



## Editor's Foreword – Andy Clark

Welcome to the Q4 edition of the branch newsletter and a belated happy new year. 2024 eh!

I've done the usual update of the table below, showing the first few events for 2024, including the Association AGM in April. We had to reissue the last edition due to a gremlin in one of the times I'd quoted, so the usual caveat remains that it is worth also checking the branch website when you can.

Now this newsletter has been running for a couple of years, it feels like a good time to take stock of what is working and what isn't, so feel free to email me directly with any feedback you may have – good or bad. I am generally finding there is enough content to keep this going quarterly, with minimal chasing, which is great, although I am always keen to expand the pool of 'regulars'.

Thanks for all the contributions to this edition and I hope you enjoy reading it.

Date	Location	Time	Notes
Saturday 20 <sup>th</sup> January	Woolstone	10:30-12:00	Branch Training Session: Rounds and Call Changes. Please email if interested: <a href="mailto:deputyringingmaster@cheltenhambranch.org.uk">deputyringingmaster@cheltenhambranch.org.uk</a>
Wednesday 24 <sup>th</sup> January	Winchcombe	19:30-21:00	Branch Practice
Saturday 27 <sup>th</sup> January	Didbrook	10:00-12:30	Branch Training Session: Raising and Lowering Please email if interested: <a href="mailto:deputyringingmaster@cheltenhambranch.org.uk">deputyringingmaster@cheltenhambranch.org.uk</a>
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> February	Colesbourne	14:30 start	Ringling for the Snowdrop Festival
Saturday 9 <sup>th</sup> March	Various	All Day	Spring Training Day
Saturday 13 <sup>th</sup> April	Various	All Day	Association AGM, Croome Trophy Competition and Penn Trophy in the Stroud Branch

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## Branch AGM – Andy Clark

Please note that Barbara Pettit has circulated the full minutes of the meeting via email, so I won't replicate them here. By way of summary though, I've extracted some of the notes from the minutes.

The Annual General Meeting of the Cheltenham Branch of the Gloucester and Bristol Diocesan Association of Church Bell Ringers was held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2023 in St. Mary's Church, Childswickham. 17 members were present with ringing at 15:30 followed by a service taken by Revd Jo Williamson and then sandwiches, cake and tea (and a tub of chocolates which my daughter quickly spotted – this wasn't in the minutes by the way!).

Peter Aylot and Charles Milward, both of Charlton Kings, were proposed as new members by Hilda Ridley, seconded by Richard Knight and duly elected.



Pat Halls introduced a 'pot-luck' 6 bell striking competition which had been suggested to her by a learner back in her Derbyshire days. A ground floor, easy going ring and good weather are recommended. All turn up on the day and five ringers are picked out of the hat and assigned to the first of the pre-arranged leaders, and so on. Everyone rings and judges as well – good listening practice – with the team leaders giving the team's results. They gave medals on ribbons to the winning team. The meeting thought it a good idea and it should go onto the 2024 Programme.

There being no new nominations for branch officers, Ann Jessop proposed and Graham Lee seconded that Richard Knight as Chairman, Cara Capewell as Deputy Ringing Master / Training Officer, Harry Stephenson as Treasurer, Barbara Pettit as Secretary and John Irving as Management Committee Rep be re-elected en bloc and this was unanimous. Stuart Tomlinson has stepped down as Branch Ringing having started the role in 2014 (the branch offered their thanks for his hard work).

Finally, the theme for 2023's 'Achievement of the Year' is 'Anything that has happened in your Branch over the last year, being worthy of recognition by the whole Association'. Barbara suggested that Cara's training initiative be put forward by the Branch and was supported by all.

Some of the key branch dates for Q1, 2024, were included in the summary table at the start of this newsletter. Just into Q2 is the Gloucester & Bristol AGM in the Stroud Branch, with the AGM, Croome Trophy and Penn Trophy being held on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April. Please pop it into diaries.

## 256 Completed – Reg Hitchings

Last year I wrote a report about completing all 256 variations of Double Oxford Bob Minor which was a project that started in 2017 (I wasn't counting some early ventures). We only got to 256 when the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers changed the rules regarding how many blows could be in the same place. 256 is achieved by eight different front works, eight different back works and four different middle works. In my article I questioned what next – well firstly I hadn't rung all the 256 on an inside bell and secondly, I hadn't conducted all 256. Well, I can now report that as of 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2023 both targets have been completed! The table below (left column) was my first of Double Oxford as Conductor, with the right column showing the 256<sup>th</sup> Variation of Double Oxford (Abbeyfold Bob Minor) as conductor. It was nice that Isabel was in both.

<b>Weston under Penyard, Herefordshire</b> St Lawrence Saturday, 8 November 1986 in 38m (10–0–24 in G) 1260 Double Oxford Bob Minor  1 Andrew Wood 2 Frances Mulvey 3 Isabel Morris 4 Roman Sadowski 5 Michael Mulvey 6 Reg Hitchings (C)  Circled the tower 6. Birthday compliments to John Hitchings (7/11)	<b>Cheltenham, Gloucestershire</b> The Bicycle Ring Monday, 2 October 2023 in 27m (1lb 7oz) 1260 Abbeyfold Bob Minor  1 Pat Halls 2 Isabel Hitchings 3 Stuart Tomlinson 4 Barbara Pettit 5 Ben Gooch 6 Reg Hitchings (C)  With the band and friends' greatest relief Reg has now conducted all 256 symmetrical variations of Double Oxford. Now for something new!
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## **Leckhampton (and Friends) trip to the Lake District September 2023 – *Stuart Tomlinson***

This year we chose to visit the beautiful Lake District to enjoy the scenery and hospitality of the local ringers and their bells. Twenty of us, including two non-ringers, received a warm welcome everywhere.

We started our trip with ringing at Lancaster Priory and Morecambe on the way up and then headed on to Kendal where we had a good meal at Ye Olde Fleece Inn. We were glad that the threatened storm Agnes largely passed us by – the wind and rain were impressive, but not as bad as expected.

On Thursday we drove to Barrow-in-Furness where we enjoyed the 12cwt eight. These bells went well, and we managed a variety of methods from rounds and call changes to three leads of Bristol. Next was Dalton-in-Furness, where everyone had the opportunity to ring on this easy going and pleasant ten. Lunch at The Brown Cow Inn was more substantial than expected. We certainly eat well on our trips – most of us were also having a cooked breakfast and a pub dinner in the evening! After lunch, we rang the six at Ulverston, the eight at Flookburgh and the six at Cartmel Priory – what an amazing and atmospheric building and such an unusual ringing room. We are so fortunate to visit some incredible, historic buildings. We ended our day with an excellent meal at the Pheasant Inn in Allithwaite.

On Friday we moved on to the Central Lakes area. We started our day in Kendal at Holy Trinity. Again, easy going and pleasant to listen to and we managed everything from rounds and call changes up to a lead of spliced Yorkshire and Little Bob on the 23cwt ten. Next was the eight at Bowness-in-Windermere followed by lunch, with gorgeous views of the lake and the mountains.

Our next tower was the bright little eight at Hawkeshead – some chose to get there via the ferry crossing whilst others chose the drive up and around Ambleside – pretty much a dead heat! At Hawkeshead we admired the long lengths displayed on the peal boards. The bells ring beautifully, and are fast, so it is clearly a good place for such attempts. Next was the 7cwt six at Brathay where we rang Brathay Delight Minor. We finished the day on the 32cwt eight at Ambleside. These are a joy to ring, and to listen to. Special mention to Harry who rang the tenor for a half course of Yorkshire – they go wonderfully, but they are big bells (for us!). We finished the day with a lovely dinner at Zeffirellis vegetarian restaurant – some of us hadn't realised it was vegetarian until we tried (and failed) to find any meat / fish on the menu!

For our final full day, we started in the Northwest Lakes at Irton – a special place, well off the main road and surrounded by peaceful countryside with wonderful views towards Wasdale. We had a friendly welcome everywhere, but especially here, where drinks and snacks were provided by the local ringers. We found these bells the most challenging of the trip, but we managed to ring some reasonable triples and plain hunt on seven. The eight at Egremont are on plain bearings but were kindly oiled by the local ringer for our visit. They soon settled down and rang reasonably well. The 13cwt eight at St Bees were a joy to ring – another lovely building. Chips and sandwiches were enjoyed at the Manor Inn and then on to the lovely twelve at Whitehaven (yet another amazing building) and finally to Workington to the best facilities of the trip (we counted at least three toilets!), in the remodelled church following a devastating fire. Everyone was tired by then, so perhaps we didn't do justice to the very good bells, but we did enjoy ringing them.

On Sunday morning, most of us rang for service ringing at Cockermouth and / or Keswick. We had an amazing time and thanks to all the local people we met in pubs, restaurants and towers. A great place for an outing. Special thanks to Stuart, who did a heroic job planning and booking everything, both towers and pubs / restaurants. It all went like clockwork. Looking forward to next year's trip already!





Top: Stuart, Isabel, Barbara, Gilly, Harry, Chris, Keith, Steve, Reg, Mike, Jon, Bob, Pat at Whitehaven  
Bottom: The group ringing at Ambleside





## Hawkear – *Simon Ridley*

As some of you may be aware, St Mark's Cheltenham have recently installed something called "Hawkear" in the tower. But what is it, how does it work and why do we need it anyway?

### What?

Hawkear is a complex piece of computer software which can listen to recordings of ringing and analyse them, giving extremely detailed and objective feedback about any piece of ringing and individuals' performance within it. Originally developed to assist judges at the National 12 Bell competition, it is now available for general use in towers and has been installed at Cheltenham Minster and St Marks. The best part is that it is objective – this is not a judge's opinion, this is mathematical fact. It aims only to inform and not to offend!

The system consists of a microphone hung above the bells, feeding down into a laptop computer in the ringing area. As the bells are rung, the system records the ringing into sound files and analyses them for accuracy and style.

After the analysis, it produces a set of graphs and metrics which give a lot of detail about the ringing. Feedback can be given at different levels of complexity.

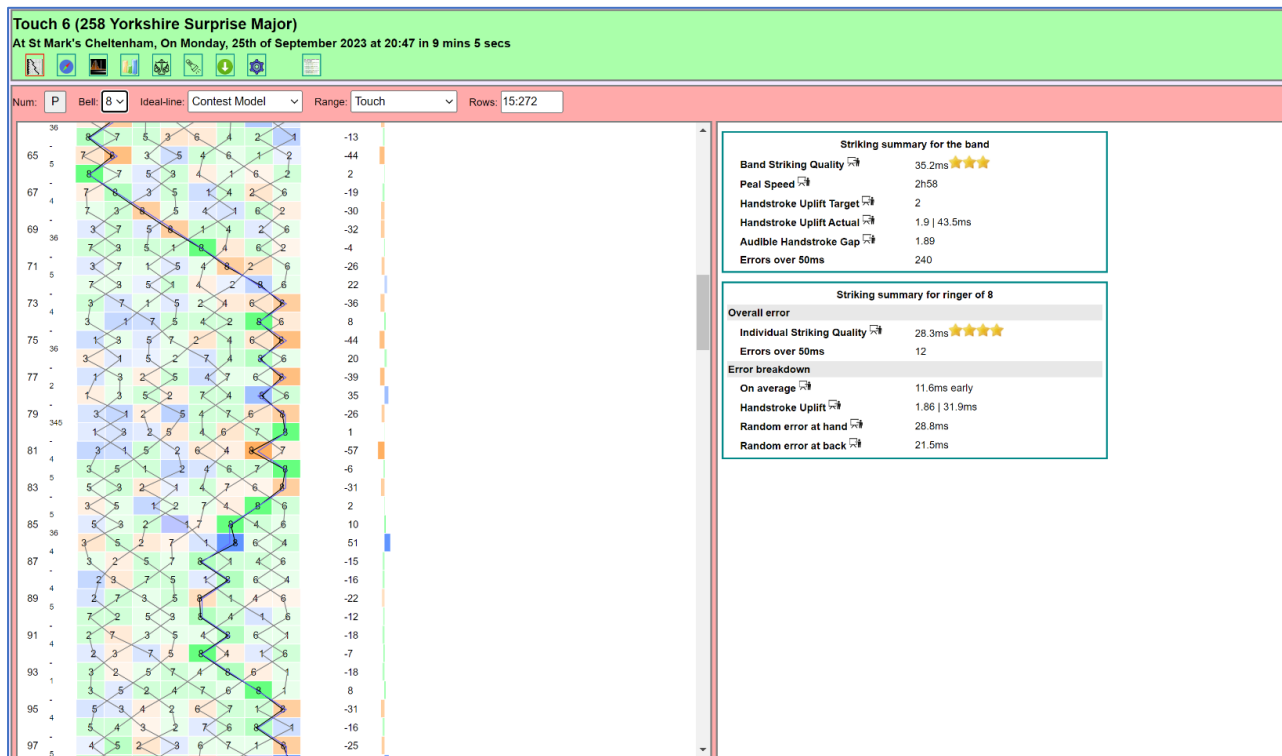
### At its simplest:

A grade for the overall quality of the performance using standard deviation – see below (ms = milliseconds. 20ms would be a slight hesitation in a solid piece of ringing, 50ms would be a very noticeable clip).

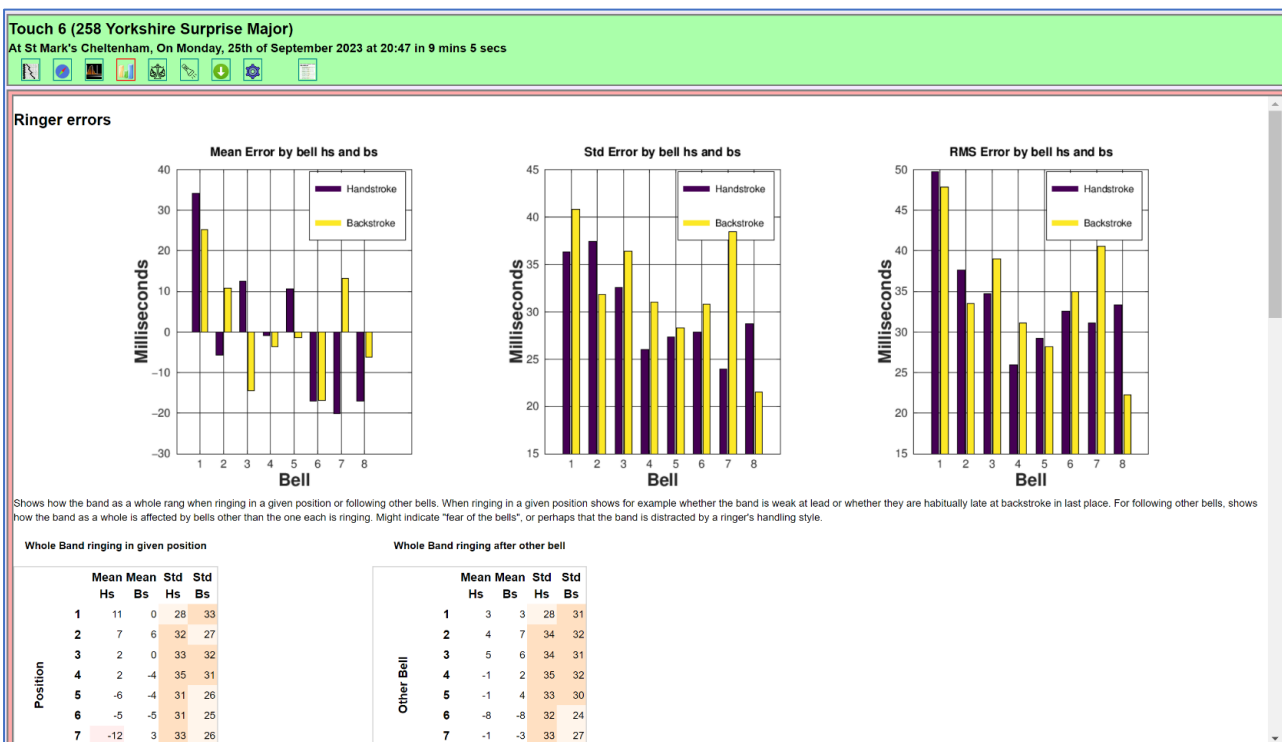
Stars	Standard deviation	Translation
1 star	44-51 ms	Reasonable
2 stars	38-43 ms	Good
3 stars	33-37 ms	Very good
4 stars	28-32 ms	Excellent
5 stars	24-27 ms	Fantastic
6 stars	20-23 ms	Best bands in the world

### For those wanting more detail:

Graphs showing the overall performance of individual bells, using standard deviation and a star grading. See overleaf – this is the overall analysis of the tenor at St Mark's being rung to a course of Yorkshire. To the right can be seen the overall grading and the number of errors over 50ms that were made. Green is good, blue is slow and orange is quick. The stronger the blue or orange, the bigger the error. To the right of the grid can be seen the severity of error. There is a rating for the band as a whole as well as an individual rating.



Next we have an example of the same touch showing average errors made by all the bells. Looking at the left-hand graph, we see that the treble is on average slow, more so at handstroke, with an average handstroke error of 34ms.



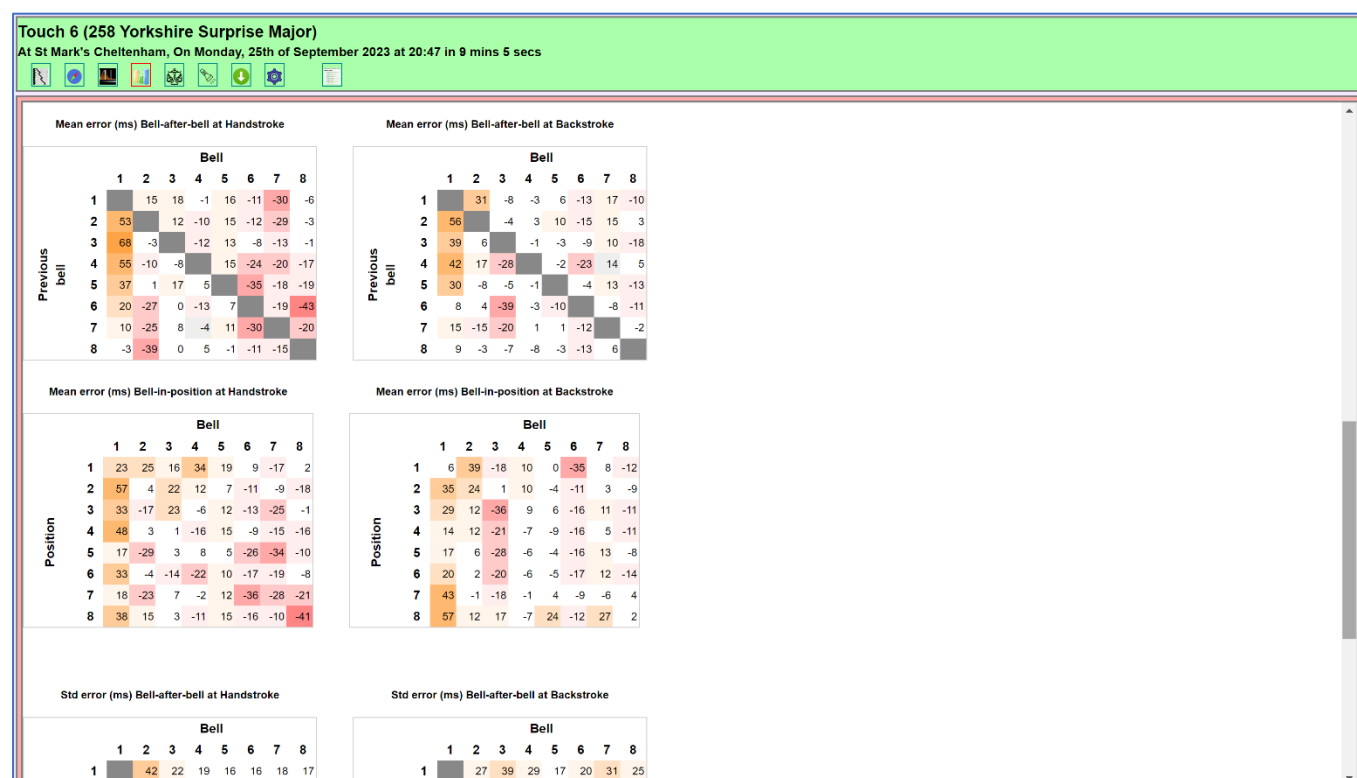


### For those really wanting to drill down:

Metrics are available showing you areas of concern for specific bells, in specific positions in the change, or doing specific pieces of work.

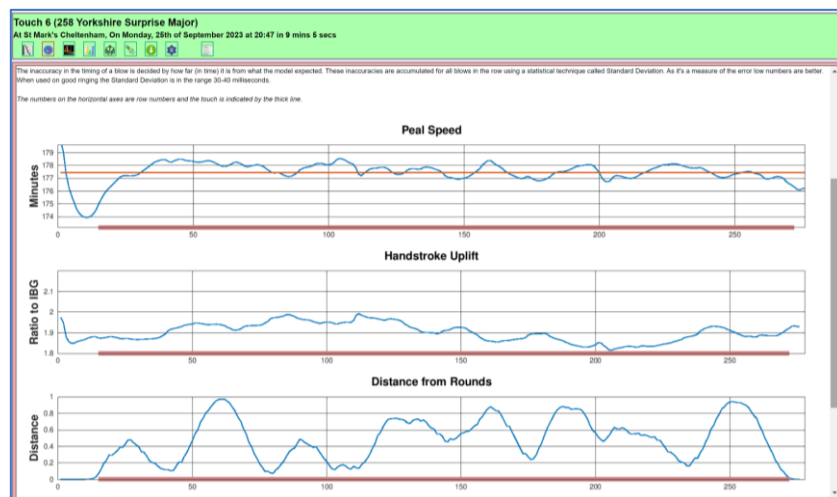
Here we have a series of graphs showing the mean errors of bells when following other bells. For example, if you take the top left graph. Find the bell you were ringing (along the top axis) then look down the column and you will see the mean error you made at handstroke when following each other bell. The top right grid shows the backstroke errors.

Or if you prefer to go by position, the lower left graph. Again, find the bell you were ringing along the top, then the numbers in that column show your mean error at handstroke in each position.



Overleaf, we have some additional information – the peal speed chart shows how much deviation in speed there was throughout the touch. Here it can be seen that the overall speed would have been 2h 57 minutes, but that there was a dramatic slow-down as the band entered changes. The other graphs show the handstroke lead gap and how it varied in speed, and the speed relational to the distance from rounds.





### How?

This is where it gets complicated! The system runs several different 'models' of ringing simultaneously which allow for speed, handstroke gap, style, and a number of other variables. For example, this means that a band who choose to ring with big handstroke gaps, providing they were consistent, would not be penalised over a band who rang with tighter gaps. The key to success is consistency – which is what the system measures best.

### Why?

**Objectivity** – The debate about what constitutes 'good ringing' has been ongoing for many years, and many a judge has been criticised for choosing one style over another. Furthermore, human judgement can be subjective – what one person may consider (in rounds) a slow blow from the fourth, another might consider a quick blow from the fifth. Hawkear eliminates this subjectivity.

**Fine-tuning a test piece** – When a team is ringing well, but really wants to improve their performance, particularly when there is a set piece for a competition, they can ring the bells they will ring on the day and learn what specifically they need to do. For example, when 4 and 5 meet in X position, they need to do Y.

**Individual study** – If someone wants to really focus on improving their ringing, Hawkear can provide guidance. For example, it could highlight that when ringing around the back, one has a tendency to be too slow on the way down the front, or, when one rings the treble, they clip the tenors.

This system is clearly not intended for beginners – although it has some limited use to support the views of competent tutors, there is much ringing where we do not need an advanced system to tell us the issues. It assumes that those ringing are capable of making the adjustments in order to improve their ringing and so excellent bell control and some degree of experience is assumed.

However, for bands who either as a team or as individuals want to see how they can improve their own ringing, it is a wonderful tool, giving more data feedback than anything that has gone before it. It is very useful for preparing specific pieces of ringing, for example Sunday touches, striking competition pieces or wedding ringing.

If anyone would like to see a live demonstration or have their ringing (as a team or individuals) examined, please get in touch.





## Painting Bell Frames – *Stuart Tomlinson*

I have recently finished painting my fourth bell frame at Elmore, just south of Gloucester. Prior to this I painted the frames at Tirley, Woolstone and Leckhampton. How did I get involved with this?

Malcolm Taylor saw the frame painting I did at Leckhampton and, knowing that I had recently retired, enquired whether I might be interested in painting another bell frame. I decided I would and here I am three years later, having painted a frame in each of those years. Why did I agree to this?

Well, I do quite enjoy painting. I am happy working away quietly on my own and I think of it as my bit of volunteering, even though very few people will see the results. However, if done well and provided the tower has been insulated against the worst of the elements and nesting birds, then the re-painted frame should be good for another thirty years or so. Who knows, by then there may be renewed interest in ringing in these outlying villages, as well as the ongoing visiting bands and ringing for weddings. I also like being able to pick and choose when I work. If it takes a bit longer, it doesn't really matter – the frame has probably needed repainting for a few years, so another week or month won't make much difference.

You may think it isn't a good idea me doing this work alone. However, I always ensure that the tower contact (as well as my wife) knows when I am painting. I take my time when moving around, and generally don't spend more than one to two hours working before taking a break and no more than three to four hours in total. If I feel tired or that I am making mistakes, then I take a break or stop for the day.

So, what do I wear when painting? I wear old trainers with grippy rubber soles, and a thick wool hat to reduce the impact of the inevitable knocks against the metal frame! I also wear a quality face mask when rubbing down. Gloves and overalls are essential – it is a messy job and you are bound to get paint on you. Good lighting and a small vacuum cleaner to collect dust, flaked paint etc. are also a must. There is a lot of climbing up and down tower steps and ladders, and I use a heavy-duty bag to transport tools etc. I tried an old rucksack once and found I couldn't get through the ceiling hatch!

I don't have the job all planned out at the start, rather I have an idea of what I will do on each visit but decide once I get up there and see what needs doing, or what I missed on the last visit. It is amazing how much metal there is in a typical bell frame and getting to all of it does require you to be nimble and flexible and have a reasonable head for heights.

Elmore has been the hardest of the jobs so far – twenty seven visits of three to four hours – maybe one hundred hours in total, plus travel and cleaning up time. The frame was in a bad state with a lot of flaking paint and a fair amount of surface rust. I used metal wallpaper scrapers to remove loose paint, and any built up grease or gunge that may have been painted over previously (there was a lot of this at Tirley, where someone in the past had been rather liberal with the grease). My aim is to get back to a firm surface that the new paint will adhere to. At Leckhampton and Woolstone I used Hammerite 'straight to rust' paint. At Tirley and Elmore I used a French paint (Deproma), which Malcolm Taylor recommended. The latter costs about £120 per 2.5 litre can and I used about eight cans, so close to £1,000 of paint! I apply two coats – the aim being to give a good coverage to all the metal frame (or as much as I can get to) to prevent rust from taking hold. As with painting a second coat of paint at home, the second coat is always a bit of pain – working out where you have or haven't already painted. However, that second coat really does make a difference, adding a lot more protection.



Sadly, the towers I am painting at no longer have regular bands, although Elmore does have a lot of weddings, due to Elmore Court hosting lavish wedding receptions. Indeed, as I was tidying up after one of my sessions, I heard a lot of voices in the church, and when I climbed down, I found a drinks and canapes 'meet the vicar' party for a wedding due to take place the next day. I think I could have joined in, but really wanted to get home and anyway I was a bit too casually dressed for the occasion! Another time at Elmore, I heard voices outside and when I looked down through the louvres, I saw three people wearing dark clothes and acting suspiciously in the churchyard. I carried on working and a short while later heard horses and hounds and a loud commotion – the people I saw earlier turned out to be hunt saboteurs! Usually, it is quiet up the tower, with maybe a few creaks and groans, especially if the wind is blowing. Sometimes there is a close encounter with a bird, when working near the louvres. Best if you aren't easily spooked!

At Tirley and Elmore I also painted the outside of each bell with a black emulsion paint (an idea I picked up from Simon Ridley). This is purely cosmetic as the bell itself isn't going to rust, but it does look good, and it makes the bell inscriptions much easier to read, should anyone venture up for a look.

For interest I have included some 'before' and 'after' photos below and overleaf.

The 2024 tower is yet to be decided – watch this space!





### 1,000 Quarters on Mini-Rings – *Reg Hitchings*

On the 28<sup>th</sup> December I rang my 1,000th quarter on a mini-ring. “A what” – I hear you ask – well I define this as a secular ring of bells rung with wheel and rope and the tenor of the ring weighing up to 22lbs. The first (left column) was in Switzerland in 2007 and it was the first and only quarter peal rung in Switzerland on ‘tower’ bells. Of the 1,000 quarters, I have conducted 711 and 505 of them have been on The Bicycle Ring.

#### **Die Glöckli, Winterthur, Schweiz**

22 Lärchenstrasse  
Sunday, 26 August 2007 in 31m (22 lbs)  
1260 Plain Bob Minor

- 1 Nathaniel Hitchings
- 2 Anthony Parry (C)
- 3 Rodney Yeates
- 4 Jeremy Hitchings
- 5 Isabel Hitchings
- 6 Reg Hitchings

First quarter-peal on the bells.  
First quarter-peal in Switzerland rung on tower bells.  
First on a mini-ring 3.

#### **Cheltenham, Gloucestershire**

The Bicycle Ring  
Thursday, 28 December 2023 in 26m (1lb 7oz)  
1272 Norwich Surprise Minor

- 1 Isabel Hitchings
- 2 Ben Gooch
- 3 Barbara Pettit
- 4 Alison Lee
- 5 Reg Hitchings
- 6 Stuart Tomlinson (C)

First in method 4.  
1,000<sup>th</sup> mini-ring quarter peal 5.



## New Year's Resolutions – *Harry Stephenson*

With the New Year now upon us, I have turned my mind to resolutions for the year ahead. Admittedly, no chocolate and running every day have gone out the window, but ringing resolutions are something that I have made (and generally managed to keep) every year.

Here's some ideas for you:

- Ring somewhere new! For some this might involve visiting a branch practice or attending a training session. For others, it might be going on a ringing outing or even visiting another tower whilst away from the local area. Either way, ringing with different people and on different bells can often have a real positive impact on your ringing.
- Ring something new! Not unlike the above point, this could vary from ringer to ringer. You might want to ring a bigger bell, a smaller bell (why not come to Warden Hill!) or a new method or variation. For others it will be all about calling something new or in my case ringing methods with silly names. You know what they say – variety is the spice of life!
- Getting involved outside of practice nights! There's obviously so much more to ringing than the 90-minute weekly practice in your local tower. Sunday ringing is the obvious one, but lots of towers will have regular Quarter Peals and there is always room for help with belfry maintenance and on branch committee! We are very lucky to be involved in what is in reality a cheap hobby, but giving back is important too.
- Safety in the tower! This is one that often escapes us. Whilst ringing is generally a safe activity, the bells that we ring are powerful and can cause real problems if not fully respected. Keeping your feet on the ground and talking to a minimum can make a huge difference to the safety of ringing.

Wishing you a happy and ringing-filled 2024.