



SPECIAL GOLDEN JUBILEE ISSUE

HRGB NORTH WEST REGION

1975 - 2025

Chatter from the Chair



Hello everyone and welcome to the last issue of Oyez for 2025.

As I'm writing this, a certain commercial radio station has begun playing seasonal music; garden centres have been stocked with decorations and lights for weeks and supermarkets and food halls have been re-arranged to promote 'festive fayre' so nobody knows where anything is anymore. Every time I drive at night, front windows and outside illuminations make journeys so much more interesting! But all this did make me wonder how soon teams dust off their Christmas music and get going with the comfortably familiar or even invest in some new pieces as a

challenge and a change? Did you get well underway in September or have you waited until after Bonfire Night? We've all heard "Don't the bells sound lovely at Christmas?" Well yes, of course they do, but surely we are unanimously of the opinion that they also sound wonderful in July! Whatever your tradition, I hope you're enjoying this time, whether it's rehearsing for public concerts and performances or just for your own amusement. In all the worry about playing well, never under-estimate the enjoyment your audience will have. My first experience of having a go at handbell ringing was at a very informal Christmas evening and look what that led to!

Recently I went to see *The Choral*, written by Alan Bennett, and thoroughly enjoyed it. I saw a description of the plot-line regarding the fictional community's choral society as it struggled with the loss of male singers to the war which 'grievously thinned out the membership.' It occurred to me that there are some parallels in our own history

and it added a dimension to the talk I gave on handbell ringing to a local Mothers' Union group a few days later.

As we come to the end of 2025, it's good we have on record our celebration of the North West Region's Golden Jubilee. Our major event in the spring seems a long time ago now and although some teams managed to get together locally in the autumn, we haven't seen some of you for quite a while. Our region is not alone (by any means) with teams who aren't able to attend events for a variety of very valid reasons but we would love to see you in 2026. You will be hearing early in the New Year about our Spring Gathering on Saturday 28th March at The Ministry Centre, Aughton near Ormskirk as well as receiving formal notification of our AGM which will be held during the event. Please do seriously consider coming! It's a new venue, as we've been successful in finding somewhere in the middle of the region to geographically suit as many of us as possible. As we have some changes to the North West Committee, it would be really helpful to have your support. We all know about AGMs and the temptation to avoid them because we might find ourselves with a job! This is an opportunity for you, as members, to help us plan events and your ideas and suggestions are essential to that. We look forward to seeing you there.

On behalf of the NW Committee, may I wish you the very best for a Happy Christmas and all good wishes for 2026.

Happy Ringing

Linda Parkinson

A QUICK NOTE FROM YOUR ACTING EDITOR

Thank you to everyone who has sent in articles for this special Jubilee edition of Oyez – it's good to see that in our 50th year, the Region is still thriving and so many of our teams are active in their own localities, bringing the pleasure of handbells to a wide audience.

You will find news of many of our teams on the next few pages – and a team from the North East Region has sneaked in, because our own Anne Hopley saw them braving the great outdoors at Chatsworth!

Please note the word "Acting" in the heading to this note – I don't remember how many years ago I said I would take on the job, just to keep things ticking over until someone more competent came along, but it's been a while! We are still looking for a new Editor, so here are some things to think about:

- It's not a huge undertaking – three issues a year, and the content comes to you.
- You don't have to attend Committee meetings if you don't want to (though we'd love to welcome you if you'd like to give us a try!).
- No qualifications needed – I just use Word and fiddle the photos in somehow!
- Last but not least - you certainly wouldn't have a hard act to follow.

Do get in touch with me (details on the last page) if you want to know anything while you are considering this wonderful opportunity.

Irene Merson

ALL ROUND THE REGION – OUR TEAMS' ACTIVITIES DURING THE GOLDEN JUBILEE YEAR

A DOUBLE CELEBRATION FOR GRESFORD ALL SAINTS HR

2025 has been a year of Double Golden Jubilee celebrations for us, as in addition to it being the 50th anniversary of the formation of North West Region of HRGB, it is also 50 years since Mrs Norah Randles, an eminent tower bell ringer at All Saints' Church Gresford, purchased three octaves of Whitechapel handbells and established the Gresford Handbell Ringers team.

As we are one of the few teams in North Wales it seemed appropriate to perform a concert of



mainly Welsh hymn tunes and traditional folk songs and airs at Capel Y Groes in Wrexham, which we repeated at a Heritage Day at our own All Saints' Church a few days later. We've always kept a comprehensive handbell archive, which was on display throughout the day and included the original receipt for £1015.22 from Whitechapel Foundry for the purchase of the three octaves of handbells in June 1975!

Norah Randles bequeathed the bells to All Saints' Church in her will - what a wonderful legacy she left to us and I'm sure she'd be delighted to know that both the North West Region and Gresford Handbell Ringers are still going strong fifty years later!



Jill Roberts

A NEW VENTURE FOR LLANDUDNO HANDBELL RINGERS - NATIONAL RESIDENTIAL RINGING WEEK

We sent four members of our team from Llandudno, North Wales to attend the Sheffield week of ringing. We were all very excited about what we were going to be able to do and the new skills we would learn and bring back to our team to help us grow more in our playing. Wow! The first playing time together with all the other players was mind blowing. All of us were absolutely stunned by the fact that it was taken for granted that we would be able to 'get on with the music'. It couldn't have been further from the truth. We went for our coffee break absolutely bewildered with it all. After the second session, it took all of us a great deal of courage and will power to actually not head home! Many of the folks around us were so very lovely and encouraged us to stay, stating that because there were so many ringers, the odd

note missed by each of us would go unnoticed, but the learning curve for us would be worthwhile. To that end, we decided to stay - not least because we had paid - and we decided that we would at least learn something during our time. By the time the concert rolled around on Friday evening, we had grown in confidence, learning about the different techniques and trying them out as well! Of course we really did enjoy meeting other team members, and chatting with them gave us all a much-needed boost of encouragement. We were buzzing after the concert and just couldn't believe that we had managed to stay the course and enjoyed doing so. We would really love to thank everyone who helped us get through that week and we look forward to meeting you again in the future.

Thank you so much.

Christine, Jenny, Sally and Sue.

A RING FOR AUTUMN – THREE REPORTS

From Jen Hodgson, Kinder Ringers:

As part of the celebrations for the HRGB NW Region's Golden Jubilee year, Kinder Ringers hosted 'A Ring for Autumn' at St Matthew's Church Hall in Hayfield on Thursday, 16th October. Marple URC Handbells and the Norbury Handbell Ringers came along for a fantastic evening of massed ringing, which also included a range of beverages and homemade cakes for sustenance.

The programme started with an introduction by the leader of the Kinder Ringers - and organiser of the event - Anne Hopley. For the ringing sessions, she had organised a range of music to suit the varied musical interests of the three groups: The Jubilee Celebration Polka; Happy Birthday; Messing About on the River; Old Macdonald; We'll Keep a Welcome; La Golandrina; Jingle Bells.

The groups were also treated to solos, which were interspersed into the programme: Kinder Ringers (dir. Anne Hopley): Golden Slumbers; Marple URC HR (dir. Sue Arden): Celebration.

In addition to the joy of taking part in massed ringing and listening to the other groups, it was great to catch up with friends and make new ones. Furthermore, the teams all wore their professional attire and took advantage of the presence of a professional videographer, who recorded the performances on the night. Whilst this event was arranged as part of the HRGB NW Golden Jubilee celebrations, it is hoped that this gathering will be the first of many similar ones in the region.

From Jeanette Jenkins, Kinder Ringers and Norbury HR:

The idea of local teams getting together to avoid travelling long distances in the darker Autumn evenings was first used by the HRGB SouthEast Region. The committee thought that it was a good idea as there had already been two full regional rallies in the NorthWest this year.

Each participating team chose a piece of massed ringing and together with suggestions from the committee this formed the programme for the evening. The music was available at no

charge and within copyright regulations. It included two fun pieces which could be used by the teams when visiting care homes and WI groups who wished to “Have a go”.

As part of our Regional Golden Jubilee we had hoped to collect video clips of the teams performing, and the mini rally gave us opportunity to do this. The host team, Kinder shared their usual practice night, saving on hall hire costs and team members provided excellent cake and biscuits for the tea break.

The committee’s choice of “We’ll keep a Welcome” was very apt as we opened up our practice to welcome our neighbouring teams. Marple URC Handbell Ringers rang “Celebration” in keeping with the Golden Anniversary theme, and Kinder Ringers rang “Golden Slumbers”.

The massed ringing included Jubilee Polka which had been arranged by Sandra Winter for our Golden Jubilee and La Golondrina, a past rally favourite of the region. Sue Arden conducted La Golondrina, reminding us of the rising and falling, soaring sound of the piece, reminiscent of the Swallow after which it is named. The piece was originally a folk song made famous by Nat King Cole in 1962 and later by Greek singer Nana Mouscouri in 1985.

Sue Evans conducted Norbury Handbell Ringers’ choice of “Messing About on the River”, another folk song adapted by Tony Hart and evocative of Tales of the Riverbank.

After saying our goodbyes we all went home to our own Golden Slumbers.



Norbury Handbell Ringers at the Autumn Get-Together at Hayfield

From Wendy Atkinson, Sue Arden and Lesley Walker – Marple URC Handbell Ringers:

A real highlight of our “Golden” year has been the mini-GatherRing at Hayfield, hosted by the Kinder Ringers. Three teams -Kinder Ringers, Norbury and Marple URC – came together to mass ring and do our party pieces as well as playing “Happy Birthday” for the North West Region. There was just about enough room in St Matthew’s Church Hall for us all and our bells and we had a chance to socialise over tea, coffee and homemade cakes. A really lovely evening.

It has been a year of celebration for us all, both as Region and as a team, and we are looking forward to 2026 and the opportunities it brings to meet with other teams.

SALE HANDBELL RINGERS

What was it Irene said? 'Something your team has taken part in; a special event to mark NW HRGB Jubilee Year.' Well! We haven't really done anything different... except, well yes, we did attend the NW Region Rally in May, and that certainly was a bit special because Carolyn won the cake decorating competition, and of course even before that, and pre-empting the committee's suggestion, we had already met up with a neighbouring team, The Bells of St Clements, for a get-together in January 2025. We were a bit limited in what we could play together as we use notation and they use numbers, but it was a fun afternoon and we discovered that we did have a lot in common when it came to drinking tea and eating cake.

I suppose a photograph and article featuring the team on the front page of a local community magazine and recruiting Isaac, our first international member, could also be seen as a special Jubilee events. (No, he doesn't travel from Hong Kong each week; just from Manchester where he is a post grad. student at the Royal Northern College of Music). Maybe though, having four more potential new members contact us in the space of three days was also something to celebrate. Be careful what you wish for however; truthfully it felt a bit scary, as at that moment in time we didn't have the bells, space or even, with up-coming engagements looming, the time to introduce them to bell-ringing as we would want to. Sadly, for various reasons none of the four could join us, but it was certainly a new experience for Jubilee year.

Literally, as I was about to finish this report, I have just heard that Isaac has written and dedicated to Sale Handbell Ringers a delightful new piece of music, *Peel Ring*, Now that really is something special we can all celebrate in NW Region's Jubilee Year.

Joan Ball, Sale Handbell Ringers

TANTONY RINGERS

This year is turning out to be more busy than others recently. We had a new recruit early in the year, who has settled in well. We have been working through the Handbell Handbook to help the newer ringers learn and brush up the skills of longer-term team members.

We were able to attend the Golden Jubilee Rally in May and submitted a video of a sub-group of the team ringing twelve bells four-in-hand for the archives.

At the beginning of July one of the local churches, St John's Bigrigg, held a Flower Festival in conjunction with Whitehaven Flower Club to raise money for the Great North Air Ambulance and Cumbria Blood Bikes. Tantony went to provide a musical background to the opening morning. We started ringing straight after the Opening Ceremony and included some pieces such as Singing in the Rain which related directly to displays and others like The Flying Trapeze from the world of show-business.

During July we also visited the Memory Club at St Bees which provides lunch and a talk/activity for those with dementia. We played a short programme of pieces which they enjoyed, and we have been invited back to ring some carols for them to sing along to in December. Mainly using the Mayola Christmas Collection I and II books, we will be playing twelve bells. For the first time, we will be transposing some into a more appropriate key for singing by using larger bells, as suggested in the tables within the books. It is surprising how different the same tune sounds in a different key.

Also coming up in December is a short slot to introduce the second half of Whitehaven Choral Society Christmas Concert to be held at Moresby Church. This will be entertainment rather than for a sing-song.

Our last event of the year will be background music for the Christmas Tree Festival at St John's Bigrigg. This will be using the standard twelve bells and include carols from our earlier events alongside some extra ones.

Jane Holland, Tantony Ringers

WAVERTON HANDBELL RINGERS



We have had a year when getting together all our ringers at any rehearsal has been a rare event. Someone has always been missing, with anything from a collapsed lung to a golfer's elbow, and everything in between. In the tradition of handbell ringers everywhere, our conductor has remained calm and adjusted our music to the maximum number of bells possible between ringers still standing. Our depleted team did manage to fulfil our annual guaranteed booking for the 12th time, by ringing in July at Waverton Village Fete, always a cheerful occasion.

Our fairy godmother (or perhaps the patron saint of handbell ringers) has suddenly provided a new recruit, and has persuaded one of our 'exes' to return to pick up bells again for our Christmas concerts. We all hope for no missing bells or ringers in a resounding 2026.

Judith Boyd, Waverton Handbell Ringers

MARPLE URC HANDBELLS - "GOING GOLDEN!"

Marple URC Handbells have been busy throughout the North West Region's Golden Jubilee Year.

In March, six of our team travelled to the GatheRing at Bolton to join in the massed ringing. In May we were on our travels again, this time to Lostock to the Golden Jubilee Rally with a nine strong team to play pieces from each of the five decades of the Region's existence. The

chatter afterwards centred around the special guest, Malcolm Wilson, and the special Jubilee cakes, admired and enjoyed by all.

Marple URC has a special group, "Strictly Come Together" that meet on Wednesday mornings for coffee and other activities. The Handbells are honoured to be asked to play for them and our visits are an important part of our year. The theme of our May visit was "Dance Tunes" and we will play for them again at the end of November with carols and festive tunes foremost in the programme.

Each year the team selects a charity to support and holds a Coffee Morning to raise funds. This year Francis House was chosen and we raised over £200 despite the best efforts of Storm Amy to keep our audience at home.



Ready to ring despite the storm

For our last mini-concert of 2025, Marple URC Handbells polished up their pieces to play eight tunes for the 'Strictly Come Together' (church coffee morning) on Wednesday 26th November.

The selection we played included four tunes from HRGB sources and a few carols, finishing off with the familiar Jingle Bells.

The audience were invited to sing along when they knew the words to the ringers' pieces, and also to ring belleplates to two more tunes - while the ringers also sang! A member of Kinder Ringers kindly stepped in for one of our regular ringers who was unavailable, so we

could play the three octave pieces we've been practising since the mini-rally at Hayfield. We believe a good time was had by all!

It has been a year of celebration for us all, both as Region and as a team, and we are looking forward to 2026 and the opportunities it brings to meet with other teams.

Wendy Atkinson, Sue Ardern, Lesley Walker

DEAN AND MARRON VALLEY HR

Here are brief reports from two recent concerts - the first from Dean Handbell Ringers.

It was too early to ring anything Christmassy and we only had 6 ringers available so we rang pieces for 12 bells, but we enjoyed ringing a good selection of our music, including some really old ones like Waltzing Matilda, a First World War Medley, My Grandfather's Clock, Knees Up Mother Brown, Scarborough Fair, and All Around My Hat. We travelled a long way to find Langwathby Village Hall, but we were very well received and enjoyed an excellent supper afterwards. We always tell a good selection of jokes and short stories and they went down well.

The second concert was given by Marron Valley/Dean Handbell Ringers. This was also to a new audience with the Loweswater Village Ladies Group and again we rang a selection of non Christmassy music which included Creation's Hymn by Beethoven, The Grand March from Aida, The Ukrainian National Anthem, Barcarolle, If I were a Rich Man and Something Good from The Sound of Music. We had 8 ringers, which gave us so much more choice. But we do the best we can with the numbers we have!

We have two Christmas concerts coming up, and are enjoying our practices but gone are the days when we almost always had 9 ringers and could play music without having to adapt our regular Christmas music for fewer ringers. But we battle on!!

Margaret Howarth

Seen by Anne Hopley at Chatsworth Christmas Fair on a cold November day: Three ringers from Dronfield HR, based near Sheffield, entertained **outside** using only 8 bells. The arrangements of familiar Christmas carols were varied and interesting and the sound carried really well thanks to their position in Flora's Temple. We were left in no doubt as to who the team were thanks to their eye-catching banner, made by one of the team.



AND NOW – AN UNUSUAL ARTICLE FROM THE AUDIENCE'S POINT OF VIEW

It was by chance I met Emma at one of the regular afternoon Opus 1 classical concerts given by the Halle Orchestra at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester. We chatted during the interval, and I found out that she played handbells with Kinder Ringers. I told her that I belonged to Bells of St Clement's handbell team who practice at St Clement's in Urmston. I would never leave my team as I have been ringing with them for years and years, and I attended HRGB events with them until 2021 when I had my hips replaced during Covid. I used to enjoy the rallies and I remember going to Bury for these.

Emma told me that on 10th November 2025, the Kinder Ringers Quartet were coming to play for the residents in the complex where I live. We've never had handbell ringers come to play for us before and I was really taken aback when I heard that Emma's team was coming. What a coincidence! Before they arrived, I found the programme and words to a piece which I had kept from the last time I heard Kinder Ringers play many years ago. I was so excited about hearing them play this time that I actually came down to the lounge for the concert the week before it was due!

They must have a very big repertoire because their programme was very varied so it appealed to everyone. I was fascinated watching them holding 4 bells at a time - I would be clashing the bells if I played 2 in hand, though some of my team do. We often let people have a go after we have played and also have belleplates people can try. Although my team also play My Grandfather's Clock, Kinder's playing was in another league; I would say I'm definitely a beginner compared to them. They were very professional and used a lot of different techniques to play the bells.

It was very interesting to hear that they were challenging themselves beyond just playing 12 or 16 bells between 4 people; I think I counted 21 bells in some pieces. I know there was a piece where they each played 7 or 8 bells and had to keep changing them; that was amazing to watch. One of the other residents was wondering how they could play two bells in each hand and Anne explained it was done by striking one bell up and down and the other side to side. I didn't realise this and thought that was so clever. I remember Anne saying that the full team plays 3 octaves. They have bags on wheels so they don't have to carry them; I thought that was very good.

Anne was a very clear speaker and made it so interesting when she gave information about each piece prior to playing. Brenda was bringing some humour and I could see how much fun they have playing together. Handbells don't exclude anybody who can't read music and is such fun as you can also have a lot of laughs when you are practising.

I enjoyed all the pieces Kinder Ringers played and couldn't pick a favourite as they were all good. I would like to thank them for their excellent performance which was very well attended and appreciated. All the residents enjoyed it, especially me, although I already knew about handbells. Music is so important to brighten up our lives and I found it really uplifting.

Celia Ternent, Resident and Audience Member

Comment from KR - never before have we arrived at a venue to be greeted by a tannoy announcement of our performance!! We were made so welcome and thoroughly enjoyed entertaining the very friendly residents.

AND FINALLY - A CAUTIONARY TALE IMPORTED FROM

OVER THE HILLS AND (NOT TOO) FAR AWAY

This relates to a recent event at a Christmas Lights switch-on in a village near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. A NE Region team, which shall be nameless, was ringing to provide background music while hot drinks were being served, including mulled wine. One of the team's fairly new ringers (we'll call her Ringer X) showed great interest in this, even though she was told by those with sad experience that it would not mix well with handbell ringing. However, in the break between sessions of ringing, she managed to escape our clutches and came back looking decidedly more cheerful.

Ringing resumed, and we got to a 12 bell version of "Away in a Manger" – as there were seven of us, it had already been arranged that Ringer X would not join in this one. As we were playing it, the piece sounded a little strange – not *wrong*, as in "someone must have picked up the wrong bell", just slightly *odd* - but the audience didn't seem to have noticed anything amiss, so we carried on.

A couple of pieces later we came to "Silent Night", rung on two octaves so we were all involved. At this point Ringer X protested that we'd already played this one. We said no, we hadn't, but she insisted that we had – then the penny dropped. Instead of sitting out, she had added the bass part of "Silent Night" to the 12 bell version of "Away in a Manger"! Fortunately, they were in the same key and they ended in the same bar. So that was all right then, wasn't it?

The moral of this story is so obvious that I'm sure I don't need to point it out to the sensible and sober (?) ringers of the North West Region!

Cheers,

Irene Merson

A DATE FOR YOUR SHINY NEW 2026 DIARY!

**The Spring GatheRing and AGM of the North West Region will take place on
SATURDAY, 28th MARCH 2026 at The Ministry Centre, Aughton, near Ormskirk.
Look out for details soon after the New Year.**

NEXT PRESS DATE FOR OYEZ: 7th April 2026.

Please submit articles / photos to Irene Merson – irene@mersons.co.uk. Articles in Word, and photos separately as jpegs, please.

On the next page you will find contact details of the Committee. If you have any ideas about the Region, or suggestions for events you would enjoy, **please** don't hesitate to contact one of the Committee. It's YOUR Region, and the Committee really welcomes your views.

So don't be shy – get in touch!

NORTH WEST REGIONAL COMMITTEE, 2025 - 2026

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