

Bath & Wells Diocesan Association of Change Ringers: Glaston Branch



Branch Newsletter No: 15

December 2025

Website address: [Bath & Wells DACR](#)

To all our Fabulous Bell Ringers ...



Throughout the year your ringing has filled hearts with joy, hope and warmth. Thank you for sharing your time, talent, and love so generously.

The holiday season is here, so alongside choirs, communities, and revellers, may the ringing of bells bring happiness and joy.

... AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

Association 8-Bell Ringing Competition

Glaston Branch hosted this year's Association 8-Bell ringing competition on Saturday 27th September at St. Leonard, Butleigh. This was more complicated than usual as the Association's 6-Bell Ringing Competition was being held the same day from 1pm at West Cranmore, near Shepton Mallet, and we knew that most Branches who entered would wish to compete in both.

We therefore had to co-ordinate with the Frome Branch to ensure teams could ring in the 6-Bell Competition and then drive to Butleigh to ring there too. As a result, a combined tea had to be provided and arrangements made for joint results to be given by the judges and presentations by the Association Master, [Rev. Guy Scott](#).





On the day the sun shone most of the time thus allowing those not ringing to listen to the competitors in the grounds of the church. In the event, 6 teams entered, with Chew Branch winning with 38 faults and Glaston Branch coming an amazing 2nd with 53 faults (see **Paul Wotton's** article). Apologies for not having a photo of the winning team who were: **Melissa Cooper** (Treble); **Beverley Perry** (No. 2); **Jenny Darke** (no.3); **Graham Darke** (no. 4); **Leslie Perry** (No. 5); **Paul Wotton** (No. 6 & Conductor); **Penelope Hooper** (No. 7); **Harry Dudden** (Tenor).

An amazing tea for 80 people was organised by **Marilyn Backhurst** and her team, and a successful raffle was run by **Leslie Perry, Hedley McLaurin and Sirius Wardell**. Profits of £240 from the afternoon have been paid into the Association's Bell Support Fund. Huge thanks go to everyone who played their part to show what the smallest Branch in the Association can do!

Mike Palmer

Branch Secretary

A Very Good Second

Coming second to the branch with probably the best 8 bell team in the association is no mean feat. To do so with a scratch band was remarkable. Those who attend my midweek Improvers Group sessions will have heard most of this before. The competition taking place in a branch tower was an advantage. As the organiser and conductor, knowing the bells and knowing the ringers was a great help. So, with no rehearsal, we were able to come together, use our practice time well and produce a very presentable touch of Grandsire Triples. That we did, gives me the opportunity as the Branch Education officer to bang on about how to get the best out of a particular band. It's all in how you place the band. Those who attend my midweek Improvers Group sessions will have heard me on this subject many times. It's not a secret. It's explained in the CCCBR online document "Running a Tower" and can be found in the Planning Ringing / Place the Band.

The document can be found at <https://runningatower.cccbr.org.uk/> or via this QR Code:



Paul Wotton

Glaston Branch Education Officer



Ring the Bells by Vicky Baillon

Vicky, a Glaston Branch member and a committed ringer in the Baltonsborough, Werst Pennard and Butleigh area and beyond, recently wrote a fascinating article for the local Parish Magazine about the history of bell ringing, its ups and downs and benefits today. She has very kindly shared her talents and skill for writing with us and you can read her article at the end of this Newsletter. Thank You, Vicky.

First South-West Ringing Course Held at Milfield

After nearly two years' in the planning, the first South West Ringing Course was held at Milfield School, within the Glaston Branch, from Friday 24th to Monday 27th October. Although the Branch wasn't directly involved in the planning and organisation, a number of our own towers hosted the participants.

Interesting facts:

- There were 120 applicants for 40 places which is a similar ratio to that for other residential courses.
- In total there were 80 tutors and helpers involved in the weekend
- 48 towers were required throughout Glaston and neighbouring Branches for the practical sessions - see **Bev Perry's** separate article about this.
- The "bar" was stocked with 280 pints of beer and 140 pints of cider, most of which was consumed during the course of the weekend!

Mike Palmer

Branch Secretary



See also **Norma Anselm's** article on her participant experience.

It was a straightforward request; would I be able to help arrange the towers for the South West Ringing Course in October?

I agreed, without properly thinking this through. I was advised that there would be eight groups of students each having six practical sessions over the long weekend. A total of 48 towers needed, in reasonable travelling distance from Street, not too difficult to ring, room in the tower to accommodate students and helpers, preferably with sufficient parking and toilet facilities if possible. Thankfully **Melissa Hunt** was able to produce a detailed spreadsheet of Association towers and gave us access to a dedicated email address for contacting prospective tower correspondents. The list was scrutinised, unsuitable towers removed for whatever applicable reason and the mailshot began. Tower correspondents advised which sessions they could accommodate and we eventually had a list of prospective venues. Then began the puzzle of linking pairs of towers to avoid unnecessary travelling wherever possible. This was eventually achieved and we were relieved to

hand the details over to the organising committee to pass onto the course tutors. Luckily the feedback was positive. The towers were generally fit for purpose and there is now a basis on which to build for whoever takes this on in future years.

Bev (and Les) Perry

Vice Chairman

A Note from a participant ,,,

And so, on Friday my bags, sweets and pillow were safely stowed away in the boot of my car and off I went to Milfield. As I got out of the car a lady enquired as to the course entrance, I duly obliged. It turned out she had travelled for nearly 4 hours as opposed to my mere 15 minutes!

Over the weekend our group travelled to Leigh on Mendip, Wanstrow, Babcary, Shepton Beauchamp, West Camel and Wincanton which gave us an extremely valuable experience of varied towers and bells on which to develop skills. Furthermore, there were many learning opportunities on site at Milfield from which we greatly benefited eg mobile belfry ringing, raising and lowering workshops, hand bells, calling, running a tower and much more.

By the end of Monday everyone was extremely tired as we had been kept very busy. If you get offered the chance to apply next year ... go for it ... you don't know you could be one of the lucky ones.

Thank you to those who endorsed my application, it is much appreciated.

Norma Anselm

Glaston Branch Member

News from our Branch Meeting on 22nd November 2025

6 new members were elected to membership of the Association – a record number at one meeting! Congratulations to them all, particularly **Brian, Sirius, Robert, and Francis** who have recently graduated from the Training Centre.



Back Row: **Robert Harvey** and **Louis Marsh**

Front Row: **Sirius Wardell, Francis Bao** and

Brian Leyshon

Louise Warner, who couldn't be there on the day.

Bev Perry reported this is the second full year that the Branch Training Centre has been in operation. There have been 12 learners each year and of these, 4 have already become members, 4 are being elected at this meeting, and a further 2 are nearly ready. Interestingly, 8 have ceased coming for medical and other reasons. Two one-hour training sessions are held on a Monday afternoon for initial handling skills and ringing in rounds & call changes. As well as beginners' courses, other towers are also using the facility to develop their ringing in various ways.

Paul Wotton reported that the Improvers Group have been ringing on Wednesday mornings to progress individual ringing skills and move towards ringing Plain Hunt with methods.

Branch Committee

- **Web Officer:** A new role linked with the new Association website: **Graham Darke**
- **Branch Secretary & Association General Committee Representative:** **Mike Palmer** is retiring at the AGM in January. Please ask all tower members if they are interested in filling this position.
- **Tower Maintenance Contact:** **Phil Kitcher** is also retiring, and a new person will need to be found.

Branch Events 2026

Our provisional programme for 2026 was announced. Details will be forthcoming nearer the date of each event. **Make a note of these dates in your dairy now!**

- Branch Annual General Meeting: 17th January, West Pennard
- Six Bell Competition: 18th April, possibly at Pylle. Two different competitions, one for method ringing and one for call change ringing
- Association AGM: 9th May
- Branch Outing: 27th June. Two or three local towers
- Branch Event: 21st November 2.00 to 5.00pm, Croscombe

Glastonbury St. John's Ellacombe Chimes Session

We recently held a practice session at St. John's learning about the history, mechanism and technique of ringing the Ellacombe chimes. Briefly, for those who may not know, it's a mechanism devised for performing change and other ringing on church bells by striking stationary bells with



hammers - a quieter and more melodic sound than normal ringing. The system was devised in 1821 by **Reverend Henry Thomas Ellacombe** in Bitton, Gloucestershire who created the system as an alternative to using his local ringers, so he didn't have to tolerate behaviour that he saw as unruly – “ungodly” competitions for prizes!

The apparatus can be operated by one person, the bells being static (or "hung dead"), each hammer striking against the inside of the bell. Another feature of this form of ringing is that well known tunes can be rung e.g. Carols at Christmas. As this system requires a particular technique, they alienated many ringers from the church, and the apparatus fell out of fashion. Consequently, the apparatus was removed from many towers in the

past, leaving holes in the ceiling and often frames without ropes. It's estimated there are @ 5,000 working bell towers in the UK, but only 400 Ellacombe chimes - 8%, with another 40 abroad. Another known set in the Branch is used regularly at Pilton. At St. John's, although not used often, they have been rung for Sunday services and weddings when insufficient ringers are available, and particularly through the Covid pandemic when full ringing was prevented for health reasons.



During the session attended by 7 ringers, everyone was able to "have a go" at ringing rounds on 8 bells, and then Queens, Kings and Tittums in turn, followed by a mixture of each. One or two more musical learners also tried ringing a more well-known piece, including something from The Sound of Music! Everyone agreed it was an interesting and useful evening, to be repeated in the New Year.

Mike Palmer

Tower Captain St John's Glastonbury

Ring the Bells

by

Vicky Baillon

*"This is an art which is peculiar to England, and England for this reason is termed 'The Ringing Island'."*¹

Anybody looking for a spot of gentle physical and mental exercise could consider the ancient art of bell ringing. Perhaps not the first activity that readily springs to mind when seeking to improve agility, balance, coordination and reaction time, but the repetitive motion of pulling a rope not only increases muscular strength, boosts memory and endurance but cardiovascular fitness as well. So before considering gym membership, why not give bell ringing a try instead?

The sound of church bells has long been associated with the English aural landscape and almost everyone lives within hearing range of them. Originating with the pagan belief that the sound of bells dissipated evil, the early church harnessed this dogma into Christian practice and bells were used by early Christian missionaries to summon people to worship. The custom of the tolling of bells was then gradually introduced across Europe, before arriving on these shores in and around AD680.

By the Middle Ages, every church had at least one bell, with the more prosperous abbeys, cathedrals and monasteries containing as many as six. Some bells were cast on site by itinerant artisans with a rudimentary knowledge of smelting and mould making, whilst others were cast in permanent foundries.

¹Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worcester, chaplain of King Edward VI.

At first, bells were hung from an axle or spindle with a rope attached, and where a church had multiple bells, these were rung in succession, producing a somewhat discordant and droning sound. After the Reformation, the practice of ringing 'rounds' derived from the new technology of a wheel attached to a spindle with the rope passed around the groove, so that the bell could swing 360 degrees. As the bell reached the top of the pendulum, it could be paused momentarily, giving the ringer greater control which was then enhanced by the fitting of a 'stay' and 'slider' to enable the ringer to 'set' the bell. Now the bells could be rung up and down the scale and the practice of 'change ringing' developed out of this milieu in which a sequence of bells was rung from the treble to the tenor achieving (depending on the expertise of the ringers), a distinct and pleasant musical effect.

By this time, bell ringing had become a secular and popular pastime independent from the church building, with parish bells as ideal instruments not only for celebration but for approval and respect.

Ringers were paid for important national and regional events. The annual celebration of Queen Elizabeth I's accession on 17th November 1558 called for the 'cheerful symphony of the bells' meeting with the approval of one Elizabethan minister who explained that 'it is natural to the mind of man to be ravished with great joy by the notes and harmony of music, which thing bells well rung commonly effect men's hearts'...² rather than, than making the wrong noise, or failing to sound the bells as expected, could signify a social or political offence; as Shakespeare put it, 'take but degree away, untune that string and hark what discord follows!'³ Some of us bell ringers are more familiar with the latter than the former. Churchwarden's accounts are dotted with expenditures on beer and cheese for bell ringers as well as commemorations with the ringers of St. Margaret's Westminster paid a shilling each for the rather gruesome celebration of the beheading of Mary Queen of Scots. As the 17th century progressed, the recreation of bell ringing flourished giving frequent opportunities for bell ringers to practice this distinctive English art.⁴ A new and important book on the subject was published in 1668 by Fabian Stedman and Richard Duckworth called *Tintinnalogia*. A somewhat turgid tome, it detailed the "plain and easie Rules for Ringing all sorts of Plain Changes" which used mathematics to determine how bells of different weights could be rung without any changes being repeated. Stedman followed his success nine years' later with the equally soporific (to some) *Campanalogia*, revealing dozens of changes without the need for calls, whereby bells must change place at each pull of the rope. These compositions were named *methods* and soon hundreds were created, often named after the cities in which they were first rung such as Cambridge, London or Norwich.

Unfortunately, things deteriorated somewhat during the 18th and 19th centuries, as in more rural areas, ringers began to gain a reputation of general obstreperousness, with reports of drunkenness, swearing, smoking in the ringing chamber, with some members of the clergy even locked out of their own church.

¹ Maurice Kyffin, *The Blessedness of Byrtaine, or A Celebration of the Queenes Holy Day* (London, 1558).

² William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, Act 1, Scene 3.

³ David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells* (London, 1989,) pp.70.

Unsurprisingly, rifts developed between the ringers and the clergy, as often ringers spotted an opportunity to earn a few shillings to spend down the pub, rather than on the good of their families.

One such vicar, the Reverend John Skinner, Rector in Camerton in Somerset was especially aggrieved, having recommended to his local band that “they are not going to the Public House spending money they had gained in folly”. Presumably he was ignored, as the good reverend appeared to spend a good deal of his time stomping grumpily around the village “to avoid the jingling of the Bells.”

To the more censorious later Victorians, all this lowered the tone, and the Cambridge Camden Society was established in 1839 to affiliate ringing with church’s moral and religious mission. Clerical authority was officially reinstated (despite opposition from many ringers who wanted to maintain their independence), and Tower Captains were appointed to ensure ‘proper’ conduct and church attendance. During this period, the floors of many ringing chambers were removed and the ropes lengthened so that the ringers were in full view of the congregation. In 1891, ‘Bell Ringing Baronet’, Sir Arthur Heywood founded the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers to represent ringers, co-ordinate education and publicity which still exists today.

Needless to say, the female of the species was excluded from ringing and it wasn’t until 1896 when a Miss Alice White of Basingstoke broke the mould, becoming the first woman to complete a full peal of bells.⁵ The Ladies Guild of Change ringers formed sixteen years’ later, as more women became interested in the practice. Following a slump in interest after the Great War, and during World War II when the bells were silenced, interest increased rapidly as the century progressed. By the start of the Millennium, approximately 95% of the church bells in the UK were rung on 1st January 2000. The “Ringing 2030,” initiative promoted by the Central Council aims to increase awareness and recruitment in encouraging all age-groups. The number of young bell ringers has increased considerably in recent years, with events such as the King’s coronation and national competitions inspiring a new wave of interest.

Although not considered a ‘mainstream hobby’ by some, but despite its mathematical connection, bell ringing only requires basic counting skills. The key thing is a sense of rhythm, timing and coordination. Most importantly ringing is inclusive and fun! Ringers come in all shapes and sizes, young and older – it’s never too late to try to get ringing and enjoy the conviviality of this most ancient of traditions.

This is YOUR Newsletter. Contributions are always welcome from all towers, about events, news or people. Send to: GlastonBranch.News@bath-wells.org.

Please remember: photos including people should have the permission of anyone in them for data protection and confidentiality reasons.

This is a special name given to a specific type of performance which meets certain exacting conditions for duration, complexity and quality.