

The Quarterly Newsletter of the St Martin's Guild - issue 51



Rookies Ring Out for Christmas.

We come from many walks of life
The Moseley Rookie Ringers
And only eighteen months ago
We really were beginners.

But now we've ticked off rounds and calls
And mastered Plain Hunt too
We've joined the Sunday ringing scene
At not one tower, but two!

We're middle-aged, but what the heck
We're keen to learn the 'trade'
And now we've rung our quarter peals
We sure have made the grade.

With L plates safely put away
We have new goals in sight
A quarter peal with all of us
One January night!

We've just been on our Christmas trip
And rung the 'Henley Three'
St Nick, St John and Ullenhall
They filled our hearts with glee.

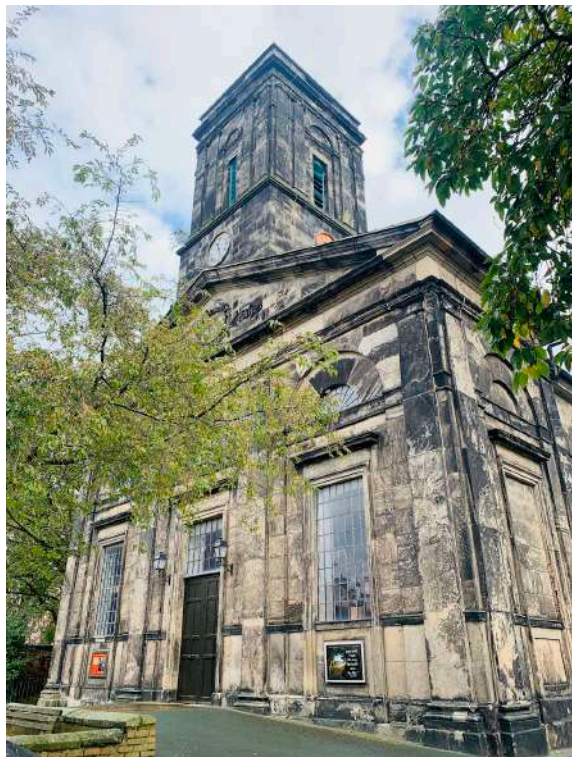
We know we couldn't reach such heights
Without help and direction
So, THANK YOU! Simon, Trish and Fran
We will achieve perfection!

Rookie Ringers @ Moseley

My First Bell Ringing Trip: An Unforgettable Experience.

On October 12th I went on my first-ever bell ringing trip with The Guild and it was an amazing experience. We visited three different towers, each with a dedicated leader who ensured that everyone, whether experienced or a beginner, was given the opportunity to ring.

We started with 8 bells in Wellington, All Saints Church, then moved on to Shrewsbury,



All Saint's, Wellington

St Mary the Virgin Church, 10 bells, and finally, St Chad's, a tower with 12 bells. A lady kindly explained to me why there are two trebles and two 6ths. She explained that they sound slightly different to suit specific occasions, much like the concept of D-sharp and E-minor in music. I was amazed that people are so precise and dedicated in creating such beautiful, harmonious sounds.

During our second stop, at St. Mary the Virgin in Shrewsbury, the acoustics inside the bell ringing chamber were breathtaking. In Chinese, we have a saying, 'various pearls falling on a plate of jade', to describe a sound of such preciousness and beauty. On the wall there was a bell-shaped memorial panel commemorating Queen Elizabeth II's visit,



which added to the significance of the experience.

What also struck me was the wonderful sense of community among the ringers. There were people of all ages, both men and women, and I was surprised at how welcoming everyone was, even though most didn't know me. One young ringer had just earned his level



Is there a row called 'princesses'..?



St Mary the Virgin,
Shrewsbury

5 certificate, which seemed to me like the PhD of bell ringing!

Before lunch time, a lady kindly asked everyone if they had someone to sit with, making sure no one was left out. It truly felt like a big, loving family.

The most rewarding part of the trip came the next day when I returned to my home tower at St. Barnabas in Erdington. As soon as I began

ringing I noticed that my bell handling had improved because our bell ringing school teachers, Phil and Tony, offered 'stand by' guidance to me during the whole trip, and other bell ringers also provided a lot of their



Leaving All Saint's.

valuable experiences. Thanks to their support I learned so much in just one day.

This bell ringing trip was not only a wonderful learning experience but also a chance to connect with a supportive and caring community. I can't wait for the next one!

Allie Lyo (edited by Emma Harris)



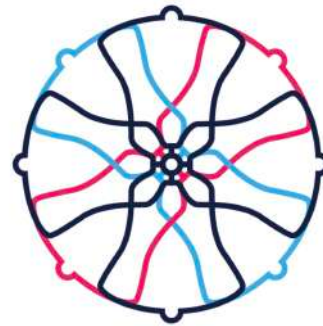
Everyone at St Chad's.

A Christmas Message from the CCCBR Executive.

Christmas cards, advertising, and all the paraphernalia of the festive season depict the traditional concept of Christmas: cheerful snowy landscapes, starlit angels, cherubic choirs and village churches with glowing windows and softly smiling families making their way to pray and sing traditional carols.

In these time-honoured scenes we can imagine, and almost hear, the sound of the bells ringing out across cities, towns, villages and countryside, calling the faithful to worship. So familiar is this sound that many people take it for granted and possibly we ringers do too.

Ringers across the world, in damp cold towers or in the heat of high summer, with just a few local ringers, with accomplished bands of experts or even a single 'hurry-up' bell will gather and produce a joyful sound. It is our duty and our profound pleasure to be part of this season.



THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

The Central Council Executive wish you good ringing and good cheer. Let's remind the world what we do. If we can invite some people to see it up close, let's do that too.

TINA, VICKI, ERNIE, FERGUS,
BEVERLY, CATHERINE, IAN AND PE

Introduction to Belfry Maintenance.

The WDCRA (Worcestershire and Districts Change Ringing Association) held a short introductory course on belfry maintenance and they were kind enough to allow Robin (a fellow member of our band) and myself to attend. Having recently agreed to take over as Tower Keeper at St Alphege, Solihull, following the retirement of the extremely experienced Mike Dodson, I have found myself on a steep learning curve with a need for a considerable amount of training and preparation. So, Worcestershire's introductory course was ideal for me.

We gathered at the pretty church of Elmley Castle, near Evesham, on the morning of Saturday 13th April. There were about a dozen of us, young and old, male and female, and we began with a talk around the font in the nave of the church. Alison Hodge introduced herself (the Western Branch Convenor and WDCRA General Secretary), Chris Tennant, who is also a WDCRA Belfry Advisory Panel Member and Steve Bowley, the Ringing Master at Elmley Castle. Alison talked us through



Elmley Castle bells

permissions, competence, health and safety, insurance and legal matters and directed us to the most up to date reference material which is the Belfry Upkeep section of the [CCCBR website](#). This supersedes the Manual of Belfry

Management published by the CCCBR which I had, however, found very useful as background reading before the course.

Alison guided us through appropriate clothing for the belfry, tools and then lists of what work was allowed in which circumstances. The Church of England owns the church buildings and their contents, including the bells. All work must have church permission for insurance cover and to comply with legislation - for example health and safety.

Substantial work requires a faculty and the details of when this is required were explained - such as lifting of a bell, replacement of a clapper shaft, treatment of a timber bell frame, and so on. We also talked about when advice should be sought from the advisory panel, a bell hanger or a foundry such as Taylor's.

The course was wider than just the physical maintenance of our bells, it covered the tower environment, assessing risks and warning notices. For instance, if members of the emergency services were present, would they really understand the implications of a 'Bells Up' sign? Then there are the considerations around birds nesting in the belfry, the legal implications of bats and the importance of maintaining a clean and tidy environment in both the ringing chamber and belfry.

All churches are inspected every five years for their quinquennial inspection. This is by an architect who checks the fabric of the building, not an engineer, and there's no requirement for them to check the bells. At Solihull we've always arranged for Taylors to complete a quinquennial inspection and this really helps to give us confidence in the work we're doing. However, every tower should check their bells at least annually. Many do it during Holy Week but locally we make more regular checks, and especially ahead of any peal attempts.

Once we got into the tower, and after the opportunity for a quick 'tower grab', we chatted about how well the bells went - they're



Elmley Castle Church

a 6, 17 cwt in E. Then we got them down before climbing the two wooden ladders to the belfry. They were interesting bells to ring with the oldest dating from about 1420, two from the seventeenth century, and the most recent from 1948, all hanging in a wooden frame. In the belfry we split into two groups, half of us with Alison and half with Chris.

Alison showed us how she inspects bells, starting from the stay at the top, working down to the pulleys. Her demonstration was so interesting and detailed

that I would not be able to describe it all here. Much of the information can be found on the [CCCBR website](#) but the experience of someone like Alison, who not only is a professional engineer but also has a lifetime of working with bells, is an invaluable part of the



Finishing off adjusting the rope of the tenor at Solihull



In the pit of the 4th at Solihull getting advice from Mike Dodson - past Tower Keeper

course. It was amazing to see her nimbly hopping around the frame!

I think we all left full of enthusiasm, although with realistic expectations of our own competence, and keen to go back to our home towers and look at them afresh. I've been really lucky to have the continued support of Mike as I get to grips with my new role. At Solihull we have the most amazing records of all the work undertaken on our bells back to 1964 which I now have the privilege of adding to. So far I've changed ropes, adjusted rope lengths, completed pre-peal checks and greased clappers, so I'm certainly getting stuck in. I would like to sign up for the next level now, having done the introductory course, maybe a beginner session. I would love there to be something similar in St Martins Guild. In the meantime I'm spreading the word and encouraging more of the local band to get involved, and I'm planning a session for our many ART students to come and get up close and personal with our beautiful bells.

Kathryn Price-Feraud

When, how and why I became a ringer.

I came to ringing comparatively late: it was in 1973 and I was 22. However, my 'journey' to that point had started much earlier, probably when I was about 7 or so and was connected to an interest in clocks.

My long-widowed grandmother lived in a rented terraced house in the Blakenhall area of Wolverhampton. When I was a toddler she fell down the stairs at home and that led to the abandonment of the upstairs of her house. During family visits to see her I'd go upstairs to play. There was a small snooker table up there and three mantle clocks. None were going, and I would open the backs to see the movements within, the pendulum, plus the gongs on which they used to chime the quarters and strike the hours. I was fascinated by them and particularly liked the sound of the chimes. That interest in clocks has stayed with me to this day and I have several about the house, two of which are ticking away as I write.

Anyway, back to ringing and fast-forward to 1968. We'd moved to a new estate between Dudley and Wolverhampton. I was 17, still at school, and decided to get a Saturday job. I wrote to quite a few shops in Dudley high street and was successful in getting one at a chemist (Timothy Whites & Taylors). They had a branch in Lichfield Street, Wolverhampton, which did late-night opening from 6 to 9. I was asked to go there one Monday evening, after school. Half-way through the shift the sound of church bells stopped me in my tracks. The shop was opposite St Peter's Collegiate Church. I didn't know it then, but it was their practice night. I threw open the doors to let the sound flood in, much to the annoyance of the shop girls who said it was too cold for that on a frosty night. The same thing happened the following Monday. From then on I put my name down for regular Monday evening shifts and enjoyed the added bonus of the bells. Looking back, it's a bit odd that I didn't try to find out who was ringing the bells, nor do I recall thinking then that I'd like to do it.

I then went to university in Birmingham (Aston), studying pharmacy, inspired by the Saturday job. I lived at home, however, so never came across the sound of bells in the

city. Had I done so, and had I learned to ring then, I reckon I'd have failed my degree as I was very keen when I did eventually learn.

It's now 1973 and I'm a pharmacist at New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton. Bells had not crossed my mind for some years, though I'd always notice if a church clock was chiming and stop to listen. One day I was waiting at a bus stop in Sedgley (very near to All Saints' church), when an old school friend walked past who I'd not seen since I left. She asked me how I was etc., and I happened to mention that I was a bit bored now that studies had finished and life was largely work-focused. "Why don't you come and learn to ring?", she said, "the tower captain died recently and the new one is trying to build things up again - 7.30, Tuesday night". I was a bit apprehensive and almost didn't go. I did turn up though, and

ascended to the ringing room. A huge pendulum was swinging from the room above, to which I was taken on my way up to see the enormous clock (still there) and the bells (ditto). There was no structured learning in those days. One of the ringers was asked to start teaching me, which he did, in the way he himself had been taught. I returned home, my head buzzing with excitement, looking forward to the next Tuesday.

It is now 51 years later and I remain a ringer and still mess with clocks. I often wonder whether I'd have got into ringing had it not been for my nan's clocks, the evening job on a practice night and, most importantly, the chance meeting with the school friend who's still ringing.

Philip Sealey
Warwick

Nearly 90 years later...

The band at Aston had real concerns about the condition of their frame and so they approached the Guild for funding from the Bell Restoration Fund (BRF). Here's our story:

To celebrate the silver jubilee of King George V in May 1935, the bells were recast, the wooden frame was replaced with a steel one and two new bells were added. These 1935 works were substantial. The new bells were rehung in the new steel frame and the old timber frame was removed. Part of it was used to construct the table in the ringing room and an inscribed beam from the frame was relocated in the baptistry inside the church. Sadly, the first peal was rung fully muffled on 25th January 1936 a few days after the death of the King.

Since then the frame has had little attention. When it was assessed it was found to be in good



condition but the years hadn't been kind to the paintwork, so it was in danger of rusting. It was time to get some quotes. The lowest price was from a firm specialising in the redecoration of industrial machinery but the tower needed some help to fund the cost. We made our application for

support from the BRF and were successful in gaining half the funding. The lead-based paint removal required the decorators to use uncomfortable protective clothing throughout the work. In addition to the renovation of the frame, a considerable volume of dust and bird detritus was removed from the bell chamber floor. The frame is now set for another ninety years..!

Margaret Griffin & Nigel Cripps
Aston Parish Church



Remembering our dear friend Richard Cann.



**28th February 1938 – 19th
September 2024.**

It was with much sadness that we learnt that Richard had passed away, he was such an important part of our local band. Despite not having been able to climb the stairs to the ringing room for a while, he continued to join us for our social events and even rang with us at easily accessible towers on outings. Although he was elected a member of the St Alphege Guild of Ringers on the 14th October 1957, this was the first meeting for nearly 4 years, so he was actually a member for nearer 70 years.

Richard described to us how, during the post war years, whilst his father was serving with the army in India, the bottom of their garden was turned into a vegetable patch and was tended by a neighbour, Mr Lane. Mr Lane would paddle across the stream from a garden in the road behind their home and had a son, David, who was a ringer. One day he posed the question, "Have you ever thought of

becoming a bell ringer?" He arranged for David to take Richard up the tower to see the ringers and witness their activities first hand. Richard liked what he saw and was subsequently taught to ring by Edgar Shepherd, Vin Rigg and Tom Warner. Over time Richard came to hold most positions within the local guild and so, whilst we have lost an 'oh, so important' member of our band, we have also lost a valued link to our history. Having rung with many respected ringers, he is a part of the legacy they leave to us all.

Richard was first elected an officer of the St Alphege Guild in 1964 when he became Tower Keeper. Despite the fact that he held this role for only a year it is minuted that the then Rector paid tribute to his work because of a visit from the church architect who had said that it was the cleanest and best kept tower he had ever seen. In 1965 Richard became Secretary to the Guild, a role since sub-divided into Weddings Secretary, Social Secretary, outings organiser and so on. Richard did it all at a time when we had anything up to 7 weddings on a Saturday, held an annual dinner and had an outing. As if that wasn't enough, he also took on the role of Treasurer at the same time.

Our meeting minutes show that Richard was an active part of the group who worked together to secure the augmentation to 12 in 1968. Richard stood down as Secretary in 1977 but retained the role of Treasurer until 1985. He was specifically thanked by Tom Warner, another highly respected ringer, for overseeing a period in which he had started with negligible funds and had brought the Guild to a point at which it was self-supporting. This was something he considered to be an almost unique position that he felt the church could be proud of. He left a solid foundation for his successor. Alongside the Treasurer role, Richard took on the role of Church and Churchyard Representative for 9 years and Handbell Treasurer for 35 years. He finally took the role of Tower Master from 1991 until 1996.

Not only has he been the bedrock of our band but he has also been an important member of the St Martin's Guild which he joined in 1955 and was later made a Life member. He proudly chaired the St Martin's Guild Henry Johnson Dinner in February 2009.

Richard was never a keen peal ringer and rang ten including eight for the St Martin's Guild. His first was in 1956. He rang 461 quarter peals that we know of, the first recorded being the same year as his first peal. He rang in and called many of the local monthly attempts before evensong at Solihull. He loved Grandsire. At one time the 11th at St Alphege was known as 'Richard's bell', his favourite for cinques, caters or triples on the back 8.



Richard was a positive force in supporting others in their ringing. He taught bell handling and encouraged particularly the younger ringers with a gentle word of advice and guidance. He explained theory and supported band members in their journeys to conducting. He made time to act as chauffeur to local practices and events and occasionally wore his chauffeur's hat, just for fun. Fun was a huge part of Richard's ringing and he had a schoolboy sense of humour and great charm. Ask how long a rope was, wanting to know if a box would be needed and, he'd helpfully reply 'oh about 50 foot!' In call changes, say 10 to 11, and he'd lean over and tell you the correct time. He'd arrive in the ringing room and whatever hat he'd come in would be tossed

across the room to the coat hooks on the opposite side, with three goes to see if he could hoopla the pegs. Amazingly he often managed it. When a long-standing Rector was invited to speak at each of our annual dinners Richard would mischievously have the younger band members giggling as he predicted every word during the after-dinner speech. To this day many of us remember how he taught us to tie the rope for the sanctus bell with his rabbit story, the rabbit coming up out of his burrow round the tree and back down. We often reference Richard's 'bells across the meadow' which is how he referred to our front five.

As well as tower bell ringing, he loved handbells. He did dabble with change ringing in hand but his real love was tune ringing. He was active in acquiring our set of 38 bells. We rang at many events including dinners, church gatherings and the local hospice where he was a long-time volunteer. Richard introduced several members of the Mother's Union to the team and then, when our hand bell team drifted, Richard brought another group together teaching, conducting and leading ladies from The Women's Institute.

He loved sharing bell ringing with any group that was interested. He hosted many tours of the tower for local school groups, scouting and guiding groups and even regularly took bells to the playgroup. For him, it was never too soon to get people interested.

When we learnt of Richard's passing, we hastily arranged general half muffled ringing the following evening which included his beloved Grandsire Caters and some Stedman on the back eight. We removed the muffles for the morning service but with our Rector's permission rang a half-muffled quarter peal of Grandsire for evensong, the usual 6-part composition that Richard often called. For his funeral we rang half-muffled before removing the muffles during the service and ringing open afterwards. We were joined by many old and new members of the local Guild as well as those from St Martin's. Richard asked for simple rounds and queens on handbells, two in hand, to be rung around his coffin which we arranged. During the afternoon we scored his requested Grandsire Triples quarter peal composition in thanksgiving for his life and service to the church for many years.

Sand Cooper

Poppies for Remembrance at St James, Shirley.

A new venture for St James, Shirley this year was the creation of a wall of poppies to hang from the church tower as an act of remembrance. It was the idea of our Parish Warden who managed the whole project from start to finish. A staggering total of over 6000 poppies were knitted or crocheted by members of the congregation and local community groups and friends. Several of the Shirley ringers made considerable



contributions, including one ringer who taught herself to knit so that she could take part!

Poppies were gathered in from Shetland to Cornwall and volunteers came from far and wide every day for a fortnight to complete the banner. The finished product is shown in the photo taken by Richard Postill. All in all, it was a great outreach from church to community.

On Remembrance Sunday itself, the bells were rung half muffled for the 9.30am service. Later, the main A34 Stratford Road was closed for Shirley's own Act of Remembrance. This was very well attended by many uniformed organisations and a large crowd of local people.

On a lighter note, the poppy banner, though it hid the entrance to the tower, did provide us with our own draught excluder!

Gill Postill



The Ringer's Bench.

The Hampton Ringers wanted to remember past ringers and supporters who have given their time to ringing the bells here in Hampton and who are no longer with us. As a result, earlier in the year, we installed a Ringer's Bench in the churchyard just outside the porch with a plaque for each ringer/supporter giving details of the years they rang at Hampton.

Sunday 24th November was a wet and stormy day (thanks to Storm Bert) but after the morning service the ringers' bench was blessed by the Revd Sue Restall. Ringers, together with friends and relatives of past ringers and the congregation all took part in the short service.

The bench has been in situ for a while now and it's good to see people taking advantage of the sunny spot, whether it's ringers waiting to ring for a wedding, wedding guests taking small children out of the service or just people passing through and taking a while to sit and enjoy the churchyard.

Bridget Osmond



And finally...

A message from Kirsty Gifford advertising the open CC rep spot in the Guild in advance of our January AGM:

BELLRINGERS



**JOIN YOUR St Martin's Guild
Central Council Reps !**

The St Martin's Guild is looking for a second Central Council (CC) rep to help with all things CC! You would:

- Attend the CC AGM on the first Saturday of September and update the guild on anything important via a newsletter article
- (Optionally) enjoy the ringing and socials held during the weekend of the AGM, meeting other reps from all over!
- Help write a report on the SMG January AGM
- (Optionally) get involved with the workshops and other projects the CC holds!

Please email smgcbr@gmail.com if you would like to hear more!