

The Chester Diocesan Guild of Church Bell-Ringers

Chester Branch

Tuesday, 02 January 2018

A Happy New Year to you all!

It is some time since I sent you a Newsletter, and you are definitely due for another one. Let me begin, though, with my thanks to you all for ringing the bells at towers in our Branch and for looking after them. I am sure that in most towers where there are bands the message of Peace and celebration of the deeper meaning of Christmas will have been sent into the community through the sound of the bells.

CHESTER BRANCH 2018

We have, I hope, a full programme of events planned for you. Naturally not every person will attend all meetings and practices. I do know some of you never come to anything, but that does not mean you are not valued as ringers. There definitely is, however, something for everybody.

I sent you in November an outline of all the dates of various Branch activities. I'll have a go at putting it into the usual multi-coloured format, but the challenge has to be to get it onto one side of A4. That might well prove impossible and I'll split the year in half and produce two.

Some people get everything they need out of their own practices. Nothing wrong with that, but countless generations of ringers have seen the great benefit of going along to other practices. We see this at the Monday Cathedral Practice and I am sure there are other examples. And don't forget a word that I often toss into the discussion of this topic: cluster. I cannot really understand why there are not more joint practices. To me it appears to be an excellent way of strengthening what is on offer and making progress.

There are also **Quarter Peals**. These are excellent ways of improving method-ringing skills and they bring enormous benefits. I know there are frequent quarters rung before the Monday Cathedral Practice, and many are at a basic level. There is no reason why more people cannot ring in these quarters. But it is also surely up to Tower Captains to encourage their ringers to take part in quarters when they judge they are up to it. I know our Branch Ringing Master is a very busy man, and he has the Guild to run as well. Incidentally, we all must be proud that the first Guild Master from the Chester Branch since the 1960s is doing such a wonderful job. His own ringing skills have really taken off over the last 18 months or so, but I can genuinely say he has the best interests of you all at heart. He definitely does want to help those of you keen to get on. Please can all tower captains think hard about this: ask Ben if he can put on a quarter for your up and coming ringers. I'll be a very willing member of the band, and I am sure that goes for plenty of others.

Yes, of course, we need good ringers to push forward the boundaries. Just think about it: do you want to be led by people with poor ringing skills or by those who can ring at quite a high level? There is surely only one answer to that question. But, let's face it, not everybody is going to reach the dizzy heights. Yet there is much enjoyment in bells being well rung in the foothills. There is not a single ringer who cannot improve in some way; and isn't it worth making the effort? Bells may be loud instruments and occasionally annoy the neighbours, but they make a glorious sound. As ringers of church bells you are all doing something very special. Let us all resolve to ring better in 2018, and continue to fill the air with the joyous sound from those mighty instruments of bronze.

PRACTICES

Back to earth now.

We now have, at last, **a series of three practices** which cover all the levels that most of you will need. As for those dizzy heights I've just mentioned, well that's up to you. At the moment there is a monthly practice on twelve bells at the Cathedral, but you'll have to work hard to get there. Of course, you can have advanced ringing on other numbers of bells. I'd be delighted to welcome anybody who genuinely wants to take part in multi-Minor ringing, something for which the Chester Guild had an enviable reputation in the past. Doubles ringing too can be quite tricky; and there are some amazing methods and variations. Somebody once mentioned a peal of 42 Doubles Principles, where the whole 120 is the plain course. To ring that would be much harder than the Surprise Maximus usually rung in 12-bell towers. And, I don't think ringing the 41 standard Surprise Minor methods in such a way that the work above treble changes every lead is to be lightly dismissed. Sorry, a personal detour. But ringing on six bells is not to be dismissed as less important than ringing on higher numbers.

Helen's Training Meetings continue this year and there are now eight of them planned. She has already sent out an e-mail giving you the date of the first one: **Saturday 13th January**; and you'll be getting full details very soon, I'm quite sure. I'm sorry I missed the last one, but hope to get to them all, unless I'm away, in 2018. I personally find these meetings very satisfying.

For years I - and many others - have been all too aware that we have **a neglected group in the middle**. This will also include some of the helpers at the Training Meetings, and they definitely need something to reward them for their dedication. Our hard-working **Ringling Master has come up with his own monthly practices**, and the first one will be on **Thursday 11th January at Handbridge**. Again, a separate notice has been issued. If you are still not sure whether these practices are for you please don't hesitate to contact Ben. One thing both he and I must stress, however, is the need for you to come along prepared. Ben has mentioned several methods. If you want to ring any of them please, please **LEARN** them! Now, am I the only one to be worried by the sight of ringers staring at diagrams on mobile phones? OK, some of you have got me down as a techno-phobe and an IT Luddite. Of course, a diagram on a screen is not useless. I have my RW Diary to look at if I just want to have a quick check on a method, and many of you get the diagram on your Smartphone. It's the same thing, isn't it? But there is more, much more, to learning a method. It's a big topic and I could go on at considerable length, but all too many people

do not know how to learn methods. I'll say no more, but I'll just throw in a reference to the wonderful **Whiting Society**. Their website is excellent, and I strongly advise purchasing some of their publications. <https://www.whitingsociety.org.uk/>

Don't forget pencil and paper (preferably squared); yes, seriously. Writing out a method can be extremely useful. By the way, the Whiting Society will be coming to towers in Wirral on 10th February. If you are interested in joining them please get back to me.

And finally the **Advanced Practices**, which are very ably run by our third Ringing Master, Simon. The first one will be at **Malpas on 17th January**. So much depends on who turns up, of course, but we don't ring very advanced methods normally. Stedman Triples, for example, is common to both Ben's and Simon's practices. Once more thorough preparation is needed. You're doing nobody any good if you don't learn methods which are advertised.

OTHER RINGING EVENTS

We need an **AGM**, obviously; and Saturday 17th November is planned, at Tattenhall. I don't think I covered myself with glory last year at Tarporley, and it became somewhat chaotic at the end. I am glad we resolved to have just one business meeting in November, but I am also conscious that there has been a genuine need to have a quarterly at the same time. We have to address that, and we will; but there will just be an AGM business meeting along with ringing, service and tea in November. We shall also have to re-visit the business meetings at the **other quarterlies**. So far these are all scheduled for Saturdays, and one of them will be linked to the Striking Competition.

I have also booked two **Saturdays at Old St Mary's**, in order to give all a Branch members the chance to ascend the ladder and ring on these comparatively rare bells.

Nothing is yet fixed for ringing for **Evensong at the Cathedral**. We need to look at the calendar and see where there are slots not yet filled. It is my fervent hope that at least once a year every ringer in the Branch competent enough to ring a bell unaided should be given a chance to ring on these bells.

SOCIAL EVENTS

I might have known that offering the members present at November's AGM the chance of coming up with suggestions for social events would not work. You promptly threw the matter back to us. It is the job of your Committee to come up with something - say one event for the summer months and another for the winter. I can't seriously imagine a year without a Walk and Ring; but neither skittles nor boules have been planned. Beetle drive anybody?

STRIKING LADDER

Sent separately from this notice is my proposal for a Striking Ladder. I did not get an opportunity to make a formal proposal at Tarporley, but it is my understanding that approval was given to try it at our Quarterly Meeting in August at Aldford. Everything you need to know is in the attached document. You'll see I'm giving you six weeks to decide

whether or not you want to take part. That would take us to the 6th February. Let's call it **Saturday 10th February**. By then I sincerely hope I have enough towers interested in taking part from this Branch. I can then approach other Branches and the North Wales Association to see if they too would like to join us. I have mentioned above clustering and running joint practices. Here is a wonderful opportunity for you all to get out and about in the Chester Branch - and I hope eventually beyond - and mix with other ringers. Remember you can compete against towers of similar ability, at least to begin with. I'm not asking you to be completely outplayed by a team of greater ability; nor am I asking you to go round the Branch humiliating teams of lesser ability. I'm quite sure things will soon settle down. Please think hard about this new venture. The concept, say in games like squash or tennis, is far from new, and Ringing Striking Ladders have been in existence throughout the country for many years.

BRF SUB-COMMITTEE

At the last Guild AGM it was decided that, instead of having one BRF Officer to propose what level of support the Guild should give to any bell restoration project, there should be a sub-committee formed to examine each application for a grant. The sub-committee members do not have to be members of the Guild Committee, but they could be. The Guild BRF Officer will still present the Guild Committee, who will make the final decision, with a proposed amount to award and the reasons for reaching that decision; but what the BRF Officer has to say will have been informed by the collective opinions of the sub-committee. These members do not have to attend the relevant meeting of the Guild Committee if they are not members of the latter committee.

The sub-committee will consist of five people, with each Branch having one member. We now must have one person in post as soon as possible. The next Guild Committee Meeting is on 6th February, but we don't meet as a Branch until 17th February. Everything could be agreed at a Branch Committee Meeting (and I'll need to call one very soon), but it would be more democratic if we made our decision on **17th February**. What we need then is somebody who knows the workings of bells and fittings, is prepared to travel and to go up amongst the bells, and who can reach an objective and fair decision about any application for a grant. I cannot believe there is nobody in the Chester Branch not able to do that. **I now want to receive a name or names within the next few weeks.** This is important; and I don't want to be Chairman of a Branch that cannot fulfil its obligations.

CONGRATULATIONS

I might have missed some performances which deserve a mention in this Newsletter, but there are two which I cannot ignore. Hearty congratulations to two people who have rung their first quarter peals. They are both from Tarporley: **Elaine Wright and Anne Gibson**. The links to BellBoard are: <http://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1193646> & <http://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1200241>

Well done, both! And while we're talking about offering congratulations to Tarporley ringers we must not forget **Judith and Jim Spence and June and Richard Brierley**. Both couples have recently celebrated Golden Weddings and the two ringers of the couple rang in the same celebratory quarter (<http://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1195959>).

QUIZ

I shall continue to set quiz questions because I know some of you try to answer them; and I like to think that more of you do read with some interest the answers. In June I asked which two towers in Chester used to have bells hung for full-circle ringing. I meant towers which are now empty. One is St Michael's (now the Heritage Centre) on the corner of Bridge Street and Pepper Street, which had a ring of six bells. They were sold for scrap in 1960, but had not been rung for many years before then. The other one was Holy Trinity, which later became the Guildhall, on Watergate Street. It closed as a church in 1960. It too had a ring of six bells. At one point they were stored in the porch from where they were stolen.

I also asked you whether the bells in the turret of St John's Church had always been a chime. They were not put in as a chime but were hung for full-circle ringing in the now collapsed northwest tower. It fell down in a thunderstorm on Good Friday 1881. There is a classic photograph taken soon after, showing all the bells still hanging but much of the tower fallen away. It was John Douglas who designed the northeast bell-turret in 1886. Occasionally you can still hear the bells being chimed. What a waste of bell metal, surely, these bells represent; together with the six at St Peter's, which could quite easily be restored to full-circle ringing. Well, that's what I think. You might have other views. I'd be interested to hear them.

The questions are a bit different this time, and are to do with methods we ring or the way we ring:-

What do you believe to be the definition of an irregular method?

If I wanted to call a method *Brexit Delight Major* (I don't, just an example), could I do so? And how would others know about it and accept the name?

What is the difference between a Surprise, a Delight and a Treble Bob Method?

Can you have Asymmetric Methods? What's this thing about symmetry, anyhow?

What is cart wheeling and why don't some people like it but others do?

We nearly always go into changes at hand stroke. Have you ever started at back stroke? And if so, why?

I could go on, but won't. There's quite a bit of ringing history there, and much could be written in answer to the first question. And many answers could be considered controversial.

JDA

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