



Editor's Foreword – Andy Clark

Here we are again, this time for the first edition of 2024. Welcome back!

Quite a bit to report on this time, so I'll hope you'll find something of interest here. Also, great to see some new contributors, including some who are very new to ringing.

I've kept the usual update of the table below, showing events for Q2 2024. The usual caveat still applies – so please keep checking the branch website in case of any short-term changes. This is intended to give you a good flavour though of what's going on in the branch.

Happy reading and see you again next quarter!

| Date | Location | Time | Notes |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|--|
| Thursday 2 nd May | Cheltenham Minster | 19:30-21:00 | 12-bell Practice (first Thursday of each month) |
| Saturday 18 th May | Elkstone | TBC | Branch Striking Competition for the Banner and Cleeve Trophies |
| Thursday 6 th June | Cheltenham Minster | 19:30-21:00 | 12-bell Practice (first Thursday of each month) |
| Wednesday 19 th June | Alderton | 19:30-21:00 | Branch 6-bell Practice |

A Peal at Alma Road – Reg Hitchings

Having scored our first peal (7-minor) last year we decided to try and get enough for an 8-bell peal early this year. After a bit of arm twisting a band was assembled for an attempt on Saturday 3rd February and 5040 Plain Bob Major was duly completed in 1hr and 58 mins. It was Alison Lee's, John Gibson's and Tony Natt's first attempt on a mini-ring and only Alison's 2nd peal (the previous was at Evesham Bell tower) and the first peal for seven years for Tony (who was the hardest to convince) – who has since said that he enjoyed it a lot more than he expected.

Thanks to all who took part. Let's see what we can do next?

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

The Bicycle Ring
Saturday, 3 February 2024 in 1h 58 (1lb 7oz)
5040 Plain Bob Major

- 1 Alison M Lee
- 2 E John Gibson
- 3 Michael P Hartley
- 4 Stuart E Tomlinson
- 5 Barbara Pettit
- 6 Tony R Natt
- 7 Reg C Hitchings (C)
- 8 Henry J Stephenson

1st on a mini-ring 1, 2 & 6



The Spring Training Day – *Christine Burnett*

Having started ringing at St Peters in Winchcombe at the end of last summer I'm acutely aware that I need as much practice as I can get to stand any chance of becoming proficient.

In the early days I was lucky to have the undivided attention of seasoned ringer Edward Kain on a tied bell when we could squeeze in a training session between our tower practice nights and Sunday service ringing.

Ringing alone is one thing but trying to make sweet music with the rest of the band is quite another and I'm in awe of the patience shown by seasoned rothers at my repeated 'beginner' errors.

As well as practices at our home tower I've been lucky to be able to join a few of the Branch training sessions including the Spring Training in March at North Nibley which focused on improving handling and striking. Both body and mind were exercised as there was plenty of time to ring alongside the experienced band of helpers as well as listening to tutor Andrew Ward on hints and advice.

The much-appreciated coffee break gave the chance to chat amongst fellow learners and the helpers and pick up more helpful advice.

I came away from the session having had old lessons reinforced, some new hints to take on board and a few handouts to revise at home to jog my memory of the well-spent morning.

There is so much to be gained by taking part in training at an 'away' tower; seeing the variation in ringing chambers / floors, ringing unfamiliar bells and meeting like-minded people and I'm looking forward to my next expedition!

Thanks to all of those involved in the organisation and Andrew and his helpers on the day.

A Milestone for Tony Foster

On 29th February 1964 Tony Foster rang his first peal. This is the entry in the Ringing World (196, dated 20th March 1964):

BIRKENHEAD, CHESHIRE,
THE CHESTER DIOCESAN GUILD.
On Sat., Feb. 29, 1964, in 2 Hours and 38 Minutes,
AT THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY,
A PEAL OF 5040 TREBLE BOB MINOR
Being three extents of Oxford and four of Kent.
Tenor 11 cwl 9 lb. in G.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>* ANTHONY P. FOSTER .. <i>Treble</i></p> <p>† MICHAEL PILGRIM 2</p> <p>‡ V. DAVID JENNER 3</p> | <p>§ F. LESLIE COVENTRY .. 4</p> <p>ALEXANDER J. MARTIN .. 5</p> <p>BRIAN D. THRELFALL .. <i>Tenor</i></p> |
|---|--|

Conducted by ALEXANDER J. MARTIN.

* First peal attempt. † First of Minor. ‡ First of Minor 'inside.'
§ First of Treble Bob.



To celebrate the anniversary two quarters of Yorkshire Surprise Major were rung – 2nd March at The Minster and 3rd March at St Mark (see band photo below).

Tony said afterwards:

“I am so grateful to those who joined me in this celebration ring, and to all local ringers who have made me so welcome in the last two years after a 22-year break from ringing. You probably know I am really enjoying it and managed 50 quarters last year.”

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Minster Church of St Mary
Saturday, 2 March 2024 in 48m (21–2–1 in Eb)
1280 Yorkshire Surprise Major

- 1 Isabel Hitchings
- 2 Cara Capewell
- 3 Liz Coke
- 4 Reg Hitchings (C)
- 5 Cath Jack
- 6 Mike Hartley
- 7 Richard H Knight
- 8 Anthony P Foster

To congratulate Anthony (Tony) Foster celebrating 60 years since his first peal (29/2/1964).

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

St Mark
Sunday, 3 March 2024 in 48m (16–1–2 in F)
1344 Yorkshire Surprise Major

- 1 Mike Seagrave
- 2 Ray Talbot
- 3 Hilda Ridley
- 4 Hannah Guggiari
- 5 Mike Morton
- 6 Andrew V Brown
- 7 Anthony P Foster
- 8 Stuart Tomlinson (C)

To celebrate 60 years since Tony Foster’s first peal on 29 Feb 1964 at St Mary’s Birkenhead





Achievement of the Year 2024 – Submission by the Cheltenham Branch

For this year's Gloucester and Bristol Diocesan Association 'Achievement of the Year Competition', the theme was 'Anything that has happened in your branch which is worthy of recognition throughout the Association.' With the winner being..... the Cheltenham Branch! The full submission is below and a particular well done and thank you to Cara on all her work in getting this initiative up and running! All the entries can be seen at <https://www.bellsgandb.org.uk/achieve.shtml>

Not many good things came out of Covid but this could be one of them! There was genuine disappointment throughout the Cheltenham Branch when the Spring Training Day in 2021 was cancelled. Cara Davies, as deputy Ringing Master, then attended a G&B officers' meeting where there was a discussion about the benefit derived from training day(s) needing to be supplemented by further locally based training activities which build on those training days. Developments like this do not happen without effective planning. Enthused by the project's potential Cara set about creating a database of learners and more experienced ringers within the Branch. As a result the Cheltenham Branch now has a more specific and targeted approach to training. Cara is Branch Training Officer and in that capacity has a good understanding of general training needs.

The approach is as follows:

- Each session is designed to concentrate on specific issues for individuals
- Small numbers of students are invited and tutors / helpers are also hand-picked. Tutors / helpers are able to learn leadership skills for future use within their own towers. Learners are also assisted by hearing from more experienced ringers
- The desired mix is not less than 75% experienced ringers who either ring or offer support by standing by
- The process has improved collaboration between the various towers with the result that ringers are happier to attend other towers in the knowledge that they are welcome and be able to discuss their specific issues in a supportive environment

So far the programme has covered:

- Bell handling (including advanced handling, moving up / down the tail-end)
- Raising and lowering
- Listening and striking
- Basic methods
- Plain Hunt / treble bobbing
- Core 7

This year, 22 sessions have run, involving approximately 25 students and 30 helpers from across the Branch, in six different towers.

Anonymised testimonials:

"I attended workshops on bell handling and listening, hearing and striking. I found both useful, particularly the latter. Extra practices like these include interesting exercises, insights and challenges and are greatly appreciated."



"...just wanted to say how much I have improved because of Cara's help and support. The training she has offered has been targeted and relevant. Cara is a great role model for bell ringing and the encouragement she gives raises your confidence to the next level."

"I have attended a good few of Cara's training sessions. She has an informal approach, is calm, encouraging and supportive. My ringing has improved as a direct result."

"Cara's sessions have been brilliant. She spots a common need amongst branch learners and creates sessions - supported by excellent helpers and in a range of towers - to meet the need. Her style is calm, supportive and innovative - trying different approaches - and her sessions have been fun. We've made good steps forward - over and above regular practice nights when not as much time can be given to learners."

The prize for winning the competition is pictured below – the Bliss Trophy.





A Personal Milestone – *Sarah Collacott (nee Osband)*

Last year I was alerted to the fact that I had rung my first peal 50 years ago. To some people this is not major news but I have rung very few and this one was the last one on five bells in the tower. I learnt to ring about three years before and the tower fairly quickly moved into saving for a new treble. We contributed all our wedding money (which was quite hard for a teenager), collected old newspapers and the usual set of fund-raising activities. The gentleman standing next to me taught myself and all my three sisters to ring. Two of us are still ringing. Stan and I are the only two surviving ringers from the peal team. He is mid-nineties and still ringing although less often. There was only one ancient marble peal 'board' in the tower so I thought it important to commemorate such a significant one and particularly with the person who taught me to ring. I have rung at St Mary's, Prestbury ever since arriving in Cheltenham in October 1979.

I feel just as passionate about ringing today as I did all those years ago when I even did a project on it for my CSE Design. The cardboard model I made is still working and has been used to demonstrate bell ringing and the various creative artefacts I made to go with it are also still around so maybe another article sometime....





12-Bell Practices at Cheltenham Minster – *Liz Coke*

When the new bells of Cheltenham Minster arrived I decided it was time to start a monthly 12-bell practice. This always happens on the first Thursday of the month. Numbers have been steady, and we always ring some rounds and call changes on 12 and plain hunt on nine or 12.

We also usually ring Grandsire Cinques and Yorkshire Royal. We have been concentrating on London Royal over the last year and have rung it twice - once with help from visitors from the G&B, and in March we rang it with Cheltenham Branch members, and even had one person standing out. I am delighted that we have managed it and will keep it in the repertoire. We also rang Little Bob Maximus at the same practice.

Everyone is welcome at these practices and they are always advertised on our website, www.cheltminsterbells.org.uk. Please come along even if you haven't rung on 12 before.

National 12-Bell Striking Competition – *Andy Clark*

Continuing the theme of 12-bell ringing, and leading neatly on from Liz's article, the Cheltenham Branch again fielded a team for this year's National 12-Bell Striking Competition. In keeping with previous years, the competition sees three different eliminators (all held concurrently on Saturday 23rd March), with the top three teams from each progressing through to the final.

The Cheltenham team rang in the eliminator at Portsmouth Cathedral and finished a very respectable fifth out of nine teams. The test piece was 288 changes of Cambridge Surprise Maximus, with Andrew Mills and John Fisher judging.

The full results of the Portsmouth eliminator are in the table below. The top nine teams (three from each eliminator) were: Ancient Society of College Youths, Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Guildford, Melbourne, Portsmouth, St Paul's Cathedral and Society of Royal Cumberland Youths. The final will take place at Chilcompton on Saturday 15th June. The Birmingham team are traditionally the favourites, having won the competition every year since 2000 on all but five occasions. So it feels like theirs to lose, but who knows! For those who like stats, do visit the 12-bell website for more.

| Rank | Team | Rang | Speed | Mark |
|----------|------------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| 1 | Society of Royal Cumberland Youths | 5th | 3h31 | 89% |
| 2 | Melbourne | 7th | 3h24 | 86% |
| 3 | Portsmouth | 9th | 3h32 | 81% |
| 4 | Oxford | 2nd | 3h23 | 79% |
| 5 | Cheltenham | 6th | 3h20 | 75% |
| 6 | York | 3rd | 3h15 | 72% |
| 7 | Wimborne Minster | 8th | 3h15 | 69% |
| 8 | Ipswich | 1st | 3h27 | 67% |
| 9 | Hursley | 4th | 3h31 | 64% |



From the Eyes of the Learners – *Emma, Laura and Steve*

Let us introduce ourselves. We are a group of new ringers – Emma, Laura and Steve – and have all been ringing at St Mark’s Cheltenham for not far off a year.

Firstly, we would like to recognise the efforts of Simon and Becca, whose patience, along with that of the experienced ringers, has given us the confidence to learn and progress within a safe and friendly learning environment.

So, let’s have a look at how we all got here, and some of our experiences so far:

What attracted you to bellringing?

“Over the years, I have often thought about giving it a try, and finally took the plunge in response to the ‘Ring for the King’ campaign which took place last year.”

“Emma and I went to Colesbourne last year to see the snowdrops, and the branch were ringing for it. It was interesting to watch them, and I really fancied giving it a try. We made contact with Simon and the rest is history! We were due to ring at Colesbourne ourselves this year which would have felt like a very special achievement but unfortunately it was cancelled due to the weather.”

What has been the best bit?

“Really, the sense of achievement and progress each time we get to ring. Recently when visiting another tower’s practice with some of their newer learners we could really see how far we’ve come.”

“I’ve loved the challenge of learning a completely new skill. It’s also been a privilege being able to visit new places and go ‘behind the scenes’ in local churches that I’ve never been to before.”

What has surprised you most?

“The age range of our ringers. My best guess would be a range of approaching 60 years, maybe more. There are not many activities which can boast that!”

“Just how hard it is! I just don’t understand how people learn all the different methods, I’m sure I’ll never be able to do that!”

“I had vastly underestimated the time and practice it takes to learn the basics of ringing safely and independently! The generosity of time and support from Simon, Becca and the other ringers at our tower has been enormous. I was also surprised by how experienced and advanced the people that we ring with are, they make it look so easy! I later realised that most have been ringing from a very young age and often many generations before them have been ringers, it’s in their blood!”

What has been your biggest penny drop moment?

“That when you think you’ve got something mastered, you’d probably better think again!”

“An ‘instant win’ for me was tying a knot in my rope – it really helps my timing and stops me flapping rope in my face!”



What has been your funniest moment?

"I guess the looks shared between us when the experienced ringers start ringing methods, how on earth are we going to get remotely to that level."

"We get on well and always have a good laugh. The first time we heard someone randomly shouting 'Bob!' during ringing was quite funny, and still is to be honest!"

"I agree, 'Bob!' still tickles me too. A moment which I won't forget is recently we helped dismantle the bell fittings at Priors Norton ready for the bells to be removed for restoration. I knew it would be a mucky job, but I didn't realise quite how filthy we'd get. What an experience! It was fascinating to learn about how bells are hung, and all their fittings, and it was fun working together as a team to get the job done."

What's your next goal?

"Short-term is to introduce some consistency to ringing call changes, next learn how to plain hunt. My long-term ambitious goal is to ring a peal!"

"I'd like to keep improving with covering and leading. I'd also like to give plain hunt a whirl! I think a peal might be a bit beyond me though!"

Favourite place you've rung so far, and why?

"St Mary Magdalene – Twyning. This was our first foray into someone else's practice, so a little daunting. I was therefore happy that I think we didn't embarrass ourselves, and as an added bonus we got a really warm welcome from the home ringers."

"Didbrook because it was the first church I'd rung at apart from St Mark's. It's a beautiful church and I liked that the bells were on the ground floor, so we didn't have to climb up a terrifying tower! The bells were nice to ring, and it was the first time I felt that I wasn't completely hopeless at it!"

"I enjoyed ringing the bells at Churchdown because I grew up close by and could hear them from our childhood home. They are also on the ground floor, so no scary tower to climb here either!"

Thoughts from the teachers

It is really refreshing teaching a group of enthusiastic and hard-working learners. Whilst having a significant number learning at once can be both mentally and physically demanding, the camaraderie, friendship, and support that our learners provide to each other is great to watch and helps them all to help each other. We use the Association of Ringing Teachers' 'Learning the Ropes' scheme, which enables us to follow a sort of syllabus to build up the skills and knowledge in manageable steps. This ART scheme not only equips tutors with a range of techniques and exercises to guide pupils and teachers through the learning process, but also provides beginners with a clear guide to progress showing them how far they have come and what they will be doing next week, next month, next year. We thoroughly recommend the scheme as it provides a safe, enjoyable and structured way for pupils and teachers to work together effectively.

It has been immensely rewarding teaching at St Mark's recently, so to all of our learners, thank you for your ongoing hard work! The photo shows Emma, Steve and Laura (from left to right).



Branch Notices – All

Trip to the Lake District

The editing gremlins kicked for the last newsletter, so apologies for not crediting Chris Hickey for co-authoring the Lake District article with Stuart Tomlinson.

A freebie for someone – *Sarah Collacott*

Whilst clearing out the bottom of my wardrobe I found this sweatshirt. I imagine it dates from the 80's. It is in good condition and will no longer be worn in our household. The label says 40". It does not look over generous. Would anyone like to give it a new home? No money required.

