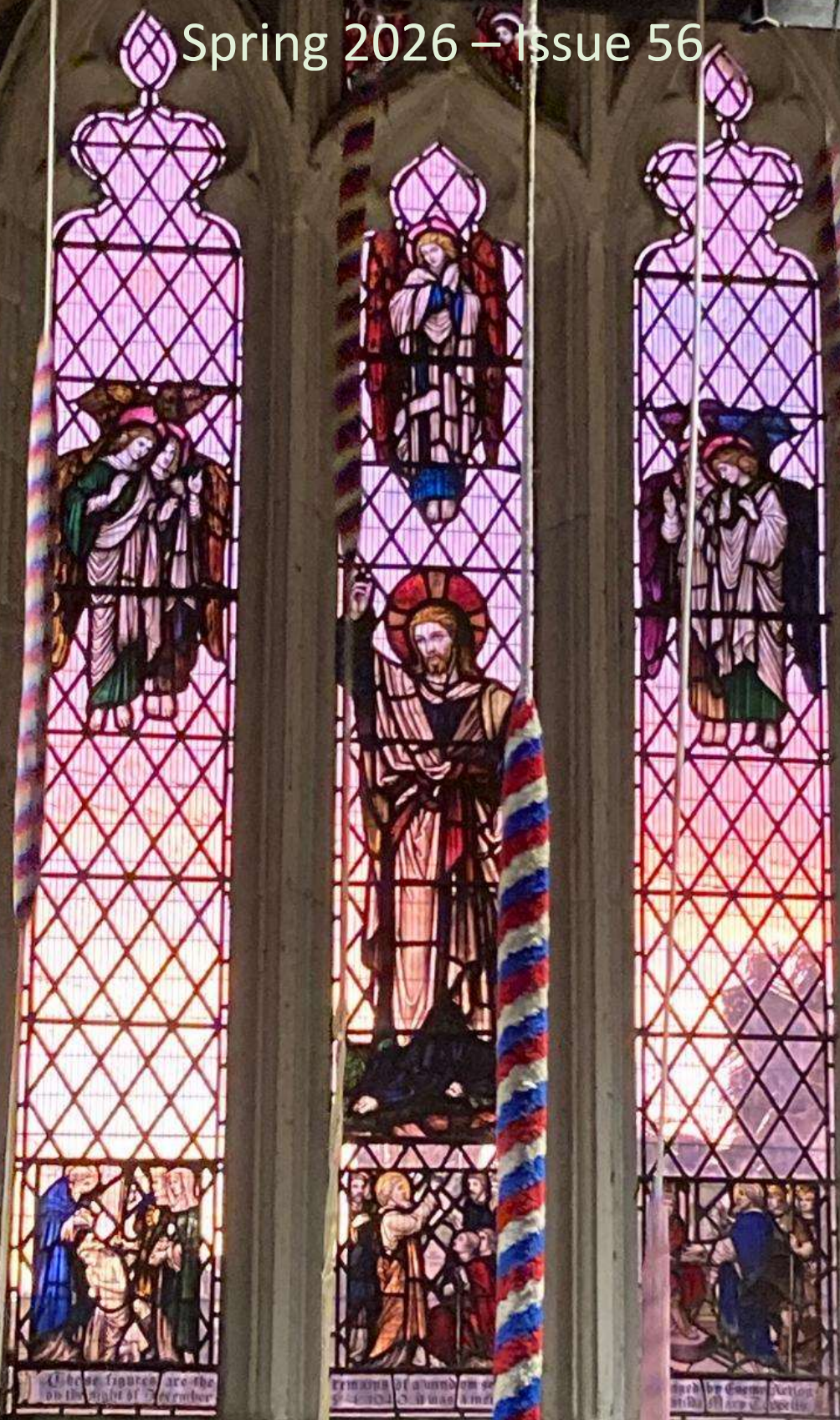


St Martin's Guild Newsletter

Spring 2026 – Issue 56



Editorial

Another year begins, another issue of the St. Martin's Guild newsletter is published, but a new editor oversees its creation.

When the post of newsletter editor became vacant at the start of this year, I was interested to know what the job would entail and tentatively asked – my first mistake! Following a little persuading, I agreed to take on the role, and in doing so briefly became the guild secretary's favourite person. So here I am, bringing guild members and friends the first of what might be many editions of the newsletter under my tenure.

Thanks are due to previous editors Lucas Williams and Andrew Brown for their advice to me.

James Ramsbottom

About Me

In case you're wondering who I am, I shall fill you in with a few details about myself.

I was born to ringing parents and have been fascinated by the world of bell ringing for as long as I can remember. I was taught how to handle a bell by my Dad at Mavesyn Ridware, Staffordshire in 1997. I rang at Lichfield Cathedral through-out my teenage years and at Leeds whilst at University, before moving to Birmingham for work in 2013. I quickly got involved with city centre ringing, and

On The Cover

The Image on the front of this issue shows a gorgeous sunset taken from the ground floor ringing room at Moseley, St. Mary, taken by local ringer Sarah Chilton.

The image was taken on a Monday night practice last September. Although a stunning view, the low sun did make ringing some of the bells more difficult. In the bottom-left of the image can be seen Simba, the Brumdingers mascot, as St. Mary's is their regular practice venue.

ringing with the Guild as a whole. I am now Ringing Master at St. Chad's Cathedral and served as guild representative on the Central Council from 2015 to 2024.



Brumdingers Success in Midlands Youth Competition



The Brumdingers travelled down to Steeple Aston in Oxfordshire on Saturday 21 March for the Midlands youth competition. We had five ringers, as one of our regular band was away. We met up at Steeple Aston village hall and were served the ringer's staple; some delicious tea and biscuits, the best being the bourbons of course.

After a short ring at Kirtlington, a lovely ten, it was time for us to head over to the competition tower. There we met up with Noah, our sub from the Coventry Guild, and went up the tower, passing over some rather alarming loose stairs. After a less than successful practice, it was time to go. We pulled off, aware of every blow. A tense few minutes later, stand was called.

Unsure of how we'd done, we went down the tower and off to our next

stop down some incredibly small country roads and up the tightest spiral staircase I've ever seen. We all made it intact, though several of us had to walk quite a long way, as our SatNav once again failed to find tower access.

Then, back at the village hall, it was time for the results, delivered by our very own Charlie Linford. As each band was called and applauded, we realised we still weren't being called. 5th, 4th, 3rd, we still hadn't been called. In fact, we placed second overall, and first on the method category.

After a delicious dinner served by the local ringers, we all went home, full of cake and smiles.

Elliot Daniel

A New Committee for BUSCR

The BUSCR AGM at the start of February saw the election of a new seven-person committee, including four students who joined this year and three who were taught by BUSCR last year. Seven may sound like a large committee, but with 33 active members and an average of three society ringing or social events a week, we now need that many to keep everything running smoothly!

Master - Nikolai Komar



I'm currently studying history and was taught to ring by BUSCR last year. A particularly dull freshers week compelled me to go to a taster session in September 2024 and since then I have not looked back, now ringing regularly outside of term time at home in Winchester. I hope many others can continue to find BUSCR and ringing to be the social lifeline it was for me!

Deputy Master - Robert Carr



I am a first year Music Technology student at RBC and I've been ringing with BUSCR since October. I came in as an existing ringer from North Yorkshire, so I've been able to assist with teaching and supporting new recruits, as well as improving my own ringing and conducting through numerous quarters and a few peals!

Treasurer - Ben Wigley



I am a second year Physics student at UoB and learnt to ring through BUSCR back in September 2024. I've enjoyed learning new methods and ringing plenty of quarters. We are currently beginning the process of fundraising to replace all of our bearings - so as treasurer I hope that I may help with some of the fundraising for this, keeping the bells at Edgbaston ringing for many years to come.

A New Committee for BUSCR

Secretary - Charlotte Holiday



I'm a first-year civil engineering student and have been ringing with BUSCR since September 2025. As a ringer of five years, and a commuting student, I still attend my home tower's weekly practice and support ringing at other local towers in the Worcestershire Association. Since joining BUSCR, my confidence has grown and I hope to join practices with the St Martin's Guild soon. I look forward to welcoming the next BUSCR cohort in autumn!

Steeple Keeper - Fraser Wood



I am a first year History student at UoB, and have been ringing with BUSCR since September. I started ringing at the beginning of 2025 at my home in North Yorkshire and so I

had some prior experience ringing, but I have gained much more since joining BUSCR, learning new methods and ringing a good few quarter peals. I look forward to learning more about steeple keeping and welcoming in new members in September.

Joint Social Secretary - Oliver Mumberson



I am currently a second year Biology student at UoB and have been a part of BUSCR since my first month of university here. An extensive musical background led me to be interested in ringing through a new friend who brought me along to a practice and since then I have learned to ring, rung my first quarters, and even inspired members of my family to get into ringing! Despite my many commitments, I look forward to helping out behind the scenes and using our social media to showcase the society that I have found the most fun and friends in and have been on the most interesting adventures in my time at university.

Joint Social Secretary - Louisa Webster



Hi, my name is Louisa and I am a first-year student studying geography at UoB. I started ringing in September 2025, and have recently

rung my first quarter peal, thanks to the excellent support and teaching at BUSCR! I'm looking forward to bringing the eclectic list of socials ideas currently in my Notes app to life over the next year and am ready to take on the challenging task of getting bellringers to socialise!

Alongside this group, Lucas Williams has agreed to remain in and around the committee to manage the upcoming rehang project at Edgbaston over the next couple of years. This will allow the committee to focus on the day-to-day running of the society, while also ensuring BUSCR remains viable for years to come.

Charlotte Holiday

BUSCR Outing and Annual Dinner

Another year, another BUSCR dinner has come and passed. This year's pre-dinner outing started with a 9am train from University station to Northfield (though some of us forgot to get out of bed and so Ubered to the tower, alleging that they planned to do that anyway). A BUSCR trip to Northfield is always welcome, my personal favourite 10 in Birmingham, but especially as this is the first time ringing on 10 for some of this year's recruits, alongside some firsts ringing Stedman Caters. There was a slight delay in the ringing, as when we arrived at the church we discovered



there was a Weight Watchers meeting booked in the same time slot as us, which ended with us being told to just pull the curtain on the ground floor ring closed.

The next tower on our outing was the perfectly pleasant Alvechurch, where we spent a good hour and then took the train to Redditch. After a quick stop for lunch at the Hub, we moved onto the last tower of the day. In my opinion, Redditch was a useful experience for the society, as it was the first time many of our freshers had the opportunity to ring on truly interesting bells; after establishing that only about four of our ringers were allowed to ring the front two, everyone had the chance to ring.

Once finished at Redditch, we rushed off to get the train home. After a short break, we reconvened at the Blue Piano. I had the honour of giving the Master's speech this year (Lucas, the Master at the time had fobbed it off on me) and while a bit nerve-racking, it was good fun. The theme for the speech, taken from a more creative previous Master, was an award ceremony for the society. The main reason behind this was that



we had decided to renew the Master's award, an award for the biggest commitment to ringing and the society as a whole, which had been ended when a previous Master had left it in a pub while drunk. As an aside, I had that story confirmed to me by said Master in the gents toilets, who then followed to offer me a drink of a mystery liquid from a water bottle he'd gotten from below the sink, assuring me that it was "30% proof". Alongside the Master's award, we gave out a number of different awards, ranging from the most southern award for one of our York-based members and most impoverished student, for a member whose family property portfolio went from 14 to a mere 9.

The Master's speech was followed by our wonderful guest speaker, Charlie Linford, who had recounted some stories from her time ringing with BUSCR and what the letters from "BUSCR" actually meant.

After the speeches and food, we had a raffle to raise some money for belfry maintenance. While I did manage to get out with a bottle of vodka and some aftershave, a personal highlight for me was Michael Parker gleefully taking a bottle of wine, only to be crushed when he sat down and realised that it was non-alcoholic. After all the speeches and food, a number of us departed the venue to enjoy the night elsewhere.

After a failed attempt to get 23 people into a karaoke bar for free by Lucas, we all headed to mine and Lucas' house to enjoy the evening further, where I think the last guest left at 3am. The afters included (I think) a puzzle, several drinks, some twister and a game of Wolverhampton Monopoly.

The day after the dinner, we had some more ringing with two quarters (well done to Fraser for ringing two quarters in one day for the first time) and a first peal of Stedman Cinques for Rob. Overall, it was a great weekend and a very memorable time!

Ioan Normington



Extracts from new ringers

Harry Wake:

When I arrived at university last September, learning to ring church bells was about as far from my mind as anything could be. I'm enormously grateful that BUSCR's recruitment efforts proved so persuasive: in bell ringing, I have found not only a genuinely enjoyable hobby, but a wonderful group of friends to go along with it.

After several months of learning the ropes, BUSCR's 71st anniversary weekend felt like a fitting opportunity to celebrate everything the society has achieved. A particular highlight was our railway outing to Redditch, which involved stopping at various points along the way to visit three towers - including my first ever ring of ten bells at Northfield. The dinner was a fantastic way to round off a memorable day; it was fascinating to meet so many alumni members there who, like me, were taught to ring by BUSCR, and have continued ringing long after graduating. I am delighted to have been a part of the celebrations, and leave them confident that the society is well-placed to enjoy many more successful years to come.



Louisa Webster:

Since I only just recently starting learning the art of bellringing in September, the 71st annual dinner was a lovely insight into the depths of BUSCR tradition and community. Taking place at the Blue Piano, the dinner comprised of a 3 course meal of South-East Asian dishes, with the crispy Vietnamese spring rolls and Thai green curry being particular favourites. Entertainment followed in various forms: there were two speeches presented by Ioan and Charlie, as well as various awards bestowed to certain members of BUSCR with particular achievements or qualities from this past year.

Birmingham University Society

Moseley, West Midlands

St Anne

Sunday, 1 February 2026 in 42m (7-0-5 in Bb)

1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Emily Tamhne
- 2 Nikolai A S Komar
- 3 Benjamin G Williams
- 4 Charlotte M Holiday
- 5 Daniel T Calvert (C)
- 6 Fraser J Wood

Rung for the 71st BUSCR Dinner.



The raffle was just as successful, with prizes spanning from wine (which was subsequently discovered to be non-alcoholic, to much disappointment) to joke books and beard oil. This raised over £200 that will be put towards much needed maintenance of the Edgbaston bells. However, it was the amalgamation of BUSCR members, past and present, that attributed to the core success of the evening. In all, it was a brilliant celebration of the society's annual achievements and ambitions, and I greatly look forward to seeing what the next year of BUSCR holds.

Birmingham University Society

Selly Oak, West Midlands

St Mary

Sunday, 1 February 2026 in 41m (12-1-17 in G)

1260 Grandsire Doubles

- 1 Edmund M C Roberts
- 2 Lydia Redman
- 3 Benjamin J D Wigley
- 4 Nikolai A S Komar
- 5 Ioan B G Normington (C)
- 6 Fraser J Wood

Rung for the 71st BUSCR Dinner.

A No.1 visit from the No.1 Club at Solihull

The after school, No.1 Club, came to visit the tower at Solihull on Tuesday 24th March! I'm not sure we've ever hosted a tower visit to so many small people before so, it was with some trepidation that we made the arrangements for 23 little friends, with their helpers, to come along and see the bells.

We met the group at the church hall so that we could go through the basics. We now have a 3D printed model of the church, a kind gift from the architect (who rather wonderfully is a ringer himself!) The model was perfect to brief the children as to exactly where we were going. They dutifully repeated back that we "do not touch the ropes!" So, we were set to go.

I took the lead as we climbed the spiral staircase, with them following behind. The steps are dreadfully uneven and the first few are particularly big if you're only 5 or 6 years old! I climbed up more slowly than I think I ever have before, the only certain way to make sure they all took their time. It's hard to concentrate on steps when you're totally overwhelmed by the new experience of being inside a turret stairway so, a slow ascent was for the best. They'd been primed to look out for the blocked-up doorway which once took you into St Georges chapel, and they were inspecting the windowsills to see how they narrow towards the top.



We made it into the ringing room and then the questions came thick and fast! They were clearly quite intrigued. We started with understanding why they shouldn't touch the ropes and never when seeing a bell rope in a church. We watched Margaret slowly ring the 6th. We talked about the delay of the sound following Margaret's pulls and together we clapped our hands when we thought the sound would come. We chatted about the

sallies, some of which go through the holes in the ceiling, clearly this fascinated them!

It was time to divide the group in two, blue and red team. The reds went on up into the belfry. They counted round the 13 bells and learnt that we'd never ring more than 12 at a time, making sense of the blue sally in the ringing room for the flat 6. We'd made arrangements for a bell to be rung just once while they were standing alongside the frame. With fingers in ears and much excitement, it turned out that wasn't enough. "Again, again!" was the shout. And of course we duly obliged.

The squeals of delight were all the more amusing for the fact that several of them were a little worried as they climbed the stairs, as to whether it would be too loud! One of them said, "that's not loud" as another scrunched up her face. Lots of chatter and cobweb spotting and whilst there was talk of spiders I'm not convinced anyone actually saw one. Once the shutters and sound control had been explained, it was time to climb back down.

Blue group had stayed back in the clean and cobweb free ringing room. We had the smaller handbells ready from our large tune ringing set. Ringing a handbell is a tricky business for little people. We carefully avoided touching the bell metal and made sure the bells didn't clash with each other. We had little hands clasped close to the leather cap below each bell, clappers organised to move in the



right direction and then we experimented with our 'flicks'. They soon managed a wonderful cacophony of sound. So, time to get more organised.

We rang them one after the other, highest note to deepest, they were ringing rounds! Then we began call changes. They each clutched a small sheet with their bell number and followed as we called out numbers and swapped them about. We soon brought them into Queens. They seemed really engaged and they recognised whether they had an even or odd numbered bell.

The groups then swapped over so they'd all had the chance to see the bells and ring handbells, and it was time to have a go on the tower bells. By this time all the bells were safely down so they had a chance to have a go at chiming. This too isn't the easiest. Once they'd learnt to give the rope a bit of a jolt, the magic started to happen!

They needed rather a lot of help with the bigger bells even with 2 or 3 small people grabbing at the rope but they were really chiming the small bells, oh what fun! They thought they were flying, they've

clearly seen too many bell ringing cartoons! Chiming bells probably most grabbed their attention. The whole visit certainly engaged their curiosity.

So, I think we can put the visit down as a complete success. A little bit 'full on' perhaps but thank you to Alison, Margaret and Malcolm who helped out and truth be known, we had a whole lot of fun too!

Sand Cooper

RABS at 40

On 18th January 1986 a band at St. Philip's Cathedral rang a peal of spliced in 4 very hard Maximus methods – Rigel Surprise, Avon Delight, Bristol Surprise and Strathclyde Surprise. Except they didn't as the composition was later found to be false. And so, a new (true) composition was devised and a (true) peal in the same 4 methods was rung on 13th March in the same year, again at St. Philip's Cathedral.

Since then, both this set of methods and this composition has become a classic and a benchmark for advanced ringing on 12 bells. So, it was only fitting that the 40th anniversary was marked in the usual way by a repeat performance on the same bells.



St Martins Guild

Birmingham, West Midlands

Cathedral Church of St Philip

Friday, 13 March 2026 in 3h 25 (31-0-21 in D)

5088 Spliced Treble Dodging Maximus (4m)

1296 each Bristol S, Strathclyde S; 1248 Avon D, Rigel S. 82 COM, ATW.

Composed by [R W Pipe](#)

- 1 Mark R Eccleston
- 2 Henry J W Pipe
- 3 David J Pipe (C)
- 4 Elizabeth A Orme
- 5 Simon J L Linford
- 6 Oliver C Bates
- 7 Graham M Bradshaw
- 8 Alistair J Cherry
- 9 Paul E Bibilo
- 10 Thomas W Griffiths
- 11 Phillip M Orme
- 12 Michael P A Wilby

On the 40th anniversary of the first true peal of spliced in these methods.

The ringers of 4 and 9 rang the same bells as the original peal.

Inside the Belfry: My Tower Keeper Course Experience

I have been longing to attend the Tower Keeper Course since last year, and it proved to be a truly marvellous experience. The course offered a detailed insight into what goes on inside a belfry.

Our tutor, Alison Hodge, gave us an excellent introduction to the preparations needed before entering a bell tower for maintenance, such as obtaining permission from the facility owner, checking insurance coverage, and bringing along useful tools and equipment, etc. One important point I had never considered before was that we should never work alone—a team of two or three is recommended. If one person is injured, another can seek help while someone stays behind to assist. A spare light is also essential in case batteries run out.

The teaching tower, St Alphege, is a 12-bell tower with a generously large space, allowing more than ten students to explore the belfry together. Access is via stairs rather than ladders, making it both easy and safe to reach. We also had the opportunity to ring the bells after the course, which was my first high number ringing experience.

Dr Hodge provided each of us with a checklist to inspect specific parts, including the bell frame, headstocks, wheels, stays and sliders, clappers, rope route, and bearings. She also brought along a ball bearing sample to help us better understand how it works.

The St Alphege tower has both traditional stays and Hastings stays. My highlight of the day was finally seeing a Hastings stay and understanding how it works. We even climbed underneath the bell to closely examine the details of a Hastings stay slider. In this course, I was able to take a close look at each component of a bell mechanism and how it functions. It provided me with deeper insight and hands-on experience above the ringing chamber. I would highly encourage new bell ringers to sign up for a course like this—it will certainly deepen your understanding of bell ringing behind the scenes

Allie Lyo



The Future of the Henry Johnson Dinner

The Guild Master has just circulated a survey asking members to give feedback on the Henry Johnson dinner. Not the one specifically which we have just enjoyed, but the whole concept of this event. As reluctant Dinner Secretary, I would like to flesh out the background to the survey and encourage you to give it 10 minutes of your time, whether you have been to a Henry Johnson Dinner or, just as importantly, not.

In the 'olden days' most territorial ringing associations would have had an annual dinner. When people travelled around less, and communication was limited to letters or perhaps the telephone, annual dinners were a rare opportunity for members of an association to see each other. Very few associations have an annual dinner. The Society of Royal Cumberland Youths went to a three-yearly format a while ago, the massive Yorkshire Association's "Snowdon Dinner" was cancelled this year when only 45 tickets were sold (maybe they heard I was speaking), and the tradition of annual dinners is really only maintained by University associations, Birmingham, and the College Youths.

The Henry Johnson Dinner has much greater historical significance in ringing than just being the St Martin's Guild's annual dinner. Henry Johnson (1809-1890) was an admired leader of ringing in Victorian Birmingham. He became widely known through his ability in

composition, his achievements as a conductor, and his life-long dedication to the art.

His 80th birthday was the focus of a grand dinner at which A. P. Heywood launched the idea of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers. Since that first grand event in 1889, the last year of Johnson's life, the celebration dinner has been held every year, with this year being the 138th.

It is increasingly difficult to organise a financially viable 'HJ'. The venue we have used for the last five years now has a minimum number of 100, which we rarely meet, and so which causes us to make a loss. It is increasingly difficult to persuade people to act as Chair, and it seems as though fewer and fewer people want to give after dinner speeches – this makes the job of the Secretary really quite hard. All costs in the hospitality sector have gone up considerably, with the £50 cost of the HJ Dinner being at the lower end of ringing dinners. We probably all remember Chris Mills going round with a bundle of HJ Dinner tickets making sales (sometime maybe under duress!) but we don't currently have anyone who will do the sales legwork like that. Selling tickets is hard.

The Council House was a great location for the dinner which we enjoyed using for about 20 years. However, the only reason we could get the dinner at a price we could

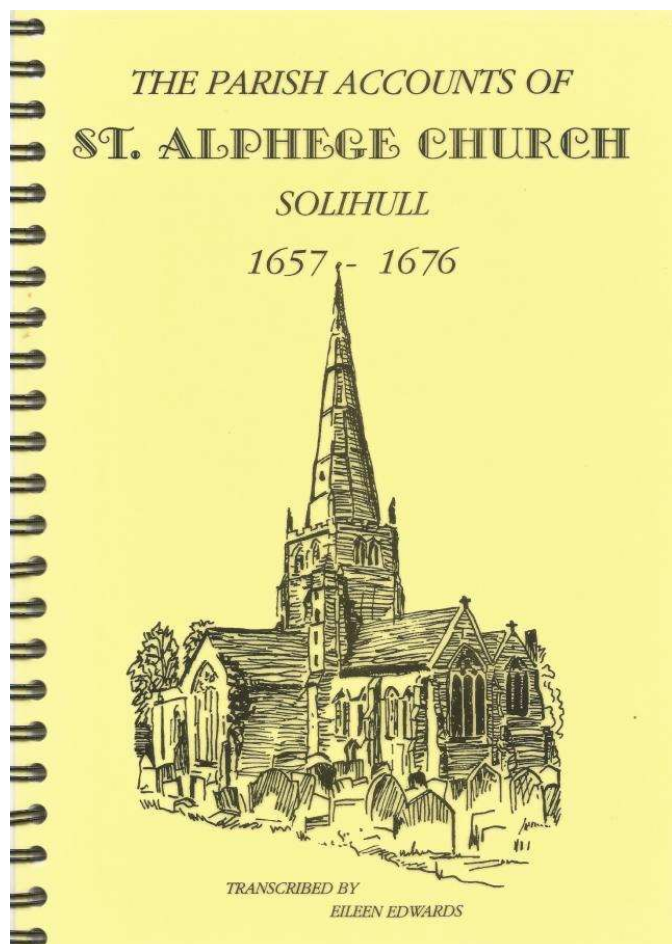
afford was being of Birmingham City Council largesse, which waived the room hire charge for us. Since then, we have been to the Burlington, which while adequate, doesn't present the sense of occasion that many ringers would want. The trouble is we have not found a venue in Birmingham that can create the sense of occasion and atmosphere we would want at anything like the price we can afford. We could have a fantastic dinner at ThinkTank in the shadow of a Spitfire, but at £100 a head and no real ale, ticket sales would be a challenge!

I recently heard someone say that the trouble with traditions is that no one wants to break them. However, this one in its current form has just about come to the end of the road unless we find a way of making more people want to come, at a price they can afford, and with a format they will enjoy. The survey therefore aims to gather as many views as possible from those stalwarts who come without fail, those who used to come but now don't, and those who would not give the advert a second glance.

Simon Linford

Click here to share your views on the Google survey form: [Survey](#)

Ringling in Solihull in the 17th Century



Little is known about the bells and bellringing at St Alphege before 1891, when the current guild of ringers was formed. Since then, we have the Guild AGM minutes and other documents, but before 1891 is a very large blank page with a few small spots on it.

Recently, however, I've been adding more to our history via a publication lent to me by Gordon Bragg, the current family archivist of the Bragg family, whose ringling exploits at St Alphege I've written about elsewhere. This document is a transcription of "The Parish Accounts of St Alphege Church Solihull 1657-1676".

These accounts detail all the income and expenditure looked after by the Churchwardens, the Parish Bailiffs, the Feoffees and other Collectors. They provide a fascinating insight into the life of the Parish at the time, but within the plethora of entries, there are about 150 that relate to the bells and bellringers with about 50 of these being payments to the ringers on special occasions.

It's worth setting a bit of historical context to this period for those, like me, whose favourite subject at school was not History! As recently as 1649, King Charles I had been executed and in 1653 Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector, a role he held until his death in 1658, when his son Richard took his place. He lacked authority and renounced power after nine months, leading eventually to King Charles II re-establishing the monarchy and reclaiming the throne in 1660, being crowned in 1661.

The Parish Accounts cover this tumultuous period and the entries relating to the bell ringers elaborate on this. The first payment for ringing was on 5th November 1657, when the Parish Bailiff, John Cottrell, made the following entry: "To the ringers the 5th of Nov - four shillings". The following year, the entry was "Pd for ringing at Gunpowder treason - five shillings".

5th November remained the most popular date on which the bells were rung across the 20 years, with 17 or 18 performances. Clearly the memory of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot was still fresh in the memory.

At the start of the period (1657), it is thought that there were five bells, with an augmentation to six in 1660. The Parish Accounts have many entries relating to the casting and hanging of this new bell.

When King Charles II entered London on 29th May 1660, the bells of Solihull were rung, as the following entry shows: "Pd to the ringers for ringing upon a thanksgiving day for the Kinges returne to his Kingdome and crowne - four shillings". This date, which was also the King's 30th birthday, immediately became one on which regular ringing took place, with 13 or 14 performances in the 17 following years.

King Charles II was crowned on 23rd April 1661, when the bells of Solihull were once again rung in celebration: "payed to George Callow's wife for drinke on the coronation day for the ringers - two shillings and sixpence". Once again, this date entered the regular repertoire, with ringing taken place in 11 of the 16 years that followed, commemorating both St George's Day and the anniversary of the coronation.

These are by far the earliest dates on which it is known that ringing took place at St Alphege, with the next date being a well-known peal in 1786 and then on several dates in 1843 - 1846, which I discovered in another book lent to me by Gordon Bragg. Perhaps another article on those occasions might follow.

Keith Whitehead