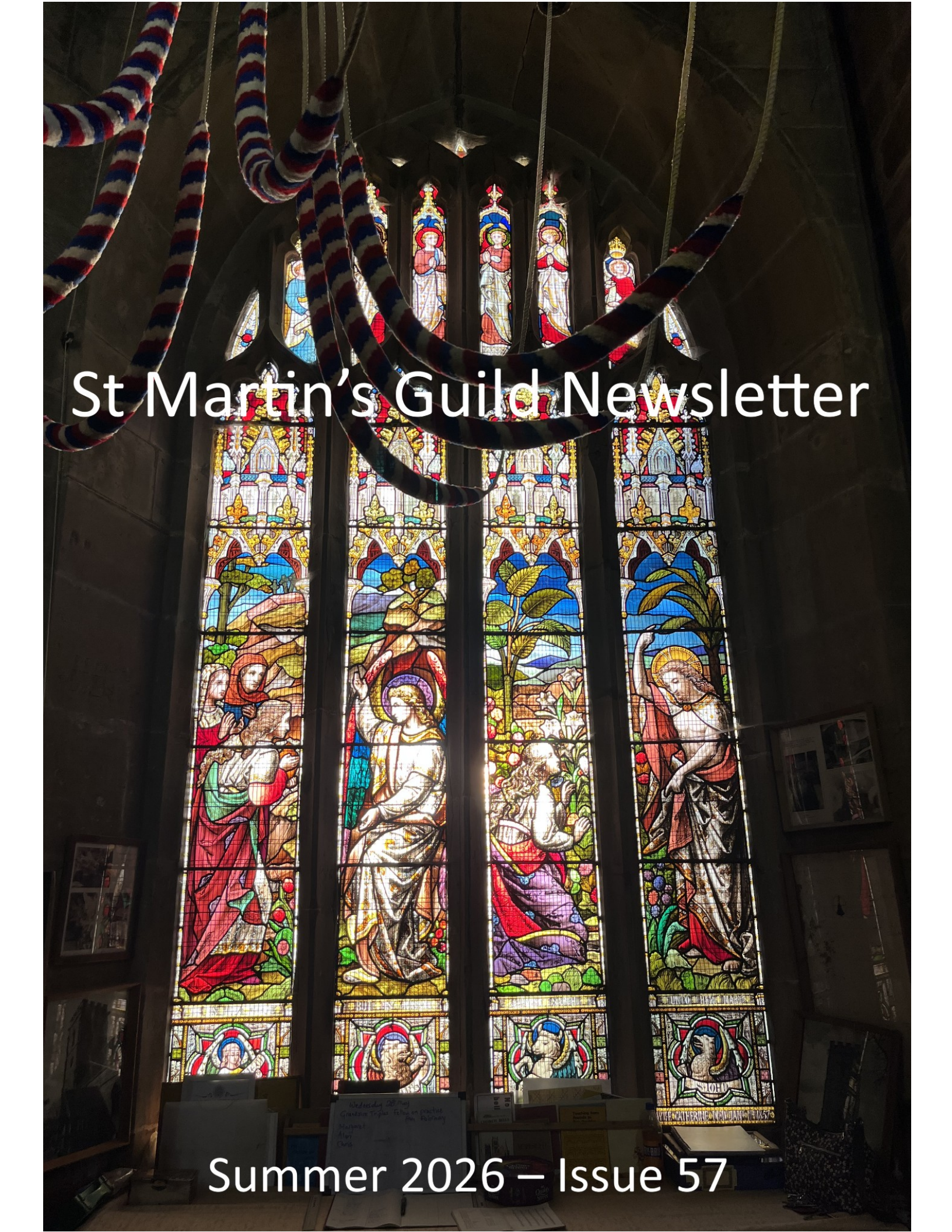


The background image shows the interior of a church, likely St Martin's. It features four tall, narrow stained glass windows with intricate designs, including figures and floral patterns. Above the windows are smaller, arched stained glass windows. Red, white, and blue striped bunting hangs from the ceiling in several places. The lighting is warm, coming from the windows. The text "St Martin's Guild Newsletter" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

# St Martin's Guild Newsletter

Summer 2026 – Issue 57



## EDITORIAL

James Ramsbottom

The photo on the cover of this issue of the newsletter is of the west window at St. Giles' church, Sheldon, wonderfully captured in the evening light by Margaret Burling. The sight of this window and the name Margaret might be familiar to more than just the local band - for the last 8 years Margaret has organised special monthly focused practices on the light ring of 8 in the tower, which have been attended by many guild members. Margaret shares some of her experiences with these practices in this issue - essential reading for anyone contemplating one of Phil Ramsbottom's suggestions also found in this issue.

Elsewhere in this issue we have a report from Sand Cooper on what sounds like a most eventful (in the best possible way) tower outing for the Solihull band and friends. There is news from BUSCR about both the M1 teaching course they hosted and the recent improvement on belfry lighting at Edgbaston.

16th May saw 3 striking competitions being hosted between the 2 towers in Moseley - the first formal guild striking competition since the COVID-19 pandemic. Days such as this require a great amount of planning, co-ordination and energy, and we give reports on the day from the hosts, one of the teams (Brumdingers) and the person who suggested this great (if ever-so-slightly overly ambitious) idea.

Just before this issue of the newsletter went for publication, about 25 guild members enjoyed the summer walking tour - back after a year off and with a new organiser. Getting an article out about that in time for this issue was never going to be possible, but it can be confirmed that all those involved had a most enjoyable time and that there will be a write-up in the next issue.

And finally, thanks to all of those who told me how much they enjoyed reading my debut newsletter as editor. It makes the job worthwhile. I hope that this issue is a worthy follow-up.

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## National 12-Bell Final News

20th June saw ringers from across the country gather at York Minster for the National 12-Bell Final, including a band from St. Martin's in the Bullring. The bells of York Minster are the 4th heaviest ring of bells in the world, making this year a particularly difficult competition for all bands.

The Birmingham team were determined to do their best to win, but there was tough competition from the Cumberland Youths, the College Youths, the current champions Bristol and the home team. The judges spoke of how high the standard of ringing had been throughout the competition. In the end, the Birmingham team were narrowly beaten by the York band, who produced a "stunning" piece of ringing conducted by Guild member David Hull. Congratulations to David and his team.

# Solihull's Busy Month of May

Sand Cooper

May is always a busy month for us at Solihull. It kicked off with our ringing outing to Leicestershire. When I write about our outings I often talk about similar themes. Firstly, the weather. It was just right - lovely and sunny but not too hot. We're not really sure how Gillian, our organiser, manages to get this right. Secondly, the benefit of ringing in towers new to us. Once again, we came home having been reminded how easy-going our bells are and how lucky we are. Our newer ringers really benefit from trying bells that are more flighty, have bouncy ropes, are both overly noisy and overly quiet, and have extra-long drafts. To be honest, this can be a little intimidating even for a few of our more experienced ringers.

Thirdly, we often mention a 'novelty tower'. This was hard to pick out this time. We had to cross the roof at Thurnby to get to the ringing room.



At Great Glen we had to move stored items out the way to ring, and at Oadby, with no local ringer to let us in, we had a complicated list of pre-ringing checks to

undertake. Here also, we found the best 'spider' for the day.

But the crown probably goes to Billesdon where the ropes were very oddly arranged. The treble and tenor were very close together making a tidy ringing style essential. The 2nd through to the 5th were hung in a long straight line with ringers giggling as they stood, quite literally in some cases, shoulder to shoulder holding ropes hung so close to the wall that you'd struggle if you had a wide girth!



At least you could rest by leaning against the wall! And it was amusing trying to see around each other as we rang. All this whilst the 6th rope was hung in a corner of its own! It turned out that the locals rarely ring all eight bells together because they find it so hard.



Finally, there's always the food. Gillian did us proud, organising for an unsuspecting publican to create a menu for us at lunch time when they

don't even normally have a food offering. But they simply had to help because this was the pub for our lunch stop! They did a great job for us and seemed to love being wrapped up in our conviviality and joy. We unexpectedly had tea and coffee laid on at an afternoon tower where the parish warden had turned out specially to greet us. In the evening we'd eaten so much that Robin needed help with his sweet and the ladies ordered extra spoons so that we could oblige!



There was the usual 'herding of cats' and stragglers to round up as we shepherded the ringers back onto the coach after each stop. The worst of the bunch will know who they are, but of course they're forgiven for snatching a look in churches as we were whisked away.

I think it could be said that the theme of the day was ropes. Not only had the ropes been so close together at Billesdon but at the same tower, literally as we chimed them having rung down, the last few blows of the visit, the rope of the treble broke and as Malcolm went to catch and hold the rope came cascading down around his head! Alan's rather harsh jibe was "where there's no sense there's no feeling!".



Later in the day at Great Glen, the ropes had been tied so tightly to some iron railings to make them safe while unattended, that it was hard work to release them to ring! They were challenging too, as they were a bit springy, having only been fitted the week before.

Once again, a truly magnificent day out and a whole lot of fun. It was great that so many of the band could make it and it was lovely to be joined by ringers from local towers that we often ring alongside - Castle Bromwich, Moseley, Sheldon, Shirley and, even further afield, Feckenham. Thank you Gillian for another special day.

# Running Special Practices at St Giles, Sheldon

Margaret Burling

I have been organising Special Practices at St Giles, Sheldon since August 2018. It was Phil Ramsbottom who persuaded me that organising practices was a good idea. Little did I realise what I was taking on!

Since the beginning we have covered a wide range of topics and methods. Originally the plan was to improve our Sunday Service ringing. As we currently have only four regular Sunday Service ringers we have tended to broaden our horizons a little more.

Quite often I can see a need for a specific topic, but I also welcome suggestions from other members of St Martins Guild. I draw on a vast array of helpers with expertise in many differing areas. As most ringers are more than happy to help others, I can usually manage to gather a willing team. I am very grateful to Eleanor and Charlie Linford for their assistance, as they have been very regular supporters of these practices. The regular refreshments including cheese scones (courtesy of Alan) and cake (baked by yours truly) of course are no encouragement to participate!

Hopefully these practices encourage others to develop their ringing by focusing on areas/methods with which they would otherwise take longer to progress due to the constraints in normal practices.

In the last twelve months we have had practices on plain hunting, St Nicholas Doubles variations, Grandsire Triples, Striking and Listening workshop, Grandsire Doubles (x2), Cambridge Minor (x2), St Martin's Group of Doubles Spliced, Ringing up in peal, Touches of Stedman Doubles and Grandsire Caters (At Solihull not Sheldon!).

If you find that you are struggling with a particular/specific area or method please contact me and I will try to accommodate you. My email address is [margaretburling@aol.com](mailto:margaretburling@aol.com)

# The Guild Striking Competitions

## The Idea - Eleanor Linford

When the standing committee were discussing the 2026 calendar, I might possibly have said "We haven't had a proper striking competition since before COVID, I reckon we could have several concurrent contests across the two towers at Moseley, it'll be fun", possibly served up with a side-order of "How hard can it be?". The slightly flippant statement turned into a more concrete plan of novice 6-bell call changes at St Mary's, 6-bell method at St Anne's and 8-bell method at St Mary's, all followed by an epic Moseley ringers' tea. Again: "How hard can it be?"

The first cornerstone of the plan was the Ringing Masters of St Martin's, St Philip's and St Paul's committing to organising three non-overlapping bands for the 8-bell contest. After that everything snowballed, we ended up with more entries for the different contests than we ever dared hope for, and the logistical challenges started. Ringing Master Rachel worked through all the permutations and combinations of band orders (and possibly a few pencils and sheets of paper along the way), with Vicky Wilby on hand to check the plans and tweak the city-centre bands a little once the perfect solution proved impossible.

On the day there was a huge amount of competitive "can-do" spirit on display (plus a few emergency journeys for Simon Linford's taxi services). Congratulations to the St

Paul's band who won both the 6-bell contests (with special mention to Brumdingers who were second each time) and to the St Martin's who won the 8-bell contest. Thanks to Jonathon Healy, Casey McLellan & James Ramsbottom and Annabelle & Matt Frost for the time they gave up to judge the contests and give positive and entertaining feedback. Further thanks to everyone at Moseley for their catering and hosting contribution to the day, to everyone who rang in a band (especially anyone who had not rung in a contest before), and to Rachel for all the versions of the plan.

Was it really such a good idea: "Hard yes".

Did we have fun: "Hard yes".

Would we do it again: "Possibly not in quite the same format"!

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## The Hosts - Trish Everett

Moseley's Rookie Ringers (Debbie, Sarah, Vicky and Helen, led by Trish) are currently working their way through 50 Ringing Things for teams, and two things on our list of things to do were to take part in a striking competition and to organise a ringers tea. So you can imagine how excited we were that the Moseley towers were to host the Guild striking competition, complete with ringers tea!

We decided that the Rookies would field a team for the call change category. That decided, we turned our attention, organisational and persuasion skills to ensure that an excellent team would be



produced! In addition we decided to go the extra mile and ensure that tea, coffee, squash and biscuits would be available throughout the afternoon.



In the week before the competition the Rookies hoovered, cleaned and polished everything in the ringing

room at St Anne's to within an inch of its life! Noticeboards were checked and rearranged as needed, too - nothing was left undone!

We enjoyed taking part in the competition, securing a creditable third place in our category - given that ringing in striking competition was a first for most of the team. Hopefully it won't be our last...

An excellent ringers tea was also produced. Thanks to all the Moseley ringers who contributed and helped on the day - a real team effort!

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Brumdingers - Thomas and Matthew Healy

It was a busy and exciting afternoon, having rung in Guild challenge days in previous years this was our first experience of a St Martin's Guild striking competition. There were three competitions at two towers, the novice call changes and 8 bell

method at St Mary's Moseley and a 6 bell method competition at St Anne's. A few of us were ringing for other teams so had to make sure we were in the right place at the right time.

Brumdingers were able to enter teams in both the call changes and 6 bell method competition, and found ourselves opening the ringing at St Mary's. The bells are familiar to us due to being our old home. We pulled off with a mixture of nerves and excitement. With tension building we skilfully negotiated the call changes then found our way to St Anne's for the method competition. These bells were much less familiar and posed many challenges including the rope length - 7 knots between us - and the lightweight nature of the bells. Ringing completed, we were on to what some people view as the most important part of the day - the tea, which was magnificent. Samosas are always welcome along with a huge variety of cakes.

Suspense was building throughout the meeting then three different sets of judges stepped forward and gave some useful comments. We found ourselves placed second in both competitions, a brilliant result and great preparation for the National Youth Contest in Nottingham in July.



# Report on Edgbaston Module 1 Teaching Course

Nikolai Komar



On the 21st February, BUSCR hosted an ART Module 1 teaching course at Edgbaston. This was led very kindly by Nick Brett, with 12 delegates in attendance. 3 of these were BUSCR members, with others travelling from various towers in the Midlands. The day involved a combination of theory in the local church hall (supplemented by regular refreshments!) with practical lessons on the silenced bells. At the end of the day, we unsilenced the bells to allow those who had travelled for the course to have a ring!

We last hosted an M1 course in September, which allowed 4 BUSCR members (myself included) to learn how to teach ringers from scratch; this proved especially useful in advance of Freshers Week. Hosting another course midway through the year allowed some of our members who were not able to attend the first course to gain the same experience, hopefully allowing the society to

become as sustainable as possible moving forward. The fact that we could benefit so many other ringers in the area by hosting made it all the more worthwhile. We are incredibly grateful to ART for organising the course and are definitely looking to host more in future!





# Edgbaston Lighting Project

Nikolai Komar

Lighting has been a major issue for steeple keeping at Edgbaston. A platform had been installed in the belfry a few years ago to allow non-ringer access to the trapdoor on the roof without touching the bell frame. Unfortunately, this then blocked the one relatively minor light source available. Since then, we'd relied on phones and head torches when inspecting the bells, which was not a safe practice.

Thanks to the SMG grant, we were able to pay for an electrician to install new lights in the belfry earlier this year. These are much brighter than what was used previously and are unobscured by the platform, allowing us to see all corners of the belfry equally well. It has been transformative for tower maintenance, allowing us to safely involve several more of our BUSCR members in steeple keeping than before.

An LED batten was also installed in the intermediate chamber, providing us with far greater visibility than was available previously. Between this and the belfry lighting, the task of maintaining the tower has become a considerably safer and more pleasant experience, so we are very grateful that the SMG were able to help us with this.

View of bells before lighting:



View of bells with new belfry lighting:



View from middle room with new LED batten:



# Suggested things for individuals or towers to arrange and do

Phil Ramsbottom

1. Arrange a focussed ringing session. This can be at your home tower or any other. It might even be an extra 30 minutes before usual practice. Ask for help leading it if necessary.
2. Arrange an outing. This can be an all day affair or simply one or two towers on a Saturday afternoon followed by a visit to a tea room/pub (delete as applicable).
3. Organise a joint practice with another tower. If you do this, have a plan for the evening. There is no point in doing the "same old same old". Invite a guest leader maybe, particularly if you want to try something different or new. The downside is that twice the number in the tower will mean half the ringing time per person.
4. Organise a joint practice but utilising both towers involved, e.g rounds and call changes at one tower, method ringing at the other. Arrange suitable leaders for both towers. Meet in a pre-arranged pub post practice.
5. Challenge another tower to a striking contest. This could be at a joint practice night or any other time and at a different tower. There is no need to broadcast the event and you can make up your own rules. The judges could be one ringer from each tower or those "sitting out". There doesn't need to be a winner - maybe just some constructive comments from the judges. Regardless of the outcome, challenge another tower. Maybe challenge a tower from another Guild/Society. This isn't about winning, it's about having fun.
6. Book a different tower for practice night a few times a year, maybe one with more bells. (10 bell towers have both a front 6 and

a back 6, and four rings of 5 if minor rings are included, so that can add to the fun.)

7. Find out more about the methods which you can already ring, e.g. the structure, what happens at the lead end, etc. Knowing and ringing a method competently requires more than simply learning a Blue line. Include looking into compositions (even if you can't yet call bobs), e.g. are there touches of bob doubles aside from the usual 120s? But don't just Google it - work it out for yourself.
8. Try ringing spliced as a means of learning a new method one lead at a time. (A typical example is Plain Bob and St. Simon's Doubles)
9. Arrange a Zoom theory session with a few others and focus on just one or two methods - a bit like joining a book club.
10. Keep a note book and scribe handy to try and work things out as opposed to resorting to a hand held device and simply looking at a Blue line.
11. Make notes of your activities and achievements, either as an individual or for your tower. Submit them for publication in the Guild newsletter or parish magazine, and/or post on Facebook - and not just the SMG page. There's loads of other ringing related FB pages to utilise. Spread the message.
12. Arrange a theory session away from the usual practice night, either general or on a specific topic/method.