



Editor's Foreword – *Andy Clark*

Thank you for the contributions to this fourth edition of the quarterly branch newsletter and the first of 2023. As ever, quite a bit has been happening in the branch so there is plenty to read.

The table below shows the upcoming events for the current quarter (April to June). Please keep checking the branch website, and look out for emails from Barbara, in case of any changes to these dates or times.

Finally, a new idea for this edition. On the back page, we now have a 'Branch Notices' section. This is really intended for smallish items or announcements that don't necessarily warrant a fuller article. Just the one notice to kick us off this time, from Cara, but feel free to contribute to that bit going forward.

Date	Location	Time	Notes
Saturday 6 th May	All Towers	-	Ringling for King Charles III Coronation
Tuesday 16 th May	Painswick	19:30-21:00	Joint 12-bell Practice
Saturday 10 th June	Cheltenham Minster	10:00-12:00	Branch Core 7 Surprise Major Practice (Special Method – Ealing Surprise Major)

A Peal on the Bicycle Ring – *Andy Clark*

On a drizzly Saturday 14th January, a group of six mini-ringers gathered for a peal on the 'Bicycle Ring' (a mini ring for those unfamiliar), in Reg and Isabel Hitchings' garden on Alma Road, Cheltenham. The story started nearly a year earlier however, when a largely similar group met on 5th February 2022 to attempt the first peal on the bells. Sadly, on that day in February, it was not meant to be, and perhaps it was a combination of nerves, unfamiliarity with the bobs in Kent / Oxford, and the cold weather, that meant the peal never really got going and instead the band used the time to practice some of the methods.

Fast forward, back to January 2023, and a second attempt was made. Pleasingly, this time, a peal was scored, with seven different extents being rung – one each of Kent Treble Bob, Norwich Surprise, Bourne Surprise, Cambridge Surprise, Double Oxford Bob, St Clement's College Bob and Plain, in that order. It was a nice piece of ringing, with few method errors, and generally clean transitions between the methods. Thanks to Reg for conducting diligently, as ever. The peal was completed in 1 hour and 49 minutes, which to a tower bell ringer, will sound like a very short time for a peal, but given the speed at which the bells are rung in a mini-ring, I was still just as mentally tired at the end as I would have been on a tower bell equivalent, if not more so!

Onto the footnotes for the first peal. First and foremost, this was the first peal for the bells. It was also a first mini-ring peal for five of the band, with Reg having previously rung one at The Bellflowering when they were in Tewkesbury. Last but not least, it was a birthday performance for Harry, who celebrated his 25th birthday on the day. One more number to throw in at this point – from the Mini-Ring's construction back in 2011, until the time of the peal, a total of 356 quarter peals have been rung, which is quite an achievement.



Talk is already turning to what next for the band. Perhaps another peal of minor methods (perhaps some of the Double Oxford based methods that Reg's band have been working their way through?), or we could expand onto all eight bells. Watch this space for further developments! Reg is always keen to attract new recruits to the mini-ring, so please contact him direct if you would like to be involved in any of the ringing and you will be made very welcome.

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

The Bicycle Ring

Saturday, 14 January 2023 in 1h 49 (1lb 7oz in C)

5040 Minor (7m)

1 extent each Kent Treble Bob, Norwich Surprise, Bourne Surprise, Cambridge Surprise, Double Oxford Bob, St Clement's College Bob and Plain Bob

1 Michael P Hartley

2 Andrew D Clark

3 Stuart E Tomlinson

4 Henry J Stephenson

5 Barbara Pettit

6 Reg C Hitchings (C)

1st Peal on the Bells

1st Mini-ring peal by all except 6

25th Birthday compliments to Harry (Henry J) Stephenson

The band is pictured below, in order of bells rung (l-r: Mike, Andy, Stuart, Harry, Barbara, Reg)





256 Variations – *Reg Hitchings*

Those of us who scan Bellboard regularly, occasionally find some very interesting footnotes and in 2017 I noticed a quarter rung in Somerset which included the footnote 'completes all 196 variations of Double Oxford Bob Minor'.

Having a number of mini-rings available and a band that was happy with Plain Minor, but perhaps not Treble Bob, Delight or Surprise, allowed me to start on the process of completing the same number. Just to be specific the 196 are symmetrical versions with 12 at the lead-end and 56 at the half-lead. I then discovered that a change in the rules by the Central Council of Church Bell-ringers allowed more blows in one place than had previously been allowed. This meant that in order to be symmetrical, Plain Minor allows five blows in one place.

So off we went, initially ringing those that are probably recognisable to many ringers - Double Oxford, Thelwall, Pinehurst, Corse and Kemerton. Obviously when we got to the 60 new possibilities lots had never been rung (and may never be again!) and we had to start finding new names. The first ones were a little haphazard – 'Miserable Thursday Afternoon Bob Minor' comes particularly to mind, but then we started themes and there are a lot of new methods named after villages and hamlets in the Golden Valley, Herefordshire and more recently local (to Cheltenham) villages and hamlets, including Stanley Portlarge Bob Minor, Elmstone Hardwicke Place Minor etc. The project (for me) was completed with Double Concrete Block Place Minor on Monday 23rd January 2023 and I wonder if any of the others might attempt to complete? I do need eight more where I rang the treble and 30 more which I did not conduct, so we have a few more to ring.

With special thanks to Isabel (232), Ben Gooch (186), Barbara Pettit (183) and Stuart Tomlinson (120) for their help and support.

The rest of the regular band wants to know what project comes next? I can assure them that it won't be asymmetrical variations (some of which we have rung) – someone calculated that, at the current rate, it would take us 220 years to complete those!

Branch Feedback – *Stuart Tomlinson*

Thank you very much to everyone who responded to the Branch Survey at the start of the year. We had a total of 20 replies.

Some of the feedback has prompted us to consider supporting a couple of towers with a few experienced ringers helping out once a month – there will be an article on this topic in the next newsletter so please look out for this.

We also received lots of positive feedback on Cara's targeted sessions, so thanks to Cara for keeping these going (and see the article later in this newsletter).

We received an interesting idea about having a further striking competition which we will raise at the AGM in November, with a view to initiating this next year. Finally, we may look to reduce the number of regular branch practices in 2024.



Colesbourne Snowdrop Ringing – *Simon Dann*

Colesbourne Park has a nationally renowned collection of snowdrops built up over generations by the Elwes family. The gardens are opened to the public on weekend afternoons during the peak flowering season around February, and there is a long-standing tradition of ringing the bells of the estate church on those days as an added attraction for the visitors, and of the G&B being one of the charities supported by the open days.

The ground floor rope circle means the visitors can see the bellringers in action which adds to their interest, and a large appreciative audience often builds up in the church. Bands from the Cheltenham and Cirencester Branches and further afield helped out this year, including a very well-attended Cheltenham Branch practice on 18th February. The bells are a 5cwt five rehung in a modern frame in 2001, so are easy to ring. If your tower would like to help continue this unusual tradition next year by taking one of the sessions for a quarter peal or general ringing, please get in touch with Simon and Angela Dann who will be happy to facilitate your visit.

The photographs below were taken during the Cheltenham branch visit on 18th February.





Spring Training Day – *Simon Ridley*

The last 10 years have seen huge developments within the field of recruitment and retention in ringing, mostly through the ART scheme that many ringers will have heard of. This scheme uses techniques for teaching drawn from diverse fields such as sports psychology, psychotherapy and modern teaching techniques. It aims to promote a broad skill base and understanding alongside a structured and professionally delivered teaching program, bringing the standard of teaching in line with that you could expect from an amateur sports club or music center. Results have proven it to be effective not only in equipping pupils but also teaching and supporting new and existing teachers.

In 2019, Covid put a stop to all training events and by 2022 it was clear that many teachers within the G&B had been lost with some towers struggling to maintain bands. It was decided to reboot the Spring Training Day adopting some of the approaches from ART combined with the new technology developed during Covid.

This year the old theory sessions were replaced by two online sessions entitled “Listen to It”, an interactive course covering the whys and wherefores of accurate striking, and “A beginner’s guide to methods”, covering how to accurately ring methods, and understand the construction behind them. These were delivered by David Bagley of Tewkesbury and Andrew Brown of St Mark’s Cheltenham and were available to all students of whatever level of experience. The practical day then consisted of intensive courses at six towers, located as near as possible to students’ homes, rather than being grouped by method.

The day has been met with largely positive feedback from pupils and discussions are now ongoing about how such training could be rolled out in smaller bite-sized chunks with specific aims and ongoing mentoring. Future topics include raising and lowering in peal, tower leadership and training the trainers. Next year we are looking at expanding our topic range so if you have any suggestions or ideas please get in touch with Roger Haynes (G&B Chairman – details via the G&B website).

Workshops – *Cara Capewell*

In January we launched into the Plain Hunt sessions. This was the most ambitious series yet with eight consecutive Saturday mornings of training sessions, with two or three students in each working on Plain Hunt (mostly trebling to doubles) and a couple more working on handling and rounds.

I wasn't sure if the branch could sustain a session every week for that long. At first it seemed like an impossible jigsaw puzzle, but quite soon the towers, students, leads and helpers all lined up pretty well, with only the final Saturday at Woolstone being in doubt, and even that turned out fine in the end thanks to more helpers hearing the increasingly desperate pleas!

Overall, we had about 18 students, seven different leads and 25 different helpers. Thank you all so much. These practices can make a real difference, so I'd like to carry on with them regularly. At the moment, I am still full of enthusiasm for it, but in case that runs out or I get run over by a bus, we have created a Training Officer post in the branch, which I am happy to have first go at 😊

Something I would like to have is a spreadsheet of everybody in the branch, detailing training requests and helper ability, to help with organisation and making sure everyone is well served by branch training. This would be subject to GDPR, so we would need buy in from everyone in it - I will send an email out at



some point.

Going forwards, my thought is to have more regular towers to take the booking stress away. So far we are looking to concentrate on the Minster, Woolstone, Didbrook and Badgeworth, and I was going to see if we can sustain a practice every other month at each.

I'm particularly keen to run a few Listening, Striking and Hearing Your Bell sessions, which would be for anyone who struggles a bit with that (but can already handle a bell well in rounds without having to think about it). But if anyone has other ideas, please shout. If you were working on a particular thing at the Spring Training Day (see Simon's earlier article) and want a bit more of it for example. Do let me know! Please contact: deputyringingmaster@cheltenhambranch.org.uk

National 12-bell eliminator – *Simon Ridley*

The national 12 bell competition has been attracting some of the best 12-bell ringing since 1975 when the first ever competition was held at St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol. The competition is open to any centre where 12-bell ringing is regularly practiced and consists of three eliminator competitions in March with the top three teams from each going through to a final in June. The set test piece for the contest is usually either Stedman Cinques or Surprise Maximus and since its inauguration, the competition has succeeded in setting and raising a very high standard of 12-bell ringing.

Cheltenham has been lucky enough to host eliminator competitions in 1986 and 2008 but has never entered a band. The advent of the competition coming to the new ring of 12 at the Minster seemed a good time to finally achieve this goal and so in early 2021, regular advanced 12-bell practices were initiated to begin to put together a team to ring for the first time.

Working towards the competition was intense and hard. Not only did we need to master the test piece (half a course of Cambridge Maximus), but we also needed to learn to ring consistently together as a team and to a standard that could hold our own with some of the best bands in the country. Pressure was raised slightly when a month before the competition, we found we were drawn to compete against some tough competition including Exeter and Birmingham, both previous national final winners. Much use was made of the newly installed 'Hawkear' system that provides objective data about the performance of the band and individual ringers, enabling people to see exactly how to fine tune their ringing. The judges in the competition also use this system to aid judging so its use in practice was invaluable.

Competition day saw us drawn to ring second, and so at midday, 12 nervous ringers ascended the tower and, having had a short practice, rang a superb performance of Cambridge Maximus, marred only for the outside listeners by a huge downpour! Having then enjoyed some excellent ringing from some alarmingly good teams, and an enjoyable lunch, we reassembled in the church at 16:00 for the results.

We were not disappointed and are still delighted with the outcome, which saw us come joint fourth out of seven teams, an outstanding outcome for a first-time entry. Overleaf is a photo of the team taken after ringing. (l-r: Jeremy Alford (11) Cath Jack (2) Hilda Ridley (5) Becca Meyer (8) Andrew Brown (9) Sandra Alford (3) Richard Knight (7) Cara Davies (4) Mike Seagrave (10) Liz Coke (1) Simon Ridley (12) Mike Hartley (6)) Special mention must also be made to Quentin Jackson and Hannah Guggaria who, as reserves, took part in all the practices but did not ring on the day – thank you. Also to Sandra Alford for her skills of organisation, Jeremy Alford for his detailed Hawkear analysis and Cara Davies for her Hawkear expertise.



So where now? The band's next outing will be at the Southwest regional 12 bell competition on the 14th October at Trowbridge and then the eliminator next year... wherever they will be! The actual practicing team is bigger than just the 12-bell squad and we are always on the lookout for new ringers. Entry level is being able to confidently and accurately ring a touch of Stedman cinsques and be willing to receive direct feedback about your ringing. If you are interested or would like to know more about the Hawkear system (also being installed in St Mark's) please get in touch. Further information about the 12 bell competitions can be found at:

<http://www.12bell.org.uk/>

<http://southwest12bell.org.uk/>



.....and a View from the Cake Stall – Liz Coke

In June 2022 I was asked if the Cheltenham Minster ringers would host an eliminator for the national 12 bell competition and I said yes. There are three eliminator contests held on the same day and the other two were at Hursley in Hampshire and Melbourne in Derbyshire.

We decided to hold the whole event in the Minster as there is a sink and kitchen area and there are also toilets in the church. As Cheltenham is a town filled with cafes and restaurants and as we don't have any cooking facilities in the church, we decided that we would just provide coffee / tea and cakes all day.

The secretary to the 12-bell committee is Liz Evans, Hugh's daughter. She kept me up to date with what had to happen and when. I had to do an information sheet to go on the competition website with information for everyone coming to Cheltenham for the day. I also provided a map of the town centre



with the names of cafes. The teams came from Birmingham, Bristol, Chilcompton, Exeter, Southwark and Towcester and, of course, Cheltenham.

We needed to find a space for the judges where they would not be disturbed. The ideal solution was to use the vestry, which also has a private toilet. They had their own steward who supplied teas, coffees and sandwiches as needed. We had a visit from one of the judging team at the end of February to check out the microphone above the bells and do some recording for the 'Strikeometer / Hawkear' system, which is a feed of the sound of the bells that is used to help the judging.

Liz then asked me to ask for permission for each team to come for a practice on the bells. This meant that the bells rang every Saturday morning or Sunday afternoon for a month – the Cheltenham band had two practices specifically for the competition.

In the middle of February, I had a meeting with the vicar, and she wanted to get the 'church family' involved in the refreshments for the day. She would organise the rota (with names from the ringers as well) and the congregation would bake the cakes.

On 1st March there was sad news from the church that the vicar was seriously ill in hospital in Newcastle. This meant that the whole of the refreshments would be the responsibility of the ringers.

On 13th March Barbara Pettit circulated an email to the Branch asking for volunteers to make cakes and be on the rota. This was less than two weeks before the contest and I was worried that no-one would answer the call. I was overwhelmed with the offers of cakes and biscuits and volunteers that flowed in immediately after the email went out. There were offers of gluten free items, biscuits and a fantastic array of cakes and I have over 30 names on my list of replies.

On Friday 24th March my trusty team of Minster helpers assembled. Reg and his little team had to stop the church clock chiming so that it did not interfere with the judging, hide one clock, cover another so that the teams couldn't see them (the techie judge brought with him an 'atomic clock' for the ringing chamber and one for the judges) and hoovered, tidied up and swept the path to the tower door. In the church we had to assemble tables, mark up the flipcharts for the order of ringing after the draw and the results at the end, set up the television screen that shows the bells, put up the price list and arrange the vestry for the judges.

Saturday 25th was a lovely bright day (with a few showers) and we opened up at 09:00 and cakes started to appear! By 10:30 the church was filling up and coffees were being served and cakes were starting to be eaten. The draw took place at 11:00 and our interim vicar, who was a fantastic help, welcomed the contestants with a prayer then drew the names of the towers out of a hat, which showed which order they would ring.

It then went fairly quiet for a few hours. Ringers wandered in and out and stood outside listening to the ringing – particularly the Birmingham band who were expected to win.

The ringing finished at 15:00 and results expected after 16:00. At that point it got busy again on the tea stall. The judges appeared at 16:15 and one gave a description of each piece of ringing, and the other judge then gave the results. As expected Birmingham won and Exeter and Bristol also qualified for the final.



Then the clearing up began and tables and mugs were carried back to St Matthew's across the road and all the tea towels and plates and pie slices and cake tins were collected by their owners and the money was counted. We were delighted to be able to donate just under £350 to the Friends of the Minster to be spent on the Prayer Chapel, which needs some work.

Exhausted but happy we finished just after 17:00. I would particularly like to thank Cath & Anson Jack, Reg & Isabel Hitchings, Michael Bishop, Mike Hartley, Andra Knight, Mark Davies and Steve & Gail Jones plus all the other people who donated cakes and helped on the rota. Thanks must also go to Rachel Hargeaves in the church office and Rev Louise Brown who took a day of bell ringers in her stride.

l-r: Barbara Pettit, Hugh Evans, Hannah Guggaria, Ray Talbot, Andra Knight, Isabel Hitchings, Tony Foster, Reg Hitchings





Branch Notices – All

Practice Nights

There is a new feature on the Branch website which allows you to see the branch's practice nights at a glance.

This is at:

<http://www.cheltenhambranch.org.uk/towers.php#practice>

As you can see, we cover all days but are most heavily loaded on Wednesdays!

The Sunday section allows you to see whether you would be able to join more than one Sunday service ring, if you so wished.

Please can everyone check their tower's days / times to ensure the information is up-to-date, and if you change those slots please let the webmaster (Cara) know.