

OYEZ



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NUMBER 30

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Chatter from the Chair

Hello everyone and welcome to this third Oyez of 2023.

As I'm writing this it is a bright and sunny day – one of the few in current weeks when it's been rather gloomy and often wet. Storm Babet made its presence felt in some areas of our region but on the whole we seemed to have missed the worst of it. The daylight hours are definitely reducing but there are still some glorious horticultural colours to enjoy.

Recently we had our two Late Summer Workshops and then our Autumn ClusteRing in Sale, Greater Manchester. Thank you to everyone who attended - some as individuals, some as a small representation of a team and a few (more or less) whole teams. Also, a huge thank you to those who led the days or helped in any way – where would we be without you? It was wonderful to come away with new skills, improved knowledge of techniques and pieces of music. Events like these are where membership of HRGB really pays off. It's been particularly special to ring Malcolm Wilson's arrangement of 'Finlandia' during this year – the piece that we had commissioned in memory of the late and much-missed Derek Jackson. Please remember that the copyright conditions attached to this piece, specifically for North West Region members, will end on 31st December 2023; see the copyright note on the first page of the piece if you wish to continue to play it after that.

Sadly, the event planned in the north of the region in October had to be cancelled. Not enough members were able to attend to make booking a hall viable. This will have been for various reasons, not least because other local events clashed on the same day. The season of not being enough Saturdays in each month is upon us! Teams seem to be relying on fewer drivers, many of whom don't drive at night or don't want to travel too far. The cost of fuel has crept up and many of us, although knowing we shall enjoy the ringing and company when we get to an event, may have to think twice about the cost and distance involved. In addition, the cost of hiring some halls has become prohibitive or they're not available due to regular bookings. These genuine reasons are having an effect on our regional events and how we plan them. During the almost 40 years I've been involved in HRGB, I've looked forward to events throughout the year and all they bring both musically and socially! Do let us know if you as a team could host an event. It may just be for 2 or 3 other local teams for half a day or a summer evening. The NW Committee is open to ideas and will support you as much as we can. Please, do consider it.

You will be well aware that the 2024 National Rally is being organized by us. Bookings are arriving daily and places are becoming limited. If you are debating whether or not it's for you, don't wait too long! The venue at The Hayes Conference Centre at Swanwick in south Derbyshire isn't too far for many of us. I know it's much further for our north Lancashire, south Lakeland and Cumbrian members but it would be good to have a significant representation from the North West as well as the Committee members. We have an amazing range of talent within HRGB and National Rally weekends are a great opportunity to take advantage of it. Besides, this is the North West Region and we have our own particular way of doing things, including views on the importance of fun within all that is planned.

As this is the last edition of Oyez in 2023, I'd like to wish everyone the very best for the Christmas season and all good wishes for the coming year.

Linda Parkington

THE "BACK TO BASICS" WORKSHOPS

The Llandudno Workshop

On Saturday 2nd Sept 2023 myself and the leader of Marple U.R.C. handbells team (Sue), travelled to Llandudno to take part in the 'Back to Basics' Workshop. The weather was fine and after about one and a half hours travelling we found a shady spot in a car park at Craig-y-Don community centre, Llandudno.

When we got inside, we saw that on the walls of the hall were posters with diagrams of note values and rests – e.g. a crotchet is valued as one note, a quaver is a half note and a minim is equivalent to two crotchets; a dot after a note extends it by a half. Likewise the 'rests' were illustrated in a similar fashion.

Back to basics was a very apt title for the workshop as we didn't need to take any bells, tables or music etc. so that made travelling easy. The hall was set up for us with long tables,

with bells, belleplates, and tone chimes, with individual places of one octave of these alternatives – e.g. G through to A. Each participant could make their choice of instrument. Beth McCord led us, starting with playing a scale according to her instructions – e.g. play a scale quietly, or play it loudly, or getting louder or quieter, or play it bottom to top, then top down, through the notes.

After some practice we were asked to move to a new position giving the opportunity to play an octave of belleplates or tone chimes. Whilst doing this Beth encouraged us to speak to our new ‘neighbour’ or get to know bellringers we had met at rallies before. We then practised more scales on our ‘new’ instrument.

During the course of the day we had several breaks. We took our own food and drinks were provided.

We also had demonstrations of playing ‘four in hand’, which needs much practice, and were shown how to hold a bell correctly. In the afternoon we also had information about teams that play in notation – that is reading their music using a system of symbols such as letters or numbers.

The day ended by us all playing ‘Can-Can’ and ‘Over the Rainbow’ using manuscript music and we went home feeling that we had had an enjoyable day.

From Molly, Marple URC Handbells.

ANOTHER ARTICLE ABOUT THE LLANDUDNO WORKSHOP:

What to do on a sunny Saturday in September.

Granddaughter off to climb Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon). Nain (Grandmother) off to Llandudno – sun, sand, sea, white rabbit – well, no. Five of us from Gresford Handbells were to spend the day indoors on this fine day. Thanks to Nikki for volunteering to drive us.

The venue was Craig y Don – loads of parking space. We walked into a hall already set out for the workshop. Tylwyth Teg had done all the fetching and carrying associated with handbells and had set out rows of two octaves of handbells in readiness for the day ahead. It was great to be able to handle British and American bells, chimes and bell plates, to feel the difference in weights and tone. I still love our Whitechapel bells.

Beth introduced us to music notation and bell playing techniques as if we were newcomers in at the deep end. Forte, piano, crescendo and rest.

Some of us lunched outside in the sun watching a game of croquet on the lawn.

Meanwhile, back inside, the Tylwyth Teg had set out the tables with the bells appropriately placed for the afternoon session. Our first piece, ‘Can Can’, was led by Kate, who had arrived via Milan and Amsterdam and flight delays. Gradually we negotiated the tune part, the dal segno and Coda till we got the piece together to a decent speed.

Time for a paned (cuppa) then, while those Tylwyth Teg reorganised the bells for the next piece – ‘Over the Rainbow’. The music this time was set out in number system – familiar to some but not to me. Beth encouraged us, the numbers worked! But I do like to see a score, so was glad of a run through on those copies too.

It was great to have the opportunity to chat to other players from North Wales teams and others who had travelled so much further.

Question time regarding various techniques towards the end of the session presented an impromptu demonstration of ‘four in hand’. You make it look so easy!

The ‘Tylwyth Teg’ (fairies, you should have guessed by now!) were of course the Committee Members of the HRGB North West Region who had organised everything to the finest detail. Thank you all for an excellent day. Diolch yn fawr.

Gaenor Taffinder.

THE NEWBIGGIN WORKSHOP - SOMETHING NEW

When it was decided to organise a “Back to Basics” event, I think some people might have wondered what it was all about. But as the saying goes, “Nothing ventured, Nothing Gained”.

So on 16 September Dean, Marron Valley & Eden met at Newbiggin for this event. Whether you were new to Bell Ringing or have been ringing for decades, there was something for everyone. Of course there was a lot of ringing, we worked on a piece of music at the Workshop, but there was also the opportunity for people to have a good natter and talk bells.

The day was led by Beth McCord and Kate Worthington and they showed and discussed different techniques. It was surprising how many different ways that people who cannot read music are helped, either by colouring the notes or using a numbering system. There was also an opportunity to have a go with Chimes and Belleplates.

Everybody who went said they enjoyed themselves, and our appreciation goes to Beth, Kate and the North West committee for organizing this event.

Sheila Harris

HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO TO RING BELLS?

MEET OUR NEW OVERSEAS AMBASSADOR, MAUREEN WILLIAMS!

When Beth McCord contacted me in March this year, asking if I could help, I had no idea it would lead to a wonderful friendship in another country. Gesine, a German lady, was bringing a group of 46 people from Germany to the UK for their annual holiday in April. They were staying for three of the nights in Llandudno, North Wales, where I ring with our team.

Four of the German group are handbell ringers and Gesine contacted Beth to inquire about the possibility of attending a bell ringing concert or a rehearsal. Beth put her in touch with me. Our team practice is on a Monday lunchtime, so I offered Gesine the chance to ring with

us. Unfortunately, their group's itinerary didn't allow them to join us at that time, but Gesine suggested I meet them anyway at their hotel in the evening, which I did and we hit it off immediately. In an effort to accommodate them, our team agreed to hold an extra practice on the Tuesday evening at 8pm and the four German ringers eagerly agreed. They enjoyed the evening very much, though we have a very different set up to what they're used to.

Gesine invited me to go to Germany and take part in their rehearsal night in Wittenberg. I accepted her invitation and travelled to Germany on 5th September. The next evening, I attended the rehearsal and met the rest of their team. It was a challenging evening for me, as everything was so different to what I'm used to. (Now I know how they felt when they were at our practice!)

The conductor was speaking in German, the music included bass clef (our team's music has only treble clef and the bells I was given were on the bass clef so I struggled to find my notes), the music wasn't coloured in (mine usually is), and they used techniques (swing, echo) that our music doesn't have. Fortunately, Beth had actually demonstrated these very techniques a few days earlier during the NW workshop in Llandudno!

Despite all these challenges, I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience.

Gesine, being the kind, generous lady that she is, invited me to stay with her, and I gratefully accepted. We are already good friends, and I have the HRGB, and particularly Beth McCord to thank for it.

And I was given a team t shirt! Here I am wearing it [*fifth from the left*], with the Handbell Choir of Schlosskirche Wittenberg!



NOYE'S FLUDDE - AGAIN

In late June an email request arrived asking for 6 ringers to take part in a production of Noye's Fludde in Manchester. Having been involved on three previous occasions over the years for differing groups our initial reaction was not to accept. However, as it was to be part of Manchester International Festival we felt it was too prestigious an opportunity to turn down. We dug the music out from our archives and decided that three of us could ring the twelve bells four-in-hand.

The first rehearsal for the orchestra and principal singers was in the rooms used by the Hallé Orchestra and so had a full orchestral layout. On arrival we were very warmly welcomed by the production team and shown to our places – in front of the percussion section and next to a group of recorders. On the first run-through which included our part we struggled to hear our cues and it was probably obvious we had not had chance for much practice (we had only 2 weeks' notice), so we were given a special rehearsal room in which to relearn it. We were perfect playing on our own. Fitting in with the other instruments was the main problem!

When composing his opera Benjamin Britten determined to create parts for as many performers as possible. His score features a motley collection of instruments, including a wind machine, mugs, trumpets, organ and bells as well as strings and recorders. In keeping with his wishes for performances to be by community groups this one was to be a collaboration between Manchester Collective and a community-based company from Leeds. Only Noah, his wife and the Voice of God were professional performers. Most of the instrumentalists were young students from various music schools and colleges around Manchester. We were the oldest participants by a good few years. After further practice on our own during the following week we felt a little more confident as we travelled to the final rehearsal on performance day.

When we arrived, we were amazed to be confronted by the vast, former warehouse space next to Piccadilly Station, where the production was to take place. We were each issued with a pass giving us access to the back-stage areas. These were divided up for each group of performers – animals, principals, instrumentalists etc – with snacks and drinks provided in each. In the auditorium itself the orchestral space was already set out with illuminated music stands, microphones and miles of cables. Although our seats were still near the percussion, we were a lot further away from the recorder section, much to our relief. Immediately in front of us were the organist and pianist, to whom we will be forever grateful for their helpful, smiling cues. We were intrigued to see the pianist using a tablet for his music – no awkward page turns, just a quick swipe! We then had sound checks for all the instrumental groups in turn before the final rehearsal, which included the 180 children from Leeds who were the animals entering the Ark.

A lunch break followed – no admittance without showing our passes – before the mid-afternoon performance. All went well and ended with a standing ovation from the sell-out audience. The whole experience had been so professionally handled, everyone involved so friendly, helpful and patient, that we felt we had learned a lot, and maybe, just maybe, we would be prepared to do it again!

KINDER RINGERS TRIO

AUTUMN CLUSTERINGS

Well, the Committee did plan to have two ClusteRings in October, but as Linda has said in her Chatter from the Chair, sadly the second one, at Newbiggin near Penrith for our more northerly members, had to be cancelled due to lack of numbers. The first one, at Sale Moor Methodist Church near Manchester, took place on 14th October and by 10.15 am ringers were busily bringing in all their equipment and setting up. We started, of course, with a nice cup of tea, then Beth got us off to a good start with our first massed ring – Sandra Winter’s arrangement of *The Wheels on the Bus*. Sounds simple? Well – not quite! By the time we’d worked our way through windscreen wipers swishing, horn beeping, children chattering, mummies shushing, babies going fast asleep, bell ding-a-ling-a-linging, and doors opening and shutting, those wheels going round and round turned out to be pretty exhausting! Lots of special effects were provided by Jocie, with her boxful of magic.

This was followed by individual pieces from Maghull, represented by Beth and Jocie, Norbury HR, Marple URC HR and Kinder Ringers. Malcolm Wilson’s arrangement of “Finlandia”, commissioned in memory of Derek Jackson, was the next massed ring. We had rung this before at the Spring GatheRing, but Beth quickly reminded us of the finer points and looked in detail at some of the trickier passages. We then had a welcome lunch break, with time to chat.

The afternoon session began with more work on “Finlandia”, followed by the second round of team ringing interspersed with massed ringing of Ryan Price’s arrangement of “Angels from the Realms of Glory”. This time we were skilfully led by Robert Pettener, who gave us a new perspective on the familiar carol and made us realise that even the best-known pieces will benefit from careful practice and interpretation.

After another tea break, which included the drawing of the raffle, we repeated all three massed ringing pieces; then it was time to pack up and travel home. A most enjoyable day of ringing, learning and socialising – thanks go to Beth, Robert and members of the Committee for organising the event.

Irene Merson

A SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY CONCERT

On a sunny Saturday afternoon in July the Chair of the region, plus three other former holders of that position, joined an audience of family, friends and fellow ringers for a special concert in Maghull as a celebration of the team’s 40th anniversary.

The whole concert was like a “This is your life” presentation, each piece played having some significance to the team over the years. Fittingly, the opening item was **Good King Wenceslas**, the first piece rung at a rally as the Rennie Ringers. It was played on the original set of bells bought by Simon for the family team and again included Simon, Molly and their daughter. The ringers then moved on to the present Maghull bells for the rest of the concert, beginning, appropriately, with Robin Benton’s **Birthday Rag** originally composed for

the 40th year of HRGB. The playing of **Siyahamba** then reminded us that Simon had worked in Africa and when he returned home he brought with him a special drum which was played by Lisa to accompany this piece. Several members of Maghull have attended International Symposia and this was reflected in **Grazioso** by Arnold Sherman which they had played in Toronto. In 2008, after hearing an Irish team ring an arrangement of **Pirates of the Caribbean** the team decided to add it to their repertoire too.

This was followed by **Mountain Mist**, a favourite of a previous MD, Judith Barker, and which featured Robert on the flute. The next piece was **Phantom of the Opera**, played in memory of two of their former “refreshment ladies”, who had particularly enjoyed it. Then came the beautiful, original composition by Robert called **Solitude**. It had been a real hit when played during the team’s recent performance in the National Rally Concert at Stirling. Most ringers have played **Meditation on Blaenwern** by Malcolm Wilson. It had been commissioned by Simon to celebrate his and Molly’s 35th wedding anniversary and is still regularly played nearly 30 years later. For their finale the team played the ever-popular **Highland Cathedral** and it ended a wonderfully entertaining afternoon of music, compered by Beth, who gave interesting explanations throughout.

Afterwards there was a chance to view the extensive archives, have refreshments, toast the team, and have a piece of the very special birthday cake.

Congratulations, Maghull. We hope we can come again for your Golden Anniversary!

Anne Hopley

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT EVENTS IN 2024

As you’re aware, the North West Region will be hosting the National Rally in Swanwick, Derbyshire, from 5th to 7th April 2024. Because of the amount of work involved, the Committee will not be in a position to organise the usual Spring GatheRing – if you think this is a shame, perhaps your team would like to talk to the Committee about putting on an event to take its place!

This in turn means that the Annual General Meeting of the North West Region will be held on Saturday, 16th March 2024, commencing at 12 noon, at Knowle Green Village Hall, Knowle Green, Preston. This time, there will be no ringing alongside the AGM.

NEXT EDITION OF OYEZ

We are still looking for an Editor for Oyez. If you feel that this is something you may like to take on, please don’t be shy – get in touch with Linda or Irene!

For the time being, please submit articles / photos to Irene Merson – irene@mersons.co.uk. Articles in Word, and photos as jpegs, please. Let’s have news of your Christmas activities!

NEXT PRESS DATE: 20th JANUARY 2024 For the February Edition of Oyez

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