

Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



**Learning
the Ropes™**

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Achievements, great and small – this is what this new year edition of Tower Talk is focusing on.

Each week, ringers everywhere are taking small steps towards their goal, whether that is being a reliable member of a Sunday service band, conquering a small handling issue they have found difficult, taking on a new method, or ringing a quarter or even a peal.

Whatever the goal, and however long it takes to get there, we celebrate every success and salute the effort and determination to achieve it.

With the Coronation coming up in May, there will be many bands and individual ringers setting themselves some goals and looking forward to sharing success with fellow ringers. Not every ringing achievement is recorded on *Bellboard* or printed in *The Ringing World*, but we would like to invite you to share your achievements in our next edition of Tower Talk, so please email your stories and photographs to:

towertalk@learningtheropes.org

Sharing the joy of success

*The picture is of
Claire Thompson, Rich Moon,
and Kay Gilbertson
receiving their LtR Level 1
certificates, taken at our
Christmas social practice
at Desford, Leicestershire*

*(Hence the Christmas jumpers
and the lights in the window!)*



Much Trepidation at Much Hadham

Ali Poulter, Much Hadham, Hertfordshire

I had recently given up working as an LSA at a local school and, to be honest, I was feeling a little 'lost'. My husband Steve had discovered bellringing after the last lockdown, and he was loving it – I was fast becoming a bell-ringing widow! He would come home talking about his adventures and learning using jargon I couldn't relate to. After months of both him and his teacher Ron Sambridge encouraging me, I decided to give it a go to see what all the fuss was about.

To say I was an anxious learner is an understatement! Stories of limbs being broken and other unmentionable injuries were relayed gleefully to me by friends who had colleagues who were bellringers. It was with great trepidation that I approached my lessons. I started with an introductory lesson with Ron who explained the process and what I would expect from him as a teacher and he of me as a learner. I was soon signed up to have weekly lessons with both him and other teachers at Much Hadham and so it began.

Being so nervous, the mantra '*Ali, breathe!*' resounded frequently. On one occasion, I reached the tower door and, overcome by nerves, I turned back to go back home only to see Ron and his grandson coming up the path. With a cheerful '*Hello Ali!*', I was gently ushered back to the tower for my lesson. Ron put up with a lot teaching me! I got very frustrated when I had tried something over and over and just didn't get it. (Think tears and the occasional naughty word not befitting of a vicar's daughter!) His approach to this was to calmly hand me a rope and suggest I just have a gentle ring whilst he thought of another way to teach it to me. Slowly I started learning something different each week and my cries of '*I'll never be able to do this!*' lessened and my confidence grew. I started to look forward to lessons both with him and the other wonderful teachers. (They have recently joked that they drew straws to see who would teach this mad woman each week... at least I *think* they were joking...) Both they and Ron taught me with kindness and unending patience and with an unwavering belief that I would one day become a competent ringer.



Thumbs Up! Ali with her teacher Ron

After nearly five months, I achieved my LtR Level 1 and rang for the first time after church. I am now well into the Foundation Skills of Level 2 and loving every moment of the challenge. The band are like a family where encouragement, understanding, laughter, and chocolate is in abundance. We are all at different stages of learning and mistakes are made, but no one is made to feel left out. Ron is at the centre of all of this, and it is so wonderful to have him back in the tower after a recent health scare.

Yes, I still get anxious about learning new and tricky things, but on a Sunday when we get the thumbs up to start ringing, my heart now races not with fear, but with excitement and happiness to be doing something I absolutely love.

Ron's grandson Jack, who is working on LtR Level 3, has these tips for Level 2:

When I did Level 1, I was used to ringing at my own pace so learning to ring with others was my biggest challenge when I moved on to Level 2; it was really challenging to work out how to speed up or slow down to fit in with the other ringers. My favourite Level 2 exercise was dodging - it was great fun and it really helped me learn to change places accurately at the right speed.

My top tip is to listen to what other ringers suggest – their advice can help you a lot.

Sue Fox from the Thorley band, a few miles away from Much Hadham, writes:

“I’ve always fancied having a go at pulling a bell.”

These were the words I happened to mention to a member of the churchyard tidy group when I noticed the tower was having an open day. Before I knew it, I was standing in the tower among the ropes and was introduced to the wonderful Ron – a man on a mission to build a big band of regular ringers.

And so it was, with Ron’s dedication, enthusiasm, commitment, patience and brilliant teaching that I became truly hooked! After many enjoyable lessons with both him and Dee (a teacher at a neighbouring tower) expertly taking me through the steps to bell handling on the Learning the Ropes scheme, I passed my Level One. I now very much look forward to every opportunity to ring.

I still face many challenges, especially when ringing the bells up and down, and who to follow in call changes, but that’s where the fun in bellringing lies – and there has been so much fun! There is a real joy in learning a new skill, but even more so when doing it amongst a group of amazing, encouraging and caring people. Thank God for the day I met Ron.

Avoiding Housework

Clare Toberty, Twickenham

After retiring at the end of 2021, I spent January on a mission to sort out cupboards and clean the house. Possibly in an attempt to be rid of the marigolds and restore domestic calm, my husband shared a U3A link to local bell ringing, something he knew I was interested in.

University of the Third Age:

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/about>

Within hours, I got a response and was invited to the tower. The band at All Hallows, Twickenham are very friendly and welcoming, led by Steve, a dedicated Ringing Master and teacher. He has been associated with All Hallows for over 20 years and has grown the band and their skills tremendously. Mary had just taken an ART Teaching course, and I greatly benefitted from her patience, enthusiasm and skill.

It’s hard to do bell-ringing homework, so time on a rope is precious. Steve and Mary gave me a lot of one-to-one coaching with plenty of encouragement and feedback to help develop my basic skills and confidence. It was all very motivating. When I ring with the band, they patiently allow me to crash around their practice.

Using the Learning the Ropes scheme helps me understand my progress and where to focus. Also the modules and assessments recognise it is not a linear process and shortcomings in some skills can be worked on at the next Level.

After about six months I started to visit other local towers who also generously shared their skills and ropes. In December I was in Dublin and a bell-ringing friend invited me to ring on Sunday morning at St Patrick’s Cathedral and St Audoen’s, which was an honour.

My goals are to achieve all the basic skills up to Level 2, and master call changes so I no longer panic when the bell I’m following is moved – aargh!! And time to look at ART’s online learning resources, I think. After that perhaps Plain Hunt, although I fear ringing by listening only and facing outside the circle is on the cards.

By the way, the house needs cleaning!



Sunday Ringing at All Hallows, Twickenham with Clare, second from right,

Handbell Fun at Harrow-on-the-Hill

Sonia Field, Middlesex

Most tower bell ringers know at least something about handbell ringing even if it isn't something that they do themselves. But I bet that they think of change ringing on handbells: plain hunt, plain bob, or perhaps for the fancy ringers some spliced surprise major. How many of you have tried tune ringing on handbells?

I have been a member of the Harrow-on-the-Hill tune handbell ringing band for far longer than I have rung on tower bells. In a roundabout way, that was what led me to learn to ring tower bells.

We have 49 Whitechapel handbells (four octaves) which are set to strike only one way, unlike change ringing bells which strike both ways. We wear gloves to protect the bells and hold them slightly differently from the change-ringer hold. I found that very confusing when I first tried change ringing on handbells!

Currently we have about eight active band members (sadly rather fewer than before Covid). We play from music scores – and colour up the parts for each desk, to enable those who are not proficient at reading music to be included. It's helpful to be able to count a beat though!

Some of us can play four in hand on the smaller bells; excellent Brain Gym!

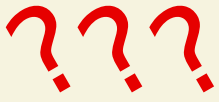


This is the 'Have-a-go' workshop after the performance.

The St Mary's ringers are in the dark blue uniforms with the white collars, and members of the audience are all busy eating, drinking or ringing!

We have a wide range of music, much of it scored specifically for our band, although some is 'off the shelf', so we can put together programmes suitable for different tastes and ages. Today we entertained members of a local Catholic church with a selection of tunes such as: *The Bells of St Mary's*, *Messing About on the River*, *Oh Dear What can the Matter Be*, and *Over the Rainbow*. And after that we ran a have-a-go workshop (using coloured-up number scores to support inclusion) which is always entertaining and well received.

Our performances raise a lot of money for local charities throughout the year and bring pleasure to many.



Puzzle Corner

Rose Nightingale and Denise Tremain, ART Administrators



ACROSS

- 3. Bell muffles are usually made of this
- 7. They cast the current Big Ben
- 10. Getting the pitch just right
- 11. Heaviest bell in a chime or carillon
- 12. St Paul's Cathedral bells were cast here
- 16. Bell moulds contain this waste product

DOWN

- 1. Wood used to make stays
- 2. Cripplegate bell foundry
- 4. To add more bells to a tower
- 5. Drayton Parslow family of founders
- 6. Mears and...?
- 8. This makes up 23% of bell metal
- 9. Chacombe family of founders
- 13. Small bell sometimes rung during the service
- 14. A trust who supply surplus or salvaged bells
- 15. Natural fibre used to make bell ropes

Solution on page 20

Thank you, Teachers!

The ringers at East Claydon, Buckinghamshire

Here at St. Mary's church, East Claydon, the ringers are led by three amazing individuals – Kate, Nicki and David. Kate is our Tower Captain and a brilliant ringer, David is a very skillful ringer who seems to know all of the best teaching methods and wants us to improve all the time, and Nicki is another skillful ringer who not only helps with our improvement in ringing, but is always checking in on our wellbeing both at ringing and elsewhere.

Our tower consists of about fifteen regular ringers with around a sixty year age gap between the oldest and youngest. Our three wonderful leaders help every single ringer with their improvement on a weekly basis, whether they have been ringing for decades or a few months. We wanted to tell them, and the wider ringing world, just how much we appreciate them and all they do for us.



*Teachers at East Claydon
From left: Kate, David and Nicki*

Helen who first started in 1998 says:

They are a wonderful support to not only our youngsters we have learning, but also to the more mature ones as well. Kate has always been encouraging, patient and gives me tips in order to progress and her words *"you're doing fine"* kept me turning up each week. We are very fortunate to also have Nicki and David to support and teach both the younger and older ringers each week.

Joshua (started 2017) adds:

Nicki, David and Kate have always stood by me when I've been ringing, never truly giving up on me despite numerous obstacles standing in my way. Without them I would have never stuck with ringing.

Matthew (started 2016) says:

The three of them allow us to choose what we want to ring and encourage us to learn new methods to build up our skills.

Recent recruits Joy and David say:

Everyone has been really welcoming since we joined; David, Nicki and Kate have been very generous with their time and patience in teaching us both. No matter how many times things have to be explained, they never get annoyed and are always positive. They are all excellent teachers identifying what we need to change and supporting us in our learning. They have made our new hobby enjoyable and something we look forward to each week.

The final word goes to Esme, who started in 2017

Kate, David and Nicki are amazing ringing teachers for all of us. They ensure that we are improving at our own pace rather than pushing us too quickly, so they ensure we succeed at every method we try (after a while anyway). Not only have these three individuals helped and supported me with my bellringing, they have also been wonderful and helped me get through and get back to ringing after bereavement and illness – I couldn't be more grateful for them. I may not be the best student for them but as soon as I have the rope in my hand I try my best – well, most of the time – and feel confident thanks to their encouragement and patience.

News from the North East

Anthea Enzor, Darlington Teaching Centre

The Darlington Teaching Centre is based at Holy Trinity Church, Darlington. The main aim of the Centre is to teach people to ring so that the bells in the area are rung regularly for services on Sundays. We also wanted to provide a structured approach to teaching using the *Learning the Ropes* scheme and increase the number of teachers in the area. The centre started just before lockdown and restarted in autumn 2021 with a group of six new ringers. Now we have eleven ringers working at Level 3, three working at Level 2 and four more learning bell handling, taught by a team of eight teachers. We have five regular sessions each week, plus additional handling sessions by arrangement. Here are some Teaching Centre highlights!

A Teaching Centre Outing

The seeds of an idea germinated during our District outing in June. A couple of Teaching Centre students took part and enjoyed a good day out in Cleveland, but several couldn't make it, and those who did had to take their turn for a ring. So I began to make plans for our first Teaching Centre outing. We chose three towers that were close together, not too far away and bells that would not be too challenging for less experienced ringers.

Arrangements were made for Saturday 1st October. First, we rang at Shincliffe, a 4 cwt six bell tower just outside Durham. For most of the students, this was their first ring on bells outside Darlington and Heighington. However, learning to ring on a 6½ cwt ring of bells at Holy Trinity in Darlington, where the Teaching Centre is based, means that they were all used to ringing light bells – this stood them in good stead.

Following a pub lunch some walked and some drove into Durham and we rang on the 12¾ cwt ring of eight at St Oswald's and then the 9¾ cwt six at St Nicholas' church in the Market Place.



Shincliffe – a 4-cwt six



There was an additional (and surprise) ring on the Durham and Newcastle Association's mini ring that just happened to be outside the Student Union Building with a group of university students who were trying to recruit potential new ringers.

With a ratio of ten less experienced ringers and only five teachers, we were pleased to end the day without mishap! Everyone had plenty of opportunities to ring at each tower and grew in confidence as the day went on. The majority decision was that St Oswald's were the favourite bells of the day!

Unexpectedly bumping into and then ringing the Durham and Newcastle mini-ring



A Striking Competition

Congratulations to Gillian, Aileen and Gwendoline, three of the first group of recruits at Darlington Teaching Centre, who took part in their first striking competition. All three started learning to ring in the autumn of 2021. At the end of their first year Gillian had completed LtR Level 2 and Aileen and Gwendoline were almost there.



The towers at St Oswald's (left) and St Nicholas (right), Durham.

The Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Association's six bell striking contest was held at St Margaret's Church, Tanfield and we encouraged some of the newer ringers to take part. We were drawn to ring fifth, so we had a nervous wait in the churchyard in the sunshine listening to the experts. When it got cold we moved into the church and had a go at ringing handbells.

At last, it was our turn to ring. We were glad to be able to try the bells first and were pleased to find they were not too tricky to ring. Once we got started on our test piece everyone began to relax and listen carefully to their striking. Once or twice, there were some clashes especially when a change was called, but we were pleased with our performance and felt we had tried our best.

Refreshments in the church hall were much appreciated while everyone was waiting for the judge's verdict. Andrew Aspland from Beverley summarised his opinion of each piece of ringing before giving the results. Realising that we were an inexperienced band, he was very kind and commended us for being brave enough to have a go. He noted that our ringing settled down as we went on and was very complimentary about our leading. Well done, Gillian! He kindly refrained from telling us our score and, as we expected, we came last! However, all three felt proud to have taken part and also to be elected members of the Association, following which they were presented with beautiful membership certificates. They all enjoyed the afternoon out and felt they had been made very welcome. They were also delighted to hear about Andrew's experiences as a contestant in the Great British Sewing Bee!

A New Teacher

Congratulations to Jenny Jackson, who attended the ART M2C teachers' course in September. Jenny is not a tower captain, but she came on the course because she wanted to be able to help at her own tower, St Cuthbert's in Darlington. As she had never run a practice and did not feel confident enough to stand with a less experienced ringer, she felt she had a lot to learn! Having tried her hand at leading part of the sessions at Darlington Teaching Centre, I am delighted to be able to report that she led the whole of last Friday's Level 3 session. Well done, Jenny! What is more she received lots of positive feedback from her students.



Jenny, who recently attended an ART M2C

One Year On

Jayne Boardman, Kirkham, Lancashire

I'd always been curious about bellringing, so when I saw a Facebook post in February 2022 on my local church's page offering people the chance to learn, I went along. That was one year ago! Several others came and went over the following weeks, but I was the only one who stuck with it. Once I had my Personal Progress Logbook for Learning the Ropes, I was able to focus my learning, and it was motivating to see my progress towards Level 1.

In August the Fylde Branch of the Lancashire Association of Change Ringers held their monthly meeting at my church, St Michael's.

I took my daughter Victoria along to show her what I'd been doing every Tuesday evening, in the faint hope that she might want to give it a try. (She'd been saying that bellringing was just for old fogies!) The Ringing Master got her to have a go, which she secretly enjoyed. The following Tuesday, she came to practice with me and has been learning to ring ever since.

As is the case with young people, they pick things up much quicker than those of us who are a bit older and she has already passed me in skill and ability. Early in December she took part in a short news item for ITN which was focused on the recruitment and retention of young ringers. She will also be going to her first 3Ls (*Lancashire Lads and Lasses*) meeting soon, upping the current ratio of lasses to lads!

I'd like to be able to say that my bellringing journey has been a lovely smooth upward learning curve... but it hasn't! I had a few mishaps early on which knocked my confidence and sent my anxiety soaring. On one occasion I somehow managed to get my hand stuck in the rope, resulting in a huge bruise, and another time the sally knocked my glasses off. Why on earth did I stick with learning to ring, you might rightly ask? The answer is that giving up would have been too easy. I also would've felt that I'd let my teacher Ken and the rest of the ringers down after the time and patience that they had invested in me. Instead, I chose to watch training videos, read articles and join Facebook groups for tips and support. I found that I was not alone in feeling nervous and having confidence wobbles, and that helped too.

I go to each monthly branch meeting and have a ring, maybe only for a few minutes, on different bells in different towers. At the moment, I always ask an experienced ringer to stand with me – however I always feel better for having rung somewhere different. (It's also another tower to add to my list for my *50 Ringing Things!*) Victoria and myself, along with another of our tower colleagues, regularly go along to Friday practice night at St Anne's Parish Church. This has helped enormously with my confidence because Stuart and Monica have been very welcoming, patient and helpful. The extra rope time each week definitely helps, and I would advise any new ringers to try to get along to more than one practice a week.

Victoria and I now ring regularly for Sunday service at St Michael's and I'm proud to say that we received our Level 1 certificates at the first Sunday service in 2023!



One year on from seeing the Facebook post about ringing - Jayne and her daughter Victoria with their LtR Level 1 certificates



Going for Gold at St Mary's, Frampton

Gareth Downs, Dorset

I learnt how to handle a bell as a teenager at St James' Church in Poole, Dorset. My head of music was the tower captain, and led the band at St. James' and also at St. Mary's on Brownsea Island. As a teenager I picked up the basics quickly, but as young adult life began, I lost the time to continue as a ringer.

I have always had a love of our Church buildings, their history, and the architecture of both parish churches and grand cathedrals. After moving to the village of Frampton in 2019, an attraction to the location was that our house is sited just behind the parish Church, and we could hear the tenor bell struck by the clock hammer on the hour – although there was no regular ringing or local band in the tower,



St Mary's Frampton

In the summer of 2022 I went on a recruitment drive to train a local band to try and get the bells moving once more. With several taking up the opportunity, we arranged for a tower inspection, only to discover the bells were in need of major work – some 100 years after the last rehang of the bells there. The teaching continued at the village of Maiden Newton, and I set about researching the history of the tower and the most sympathetic way to recommission the bells whilst preserving the history, as part of the *50 Ringing Things* challenge to which I had recently signed up.

I have found the *50 Things* a brilliant way to reconnect to ringing, and many of them have helped me improve my skill as a ringer, and get me out to different towers to see how they have managed similar projects when major work is needed on listed bells and frames. The new friends I have made on ringing outings, completing quarter peals and ringing for special events like Christmas and New year have given me a new network of contacts. Their experiences and knowledge have helped me with the project planning at Frampton, which I hope will eventually result in the bells ringing again.



The tenor, fifth and fourth bells up at Frampton

The tower originally held six full circle ring bells and a Sanctus bell, gifted to the church by the land owner of the village, Robert Browne. The bells were cast by Lewis Cockey from Frome in 1694. Over the years the treble, 4th, 5th and 6th have been recast, so we have a mismatched ring, but the lovely 1920 Taylors 16 cwt tenor masks a lot of the individual flaws. The bells are hung in a mighty oak frame, dating back to 1694, which has been modified over the years, but is now listed. With only eleven Cockey bells left in churches, three in Frampton, I feel it is important to preserve them and the frame for future generations.

I hope to achieve my *50 Things* Gold by the end of this year. It has been a great way to push myself and develop in a fun way, using my love of history to reignite my interests from several decades ago.

My First Peal

Sarah Robbins, Shenfield, Essex

Sarah Robbins, age 14, writes about her first peal

I started to ring for the Ringing Remembers celebration in 2017-2018. I joined the Learning the Ropes scheme and was very happy to receive the Level 1 certificate in August 2018, and even more so in December 2021 when I completed Level 5.

2022 was an exciting year for me. Firstly, I was in the team that won the Ringing World National Youth Contest in Exeter. This was a truly amazing experience. I have also been learning how to teach new students with the help of Beth and my dad (my teachers) and I have completed the ART M1 course. I have also had a big focus towards learning more complicated methods and being able to ring on higher numbers.

Ringing a peal seemed like the next challenge.



First Pealer's Club

This Certificate of completion is presented to

Sarah H Robbins

Congratulations on completing a peal for the first time ringing 5040 changes of Oxford and Kent Treble Bob, St Clements College Bob, Cambridge Surprise and Plain Bob Minor on the four at St Mary's, Shenfield, Essex on the 21st August 2022.

The Band:
Treble John Cousins 4 Sarah H Robbins
2 Trevor E Church 5 Mark S Robbins
3 Nigel S D Taylor 6 John G Harpole (C)

Association Master



Ever since I started to ring methods, I have been wondering what it would be like to ring for such a long time, and it's been one of my main goals. The opportunity came with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

There were three of us who wanted to ring our first peal, my friend Emily Brooks, my dad, and me. With the help of Beth and other ringers we got the band together, and our supportive Rector, Father Chris, let us ring at my home tower, Shenfield.

We knew we didn't want to ring Bob Minor or Doubles, but we also didn't want it to be too complicated as we wanted a good chance of success.

We eventually decided on Oxford, Kent, St Clement's, Cambridge, and Bob Minor. I know, not the most common first peal methods! Once that had all been sorted, we started our practices.

Our practices helped us to get the feel for each method and to get used to changing methods. Our last practice before the big event went pretty well, and I felt quite confident with everything. Then came the day we had all been waiting for, June 3rd. I was nervous to start but when we got going it all just melted away.

All the method swaps sounded OK until we got to Cambridge, which unfortunately went too wrong for John, our conductor, to correct, so we had to stand. I felt awful that we hadn't succeeded after all our hard work, but we still had hope.

The next attempt was a few weeks later to fit in with Emily who was due to go into hospital for some surgery. We were all looking forward to this second attempt, but unfortunately John went down with COVID the day before, so this had to be cancelled.

It would be several months before Emily would be fit enough to attempt a peal, so she urged us to continue without her. We decided on the 21st August, which happened to be around the centenary of the first peal rung on the Shenfield bells.

This time we didn't have as much practice, so I felt a little underprepared and a lot more nervous as I knew how easily it could all fall apart - but I still had hope that we could do it.

As we started, I had butterflies in my stomach, and after about an hour I started to get tired and my legs felt numb, but I knew that I had to keep going.

Around the last 30 minutes my hands started to hurt, and I felt really tired. It got to the last bob and John called "That's all." The huge relief I had when I knew it was over and I had just rung my first peal was amazing. It took a while for it to really sink in that I had just rung for over two and a half hours and all the hard work the whole band had put in was worth it. When we came down from the tower we were greeted by members of the tower band and friends, which was a big surprise.

I want to thank the whole band for being there and always steady so that it was such an enjoyable experience - and especially to John Harpole, who conducted the peal for us and coached us through this massive step in being a bellringer. I can't imagine keeping track of all the calls and making sure that everyone is in the right place all the time.

For anyone who is wondering if they can or want to ring a peal, my advice would be to find a very reliable and steady band to be around you and to have lots of practices with longer lengths beforehand so you can work your way up to it and it's not too big a leap from ringing quarters. I would also recommend ringing something that you are comfortable with, so that you have a higher chance of succeeding. To round off, ringing a peal has been such positive and exciting experience and I'm glad I was given the opportunity to do this at such a young age, and with an amazing band, although it was tiring and I had to use a lot of concentration.



Sarah (top right) with the peal band, including her dad, Mark, standing next to her



I can't wait to ring another in the future!



The First Pealer's Club

Yvonne Towler, Essex Association

The Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 2022 gave us the idea of trying to encourage ringers to accomplish their first peal. A peal may seem like a long way off when you first start to ring but if someone has a goal, we in Essex want to help them achieve it.

One of our members, Sarah Chin-a-Loy, designed a lovely metal badge and Certificate. We soon had the first member of the Club in view. Oliver Lee, a member of Essex Young Eagles, had his first attempt cancelled in March 2020 because of the Covid lockdown. This was a big blow for Ollie and it was two years before it could be rescheduled, but a very successful peal was rung at Writtle on 29 March 2022.

Three more soon joined the Club - William Beech, another member of the Essex Young Eagles, rang a successful peal at Leigh on Sea and David Newton, an adult ringer from the Northern district, rang three methods minor on 26 February, after which we celebrated with a pint! Hal Meakin who came to Essex to study

at Essex University was very keen, and he accomplished his peal at Terling on 12 March.

Two peals rung as part of the Jubilee celebrations included first peelers - Theo Johnson at Terling and Hayden Musham at Hornchurch.

Two more Young Eagles, Emily Brooks and Sarah Robbins, along with Sarah's dad Mark, were our next set of ringers who attempted a peal at Shenfield on the Jubilee weekend. Unfortunately it was not successful (see Sarah's article on page 12) and Emily was unable to ring in the next attempt having had to undergo surgery. Sarah and Mark scored their first peal on 21 August.

Towards the end of the year, Rachel Arnold rang her first peal on 19 November at Saffron Walden. Then Sam Beech, who couldn't be persuaded at the beginning of the year, succumbed and closed the year with a peal at Hornchurch on Christmas Eve. It has been very pleasing that some of the ringers have carried on and rung further peals during the year.

We are going to continue this initiative in 2023 and beyond, knowing we have already at least three more keen Young Eagles, Emily Brooks being one of them.



The Essex Association's First Pealer's Club badge



Oliver Lee (left) and William Beech (right) receive their certificates from Essex Association Master Andrew Kelso

Theo Johnson writes:

Having learnt to ring four years ago, I thought that it would have still been quite a while before I was able to ring my first peal. That was until I heard about the Essex First Pealer's Club, which made it possible for me to ring my first peal much sooner than I thought!

I was really excited, mainly because I was doing something that more experienced ringers do which gives you the 'I've made it' feeling. It's also nice to get a lot of congratulations and recognition from other ringers after ringing your first peal and it can also take you to places in your ringing career that you never thought were possible!

Ringling for the Coronation

The eKenton band, Middlesex

The Tower Talk team invited the eKenton band (a training band originally formed online during 2020) to come up with some ideas for a sequence or some call changes that could be rung for the Coronation by those at an early stage in their ringing career. Here's a couple of their suggestions:

Coronation March

Wendy Crampton

I'm sure that a very splendid and complicated 12 bell method is being created to celebrate the King's coronation, with an edit for 6, 8 and 10 bells available. However, it appears that there is a very large gap in the opportunity to participate in any national celebrations for folk who have not yet mastered methods, or who do not have the opportunity to join in a Quarter Peal attempt.

So I have created a sequence, rather than a method, combining foundation skills from the first three levels of the LtR scheme. The aim is to build confidence in new ringers and support their growth; and more importantly to ensure they are included in the celebratory ringing, and are aware that they are valuable members of their band and part of the wider ringing community.

The sequence (below) should be learnt in its individual components before putting the pieces together at a speed comfortable for your band. Being able to pull off in well struck rounds before moving on to reverse rounds is a starting point. All of the components below require a focus on bell control and accurate striking. A large emphasis should also be placed on the ability of each member of the band to be able to ring from different bells. No one should feel they are stuck on a particular bell.

The Coronation March can be fully conducted but ultimately the encouragement is to be able to remember the sequence and where you are! You will probably need to decide how long you will stay in each component sequence before changing to the next one. Each band member should have the opportunity to learn to call. I hope this offers a timely length of ringing that will support and stretch the development of both the physical and the mental side of ringing.

Rounds	then	Reverse rounds (sometimes known as Switcheroo)
Rounds	then	Mexican wave up and down (places or long places to suit)
Rounds	then	Reverse rounds
Rounds		

Orb and Sceptre

Sonia Field

I like the name 'Orb and Sceptre' for a Coronation piece. As the row 321546 sounds rather good but doesn't (yet) have a specific name, I decided that this could be the 'Orb' part. And because I also want the tenor to be required to move place, I chose the 'cross' position for 'Sceptre'.

Call 4 over 5, and 2 over 3 (as in going towards Queens on six): 1 3 2 5 4 6

Call 1 over 3, then 1 over 2 (so 2 doesn't have to lead): 3 2 1 5 4 6 **ORB**

Call 3 over 2, then 3 over 1 (so now 2 does have to lead): 2 1 3 5 4 6

Call 5 over 4, then 3 over 4 giving 2 1 4 3 5 6

Finally move the tenor, calling 5 over 6 giving 2 1 4 3 6 5 **SCEPTRE**

Now return to rounds by crossing the back pair, the front pair, finally the middle pair.

Of course, you can call it any way you wish. But for a fairly novice band this order works well, providing some familiarity and structure, but also scope for stretching individuals and the band.

On 8 bells, Orb would be 3 2 1 5 4 7 6 8 and Sceptre would be 2 1 4 3 6 5 8 7

So now, All Saints Harrow Weald has a two-part Coronation piece to practise: Coronation March & Orb and Sceptre.

You can try this too... or perhaps you would prefer to compose your own?

Meet the Band

Janet Clayton, Ruskington, Lincolnshire

I'm not a bellringer, but I have just spent a wonderful two hours with the very friendly and jolly bellringing group at the church in Ruskington, Lincolnshire. I wanted to know what makes them turn out on cold, dark winter evenings and on Sunday mornings when they could be tucked up in bed. The reason? They seemed to imply: we love it!

The Tower Captain of this happy team is David Cooper, who began ringing after curiosity led him to ask his neighbours where they went every week. He was invited to join them and was hooked on the first night, and even persuaded his wife to join too. Progress was slow at first until he realised he had picked up some bad habits so went back to the beginning with a different teacher. Since then he has gone on to attend teaching courses and now thoroughly enjoys watching his pupils progress. He gets great satisfaction when he is thanked for his efforts, and the number of 'likes' on Facebook is beyond belief.

All the ringers value the social aspect of the group. No one is alone, the banter between them is gentle and everyone is pleased when somebody achieves something. They have team T shirts which they designed themselves and their pride to be part of a continuing tradition which is centuries old is evident.

As a non-ringer, I was very impressed with their enthusiasm, friendship and dedication. I realised this was not something you can learn quickly and as for the methods in the book, they looked like complicated knitting patterns! But it is all worth it for the many benefits it undoubtedly brings and I'm glad I went along to find out more about them.

Let's Meet the Band



The Ruskington band, some wearing their tower ringing shirts

Ann

who is an accounts' technician, saw the bells when they were being taken away for refurbishing and rehangng. When the bells were rung for her daughter's wedding she contacted the church to find out more, and joined the band. She found it to be a steady learning curve; there is a lot to learn, but when you hear the sound of your bell it really is an achievement. You need patience and a good teacher but she can now ring up and down, and feels very proud to say she is a bellringer when asked how she spends what little spare time she has.

Heather

is a semi-retired chiropodist. She loves to be part of a group and get a sense of belonging. Her journey was inspired as a follow-on from a handbell ringing group also in the village of Ruskington. Different skills are required, but concentration and determination are a common factor. Heather is very proud of what she has achieved, particularly ringing for the Platinum Jubilee celebration, for the Ukrainian National Day in August and for the Queen's funeral. Her disappointment came when she fell while on holiday and damaged her shoulder and couldn't ring for a few months, but she is back in action now!

Ron

is retired and has recently returned to ringing after meeting David! He has enjoyed his comeback and has made new friends and feels that he is now ready to assist the beginners.

Lysette

also has a full time job in finance but manages to fit in time for bell ringing. She finds it relaxing and enables her to switch off completely from work and concentrate on this wonderful experience. Everyone agrees with her on this point! She loves ringing for special occasions like Remembrance Day and especially weddings - getting paid is a bonus!

Katie

is a full time Business Analyst and busy Mum, and is the latest recruit. She has always wanted to ring but never lived near a church with bells until she moved into Ruskington. She has had an introduction and the safety lesson, and already feels a great sense of achievement at what she has learned in her first month. As she works from home it has given her a social life and a chance to meet more people from the village. A big plus for her is the real mix of age and gender in the group.

Peter

began ringing in 2021 when he was passing the church and heard the bells. Remembering his grandmother's love of bells, he decided to learn in her memory. It has been a slow learning curve for him, especially when he had a broken finger, but he is steady and determined and an asset to the team. Like the others, he loves the camaraderie and greatly appreciates the friendship and help from the other experienced ringers.

Stephen

is a full time lorry driver so can only attend when work allows, but after about five years he is now experienced enough to help David so is a very useful member of the team. He was tempted to join when his teenage son (who has autism) wanted to try. Remarkably, the discipline of the regime has helped this lad and he can now ring without continual supervision and he is able to converse with everyone.

The Bells Called Me

Cameron Dodd, Tilston, Cheshire

As a very young child I used to go to sleep at night listening to the bells, when the Tilston band held their weekly practice. I have always been very interested in bells, so my parents took me to one of the tower open days in 2015 to see the bells when I was eight years old and I remember having a go at pulling the rope!

I was also extremely excited to go up the tower to see the actual bells. Since that day, I always wanted to have another go.

In September 2021, I went to another Tilston Tower Open Day and took up the challenge of learning to ring. I started in October that year, understanding how to ring the backstroke and handstroke separately, before putting them together. The first time I rang on open bells was for a Christmas tree service later that year. After this, I learnt Plain Hunt. This was definitely a challenge to begin with but after a lot of simulator practice I managed it. I have definitely enjoyed the challenge of achieving Levels 1 and 2 of the Learning the Ropes scheme and learning new methods.

I have rung for several weddings, the passing of Queen Elizabeth II and the Proclamation of King Charles III. I also rang my first Quarter Peal on the tenor on 12th December 2022. I ring regularly at St. Mary's in Tilston, Cheshire for practices and services and have enjoyed ringing at other local churches and Chester Cathedral.



Cameron receiving his certificate from his teacher, Steve Farmer



Cameron at Chester Cathedral, and with his quarter peal plaque

Images right and wrong

David Smith, Tower Talk team

The last issue of Tower Talk, number 24, as usual contained lots of interesting articles and images submitted by readers. I always enjoy the 'sneak preview' that my job (typesetting and layout) allows me, and it is great fun putting the whole magazine together.

It is also good to see the wide variety of images that are submitted. But I also have to find some extra photos or drawings or clip-art sometimes. I do my best to find stuff that is entertaining and relevant, but slipped up badly when it came to the article *Mourning HM Queen Elizabeth II in Scotland* (on page 5). This made mention of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh. There was a bit of space alongside so I included the image of 'St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh' that is shown at the right.

Unfortunately it turns out that there are two St Mary's Cathedrals in Edinburgh - needless to say I got the wrong one! I should have known better as I've rung at the Episcopal Cathedral (the one that has bells - a very impressive 41 cwt twelve). Many thanks to Ian Bell, ringing master at St Mary's, for spotting the error, letting us know and sending in this picture of the correct St Mary's. Ian also makes the point that visitors are welcome. For more information about the cathedral and about ringing in Scotland generally, see the website of the Scottish Association of Change Ringers: <https://sacr.org>

How to send in a photo

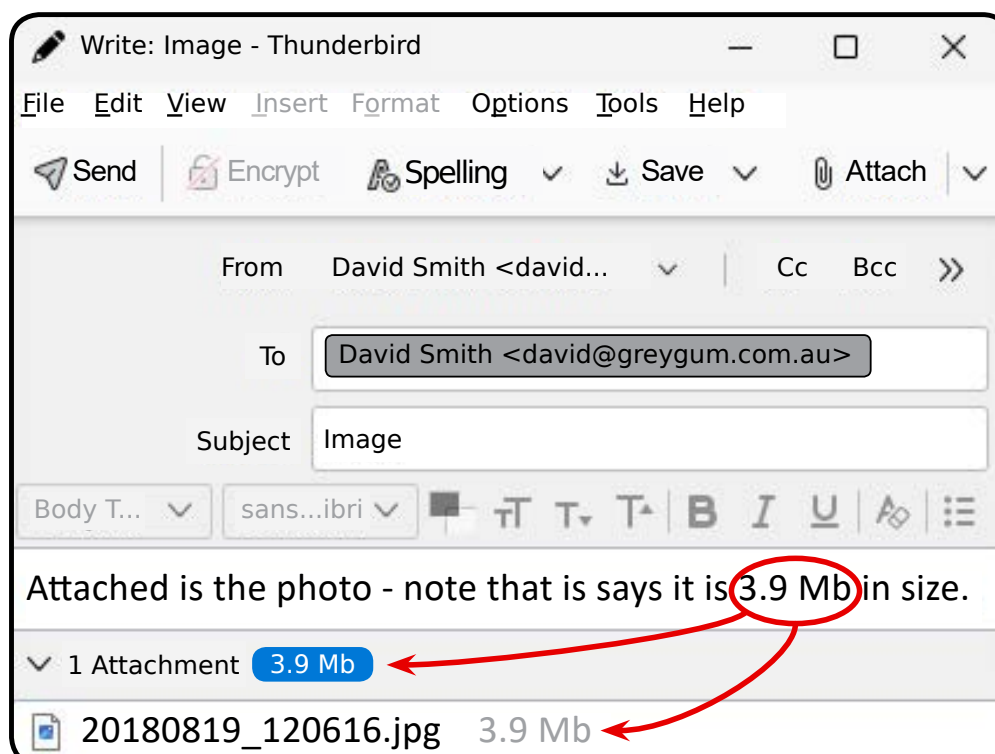
This is perhaps a good opportunity to make a request about sending in images. Most images that come in are really good, and many of the potential problems I can try to fix. But one thing I can't fix is if the photo has been compressed too much. Modern devices typically take an image that is around 1 Mb to 4 Mb in size (1 Mb is about one million bytes, so the image is generally one to four million bytes). Unfortunately a lot of software decides (often without asking you - thanks Microsoft!) that this is far too big, so it compresses the file, sometimes down to as little as 80Kb. It's gone from *four million* down to *eighty thousand* bytes, meaning that 98% of the information has been lost!



St Mary's, Edinburgh
But this is the
Catholic Cathedral!



Here is St Mary's
Episcopal Cathedral,
Edinburgh.



The resulting image may look ok on a small phone screen, but it is a disaster for any serious publication like Tower Talk.

So ideally when sending an image please attach the full-sized image to an email by itself (so not inside a Word document or similar), say 'no' to any offer to make the file smaller, and if possible check the size of the attachment - it should be at least 1 Mb. Email software varies, but the image on the left shows how one email software tells you the size of the attachment - and others behave similarly.

Thanks!

A Shutdown Hobby Turned Mission

Conrad Braam, Wilburton, Cambridgeshire

The birth of the goal. A mission, which I have kept to myself till now. About 300 yards from our Victorian mid-terrace house, the six bells of St Peter's, Wilburton, Cambridgeshire, are infrequently rung. We grew up abroad so the novel sound nearby, one day during the big shutdown, had us listening and naively thinking *aah, that can't be too hard to do?*

Following an invitation to visit the tower extended to my wife Rowan (via a colleague of hers, who was at the time working towards her LtR Level 1), we signed up to learn to ring. A mere two miles away, at Strettham St James, is a Ringing Education Centre run by the Ely Diocesan Association.

It's been over a year now, and learning a skill is much slower at age 50, but I have finally passed my Learning the Ropes Level 1. Frustratingly slow, and sometimes I wonder if being neither musical nor mathematical has slowed me down too. But that first lesson turned the lockdown hobby into a mission to ring church bells in my village. I'm still working from home, and when I do hear ringing, I dash down the road and sneak in to watch for a bit. Just this week was our district AGM, so we are now association members too. In fact my smart wife has got a place on the district committee already.

So I'm now officially attached to my training tower. Currently we don't have a full band. Last Sunday, for example, we only rang the middle four there. So I'm still a very long way off from achieving my mission of ringing at my local tower. But for me that mission, even though I'm unlikely to ever be skilled enough to ring a full peal like the wonderful visiting band that first got me curious, remains the focus.

And I'm super excited about that, perhaps because learning has energised me personally. I love the history and the technology of bells, and I have let all my friends know. I'm a bit ringing crazy now they tell me, and I don't mind. I'm pretty sure it has been good for my back pain and keeping me mobile. In fact I have started another ringing "mission" already, because just having a goal has been so positive for me. More on that mission (which involves microphones) some other time!



Conrad in action!

Answers to Puzzles

Here is the solution to the puzzle on page 6.

Across		Down	
3	Leather	1	Ash
7	Whitechapel	2	Warner
10	Tuning	4	Augment
11	Bourbon	5	Chandler
12	Taylors	6	Stainbank
16	Manure	8	Tin
		9	Bagley
		13	Sanctus
		14	Keltek
		15	Flax

