One amazing evening,
I got my level two,
long time to get level five,
all I've got to do, is think it through.

Matthew Healy

Do you need help with your learners?

I am hearing that many towers are seeing an increase in learners and I hope they have the teachers to satisfy the demand. If not, or if there are others in your tower who would like to teach, I would recommend that they sign up for an ART M1 teaching bell handling day course, which takes people through all of the teaching exercises needed to teach someone to handle a bell. All the available courses can be found [here](#).

If there is enough demand within the guild - and I hope there might be - a course could be run in Birmingham. Is there anyone out there who would be willing to be course organiser? The course organiser facilitates the course, booking a tower and hall and organises catering. They help to populate the course by identifying people locally who would benefit from either learning or brushing up on teaching skills, or who, as an experienced teacher, needs to attend as they will act as mentor to people teaching for the first time.

ART provides the tutor to deliver the course. The course is a full day and delegates then have a two-year period to practice their teaching skills, with the help of a mentor. At any time during those two years the mentor can recommend them for an assessment for accreditation. Whilst they are practising and after accreditation, teachers can register their learners on the Learning the Ropes scheme and apply for certificates for them.

Not everybody who attends an ART module takes their teaching as far as accreditation. One advantage of doing so is that it is something you can use to prove your qualification as a teacher to a prospective learner or parent, or to the PCC if you are planning a recruitment drive. Many people attend just to acquire the teaching skills. Some people attend out of curiosity.

Whether you take things as far as accreditation or not, invariably people who have attended a day course feedback that they learned new skills and they got a lot out of the course - even teachers with many years' experience usually say they've picked up something new.

Food for thought - if anyone feels they would like to take this further please get in touch claremcardle151@gmail.com

Call Change Competition at Moseley.

Moseley is hosting a Call Change Competition on Saturday 3rd June and bands from the Guild are encouraged to enter. It is call changes in the Devon style - which includes ringing up and down and the standard Devon competition piece, 60 on 3rds, as the test piece. The competition is in the afternoon, with a draw at 12, and the test pieces start at 1pm. There will be food and



beer so it should be a good social occasion! Although possibly of more interest to visiting teams, there will also be ringing at St Anne's for competing bands.

The competition is called 'National' because call change competitions in Devon are generally only for members of towers in the Devon Association. This competition is intended to open call change competitions up a bit, and entice some of the Devon call change teams to travel. While it is not expected that teams will come from all over the country, some teams from Devon are coming and we are hoping that there will be some local bands as well.

Details of the competition are on a dedicated [website](#).

It would be great if there could be representation of local bands. The Devon visitors are very keen to pitch themselves against method ringing bands, and it will also be an opportunity to hear our bells rung by Devon call change teams.

Simon Linford

Ringling for Commonwealth Day.

In October 2022, ringers around the world were invited to take part in ringing for Commonwealth Day on Monday 13th March. This date marked the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Commonwealth Charter by the late Queen.

Having had plenty of notice, we managed a good turnout for open ringing by the Solihull band at 7:30 pm, culminating in the requested ten whole pulls of Queens (on ten bells) and, for good measure, some whole pulls of Kings, which we didn't count!

We were asked to submit details of our tower and were promised a "Certificate of Grateful Recognition", which arrived as soon as I had sent the details. As you can see, it was very colourful, but I was underwhelmed that, having provided tower details as requested, the certificate was entirely unpersonalised and didn't even mention bell ringing! But at least ringers were thought about and invited to join in, which is positive.

Keith Whitehead



Personal experience of Ring for the King publicity.

This article has been adapted from what Simon wrote in his Central Council President's Blog, after the BBC visit to St Paul's.

Come on Charlie, it's 6 o'clock - we're leaving in 30 minutes. Not the wake up call a 15 year old wants to get in half term, with previous mornings not having been graced with her presence at all, but this was the BBC calling. We were off to St Paul's, Jewellery Quarter to do a live broadcast of ringing and interviews in support of the Ring for the King campaign. Many ringers, and even more non-ringers, saw the ringing broadcast live on BBC Breakfast and then subsequently on lunchtime and evening news. So many in fact that over 1000 learn to ring enquiries were sent out to teachers everywhere. How did it feel at the coal face?

Firstly, Breakfast TV is, by definition, early. We couldn't really work out why it needed to be live given they also had some pre-recorded footage from Ipswich, but they wanted to blend that with live stuff, that's where the Birmingham team came in. The presenter also didn't know why it had to be live but said live TV added a frisson of excitement. You can mess up with no way back.

The only other times I have been ringing before the sun comes up have been stunt multiple peal performances. I'll always remember a lovely outdoor barbecue breakfast at Quex Park after the first of four peals of Maximus. This time, cooked breakfast was supplied by a local café, with Richard Grimmett extracting both a taxi and breakfast budget out of the Beeb.

Tony Daw was there at 5am to let in the BBC engineers, and 10 members of the St Paul's band were already up the tower ringing a course of London Royal when Charlie and I got into the ringing chamber at 6.45. That was for a sound check, with the cameraman communicating with the live broadcast team outside. All was going to plan.

Ring for the King has caused a bit of a media frenzy. I had a 6.50am live slot on BBC Radio Five Live the week before, the Council's PR Officer got to do a local media round robin – just like Liz Truss famously did. Even that



St Paul's in Birmingham with the BBC
Outside Broadcast van outside

publicity nearly broke the Ring for the King helpdesk, which has the ART Admin team sitting behind it, but it was only a portent of things to come. Future media requests had to be put on hold while the ART team caught up.

With the ringers doing their stuff upstairs, attention focused to the live interviews. Timing had been variable, and the piece could have been pulled if Putin had done something stupid, but we got told that we would be live at 7.50 and my fellow interviewees, the vicar, Elizabeth Wilby, and Charlie Linford assembled in the nave. I had briefed them on the sorts of things to say but they didn't really need it. Both spoke eloquently about what they like about ringing, with no lines fluffed, no umms and no gratuitous use of the word 'like'!

If you've not done live media, it is made easier by having pre-prepared answers to the questions they might ask, and some target sentences that you can reel out. Sort of "that's a good question, let me answer a different question". I particularly wanted to get across that ringing takes quite a long time to learn, to deter those who think they can just come along on Coronation Day. Although we had



Band members tuck into breakfast in the training room at St Paul's

given the BBC this story some months earlier, it was the BBC who chose to run it when they did, and we recognised that recruitment and teaching of ringers in 11 weeks is a tall order. However, it was still too good a PR opportunity to miss provided we made the right points.

We did a second piece live for the BBC News Channel at about 9.30, this time swapping in Richard Grimmett for the vicar - it took the presenter many goes to call him ringing master not ringmaster! Richard was able to say how strong the band is at St Paul's, built on a pursuit of high striking standards and a strong social side.

It was not long before we started to find quite what an impact the coverage had had. Alarm bells were flashing at "Ring for the King HQ", aka the ART Admin team, and by the end of the day there were getting on for 1000 people who had expressed interest and given their contact details. The specially created website ringforthe king.org had been designed to act as a filter, explaining what ringing is all about, and getting better qualified leads.

Birmingham has become a bit of a 'go to' place for filming ringing. Moseley has featured in a number of pieces about young ringers, and the St Paul's band's ability to pull out all the stops and support something like this is going to get remembered by PR and media teams.

Simon Linfoord

ART Conference 11-12 March Bournville.

Thursday and Friday of the first full week of March saw freezing temperatures and heavy snow, causing chaos on the roads and school closures. The organisers of the ART conference must have breathed a sigh of relief as on Friday afternoon a rapid thaw set in and most of the snow disappeared. It was still a cold weekend, but a warm welcome was promised and delivered at Bournville Gardens as people arrived on Saturday morning for a weekend of presentations and practical workshops delivered to the usual high standard that we have come to expect by the Association of Ringing Teachers.

As I sit on the ART Management Committee, the task had fallen to me to find a suitable venue at which to base the conference and organise access to multiple towers for the practical workshops. In theory, the tower bit was straightforward, but the venue for the conference base was a bit more challenging. The usual places that host the conference are church halls and indeed we have hosted the conference in Birmingham before - in 2014 at Northfield's Pastoral Centre. Other venues used in the past were Taylor's Bell Foundry and Worcestershire County Cricket Club. After a bit of head scratching, I realised that the venue had been hiding in plain sight - we could go to my Mum's! or, to put it a little better, Bournville Gardens Retirement Village, which is where she has an apartment. Lesley Belcher (now immediate past Chairman) and Annie Hall came to visit to case the joint in November and were blown away by the facilities. Fortunately, there were no social bookings for the village hall that weekend and so Bournville Gardens were very happy to let it out for the conference.

Saturday began with the ART AGM - a masterpiece of efficiency lasting less than 30 minutes. The significant piece of business transacted was the election of Andrew Slade as the new ART Chairman. Then began two days full of interesting presentations and workshops in towers, open to anyone, ART members or not, delivered by a wealth of talented people from within the ART fold. Birmingham was well represented on the presenting front,

although sadly not so well on the participation side. Presentations ranged from Teaching Theory (Andrew Brown), Diversity in Ringing, Decision Making in Ringing, Building a Strong Future for Ringing (Simon Linford), and the Learning the Ropes Advanced Call Changes scheme (Clare McArdle), to list just a few. Practical workshops included a Devon Call Changes taster, Ringing Up and Down in Peal (Phil Ramsbottom), two workshops aimed at developing technique to ring heavy bells, Running a Good Practice, and Teaching Good Striking. These are not exhaustive lists and feedback suggests that all were well received.

Saturday early evening was taken up by the ART Awards delivered with her usual style and aplomb by Stephanie Warboys. This year's judges, Julia Cater, Colin Newman and Wendy Bloom were hard pushed to choose just one winner in many of the categories, such as the quality of the entries showcasing some amazing achievements and contributions to ringing today. A highlight of the awards ceremony for me was the highly commended in the Learning the Ropes Achievement Award for our very own George and James Ellis. Well done boys - there was some very stiff competition. After the awards ceremony there was an evening gathering for food and time to wind down and relax at The Cambridge in Longbridge.

Sunday followed more or less the same pattern with workshops and presentations. Delegates returned home having learned a few new things, picked up a few tips and generally having enjoyed a very sociable weekend. Everything had run smoothly, there were no hiccups at any of the towers (that I am aware of), for which I thank the tower contacts and those who arranged access. There was good feedback too from Bournville Gardens - many of the residents had been curious about a bell ringing conference and had shown quite an interest. Some were very helpful too when the event was being set up, taking pride in their village. Takings were up in the Bistro and the shop. Reflecting on the weekend, Bournville Gardens was the perfect venue...

The ART Conference is an event open to all with a great deal that is of interest to ringers whether they are teachers or not. If you missed it this year, it is certainly an event worth considering in future years.



George and James receive their LtR Achievement Awards from Andrew Slade

Unfortunately, it's not likely to be right on your doorstep for a few years, but, if you are looking for a ringing focussed weekend away, then it could be for you.

Clare McArdle

Mini outings with friends.

Last summer I was encouraged by our keen learners to organise a mini outing, which incorporated a few towers in pretty places. We didn't go too far and ended up on a sunny Saturday evening at Enville, which had much needed space for ringers to rest on the grass outside the very small ground floor ringing room. It also, significantly, had a pub just round the bend, to round the afternoon off nicely. While some ringers were appreciative of the grab, others were just grateful to be out ringing somewhere different, or just anywhere really. In particular, our Brierley Hill learners were enthused, so I hastily promised to book more outings.

While I have notions for another summer outing in the countryside, a bit further away

this time, the request for a visit to the sea side is perhaps beyond my scope at the moment. However, as an interim, I did set about a three tower ultra-local event this last Saturday, 18 March. After a few querying looks at just how local the three towers were, people signed up anyway. I think many of us are guilty of passing a good many towers on our everyday commutes, so it wasn't as daft as it seemed. So, the inhabitants of Wordsley, Kingswinford and Wombourne were treated to a range of call changes, to a bit of Grandsire and even some Stedman Triples. With the organisation of all of two tours under my belt these are my musings on what to take forward for next time:

1. Make sure there is something in mind for all the band to ring.
2. Add some extra, extra time for travel between towers. Just a bit.
3. Send some people on ahead early. Every time.
4. Look up the weights beforehand and let everyone know.
5. Make sure the pub at the end isn't going to be mostly for food, or book.
6. Look up alternative pubs nearby.
7. Remember to sign the visitors book, which you have reminded everyone else to do.
8. Never leave less established ringers without a buddy on unknown bells.
9. Always ask the key holder where the treble is. If you forget to do this before they leave the room enjoy chiming four or five of the bells to find it.
10. Remember the country code and leave the place as you found it. Take a good look at how you find it so you can do this.
11. Take a brolly into the tower with you.
12. Volunteer others to run a tower or two.
13. Make sure there are toilets somewhere along the way.
14. Check and re-check where everyone can park.
15. Get someone to take photographs.
16. Never say never again.

Jenny Sunter

Ring for the King.

October 2022 - I had just arrived at a holiday destination in France when I got my first phone call from the Times newspaper asking me to comment on the need for new ringers. This was the first evidence for me that the "Ring for the King" campaign was taking hold. I truthfully told the reporter that we had already experienced an upsurge in people enquiring and that currently all our bell handling places at Birmingham School of Bell Ringing were taken - we had just begun a new cohort of Level 1 students and we had a waiting list of people to join. As the waiting list grew longer, I was giving people the option of staying on the list or offering to put them in touch with their local tower to learn there.



As the new year started at BSoBR we prepared for the next cohort and held a taster session for around 10 new prospects. They all wanted to start and showed the commitment we had hoped for, but 10 was too many. Fortunately, we were able to divert some of them who were from some distance away to towers local to them where we had contacts, and so, at the end of January another 7 students began their training.

At the end of February BBC Breakfast news featured an item on bell ringing broadcast live from (our) St Paul's at 07.50. The media had got hold of the campaign to recruit new ringers to ring for the coronation of King Charles III. What followed can only be described as an avalanche of enquiries about learning to ring.

Within 10 minutes of the broadcast, I had received two enquiries through the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing website and a steady stream of enquiries was making

its way into Eleanor Linford's inbox. Nationally the Association of Ringing Teachers administrators reported that having had a busy month in January with over 120 enquiries through their website, the 1000 or so enquiries that landed in those last few days of February was certainly challenging.

Having thought we were doing quite well with teaching and distributing students locally, the situation quickly became critical. With not much time left to train people so they would be ready to ring for the coronation, which was why they were volunteering, we had to pull a rabbit out of a hat, or something... a waiting list plainly wasn't going to work.

A flurry of emails between the Standing Committee and BSoBR tutors ensued and tactical negotiations with St Paul's and Phil Ramsbottom about clearing the St Paul's diary on Wednesday nights resulted in a brand new 12-week bell handling course being established and populated by students and tutors within 10 days.

On 8 March we rolled out our "oven ready" bell ringing taster session - given that it was the first night of heavy snowfalls we were pleased to greet 6 out of 9 hopefuls who didn't want to miss it. First tick in the box for commitment... After the taster a couple of people decided ringing was not for them, but we were joined in the following weeks by several more new enquirers. So we now have a new cohort of eight students all progressing nicely. In addition, we have been able to give mentoring opportunities to trainee teachers working towards ART accreditation.

We will be giving our new ringers a "Ring for the King" experience, whatever stage they have got to on coronation weekend. Over the next few weeks we hope to match them up with their local towers and get them started at their local practices.

Clare McArdle



The Ringing Master's report.

I'm pleased to say that there has been an uplift in the regular activity within the Guild which has provided not only a good start to the year but an extended range of ability levels. The year started off with a new and regular surprise major practice, usually at Edgbaston, which will be held on the first Saturday of every month commencing at 7.30pm. Eleanor Linford must be thanked for arranging these and also for circulating some 'homework' beforehand in the form of a method menu. Methods so far have included some of the standard eight along with Cornwall and Lessness including spliced, so for any Guild members wishing to expand their surprise major repertoire, this is the place to be. In addition to this, Solihull has established a regular higher numbers practice on the 4th Wednesday of every month commencing at 7.30pm. Thanks go to Malcolm Paulson and Sand Cooper who have not only set this up and attracted sufficient ringers, but also invited guest leaders to come along and run the sessions. To date the method repertoire has largely comprised Grandsire, Erin and Stedman caters, Little Bob Royal and Erin Cinques, so it's a good starting ground for competent eight bell ringers wanting to move on to some higher number ringing. On an

occasion when Solihull bells weren't available, this was converted into a quarter peal of Grandsire Caters at St. Pauls and congratulations go to **Alex Parsons** for whom this was his 50th quarter peal and also his first of caters as conductor. Whilst we're on the subject of quarter peals and 'firsts', having had a quick search through Bellboard, congratulations should also go to:

Casey McClellan - first on 12 bells,

Max Earthquake - first away from cover,

Kirsty Gifford and **Trish Everett** - first of Superlative Major,

Sharon Wall - first of minor,

Geoff Ridgway - first quarter peal,

Elliot Daniel - several firsts including in a variety of minimus methods over several quarters and his first peal - the first handbell peal of minimus for the Guild.

Due to my search criteria this might not be a definitive list so please accept my apologies if you feel you've been left out, it is not intentional.

The special practices at Sheldon (3rd Wednesday of the month) covering basic doubles and minor methods, bob calling and splicing have been well attended. I'm very grateful to Margaret Burling who has now been arranging these for more than a few years. Prior to the St. Pauls workshops being put on temporary hold to be able to support the Ring for the King enquiries (more on this elsewhere in the newsletter) three workshops were held at the start of the year, two of them at St. Pauls. The first one was a theory based Zoom session covering Bastow and Little Bob prior to the practical follow up workshop two weeks later, the Zoom session proving to have been very beneficial. The third workshop covered Single and Double Oxford with the usual related theory thrown in for good measure. The regular workshops will return on Wednesday 14th June at St. Pauls and if members have any suggestions for particular topics they would like to be covered, practical or theory (which can be via Zoom) please let me know and it can be arranged.

Ringings at Moseley, St Mary on the third Thursday morning of each month continues to be an ever regular presence with the usual mix of ringing, some theory learning and of course, tea, coffee and cakes. These practices are open to all Guild members and cater for all levels of

ability, so please do come along and join the fun which incidentally begins at 10.15am.

From a quick tally of all these events, by the end of the year almost 60 regular special or focussed practices and workshops will have been arranged collectively by a number of Guild members, covering a wide spectrum of ringing and catering for ringers of all abilities. It's refreshing to know that not only are members prepared to arrange these events, but also that plenty of Guild members are keen to attend them. This is an incredible achievement and one in which all Guild members can be proud.

Phil Ramsbottom

Jubilant dancing ringers.

In the betwixtmas down time, while driving back from a distraction of doing nothing sensible, I heard on Radio 4 the lead singer of the group Elbow talking about their hit song 'One Day like this' and how it has been the soundtrack to so many, many things apart from weddings. He recounted that the opening tune related to bells he had heard. This is lovely to know. He went on to comment that the track was even used as the soundtrack of a video of some bearded, beer bellied ringers, dancing in celebration of having won a competition. My interest was understandably peaked. Anything to avoid the ironing, I did a search, but no matter what permutation of bellringers, dancing and Elbow I put into the search tab I did not land on it. There seem to be a lot of clips of hand bells and the Salvation Army. I refrained from further searching for bearded, beer bellied bell ringers for fear of what it might trigger!

Has anyone ever seen this video? Are you starring in it? Is there a link to be shared here?

Jenny Sunter



The lead singer of Elbow.

National 12-Bell Contest Eliminator - A View from the Cake Stall.

In June 2022 I was asked if the Cheltenham Minster ringers would host an eliminator for the National 12-Bell Striking Contest and I said yes. There are three eliminator contests held on the same day and the other two were at Hursley in Hampshire and Melbourne in Derbyshire.

We decided to hold the whole event in the Minster as there is a sink and kitchen area and there are also toilets in the church. As Cheltenham is a town filled with cafes and restaurants and as we don't have any cooking facilities in the church we decided that we would just provide coffee/tea and cakes all day.

The secretary to the 12-Bell committee is Liz Evans, Hugh's daughter. She kept me up to date with what had to happen and when. I had to do an information sheet to go on the 12-Bell Contest website with information for everyone coming to Cheltenham for the day. I also provided a map of the town centre with the names of cafes. The teams came from Birmingham, Bristol, Chilcompton, Exeter, Southwark and Towcester and, of course, Cheltenham.

We needed to find a space for the judges where they would not be disturbed. The ideal solution was to use the vestry, which also has a private toilet. They had their own steward who supplied teas, coffees and sandwiches as needed. We had a visit from one of the judging team at the end of February to check



out the microphone above the bells and do some recording for the 'Strikeometer/Hawkear' system, which is a feed of the sound of the bells that is used to help the judging.

Liz then asked me to ask for permission for each team to come for a practice on the bells. This meant that the bells rang every Saturday morning or Sunday afternoon for a month - the Cheltenham band had two practices specifically for the competition.

In the middle of February I had a meeting with the vicar and she wanted to get the 'church family' involved in the refreshments for the day. She would organise the rota (with names from the ringers as well) and the congregation would bake the cakes.

On 1st March there was sad news from the church that the vicar was seriously ill in hospital in Newcastle. This meant that the whole of the refreshments would be the responsibility of the ringers.

On 13th March Barbara Pettit circulated an email to the Branch asking for volunteers to make cakes and be on the rota. This was less than two weeks before the contest and I was worried that no-one would answer the call. I was overwhelmed with the offers of cakes and biscuits and volunteers that flowed in immediately the email went out.

There were offers of gluten free items, biscuits and a fantastic array of cakes and I have over 30 names on my list of replies.

On Friday 24th March my trusty team of Minster helpers assembled. Reg and his little team had to stop the church clock chiming so that it did not interfere with the judging, hide one clock, cover another so that the teams couldn't see them (the techie judge brought with him an 'atomic clock' for the ringing chamber and one for the judges) and hoovered,



Barbara Pettit, Hugh Evans, Hannah Guggaria, Ray Talbot, Andra Knight, Isabel Hitchings, Tony Foster, Reg Hitchings

tidied up and swept the path to the tower door. In the church we had to assemble tables, mark up the flipcharts for the order of ringing after the draw and the results at the end, set up the television screen that shows the bells, put up the price list and arrange the vestry for the judges.

Saturday 25th was a lovely bright day (with a few showers) and we opened up at 9 o'clock and cakes started to appear. By 10.30 the church was filling up and coffees were being served and cakes were starting to be eaten.

The draw took place at 11 o'clock and our interim vicar, who was a fantastic help, welcomed the contestants with a prayer then drew the names of the towers out of a hat, which showed which order they would ring. It then went fairly quiet for a few hours.

Ringers wandered in and out and stood outside listening to the ringing - particularly the Birmingham band who were expected to win.

The ringing finished at 3 and the results were expected after 4. At that point it got busy again on the tea stall. The judges appeared at 4.15 and one gave a description of each piece of ringing, and the other judge then gave the results. As expected, Birmingham won and Exeter and Bristol also qualified for the final.

Then the clearing up began and tables and mugs were carried back to St Matthew's across the road and all the tea towels and plates and pie slices and cake tins were collected by their owners and the money was counted. We were delighted to be able to donate just under £350 to the Friends of the Minster to be spent on the Prayer Chapel, which needs some work.

Exhausted but happy we finished just after 5 o'clock. I would particularly like to thank Cath & Anson Jack, Reg & Isabel Hitchings, Michael Bishop, Mike Hartley, Andra Knight, Mark Davies and Steve & Gail Jones plus all the other people who donated cakes and helped on the rota. Thanks must also go to Rachel Hargeaves in the church office and Rev Louise Brown who took a day of bell ringers in her stride.

Liz Coke



And finally...

I asked ChatGPT what change ringing is. Even though the last paragraph is mostly accurate, the response clearly shows that the ChatGPT AI is as good at making things up as us..! Ed.

'Change ringing is a traditional English style of ringing church bells in which the order of the bells is constantly changing. In change ringing, a group of bells, typically six or more, are rung in a specific sequence or pattern known as a "method". The bells are rung one after the other, with each bell sounding once in the sequence before returning to its starting position.

The sequence of changes is not determined by a musical score or composition, but rather by the conductor calling out the changes in a specific order. The conductor may call out the changes either verbally or by using a set of handbells, which are used to signal the order in which the bells should be rung.

Change ringing is a highly skilled and precise art form that requires both physical dexterity and mental focus. The aim of change ringing is to produce a clear, musical sound that is pleasing to the ear, rather than simply creating a cacophony of noise. Change ringing has a long history in England, and is still practiced in many churches and bell towers throughout the country, as well as in other parts of the world.'