

# Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



Learning  
the Ropes

Association of Ringing Teachers / Learning the Ropes – [www.bellringing.org](http://www.bellringing.org)

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All of us have come to ringing in different ways, some have been ringing for decades, some have just joined. We are all familiar with our own ringing histories but what we don't know is what the future holds for us, our ringing, our band and the wider world of ringing? This is something we all need to think about.



*Come and have a go at bellringing!*

The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR) has initiated a project called Ringing 2030 to look to the future and plan how ringing could and should change in order for it to be sustained and thrive in the future. If you want to know more about this, have a look at the Central Council website, where you can also sign up for updates. <https://cccb.org.uk/ringing-2030/>

So what would ringing in 2030 look like to you, and what can you do, either by yourself, with your band or within your Guild or Association? This edition has many stories of how fellow ringers are getting involved to ensure our amazing art has a healthy future - developing new bands, learning to teach new recruits or volunteering at big events which raise the profile of ringing, such as the Essex International Jamboree - looking at the picture above, looks like it was a lot of fun! If you have been involved in a similar event or want to share some good news, we always want to hear from you so do get in touch.

# Tower Captain for a Day

Sarah Holland, Essex

I'm the Tower Captain at Great Bardfield in Essex, but on 28th July I spent the day running a unique and fascinating tower. The 'tower' was in fact the new Mobile Belfry designed by Taylors (it's a six bell mini ring which can be set up from a trailer, by one person in an hour!) and the location was the Essex International Jamboree near Chelmsford, Essex. Put simply, the Jamboree is an enormous camp for Scouts and Guides from around the world; it lasts one week, but takes years to plan. It's a famous event in the Scout and Guiding world, and the Essex camp is renowned for being one of the best jamborees.

I had never been to anything like this before but my husband and I both eagerly volunteered after an appeal from the Essex Association for helpers. We had a fair bit of paperwork to do which, given the scale of the event, is to be expected. Apparently for that week the jamboree field became the biggest village in Essex, and we thought it was superbly organised.

Across the huge site there were a number of activity 'zones' where the young people could try out a vast range of different activities. We were part of the Motion Zone where we were well positioned right at the entrance, which we felt was very advantageous; not only were we easy to find but we could start ringing and immediately spark a bit of curiosity. We also stood out in wearing our new branded bell ringing T shirts, which we thought made us look pretty professional! We had no idea how many people we might attract — after all, we were competing with other activities such as dodgems and Segways!

On the day we arrived to find the Mobile Belfry set up and ready. There were ten volunteers (some brave souls were camping all week!) and each of us had a specific role - mine was tower captain!



*The Volunteer Team, with Sarah the Tower Captain for the day, far right*

It was a bit daunting — it's not always easy being tower captain on our regular practice night, let alone in a huge field with people I didn't know and a steady stream of young people most of whom had no idea at all about bell ringing! I had to make sure ringing was demonstrated in a structured way, and had to organise the teaching so that nobody had to wait too long to have a go (and also were given enough time to have everything explained). Not everyone had English as a first language either so that made us really think carefully about how we communicated. We had to make sure we kept the flow of people going and that there were enough other interesting things to do while the young people waited.

Some of the other volunteers greeted people and encouraged them to find out more, others introduced them to handbells, and others gave handling tuition.

We were really struck by the immense enthusiasm from everyone we met.

For the whole session - one in the morning and one in the afternoon - we were ringing solidly and we estimate we taught at least 200 people the rudiments of handling a mini ring bell. We managed to give everyone who was interested at least one go; some came back for more and others, who were already ringers, had a chance to ring a variety of things with our band. It was lovely to give them the chance to show off their ringing skills to their scouting friends.

My husband and I are both passionate about teaching and showing that ringing is a hobby for people of all ages, and how it can give you so many skills and confidence that you can use throughout your life. We also wanted to show how it can be a great part of a busy young person's life. Our 16-year-old son, who has also been a Scout, came with us to drum up interest on the day which was great.

He has got a lot out of both Scouts and ringing and giving something back to both hobbies was important to us. As ringing teachers it was wonderful to be with equally enthusiastic people all day and we felt the whole experience promoted ringing and its place in our culture very positively.



We hope that many of the scouting leaders now see that they can take their young people on a trip to a local bell tower.

Perhaps many of the young people may not immediately go and learn to ring - though that was encouraged too! - but even if it might mean that, in later life when someone moves to an area next to a church with bells, they might be supportive because of this experience.



*'To sum up, if you ever get the chance to get involved with anything like this, please take advantage - all skills are welcome, and everyone can make a contribution.'*



*Brownies waiting their turn at the Mobile Belfry*

# The Magic of the Cluster

Clare Morris, Overton-on-Dee

*In the last edition of Tower Talk we featured some of the recent ART Award winners. Here we meet some of the members of the Chirk Cluster in North Wales which won the Band of the Year Award.*

## Overton on Dee, Cluster Tower 1

*David and Liz Price Jones have been ringing since September 2022*



'It was after the quietness of Covid-19 that we appreciated the sound of bells ringing again in our local church of Overton. Reading our monthly village magazine we saw that anyone interested in learning to ring was invited to pop along on a practice night and watch the ringing. This is where our journey began, and we were made to feel very welcome.

The challenge started the following week. It looked so easy when we watched the practice night, but we now know it's a skill that is harder than it looks!

Our learning began in Overton, which includes ringers from Bangor on Dee and Chirk, which are part of the cluster. For extra tuition, we were invited to Chirk for one-to-one ringing sessions to help build our confidence and progress. Within a few weeks we were able to join Bangor on Dee on their practice evenings and occasionally to the pub after!

Nearly two years in, we have a lot of new friends and are able to ring on Sunday mornings and for weddings and we enjoy making progress and keeping a village tradition alive. Recently we spent a day at Chirk fine tuning Plain Hunt on five. None of this would have been possible without the time, support and patience of the tutors and ringers in the Cluster.'

*Clare Morris, Ringer since 2015 and Tower Captain since 2020*



I started ringing in 2015 after seeing an advert in our local village newsletter. I began to learn but I really struggled, and I was becoming anxious with the long draught, no rope guide and some very 'hairy' moments. A young more experienced ringer had a word with me on the way out of a stressful practice and said: '*if you really want to learn how to ring properly, you need to go to Chirk on a Monday night*'. The rest, as they say, is history. I toed the line in my own tower and soaked up everything I could get elsewhere.

During early Covid-19, our Tower Captain became ill and immediately resigned. As soon as I heard, I emailed the vicar and said how much I wanted to be the next tower captain. I got the job!

In the 'mothership' tower as I call it, I have been astounded at how much support I have received and how much I have learnt about ringing, steeple keeping, teaching bell handling and running a practice session. The restrictions following the initial Covid-19 outbreak demonstrate the support we had, and I look back fondly at our outdoor, spaced-out handbell ringing sessions under a gazebo in someone's back garden on a Saturday afternoon and our Ringing Room Zoom sessions.

We are fortunate in the cluster to have the wisdom and support of a very experienced, accomplished ringer, who has the ability to very gently push you out of your comfort zone. I never dreamt I would be able to ring a peal or have the confidence to join a practice at York, Glasgow and Chester Cathedrals.

We are mindful that we need to look to the future, and we are trying to recruit and teach new ringers – again all supporting and helping each other, facilitating more people to be involved in teaching bell handling. We also have plans to attract the younger generation.

Words cannot express how much I love bell ringing. I have retired early so that I can ring more! I value the knowledge, support, friendship and fun we all have as a group of three towers.

We are currently preparing for a 'Cluster Striking Competition' with everyone's names in a hat and random bands being formed. The winner will receive 'The Cluster Cup'!



*Time for another round...*

**Pauline Goring, Ringer since 2021**



I started bell ringing just before Covid-19, and as soon as we could resume, I jumped right back in. From the very beginning, I was hooked. There's something about the challenge of ringing that captivates me, offering the perfect escape from the demands of a busy day at work.

What truly stands out to me is the friendship and support I've experienced since joining Overton on Dee. This connection has only grown stronger as I've expanded to ring in Bangor on Dee, Chirk, and Llangollen. Being part of a cluster has pushed me to improve, giving me the chance to ring with people of different skill levels and progress from a learner to a helper for the new starters.

The friendships I've built through ringing mean the world to me. My bell ringing skills have developed to the point where I'm confident enough to travel halfway around the world and ring at towers in Brisbane and Sydney. Before ringing, I would never have had the confidence to meet and talk to new people in this way! I've even ventured into bell maintenance and now share the role of steeple keeper at my local tower. I can fit a stay, tighten bolts, and even discuss the merits of WD-40. For me, our cluster isn't just about ringing, it's about offering each other friendship and support, especially during tough times or when we're feeling frustrated.

A standout moment for me was when I rang my first quarter peal the day after my mother died. No one hugged me or made a fuss when I walked into the tower, but I have never felt so supported by a group of people in my life. Moments like this are what make our group so special.

We always make time for tea, coffee, and a chat at our sessions, and our pub conversations afterward are filled with laughter, whether we're talking about ringing or life in general. As a group, we've all grown and gained so many skills together. The encouragement and confidence I've received from everyone in the group have helped me progress to ringing quarter peals and peals. We're more than just a cluster; we're a close-knit group of friends—a dysfunctional, blended family who share a deep love for bell ringing. That's what I cherish most, and that's what makes our cluster truly special.



*Pauline at work in the belfry*

## Bangor on Dee, Cluster Tower 2

*Deryl Crocombe, Ringer since 2017 and Deputy Tower Capta*



I've been deputy tower captain for the past two years. When our bells were taken to Taylors for repair and refurbishment, I was contacted by the tower captain from another local tower with the offer for our ringers to join their band. This was to be the start of a brilliant collaboration with the three towers in our area.

On a personal level, being part of a cluster which has different levels of experience and ability has enabled me to ring quarter peals, which is not something I would have considered in the past. It has also given me the confidence and the contacts to ring while on holiday in Australia and at Liverpool Cathedral. Knowing I would have lots of help and input, it also enabled me to



*In the lighthouse on Lundy*

successfully recruit new ringers. This is something I would never have considered before being part of this cluster. I am currently being given help and encouragement from other tower captains to lead the practice in my own tower. The band from all three towers regularly supports the ringing practice in each of the towers, and supports an 8/10 bell practice in other towers in the area. Being able to get enough ringers for a wedding or other occasions is never a problem! Having so many willing ringers to call upon is a definite bonus. The same can be said for tower maintenance, as there is always someone available to mend a stay, or fit the muffles if needed. My tower recently hosted a very successful village coffee morning to raise the profile of bell ringing in the community and to say thank you to the village for supporting us. We were very lucky to have a band to ring handbells made up from members of the cluster. We are a very social group and have recently returned from an excellent 'ringing' holiday to Lundy (an island in the Bristol Channel) and often meet up to go bird watching and walking in the local area.



It is 18 months since I began to ring bells, and the Chirk/Overton on Dee/Bangor on Dee cluster has proved invaluable to me. Along with other ringers, I have benefited from the numerous workshops which have been offered, such as listening skills, ringing up and down and Plain Hunt on 5. There are also opportunities to ring at other towers' practice nights, including on a simulator, which we don't have in my own tower. We also benefit from chances to ring at churches with rings of 8 and 10, both locally and from tour days.

Experienced ringers are readily on hand and willingly offer support and share experiences. I have also met and chatted with other new ringers about our progress and challenges.

Another plus about being part of the cluster, is the social aspect. The Christmas buffet included Secret Santa which was great fun. We help each other out at individual towers' fund-raising events too. The recent tower coffee morning would not have been so successful without the help and contributions from the other towers. I am grateful to our cluster in enabling me to meet new people, enjoy a great social circle but mainly to allow me to fulfil an ambition to ring bells.



The cluster works well because of, rather than in spite of, three very different towers, Chirk, Overton-on-Dee and Bangor-on-Dee, where the bells are very different in configuration, presentation and maintenance. The tower captains too are very different individuals with contrasting teaching styles and approaches to running a practice, all to the benefit of a novice like myself.

Visiting bands have also provided advice on an occasional basis, and I feel very included in the camaraderie of bell ringers. You cannot ring church bells alone any more than you can sing in a choir alone or play in an orchestra on your own. Within weeks of first attempting to ring a bell, I greeted a visiting band at my local tower. After watching them do what seemed, and still seems, something phenomenally complicated, they asked me if I'd like to ring with them. 'I'm new to this, I can only do rounds', I said. We immediately did gloriously kind rounds. Similarly there are visits to other towers outside of our cluster, which I am looking forward to in due course, when I feel more confident at tackling other towers "blind".

Our local village hall, adjacent to the church, holds a coffee morning most first Saturdays of each month. We were offered April's date and dozens of villagers attended, which raised our profile in the village, as well as putting faces to ringers for many.

Within our cluster I have met like-minded people, whom I never otherwise would have encountered and with whom I enjoy a drink after some practices. There's a fascinating mix of those who are interested in the historical aspect of their church, ringing on a Sunday to preserve a long tradition, and those who also stay for the service afterwards.

There's an unrelated bonus to this for me in that, as a R S Thomas enthusiast, I find myself with the cluster in the same area as he would have negotiated in his curacy, based in Chirk and then later nearby Hanmer. He probably preached in all three churches, where I now ring. Novice for nearly two years and still very much learning.

### Chirk, Cluster Tower 3

*Peter Furniss, Experienced ringer of more than sixty years*



For most of my ringing career, I have been in the role of tower captain/ringing master. I sometimes wish I wasn't! During that time I have met and rung with many excellent ringers and special people who I number amongst my friends and yet rarely in all that time have I come across a group as special as those I currently ring with in the Overton on Dee, Bangor on Dee and Chirk Cluster. And so what is it that makes this group so special?

Firstly, enthusiasm and commitment. Three practices per week. Not everyone attends every practice, but it is very unusual to cancel a practice because not enough people can attend. Woe betide me if I suggest cancelling a practice because it is a Bank Holiday! No scratching around for bands to ring a quarter peal or having to implore someone to ring. A far more common problem is who to leave out.

There is a culture of learning and wanting to improve, and most importantly, everyone is willing to listen to and act on advice given.

It may not always be apparent but there is a reasonably clear and structured pathway to progress. The group is very mixed in experience, but it is possible to see where everyone is and where they are going.

Secondly, mutual support. The group is very supportive of each other. A success by one member is celebrated as a success by everyone. Teaching, mentoring and encouragement is not the preserve of one or a few individuals. Everyone is encouraged to help and contribute.

Often it is those who have experienced the learning most recently who are best placed to support those starting on the next step. And mutual support isn't limited to bell ringing. When needed and wanted, support is there for those experiencing the vicissitudes of life. Finally we try never to forget that ringing should be enjoyable and fun and that some of the enjoyment comes from celebrating good ringing!



*Having a go!*

*Ian Wiltshire, supporter and experienced ringer from down south, now living in North Wales*



Being a member of the local cluster group in North Wales means that I've found myself deeply embedded in a vibrant and welcoming bell ringing community. Having learned the ropes at Addington in Surrey in the late 60s, and moving on to East Grinstead in 2002, it's clear that bell ringing has been a consistent thread in my life, a passion that I've carried with me through the years.

Moving to North Wales in 2022, I expected a quieter life, with a bit of bell ringing on the side. Instead, I've found myself busier than ever, embraced by a community that shares my enthusiasm for this unique and historic art. Each tower in the cluster group has its own character and strengths, providing a rich and varied experience.



At Bangor on Dee, we engage with beginners and enjoy the social aspect of post-practice meet-ups at the local pubs.

Overton on Dee offers a supportive environment for handling and rounds, as well as opportunities to refine skills in methods like Plain Bob Doubles, all complemented by the warmth of cake and coffee.

Chirk, on the other hand, whilst still giving learners ample opportunities, challenges the improvers to push their limits with more advanced methods like Double Oxford, Kent Treble Bob and Cambridge Surprise. With the support of my new friends, I've even rung a few peals despite thinking I'd retired from peal ringing!!

Being part of this cluster group isn't just about the ringing itself; it's about the camaraderie, the shared learning, and the joy of progressing together. It's a vibrant, supportive network that keeps me actively engaged, allowing me to continue growing and contributing to the bell ringing tradition. Embracing this new chapter in North Wales, I look forward to many more ringing experiences and the deep connections that come with being part of such a passionate community.

## Toughening Up

Dr Josh Watkins, Suffolk

Callouses and blisters are an unfortunate but necessary part of ringing, especially if you ring at more than one practice a week!

The first time I rang more than one quarter in a day, I ended the day with blisters - ouch! Once I started ringing more quarters more often, I rapidly started to develop hard skin (callouses if you will, but not unsightly or annoying) and didn't get any further blisters.



The top-most layer of your skin is called the stratum corneum - it is the thickest but most variable layer of the skin and is mainly made up of dead cells from layers below that are stuck together. This allows for vitally important immune defence mechanisms but also for protection against wear and tear.

The soles of your feet have harder skin, because they have the most wear and tear to deal with out of your whole body - they have a thick layer of that stratum corneum. If you meet a guitarist, ask politely to see the tips of their fingers - rock hard, or they'd end up cut by the strings! Look at the hands of a peal ringer - they will have hard pads on the areas they hold the ropes with. This is a benefit, as they prevent blisters - which are painful and eventually come off and reveal new, softer skin below.

I try to avoid using anything to particularly soften my hands, because if I did then the next time I try to turn a tenor in to a quarter, or ring a peal around the back I'll be in big trouble. Experienced ringers, you know, are the best source of information on these subjects - they've been there, done that, had the blisters, which have then turned into those useful callouses.

# The Fen Tigers Come Roaring Back

Dee Smith, Cambridgeshire

The Ely Diocesan Association Young Ringers (aka The Fen Tigers) has always encouraged and supported an enthusiastic group of young ringers who participated regularly in the Ringing World National Youth Contest (RWNYC), until Covid-19 caused a halt to the competition. By 2022, most of these ringers had grown up and moved onto pastures new.

The task of restarting the group was undertaken by Lesley Boyle and Dee Smith. We were aware of young ringers in various towers across the Ely DA, but the difficulty was just getting them together in one place at the same time! In July 2022 we held the first Young Ringers event with the attraction of ringing at Great St Mary's in the centre of Cambridge, which is the only ring of 12 in the Ely DA, as well as ringing on the brand-new peal of bells at St Clements (the latest ART Ringing Centre, also in the city centre). The event was an enormous success and gave us the encouragement to continue.

The following year was spent going along to district meetings, advertising everywhere and getting the contact details of families with young ringers. We held weekend practices, rotating around the four districts in the Ely DA, as well as a monthly weekday practice at St Clement's in Cambridge. Becca Glazier looked after the refreshments (very important!), Lesley ran the ringing and I covered all the admin that goes with Young Ringers.



In July 2023 we entered a team for the RWNYC in York. We only had five ringers and were kindly lent a sixth ringer from Norfolk! It was a fantastic weekend, and we vowed to enter a full team the next year. So on Saturday 6th July 2024, we found ourselves travelling to London with 14 Fen Tigers.

Thanks to the support of all the families and a grant left to us in memory of Jim Skillings, we were able to take the whole squad of young ringers, and had two teams - the Bengal Tigers and the Siberian Tigers - ringing in the 6 bell Call Change competition at St James, Garlickhythe (aka The Royal Jubilee Bells). We were all thrilled that they came joint third (8.5/10) and joint sixth (6/10) respectively. All the hard work and determination had paid off! After ringing the competition piece, the Fen Tigers set off on an adventure to ring at five other City of London Towers including the bells at the iconic St Mary Le Bow.

The results ceremony was held at St Paul's Cathedral, where Great Paul was rung to celebrate the occasion. We set off home to the sound of St Paul's Cathedral Bell Ringers ringing Stedman Cinques across the City.

We now have over 50 Young Ringers on our list (ages ranging from nine to 18 years). Since the competition, our Young Ringers have been ringing quarter peals and are planning to organise their first ringing outing. To any ringers who are thinking of starting (or restarting) a Young Ringers' group, just go for it! Not easy at the start, but the rewards and contributions to bell ringing are amazing.

Looking back on my time at the Ringing World National Youth Contest (RWNYC) in 2013 and 2014, I can see how much it helped me grow as a ringer. They were not just about the competition but also about meeting new people, learning new skills, and stepping out of my comfort zone.

# The Early Days of RWNYC

Neal Dodge, Suffolk

## Preparing for the Contest

In Suffolk we had regular young ringer practices, which given the size of our county was organisationally challenging but very valuable to allow us to connect with ringers the same age as us, ring on different bells and build our ringing experience and knowledge. Our group would meet regularly to practise together, working on getting our timing and rhythm just right. It wasn't just about being perfect; it was about learning to ring well as a team.

For many of us, including me, ringing on eight bells was a new challenge. Most of us had learnt on six, so moving on to triples was a big step and one that I certainly wouldn't have made quite so soon if it wasn't for the contest.

At first, it felt overwhelming, but with practice, it became a valuable learning experience. These practices taught us to listen carefully and to work together more closely.

## The Contest Experience

The actual contest days were a mix of excitement and nerves. It was amazing to see so many other young ringers from around the UK, all gathered for the same purpose. The atmosphere was lively, with everyone eager to show their best ringing. And just the experience of travelling and ringing elsewhere made it a real adventure.

When it was our turn to ring, the pressure was on. We wanted to do well, and we knew we had prepared well for this moment.

Ringing in the contest was a test of everything we had learned. Even though we were nervous, it was also thrilling.



*Original members of the Young@Herts team still having fun ten years on!*





*Looking down into the ringing room at Worcester Cathedral at the 2014 contest*

One of the best parts of the RWNYC was meeting other young ringers. The contest was not just a competition; it was also a chance to make new friends. We met ringers from different parts of the country and shared our experiences. These connections were important. They helped me realise that ringing is a shared passion, and it was comforting to know that there were many others like me. The friendships we formed at the contest have lasted, and we've stayed in touch even after the event. It created a network of young ringers that have now grown up together and have become ringing leaders themselves.

Participating in the RWNYC helped me grow a lot as a ringer. It pushed me to try new things, like ringing on eight bells, and taught me to handle the pressure of performing. It also gave me the confidence to become more involved in my local Guild and I have subsequently been the Public Relations Officer for my Guild for the past five years and have also got involved in many restoration projects around the county.

The contest also deepened my appreciation for ringing. It was inspiring to see so many young ringers and to be part of such a vibrant community.

After the contest, I felt more motivated to improve and to take on new challenges in ringing. I wanted to be more involved, whether it was helping to organise practices or learning more advanced methods, and that was exactly what I did. Now the contest is even bigger and more inclusive than it was ten years ago so I hope this means that many more young ringers can be inspired to make the most of what ringing can offer.

# A Year of Learning at Carlisle

David Steel

I have been ringing for around about a year now, following my wife into the world of mystery that is bell ringing, and I love it. The red sandstone of Carlisle Cathedral, the walk along the clerestory under that blue and gold ceiling, the ringing room when it moves and the sallies are bobbing, the belfry with its array of colour, Taylor red, bronze and gold.

How could you not feel wonderful surrounded by it all?

The thing that makes it though is the people; they have from the very beginning been welcoming, humorous and friendly.

It is difficult to describe how generous the cathedral ringers are with their time and the devotion they put into the band and the tower, and I am very grateful to them all. Of course it isn't entirely without days of frustration. I swear that bell ringing is the most difficult thing I've ever tried, and it doesn't come naturally to me. Sunday mornings have changed from a chance of a lie in into a morning of nervous tension and the dreaded phrase of 'closer David', but I also cannot remember a day when we haven't been able to have fun and a good laugh, rounded off with a coffee in the cathedral café. So, if we ever wonder why the tower has a band in excess of 30 members and a group of learners making steady progress, the answer is easy; it's because of the people.

It has also been my good fortune to have been invited to be a steeple keeper and being upstairs in amongst the bells is a thing that brings me great satisfaction, and I am slowly acquiring from Barry, Ron and John the skills associated with that.



*L to R: David Steel, Ron East (Tower Captain - Carlisle Cathedral), Sarah Steel*

It is amazing how readily you can acquire a sense of responsibility and even affection for the bells and everything associated with them. Ron, our tower captain, is also the Diocesan Bell Advisor, and has for many years had a band of Carlisle Cathedral volunteers who have been responsible for carrying out many projects across Cumbria, they carry out all manner of works from general maintenance to the complete renovation or renewal of bells and frames. I have had the privilege of joining them on several occasions and cannot express the pleasure and sense of purpose I have derived from playing just a small part in bringing bells back to life, or just simply to keep them ringing. I believe that church bells are part of our history and it's nice to play a small part in that heritage.

There you have it then, a year of learning to ring bells at Carlisle Cathedral, it's not just ringing, it's also spanners, screwdrivers, splices and stays, but mostly, it's just the people.

*'A mistake is never met by a harsh word or shake of the head, it is met with words of encouragement, a smile, and a genuine desire to help, particularly from the teachers and leaders.'*

# The Importance of being Last!

Annie Hall, Warwick

To complete Level 3 of Learning the Ropes, two quarter peals need to be rung, one on the tenor and one on the treble. Covering is a useful skill in its own right - for a start, it introduces 'ropesight' in an easy way without the additional need for changing speed. Most people start by ringing the tenor behind to rounds, and when this has been accomplished, progress to covering for call changes. Some teachers encourage the learner to call the changes from the tenor as it helps them begin to see the movement of the bells in the change and maintain the rhythm. Practise getting the rhythm right before going into changes. It's quite challenging, but you feel a great sense of achievement when you get it right.



*Tenor ringing coaching*

Moving on to methods, it's usual to start with Plain Hunt on as the tenor follows a different bell for two blows, looking for a new bell every backstroke. Getting used to a steady rhythm while looking for a different bell is good preparation for the next step, which is to cover for methods. This is when it's important to use both skills of ropesight and sense of rhythm to help produce a joyful piece of ringing.

To practise covering, it is not always essential to ring the tenor or the heaviest bell - a novice ringer can ring any bell in the circle which is comfortable for them and then this bell can be called up to ring in the last place in the row. It can sound quite odd at first, but using a simulator is useful with this exercise, especially if you change the notes of the bells! Alternatively, you can always ring your quarter on the tenor on a lighter ring of bells, if there is one nearby which will accommodate you. If, in the opinion of the teacher, it is not possible for the learner to ring a quarter peal on the tenor, for whatever reason please review the ART Equality Policy - available on the ART website at: [bellringing.org/policies-and-guidelines/equality-and-diversity-policy/](https://bellringing.org/policies-and-guidelines/equality-and-diversity-policy/)

Hannah Wynn from Cramlington in Northumberland, recently completed her Level 3 and makes some interesting observations on her experience of ringing the tenor...

*"I found it a really useful skill to acquire, and I have learned a lot from ringing behind both in general and for my quarter peal. If the tenor is in the wrong place, then the ringing often falls apart or just sounds terrible. Although no one rings by the tenor, like they might ring by the treble, I know that I for one use that steady metronome to be able to hold a good rhythm, especially when I've ended up totally lost! Learning to tenor behind taught me to hold a steady pace, even when the bells below me have fallen apart.*

*I've also improved my ropesight through covering - this in some ways is much harder than when ringing the treble (not that I've ever worked out why!). But when covering for longer portions of ringing, I've found myself spotting patterns and understanding how some methods are put together...*



*Hannah ringing the tenor*

And from a teacher's perspective, Jane Mellor from Berkshire says...

*"Recently I organised a quarter for a couple of progressing ringers for their ART Level 3 and specifically asked one ringer to 'bong behind', thinking it would help with both handling and ropesight. When I asked them to write a few words I was surprised!"*

*As I don't have good ropesight yet, I've also been able to develop my listening skills, in addition to holding a good rhythm and spotting the bells as they come up to the back. My first quarter was ringing behind, and I think it was probably the best introduction I could have had to ringing for such a long time. I was really able to practise ringing steadily and looking for the different bells (as well as looking for patterns in the method). Compared to my second quarter where I rang the treble, it was also much easier as I didn't need to be counting quite so frantically for so long!*

*I have also realised that being a solid tenor ringer means you'll get more time on a rope at a practice or a meeting. If you can ring the treble and cover, then often you can be really useful to help fill out a band for more complex methods — it will be a long time till I can ring inside for a touch of Stedman, but I can ring the tenor for it!*

*"It sometimes feels like ringing the tenor behind is not valued as much as it should be, with more emphasis on people moving on to 'flashier' ringing, either on the treble or inside. In terms of development though, I have personally learned an awful lot from covering and count it as an essential skill for all newer ringers to learn so that they have built a solid foundation of technique, consistency and listening before taking on more complex skills."*



*The successful quarter peal band*

I was somewhat stressed as I didn't want to mess up for the other learner's sake. It should help with ropesight, but I did it all by listening and rhythm.

Ringing the tenor to my third quarter meant I was less stressed about going wrong.

I would say the main benefit this time on the tenor was being able to focus on not overpulling, which I have a tendency to do, and in improving my listening skills and rhythm.

*During the quarter peal the tenor ringer clearly abandoned all attempts to gain ropesight and concentrated on handling and listening.*

*Anxiety prevented the natural relaxation into tenoring and the chance to try to look, but luckily confidence in their listening provided the stability required. I know more quarters and more tenoring, even at any level, will help bind all these skills. The quarter peal was successful!*

Jane goes on to reflect...

*"Effective tenor ringing is a skill in its own right. As it is the heaviest bell of the ring, a little more strength will be required but it isn't all about pulling. Good bell control is required to allow the tenor to swing through just the right amount with an accurate balance between pulling and checking to strike in the right place. Bell control comes with good handling, so for a heavier bell long smooth strokes are imperative for gaining that control.*



## Should we teach ringers to listen, look or have rhythm first?

*At Level 3, these are the skills that we focus on, and tenoring behind gives the learner a chance to experience them all. When these two skills of looking and listening come together, the new tenor ringer may start to be able to watch bells change below them, enabling development of their rope sight skills."*

To conclude, Anthea Enzor from Darlington gives us these tips for building good covering skills.

### Listening

If you are ringing the tenor your bell will make the lowest note, and you may find you can pick it out by listening for that note at the end of the change. You can even practise this while sitting out. Alternatively, you can count each bell as it sounds and listen to whether your bell is in the right place (remember to count when the bell sounds, not when the ropes are pulled). You can do this in the rounds to start with and then you will get a feel for the rhythm. When the method starts you need to keep ringing at a steady speed to stay in last place but keep listening for the lowest note or counting! If you are early you need to ring a little bit slower, and if you are late, you need ring a little bit faster. Try to make only small adjustments and don't change speed too dramatically!

### Observation

To strike last, you need to spot which of the ropes comes down last. At handstroke you can watch the sallies rise in front of you, at backstroke you will need to look for the last tail end to come down. Some people find it easier to focus on the hands of the other ringers. Yours will always be the last rope down, but you may begin to notice that there is a pattern to the bells that you are following. Ask to see a diagram of the method afterwards and compare this to your observations. It may help to learn the pattern initially but remember that even very experienced ringers don't always know in advance which bell they will be ringing over at the back, they will ring steadily and just have an awareness of which is the last bell.

### Two Skills Together

Seeing when to pull will help you develop your ropesight for method ringing but you need to fine tune when your bell sounds by listening as well. If you are simply covering using your listening skills then you will be missing an opportunity to develop your ropesight, so try to spot the bells changing below you. Start with trying to spot the last bell but keep listening! The best thing to do is to use both skills if you can.



## Other Clues

More experienced ringers will be willing to help you ring in the right place, so make sure you are not looking up, but are looking at the other ringers, as you may see a nod or a wink to indicate they are the one you should follow. Look across the circle and try to use your peripheral vision to see all the ropes and faces at once. Avoid turning your head, as you might miss the right rope if it is out of your sight.

Keep in mind the fundamental rule of change ringing - a bell can only change places with the one before or after it in the row (change). For the tenor ringer this means that no bell will be ringing after yours, so you only need to think about the bells below you and which bells they are following. You might be able to spot that by seeing who they look at. Watching other ringers' eyes can help as, on the whole, they will be looking at the rope they are following. Anthea asked some of her students from the Darlington Teaching Centre for their thoughts on covering.

*"As with many physical skills, the tricky part of learning bellringing is having to concentrate on various things simultaneously until they hopefully become automatic. However while 'covering' you do get a break from one of the trickier elements in bellringing, which for me is moving around the order, so you can concentrate totally on striking and technique. I think I've made reasonable progress in 'covering', which is very satisfying and boosts morale after slow progress on an inside bell. I find observation with both eyes and ears essential. It's very enjoyable". (Tom)*

*"I'm still learning to cover and don't find it particularly easy as my rope-sight is still very much a work in progress. I have to keep telling myself to "open my ears" and "look" while trying to keep that steady rhythm going... not easy, but hopefully it will come in time. I do, however, enjoy the challenge but don't enjoy quite as much as ringing other bells." (Janice)*

*"I find covering quite easy as we ring steadily in last place, rather than changing places on each blow. The tricky bit for me is to remember change on the backstroke." (Phyllis)*

*"I like covering, I find it easier compared to learning a line for method ringing. All you need to do is bong-at-the-back; listen, keep counting and keep a steady rhythm. It can be very therapeutic. I find myself zoning in into the tune and rhythm, making adjustments where necessary if I end up clipping or leaving too big a gap between the 5th place bells. My ropesight isn't very good, so it's good that you can ring with a band ringing a method by using listening skills. I found I got the hang of it quite quickly, once I had abandoned using my eyes and used my ears instead." (Gillian)*

So to summarise, a steady tenor can save a piece of ringing from totally falling apart if there are multiple errors or if the striking becomes choppy. A tenor ringer who can't strike their bell accurately and who rings at variable speeds can also cause great difficulty for the other members of the band, so covering is a very important skill to practise and develop. In fact, some might argue that the tenor is the most important bell as it sets the rhythm of a piece of ringing.

There is a whole host of useful information on this topic to be found online by following these links:

<https://ringingteachers.org/resources/Method-Toolboxes/covering-toolbox>

<https://ringingteachers.org/resources/learning-resources/learning-tips/ringing-round-the-back>

# Wordsearch Challenge

Rose Nightingale and De Tremain, ART Admin team

## At the Foundry

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

CAST  
LATHE  
HEAT  
CLAPPER

MOULD  
TUNING  
ALLOY  
REPAIR

BELLHANGER  
HARMONICS  
COPE  
LOAM

BRONZE  
FURNACE  
COOLING  
CARILLON

# Outing Etiquette

Jen Johnson, Hertfordshire

A guide for the organiser and the tower correspondent...

*Jen is a ringing outing organiser par excellence, having rung at over six thousand towers in a long ringing career of over fifty years. And now after a mis-spent youth (her words!) she has respectably settled into the role of manager of the Hertfordshire Youth Team, Young@Herts. So who better to ask for some helpful tips and advice?*

So you're organising the outing for your tower or just some friends?

First time? Don't worry. Here you will find all you need to know for a successful day. Of course if it goes too well, you're stuck with the job forever...

## Top Tips for Organisers

Start early! Don't leave any of this to the last minute. Begin your prep at least two months before the day or even earlier. You are unlikely to get all the towers you want, and you need time to find alternatives and go through the request process again.

Where do you want to go? What transport are you planning to use? Cars, self-drive minibus, coach, train/walk? This will affect your timings, and tower choices. You won't get a coach down tiny rural lanes!

Open your computer (larger screen better) at Dove's Guide [www.dove.cccbr.org.uk](http://www.dove.cccbr.org.uk), and find an up-to-date large scale road atlas. Digital maps really aren't suitable for outing planning. You need a clear overview of the whole area and roads.

The Dove database will tell you everything you need to know about a tower and its bells. Bear in mind the capabilities of your band. If you ring at a 6 cwt 6, and most rarely ring on more than six, don't go to a 30 cwt 8! Are your band elderly, or have mobility issues? Look for ground floor towers. You can filter the search on Dove for exactly what you're looking for in any area, and then the map will show you locations. This will narrow down your choice if you're not familiar with the area you plan to visit.

If it's a car outing, it's probably best to avoid large towns and cities unless you plan to walk between

multiple towers once you're there, and parking will cost you time and money! If your destination is a city with walkable towers, check for a park-and-ride or long stay car park BEFORE you ask for any towers. Logistics are what make an outing successful.

If you're going rural, choose the first tower carefully - a toilet there is always appreciated! It's great to venture into a new area but about an hour's drive from your home location is probably the furthest you'd want to go. Second and third towers can either be adjacent villages or a short drive apart (half hour max). Use websites like AA route planner to confirm distances and times of travel between towers. Don't forget that people will dither, use the loo, generally faff about, so allow an extra time for that. When you've identified your second and third towers you need to look for a lunch location.



If you want a pub lunch, you'll need to Google for suitable places nearby and contact them to make sure they can take a party booking. Expect to pre-order food. At this point you may need to change your morning tower choices if no suitable lunch venue can be found (a lot of pubs have closed and it's not as easy as it used to be). Get a provisional booking with the pub immediately.

Allow two hours for lunch, and if possible, have lunch in the village you plan to ring at after lunch. Otherwise you'll be herding everyone out, people will forget to pay, and you could get stuck with the bill! If lunch is going to be DIY, then choose a small town, and check in advance that there are sufficient pubs or cafes.

Lunch is over, and everyone's congratulated you on what a splendid day they're having! Time for three more towers. Six in a day is usually enough for most people. The afternoon towers should head back towards home unless you've stayed in one small area. As with the first tower, make sure the last one is no more than an hour's drive back.

Timings: 45 minutes or an hour at each tower, depending on the number of people in your group, and their ability. Appoint a ringing master for each tower.

### Asking for towers

Start with the Association/Guild website to find contacts and use email where possible so you have everything in writing. Allow two weeks for a reply. Generally you'll get at least an acknowledgement in that time. A "No" usually comes quickly!

If you've heard nothing after two weeks, go back to the website to see if there's a phone number, and try that. If all else fails, try the district or general secretary of the Guild. Or you could approach one of the contacts that has replied and ask for their help. If none of this works, then Google the church website and go direct to the incumbent or church office.

Expect to leave a generous donation. Some towers will have a fixed fee, otherwise somewhere around £20-£30 is about right. Confirm your visit a week before the day and ask for the phone number and name of the person meeting you. Lock-outs due to forgetfulness are too common.

### Some advice for tower contacts

If you are the contact point for your tower, you need to be contactable! Make sure that your chosen form of contact is correct on your Guild website, and in the Annual Report. If your Association uses the generic 'tower@guild' email forwarding service, then make sure this is working.

This needs to be someone who knows the abilities of everyone present and will make sure that everyone gets a decent ring. Share the duty out between appropriate people (your tower captain might like a day off!) An outing can be a nice opportunity to let some of your less experienced ringers try running a short session (with a bit of mentoring). The most important thing to remember when on your outing is that you are guests in someone else's tower, and you should make your ringing the best it can be. Don't be too ambitious or expect too much of the less experienced ringers. Stick to what you know you can do well.

Coach outings used to be very popular but not so much nowadays, but if you can fill a coach (with non-ringers if you're going somewhere touristy), then it's the best way to visit larger towns and cities where parking could be tricky. Bear in mind that the coach driver will have limits on their hours, and your drop off point may not be as close as you'd like to the towers.

Taking a train and walking is a great idea for some larger cities where there are enough varied towers to suit all abilities within walking distance. Check the distances and consult a local about your route.

If someone has emailed you and not received a reply, they'll be blaming you, even if the address was anonymous, and you haven't received the message!

Check your email regularly for requests, and reply immediately, even if only to say "Thanks, I'll ask the vicar". Update the visitor as soon as you can and ask for them to remind you a week before the visit. If there are any special details, like car park location, clock chimes, bells up/down, make sure you've passed all of this on. Provide the name and phone number of whoever is meeting the ringers. People forget!

### And finally

It is to be hoped that most visiting bands will know how to conduct themselves in your tower, but if you feel that the ringing is just too consistently poor, don't be afraid to speak up, and have a quiet word with the organiser, asking them to ring within their capabilities.



'Enjoy your outings!'

## Learning the Ropes Achievements

Rose Nightingale – ART Administrator



Between June and August the following certificates were awarded:

Level 1 — 95

Level 2 — 68

Level 3 — 30

Level 4 — 19

Level 5 — 13

### Congratulations to everyone!

If you are working towards Level 5, don't forget that if you achieve this you will receive an invitation to the unmissable Learning the Ropes Masterclass, where you will experience a day of unrivalled tuition, comfort-zone-busting ringing and the company of the country's finest ringers.

# A Warm Welcome for All

Len Roberts, Chairman of the Mere Branch of the Salisbury Diocesan Guild

On the afternoon of Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August ringers and learners from the Mere Branch of the Salisbury Diocesan Guild of Ringers gathered at the beautifully situated church of St James Shaftesbury, Dorset, for our annual Summer Social. Learners and recently elected members were very much welcomed at this event, which provided an ideal opportunity for ringers to meet new members and those who are still 'Learning the Ropes'.

Everyone was given the opportunity to ring, whatever their level.



*St James' church, Shaftesbury, Dorset*



*Enjoying the traditional tea*

The afternoon began with ringing, which included something for everyone, with support provided when required. Ringing was then followed by a traditional bellringers' tea. After the sumptuous tea the SDGR Guild President, Pat Davidson, presented another seven LtR Certificates, bringing our total certificate winners so far this year to fourteen, an excellent achievement. Recipients of LtR certificates offered favourable comments on the LtR scheme, saying they liked the whole-part-whole approach to learning and that the different elements were delivered in bite-sized bits which they were able to understand.

One of the participants, Jeremy Stanford of Blackmore Vale added...

*"As a late newcomer to bell ringing, my enthusiasm for this fascinating hobby was tempered by the jeopardy of several hundredweight of bell swinging above my head! However, following the measured progress in the LtR syllabus, backed up with regular practices, soon allows confidence to be built. The focus on safety, and the advice on correct technique is invaluable, enabling the basics to be grasped fully before moving on to more advanced ringing. As a consequence, I have reached the stage where my enjoyment of ringing increases every time I am in a tower."*

This social and presentation event was well attended and immensely enjoyed by all. The Mere Branch extends grateful thanks to all who helped to make the event such a success.

Particular thanks go to Janet Lowe and those who helped provide and serve the excellent tea, to Ringing Master Nick Dallison, Training Officer Judith Williamson and our Guild President Pat Davidson, who assisted with the ringing in addition to presenting the certificates.



*New members catch hold!*

# Who's Who in your Local Association or Guild?

Lucy Chandhial, London

*"Lucy learnt to ring in Sussex as a teenager, had a long gap and returned to ringing ten years ago at Kilburn in London. She rings at a variety of London towers, is District Secretary for Middlesex N&E and joins Roving Ringers cycling tours each summer.*

*She is also a volunteer member of the Recruitment and Development Central Council (CCCB) workgroup to look at how we can support ringers to take on leadership responsibilities with confidence and therefore keep creating opportunities for ringers in their tower and beyond."*

Bell ringers enjoy ringing at their local tower, and being part of a local band, but many also love the social dimension that ringing gives us - meeting new people when visiting a friend for the weekend, or taking a holiday in another part of the country (or world). Summer, in particular, is a popular time for outings, where the band spends a day visiting towers to try the difference between one set of bells and another and see new places.

District or branch practices, training events and outings - are all organised to bring people together from across a wider area with a like purpose in mind. Associations and Guilds have Ringing Masters, Training Officers and Branch Secretaries (or equivalent roles) to ensure that ringers can participate in local activities, designed to suit their stage of ringing and their interests on a regular basis.

Do you know someone who has a role in your local Association?

Are you aware of the calendar of available training, practices and meetings or outings which you could join? It's a great way of getting to know other ringers and feeling part of the ringing community.

If you have not yet joined in with district or branch activities, ask around about what is available or look online, as this can be a great source of extra rope time, supported by a wide range of local ringers.

If you are a regular at these events, have you considered taking a role in the organisation of next year's activities?

Most Associations and their branches have an annual meeting in the winter or spring to make decisions about what could be offered and to elect the officers who will make it all happen. New members with energy and a fresh pair of eyes are welcomed and will usually find that there is a lot of support from the membership.

In my district, a team of 11 volunteers organises and leads the district events for 270 members across 30 towers and we have seven events each month. In your area it may be a smaller team, where an offer to help may be even more appreciated!



*St Nicholas Church, Brighton*

As an example, Janet Betham organised the Middlesex North and East outing to Brighton in June as part of being an Assistant District Secretary.

Thirty people came for all or part of the day and enjoyed being on the coast, ringing some different bells and of course the sociability of lunch and breaks throughout the day.

Janet said, "It has been enjoyable planning new towers to visit, keeping the whole of London and outskirts in mind, including new learners' trips, summer outings, Christmas ringing and New Year socials.

It can seem daunting at first getting through to tower contacts, but you soon learn the short cuts and manage to fix up a day's ringing with travelling in between and a pub lunch.

The last trip I organised was to Brighton with three very different towers, but the group coped brilliantly, including some learners.

Over in Essex, Sarah Scannell rings at Goldhanger St Peter. She volunteered to be a District Training Officer and organises a simulator working group to ensure ringers are benefiting from best practice in silent practices and training.

Sarah is willing to take on this responsibility because she believes in the value of community and the preservation of cultural heritage. Her role allows her to make a meaningful contribution, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity.



*Sarah Scannell*

Her organisational efforts, such as the simulator working group, highlight her commitment to ensuring that bell ringing remains a vibrant and accessible practice.



*"If you think you could offer something, it's easy to contact the District Secretary or Ringing Master to find out more by checking out the website of your Guild or Association - they are all ringers just like you so would be delighted to hear from you!"*



# Judging My First Striking Competition

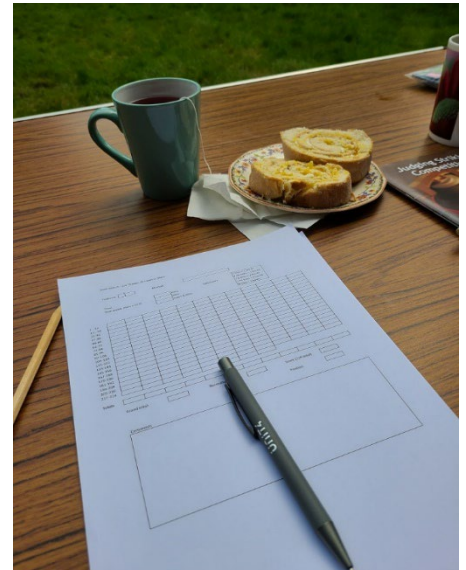
Laura Parker, Sheringham, Norfolk

Now that sounds scary!! But, like everything in bell ringing, when offered the chance to judge The Suffolk Guild's six and eight bell striking competitions alongside an experienced ringer, I thought - why not?!

I got a message from Sally Brown, a very experienced Leicestershire ringer who I had met (through bell ringing of course), asking if I would like to sit alongside her as assistant judge. She told me she liked to have someone who hadn't had the chance before to have the opportunity to see what's involved and learn some skills. My first response was...

" I wouldn't know what to do! I have only been ringing for a little over two years".

Sally reassured me and sent me details of a book that's available from the Central Council, called *Judging Striking Competitions* by Simon Linford. Great reading, not just for judges but it also gives ringers a good insight into what judges are listening for and how they go about scoring.



*Tea, snacks, pen, paper - all ready to go!*

(Click this link to browse the Central Council shop [CCCBR Shop](#) )



*Laura (right) with fellow judge Sally Brown, and an invaluable book!*

So, on the 18th of May 2024 we met at St Ethelbert's, Falkenham in south east Suffolk for the six-bell striking competition and were shown to judges' area, which was amazing to say the least. We needed, obviously, to be close to the tower outside to hear the bells so we had a gazebo in the churchyard, set up with all the essentials - snacks and drinks included! Sally gave me a quick run through of what we needed to do, what to listen for and how to mark the scores.

First team up and I was feeling slightly apprehensive but focused. I marked away on my pre-printed grid. On with the next team, then the next and before I knew it, we were done. The time flew by, and when we compared our score sheets it seemed I was doing OK. We deliberated, compared notes and came to our conclusions, writing our comments on each team's ringing.

Then it was time to move on for a spot of lunch in a hall nearby and to deliver the first set of results. It was great to do this with additional comments and, of course a great feeling for all to hand out certificates and the all-important trophy. I think everyone was pleased with our conclusions.

We then moved onto St John the Baptist Church in Felixstowe, just a few miles away, for the eight-bell competition.

Off we went to another beautiful set-up in the garden at the back of the church with our refreshments bag in tow, as well as our grids and pens! We were lucky to be blessed with a beautiful sunny day.

I thought listening to six bells was full-on concentration, but this was mega. Team after team rang beautifully. I had time to have a quick tower grab for me then onto the results.

So how was my first experience of being an assistant judge? I would say, a bit like bell ringing itself, it's not at all easy! I felt a great sense of responsibility as these were all ringers who were ringing their best and deserved to be well judged. I certainly felt the pressure but with the encouragement of Sally and as the day wore on, I relaxed into it. It really wasn't as scary as I had imagined.

I think if you're ever asked, then do it - but alongside someone who has experience of judging. Read up and ask others for advice. I am so pleased that after my initial hesitation I did it. It was a fantastic experience, meeting some great fellow ringers, and seeing the delight on the faces of the teams as we gave the results. Bell ringing can be so inclusive no matter what your role, from ringing, steeple keeping, tower captain or judging a competition - just make the most of opportunities which come your way.

The day finished with Sally and I being given a goody bag and applause. All in all, a very good day. Oh, not forgetting two tower grabs for me. Everyone's a winner.



*All done! Sally signing the certificates*

## 50/50 Club Draw News

Gill Hughes, Belper

The 50/50 Club supports the Association of Ringing Teachers in delivering training for teachers and ringers. It is a simple way of supporting the work of ART as well as having the chance to win a cash prize. All you have to do is join, pay the subscription of £12 per year (can also be £3 per quarter or £1 monthly) and your membership number will be entered into a quarterly draw. Over the year, half the money received goes to ART... and half is shared out in prizes by a draw of member numbers.

Everyone with a SmART Ringer username login can join the 50/50 Club – that's all Learning the Ropes ringers and everyone who has attended an ART Day Course. So please do join, and encourage others involved at any level with ART and Learning the Ropes to join as well!

Full details on how to join are here: [Donate to ART - bellringing.org](https://www.bellringing.org/donate-to-art)

Why not get your whole band to join?

Prize winners were:

- June draw — Geoff Horritt, Robert Nichols and Ginette Pardoe
- September draw — Rebecca Odames, Martin Kirk and Ian Turner

# Tick My Box

Mary Leneis, Abingdon

To the consternation of my fellow learners, I recently finished Level 5 of the Learning the Ropes ART course. Consternation, because although several of them are at the same level or more advanced than me, most have lost their little blue LtR books and stopped collecting tick marks at some point. Some people don't have the same (some might say obsessive) need to finish what they start, and for them the LtR course was a good introduction, a stepping off point for the skills of bell ringing.

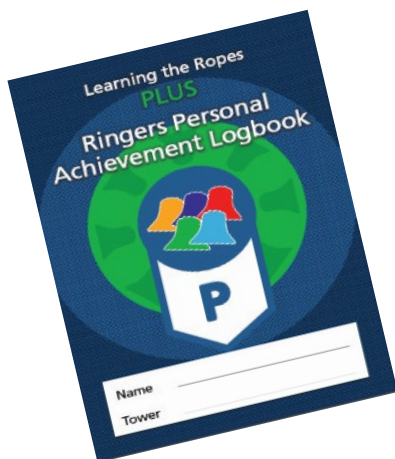
Some of us, on the other hand, had a sheaf of completed I-Spy books on our childhood bookshelves, and enjoy the opportunity to tick off completed items on to-do lists. A way to quantify progress, who could ask for anything more?

I began ringing in summer 2019, according to my logbook. It feels like a lifetime ago, doesn't it? Thanks to my home tower teachers Debbie Greenfield and Nick Clarke, and the Abingdon Saturday morning ringing school run by Susan Read, I was able to get through levels 1 and 2 by January 2020. And then...

After an unexpectedly extended pandemic break, I felt like I was starting all over again returning to the tower, but with help from the teachers and tower mates, I soon moved on to methods and quarter peals. Actually — I say soon, but the logbook never lies, and I did my first quarter peal in mid-2022, so clearly, I'm not as quick a learner as

I make myself out to be! For other learners moving on from call changes to Plain Hunt to Plain Bob, hang in there. It gets better! One day you realise you aren't having to consciously think about bell handling anymore, and another day you finally get ropesight... you will get there.

Then began the era of quarter peals. Tenor! Treble! Inside! Only ever one at a time, though, thanks. With a fantastic community of supportive ringers, I've had opportunities to ring all sorts of quarter peals in a variety of towers. Each one is incredibly educational and fun (and terrifying beforehand).



My final task to complete the Level 5 certificate was to call a 120 of a chosen doubles method. I have now blagged my way through calling Bob Doubles - not an intuitive skill, but like the others, I'm sure it will come with practice.

Having submitted my completed logbook to my tower captain who then had to do all the online admin, I broke the exciting news to him. THERE'S ANOTHER BOOK!

I am eagerly awaiting the arrival of my next book of skills to tick off - the Learning the Ropes PLUS green logbook! I'm licking my pencil in anticipation.

# Quiet Please!

Debbie Chart, Moseley, West Midlands

Bell ringers are known across the globe for their sociability – a friendly bunch who love to chat and catch up over a pint of real ale. Ringers are encouraged to visit new towers where they are guaranteed to receive the warmest of welcomes, often joining the local band for a drink or meal after practice night. Plenty of opportunity for free-flowing conversation!

But when it comes down to the serious act of bellringing, where does conversation fit in? Can people ring and chat at the same time? Indeed, should they chat and ring at the same time?



After all, this is an ancient tradition, and over the years an unwritten code of conduct or tower etiquette has developed. We all know that things went awry in the early 19th century when bellringers earned a bad reputation for riotous behaviour, but thanks to the passing of the Reform Bill in the 1830s, and the introduction of Tower Captains at each church, unruliness was eliminated and proper, reverent behaviour returned.



*Sssh!*

But what about the chit-chat? Debate on this topic often crops up in various groups on Facebook. Some like the relaxed nature of chatting while ringing, keeping it all friendly and fun, whilst others regard it as unnecessary, off-putting and even disrespectful. So, what's behind this?

Is it age related? Is it the youngsters who like to catch up on life's events when they meet in the tower? Maybe it varies, depending on the size of the tower? Are smaller towers more or less chatty? Perhaps it's the country folk who like to chat a bit more if practice night serves as a weekly or monthly catch up? Are people more inclined to toe the line in ground floor chambers as opposed to first floor ringing rooms where they are out of sight?

The various summer socials, tower grabs and ringing outings I have enjoyed this summer provided the perfect opportunity to ask a range of ringers for their views. Here's what they said:

- *"It's okay to crack a joke, but no full-blown conversations".*
- *"It depends on a lot of factors – who you're ringing with, what you are ringing and whether it's practice night or for a service or competition".*
- *"As young people, we do sometimes chat quite a lot as we like to have fun, but we are always reminded when we need to be quieter!"*
- *"As a wearer of hearing aids, chatter in the circle can make it very hard to hear the striking clearly, so I really need chatter-free ringing".*
- *"It's fine to relax into a session with some light banter, but it's very distracting if people talk when you're trying to ring methods".*
- *"Some people talk to themselves when they ring which I find quite off-putting."*
- *"When it's a performance, such as for a church service or wedding, it needs to be really polished, so conversation shouldn't be allowed."*

- *"Only talking relating to what is being rung should be allowed."*
- *"I would never ever chat when ringing at a new tower, as I would consider it very discourteous."*
- *"I'm still in the process of learning a lot of new stuff and can't concentrate unless it's really quiet and focused on the task in hand."*
- *"Absolutely go for it, everyone should be allowed to talk and ring at the same time."*
- *"Standing behind someone guiding them is okay, chit-chat and gossip needs to be far away, out of earshot of ringers."*

As always, we like to ask the views of our tower captains who are ultimately responsible for upholding the standards of their bands. They were united in their views — they told me...

It's about getting the balance right. We want ringers to enjoy their ringing, whether it be a practice, coaching or for a service but behaviours need to adapt according to the situation.

On practice nights we often have ringers with different levels of experience, so we aim to avoid conversation whilst ringing to give everyone their best chance of keeping up. Concentration is crucial. We make sure to allow time to chat between ringing and so discourage talking while others are ringing.

Coaching is a bit more relaxed, and of course, with the youngsters we need to keep it fun, so we are a bit more tolerant of chit-chat in these sessions.

It's not just about etiquette, though - we are teaching our new ringers to listen to the sound of their bell and develop a good set of listening skills. It's hard to do that when there is a lot of background noise.

There is also the serious side of competitions where we must be 100% focused so the idea of talking while ringing wouldn't even arise. We aim to instil high standards and to conform to the excellent etiquette set out by previous generations of bell ringers, after all, we never know when we may get visitors! As bell ringers, we are there to deliver a first-rate service to the community so wherever we are on display to the public, we show our best side. Who knows, there may be aspiring bell ringers lurking!

So the general consensus is to keep chatter to a minimum — but definitely make the most of the pub afterwards!

## 50 Ringing Things News

Rose Nightingale, ART Administrator

Delve into the wide world of bellringing with this set of challenges!

To find out more visit:

[50 Ringing Things - bellringing.org](http://50RingingThings-bellringing.org)

The following ringers received awards:

Louise Webber *Gold Plus*

Karen Tester *Gold*

Laura Kang Ward *Silver*

**Congratulations everyone!**



# Dorset Ringers remember Alan

Debbie Phipps, Lytchett Matravers



*Alan keeping the ART bookstall cheerful*

In July 2016 when we only had a band of five, Debbie Phipps and Annie Mitchener organised an Open Day to encourage more ringers to join.

Along with other members of the East Dorset Branch, Alan Bentley came all the way from Verwood to help. With the enthusiasm of these helpers we found we had several people who wanted to learn to ring but Annie and Debbie were not able to do this without support. With the encouragement of Alan, who acted as their mentor, they took the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) Bell Handling Module and felt more comfortable teaching these new learners how to handle a bell

One of the first to pass Level 1 was Cathy Neyland in January 2017, who learnt quickly and was soon encouraged by Alan to do the Module One course, which supported Debbie and Annie with their teaching. Alan continued to support our trainers and ringers for many years – travelling all the way over from Verwood every Friday afternoon and many other days when we had special practices. He did so much more as well - helping with grant applications for the Bell Restoration project in 2019, and setting up a simulator, and then with helping with the simulator sessions for our ringers. I remember trying out 'I'm sorry I haven't a clue' which was an exercise made up by Alan himself. He also helped Cathy set up the cameras in the belfry which were linked to the monitor on the ground floor in the church to enable people to see what was going on 'upstairs'. He supported our Open Days, gave handbell demonstrations and helped out when the Cubs came for a session. He rang with our ringers when they had a Bob Doubles challenge and many of our ringers remember his gentle support and quiet encouragement when he would stand behind a ringer trying something new. When we were ready, he encouraged us to go for quarter peals and joined us in many of these. During the pandemic, Alan and Debbie helped ART with the planning of the new '50 Ringing Things for Teams' and though many of our band have done the individual one we now feel we would like to attempt the Teams version with some of our new ringers.

Sadly Alan didn't get the opportunity to ring a peal on the restored bells, but we thank the band who rang the peal on 19 August 2024, which was dedicated to Alan. We have a mixed ability band but with friends we did manage an attempted quarter peal with five Lytchett ringers and a good supporter Angie Jasper to call it for us. The rest of our band all took part in ringing Mexican Wave in memory and with thanks to Alan. When some of our past ringers heard of his sad passing, they wanted to come and ring for him too.

So on Friday 16 August we had three ringers who have left the band for various reasons and one who has not rung for a while. All of them have fond memories of the gentle support Alan gave them and the huge support he gave to our trainers and learners. Everyone got an opportunity to ring a bell in his memory.

His name will live on, on the plaques on our wall, in the work we see in the tower and always with affection in all our hearts.

# Best in Show

Nikki Thomas, Norwich

I received an email through the church office at St Peter Mancroft asking for nominations from our Young Ringers' Team for 'Young Achievers' to be recognised at the Royal Norfolk Show.



*James and Ellie with their rosettes*

Ellie and James have both been enthusiastic about their ringing from the day they started, keen to learn and make progress but also keen to share their enthusiasm with their school friends and gradually introduce them to ringing.

The result is we have several new ringers who are close friends of both Ellie and James from their respective schools.

They were subsequently invited to take part in the 'Young Diamonds Tribute', organised in partnership with the Norfolk Lieutenancy and the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association (RNAA) at the Royal Norfolk Show this summer.

The aim of the Tribute is to highlight the many individual and collective achievements of young people - whether they are a young carer, have achieved something at the highest level or have added value to their community. As part of the Tribute, they took part in a parade in the Grand Ring where they were addressed by HM Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk, the Lady Dannatt MBE.

Here is Ellie's account of this exciting day...

*"On the 27th of June, James and I attended the second day of the Royal Norfolk Show to receive our Young Diamond Award. These awards were given out to young people to acknowledge their contribution to their communities, their leadership skills and their commitment to their hobbies and skills.*

*We processed in the Grand Ring with lots of other young people who were there with Scout groups, charities, orchestras and almost anything else imaginable. There was even a full-sized marching band playing! We were then addressed and greeted by the Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk and The Duke of Edinburgh. Every young person in the tribute was awarded a rosette which is proudly displayed in the cabinet at home! It was an amazing experience which I'm sure I won't forget for a very long time".*

# Wordsearch Challenge Solution

Rose Nightingale and De Tremain, ART Admin Team

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