

Middlesex Bell News

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

In this issue

Bow and St. Paul's
Janets' Jaunt to Kent
Farewells from Tom and Dylan
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A Cautionary Tale
and more...



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Issue 120 December 2024

Middlesex Bell News

All the news, articles, achievements, outings and seasonal celebrations from members throughout the Middlesex County Association and the London Diocesan Guild.



St. Michael's, Cornhill



Interior, St. Michael's, Cornhill

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From the Editor

It's been a whole year since yours truly took over as Editor of this illustrious 'comic'. That's four issues dragged through the pagination dust and rigorously bashed into shape. Sometimes I fear it's like squeezing blood from a stone, so hard is it to get you good people to put fingertips to keyboards (gone are the days when I could have said 'pen to paper') and write something moderately sensible about this thing called Campana Tinnitus (that's Latin for Bell Ringing, just in case you weren't like me and did Latin at school all of... oh, a million years ago now), but this time round you have all excelled.

Thus, we say our sad farewells to both Tom Britten and Dylan Thomas. I'm sorry but I fear I have to say this: Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light. Phew, got that out of my system.

We take a look at bells in South America care of our very own Chilean bellmeister, Tomas Brantmayer, and we gorge ourselves on the latest Janets' Jaunt, take a peep at ringing Devon-style, before wagging a cautionary finger at newbies intent on hoisting themselves from their own petards, if not bell-ropes.

Finally, but before the calendar, so not quite 'finally', there's a plea for someone to put their head above the parapet and say they'd like to stand for the role of General Secretary. Details on pages 13 and 14.

Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Front Cover

The bells of St Mary's, Upper Street, Islington

Photo by Dylan Thomas



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MERRILY ON HIGH

St Mary-le-Bow and St Paul's Cathedral new members' outing, 28th September 2024

Corinne Drewery, St. Mary Magdalene, Holloway

Who would have thought just over a year ago, when I began bell ringing, I would be ringing the famous Bow bells of St Mary-le-Bow and climbing the 528 steps (well not quite all of them..!) to the bell tower of St Paul's Cathedral! Not an easy feat for a novice ringer overcoming a fear of heights. Dedicated bell ringers of varying experience and novices like myself were invited to join one of many ringing tours organised by Janet Betham, this one in particular for learners of this exhilarating and fulfilling ancient skill.

First stop St Mary-le-Bow, one of the tallest Christopher Wren churches. Guided by experienced ringers we were given the opportunity to ring the iconic Bow Bells. According to folklore, if you're born within the sound of them, you're a true Cockney. They also get a mention in the nursery rhyme Oranges and Lemons.

I am still perplexed by the descriptions of bell weights, but these 12 were extremely heavy (41-3-21)! I am told that the 8 bells of Holloway St Mary Magdalene, where I am a learner, are not the easiest to ring, which made the Bow Bells more manageable under the expert guidance of mentors Claire Baker, Steve Jakeman and Adrian Sweeting, although I only attempted to ring bells 5 & 7.



Following an enlightening talk by MCA President Dave Bassford, we proceeded to St Paul's Cathedral for a guided tour, where we were given exclusive access to the ringing chamber, and for those brave enough, to see the bells above in the belfry, with spectacular views of the dome and the City of London (I am told!), I caught a glimpse through a window on the stairway.

Dave gave us a brief history of ringing at St Paul's, and the expertise and experience required to be considered a ringer there. He also pointed out a plaque of particular interest - that of the first peal rung by an all female band in 2012 during the women's Olympic marathon. As our party was comprised of a fair number of women ringers, this was very encouraging! On our descent we had the luck to be passing the trophy room that houses the Great Model, and were given a glimpse of the miniature of St Paul's submitted by Christopher Wren to King Charles II, along with the drawings and plans, for rebuilding this famous London landmark after the Great Fire of London.



For a few hours we had entered another time and place, keen to preserve this ancient tradition beyond the chaos of the world outside.

Many thanks to Janet Betham, Dave Bassford and all of the dedicated bell ringing mentors and teachers, and a special mention to Tom Britten who has been a great teacher- good luck with your new life in Manchester!*



JANETS' JAUNT - KENT

Joy Heywood, St. Mary Magdalene, Enfield

October 5th was a sunny early autumn day – just right for walking and ringing. The Janets were joined by twenty or so eager people and a dog, Alec's lovely King Charles spaniel, Lucy. Arriving at Hever station, we set off along a claggy woodside path and then through lush grassy fields towards the church of St. Peter, watched by a small flock of sheep whose field we had invaded.

On the north side of the church lie the gates of Hever Castle, famously the home of Anne Boleyn and her family, and on the other side of the church is the Henry VIII pub, rather inappropriately named, we thought!

The ringing chamber was reached by an ancient hewn-wood ladder-staircase just inside the west door. There were 6 bells, the tenor weighing 9-0-25 and being one of the newest of the six (1995), while the oldest bells were the 2 and the 3 which were cast in 1703. They were nice bells to ring and were handled well by both the less and the more experienced ringers among us, with ringing ranging from call changes to Surprise Minor.

The church was worth exploring, too. It was beautifully decorated for the Harvest Festival including a display of tins on the tomb of Sir Thomas Boleyn (father of Anne), which stands to the left of the chancel. The local sheep featured in the East window and there was an interesting display telling the stories of the men on the War Memorial, many of whom had been staff at Hever Castle.

We had an excellent lunch and conversation at the pub and afterwards, in the garden next to a large mill-pond, Martin and Fiona, Janet D and Guy were joined by others to ring handbells.

Then we set off on the main part of the walk to Edenbridge, about 3 miles through fields – some ploughed, some being harvested of sugar beets and some growing maize "as high as an elephant's eye"! We were overtaken a couple of times by an enormous tractor towing a trailer on its way to and from collecting the beets. We passed a huge 1930s house, crossed a stream and also saw an old way-marker which appeared to say "Streatham Hill House 34m". The path eventually brought us out into a 1980s estate of semi-detached houses which belied the main part of Edenbridge, which is a pretty little town with a long high street full of old buildings of various periods.

The church of St. Peter and St. Paul is of mediaeval origin but with the inevitable Victorian restoration. The ring of 8 bells dates to 1911, the tenor here being 14 hundredweight. The ringing room is a sort of square doughnut shape! There is a gallery, around which the ringers stand, and a square "hole" through which you can see down to the ground floor of the tower! Again, we enjoyed ringing a variety of call changes and methods – novice ringers were stretched and experienced ringers had fun.



Above: Arriving at St. Peter, Hever

Below: Ringing at Hever



JANETS' JAUNT – KENT, CONT'D

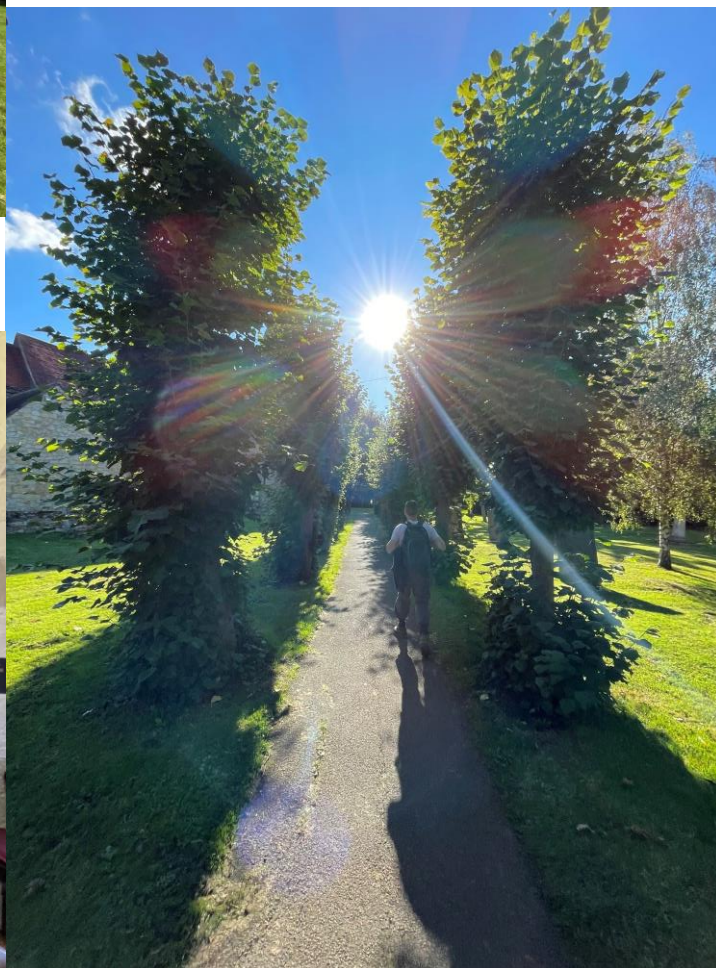


The church was also beautifully decorated for harvest. It has a Norman font, a recently discovered mediaeval wall painting of the Madonna and Child and a Burne-Jones stained glass window.

We retired to the nearby pub, Ye Olde Crowne, for a well-earned drink before the last short walk to the station and the train back to London Bridge.

It was my first Janets' Jaunt and it was a perfect day! Thank you to Janet Betham and Janet Drake for the organisation and scouting out and see you next time!

Above: Walking between Hever and Edenbridge
Below: Ringing at SS Peter & Paul, Edenbridge
Right: Leaving at Sunset



50 Ringing Things for Teams

Jean Power, All Saints, Harrow Weald

Our tower bell ringers at All Saints in Harrow Weald have been busy taking part in '50 Ringing Things for Teams'. It's been fun deciding on which challenges to take part in and ticking them off one-by-one.

Lots of the options are around publicising bell ringing. So last week I assisted Sonia Field, our Ringing Master, as she gave a talk on bell ringing to the local U3A group in Kenton with the aim of spreading some bell ringing knowledge and, as I'm sure all bell ringers are secretly doing, to see if we could lure in any new recruits. It was a fun talk as Sonia explained the history and principles of bell ringing before we gave some

demonstrations of the hand and back strokes (with me standing on a stepladder holding a rope). Afterwards, lots of the audience joined in with some rounds on hand-bells; and I had my first try at hand-bells! It was a lively time with lots of questions and chat afterwards. It was interesting to discover what different people took from the talk and to hear the wide range of questions they had. We're looking forward to some visitors to the tower and hopefully even some new members of the ringing team...



ONE LAST DRINK AT THE LAMB

Tom Britten - St Mary Magdalene, Holloway

It's gone past closing time at The Pride of Spitalfields. I've enjoyed some farewell drinks, and the barmaid hands over a couple of free pints. I'm moving up to Manchester the next day.

On a Wednesday evening in September, 2021, I stepped into a ringing room in London. It had been 10 years since I had last done so, and it was with a sense of wariness that I got in contact with Holloway tower to see whether I could just turn up and see what would happen. As is the case for most towers, I was, of course, greeted with warmth and welcome and, having demonstrated I could still handle a bell after my ringing career break, proceeded to dig deep into my memory for blue lines that I had forgotten I had even known.

I started ringing on 1st April, 2000, at Reydon, Suffolk, and learned much within the Suffolk Guild, before moving to Sheffield for University, then down to Hertfordshire, and finally London in 2011. I rang for a short while when I arrived in London, but soon drifted away as life took over, to such an extent that for many years I completely forgot all about it. Only when pressured by my university ringing friend did I really remember that it was something I had done, and decided I would re-visit the London scene.

Whilst Covid had an impact in all areas of life, I never considered the effect it had on the ringing community – for an activity that requires being in a (usually) small room, close to a group of others, passing (usually) grubby ropes from one person to the next – it, of course, suffered. I'm not in a position to assess before-and-after, but speaking to many people, it became clear that I joined at a time of re-building and re-growth – both in terms of numbers of ringers, but also in terms of capability. Many others, like me, were brushing off blue lines, wanting to get back to ringing the “exciting” stuff, but realising, often with frustration, that a period of “de-rusting” was needed.

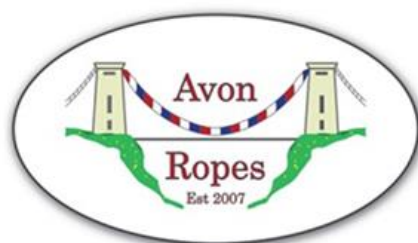
After a few weeks attending Holloway practices, I started to throw myself into other tower and district practices, and while recognising the odd face here and there, I found a new community of ringers. There was clear enthusiasm to develop people, and as I unlocked old memories, I was able to contribute to several towers in their teaching of learners, or be an extra body to stabilise a band. I discovered an immense enjoyment in seeing others develop, and guiding them to try things they didn't think they could do (even if a sometimes not-so-gentle nudge was needed!).

When asked if I would like to be nominated for the role of the N&E District Ringing Master, it was an easy decision – I felt I could constructively contribute to the ringing in the district, and give back the time and effort that had been invested in me over the years. I sincerely hope I have done so, for I have truly enjoyed spending many hours in towers (and pubs) with you. There have been too many highlights to mention, but events that stand out in my mind are the District Quarter Peal Weeks (huge numbers of firsts which is always fantastic); ringing for the Queen's funeral; and ringing for the King's coronation.

As I leave London to start a new era of my life in Manchester, I would like to thank every single person who has supported me, and all ringing in the Association, particularly in the N&E District. The District Committee, and all those who help, have ensured that district events run like clockwork.

I am especially proud of the progress we've made at Holloway (the best 8 in North London? Booziest 8? Certainly, the 8 I owe most to). With support from across the patch, we have been able to grow a solid foundation, regularly ringing all 8 each week, with superb progress from our learners. Long may it continue!

Despite all the towers I have visited, part of my heart will always reside at the often sweaty, but ever enjoyable, Lamb: the pub of choice after a Holloway practice. I have made some life-long friends, and I shall miss all that goes on. I am certain that it will go from strength to strength. And when you're trying something new, and the tenor is upside down, and you can't think whether you're doing near or far places, and chaos is all around, just remember: “it's only ringing” - have a drink at The Lamb and come back next week.



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FAREWELL FROM DYLAN THOMAS

Dylan Thomas – St Anne's, Highgate

In 2022, I took a great leap in my Bellringing career, when I decided to venture out into the Northern Hemisphere, after 3 years of ringing in Wellington and nearly 2 years of meeting and talking to ringers from all corners of the world online via Discord, Facebook Messenger, and Ringing Room. During my year of travels, which was divided mainly between Hungary, Germany, and the UK, with many other countries along the way, I totalled four and a half months of ringing all around the UK. 400 towers were grabbed in that time, whereas in NZ I managed 5 in three years!!!

I will never truly be able to convey just how kind, caring and welcoming the UK ringers were. They were also a fountain of knowledge and advice, and I am grateful to have made a great many friends. For these reasons, and a general sense that I wasn't quite "done" I decided to apply for a visa with the help of my dad, so I could stay in England for another couple of years. Following in the footsteps of my parents, I chose to make London my base.

My family and I (parents, sister, uncles/ aunts and grandad) had gathered in Hungary at Christmas. It wasn't easy to tell them that I wasn't going to be travelling back with them. It is the longest distance one can possibly be away from your loved ones, roughly 12000 miles. This really started to hit once I found myself roaming the streets of London, having just scored a job as a Labourer on a building site about a week or two after landing, with the debatably harder task of finding somewhere affordable to live... without my parents or any form of family around for support. My strength lay in my UK family. Luckily, after around a month of searching, I found a lovely flat with 2 Irish guys (no, not ringers!) in the lesser known suburb of Gospel Oak, 20 minutes walk from Camden Market. I loved this flat for several reasons, one of which was that you could see St Martin's, Gospel Oak, straight through the kitchen window. It wasn't too long before I bumped into Janet Betham, Tower Captain there, who encouraged me to come along to St Anne's, Highgate. Gospel Oak bells are rung every 2nd and 4th Sunday, while Highgate are rung every 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sunday, plus a weekly practice. I immediately felt very welcomed and at home with Janet, Anthony, Andrew, Em (fellow Kiwi), Elizabeth, Nick, Eldred, Dick and Bill, and various new learners, which Highgate had just taken on board.

With the amount of ringing the capital has to offer, I was of course in search of other towers to make up my 'weeknight regulars'. Monday was generally my day off. On the rare occasion that I did ring, Hackney or Kilburn was generally the venue. Ryan Noble very kindly invited me to ring at College Youths practices, which was my Tuesday ringing - split between various 12s in the City of London. I ventured down to Southwark most Wednesdays, but had also become a regular at Holloway, where Tom Britten and Claire Baker have done a lot of work and recruitment to bring a practice back to life. Thursday was Highgate night, with the odd trip down to Maidstone or South Croydon, and Friday night was usually Barnes, Camberwell (1st) or the Middlesex 12-Bell (2nd).

This variety of towers and ringing is something I really enjoyed and it is a great privilege to be able to help at so many different towers, a far cry from one practice and two Sunday rings a week in Wellington. I've also really enjoyed taking part in (and occasionally judging) striking competitions, such as the London 12-Bell and various Middlesex/ Surrey contests. I feel really privileged to have also been elected to the College Youths in October 2023, alongside my friend George Vant, and to take part in running the RWNYS in 2024.

While it may have taken a while for me to settle in (and believe me I spent a long time debating whether it was the right choice to stay in the UK) I realise now that, on the eve of heading to the Southern Hemisphere to spend Christmas and New Year with family, just how at home I now feel over here. Over my time here my friendships have only gotten stronger, and greater in number. I met a great many people and learned so much that had I left earlier in 2022, I would have missed out on SO much. I mean, I arrived in the UK ringing badly struck call changes on 12, and will leave ringing, well... at the moment only *badly* struck Zanussi, but it'll get there!

I want to thank all the ringers (I can't mention all of them!!) in and around London, and beyond, who have been so welcoming and helped me to flourish whilst I've been here. Words cannot express how grateful I am, I could not have done this amazing tour and achieved what I have without you. I hope that in a few years' time I will be able to return. I will miss you all terribly - It's gonna feel quiet in NZ... Kia Ora.



Dylan's party at St. Anne's saw a cross-section of about 50 ringers from across the Association, some of whom, including Michael Uphill, had never rung here before. Dylan certainly made friends everywhere, and we enjoyed his special NZ wine and biscuits as well as sandwiches, cakes, pizza and Bucks Fizz. The party ringing was excellent, of course, and we will miss Dylan helping our own band, especially the learners. Thank you, and come back soon!
Janet Betham, Tower Captain, St Anne's Highgate

BELLS FROM SOUTH AMERICA

Tomas Brantmayer – St John's, Hackney

In 2016, I spent my days studying composition at the conservatoire and playing the organ at the Cathedral of Santiago de Chile, my hometown. It was during the long hours spent in the Cathedral that I met Eduardo Sato—a bellringer, musicologist, pianist, and founder of *Campaneros de Santiago* (Bellringers of Santiago), a group dedicated to the liturgical and historical ringing of bells in the churches of Santiago. From that meeting, a friendship blossomed. Eduardo invited me to join *Campaneros de Santiago*, and for over eight years now, I have had the privilege of ringing bells in various temples across Chile.

Chilean bells are radically different from British ones, both in their sound and the way they are rung. While bell ringing in the United Kingdom emphasizes musical structure with a strong melodic and harmonic foundation, the methods in Chile are closely tied to the language. Each ring's morphology is associated with a specific message, acting as a kind of sonic extension of speech. Moreover, unlike the English tradition, Chilean bells remain stationary when rung and lack specific tuning. This means that the partials that form their harmonic spectrum are not tuned to the bell's fundamental tone, producing a sound that is somewhat noisy and chaotic, yet equally beautiful. Because of this, the bells in Santiago de Chile are primarily expressed through intricate rhythmic patterns rather than melodic combinations.



In 2022, I moved to London to pursue a Master of Composition at the Royal College of Music. Although I was leaving my home country, I wanted bells to remain a part of my life. I reached out to the bellringing group at St John at Hackney, the church nearest to my new place, and they welcomed me warmly into their community. Under the guidance of Steve Jakeman, the Tower Captain, I discovered a fascinating new sound world. Steve taught me how to handle a bell, ring in rounds, changes, and most recently, to cover—a skill that allowed me to ring my first quarter peal just a few weeks ago. This experience was particularly meaningful, as it not only boosted my confidence but also marked a significant step in my journey as a bellringer.

Beyond Chile and the United Kingdom, I have had the opportunity to ring bells in Italy and Spain in recent years, countries with their own rich bellringing traditions. I am deeply interested in how bellringing creates a kind of sonic map, helping us better understand each society and its culture. The outings I have taken with the Hackney bellringers to different towns across England have been incredibly enriching for me as a foreigner, offering a unique way to explore the territory through its sounds. The sound of a bell is truly unique. Perhaps because of its beauty, some have called it "the voice of God" or "the tongues of the Church." To me, its sound represents a profound mystery—a mystery I want to stay close to, as it connects me more deeply to myself and, maybe, to the essence of the spirit, if such a thing exists.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Eduardo Sato and my friends from *Campaneros de Santiago* for introducing me to the world of bells. I also want to express my gratitude to Steve Jakeman and the Hackney bellringers, who have generously welcomed me into their community. Their support and kindness have made this once-foreign land feel like a second home.

12-Bell Striking Contest

Nine bands took part in the fifteenth London Twelve Bell Striking Competition. The competition was held at St. Michael, Cornhill on Saturday 26th October judged by David Hull, Jemima Bleackley and Harry Helyer.

Report by Editor, Angela Elliott

I could have gone on an outing to the wilds of Beaconsfield on 26th October, but instead I rocked up at St. Michael's, Cornhill to observe the 2024 London 12-Bell Competition for the Whitechapel Trophy, and very pleased I was that I did so because the crème de la crème of bell ringers were out in force and ringing up a storm.

The test piece was 1 lead of Primrose Surprise Maximus and 5 leads of Cambridge. As I'm only just getting to grips with Treble Bobbing, I imagine this involved some heavy duty treble work, not to mention substantial mind-bending around the various dodges required by the other bells.

In conversation with Dave Bassford just before the draw, I learned that he wasn't very confident as to Middlesex's chances. However, nothing could be further from the truth because, as all football pundits know, middle of the table is a fair place to land – but I get ahead of myself.

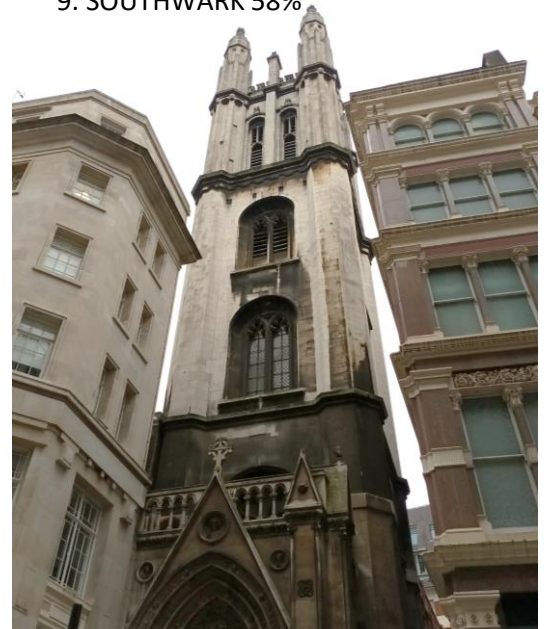


Our band was:

1. Geraldine Forster (Surrey)
 2. Mary Gow (Twickenham)
 3. Stephen Mitchell (Twickenham)
 4. Andrew Hodgson (Kensington)
 5. Chris Gould (Twickenham & Cornhill)
 6. Mike Palmer (Hillingdon)
 7. Mark Liebenrood (Barnet), Conductor
 8. Tom Lawrance (St Vedast, Foster Lane)
 9. Tim Palmer (Hillingdon)
 10. Dylan Thomas (Highgate)
 11. Dave Bassford (St Paul's)
 12. Simon Meyer (St Mary le Bow)
- Reserve: Michael Leese (Ealing)
- Thanks to all for ringing!

Result:

1. ASCY 85%
2. SRCY 84%
3. CORNHILL 83%
4. ST PAUL's 80%
- 5. MIDDLESEX 78%**
6. SOUTHWARK 76%
7. SURREY 73%
8. UNIVERSITY OF LONDON 68%
9. SOUTHWARK 58%



The parish church of St. Michael's Cornhill is one of those City churches lost to the Great Fire of London in 1666, and reputedly rebuilt on the same footprint by the great Sir Christopher Wren. The tower is largely a Hawksmoor confection with embellishments in the 19th century. Cornhill's 12 bells were cast by John Taylor, the largest weighing 30cwt, and consecrated by the Bishop of London on Sunday 3rd April 2011. These replaced a previous ring of 12 bells of varying ages.

The church fair hummed with ringers for the draw, but all appeared to retire to the nearby pub, once appraised of their place in the ringing order. This does rather make me wonder if some of the later teams were three-sheets to the wind, as the saying goes, by the time they came to ring, but I'm sure all were being very cautious not to over-imbibe. For me, the pleasure was in listening out for a smooth delivery of the test piece and enjoying the fine ringing from all teams. I'm glad I didn't have to judge because it was difficult to pick faults. That said, the team that stood out for me, insofar as their ringing was like butter sliding off a plate, was SRCY.

As soon as it had started, it was all over (well, several hours later, but you know what I mean) and we gathered once more to hear the results. Imagine our surprise when Middlesex came in 5th. A game of two halves, perchance? We didn't expect to beat the top four 'elite' bands, but we did come 'first' over the remainder and thus mid-table, as I said earlier, is not a bad place to land.

If you want to listen to the teams all are recorded here:

<https://www.london12bellcomp.org.uk/>

With thanks to judges David Hull, Jemima Bleackley and Harry Helyer. I would have included their comments on each team but I understand they destroyed their notes. Bit of a shame that.

Ringling Up and Down in Peal

Vanessa Randall, Hampstead

It's often hard for beginners to know when the right moment is to sign up for a class. I've been out of my depth a couple of times, keen to make progress but without the basic handling skills required. However, the timing felt perfect for 'Ringling Up & Down in Peal' training run by Edmund Wratten on the 28th September this year. I'd reached a point where I could ring up and down fairly easily by myself but doing it in peal was elusive and confusing. Thanks to Edmund's clear explanation and the helpers, it began to dawn on me why. Most likely I had been told many times in my tower, but I was finally in a place to take on board the fact that the light bells do not go up or down in a straight line, that they must change their rate of ascent or descent to accommodate the heavier bells in the peal, and that some treading water is often required. Sometimes it's hard to absorb this on a practice night when we only ring up and down once, often in a bit of a rush, and on a small number of adjacent bells. Until this class I had been relieved just to end the raise or the lower in the right position.

We were five students with several helpers, which meant that we alternated ringling up and down and the bells were always in the right position. It felt as though we had a lot of practice so the self-consciousness of performing in front of others was soon forgotten. I am still in the process of transferring the new insights gleaned from Edmund to the physical business of ringling up and down in my tower, but I feel that the lights are a bit brighter and at least I now understand why I was going wrong. It is rare to spend so much time on one skill and I am grateful both to Edmund and all the helpers who came along knowing that they'd be spending three hours just ringling up and down as we learned.

Isleworth Tower is back in operation

Louise Dixon, Isleworth

We have now had the engineers in to clear the loose stonework on the outside of the tower and to have a Risk Assessment done. Steve Jakeman has replaced the broken stay and check the gudgeon on No. 9.

We are about to recommence our training programme, on Tuesday evenings at 7pm. Text message me on **07940 509 520** if you'd like to come along.

Devon Knows How They Ring So Well

Kate Eden, St James' Islington

Celtic and Rangers. The Beatles and the Stones. Yin and yang. Such opposites are the stuff of legend. But what about bell ringers and... *Devon* ringers? Are they opposites, too? Step forward Freddie Crowley, who's grown up in the Devon tradition. On Saturday 26th October, he kindly led a workshop for a group of London ringers, to introduce us to his vernacular. It was a revelation. And yes, the Devon way *is* very different. For a start, ringling up starts with two silent pulls, followed by a simultaneous chime. And once the bells are up, there's no break; the ringling progresses straight into call changes.

Call changes are the alpha and omega of Devon ringling; there are no methods. If any of us assumed this was the soft option, we soon learnt our mistake. The changes are called in much quicker succession, and each switch is expected to be timed to perfection! We did our best, straining every sinew and brain cell to raise our game.

The speed of Devon ringling is also legendary; quicker than we're used to and with no handstroke gap. This demands a different technique, with hands higher up the rope, and keeping each handstroke close. Without a handstroke gap, the bells produce a 'cartwheeling' sound; a smooth, uninterrupted flow that's mesmeric.

Finally: ringling down. Once again, this flows directly from the call changes, with no break. And again, there's a close handstroke, to maintain the quicker speed. Surprisingly, it doesn't end with a 'drop and catch'. Once the chiming has reached the right stage, we simply drop! What a strange feeling, with a daring touch of nonchalance.

Perhaps the biggest debate of the day focused on the scones that we enjoyed during the break. Jam first, with clotted cream on top or the other way round? Opinions became heated, and the only way to settle the matter was to defer to the Devonians (cream then jam).

We all came away with renewed respect for our Devon compatriots. Their ringling style is a whole new language: technically demanding, and producing truly beautiful music.

I'd encourage anyone to try it. Scones included.



Hackney Belles in Advent Action

Stephen Jakeman - Hackney

Under the leadership of Lucy Cartwright from Hackney, the reformed Handbell Team made their debut at the South Hackney Advent Carol Service on 1st December. Ringling two carols their performance was greatly appreciated and enhanced the service. They will be in action again for the Christmas carol Service at South Hackney on December 22nd at 6pm. All that practicing was well worth it!

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Constance Redgrave – St Anne's, Highgate

Newbie

Well it wasn't fun and hurt a lot but I'm ok and still ringing. I had to think long and hard about writing this because I didn't want to scare anyone; but and it's a big but, I had never seen this happen and I really don't want it to happen to anyone else...so here goes.

About a month ago, I attempted to ring a new bell for the first time and somehow the rope wrapped itself under my left arm, lifted me up off the ground and dropped me in a heap on the floor. I had a large purple bruise/burn from the bottom of my ribs to my underarm and a rather sore shoulder. Otherwise there was no real damage except to my pride. The tower was brilliant and I was up ringing again in about 20 minutes. Saying that, I suspect shock was masking the shoulder and when I got home, the bruise was a surprise.

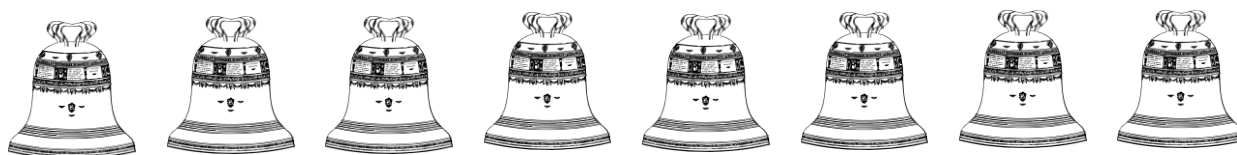
What I found really interesting was watching other people with hyper-vigilant eyes as I sat to the side recovering. I could see some of the people had their ropes falling consistently over the back of their left wrist and forearm. Others were more like mine, i.e. all over the place. Over the next few days I continued to watch closely and kept seeing this over and over again. When I asked why, I got interesting answers but nothing conclusive.

As with most lessons in my life there is a process. My first question had to be, did I want to quit ringing? The answer was loud and clear: absolutely not. So with that out of the way, I had to ask how I can make sure this never happens again. After all, if we are smart, we look both ways before we cross the street. There has to be a way to do this more safely.

The obvious place to start was back at the beginning and for the past month I have kept my focus strictly on bell control, rounds and call changes; in that order. The big challenge has been my nervous system quite reasonably concluding that bells can kill me. While this might be possible, I think it's very unlikely. I also continue to struggle with lack of band-width. Anything that requires moving my attention from the rope to something else can trigger blind panic and my brain just stops working. I can't hear anything and I have no idea where I am or what I am meant to be doing. The patience and warmth from everyone during these episodes has been really lovely. Shout out to Steve Jakeman, Edmund Wratten and Dylan Thomas for their hard work and feedback while I work my way through this process.

So boys and girls, what did we learn this time? No surprise; bell control, bell control and more bell control. All roads seem to lead back to the same place. There is definitely a theme developing here.

So going forward my new goal is elegant and beautiful rope technique and I am determined to get it. Wish me luck.



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RUNNING THE MIDDLESEX ASSOCIATION

Lucy Chandhial

We all know the phrase ‘many hands make light work’ and this is very true in a volunteer organisation which supports members to enjoy bellringing at different towers, for services, practices, district activities and events.

The Association not only leads to the district practices, outings and trainings so many of us enjoy but provides the back up of the Bell Restoration Officer for maintenance queries and major renovations, the website and Bell News to know what is going on in the diocese and maintains the heritage of ringing through the library records.

At £10 a year membership is excellent value if you enjoy the chance to ring not just at one home tower and like the structure provided for national events, records of achievements and questions about strange noises in the belfry!

At the ADMs (S&W 11th Jan, N&E 15th Feb) and AGM (26th April) elections are held to appoint people to take on roles which create the overall benefit of the Association ranging from supporting roles like Assistant Secretary or Training Rep (usually requiring you to organise three or four activities in a year) to guiding roles like Training Officer or Safeguarding Officer, which lean on relevant experience and apply it to supporting Association members.

All roles are up for election but in some cases the existing Officer is willing to continue and in others we have a clear vacancy to be filled. One important role which will be vacant at the AGM in April is the role of General Secretary. So what does it mean to be the ‘Gen Sec’ of the Association? With an Assistant Secretary to support, this person manages the agenda of the AGM and Autumn Meeting, ensures that minutes are taken and that members are informed of the most important actions or agreements. They use data from the Annual Report to complete the Charity Commission return for the Bell Restoration Fund and they are the main contact person for the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers. When we have our inter-district striking competitions the Secretary or Assistant Secretary invites suitable judges from another Association.

If you would be interested to consider this role, or any other District or Association role, in the new year please talk to any current Officer for more information about the level of time commitment involved, the likely skills required and therefore which roles might be most suited. You can always approach the current post holder to find out more as the website and Annual Report have the details:

<https://www.bellringing.london/association-guild-officers/>

<https://www.bellringing.london/district-officers/>

Steve Mitchell

As indicated by Lucy, we have a number of key positions to elect new people to in April 2025. With Linda (and Tom) standing down as General Secretary (and Assistant) it is vital that we line up successors. We can travel hopefully and see what happens at the AGM, but we really should be identifying and preparing someone during the winter to take over as General Secretary.

News from The Central Council

Adrian Sweeting – CC Rep

Who would have thought it, after 50 years of ringing, I am a Central Council Rep for Middlesex! Why now, you all ask. Previously, the Central Council appears to have been rather uninteresting, although it performed useful jobs. It maintained (and still does) Method and Composition libraries, Ringing World, and Bellboard, and so was and is responsible for many of the things ringers use to facilitate their ringing, and communicate about it afterwards. It was filled with people who had been on the Central Council for ever, and nothing ever changed (personal opinion, before anyone gets cross).

The Organisation of the Central Council

The work of the Central Council is done by Workgroups, each of which has a leader and people co-opted into the groups, who possess skills and talents that may help. There are two types of Workgroups: Those doing the traditional work of the Central Council, being Methods and Compositions, Bell Repair Fund, History and Archives, Safeguarding etc. These seem to pretty much function as expected, and magically, when we want something from them it should be there.

Those associated with the Ringing 2030 project. Ringing 2030 is the Grand Plan to save ringing by sparking interest in learning and continuing to ring, thus saving it from the ageing ringing population. This is much more than a fancy recruitment drive, and to succeed, will need a massive amount of work and very wise use of resources, both financial and personal skills. As a CC rep, I can communicate what is happening, and hopefully find people from Middlesex who can to give their time and expertise to help this project. However, I am the only one and we are entitled to 4. I hope to write articles for Bell News, explaining what the CC are doing, or not doing, and how you can help. For a start, become a CC rep and join in.

Next time, what is Ringing 2030?



SAD NEWS

Stephen Mitchell, Master

In recent years we have been very sad to lose a number of serving or former Tower Captains and Ringing Masters of Middlesex S&W District towers: Dorothy Barker, Frank Blagrove, Michael Sprackling, Norman Edwards, Richard Wilson, Dennis Brock and most recently (in September 2024) Monica Trow.

Monica's funeral took place at St Nicholas' church in Chiswick. A large congregation included many Middlesex, and Surrey ringers. These included the Chair and Ringing Master of the S&W District, and the Master and General Secretary of the Association.

Immediately after the service a half-muffled quarter peal of Plain Bob Major was rung:

<https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1787775>

Monica was a keen ringer of local, developmental quarter peals. Bellboard records her as having rung 156 at Chiswick, and 350 at Barnes: most of these were rung before practices on Monday and Friday evenings. All the members of today's quarter peal band rang a lot with Monica over the last 25 years or so. Our combined total of recorded quarter peals with her was 1,843.

David J Atkins

Those of you who (like me) rang in South and West Middlesex 40 – 45 years ago (!!) will undoubtedly remember David as a young man with irrepressible enthusiasms for cycling, ringing and drinking real ale, often all on the same day, indeed on the same afternoon!

Having rung with the Exeter Colleges Guild in the early 1970s, David moved to Staines in 1978, and worked in Teddington through the 1970s and 1980s. He was an enthusiastic ringer in the band led by Ralph Collins at Staines St Peter. Ralph says he was the band's leading conductor of touches, frequent quarter peals and occasional peals. David was an active supporter of South & West District ringing practices, events and outings. He rang 42 peals for the Middlesex Association, all of them at towers in west London or Windsor, including Plain Bob Royal at Twickenham, Stedman Caters and Cambridge Royal at Hillingdon, 8 Spliced Surprise Major at Staines, and Spliced Plain Major in 9 methods (with 370 changes of method) at Isleworth in February 1986, conducted by Peter Felton - I have particular memories of that one!

David moved to Hampshire in the 1990s, ringing in the local band at Alverstoke, where he is recorded on Bellboard as having rung for the coronation last year, and where he rang his last recorded quarter peal on 12 November 2023. I am sure he will be greatly missed there.

These days, we are rather short of people in their 30s, with David's ringing skills and general commitment to the cause, in S&W Middlesex. Although I believe he never held a District or Association office, he made a significant contribution to Middlesex ringing.

Monica Trow

Jill Wigney

Monica Trow was a Life Member of the Middlesex Association, did a short stint as S&W District Secretary in 2015 and had been Tower Captain at St Nicholas, Chiswick since 1999 where she rang 14 peals and 155 Quarter Peals. She also rang regularly at St Mary, Barnes where she rang 11 peals and 350 quarter peals, and was a member of the Thursday lunchtime band at St-Giles-in-the-Fields, Holborn. Altogether she rang 55 peals, 24 of them for the Association. She moved to London in the mid 1990s, initially ringing with the Ealing band. She was an enthusiastic ringer, hugely supportive of District and Association events and she was good company in the pub afterwards, with many stories to tell!

She liked to go on ringing outings, and in particular supported the annual Barnes Summer Trip and the Reading and Channel Islands Tulloch fortnight right up until this year.

She could ring handbells - scoring 11 quarter peals in hand and most recently supporting the Friday handbell group run by Steve Mitchell in Twickenham.

She was sociable and likeable and very kind. She would put on a lunch every year for the Chiswick ringers at her house - and who can forget the year that she got trapped in the lavatory all night the night before and still insisted the lunch should go ahead!

She always provided something for ringing teas when asked, and always made an extra batch of little sponge cakes with icing and a cherry on top just for me - in case they all went before I got to them!

We were friends for 25 years and I miss her company and her wicked sense of humour.



Email Updates: Changes and more details are sent via email to the Middlesex Association email list nearer the date of each event. Send an email to mcaldg+subscribe@googlegroups.com to be put on the list if not on it already.

Dates, times and venues subject to change. Please check with event organiser.

District	Date	Day	Event	Location	Time
N&E	04/12/2024	Wednesday	Surprise Minor Methods practice	Southgate	19:00 - 21:00
S&W	05/12/2024	Thursday	Triples Practice	Hanwell	20:00 - 21:30
N&E	08/12/2024	Sunday	Caters and Royal Methods practice	Hackney	14:00 - 16:00
N&E	10/12/2024	Tuesday	Plain Triples and Major Methods practice	Enfield St Mary Mags	19:00 - 21:00
S&W	10/12/2024	Tuesday	6 bell practice	Norwood Green	19:45 - 21:00
Association	13/12/2024	Friday	Association Cinques and Maximus Methods practice	St Magnus the Martyr	18:30 - 20:30
N&E	14/12/2024	Saturday	Christmas Ringing	St. Andrews, Holborn	13:45 - 14:45
N&E	14/12/2024	Saturday	Christmas Ringing	Holy Sepulchre, Holborn - with tea and mince pies, pub	15:30 - 17:00
N&E	19/12/2024	Thursday	Plain Doubles and Minor Methods practice	Islington Upper St	19:00 - 21:00
S&W	20/12/2024	Friday	Surprise Major methods practice	Heston	19:30 - 21:00
N&E	27/12/2024	Friday	Surprise Major methods practice	St Lawrence, Jewry	18:30 - 20:30
S&W	02/01/2025	Thursday	Triples/Minor/Doubles practice	Hanwell	20:00 - 21:30
S&W	07/01/2025	Tuesday	6 bell practice	Norwood Green	19:45 - 21:00
N&E	08/01/2025	Wednesday	Surprise Minor Methods practice	A week late to avoid New Year - Southgate	19:00 - 21:00
Association	10/01/2025	Friday	Association Cinques and Maximus Methods practice	St Magnus the Martyr	18:30 - 20:30
S&W	11/01/2025	Saturday	S&W Annual District Meeting	Harefield	tbc
N&E	12/01/2025	Sunday	Caters and Royal Methods practice	Hackney	14:00 - 16:00
N&E	14/01/2025	Tuesday	Plain Triples and Major Methods practice	Tottenham	19:00 - 21:00
N&E	16/01/2025	Thursday	Plain Doubles and Minor Methods practice	Stepney	19:00 - 21:00
S&W	17/01/2025	Friday	Surprise Major methods practice	Heston	19:30 - 21:00
N&E	18/01/2025	Saturday	Ringing prior to District Planning Meeting	Highgate	14:00 - 15:00
N&E	18/01/2025	Saturday	District Planning Meeting plus meeting	Gospel Oak ringing followed by meeting at 16:30	15:30 - 16:30
N&E	24/01/2025	Friday	Surprise Major methods practice	Bow in the Road	18:30 - 20:30
S&W	24/01/2025	Friday	10 bell practice	Harrow on the Hill	19:45 - 21:15
N&E	25/01/2025	Saturday	Training Course	TBC	10:00 - 13:00
S&W	25/01/2025	Saturday	Training	Hillingdon tbc	10:30 - 12:00
N&E	05/02/2025	Wednesday	Surprise Minor Methods practice	Holloway Road	19:00 - 21:00
S&W	06/02/2025	Thursday	Triples/Minor/Doubles practice	Hanwell	20:00 - 21:30
S&W	08/02/2025	Saturday	Second Saturday training	Cranford tbc	10:30 - 12:00
N&E	09/02/2025	Sunday	Caters and Royal Methods practice	Hackney	14:00 - 16:00
N&E	11/02/2025	Tuesday	Plain Triples and Major Methods practice	Isle of Dogs	19:00 - 21:00
S&W	11/02/2025	Tuesday	6 bell practice	Norwood Green	19:45 - 21:00
Association	14/02/2025	Friday	Association Cinques and Maximus Methods practice	St Magnus the Martyr	18:30 - 20:30
N&E	15/02/2025	Saturday	Annual District Meeting	Garlickhythe (probably another City tower beforehand)	14:00 - 18:00
N&E	20/02/2025	Thursday	Plain Doubles and Minor Methods practice	Islington Upper St	19:00 - 21:00
S&W	21/02/2025	Friday	Surprise Major methods practice	Heston	19:30 - 21:00
S&W	22/02/2025	Saturday	Fourth Saturday training	Hillingdon tbc	10:30 - 12:00
N&E	22/02/2025	Saturday	Training Course	TBC	10:00 - 13:00
N&E	28/02/2025	Friday	Surprise Major methods practice	TBC	18:30 - 20:30
S&W	28/02/2025	Friday	10 bell practice	Twickenham tbc	19:45 - 21:15

Items for inclusion in **Middlesex Bell News** to Angela Elliott at BellNewsEditor@bellringing.london

Next deadline Friday 21st February 2025

The newsletter is proof-read by Janet Betham (020 8340 1368) jrbetham@hotmail.com

Website material should be sent to Webmaster: James White (S&W),

mail.James.White@gmail.com or to Anthony Davey (N&E), anthony@smoketree.org



Holloway ringer Corrine Drewery reports that her mum, Elaine Drewery runs Hedgehog Care, www.hedgehogcare.org a sanctuary in Lincolnshire, and was keen to feature bell ringers on her annual Christmas card and sent a sketch of some of the Holloway ringers. Can you guess who they are?