



Editor's Foreword – *Andy Clark*

Happy New Year!

Here we are again. You will note that the article following this foreword is an introduction from Mike Hartley, our new Branch Chairman. We hope that Mike's article will become a regular part of the newsletter. As Mike explains, the programme for 2025 will be shared soon, so no summary table here for now, but it'll be back for the next edition.

Thanks for the contributions and see you again for the Q1 newsletter which should appear by mid-April. A reminder of my standard request – while Barbara won't email for contributions until early April, if you have a burning idea or even a fully-fledged article, please send them over as and when convenient.

From your new Branch Chairman – *Mike Hartley*

Hello everyone. I hope you had a lovely Christmas and are looking forward to 2025.

Some of you will have known me for many years, but for those of you who don't, I moved to the Cheltenham area in 1978 and I have been a ringer at Cheltenham Minster ever since.

My ringing background

I learnt to ring at school in Dorset and then spent four years in Nottinghamshire before coming to Cheltenham.

Family commitments forced me have a break from ringing for more than twenty years, apart from occasional Sunday mornings. However, on retirement from work in 2018 I returned to ringing with renewed enthusiasm.

Ringing Priorities for 2025

Your Branch committee (see: <http://www.cheltenhambranch.org.uk/contacts.php>) met just before Christmas to consider this year's Branch programme, which will be communicated soon. It will include information on ringing for the Colesbourne Snowdrop festival, training sessions, striking competitions and the next AGM.

The committee agreed unanimously to one significant change: that there will be no monthly Branch Practices hosted by towers on their practice nights. These had been poorly attended for some time, and it was felt that they had been superseded to a degree by Cara Capewell's excellent training sessions. Branch members' responses to the questionnaire sent out by Stuart Tomlinson in 2022 also showed that these long-standing Branch Practices had served their time.

A second minor change will be the holding of the Branch striking competition in late September instead of the summer.

Branch Ringing Master Post

The Branch Ringing Master (RM) Post remains vacant. Should anyone like to find out more about the role with a view possibly to taking it on, please let me or another member of the committee know.

In the continued absence of a RM, I will be seeking volunteers to help out with a small number of specific

<http://www.cheltenhambranch.org.uk/>



tasks which would normally be done by the RM, e.g. organising this year's striking competition for the Banner Trophy; or coordinating our Branch's 8-bell team to compete for the G & B's Penn Trophy.

Committee Members' Visits to Branch Towers

I think it is essential that Branch committee members visit all Branch tower practices in person during 2025. The purpose of these visits will be to capture training needs and personal ringing aims or wishes (e.g. a quarter peal to celebrate a special anniversary), share information and support the practices.

I will be drawing up a rota and contacting tower captains and contacts to make this happen.

Clearly there are limits to how many visits just four committee members can make to practice nights across the branch, so if anyone would like to join us on the rota, even if only for a very few visits, please let me or another committee member know.

Lapsed Bellringers

I look occasionally at the national Facebook site for bellringers. In addition to being a source of good ideas, I'm struck by the number of people across the country returning enthusiastically to ringing after a break of many years. If you are aware of any 'ex-ringers' who might now have more spare time to devote to ringing, perhaps you could think about encouraging them to return.

Special Anniversaries

2025 will be a busy year for celebrating special anniversaries. The 8th May will mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day. In addition, I'm aware that at least two branch members will be celebrating their 80th birthdays, and one will reach his ruby wedding anniversary.

Doubtless there are other significant dates. If you would like help with some ringing to mark an occasion, please let the committee know.

Finally, thank you all very much for your continued service to your churches and your enthusiasm for this wonderful art of bell ringing. I look forward to meeting you at some point during the year.

Best wishes, Mike



Reverend Canon Owen C Barraclough (1932-2024) – Reg Hitchings¹

Owen came to ringing late in life. When he retired from ‘full time’ minister in 1997 he and his wife Joan moved to Cheltenham. They decided that they needed a retirement project – apparently Joan wanted to join a Choir but Owen insisted on taking up Bellringing. He and Joan were taught to handle at Prestbury by Janet Covey-Crump and rang there regularly until 2004 when he and Joan heard bells being rung for a wedding at St Mark’s Cheltenham – having been previously unaware there were any bells in the tower 100 yards from their house! Owen continued to ring at the tower until several years after the new ring of eight was installed in 2007.

Owen provided the committee that oversaw the project with a great deal of support, both moral and practical, and during the works he and Joan made sure that all the workers in the tower were exceptionally well-fed and watered, sometimes to the extent that afternoon work was a little slower than the morning! His enthusiasm for the project was unwavering and his support was greatly valued. He rang in the first quarter peal on the new bells in 2007 (see left panel).



Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

St Mark

Monday, 31 December 2007 in 47m (16–1–2)
1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Owen Barraclough
- 2 Alexandra J Hajok
- 3 Hugh N Evans
- 4 John A Irving
- 5 Hilda C Ridley
- 6 Philip A Abbey
- 7 Simon J Ridley (C)
- 8 Joan M Barraclough

First Quarter Peal on the bells since restoration and augmentation. With thanks to all those who contributed to the project.

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Warden Hill, St Christopher

Saturday, 16 April 2011 in 2h 32 (63lbs)
5040 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Gillian Lloyd Williams
- 2 Isabel Hitchings (C)
- 3 Owen Barraclough
- 4 Joan Barraclough
- 5 Nathaniel Hitchings
- 6 Maureen McBane

For the retirement of The Revd Canon Owen Barraclough from St Christopher’s, part of The Church in Warden Hill.

- 1st peal: 1, 2, 3 (aged 79), 5, 6.
- 1st peal as conductor.
- 1st peal inside: 4 (= 2nd peal).
- 1st peal on the bells.

¹ With input from Simon Ridley



In 2005, Owen was installed as Priest in charge of St Christopher's Warden Hill. He joined the band there and was a member until 2021 when he finally gave up due to ill health.

Owen rang two peals, the first gaining status as Central Council peal of the year in 2011 (see right panel on previous page). Owen also rang one half peal, along with 320 quarter peals (including 200 at Warden Hill, 42 at Prestbury and 57 on various mini-rings around Gloucestershire). He conducted two quarter peals.

Owen was Chairman of the Cheltenham Branch from 2007 until 2012.

He and Joan thoroughly enjoyed ringing and joined a number of non-territorial groups visiting towers in the South of England.

We will always remember his infectious laugh.

An unusual incident at Ripple Church – *Stuart Tomlinson*

During a Leckhampton Quarter Peal Day in August, we had a very unusual incident at Ripple church.

We were raising the bells and were only about a quarter of the way up when the tenor bell stopped swinging. Tony Foster was on the tenor and said that he couldn't pull the rope at all – it was well and truly stuck! The lady who had let us in hadn't long left, so I dashed down the stairs and fortunately found her in the churchyard along with her adult son. They both came up and I went up with them into the bell chamber to see what was wrong (all the other bells had been lowered).

Upon investigation we found the clock hammer wedged between the bell and the frame. The clock is not in use, and the tenor hammer was only held away from the bell with baling twine. This must have broken or come loose at that moment, probably due to vibrations when the bells were being raised. The bells haven't been rung for some time.

To remove the clock hammer, we needed to lift the bell slightly. It took the weight of three ringers hanging on the rope to lift the bell enough for the hammer to be extracted. I think their combined weights are about 35 stone – no names! The tenor weighs 12cwt. Amazingly the only damage was a bent arm on the hammer, and we were able to continue with our quarter. Very fortunate that it happened then and not whilst we were ringing the bells full circle – there certainly would have been considerable damage if that had been the case. Also, fortunate that the lady who let us in was still in the churchyard along with her son, who is a blacksmith and had the tools (and the strength!) needed to remove the hammer. Just wish I had taken some photos, but I hope you can visualise the scene from the above description.



Elizabeths Peals – *Liz Evans*

In the first dull week of January 2024, I spent plenty of time in the dark evenings scrolling through Pealbase and Bellboard to set up two peals for bands of Elizabeths. Andy Clark has asked me to write about them because Liz Coke rang in both peals, and the second of them was rung at Cheltenham Minster (which is where I learned to ring).

Back in 2016, Liz Hibbert organised for ten Elizabeths to ring a peal at Oxford St Thomas for Queen Elizabeth II's 90th birthday. I didn't consider at the time that five of that band have A as their middle initial.

In summer 2023, I called an all-female QP in Dordrecht in which three of the band were all named Elizabeth Ann(e), and I wondered then whether it would be possible to find a peal band all named Elizabeth Anne. This got me thinking about whether a peal had ever been rung by a band who all shared the same first two names. After a search through Pealbase, I came to the conclusion that this hadn't yet been done, so I made it my mission to take this record for the girls.

Pealbase shows that there are 75 Elizabeth As who have ever rung a peal, so I was confident that I'd find five more Elizabeth Annes. I already knew that Liz Coke would be in the band as Liz was a ringing mentor for me as a teenager in Cheltenham and I knew that we shared the same names. Liz Barnes was one of the Elizabeth As in the Dordrecht QP, so that completed half a band. A quick email to the other Elizabeth As from the Oxford peal confirmed that their parents had all gone for the classic name choice, so I instantly had a band and set about finding a convenient location.

In order to avoid clashing with preparations for the 12-bell contest and exciting foreign holidays, we set the date of Saturday 27th July (26th July is St Anne's day). I spent the intervening six months trying not to tell too many people about the peal attempt, as I was rather worried that a male band (possibly the Simon Js) would get in first!

To the delight of all the band, the peal was successfully scored at the first attempt. No other flashy peals were scored in that part of the summer and our peal was the featured performance on Bellboard for 21 days. At the time of writing, this peal sits in 22nd place on the most-liked performances of all-time list with 234 'likes'.

The second peal was to be the first peal on 12 rung by a female band all sharing the same first name. This was organised for 17th November to give Beth Sinclair plenty of time to book a reasonably priced flight as she had agreed to fly in from Washington DC for the peal.

Having not rung together as a 12 bell band, the peal got off to a tentative start, but we settled into some good ringing. We worked as a team, making eye contact with who we were dodging with, and we avoided the temptation to shout, "Liz – dodge with me!". With one and a half courses to go, Liz Orme gave us a positive peptalk which saw us through to the end of the peal. On standing the bells, we heard a cheer go up from the churchyard where a group of husbands and parents had gathered to listen. They'd been telling passersby why they were standing in the churchyard so, as we emerged from the tower, we got another cheer from our supporters and their new friends! Thank you to Michael Bishop and Andrew Haines for also stopping by to listen.

There was no 4G in the pub, so I didn't send the peal up to Bellboard until I was on the bus back out to Swindon Village. By the time I sat down with a cup of tea only 20 minutes later, we were already the



featured performance on Bellboard. The number of 'likes' grew and grew and, by the time I wrote an article for the Ringing World the following afternoon, it had hit 340 'likes' and was fourth on the all-time list. Today we now sit second on the all-time list with a massive 456 'likes'!

I knew that both peals would be special to those of us who rang in them, but I had no idea how many messages of congratulation we would receive individually and collectively. It was truly amazing to read all the messages, and we're so grateful that the ringing community has celebrated our success!

A few people have asked what's next. Well, the dark January nights are about to arrive so I've got plenty of time to scroll through Bellboard and Pealbase and set up our next challenge...so watch this space!

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Minster Church of St Mary

Saturday, 16 November 2024 in 3h 33 (21-2-1 in Eb)

5042 Yorkshire Surprise Maximus

Composed by R. W. Pipe

1 Elizabeth M Harvey

2 Elizabeth M Sinclair

3 Elizabeth A Hibbert

4 Elizabeth Hutchieson

5 Elizabeth A Coke

6 Elizabeth A Barnes

7 Elizabeth A Orme (C)

8 Elizabeth A Burton

9 Elizabeth A Pawley

10 Elizabeth C Frye

11 Elizabeth J Colliss

12 Elizabeth A Evans

The first peal on 12 by a female band all sharing the same first name



Band photo for the Cheltenham Peal – clockwise from front right



Hilda's 1,000 Peals for G&B – Andy Clark

Congratulations to Hilda Ridley on ringing her 1,000th peal for the G&B Diocesan Association (see panel).

Hilda's first peal was on 30th March 1970 at Leckhampton – Grandsire Triples. Her father conducted and there were four other family members in the band. It was also a first peal for her brother Bernard, her sister Clare and her mother Helen. Leckhampton remains Hilda's most pealed tower with 187 peals.

One peal that Hilda was particularly pleased to ring in was an all-family peal of 210 Treble Bob Minor at Leckhampton on 29th July 1974.

Hilda rang 1,080 peals with her late husband John and has conducted 21 peals.

Gloucester & Bristol Diocesan Association Stratton St Margaret, Wiltshire

St Margaret of Antioch

Friday, 3 January 2025 in 2h 49 (8–0–15 in G)

5120 Bristol Surprise Major

Composed by John R Ridley

- 1 Cynthia E Howell
- 2 Malcolm P Taylor
- 3 Sarah B Ewbank
- 4 Hilda C Ridley
- 5 Richard L Thumwood
- 6 Mark Edwards
- 7 Simon W Edwards (C)
- 8 Simon J Ridley

1,000th peal for the Association: 4

300th tower bell peal together: 2 and 4

First Quarter Peals

Congratulations to Sue Clegg and Isaac Hanfrey on ringing their first quarter peals.

North Cerney, Gloucestershire

All Saints

Wednesday, 16 October 2024 in 41m (5–3–0 in Bb)

1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Suzanne Clegg
- 2 Hilda C Ridley
- 3 Judith E Carter
- 4 Peter J Harris
- 5 Peter G Holden (C)
- 6 Michelle L Waymont-Palmer

First quarter peal: 1

To celebrate Sue's 60th birthday.

Charlton Kings, Gloucestershire

St Mary

Saturday, 26 October 2024 (17–0–13 in Eb)

1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Isaac Hanfrey
- 2 Pauline Smith
- 3 Hilda Ridley
- 4 Ray Talbot (C)
- 5 David Lynch
- 6 Quentin Jackson
- 7 Richard Knight
- 8 Peter Aylott

First quarter peal: 1



Branch Notices – All

Deaths

We were sorry to learn of the passing of Reverend Canon Owen C Barraclough. Please see Page 3 of this newsletter.

Cheltenham Branch AGM

The Cheltenham Branch held its annual AGM at Didbrook on Saturday 9th November.

The Chairman (Richard Knight), Treasurer (Harry Stephenson) and Ringing Master (Simon Dann) stood down from their roles at the meeting. Mike Hartley was elected as Chairman, with Cara Capewell as Deputy Ringing Master / Training Officer, Tony Foster as Treasurer, Barbara Pettit as Secretary and John Irving as Management Committee Rep. A welcome to those new to the committee and a thank you for the continued efforts of Barbara and John who have stayed on the committee.

South-West Ringing Course 2025 Ringing

Barbara emailed with some details, but in case you missed it, just to provide some brief details on this new South-West Ringing Course, 2025, which will be similar to the present Hereford, Bradfield and North-West Courses:

- Dates: 24th – 27th October 2025
- Venue: Millfield School, Street
- Cost: TBC, but will be similar to the other four-day courses (last year Bradfield was £350 for students, £260 if 25 or under on the course dates; £198 for helpers, or £150 if 25 or under on the course dates)

Further information will be provided in due course.

Central Council Blog

Just a reminder that there is a weekly blog, accessible via the Central Council website. It is free to subscribe and keeps everyone in touch with what the Central Council is working on behalf of all ringers.