

NEWS

The Quarterly Newsletter of the St Martin's Guild - issue 47



The Birmingham Cathedral Band's home victory.

The organising of the 2023 Robert B Smith competition was a big operation, but there was one other matter which ran concurrently and could not be overlooked. The Cathedral band would once again be entering a team into the competition.

We knew that we had a good chance of winning it this year as we were on our own bells - always an advantage, especially when they are as idiosyncratic as the bells at St. Philip's. However, nothing could be taken for granted. Practice was needed if we were to have any chance of even doing well.

In previous years the band has had about 3 practices in the few weeks leading up to the competition, visiting different rings of 12 around the West Midlands to practise getting used to an unfamiliar ring as quickly as possible. But things were different this year. All 3 of our practices were at St. Philip's.

The first practice was used to decide on a band placing and get to know the test piece - all bands would be ringing the same touch of

Erin Cinques. Placing the band was easy. I already knew who I wanted to ring the front and back bells and I had an idea about how to place the ringers around the middle. The first run through of the touch went smoothly so no moving of ringers was felt to be needed.

Getting to know the touch was a little more challenging. Although it's a fairly straightforward method, the Cathedral band don't ring Erin on a regular basis and it took us most of the evening to learn the touch and ring it without method mistakes. Although we were a long way off being ready for the big day, our ringing showed signs of promise.

One week later we met again at St. Philip's. This practice was to be a little different from what we were used to. The Hawkear equipment had already been set up for the competition so we were able to use this to review some of the touches we rang during the course of the evening. We also paused the

contents:

Prep for a striking competition James Ramsbottom.....	1
An invitation to pay tribute Richard Grimmett.....	3
Mensa members check out ringing Kirsty Gifford Alex Rivas.....	4
The Ringing Master's report Phil Ramsbottom.....	4
There's so much more to ringing Deborah Chard.....	5
An invitation to dinner Sand Cooper.....	7
A day out in Birmingham Sarah Chilton.....	8

ringing halfway though to listen back to what we had just rung and see what we all thought of it.

Another week went by and we had our final practice. We all knew that any adjustments we made to our striking had to be very slight - merely thinking about doing it was almost enough. Nothing much needed to be said between touches as we all knew what we had to do. The final touch of the evening was declared by Hawkear to be comparable with most ringing in the National 12 Bell Final, so we were in a good place.

On the day itself our time in the tower flew by. There was only time for one practice which we used to get settled back in as quickly as possible. Then the big moment. After all the practice and preparation, we set off into our test piece. 10 minutes later it came round, everything having gone to plan.

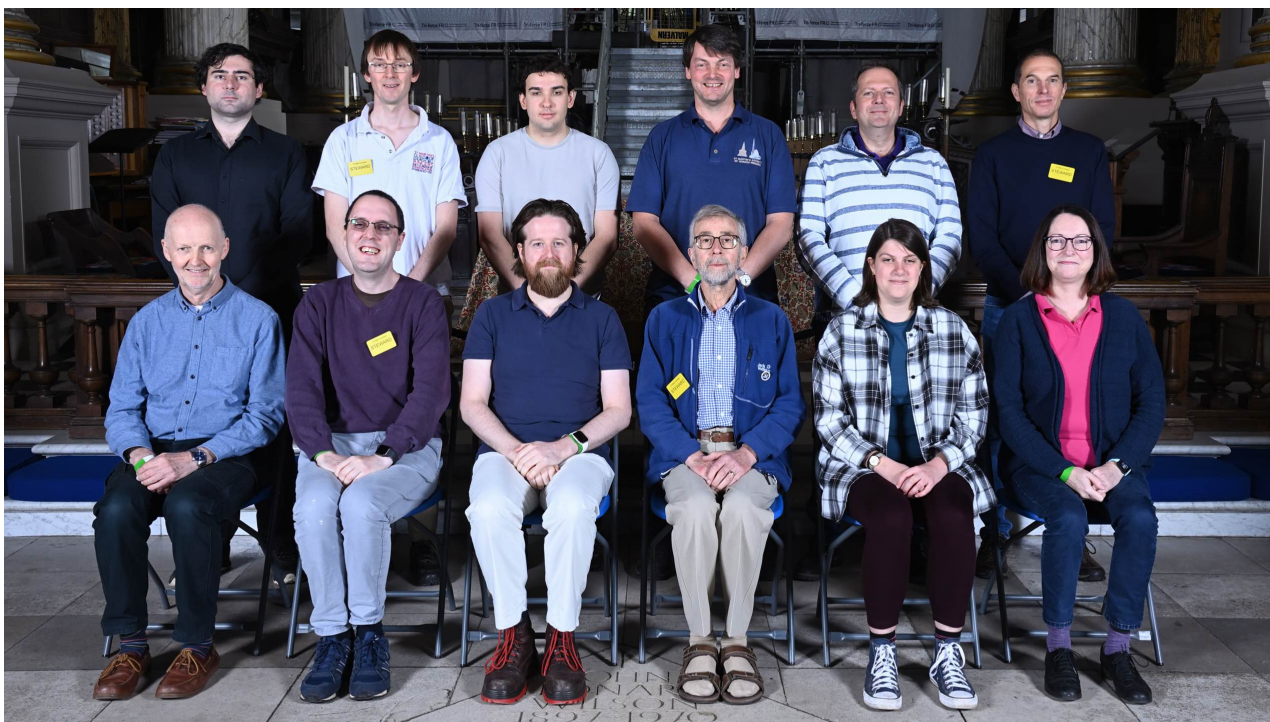
When not busy helping run the rest of the day - or conducting the scratch team - I tried to have a listen to the teams from outside the Cathedral. A lot of them were sounding rather good. However, it's impossible to compare a

piece of ringing heard inside, in which you're performing, with one heard outside.

At the end of the day, judges Julia Cater and Cecilia Pipe gave comments on all the teams which rang and then delivered the results in the usual reverse order. One by one the teams were placed. The judges got down to the last 2 and we still had yet to be named. Then the team from Cambridge were announced as second place and we knew that we'd won. My initial reaction was one of relief, as we'd succeeded with all our planning and hard work. But I was incredibly pleased to then find out that we'd won by a considerable margin - 92%, with Cambridge following on 85%.

It can't be denied that we had a home advantage this year. But that only counts for so much and was no guarantee of success. We won because everybody in the band put in a lot of effort and attention to detail on their own ringing and we can be very proud of what we managed to achieve.

James Ramsbottom



1. Victoria Wilby 2. Catherine Morley 3. Mike Dodson 4. Matthew King 5. Graham Kelly 6. Phil Ramsbottom
7. Michael Parker 8. James Ramsbottom (C) 9. Alex Frye 10. Tony Daw 11. Michael Wilby 12. Jon Townsend

Dear All,

John McDonald may or may not be a name you are familiar with. It's nearly 20 years since John died shortly before his 66th birthday, on the 20th January 2004. John lived in Birmingham throughout his life and learned to ring at Erdington Abbey when he was 13. His first peal was at that tower when he was 14. During the same year John also rang peals of Stedman Cinques at the Cathedral and the Bullring.

Everyone who met with John will never forget him. He certainly made a mark on all he spent time with. He was infectious about every ringing project he engaged in, and provided endless entertainment around the post ringing pub table with his tremendous wit. An example occurred when a certain ringer left Birmingham to live in London. John observed that 'the ringing in both cities improved'. In addition to ringing, at which he was very good, John loved to listen to music (in particular Wagner), played bridge at county level, taught bridge in various north Birmingham bridge schools, and taught in schools, colleges and OU Summer schools.

John was ringing master at the Abbey for many years, and also led the formation of the St Chad's service band in the 1970s which still continues to this day. He ran the ringing at Chad's throughout that time. John was also a member of the Bullring band, and served as Ringing Master and Master of our Guild. John's favourite ringing was triples, especially stedman.

Back to matters in hand! A peal at St Chad's has been arranged on Saturday 20th January to mark the exact 20th anniversary of his passing. But it would be fitting if the day can serve as a tribute to the John's legacy from all of us. Whether you knew John or not, you will have benefited in some form or other from his legacy whilst ringing in Birmingham. I am therefore encouraging you to perhaps partake in a quarter or peal of Stedman Triples or another triples method on that day. I will also be arranging an evening social, probably in the Bull, Price Street where it is hoped members of John's family will also be.

I'd be grateful if you could let me know whether you would like to participate in this day, and in what manner, whether that be as an arranger, ringer or bystander - and whether you will attend in the evening. Please bear in mind that this is not a learning day as such, but a tribute day - it isn't a day for firsts.

Please consider this soon and let me know by January 5th at richard@grimmett.org

Best regards,

Richard Grimmett

Mensa tries bell ringing.

On Saturday 21st October, Mensa held their AGM in Birmingham and requested that the guild put together a taster session on bell ringing for some of their members. Of course we were happy to oblige! The session was split over two towers - St Philip's cathedral and St Paul's in the jewellery quarter.

At St Paul's the group received a general overview of ringing which included an explanation of how a bell functions, some history on how ringing came about and even a bit of the theory behind method ringing. This was then followed by a demonstration of change ringing and finally a go at ringing some backstrokes. There were even a couple of naturals in the crowd who progressed onto the handstroke.

Meanwhile, over at St Philip's, the group ascended up the tower to learn about the history of the cathedral as well as to get a more detailed view of ringing. Topics like the intricacies of peals were discussed which provided an insight into how complex ringing can really be. Plus, a very important conversation on the social opportunities ringing provides was had (aka our shared love of the pub). Additionally, everyone was given the chance to chime a bell - just for the bragging rights.

Having thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and with some members even expressing an interest in picking up the hobby, I think we left a great impression of what ringing is all about.

Thank you to Gill, Holly, James, Steve and Tony for giving your time and helping out.

Kirsty Gifford & Alex Rivas

From the Guild Ringing Master.

In stark contrast to my last newsletter report this submission is noticeably shorter, though I'm quick to add that this is no reflection on the level of activity during the last quarter of the year.

One of the main events of the last quarter was the City Centre Open Day in October. This was very well attended and provided an opportunity to those who hadn't already to ring at St. Chad's, St. Martin's and St. Paul's. A more detailed report on this is elsewhere in this newsletter.

A lesser known about event also took place in October which came about following a request by Mensa for a bell ringing taster session during their AGM weekend which was being held in Birmingham. Again, there is a more detailed report on this elsewhere in this newsletter.

Having had a quick scan through the peal columns I couldn't help noticing what I consider to be a particularly outstanding peal which I feel is worthy of a special mention. And in case you're thinking this is yet another one of those outstanding high number complex performances at St. Philip's or St. Martin's, you couldn't be more wrong. It was a peal on four handbells - 9984 changes in length and containing 26 methods - rung by Luke and Elliot Daniel in 3 hours and 42 minutes aboard their narrowboat. At the time of ringing it was believed to have been the longest peal of minimus ever rung and Luke and Elliot are to be congratulated on this incredible achievement. This goes to demonstrate that progression in ringing is not necessarily measured simply by an ability to ring complex methods on ever increasing higher numbers of bells, there is much that can be achieved by focussing on the totally opposite end of the scale.

The workshops this last quarter have been a mix of theory and practical sessions. An evening spent ringing touches of Kent TB minor was notable as several attendees had spent most of their ringing careers avoiding touches of this totally harmless but seemingly baffling method. They have now been converted, having seen the light. A couple of on line sessions covering basic entry-level theory were attended by some of our newer members who were keen to start familiarising themselves with what will soon be coming over the horizon and heading in their general direction.

I'm pleased the higher numbers practices at Solihull continue to be well supported and despite initially being billed as entry level, Cambridge royal has been rung on at least one occasion. Malcolm and Sand are to be thanked for initiating and maintaining these events. The monthly special practices at Sheldon have provided a colourful variety of methods including Erin, St. Clements, treble bob hunting and forward minor to name a few. Margaret always puts a lot of work into

planning and running these practices and is to be thanked for her efforts.

The surprise major practices at Edgbaston continue to be well supported and the repertoire has extended with each passing month. Thanks go to Eleanor for initiating these events, running them and also for issuing the regular homework.

Moseley on the third Thursday mornings is proving as popular as ever with a few new regular faces appearing in recent months. In addition to the usual fare (rounds and call changes and upwards) jump call changes have also been recently added to the pot, which has proved very popular. The basic idea of these is whilst moving a bell from say 5ths place to 2nds place is done one place at a time, moving a bell from 2nds to 5ths place can be done in one step necessitating the bells in 3rds, 4ths and 5ths place to all move one place forward at the same time. I hope the example below, showing how to produce queens with just two calls, might be of some help for any towers out there that may like to give this a try.

		1 2 3 4 5 6
Call "2 to 5"		1 3 4 5 2 6
Call "4 to 2"		1 3 5 2 4 6

And finally, it would be very wrong to report on the Thursday ringing at Moseley without thanking Trish who has continually provided us with tea, coffee and an array of cakes and biscuits. Thank you Trish for all you've done during the year, your efforts have always been very much appreciated.

In closing, I'll be stepping down at the forthcoming AGM, so this is the final newsletter report you'll receive from me. But before I go I thought I would leave you with three thoughts - more for the benefit of our newer recruits to this wonderful exercise we call bell ringing. Most of you will have already heard me say this, but for one final time:

1. If you really want to progress, arrange your own ringing events, don't wait for someone to do it for you. There is no shortage of other ringers who would be more than willing to help you with this. There's even a link on the Guild website to help you:
[The 'Three Events Challenge'](#).
2. When it comes to method ringing, don't just learn the Blue line, learn the method - properly.
...and finally:
3. Relax.

Phil Ramsbottom

People think it's just about pulling a rope and job done. It's so much more!

The Times' article earlier this year lamenting a shortage of bellringers for the King's Coronation both piqued my curiosity and solved the problem of that special 'something' to do on my 60th birthday. I was just like the people referred to in the newspaper article. I, too, thought it was just a question of pulling a rope. What else could it be?

I was about find out.

I had no idea what a fascinating world I was entering into when I had my introductory session in Moseley in early April. Thanks to our very dedicated Tower Captain who coached me intensively over the following month, I was considered 'good enough' to take part in the Coronation ringing. I did 'Ring for the King' and I was hooked.

The ringing itself is a real joy, with the inevitable frustrations when things go wrong and the sheer delight when things go to plan. As a band we share these highs and lows



together and I'll be forever grateful to those who have been in the business for decades for their enduring guidance, patience and humour. Alongside ringing tower bells, I have been thrown into the world of ringing handbells which, again, is harder than it looks. The skills here transfer beautifully to tower bell

ringing, so I'm happy to have this in my portfolio. Everyone should give it a try.

But beyond the ringing itself, there is so much to discover: the history of bell ringing, bell founding, handbells, methods, striking competitions, belfries and the complex world of bells, ropes, sliders and stays. **'50 Ringing Things'** was just what I needed! It's an amazing initiative for newbies and has really opened my eyes to the previously unexplored world of bell ringing. It encourages ringers like me to develop the art of bell ringing alongside providing a service to one's own tower and band whilst also contributing to the wider bell ringing community.

I am enthusiastically working my way through the list and would love to share some of the highlights - which go some way to showing the richness of bellringing.

I visited Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, the largest cathedral in Britain, where I was allowed to go up to the bell tower (not normally open to visitors). The bells were incredible to see at close range. They are the highest and heaviest peal of bells in the world, with the centre bell, at over 14 tons, being heavier than Big Ben.



A tour of John Taylor's Bell Foundry in Loughborough was like a step into the past. As our guide escorted us around the wonderful grade II listed building we saw craftsmen at work repairing bells, tuning bells, even crafting a bespoke stay from a tree that had fallen in a churchyard. As the last foundry in Britain, it

carries out vital work for the UK as well as for the wider world; Taylor's bells exist in over 100 countries. Worryingly, the art of bell founding, which dates back to early medieval times, is now critically endangered, with fewer than 30 craftsmen in the UK.

Our local Moseley towers and The St Martin's Guild of Church Bell Ringers are very active with a busy calendar of events to which newcomers are welcomed with open arms. At one such event, a ringers' tea in the summer, I was lucky enough to witness a Striking Competition with visiting bands from all over the country. I never would have imagined that there was a competitive element to this ancient tradition. Added to this, a few months later was the surreal experience of ringing in Birmingham at both the Roman Catholic Cathedral and at St Martin's Church (one of three towers worldwide with 16 bells) on a recent open day. It was daunting, to say the least! My ventures into the belfry have been limited to fitting muffles for Remembrance Sunday and tying the bells for weekly practice - so there's still plenty to get stuck into there.

In summary, bell ringing has been an amazing, if not, chance discovery, not just for the art itself, but for the wonderful world of bellringers that I have now joined. I hope my enthusiasm for 50 Ringing Things will encourage other newcomers to dig deeper into this fascinating world too.

Deborah Chard



Hello to you all,

I am really pleased to be able to share with you all, further details of the Henry Johnson Dinner including a link for purchasing tickets.

Henry Johnson Dinner

The 136th Henry Johnson Dinner will be held on Saturday 24 February 2024.

Tickets can be booked via this link:

[Participant.co.uk - 136th Henry Johnson Commemoration Dinner](https://www.participant.co.uk)

6:00pm for 6:30pm
Saturday 24 February 2024

MacDonald Burlington Hotel
Burlington Arcade
126 New Street
Birmingham
B2 4JQ

Tickets £46.50 (£35 if aged 18 or under and in full time education, and also for BUSCR students)

The dinner will once again be held at the Burlington Hotel. Our Chair will be Eleanor Linford. The Black Tie dress code is optional. Real ale will be available at the venue.

There will be a limited number of rooms at a concessionary rate which will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis. To book a room at the Burlington please call 0121 643 9191 and quote GUIL240224. Rooms will be charged at £160 Bed and Breakfast single occupancy and £175.00 for double occupancy. Full pre-payment will be required at the time of booking, all rates are nontransferable and non-refundable. These discounted rooms, will only be available until 13th January 2024.

Look forward to seeing you there!

Sand Cooper
Guild Secretary

A bell ringing day out - Saturday 14th October 2023.

As a 'newbie' bell ringer I was very excited to go on this day out and get to ring at three fabulous towers around Birmingham City Centre: St Chad's Roman Catholic Cathedral, St Martin's in the Bull Ring, and St Paul's in the Jewellery Quarter.

Having moved to the Birmingham area for studies back in 1994, I have 'lived' with these iconic landmark buildings in my peripheral awareness for many years, but in all that time before being involved in bell ringing, I never imagined my future-self having any personal connection to them.

There is certainly a lot to be said for the 'rich tapestry of life'.

Whilst each of these impressive buildings have their own fascinating histories, the joy of the day was to be had in being welcomed within their walls with a specific purpose and as part of a wider community of fellow bell ringers.

St Chad's is a beautiful cathedral with many architectural details to marvel at and enjoy. We were, however, immediately hustled up a tight, metal, spiral staircase to the ringing room. It was so cosy up there that ringers must stand on the closed hatch to the staircase to be able to ring. The standout feature of the ringing room was the floor to ceiling lattice leaded window looking straight down to the nave and up to the altar - not for the faint hearted (but a handy view if ringing for a wedding, as I was told with a wink by a seasoned bell ringer after the event).

There is much to love about the physical activity of bell ringing and of knowing that you are working together with your fellow 'band' to ring a good performance; but, of course, when you are ringing, although you can hear the bells, you don't get to enjoy their full effect. Having rung quite early on, and because the ringing room was so tight at St Chad's, we duly took our leave to make space for others and had the added pleasure of being outside, striding off to the next destination, with the sound of the bells ringing out across the streets of Birmingham behind us - a beautiful start to the day.

St Martin's, our second tower of the day, is a rather special church in Birmingham, having been the focal point of the markets since the

12th century, and being home to the world's first change ringing peal of 16 bells. I think quite a few of us were rather excited at the prospect of seeing and ringing on these bells and so there was quite a feeling of anticipation as our little knot of bell ringers made our way southwards across the city towards the Bullring.

The first thing that strikes you when you have climbed the obligatory spiral staircase to the ringing room is the sheer size of the room. The initial 'surprise' is very quickly balanced by the realisation that there are, after all, 16 bells (and ringers!) to fit in here.

You then find yourself drawn past the sea of ropes hanging down all around the white painted wooden walls, to the dark wooden plaques proudly announcing the peals rung at differing dates, by different ringers, from the 1890's. And it was a warm pleasure when you spot the names of your current fellow bell ringers listed there, a reminder of the history passing through your hands as you ring and as you learn and keep the skill alive for future generations to come.

Having a 'working' peal of 16 bells is no mean feat, so we could easily sneak off down a tangent of the physics of bells, weights, sizes, wheels, ropes etc and look at how this affects their relative ringing speeds etc... but whilst fascinating, I think we'll stick to the day itself!

The sound of these bells is certainly one of a kind. The smaller bells reminded me of the old-fashioned tinkling you would hear emanating from a music box (or 'carillons à musique' as they were originally called), perhaps for some a little twee, but to me it sounded nostalgic and rather lovely. And it was certainly unusual to hear the heavier bells ringing alongside their counterpart smaller bells.

Having had some 'fun' ringing rounds and call changes in different positions around the 16 bells, we were treated to all 16 bells being rung by the high calibre ringers in our midst. The bells were called via 'jump changes' (for speed) to Queens and back. It was a thoroughly enjoyable performance and sounded especially musical when the set-up had been carefully planned to give the final call back to rounds - the effect was of a symphonic waterfall cascading the bells back into their original positions.

The impressive part came later when I listened back to the recording to make sense of the call changes going on throughout the ringing to see exactly what gymnastics the ringers were up to. Particularly impressive was the 15th bell moving up 14 places to the back to ring after the 13th bell, ready to be swapped back into rounds in the final call - that's the thing with professionals, they make the difficult things look so simple and effortless - and then, when you look under the bonnet or indeed under the water line, those swan-legs are actually 'going like the clappers'... (yes, I know, apologies; no pun intended 😊). Very impressive indeed!

Our final tower was St Paul's in the Jewellery Quarter - an elegant and resolute building set in the one remaining Georgian square in Birmingham, being itself the city's only surviving 18th century church. St Paul's, of course, has its own rich history, part of which is currently its use as the training centre for the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing which was established in 2013. So, as a local bell ringer 'newbie' who has been learning with a local teacher, this was a fantastic opportunity to visit such an important place. One of the interesting things to note was the 'double level' of bell ropes - there was a lower floor which included a separate training bell rope. This arrangement was particularly useful during the partially lifted lockdowns when there were limits to the numbers of people able to be together in a smaller space. A set number of



ropes were passed down through holes to allow two sets of ringers to ring together but on different levels. I imagine this made the bands' communications somewhat more 'interesting' than usual.

One of the fundamental things that was great about the day was, of course, the variance in the bells themselves at each tower - how they felt, how they sounded and how they rang or interacted with each other - from the long draught of the bells at St Chad's, to the differing sizes of the bells at St Martin's. Every tower had its 'special' bells - the ones that are odd-struck or will catch you out at the drop of a hat. All this made the day a great opportunity to literally just 'have a go' at each of these differing towers; feeling the different weights, settling into the handling of the different bells and how they played alongside each other.

And... to top off all that 'hard work'? A good ol' pub ending (of course!) at The Bull in Price Street (circa 1800). Just the ticket for a sit down, a hearty meal and a chit-chat about the fun of the day - all washed down with a drink or two.

All in all, the ringing day out was a great success with ringers from many localities and further afield, different levels, ringing experience and ages, all coming together and supporting each other to have a grand ol' time ringing the bells of Birmingham.

Fabulous! When's the next one? 😊

Here's a big 'thank you' to everyone who made this bell ringing day possible, to the tower leaders on the day and to all those who worked behind the scenes to keep things running smoothly.

Sarah Chilton (Moseley)



DATE TOUCH

Solihull, W Mids. 19 Nov, 2023 PB Major: Margaret Burling 1, Richard J Andrew 2, William G R Davies 3, Linda M Whitehead 4, Keith D Whitehead 5, Michael G Dodson 6, Malcolm J Paulson 7, Stephen R Shipley (C) 8. For Evensong & to celebrate the 45th Wedding Anniversary of Gillian & John Stead on 21st October. Also for Kathryn Price-Feraud (one of our ringers) & her husband, Pierre, who renewed their marriage vows at St Alphege on 23rd September, following their 30th Wedding Anniversary. Date touch in 20 different years: 4, 5. £8

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