

OYEZ



February 2024

NUMBER 31

IN THIS ISSUE:

CHATTER FROM THE CHAIR

TEAMS' ACTIVITIES

REMEMBERING ALBERT GRAHAM

C W FLETCHER STRIKES AGAIN!

EVENTS IN 2024



Chatter from the Chair

Hello everyone and welcome to this first Oyez of 2024.

By the time you read this, hopefully the very cold spell in the middle of January will be but a distant memory. A day for not going over the threshold unless you absolutely must, has a silver lining resulting in this submission beating the copy date to our 'temporary' editor, Irene.

2024 brings anticipation and excitement (that's two words for it!) for those of us involved in planning and delivering the National Rally Week-end in April. Bookings officially closed on the 30th November and we are delighted that almost all the places booked at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire have been taken up. We are currently dealing with final payments and requests for last minute, late and very late bookings, ordering and distributing music and corresponding with those who have very generously offered their time and talents to lead sessions as well as those who have promised the loan of bells and foam. Accommodation is being allocated, being mindful of specific requests and requirements, the timetable being finalized and the Saturday evening concert programme being put together – at which we are delighted Maghull Parish Ringers will represent our region. This litany of tasks is incomplete by a mile but you get the idea!

This is a very busy time for a few but we are now at the point of 'widening out' the tasks and are grateful for all who have offered to contribute in any way they can. To say the booking system so far has been 'interesting' is an understatement! How on earth we ever managed to deliver past National Rally week-ends without the technology we just take for granted now is, and will probably remain, one of life's mysteries...

I had a wonderful afternoon in December, attending a fantastic Christmas Concert given by the Maghull Parish HR and Bronze Carillon. I persuaded a friend to come with me who has never seen handbell ringing on that scale before and she was totally bowled over. It's a real privilege to introduce someone to the expertise and enjoyment ringing offers and she received a warm welcome. Beth's mum, Linda McCord, was up from Norfolk and the photo below shows East Anglia Region and North West Region 'Chairs' – both Linda – meeting.



In light of the National Rally, we aren't having our usual Spring GatheRing but we look forward to seeing you at events in the summer and autumn if we don't see you at Swanwick.

Happy ringing.

Linda Parkington

NOW LET'S SEE WHAT SOME OF YOU HAVE BEEN UP TO...

Treading the Boards; a Different Sort of Christmas Carol

Sale Handbell Ringers have been playing at various engagements in and around Sale for over 30 years now, but never before had we been involved in any sort of theatrical performance. November 2023 changed all that. Some months earlier we had been approached by a local theatre to take part in their production of *A Christmas Carol*. Initially the producer had visualised us enthusiastically ringing our bells as we made our dramatic entry down through the auditorium during the final scene which, after the very 'dark' drama earlier, would be full of colour, joyful carol singing, handbell ringing, general happiness, presents being exchanged, snow falling over everybody, and Scrooge handing out humbugs to cast and audience alike. As we play off-table, our entry through the auditorium obviously was not going to work so in the production we played on stage wearing Victorian costumes (think Quality Street Chocolate adverts including the bonnets)



It was definitely a different experience; our usual performances are to small groups and it was certainly a change to be part of a much larger production and facing an audience of about 400 every night of the week – plus a matinee on the Saturday afternoon. The theatre was booked to capacity for every performance, and although we like to think it was because word had got out that we were performing, in actual fact, we have to admit that it might have been something to do with *A Christmas Carol* being one of the set books for GCSE this year. As a result there were lots of young people in the audience and they definitely enjoyed the play if the applause and whoops were anything to go by. The production even got standing ovations on several nights. We played a rather flashy version of the *Boar's Head Carol*, arranged for handbells by Kevin McChesney giving us chance to show off various ringing techniques and effects, such as tower swings, echoes, thumb damping etc and finishing off with a triumphant and much practised coordinated gyro. We then played, predictably, *Ding, Dong Merrily on High* for people to sing to, and concluded the show with the handbell arrangement of *The Trumpet Voluntary*, arranged by Martha Lynn Thompson which works extremely well on handbells. Who knew? Certainly not Jeremiah Clarke the original composer, or the trumpet wouldn't have got a look in!



So would we do something like that again? Yes definitely; although we couldn't have done it without our MD, Kate's musical ability and leadership. Despite a few misgivings along the way, we really enjoyed being part of the larger team that worked together to put on the play. It strengthened us as a team, musically and in the way the team bonded as we focussed on how our playing fitted into the whole production. Handbell ringing is essentially a team activity, but this set us new challenges and gave us interesting insights into the much wider teamwork involved in staging a dramatic production such as *A Christmas Carol*.

Joan Ball

Sale Handbell Ringers

MARPLE URC HANDBELLS – UPDATE

We have had much team togetherness in 2023, during which we've celebrated the Coronation - holding a musical fund-raising for Macmillan Cancer Support in May. We've attended NW HRGB Gatherings in March and October – with variability in levels of performance as our practice weeks had been limited by availability and not-so-good health of some members.



When our group of ringers were feeling confident at the end of 2023, we enjoyed the fruits of our weeks of practising by playing a set of tunes for the 'Strictly Come Together' coffee morning in church, followed by a trio of carols in the Marple URC Carol Service on December 17th which was a good end to our year.



At the last meeting in December we finished the year in style by having a party – making hats, playing a form of 'bells beetle' and eating festive fare. Now we are looking forward to good times in 2024 – and I don't mean 12/8!

Sue Ardern

MORE CHRISTMAS HANDBELLS!

Waverton Handbell Ringers took part in a Christmas Tree Festival at Hamilton Street Methodist Church, Chester. The tree abounded with decorative bells and musical symbols *[see photograph on the right]*.

Judith Boyd,

Waverton Handbell Ringers.



CHRISTMAS 2024 AT NORBURY

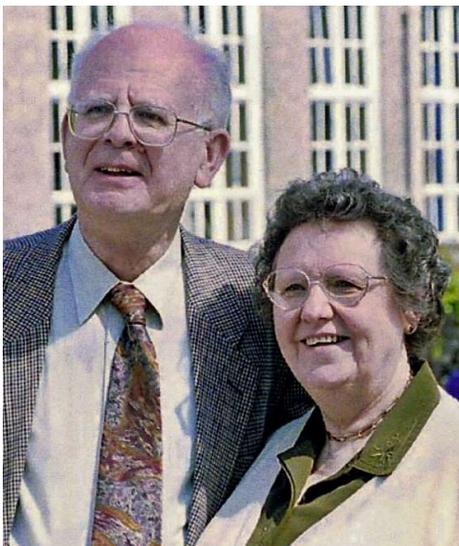
This year we had enquiries from new Care Homes we had not visited before. One of the entertainments managers said it had been on her bucket list to see handbells played live. As with any new venue, the space and layout is often an issue and it sometimes comes as a surprise how much room we take up with 120 bells, tables, foam and music stands. The day centre at Handforth was very spacious and we enjoyed playing to an appreciative audience of clients and staff. Sometimes we get requests for tunes which are not in our repertoire, such as “Walking in the Air”, but Jingle Bells and White Christmas always go down well. We played one concert after our Christmas Meal out which is usually our last meeting before Christmas and a well-deserved sigh of relief after the business of Christmas. It was lovely to see how beautifully the homes were decorated for Christmas and that we had added to their celebrations.



Albert Graham 1936 – 2023

Sale Handbell Ringers were saddened by the death in October 2023 of Albert Graham who was one of its founder members. When his wife, Judith and Mo Morris were initially inspired to set up the Group and acquire a set of handbells in 1990, Albert became its Treasurer, a position he held continuously until 2022 even after illness prevented him from taking part in regular rehearsals and performances.

Albert was a very special person. He cared about people and they loved him. He was a highly respected Methodist Local Preacher and his whole life was underpinned by his deep and thoughtful Christian faith. Born in Nenthead near Alston, Albert remained a proud Cumbrian and supporter of Carlisle United (as well as later, Liverpool F.C.) all his life. His life journey took him from Cumbria to Liverpool University, and then, via Yorkshire where he met and married Judith, on to Nigeria before it eventually brought him to Sale as a Geography teacher at Sale Boys Grammar School.



Albert & Judith were very much a team; proud and loving parents of Ruth and Andrew and later as grandparents to their five grandchildren. The hospitality they offered to visitors to their home was always warm, generous and, above all, fun. Indeed, the Handbell Ringers weekly rehearsals took place in their kitchen for about the first 20 years of our existence until the numbers in the Group increased and there just wasn't room for everybody to fit into the kitchen any more. Rehearsals were always followed by tea, coffee, delicious biscuits a lot of conversation and laughter, and were a time of team bonding when individuals became part of the team, and friendships developed.

Thank you, Albert, for all you contributed to helping Judith and Mo's bell-ringing dream become a reality, and enabling so many others to enjoy the pleasures of handbell ringing.

Sale Handbell Ringers

AN APPEAL FOR INFORMATION – CAN YOU HELP?

Mark Jones, of Bristol, is writing a book about recordings of bells, which will include a section on Handbell Recordings. He has already accumulated a good deal of information, and been in touch with some HRGB members, but if you know of any recordings and want to check whether he is already aware of them, please contact me (irene@mersons.co.uk) and I will send you a copy of his list.

There will probably be further information about this in Reverberations, later in the year.

Another interesting piece from the book, 'Handbell Ringing' by CW Fletcher
1888, Chapter III "The Players"

"I have often been asked why the number of ringers in a company is always five? Whether there is any special advantage gained in not having six? The answer is simply that "there are reasons" which make professional ringers prefer that number, but there are none whatever to prevent local bands having as many as they wish, except that each player requires a certain amount of elbow room.

I recommend, therefore, that the company shall consist of five performers, of whom two shall be (if desired) ladies, care being taken that each one is physically fairly strong, possesses plenty of perseverance, and above all, is an excellent reader of music so far as the notation of time is concerned. Having brought our company together it will be necessary to explain that the strongest should be selected to play the bass part, the two more reliable readers to play the treble between them, the alto and tenor will then fall to the share of the two ladies, who will then occupy the post of honour in the centre of the table where these bells are always placed."

Towards the end of the book there is a piece about change ringing.

"The first is called a "Plain Course of Stedman's Doubles." It consists of 60 changes, rung upon five bells, and was invented by Mr. Fabian Stedman about the year 1640."

Guess what our team are going to have a go at!!

Sheila Harris, Dean Handbells

EVENTS IN 2024

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, Clitheroe Road, Knowle Green, Preston PR3 2YQ. This time there will be no ringing alongside the AGM.

There will be a Summer GatherRing at Llandudno on **Saturday, 13th July 2024**. More details will be published when the Committee has recovered from organising the National Rally!

We are looking into the possibility of an event in September, at the northern end of the Region. We will be contacting teams in the area over the next few weeks, to gauge how much support there would be for such an event.

The Committee hopes to organise at least one further event in the Autumn. Again, discussion will take place after the National Rally.

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.

NEXT PRESS DATE: 20th MAY 2024 For the June Edition of Oyez

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