

Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



Learning
the Ropes

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This edition is all about the band. We have some inspiring stories from people who have joined forces to improve opportunities for everyone, who have found new friendships through ringing and who have encountered the warmth of the bell ringing world when visiting other towers.

The beautiful mats from Dunblane Cathedral, pictured below, caught the eye of visiting ringer Wendy Watts while on holiday in Scotland just before Christmas and she describes the warm welcome she received at each tower on page 2.

It is especially heart-warming to read the account from Tatiana on page 9 of how she has found peace and comfort by joining the band at Doncaster Minster while she is many hundreds of miles away from her home in war-torn Ukraine.

Building a band isn't one person's responsibility, it is everyone's and everyone can contribute something.

The 50 Ringing Things Challenge serves up plenty of ideas for the different kinds of things to get involved with, which make ringing so rewarding. Helping with maintenance, making the best ringers' tea or organising an outing are all things anyone can do no matter how new a ringer you are.



The beautiful mats at Dunblane Cathedral

Best Christmas Present Ever

Wendy Watts, Nutfield, Surrey

When we received an invitation to share Christmas with our Scottish friends in beautiful Limekilns, Fife, there was only one problem... the thought of being away from our home in Surrey and not bell ringing at Christmas was unimaginable.

Both my husband and I had received the call to 'Ring for the King' in April 2023. Not only did we have the honour of ringing for the King, we were invited to carry on learning and haven't looked back.

So where do I start? I looked up Scottish Association towers and found what I thought would be my local tower at St. Andrew's University. I emailed the tower captain Peter and his wife Rachel Williams, who could not have been more welcoming. They said they would put a band together especially for our visit! We were so overwhelmed by them even saying yes, but to open especially for our visit, was just amazing. Peter also suggested that while I was up there I could visit other towers and reeled off a list of names.

Finally, a ringing friend told me he had arranged with his friends Ian and Barbara Bell for us to visit St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh. Even more amazing and how exciting! This is how our week panned out, in the most special way imaginable.

Monday 18 December – St. Andrew's and St. George's Edinburgh

Lovely Annie and her band welcomed us to this beautiful church. The bells were a delight to ring, and to watch the experienced ringers ring methods on all the 8 bells was just sublime.

Tuesday 19 December – St. Andrew's University

What a wonderful experience! We turned up and parked by the chapel and walked through to the beautiful square, all lit up in blue. This is where we met Andy MacKenzie, who with fellow ringer Tania, travels every week from Dundee to join in the practice on Tuesday evenings. At the practice we met up with Rachel and Peter who had been so helpful when planning our trip. We rang all evening and Peter was very generous with his teaching and time. We were extremely grateful for this opportunity.

Wednesday 20 December – Dunblane Cathedral

We met Niki Wildman the tower captain and her lovely children, who were also ringers. This was a special place and we felt very honoured to be ringing there. A young lady ringer was ringing the 25 cwt tenor up and made it look so easy.



Bells at St Salvator's, St Andrew's University



With the band at St Salvator's, St Andrew's University



The beautiful mats of Dunblane Cathedral

So after some rounds and call changes, I was given the opportunity to ring the tenor. What an unforgettable experience – it was the heaviest bell I have rung so far. This bell was unforgiving, so no excuses, and it makes you ring at your best, pulling through on both strokes and remembering that flick on the backstroke. After four strokes the rhythm was there and the wonderful Alison Stevens was there to give me expert advice and tuition. Everyone was so helpful and I am thankful to all of them. These were beautiful bells and going to the pub after was a bonus! Oh, and they have the best mats in all the bell towers I have visited so far!

Thursday 21 December – St. Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh

Where do I start? Ian Bell, tower captain, asked me if I was good on my feet and I soon found out why. There are 100 steps up the tower on an anti-clockwise spiral staircase, then a walk across the roof where at night you can see beautiful Edinburgh all lit up. Then yet another tower and another 20 steps, before you enter the biggest ringing room in Scotland! Wow! Absolutely worth all the effort!

To add to the excitement and experience, the bells were up and muffled, so we witnessed some very special ringing. The tenor weighed in at 41 cwt, which is the heaviest bell I have ever encountered, but no, I didn’t ask if I could ring it. (But maybe in the future!) It took three men, including Chris who we met on day one, to ring it down. After a lot of effort all the bells were rung down, muffles removed and yes... rung back up again! Fabulous! Well done to all those strong, determined and dedicated ringers. It was our first experience of ringing on 12 bells and it was great! The cups of tea made by Barbara Bell were very welcome at the halfway point.

Our friend Stefan Johnson, with whom we were staying, had permission to join us and had his very first ringing experience, something he will never forget.

Friday 22 December – Holyrude Cathedral, Stirling

We met Rob Ferguson, the tower captain, and his experienced band. This ornate stone tower, so close to the stunning Stirling Castle, was so full of history we felt very humble to be ringing there. It was wonderful to listen and watch the band ring methods, such as London and Cambridge. We were able to ring rounds and call changes and were given the opportunity to practise plain hunting.

Saturday 23 December – Dunkeld Cathedral

We met Tim Gatland and lovely Elizabeth in the morning. They kindly opened the tower at this beautifully situated cathedral especially for our visit. So with our hard hats on and a health and safety briefing, we entered the site.

Well, what a sight it was! Ooh my! The ruins of the old Cathedral looked stunning and we were speechless with its beauty. You have to enter through the old ruins to get to the bell tower. We were shown where the old bells were hung originally, then we arrived at the nice spacious bell room. There were only four of us but it was just as wonderful. The bells were lovely to ring.



Ready with hard hat at Dunkeld Cathedral



St Andrew’s and St George’s Edinburgh

So from thinking I wouldn’t be ringing at all over Christmas, I ended up with the best possible ringing Christmas I could have wished for! Thank you everyone!

What a Privilege!

Linda Coveney, Milton Keynes

Ringling for the King! It was a must for an enthusiastic, but not very experienced ringer.

I had booked a walking holiday, followed by travelling around Scotland in our motorhome when the Coronation date was announced and initially thought that I wouldn't be able to ring, as I wouldn't be back at my home tower in Milton Keynes in time. I made contact with a ringer at Tulloch Ringing Centre, who recommended that I go to Inverness Cathedral, the most northerly bell tower in the world. I persuaded my long-suffering husband to change our travel plans slightly and managed to get to a practice, then proudly rang one of the 10 bells on Coronation Day.

I had only been ringing for a year and was very much a learner (still am), but the welcome I received at the cathedral was second to none. With very few bell towers in Scotland, many of the ringers travel great distances to ring.

I very much appreciated being able to ring alongside such a devoted and friendly group of ringers. Such a privilege!



Linda ringing at Inverness

The York Colleges Guild

Simon Edwards, York University

It's fair to say that the York Colleges Guild (YCG) has had a hugely successful couple of years and is currently in a position of some strength.

Last September, seven of us attended an ART bell handling course in readiness for the year ahead (and with the expectation that we would attract some new learners at Freshers Fair). Under the expert guidance of Christine Richardson, a group with very diverse teaching experience learnt how to take a raw beginner from Muggle to Wizard (or close enough), with plenty of hands-on practice. For me, the biggest take-home was a boost in confidence – from knowing that much of what I would have done was pretty OK, and that I could recover a bell in case of emergency, every teacher's worst nightmare! Fortunately, such incidents have been few and far between.

Freshers Fair certainly did attract learners – lots of them! And having a Wombel certainly helped! Following an initial 'Give it a Go' session, more than 20 students began learning to ring in October, making our early practices rather manic to say the least! We have retained nine of these, which means that everyone gets more rope time. The teaching is shared, so no beginner has just one or two teachers, although we do inevitably end up working with some learners more often than others.

This benefits everybody; the learners are exposed to a variety of teaching styles, and we teachers (who are mostly teaching bell handling for the first time) get a range of students to work with. This gives a great opportunity for us to practise too, as each beginner exposes a different weakness or preferred way of working.

Our Wednesday night practices at the Oratory (St Wilfrid, a fine 18 cwt ring of 10) continue to keep us busy (as do the après sessions, where we are currently trying to visit a new pub every week). Balancing the time between teaching and ringing is a challenge (which our Lord High Ringing Master, Matthew Hall, has risen to superbly), but is becoming easier now numbers have levelled out. Our repertoire is wide and varied, but we currently have established ringers learning Plain Bob, Grandsire, Stedman and Surprise Minor. We also like to roll out a new Doubles variation every now and then, which certainly keeps the good folks on BellBoard entertained! Elsewhere, the YCG benefits from an active ringing scene in York itself, where students are made welcome and integrated at other city towers. Currently, we're on track to beat the record for YCG quarters scored in an academic year for the second year in a row (not least thanks to Nat's enthusiastic organisation, and recent discovery of handbell ringing).



Teaching in action with Ben and Emma

A mini-outing just before Christmas was the first time many of our learners had rung outside of York; everyone acquitted themselves very well on “foreign” bells. Some were also linked up with their local towers at home so they could continue ringing over the Christmas break. There are plans afoot to take our band to the Minster later this term, which many are looking forward to.

I cannot finish this article without talking about the benefits this year has brought to the teachers. There is no substitute for anything in ringing but hands-on practice, and this applies equally to teaching. It would be foolish to pretend that everything has been perfect – of course there have been bumps and challenges – but overcoming these has been a learning experience too and taught us plenty along the way. We are lucky to have a pool of teachers and can bounce off of each others' experiences and ideas.

Throughout the term, it's fair to say that our confidence and competence have grown, as we learn from mistakes and adjust our ways of working where needed. Our differing teaching styles also benefit our students, and I'm sure many will take over the teaching mantle themselves in future years. Teaching is also highly rewarding, and the smiles we've seen from both learners and teachers when one has mastered something this term have made all the hard work worthwhile!



December YCG outing

Are you planning to study at York – or know somebody who is – and would be interested in joining us? We'd love to hear from you! We can be contacted via email on admin@ycg.org.uk.

Getting to Grips with Bell Ringing

Emma Herbert, York University

Since arriving at the University of York last September, I have had the great privilege of joining the York Colleges Guild and learning how to ring. Admittedly, I was slightly naïve about how long it would take for me to ring unaided, but I am getting there slowly! The process began with me only pulling backstrokes, which was the easy part. It then progressed into me ringing just the sally and imitating my guide with a pretend tail end. Once I put the two together, I had a tendency to not flick all the way down on the backstrokes because I was nervous about catching the sally in time, and I therefore had to go back and practise backstrokes alone again.

I was a bit confused by the changes in the tension on the rope to begin with, but then realised that I needed to pull harder if it was getting too loose and less if it was getting too tight, despite it feeling more natural to do the opposite! Sometimes the rope would sway from side to side, but this was largely due to me moving my hand outwards too much when going to catch the sally and not having enough control over the bell. I was therefore advised to imagine that I had two walls either side of me that I had to stay within.

To date, I have been learning how to speed up and slow down a bell, although it feels like it is harder to speed up when the rope is tight and slow down when the rope is loose. The handling of each bell is different due to their different weights, and sometimes my ribs hurt the following day after pulling too hard on a heavy bell! Ben, Megan, Simon, Dominic, Natasha, and Jemima are great teachers and are always able to offer great advice on how to improve.

As a music student, I am familiar with theory and language that may seem strange and complicated to those who do not understand it. I am interested in bell ringing terminology and theory and am keen to dedicate more time to familiarising myself with it outside of practices. Later this year, the York Colleges Guild will be visiting York Minster, and I am really looking forward to getting the opportunity to ring there. Many of the wonderful ringers at our society have been ringing for ten years or more, and if I am still ringing in ten years' time, I believe that I will be very proud!



Ringling at Market Weighton

My First Semester at York

Cloud Jarvis, Colorado Springs, USA

I felt very welcome at BellSoc. Practices usually consist of sitting on comfy cushions in the allocated tower (usually the York Oratory), a couple of one-on-one practice sessions with a bell and teacher, and a chance to ring in rounds.

On my first day, safety was the major focus, then we quickly moved to backstrokes. I have learned so much over the past semester – safety, the different parts of the bell, the basic techniques of ringing, and recently I've been learning how to ring in rounds by myself. My teachers are kind and accommodating to my hearing impairment. It isn't difficult to see how hard the instructors work and their passion for bell ringing. They take the time to go over skills I have been struggling with and give helpful advice and great encouragement. As the semester has gone on, the practices have become better and better, as the head of the society (Matthew) learned to balance the large number of new ringers with making sure that the older members got their practice as well. Afterwards, it's off to the pub!

Team Spirit

Amanda and Kate, Bramford, Suffolk

Learning to ring at our local tower in Bramford near Ipswich in Suffolk has been great fun in a group of five learners. We all started our bell ringing journey at the same time in order to ring for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and of course subsequently we rang when Her Majesty died and then for the Coronation. We didn't know each other when we started, so we have all made some great new friends. We are in our 30's to 50's and are a mix of accountant, paramedic, environmental adviser and healthcare workers. For most of us as well, we started ringing as a way of finding something just for us to do, away from the demands of work and home. It's a chance for us to do something just for ourselves.

All the way though we have encouraged each other and we gelled from the off as our teachers created an informal and fun atmosphere and we all seem to enjoy each others' sense of humour!

For a while, our weekly practice sessions focused on getting us through a local striking competition. The goal was for us to feel comfortable ringing with each other and following certain changes. The striking competition did not go as well as we hoped, and we felt rather deflated afterwards. However, our imaginative teachers Jonathan and Amanda came up with the idea of a mini striking competition, which happened on one of our local practice nights.

We were randomly allocated into teams, so we found ourselves ringing with people we may not always ring with, which re-focused us. The atmosphere was supportive, with a friendly rivalry running through it. There was no doubt it brought out a fresh competitive spirit in us! With this came a few nerves as we were determined that we could show that we could ring better than we had at the earlier striking competition. Would the judges who were familiar with our weaknesses realise which bells we were on? It certainly pushed us to ring our very best, and we really felt that we had done that once we had our turn. It gave us the positive boost that we needed at the time. We proved to ourselves that we could ring under pressure. The whole exercise played well to those with a competitive spirit, and certainly brought out our best ringing.



The Bramford Team with Kate (second from left) and Amanda (far right)

We are now progressing at different rates. Some are naturally talented, others have to work harder. Some can attend practices at other towers while others have commitments which prevent them from doing this. We two have recently rung our first quarter peals! Whatever our circumstances, though, we still continue to support each other and enjoy our new found friendships.

We greatly appreciate the local towers which have given us their time and expertise which has helped immensely. It has certainly taken a combined effort of many people to get us to where we are now. However our teachers, Amanda Richmond and Jonathan Williamson, not only give us time and expertise but with their sheer unadulterated enthusiasm, they pull us through anything we find difficult. We are so lucky to have them!

It's a Family Affair

Emily Hall, Nottingham

I was seven when my Grandpa told Mum and Dad "That's it, she's having a go on the second", which is the lightest bell in Leatherhead tower. Old Brampton in Derbyshire was where I actually learnt to ring, though I think it is special that my first blows were at the tower where my Grandpa has been ringing for over 50 years. My parents teaching me to ring was not always a smooth ride, though I wouldn't have expected it to be, either. On a family holiday where I can't have been older than 9 or 10, I was so spooked by a slightly longer draught that I spent the rest of the evening in the park over the road from the church instead (they had two old-fashioned iron slides welded together. Awesome!)

I've had many mentors over the years, though my main source of inspiration has been my mother, Susan Hall. She's given me the courage and strength to embrace the imposter syndrome, and go for it, whatever "it" may be. I hope that everyone has a Susan Hall in their ringing careers, who believes that you are capable of anything you put your mind to. In recent years I have tried to become a Susan myself, which, it turns out, is actually terrifying and a lot of hard work. You are required to be fearless and say "yes" a lot more than "no". For example "yes" to turning in the tenor to that quarter peal, or setting up a new ringing association for young ringers.



The Hall family catch hold

I should add that my dad, Andrew, has also taught me vital life skills, too, including drinking beer. I must admit that I clearly thought that most of his advice was nonsense, so I did not heed his advice to "learn minor methods by above and below the treble" back when I was in my early teens. This came back to bite me during preparations for a peal of 41 minor. It led to a rather smug, and long awaited, "I told you so".

However, when it comes to ringing and family, it isn't just my immediate family who have had an influence. There's the wider community of bellringers, the "ringing family" who have helped me become the person I am today. In 2015, after moving to Nottingham, I was welcomed into the Nottingham University Society of Change Ringers (NUSCR) family, with several of them becoming housemates along the way. I have made friendships which will last a lifetime, including becoming a godmother to the daughter of two friends who took me under their wing in my first few years at university. A joy and a privilege, and I have put dibs on taking her out for her first pint!

There's also the side of the ringing family which means that you can turn up to any practice night, even though you might not know anyone in the ringing chamber, and be welcomed. Usually, you get watered and fed in the local pub after practice, too. Work takes me to all areas of the UK, and I always try and gate-crash a practice if I am able to. Regardless of ability or tower demographics, I have always felt like I am in a safe space. Of course, there is usually at least one person with whom you have a shared acquaintance, too. However, I'm not sure I'm used to being "Rosie's sister" when I visit the York area! Regardless of who you are, being a bellringer means that you always have a family to belong to. I look forward to seeing where this takes me in 2024.

A couple of years ago, I fearlessly said yes to becoming a founder member of the Young Change Ringers Association (YACR). I hope this can create a ringing family for ringers of the future to enjoy all the great experiences I had while being lucky enough to grow up in a ringing family. Find us on Facebook for more details and our 2024 events. <https://www.facebook.com/YCRA.official/>



Solace from War

Helen Nichols and Tatiana Hlembitska



In March 2023 we welcomed a young Ukrainian Tatiana Hlembitska to our tower at Doncaster Minster in South Yorkshire. Her English is coming along nicely and we are both honoured and proud to have her with us in the tower. She has enriched our lives and taught us a lot about Ukraine and what the Ukrainian nation has been through. In her own words, Tanya explains how she came to England, her life in the Ukraine and how she came to us in the church and up the tower.

We quickly realised that we were going to struggle with a language barrier as she did not speak English. It didn't stop us showing her around and we even let her try a bell. Together we persevered, downloading words in Ukrainian and hoping we had the correct dialect. Tatiana would often giggle when we didn't have things quite right. With the help of sign language and pictures and much laughter, Tanya can now handle a bell and rings with us every week.

My name is Tatiana. I am 30 years old. I was born in the beautiful city of Ivano Frankivsk, Ukraine. I lived there all my life. My family is small, but I love my parents, my sister and her daughter very much, and I miss them. I always dreamed of visiting England, it was my dream, which I did not think would come true. Unfortunately, it came true due to sad and painful circumstances.

I arrived in May 2022 after the start of the war. I am really grateful to England for supporting and helping me and my country. Being here I can help as well and I believe and hope that everything will end soon. At the moment I am working on studying English and I go to church and practise ringing the bells. From time to time I explore England.

How did I meet Helen and the ringers? It's very interesting because it was a sign for me that I realised later. I had a difficult period in my life and I was not interested in anything at all. I was very upset. I often prayed and asked God to give me some answer or sign of what to do next! One day I went to church just to pray. It was March 21, 2023. As I left it, I just looked at the announcements that were on the bulletin board. One of them said that anyone without experience, without being musical, can come and try to learn how to ring the bells. I decided 'Why not?' I went back to the church to ask if it would be a problem that I don't know English. Someone put me in touch with Helen who said that everything will be fine, just come! That's how I started doing it.

I am very grateful to Helen for giving me such an opportunity and believing in me. Also for her patience and support, because at that time I did not understand anything, but step by step I started to get better. I was really happy with small achievements.

I am grateful to James who also taught and supported me when Helen was away. I thank all the ringers I know. It is a gift from God that has given me a wonderful experience. In practice, I feel peace of mind. I would say that this is a meditation for the soul that I recommend to everyone.

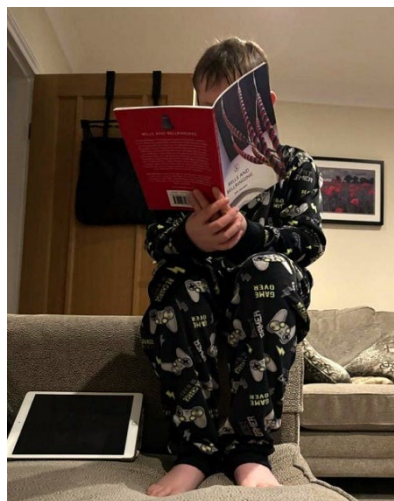


Helen and Tatiana

Thetford Max

Wayne Thomson, Thetford, Norfolk

No, that isn't a new method I have composed but my son Max (we live in Thetford) who since the age of four, has had a huge interest in clocks and bells, as well as a continued fascination with the history of Big Ben.



*Max doing what he likes best
– studying ringing*

Back in April 2023, we started learning to ring – well, I was there with Max so it didn't take much to persuade me to have lessons as well! We searched all over for a tower which would take us on and found what we were looking for at Bardwell in Suffolk, just a few miles from Thetford. We are now signed up to Learning the Ropes and Max's weekly commitment and his determination to succeed as a bell ringer have meant that we have both achieved LtR Level 1 and are keen to get Level 2. We ring every week at Bardwell and also ring for Sunday services which we think has really helped us ring steadily in rounds. Max is well away, calling the changes most Sundays and has become a confident bellringer. We have also become members of the Suffolk Guild of Ringers and we have really enjoyed going to the various district practices every month, and in the school holidays we attend the Norfolk Junior Ringers' events.

One of Max's goals is to ring at his local tower, St Peter's Thetford. This church is owned by the Town Council and for several years there has been no ringing there. When asked about his ambitions in life, he said 'to have the keys to my home tower

of St Peter's so I can ring the bells for the people of Thetford'. Fingers crossed he will soon be able to achieve this admirable ambition. Meanwhile, he was busy last weekend with another ambition of his – to visit Big Ben. An amazing day out, but sadly no photos allowed, so instead I have a picture of Max doing his homework – reading a bell ringing book of course!

Better Together

The Oxon Ringing School

In 2014, Susan Read started a Ringing School at St Helen's Abingdon in Oxfordshire to give new teachers the opportunity to practise their teaching skills while being mentored by experienced ART accredited teachers. Not only did this provide a great learning environment for new ringers to follow the Learning the Ropes scheme, but it enabled teachers to gain experience and become accredited.

By 2023, three other towers (Kirtlington, Dorchester and Witney) had joined the Ringing School. Steve Vickars, the Kirtlington Centre Lead said: "I had already been involved in teaching and mentoring at Abingdon Ringing School from 2019. I was very impressed with how Ringing School accelerated the development of new ringers, and how it helped new teachers develop under expert mentor guidance. So, when Susan asked me to start a ringing centre at Kirtlington, I was delighted to join. It has been a very busy time, but it has been incredibly rewarding to see the progress made by our students and teachers."



So these four towers have now come together to form the Oxon Ringing School, with Abingdon School founder Susan Read becoming Chair. Over 50 learners have received one-to-one training following the Learning the Ropes scheme. 22 students have achieved LtR Level 1, 6 LtR Level 2 and two have achieved LtR Level 3. If you would like to find out more about Oxon Ringing School, visit our page at: <https://odg.org.uk/info/oxfordshire-ringing-school/>

Learning to Ring the Oxon Way

Laura and Debra, Oxon Ringing School

Introducing Laura and Debra

Laura (12) started ringing in early January 2023 and joined the Ringing School in February, achieving Learning the Ropes Level 1 in May, Level 2 in August and just a year after starting ringing, she achieved Level 3, having rung her first quarter peals in December 2023, with mum Tracey in the band. She attends practice sessions at several different towers, including St Aldates Oxford and Longcot, and is now regularly involved in the Oxford Diocesan Guild Young Ringers' practices.

Having retired in 2018, Debra Scrimshaw started ringing in 2021, and joined the Ringing School as a student in October 2022, achieving her Level 1 in November that year, Level 2 in August 2023 and completed the second quarter peal required for Level 3 in January 2024. Debra has actively sought out opportunities to make progress, attending additional practices at Bampton and Kirtlington, as well as focused method practices at Bletchington.

We asked Laura and Debra some questions about their experiences so far and this is what they told us.



Laura receiving her LtR Level 2 certificate

What have been the highlights of learning to ring?

The wonderful people I have met and new friends I have made. The sense of achievement I feel when a tick goes into my logbook and I complete a Level. The opportunities to ring in different towers, on different bells, with different ringers, and the wonderful welcome I receive wherever I ring. Finally, being able to ring for special occasions such as weddings, royal events, and on Remembrance Sunday. **Debra**

I have liked meeting new people the most, and also meeting other young ringers outside of my school. I have enjoyed learning a new skill and learning at the same time as other youngsters. **Laura**

How has the process of learning to ring differed from your initial expectations?

I was probably typical of most ringers starting from scratch and started with no appreciation of the journey I was about to embark on. It was a complete eye opener for me. It was nothing like I'd ever done before. At the outset I had expected that ringers in my local tower would teach me to ring. They straight away introduced me to the LtR scheme and I hoped to be able to ring rounds for Sunday service one day. I quickly realised that my learning curve would be a long one, so as my enthusiasm for bell ringing grew I started searching for ringing courses that would help me acquire the skills I needed more quickly. That's when I discovered the Oxon Ringing School and applied to join their course for beginners. **Debra**

I thought it would be easier. Everyone just thinks you pull a rope. I didn't realise that there was so much to it. I didn't know that you needed a group of ringers to ring together. **Laura**

What do you think of the Learning the Ropes scheme?

I found it very helpful breaking down learning to ring into very small steps. I felt like I had small targets and this made me feel like I was always achieving. It was very motivating to get a couple of ticks in my book almost every week. I also got to attend many ringing sessions with other people who were at exactly the same stage as me. The sessions were one-to-one with a ringing teacher. I made lots of progress at these sessions. At the local practice, I would just get 10 minutes or so before the start of the main practice.

Laura

I loved the structured approach with targets at each level to focus on and the reward of having a Level signed off by an experienced teacher. The Levels are planned in such a way that provide a logical progression, each skill builds on one previously learned. The ringing exercises that have been designed to teach the required skills are fun as well as challenging and definitely work. Ringing involves physical skills and mental ones, so there's definitely a lot of 'brain training' going on whilst ringing a bell. **Debra**

What would be your top tip for any new ringers starting out?

Don't expect miracles immediately, you're learning something new. Believe in the process and be patient with yourself. Gradually you will understand what is required and achieve your goals. **Debra**

Don't compare yourself to other learners. Everyone learns at their own speed. Keep at it. Don't stop because you've reached a stage that you find tricky. Sometimes you feel like you're not making progress. Most of the time, this is not the case and the next week would be better. **Laura**

And your top tip for teachers?

An abundance of patience and calmness go a long way, as if you panic, so do your students. **Debra**

I liked the way the teachers encouraged me. They gently pointed out things that needed correcting and complimented me on the things that were going well. I enjoyed having more than one teacher, as they all had their different ways of teaching. The teachers encouraged me to go to other practices to ring more. I loved having all the people that had taught me to ring in my first three quarter peals. **Laura**



Debra (far right) at Witney after ringing her first quarter peal

Fun-dation Skills

Give them a Try!

Foundation skills are the core of Learning the Ropes Level 2. The focus is still very much on maintaining a good handling technique while having to think, look, listen and move your bell around! A whole series of exercises have been developed to build the skills you will need for change ringing. The idea is that you can practise these core skills without the distraction of having to think about other things, a bit like practising just a few bars of music instead of the whole symphony. You can find more resources at: <http://ringingteachers.org/resources/Method-Toolboxes/kaleidoscope-toolbox>

Foundation skills are very inclusive and as well as building skills, they are a lot of fun. We asked Susan Read of the Oxon Ringing School to share a couple of her favourites. All of these exercises can be varied in lots of ways depending on the level of experience of the ringers – start simple!

EXCUSE ME!

I thought up this fun exercise for our young ringers based on the old 'Excuse-Me' dance where those without a partner could approach a couple dancing in ballroom and take over dancing with one of the couple, releasing the other to look for someone else on the dance floor that they would like to dance with.

Before the game, the handover of a rope must be demonstrated and each ringer new to it must practise giving and taking a tail end. The handover consists of a ringer performing a handstroke with just one hand and simultaneously passing the tail end with the other hand to another ringer standing ready to receive it.

We ring rounds and one of those sitting out approaches someone ringing, (taking care to observe all safety rules) and requests very politely "Excuse me, please may I ring your bell"? They take over the bell using the technique just described and the ringer now without a bell has to ask someone else. This continues until the person in charge calls "Stand". It's fun to interact with each other and it provides a lot of hilarity, sometimes with more than one person asking for ropes at a time. But it is important that the rounds remain well struck both before and after each handover takes place. And the benefits:

- Gives the new ringer more confidence in bell control.
- Reinforces listening skills by making sure the rounds are maintained.
- It's a great ice breaker.

TWISTER

A simple technique needs to be demonstrated and tested beforehand: When asked to twist, the ringer waits until their hands are stretched high at backstroke and turns 180 degrees to face the other way, continuing to ring facing out of (or into) the rope circle. Whilst facing outwards, each ringer is encouraged not to look at the ringer they are following, but to listen to continue to ring in good rounds.

Start by ringing rounds. The conductor tells one ringer to twist, e.g. "2 twist". That ringer twists and then instructs another ringer to twist, and so on. If it's too much for different people to call out 'twist', you can just have one conductor. You can twist either in or out of the circle. This game **cannot** be played if anyone has to stand on a box when ringing because they could fall off their box! Apart from that, it can be good fun with the ringers interacting with each other. Ringing facing outward encourages listening rather than looking – again, another very useful skill.

Twizzle and Me

Laura Kang Ward, California

Sometimes half the fun of bell ringing is decoding the mysterious jargon. What *are* 'cat's ears' and 'coat hangers'? What *is* 'spliced Phobos and Bristol Max'? (No idea, but it sounded sublime at Great St Mary's!) Then there are the intriguing terms 'switcheroo' and 'twizzle' used by your friendly local ART teachers. And what about 'jump lottery' and 'POFFIO'?!

Ever since Louise Booth kicked things off for me with 'long places' at Rotherhithe in December 2022 – two whole pulls in 3rds place, then two whole pulls in 4ths place; repeat, repeat, repeat! – I enter each new tower (I am an itinerant learner) eagerly clutching my wish lists (dog-eared printouts of the ART Kaleidoscope exercises plus my Little Green Book). Often I am met with blank stares; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is baffled. There isn't the band, or the know-how, and I end up ringing the usual rounds and call changes or maybe plain hunt.

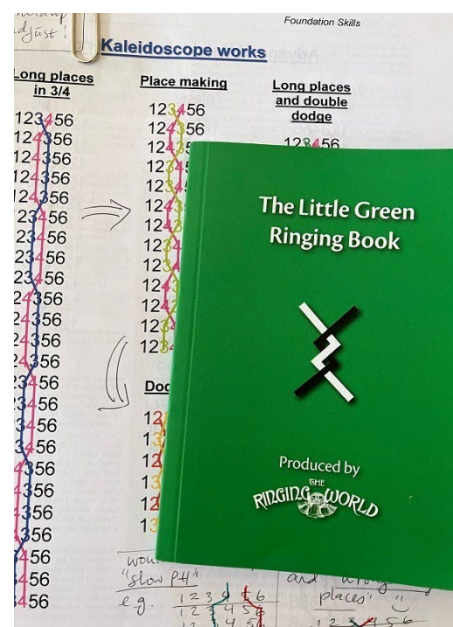
I had more success at Little Rock, Arkansas, at the Seven Towers Festival last April. The previous month, Alan Faiers in Northamptonshire had continued the adventure with 'dodge – lead – dodge – seconds', after which I felt unexpectedly emotional. Maybe I *could* become a bell ringer after all! Somehow working on improving my striking and making my bell behave **outside** of the crucible of busy practice nights gave me a hope and a confidence I hadn't had before. I was thrilled to feel a glimmer of actual **bell control**. Bring it on!

Back to Little Rock: during a break, I asked if anyone wanted to dodge with me, and Allen Nunley from Texas gamely volunteered. Former sub commander Bob Aldinger, formerly of Honolulu, decided we needed a treble to keep a steady rhythm and slow us down, so he jumped in. Now we were doing 'treble bob in 2/3'. Faith Magwood from Victoria, British Columbia, was recruited to join the fun and tenor behind, and we soon drew a crowd of curious onlookers... "What *are* they doing?!" Local ringer Dick Dearnley even decided to record us while standing on a pew, saying this would be a good exercise to introduce at the Little Rock practices.

Enter David Smith, at the North West Ringing Course last August, who had a lot of tricks in his arsenal, including having us stand the bell at backstroke and ... walk away! It was all about developing confidence and feeling comfortable around the ropes. Also in August, Dee Smith and Lesley Boyle in Cambridgeshire had a group of new Ring for the King recruits and me play 'twizzle'. While ringing rounds, you call someone's name and tell them to 'twizzle', and they have to walk around their rope (at backstroke) to end up inside the circle facing outwards – all the while continuing to ring rounds. Once steady, that person chooses the next victim. Hilarity often ensues, interspersed with the usual brief bouts of terror. Such is the power of fun, interactive group exercises, that – shh! – also teach good striking and basic bell handling skills.

Practising these foundation exercises – both in a group and on a dumbbell – had given me the toolkit to survive when, in Houston last week, Tom Farthing threw me onto a working bell (the 7) for a plain course of Grandsire Triples. Turn around in 3rds place – and over backstroke / handstroke to boot? No problem! Um, well, we ended in rounds; let's leave it at that. Still, I was chuffed!

So, what are 'switcheroo' and POFFIO, you ask? Those sneaky ART teachers have come up with *many* clever ways or learners to develop foundational handling skills while also relaxing and enjoying themselves. Get thee to a suitably happenin' tower and find out!



Rope time is good, but pen and paper time is good, too

Minor Stepping Stones at Tulloch

Judith Frye, ART Tutor

Have you heard about ART's Minor Stepping Stones? It is a scheme that could be used after completing Learning the Ropes. Here's how a group of people set about putting it into action.

It was an exciting start to the New Year as a group of nineteen people gathered at the Tulloch Ringing Centre in the Highlands of Scotland for a fun-filled week of ringing. The weather was sunny but exceedingly cold; luckily the Ringing Centre has a log burner, and we were sustained with excellent lunches and a vast quantity of cake!

There is a huge variety of bell ringing methods and there are many possible pathways to advance our ringing. Minor Stepping Stones is a series of graded minor methods to help develop ringing progressively. They are in five levels with certificates awarded for each level. The methods in the scheme are not necessarily those most commonly rung, nor in the order in which they are often tackled but have been chosen to develop skills in an incremental way with each method building on the previous ones.



The Minor Stepping Stones group at Tulloch (photo courtesy of Paul Wells)

The ringers came from far and wide and had a varied range of experience. Each day we looked at some unfamiliar methods, considering how best to ring them. We could have just learned the blue line, the order of work or the place bells, but we looked at other ways of thinking about methods:

- Some methods were rung by applying simple rules rather than by learning the order of work.
- With practice, we learned how to watch where the treble is and react appropriately.
- The structure of each method was considered.
- By the end of the week some were able to ring one method above the treble and another below the treble.

Initially these techniques seem more difficult than simply learning something by rote, but in the longer term they are very valuable skills to learn. By isolating each of these techniques, we were able to practise and develop them. Although learning blue lines and place bells is important, it is very helpful to be aware of the method structure, the position of the treble and your relationship to it. These elements can be combined to give a sound knowledge of what is being rung.

Fourteen quarters were scored during the week. These included 36 individual firsts, including five firsts in method as conductor.

There were additional sessions on bell technique to aid striking, "walking" methods, a talk on method theory, and some handbells. Evening ringing diverged from minor methods and helped develop skills on higher numbers. It was an action-packed week! With two rings of bells in the same building, we could have concurrent ringing sessions. While one group extended their learning in the 12-bell ringing centre, others consolidated their skills by ringing a quarter peal in the 8-bell tower.

"The week was challenging and interesting without being pressured or feeling we were floundering out of our depth."

"We've been stretching ourselves in a supportive group where there were enough experienced ringers for those of us who were less sure to stand behind or have a go."

It was amazing to see the development of additional skills over the course of a week; ringers were delighted at their new perspective of methods. Everyone grew in confidence, and I am sure the knowledge acquired will assist our future ringing. Here of some of the comments from students.

The week was certainly fun and hugely beneficial for all involved. Even those of us who have been ringing for many years learned some new tricks. Thanks are due to Helen McGregor and Peter Bevis for their hospitality and organisation of the course.

Would I do it again? Absolutely!

Minor Stepping Stones is available on the ART Online Learning Portal: <https://onlinelearning.bellringing.org/>

The Learning the Ropes 50/50 Club

A win-win for you and for ART

And yet more winners in the December ART 50/50 Club Draw:

- 1st prize of **£189.74** went to **Peter Hunt**.
- Three prizes of **£37.22** each went to **Mandy Burnett, Maureen Gardiner** and **Clare McArdle**.



The idea behind the 50/50 Club is very simple. You join, pay the subscription of £12 per year and are given a membership number. Then, over the year, half the money received goes to the ART and half is shared out in prizes by a draw of member numbers. It's a great way of supporting the ART which as well as supporting the teaching of ringing in many different ways, produces all the logbooks and teaching materials used on the Learning the Ropes scheme.

To join follow the link to this page: <https://bellringing.org/donate-to-art/>

The Mike Rigby Ringing Centre

Steve Tibbetts

For many years the Coventry Guild has grappled with how to provide members with additional training opportunities. However, most tower captains are either short of ringers or have too many learners to train whilst trying to keep their more experienced ringers engaged. So how do we quickly increase opportunities for new ringers and also our capacity to train ringers?

Nigel Dick, tower captain at Lighthorne, had already seen the benefits that a training centre can offer and was keen to help ringers by making the bells at Lighthorne available. He readily agreed to work with the Guild to set up a new training and ringing centre. This had also been the wish of the late Mike Rigby, who had worked tirelessly to develop the band at Lighthorne and had helped with the running of the Edge Hill Ringing Centre. Mike sadly passed away in June 2020, but his legacy enabled a simulator to be installed at the Lighthorne tower.

Mike wasn't just a dedicated and patient teacher, he was also a willing and hard working volunteer for ART and made a massive contribution to TowerTalk by being the technical wizard who set it all up and worked with Ruth the editor to produce this fabulous newsletter! In agreement with Mike's widow, the Lighthorne ringers thought it a fitting tribute to Mike that the Ringing Centre be named after him and an official naming ceremony is to take place in the near future.



Harie's first quarter peal – a success!

Since May 2023, training sessions have been run at Lighthorne on a Tuesday. The morning sessions are split into two, one-hour sessions with two students in each session. In each hour, a student has at least half an hour dedicated rope time and half an hour watching or standing by other ringers, or having theory explained. If appropriate they may be asked to ring and make up the band, e.g. to treble to Plain Bob Doubles in order to help another student. The afternoon is used to teach bell handling on a one-to-one basis and includes raising and lowering a single bell. The bell handling sessions commenced in August to meet an increased demand for this type of training. Students are asked for a £5 donation per session to cover running expenses.

All successful training relies on experienced ringers offering their time and expertise on a voluntary basis. To date we have been very fortunate and grateful to all the helpers who give their time so freely. We are all volunteers working towards the same goal of training new ringers; improving the skills of existing ringers in order that change ringing can continue for future generations.

The administration behind a ringing centre is a far greater thing than most people imagine. Before you know it, you are shuffling email lists and spreadsheets and trying to find teachers and helpers to match a student's needs! This is something that the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) recognises and has engaged with Angela Roskelly who looks after the "behind the scenes" admin for Lighthorne. Angela has been in touch with every UK based ART Training Hub to seek out "best practice" but has been unsuccessful in finding anything better than the system she has used since May 2023. After a lot of searching, she has found suitable software! This means that the Mike Rigby Ringing Centre at Lighthorne will be trialling a "self-booking" system of software for both students and helpers.



It's good to talk things over

Students in the morning sessions have covered everything from ringing rounds and call changes, Plain Hunt, Plain Bob Doubles (plain course and touches), Grandsire Doubles (including a quarter peal), Plain Bob Minor and Stedman Doubles. The afternoon sessions have seen 29 students attend one of the 13 sessions for help with general bell handling and raising and lowering skills. We have had some great feedback!

"A fabulous space with light bells which makes learning to ring and change ringing within every beginner's grasp. The training team is wonderfully helpful and the tower team always extends a warm welcome." NC

"Plain Hunt mystery solved, thanks to the support and dedication of the helpers at Lighthorne Ringing Centre. The sessions are relaxed but focussed with many a guiding hand to gently ease you out of your comfort zone, onwards and upwards. Thank you one and all." SC

"At Lighthorne you get the opportunity to practise whatever it is you are trying to learn with ringers that are proficient at ringing. At Lighthorne there is the time to allow many attempts to practise what you are trying to learn. The other ringers are all very friendly and supportive. I really enjoy the training sessions at Lighthorne and feel I have benefited greatly from them." JM

"To have this extra practice is so good as trying a couple of times a week at my regular tower's practice night does not seem to be enough to sink the method into my very small brain. The helpers are all very understanding and patient and give their helpful tips and are willing me on. It is invaluable extra rope time for me and I have been allowed to stay on and help with some ringers at an earlier stage which then gives me plenty of rope time to consolidate on the LtR Level I have reached and "give back" and help the newer ringers. Thanks to everyone." MB

Are you a Ringer?

A tribute to Mike Rigby, ART Accredited Teacher and Tower Captain at Lighthorne

Mike Rigby's life was cut short by a sudden illness which sadly left him little time, but he shared this article as a draft with the Tower Talk team which sums up his empathetic nature and passion for teaching. We thought it was a fitting tribute to pass on his words of wisdom as a companion to the article about the Ringing Centre which bears his name. Over to Mike...

Am I just being controversial here? Well maybe but good intent. And I hope you'll agree once you've read this. You see, the problem comes down to this: just what is a ringer? How would you define it? This is a serious question, because you can't answer the title question until you know what we're all talking about here. And thinking about these questions might just make you a better ringer, whatever level you're at.



I think the best (and simple is better, in my book) definition of a ringer is simply: someone who can ring Rounds. But now we have to ask ourselves: what do we mean by "ring" Rounds? Hasn't it got to be well struck in order to qualify? Yes, of course it has to be. So let's look at what we mean by "well struck". The first and most obvious attribute of well struck Rounds is that the ringing will be perfectly rhythmic. All the blows will be evenly spaced.

A listener who takes note of the rhythm and ignores the pitch of the bells won't be able to spot the transition from handstroke to backstroke. All the gaps between blows will be exactly the same length. There are parts of the country (mostly Devon and Cornwall, and some parts of Yorkshire) where it is normal to "cartwheel". That term is used to describe ringing where the rhythm is maintained at all times, so the transition from backstroke to handstroke should also be perfectly in rhythm. However, in the rest of the ringing world it is normal to ring with a handstroke lead gap. This term is used to describe the gap between the last bell to strike at backstroke and the first bell to strike at handstroke (i.e. the lead) being larger than all the other gaps. Usually that gap is twice as long, but different ringers have different opinions about this, so I will not dwell on it. But the purpose of having a lead gap is to help you to count your place, and this becomes more important when you ring methods without a cover. If you have a cover bell, then you know that that note is always in last place. But if you lose track of where you are and there's no cover, then you can use the lead gap as a signal to start counting from '1' again right after the gap.

Nearly everything in ringing happens at handstroke, not backstroke. Called Changes are called at the lead bell's handstroke and take effect at the next handstroke. We say "Go" and "Stand" in the same way, too. This is because it is so much easier to adjust the bell's timing at handstroke than it is at backstroke – we quickly learn to dynamically adjust the way our hands move so as to catch the sally higher or lower by just as much as is needed. But to adjust the timing at backstroke we have to take in or let out many inches of rope if we're hunting or ringing methods, or "nibble" tiny adjustments if we're ringing Rounds. People seem to learn this much less easily, sometimes not at all, so it is this that I'm going to concentrate on.

COPING WITH ODD-STRUCKNESS: To get your striking right you must be able to hear your bell. Ropesight will help to confirm that you're (probably) in the right place, but there are lots of things that can fool the eyes. An odd-struck bell will sound earlier at one stroke and later at the other, depending on which way the odd-struckness occurs. And if a heavy bell (with a big wheel) is ringing after a light bell (with a smaller wheel) you might even see the heavier bell's rope coming down first. You have to learn to let your ears over-ride what your eyes are telling you. If you are a very visual person this can take quite some effort!

Next, you've got to use the information from your ears to adjust your ringing. After you've been ringing Rounds for a even just a few days, you'll probably find yourself adjusting your handstroke to ring more accurately in the right place, and, over time, you'll get even better at it as your bell handling becomes more consistent. But you mustn't ignore the backstroke. Learn to use the thumb and forefinger of your lower (usually left) hand to "nibble" a short length of rope up or down to change the height to which the bell rises at backstroke. Do this at the bottom of the stroke, while the rope is slack. Remember, the higher the bell rises, the more time it spends near to the balance and the later it will fall (assuming that you're not using much effort to change the natural swing of the bell), so lengthening the tail will make the bell strike later than previously and shortening it will make it strike earlier.

TIP: Remember that if you've adjusted the backstroke, you're going to have to make a compensating adjustment at handstroke, or the handstroke timing will change by the same amount.

The trick is to make continual tiny adjustments at each stroke to get the timing right, allowing for your own style of bell handling. And this won't work well until you're consistent in the way that your arms rise, and in the amount of effort you put into adding energy to the bell at each stroke. This is why it's good for you to ring many different bells, as each one has its own unique characteristics and will require more or less energy to be added at handstroke or backstroke.

Every time a change is called which affects which bell you're ringing over, you've got to re-adjust your timing because you're ringing over a different bell with different characteristics to the one you were ringing over before. And, unless you're ringing with an extraordinarily skilled band, everyone else will be making tiny adjustments to their own timing too, and this might affect what you've got to do to keep the rhythm spot on. This requires an immense amount of concentration. Ringing well struck Rounds, let alone Called Changes, for any length of time is far from being an opportunity for a rest.

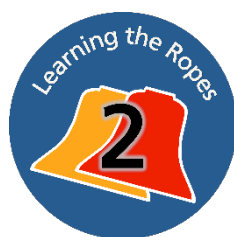
Learning the Ropes Achievers

Congratulations!

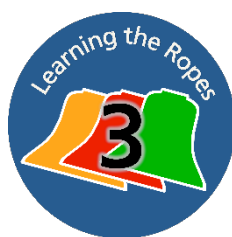
2023 was a bumper year for new recruits, thanks to the publicity surrounding Ring for the King in the early part of the year. 1563 new ringers were registered on the Learning the Ropes scheme during 2023 and 1200 certificates were issued.



Level 1
728



Level 2
264



Level 3
110



Level 4
59



Level 5
39

What an incredible achievement each level represents. That's tens of thousands of hours in total, put in by each ringer, their teacher(s) and the bands they ring with. And to be honest, a certain amount of blood, sweat and tears! Not everyone makes it to Learning the Ropes Level 5, after all the scheme was designed to be difficult, but every ringer who passes their LtR Level 1 is an asset to their tower, their community and to ringing.



Bell Towers in London Wordsearch

Rose Nightingale and De Tremain



L	A	O	V	E	D	A	S	T	E	S	H	T	S	E
E	G	S	E	N	R	A	B	F	A	P	A	R	A	S
W	S	G	E	H	G	D	T	A	A	S	I	P	V	S
E	E	G	E	F	L	A	T	S	R	A	H	H	G	R
S	Y	P	O	P	L	A	R	N	N	A	N	O	U	A
T	B	S	T	E	P	N	E	Y	C	N	C	N	N	L
M	L	S	E	H	T	Y	H	K	C	I	L	R	A	G
I	K	N	E	Y	G	A	N	A	L	T	Y	A	E	W
N	O	L	A	V	E	E	L	M	N	R	W	I	T	E
S	T	S	O	I	Y	U	I	G	M	A	N	M	T	O
T	S	E	A	L	P	P	N	L	U	M	M	A	A	N
E	P	E	N	G	E	E	F	N	O	T	C	A	M	S
R	M	A	R	Y	L	E	B	O	W	S	E	P	M	N
R	Y	T	R	A	M	E	H	T	S	U	N	G	A	M
N	E	S	O	U	T	H	W	A	R	K	S	M	A	M

STMARTIN

STALFEGE

MARYLEBOW

OLAVE

MAGNUSTHEMARTYR

SOUTHWARK

STEPNEY

WESTMINSTER

BARNES

POPLAR

HACKNEY

PENGE

GARLICHYTHE

ACTON

VEDAST

Solution on page 27

Pulling a Rope – Job Done! Or is it?

Debbie Chard, Modeley, West Midlands

An article in *The Times* last spring lamenting a shortage of bell ringers for the King's Coronation both piqued my curiosity and solved the problem of that special 'something' to do on my 60th birthday. 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 to find out!

I had no idea what a fascinating world I was entering 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!

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 sense of 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!

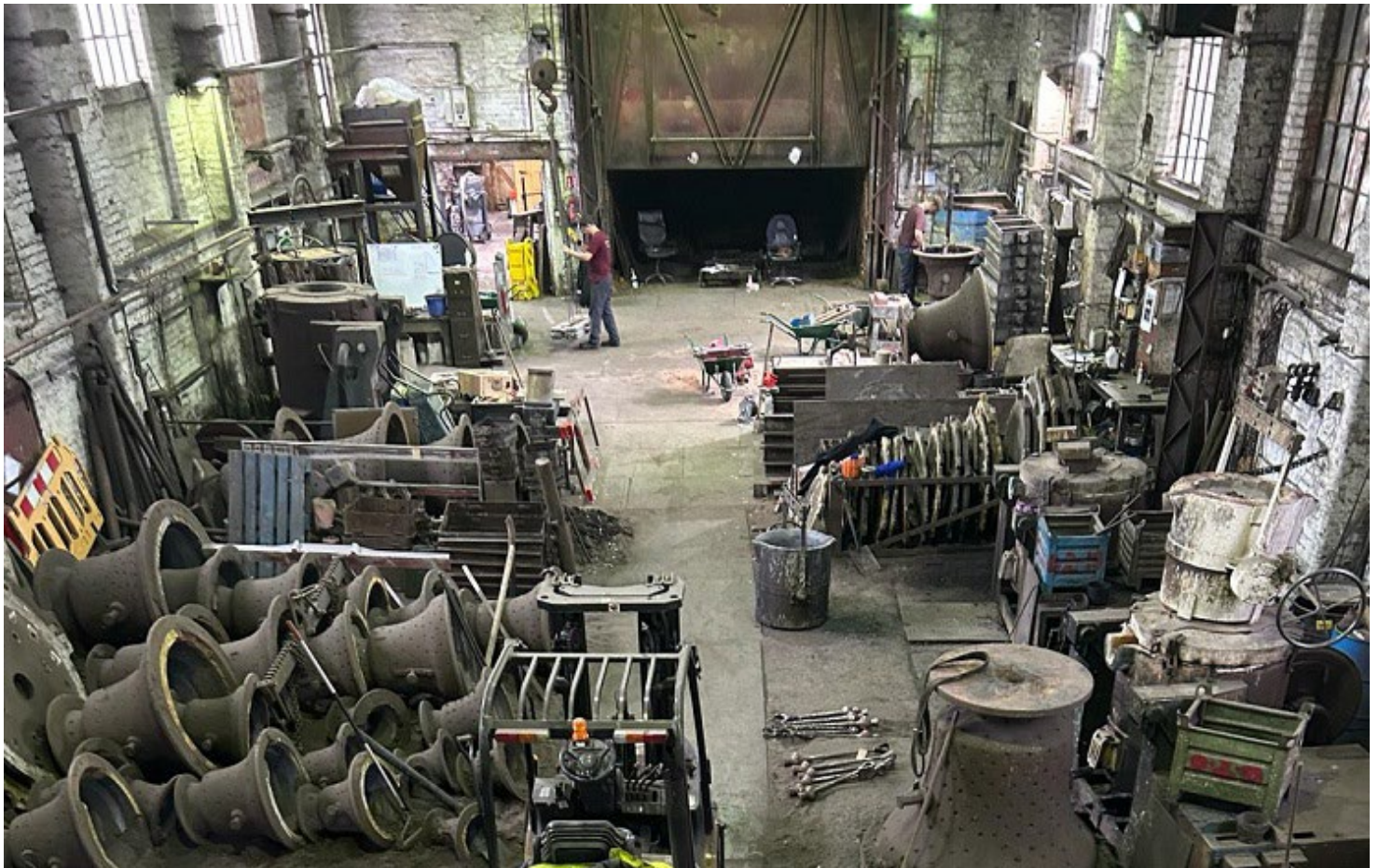
Beyond the ringing itself, there is so much to discover: the history of bell ringing, bell founding, methods, striking competitions, belfries and the complex world of bells, ropes, sliders and stays. '50 Ringing Things' was just what I needed! This structured series of challenges which has its own book and enables you to achieve a bronze, silver and gold certificate, is 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 discover so much more about the art of bell ringing alongside developing my own skills and hopefully contributing to the wider bell ringing community. I am enthusiastically working my way through the book and would love to share some of the highlights which illustrate the richness of bell ringing.

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



No, it's not just about pulling a rope, as Debbie's concentration shows

A tour of John Taylor's Bell Foundry in Loughborough was like a step into the past. As our guide escorted us around this wonderful Grade II listed building, we saw craftsmen at work repairing bells, tuning bells, even crafting a bespoke stay from an ash 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 mediaeval times, is now critically endangered, with fewer than 30 craftsmen in the UK.



Loughborough Bell Foundry

Our local towers in Moseley and the wider St Martin's Guild are very active, with a busy calendar of events to which newcomers are welcomed with open arms. At one such event in the summer, I was lucky enough not only to witness a striking competition with visiting bands from all over the country, but to experience a legendary ringers' tea. 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 at both the Roman Catholic Cathedral and St Martin's in Birmingham (one of only three towers worldwide with 16 bells) on an open day. It was daunting, to say the least! My ventures upstairs 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.

Bell ringing has been an amazing, if not, chance discovery, not just for the art itself, but for the wonderful community 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.[ere](#)

More information on 50 Ringing Things can be found at: <https://bellringing.org/50-ringing-things/>

Have a go at 50 Ringing Things

A great way of exploring the world of bell ringing

Explore the world of ringing with one of the 50 Things challenges. There's plenty of activities to do in your tower and further afield. Buy one of the books – for an individual or a team – and get started! There's even the virtual challenge which you can do from home. Certificates have been awarded to the following recent 50 Ringing Things achievers.



Gold

Sharon Patton
Laura Parker
Amy Shone
Beverley Blower
Penelope Bellis

Gold Plus

Laura Parker
Gareth Down
Jennie Francis
Amy Shone
Beverley Blower



Silver

Ruth Travis
Jayne Boardman
Jane Millward
John Haines

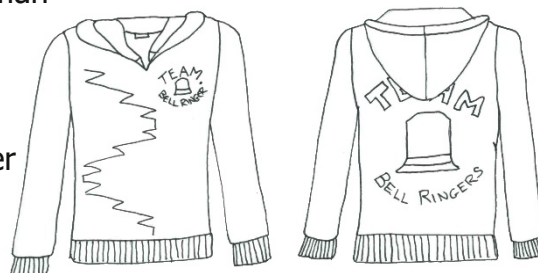
Sarah Robbins
Amy Shone
Beverley Blower
Anne Tansley Thomas



Bronze

Alison Cross
Debbie Chard
Bethan Kernot
Catherine Kernot
Hannah Wynn
Allison Devine
John Haines
Sarah Robbins

Shelly Lambert
Martin Joseph Taylor-Reid
Ruth Travis
Victoria Boardman
Jane Millward
Fiona Irwin
Amy Shone
Beverley Blower



More information on 50 Ringing Things can be found at: <https://bellringing.org/50-ringing-things/>

Why is Plain Hunt like Knitting?

Daphne Perry, St Mary's Merton, Southwest London

I never thought I would read a blog about ringing which mentioned stranded knitting – which just happens to be another of my interests. I was delighted to know that none other than the President of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, Tina Stoecklin, was thinking along the same lines as me and expressing the thoughts that have been going through my head for the last few weeks as I knit. I'm making my second Fair Isle jumper – a repeat of the first but with different colours and, I hope, a better fit. You can read Tina's blog here:

<https://ccbr.org.uk/2023/12/13/presidents-blog-87/>

I've been amazed how much quicker and easier this jumper is than the first one, and I am starting to notice how many more cues I find to keep me right. The first time I stopped to memorise each row and repeated it by rhythm: one one one, three one two one three, and so on. If I went wrong, I usually had no recourse but to stop, undo the row back to my mistake, and start again. Now I begin to see the pattern and, as you say, I can navigate by the colours in the row before and further down the knitting. If I go wrong, I generally spot it within a few stitches, because each new stitch no longer fits into the pattern.

The muscle memory has started to kick in, so I no longer need to check the diagram to see how to catch in a long strand at the back, but rely on my fingers to remember how. And my technique has improved with experience. So it's going to be ready by Christmas, whereas the last one took me 18 months to finish.

That's just like ringing. I have been ringing for about five years but have very poor eyesight so I still rely heavily on rhythm and on memorising the blue line. But I begin to see the pattern, so I can sometimes also navigate by where I hear the treble ring or who's dodging with me. When I go wrong, we don't always have to stop; I can sometimes get back in from these clues or with other help.

When I lose concentration, I sometimes find my arms pulling in the right place before I realise why they need to do that – muscle memory again. I still feel surprised when something that started off super-difficult yields to practise and becomes normal.

When a ringing friend had a baby, I decided to knit a pullover featuring plain hunt on 7 (shown in the image above) and found that the stitch was already well known. By the way, in dancing, which is also like bell ringing, I believe the pattern is called the Grand Chain.



Daphne following the rhythm of her knitting!

Look out for patterns and clues, you might be surprised to find something you didn't know you knew!

Stepping into the World of Bell Ringing

Ellen Eccles, Lancashire

Many years ago while at my aunt's house, I used to hear the bells of St Anne's at Ormskirk ring on a Sunday evening calling people to church. I quite liked the sound, which I suppose was strange for a small child to appreciate. Later on I found my dad had been a ringer at St Mary's at Penwortham. So many years later, I wanted to learn to ring and turned up at a demonstration at St Mary's church, Brownedge, Bamber Bridge, under the instruction of Graham Turner, who wanted to get some new recruits ready to ring for Their Majesties' coronation in May.

Initially seven people started off with tied bells, together with other Brownedge bell ringers. They made it look easy, but as we all know it really isn't. Like learning to drive a car or ride a bicycle, we all think that we will never be able to master it. I'm sure many of us have heard the saying from people who do not ring themselves "It's only pulling a rope attached to a bell, surely there is nothing to it." Not only is it like learning a new language with different sayings, you also have to develop the skill to control that rope and bell!

As most people will appreciate, you master one thing which then makes you realise you have more to learn. On the day of the Coronation, we all got to ring, with help from Graham's team, with friends and family watching. A party at the church was held in celebration of this momentous occasion. Later, in the summer, the group were given the opportunity to go on a bellringing trip to the Lake District to visit towers around the picturesque area. Being given the opportunity to do this added to our progress, as we experienced how each bell is different.

While talking to a colleague at work, I discovered one of them was a ringer at St Michael's Kirkham. I was invited there and now I attend regularly. On Friday afternoons, another ringer from St Michael's, Ken Jagger, runs a tied bell practice to consolidate skills. I was introduced to Learning the Ropes, and I attained my Level 1 and worked through my Level 2, achieving this in November 2023. I now also practise at St Anne's Parish church on Friday evenings, with Stuart Newton and Monica Hollows who have been great, giving advice and helping me to improve my technique. I was given the opportunity to ring a quarter peal on 3 December 2023, covering to Plain Bob Doubles. This was one of the things I most wanted to do, so to complete this was a great achievement. Everyone was so helpful, calm and great to be with.



Ellen receiving her LtR Level 2 certificate

I am now working towards LtR Level 3. St Anne's Ringing School has recently been set up, and I have undertaken a basic bell ringing course. The course was well attended with experienced bell ringers helping with the ringing and giving advice on how to improve. I have to say it was excellent – it was taught at a good pace and the tutors' advice was very clear. Additional practice sessions are available for those who wish to come along. The School brings lots of ringers and towers together to support people in a friendly atmosphere. Other courses are available and are being developed. For £5 it is excellent value – that is less than the price of a sandwich and a cup of tea!

What started out as something I wanted to do has now turned into a wonderful way of learning a new skill and keeping me challenged. I really enjoy it and I have made some fantastic new friends who are absolutely great. The knowledge from other ringers is awe inspiring and they are only too willing to impart their knowledge and experience. It's a learning experience for everyone of all levels and all ages, and it really is fun. It is a great way to keep fit too, with all that running up and down those church tower steps, not to mention actually ringing the bell! I'm meeting a great many people from all walks of life who share a goal to keep the bells going. Solicitors, engineers, nurses, accountants, court staff, as well as school children and retired people all make up the various bands I ring with. The chat in the tower is light-hearted and no one is immune from a little leg-pulling. It all makes for fun and that is what makes it all the better.

I never realised what little gems of villages we have here which normally you would drive through and never see. But when ringing at the village church, you get to see a new part of an area close to you – or you can go to visit a practice night! I think for me it's the kindness and the people I've met which has been particularly great. Everything is up for discussion among us – ringing obviously but also beer, breweries, walking routes, baking, good holiday destinations (including camper van trips), Christmas meals and finally the state of Kirkham main road, which after almost a year is still nowhere near being ready, just as it was when I first started bell ringing there eight months ago.



Wordsearch Solution

Rose Nightingale and De Tremain



L	A	O	V	E	D	A	S	T	E	S	H	T	S	E
E	G	S	E	N	R	A	B	F	A	P	A	R	A	S
W	S	G	E	H	G	D	T	A	A	S	I	P	V	S
E	E	G	E	F	L	A	T	S	R	A	H	H	G	R
S	Y	P	O	P	L	A	R	N	N	A	N	O	U	A
T	B	S	T	E	P	N	E	Y	C	N	C	N	N	L
M	L	S	E	H	T	Y	H	K	C	I	L	R	A	G
I	K	N	E	Y	G	A	N	A	L	T	Y	A	E	W
N	O	L	A	V	E	E	L	M	N	R	W	I	T	E
S	T	S	O	I	Y	U	I	G	M	A	N	M	T	O
T	S	E	A	L	P	P	N	L	U	M	M	A	A	N
E	P	E	N	G	E	E	F	N	O	T	C	A	M	S
R	M	A	R	Y	L	E	B	O	W	S	E	P	M	N
R	Y	T	R	A	M	E	H	T	S	U	N	G	A	M
N	E	S	O	U	T	H	W	A	R	K	S	M	A	M