

Bridgwater Branch Newsletter

April 2026



Dear Everyone,



So much rain and still quite cold but we are not dismayed, as our freedom is precious and we have that for sure. Freedom to meet in our church belfries and enjoy the fellowship and ringing as we have always done.

It was lovely to see so many of you at Holford for our Striking Competition and meeting. What a beautiful spot Holford is and a wonderful, warm welcome from Stephen and Pam, not to mention a splendid tea. More about that later in the Newsletter.

Last year we said farewell to two of our loyal and longstanding ringers, Gerry Brown and Keith Lane. Two old buddies, and it was touching that Keith died on the morning of Gerry's funeral in Cannington.

Also, great sadness for our Ringing Master, Mick on the loss of his wife Karen earlier this year.

My thanks to Julie for producing our newsletter so ably, please do keep sending her articles and photos from your towers, so we can all hear about what you are up to around the Branch.

I am looking forward to the Branch Picnic at Wembdon on 25th July, particularly special to Keith and I as we were married there in 1961.



My very best wishes to all my fellow bellringers and hope to see you in a belfry somewhere soon.



Freda Prime
Branch Chairman

In Memory of.....

Keith Lane. 5th October 1936 – 4th November 2025



Keith learned to ring at Kingsbury, Warwickshire at the age of 9. He came to Somerset in the 1950's for his National Service, ringing around the Watchet, Dunster and Minehead area.

Keith married Pat in 1960 after which they came to Somerset, making their home in Cannington where he joined the local band.

In 1975 Keith came to St Mary's Bridgwater where he was in the choir as well as being the Tower Captain, it was here that both his sons, Julian and Martin, learned to ring and both joined the choir. Many a Sunday they were seen rushing out of the west door and into the Podger Room to join the choir just as the prayer was read before the service.

Keith was also an active member of the Bridgwater Branch serving as Branch Ringing Master, and in later years Assistant Ringing Master, he was a member of our Association for over 59 years. Over the years Keith had taught many people to ring and always read the Ringing World with interest to see how many had gone on to ring peals and quarter peals. Keith rang 29 peals and numerous quarter peals. Keith was a great support when we started planning the augmentation of our bells and it is quite appropriate that the first quarter rung on the middle eight was in memory of Keith.

Keith was a founder member of the Handbell Ringers of Great Britain and started a team at Cannington.

Keith had a lovely sense of humour; one St George's Day he couldn't find anything red and white to wear he turned up in his Christmas jumper – well it did have red and white on it. Also, Martin told us of one Christmas Pat had bought a turkey too big for the roasting tin, no worries said Keith I have just the thing, he came into the belfry and took an old roasting tin which was used to catch the oil under the bells and gave it to Pat to use.

Sadly, Keith Lane died at home in Cannington on 4th November 2025.

Keith's funeral was held at Cannington on Monday 8th December 2025 at 12 noon and followed a period of open ringing.

On the day his funeral friends from Bridgwater Branch rang a quarter of Grandsire Triples on the middle 8 bells in celebration of his life.

- 1 Kay Smith
- 2 Margaret Lee
- 3 Margaret Furner
- 4 Chris Gaunt
- 5 Michael Munt
- 6 Charles Pipe-Wolferstan (C)
- 7 Michael Howes
- 8 Richard Lee

Keith is pictured here ringing at Durleigh in 2016



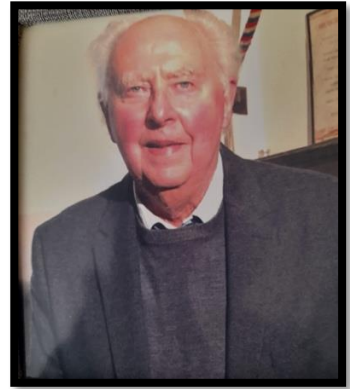
Rest in Peace Keith

Margaret & Richard Lee

Harry Meade, Goathurst.

Harry died after a period of illness on Sunday 28th December 2025. He had been a member of the Association for over 60 years and had been elected as a Member Emeritus (ME) when he could no longer ring.

Harry had been awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in the New Years Honours 2024 in recognition of his unique, sustained commitment and contribution in service to the village of Goathurst for over 60 years.



Harry's funeral was held at Goathurst on Tuesday 13th January.

A quarter peal was rung in his memory at Durleigh on Sunday 25th January 2026.

Bath & Wells Diocesan Association
Durleigh, Somerset
St Hugh
Sunday, 25 January 2026 in 47m (10-0-4 in G)
1260 Doubles (6m/1p)
120 Stedman, 240 Grandsire, 300 Plain Bob, 120 St Martins, 240 Reverse Canterbury, 120 St Nicholas, 120 Winchendon

- 1 Janet C Garnett
- 2 Cate Ovington
- 3 Margaret Furner
- 4 Michael Munt
- 5 Michael T Howes (C)
- 6 Paul D Forbes-Harper

For Evensong.
Also in memory of Harry Meade, tower captain of Goathurst and ringing member of B&WDACR for over 60 years, who died on 28th December 2025



John



Remembering Jenny



Jenny and Andy (Image: Andy Pearce)

Bath & Wells Diocesan Association

Westonzoyland, Somerset

Blessed Virgin Mary

Sunday, 12 April 2026 in 12m (19-3-19 in D)

240 Original Doubles

2 x 12 courses of Original Doubles

- 1 Julie Preece
- 2 Helen Weldon
- 3 Tim Langston
- 4 John Hallett/Jo Turner
- 5 Michael T Howes (C)
- 6 Andy Pearce

In memory of Jenny Pearce, a wonderful wife and mother who only got to enjoy 4 fabulous years in our new home in Somerset before losing her fight with cancer 5 years ago this week.

Jen -04/04/1961 - 11/04/2021

Andy Pearce

23rd November 2025 - A Visitor out of the Blue!

Bridgwater and Burnham's Conservative MP, Ashley Fox paid a visit to St. Mary's Westonzoyland, for a Bell Ringing Taster. He wanted to see bellringers in action and to have a go himself. He was instructed by Mick Howes, after watching the band demonstrate some ringing for him.



Before leaving Ashley helped wind the church clock.



14th December 2025 – Christmas Ringing, St. Mary, Bridgwater



Our usual Christmas get together marked the last branch ring of 2025. There was an opportunity for all to ring something, from rounds and call changes to the more advanced methods for those who can. As is the tradition, ringing was interrupted for hot mulled wine and home-made mince pies. If you weren't able to get there last year hopefully you can keep your diary free for the Christmas Ring in 2026.

First Branch Practice of the year - 10th January 2026 – West Huntspill



A newcomer to ringing but not the village...

As a newcomer to bell ringing, the open ringing practice at West Huntspill last Saturday was a joyous event for me.

These wonderful sounding bells were the backdrop of my childhood. Whilst playing in the surrounding fields, slow Sunday mornings, attending the vast amount of family weddings and sadly funerals too, these bells were my constant.

The bells, heavier than I'd experienced, were an absolute joy to ring and reading the familiar local names around the tower, provoked a day of reminiscing.

The first practice of the new year was very well attended, and the competent ringers made the bells sing. There was also plenty of practice for the newcomers too.

All in all, it was a wonderful start to the year and my weekend.



Jo Turner (Middlezoy)

Bob Doubles Workshop, St Mary, Bridgwater 28th February 2026



Chris Gaunt arranged a Bob Doubles workshop for beginners and improvers, helped by a number of experienced ringers.

Following an in-depth explanation of the method, with numerous tips and pointers, the group ended the session by ringing a plain course of Bob Doubles, with their instructors standing by for guidance.



The workshop was well attended and left the 'student' ringers more knowledgeable of Bob Doubles, and keen to continue ringing it back in their own towers.

Chris is hoping to run more workshops so watch out for more information.

Secretary's meeting notes 11th April 2026.

Thirty-two attended the meeting which started by remembering long standing members Gerald Brown and Keith Lane who had died in October and November 2025 respectively. Condolences were extended to Mick in the loss of his wife, Karen.

The successful striking contest is covered elsewhere in this newsletter, but we are grateful to judge Bernard North for his helpful feedback and marking. Congratulations to winning team Fiddington, who were invited to go forward and represent our branch at the association competition on 26th September in Crewkerne branch.

Ringling master Mick outlined the progress in recent practices and his aim to progress with the 8-10 bell practices. A minor method would be introduced to practices this year to challenge us to learn and go on to ring a quarter peal in it. Normal ringing from plain hunt to surprise methods will continue depending upon those attending. Mick asked for volunteers to join the 8-bell group working towards a team for the association competition on 26th September in Taunton branch.

Tower captains were reminded to make nominations for any improvers eligible for the Luxon (improvers) Trophy.

Margaret, our treasurer, updated us on branch funds and branch numbers, which now stand at 123 including 6 HLMs and 4 junior members.

Chris updated us on the successful Bob Doubles workshop he ran in Bridgwater earlier this year and thanked the helpers. Chris would like to hear of any workshops ringers would like him to organise.

Three new members were elected and welcomed.

John Hollian - Burnham

Sarah Hughes - Chedzoy

Richard Bufton - Fiddington

Additionally, Mervyn Freeman has joined our branch as a dual member with Axbridge Branch. He is registered with Nether Stowey tower.

Members were reminded of the association AGM on 9th May in Axbridge Branch and our own picnic ringing at Wembdon on 26th July 11:00-2:30.



John.

11th April 2026 – Striking Contest at Holford



Four competing teams, plus 3 scratch teams, met at St. Mary the Virgin Holford.

The draw was made, to determine the ringing order, and the Contest commenced, with Judge for the Bernard North waiting to hear the ringing.

After the last team had rung, a service was held in the church, followed by a branch meeting in the Village Hall, and the announcement of the results of the contest.

Ringers listed in ringing order – Treble to Tenor
(Left to Right)

First Place – Fiddington (9.5 faults)



Helene Goodman, Michael Munt,
Kay Smith, Richard Bufton,
Melvyn Freeman, Wilfred Goodman.



Second Place – Ashcott (24 faults)



Nancy Routley, Margaret Johnson,
Chris Gaunt, Ben Routley,
Henry Routley, Peter Cresswell.

Third Place – Westonzoyland (24.5 faults)



Julie Preece, Helen Wheldon,
Tim Langston, John Hallett,
Mick Howes, Andy Pearce.

Fourth Place – Scratch Team ‘B’ (26 faults)



Stephanie Goodman, Jo Turner,
Freda Prime, Chris Gaunt,
Ben Routley, Andrew Gigiel.



Fifth Place – Scratch Team ‘A’ Bridgwater Friends (28 faults)



Pam Campbell, Margaret Johnson,
Margaret Lee, Michael Munt,
Richard Lee, Terry Warman.

Sixth Place – Scratch Team ‘C’ (51.5 faults)



Roger Packer, Tim Langston,
Helen Wheldon, Margaret Furner,
Charles Pipe Wolferstan, Andy Pearce

Seventh Place – Bridgwater (106 faults)



Tracey Rolph, Vicki Garratt,
Jonathan Trigg, Jo Huxtable,
Richard Lee, Gerry Huxtable.





Bath & Wells Diocesan Association of Change Ringers Association AGM, May 9th 2026 Open tower routes – All Ringers Welcome!



Route A	Time	Route B
Banwell, St Andrew. BS29 6EA, 10, 23cwt, Toilet	9:30 – 10:30	Compton Bishop, St Andrew, BS26 2HF, 6, 11cwt
Churchill, St John the Baptist, BS25 5QW, 6, 14cwt (TBC)	10:00 – 11:00	Biddisham, St John the Baptist, BS26 2RH, 4, GF, 8cwt Badgworth, St Congar, BS26 2QP, 5, 10cwt
Rowberrow, St Michael & All Angels, BS25 1QL, 6, GF, 7cwt	10:30 – 11:30	East Brent, Blessed Virgin Mary, TA6 4HZ, 6, 16cwt
Shipham, St Leonard, BS25 1TW, 6, 6cwt cwt. Toilet	11:00 – 12:00	Brent Knoll, St Michael, TA9 4EE, 6, 20cwt, Toilet
Winscombe, St James the Great, BS25 1BX, 8, 18cwt Toilet	11:30 – 12:30	Mark, Holy Cross, TA9 4NF, 8, 19cwt, Toilet
Axbridge, St John the Baptist, BS26 2BX, 6, 19cw	12:00 – 13:00	Wedmore, St Mary, BS28 4AA, 8, 30cwt, Toilet
Public toilet (5 mins walk in Moorland St.)		

Axbridge, Wedmore and Cheddar all have pubs and cafes
when you will be able to have lunch

13:30 – 14:30 Open ringing then service touch at
Cheddar, St Andrew, BS27 3RE, 8, 22cwt. Toilet (in Village Hall opposite)
14:30pm – Service

15:15pm – Meeting followed by tea in The Village Hall, Cheddar BS27 3RB.
Evening ringing will be announced at the meeting



NO BELLS, JUST SHELLS

John Hallett asked me to write a few words about volunteering with turtles in Sri Lanka, despite my protestations that I could find no connections with bells apart from the Bell Turtle, a freshwater species found only in Australia!



Sixty years ago, as a student, I spent the summer fruit picking on a Kibbutz, an experience which made me new friends and gave me an insight into Israeli life not available to tourists, and I felt that 2 weeks with a turtle project might provide similar opportunities with the added bonus of sunshine in January. It certainly lived up to expectations regarding both friends and weather, and taught me a lot about Green and Olive Ridley turtles, with a cantankerous Hawksbill thrown in.



The conservation unit was in Kosgoda, on the SW coast of Sri Lanka and was set up 35 years ago by Dudley Perera and his wife to provide a protected environment where eggs could not be poached for sale to local restaurateurs, and hatchlings could be released directly onto the beach. In addition, about a dozen turtles were kept in large tanks for educational purposes for schoolchildren and visitors, to be released into a semi-protected environment when they reached 4 years old.

Each day began with the baker's van jingly version of 'Für Elise' at 6am, although work in the unit did not start until 9 o'clock. Burying eggs delivered by local fishermen was a priority - holes dug by hand in the sand to a depth of 1 meter.

(Temperature and humidity determine the turtle's sex; deep, moist and cold = male, shallow, dry and warm = female). This was followed by digging out empty or unhatched eggs, raking the sandy floor of the unit and feeding the turtles in special tanks as food residue would quickly contaminate their swimming tanks. One day of each week was devoted to scrubbing the walls and floors of the tanks with steel wool and replacing the sea water, an exhausting process, and another day to beach cleaning, everyone's favourite occupation involving wandering amongst the coconut palms along the beach. Any visitors were given a guided tour, and local children given English lessons in the afternoons, enough to keep the 6 of us volunteers busy from 9-6. Weekends were free, which enabled us to go on safari and visit local tourist spots.



The Perera family running the unit had devoted their working lives to conservation of the turtles, having had to completely rebuild in 2004 after the Tsunami destroyed everything. They must take some pride in their contribution to the removal of the Green Turtle from the endangered species list in October 2025. On reflection there was perhaps some disappointment in the lack of data collection or participation in any larger or international studies or projects, but maybe a university department will become involved one day.

Would I recommend volunteering to others? Certainly - hard work physically (perhaps a reflection of old age) but a magical way to experience a beautiful country and its cuisine and meet some wonderful people. And who would not choose to miss 21 consecutive days of rain?

Kay Smith

Method for the Year - 2026



As outlined at our meeting after the Striking Competition, I would like to introduce a new method (hopefully for most) to be learned this year.

This can be practiced as part of our Branch Practices; please don't worry, this will not be the only method being practiced, there will still be the full array of ringing to cater for everyone at the practices.

The purpose of introducing something that may be a bit more testing is to broaden our branch's knowledge of ringing other methods beyond the standard ones most can quite competently ring.

I would love to be able to ring a Quarter Peal of the method at some point, the band made up from branch members who have mastered it. It is with some irony that I have chosen this method, the name hits the nail on the head, Mental Block, something we all suffer when trying to master something new.

If you have the Methodology App (or similar) you can practice the method using the Tutor, and as you progress, select with Bobs and Singles. All I ask is that you please try to give this a go and see how we progress.

This method is based on St Clements College Bob Minor. The front work causes the bells coming in from the back to make 3rds place and go to the back again. This happens every time except when the Treble is in front of the bells coming down from the back. When the Treble is at the lead, the dodges and work is exactly the same as Plain Bob i.e.

- Bell in 3rds place dodges 34 Down and begins front work
- Bell in 4ths place dodges 34 Up
- Bells turned from lead makes 2nd and leads again
- Back 2 bells dodge 56Up/56 Down

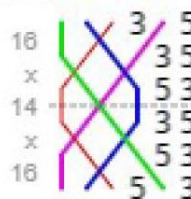
The front work, in full is:

- After dodging 34 Down, make 4 blows in 2nds place
- Lead for 5 blows
- Make 2^{nds} over the Treble
- Lead for 5 blows
- 2nds place for 4 blows

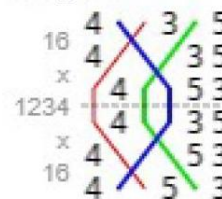
Bobs & Singles are standard Plain Bob

Mick Howes
Bridgwater Branch Ringing Master

Bob:



Single:



2026 Bridgwater Branch Practices and Meetings

9 May – Stogursey (6 Bell)

13 Jun – Highbridge (8 Bell)

11 Jul – Wembdon – Picnic and Practice

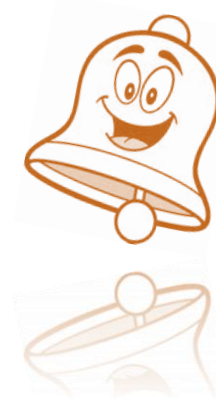
8 Aug – Bridgwater (8-10 Bell)

12 Sep – North Petherton (6 Bell) ** (to be confirmed)

10 Oct – Woolavington - Open ringing- Service – AGM

7 Nov – Fiddington (6-Bell)

Dec – Bridgwater Christmas 12 Bell – TBA



Branch Practices 1100-1230hrs

AGM Open Ringing from 1400-1500 followed by Service and Meeting

11 July Picnic (bring your own food etc.) – Open ringing from 1100-1430

If the weather is fine, we can picnic either in the churchyard or the patch of grass under the tree - bring own chairs or blankets. Small room in hall if it rains.



Keith Prime and band who rang 900 All Saints for his 90th birthday (Image: Freda Prime)

Happy
90th
Birthday
Keith



Bath & Wells Diocesan Association

Ashcott, Somerset

All Saints

Tuesday, 24 March 2026 in 35m (12-0-21 in F)

900 All Saints Doubles

- 1 Peter Cresswell
- 2 Nancy Routley
- 3 Chris Gaunt
- 4 Ben Routley
- 5 Henry Routley (C)
- 6 Shane Court

Rung for the 90th birthday of Keith Prime, long time tower captain at All Saints Ashcott. We decided that 900 changes were more appropriate for Keith's 90th birthday and All Saints as Keith was part of the band who first rung and named the method. First long length for ringer of 6

Please send any local news and items for the Newsletter to
BridgwaterBranch.News@bath-wells.org

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