



MONMOUTH BRANCH NEWS

Llandaff and Monmouth Diocesan Association of Church Bell Ringers

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Dates for the Diary

9th March, 10am (St Woolos)

Association 12 bell practice

14th March, 7:30pm (Usk) Branch

8 Bell Practice.

16th March, 2pm (Monmouth)

Branch General Practice

22nd March, 10:30am (Llanishen)

Association Daytime Practice

11th April, 7:30pm (Usk)

Branch 8 Bell Practice.

13th April, 3pm (Blaenavon)

Association AGM

20th April (Time & Venue TBC)

Branch Training (Conducting Plain Bob Doubles & Minor)

9th May, 7:30pm (Usk)

Branch 8 Bell Practice.

18th May, 4pm (Nash)

Branch Striking Competition

FROM THE BRANCH MASTER

The AGM was held at Caldicot this year. This was attended by an amazing number of people. Matthew was running the ringing (as the retiring master, Debbie, had been unable to attend). He said he had 34 in the ringing chamber at one point and he counted approx 50 at the meeting. I counted at least 11 towers represented. It was a really good turnout with great bells, entertaining service, lovely tea and efficient meeting (with 24 new members elected) followed by more ringing, again run by Matthew, then the pub over the road for the hardy few who still remained. My thanks to Matthew, as that was quite a task organising ringing for so many ringers. Also my thanks to Peter Bennett who acted as Branch Chair when Martin Gilbert had to stand down earlier in the year and is still there as a guiding light when I want it. And of course thank you to Debbie for her years as Ringing Master and Matthew for his many years editing the newsletter.

I would like our active towers to seriously consider having annual meetings to discuss who is going to do what in the tower. Who runs the ringing, who organises the social events, how much to charge for peal attempts, visitors, weddings etc. How much money is in the tower bell fund. Then of course there is the Infrastructure within the tower, and Health & Safety, Safeguarding etc. It's good practice and can be a social occasion with nibbles and beer or more formal, with the incumbent as Chair, or preferably a mixture of both. In all the towers I've been involved with, we have always held meetings and it's been a nice way to engage with the clergy too.

I intend to have a monthly 6 bell practice. It will be for single methods only and I will say in advance what that method will be. It won't be a course type event but if training or information is needed, it can of course be provided, but no official theory. I will expect that to have been done beforehand, so we can just ring the selected method. We need more follow ups, after our training courses and that's what I aim to provide. It's all very well people coming on a Plain Bob Doubles course but if they then go back to their own towers and don't have enough to ring it, or only get one go per evening, then that's not really quite enough. It will be at least once a month and the evening will vary so as not to miss anyone out. We can also arrange quarter peals as that's a great way to reinforce a method. So let me know if you fancy this? I will of course be calling on the very faithful helpers too.

As you read this the annual ringing course will have happened and my first single method practice should also have happened. If you have any feedback over either event, or anything else, please let Andrew or myself know, or any one of the committee reps - that's why we are all there. They are spread throughout the branch with most towers represented, so you should have someone accessible to you.

Anne Hayman

NEWS FROM THE TOWER

Abergavenny - St Mary's

All enquiries regarding the bells should now be addressed to the parish office - pa@stmarys-priory.org.

Caerleon - St Cadocs



We rang for the Caerleon Royal Legion Service of Remembrance in November

Caerleon ringers have had a few busy months. We were challenged by the vicar of St Cadocs to ring the handbells for a Christmas service in church. Once we found a suitable time when enough ringers could meet to learn we practiced to ring "Away in a Manger" for the service of 9 lessons and carols just before Christmas. We found that handbell ringing was more difficult than it looked and requires very good concentration from everyone - a real team activity. Thanks must go to Jenny Mole who showed us how and provided the music for us to use. Also thanks to Llanfrechfa church for loaning us their handbells to use when we realized ours left a lot to be desired.

Sadly when the day came, our leader Jenny was too poorly to join in, we were really grateful to Karen Jones for filling in.

The congregation seemed to enjoy our 2 verses of Away in a Manger (one of our band enjoyed playing so much that they started an unexpected third verse) but we all joined in and finished the verse, receiving a spontaneous round of applause at the end and a potential handbell recruit if we were to play again.



We have had a good number of people attending our practices and our newer ringers are making good steady progress in their rounds and kaleidoscope ringing.

We enjoyed our annual midnight mass ringing on Christmas eve and rang all 8 bells for a nice change, with our special little rewards enjoyed by all. Thanks to Peter Bray for his support in ringing with us recently.

NB - There will be no ringing at Caerleon from 18th February until after Easter because of major refurbishment work in the church.

Julia Jones

Ebbw Vale - Christ Church

What a fun crazy year it's been for us as new bellringers at Christ Church Ebbw Vale. The support we've had from our very patient and knowledgeable Tutor/Tower Captain Nick Jones has been greatly received. We all feel very lucky to have such a fantastic Tutor, plus such a fantastic support network - not only from our own tower, and towers in the surrounding area, but also our visiting bellringers too, so to all our helpers along the way, we would all like to say a huge THANK YOU.

We've had an action packed year. We started ringing in January 2023, with the main aim being to 'Ring for the King'. This was such a momentous occasion and one we will never forget! Since then, some of us have gone on to ring at quite a few different churches, not only on their resident ringers practice nights, but we've also rung for a wedding, a christening, not to mention Heritage days, church Fayres and Christmas events.

To celebrate our 1st Anniversary as new bellringers, we all attended a '1st anniversary' meal, which turned into a real family affair with Nick's wife Rhian, and Nick's mother Lesley, making a special appearance. A big thanks goes to Margo for organising it.



To end a lovely celebratory meal, we all headed off to the local theatre to support our very own Tower Captain playing the part of Tegwyn Pincott in the Theatre AdHoc production of 'Now in a Minute'. A wonderful night was had by all.

Margo Lewis

Llanedeyrn - St Edeyrn



It's good to have the Unicorn Pub open after 6 long years and to be able to walk next-door after bell ringing practice on a Wednesday. The pub has already established a good relationship with the church and bell ringers.

Since the last newsletter there has been a quarter peal rang at Llanedeyrn, a visiting band and a course. This weekend there will be another branch course with two bell ringers as students and 3 ringers as helpers. There are various day time practices and visiting bands booked in for the coming months. Last week it was nice to have a visit from Pam and Craig at Blaenavon. They also got to see the refurbished pub.

Training on a Wednesday evening continues to go well with our two newest members starting to learn plain hunt. We regularly have 11 of the members of the band in attendance and it's a nice relaxing and fun environment to learn and teach. On Sunday we usually have 8 ringers available and are able to run a rota if a member wants a break or is on holiday. Having 1 or 2 new ringers would be nice so we will see if we can recruit new bell ringers in the Spring.

John continues to look after the tower and is training David and Daniel to assist him. We need to look at repairing a couple of ropes where they snagged on a piece of carpet, and we will order at least one new rope soon as its past its best. Everything else in the tower is working well but at some point, we will have to spend money to ensure all the bells are in good condition. There are some minor adjustments required and we will stock up on stays.

Overall things are looking very good at Llanedeyrn, and we remain committed to ringing and letting others ring at this lovely ancient church.

Martin Gilbert

Llanwern - St Mary

At Llanwern, the learners are steadily improving with more consistent and improvement handling and call-changes. The practice on 11th February, we were a little shorter on numbers than usual, however, we still had a good practice because it gave me chance to focus on issues that needed sorting. One of the ringers that comes to practice has had issues with an untidy rope; perhaps because of not being taught correctly years ago. The lower numbers meant I could spend more time on this ringer. We went back to basics, and he had the Eureka moment where everything just clicked.

When asking what the takeaways at the end of the practice, he was grinning like a Cheshire cat.

In other news - before Christmas we managed to get in four QPs across the Netherwent Ministry Area, two at Magor and two at Caldicot, making a total of ten quarters over the year of 2023. 2024 has got off to a good start with a New Year's Day quarter at Llanwern, with more coming up.

I am organising monthly QPs at Caldicot for the 3pm family service on the 1st Sunday of the month - the quarters starting at 2pm. If you would like to ring in these please let me know.

Peter Bray

Michaelston-y-Fedw - St Michael

The new ropes have arrived from Avon Ropes and were fitted at the end of November. These have been a significant improvement on the old ropes which, in some cases, were almost more splice than rope! The only issue that we've found is that the new ropes are quite stiff because of the dampness of the tower. Taking inspiration from a previous newsletter submission by Gwyn Sayce, we're currently experimenting with putting the tail ends in a rotary washing line cover with a crystal-based dehumidifier in the bottom to absorb moisture. We'll report back when we have some conclusions!

Several Michaelston ringers attended the training morning in November for those who had been ringing for 12 months or less. They all enjoyed the event and particularly enjoyed ringing on some different bells for the first time.

The village carol service in December provided the Michaelston ringers with another opportunity for a “gig” and this was very much appreciated by those attending the service. A gig list for the first part of 2024 is currently being prepared!

Ringling-wise, progress continues to be made and we are at the stage where we can ring reliable rounds with several new ringers in at once. We've also been boosted by welcoming a lapsed ringer, which has helped enormously. A number of the band joined the Association at the AGM in January and are looking forward to the ringing course in February.

Matthew Turner

Newport - St Woolos Cathedral

Autumn was a strange and exciting time for St Woolos ringers. Up to 10 volunteers from the tower worked tirelessly for over three months to prepare the tower for our new bell! The project works also meant our practice night had to relocate to Bassaleg, for what ended up being 10 weeks! As well as enjoying a very fine ring of 8, it was a novelty for us to walk straight into the “Tredegar Arms” for refreshments after ringing. (A rare treat, as there hasn't been a pub within walking distance of Newport Cathedral since the “Six Bells” shut it's doors back in 2014).

The Tower Dinner on 25th November was well attended by 28 ringers and friends. Diners not only enjoyed a great evening out at the Mercure Hotel in Newport, but were treated to a specially written murder mystery play, featuring the ringing world's greatest detective - Sherlock “Wrong-Homes”. Three of our rising young stars: Long John, Precious Gem and Plucky Becky, gave outstanding debut performances, as each tried to prove they had nothing to do with the grizzly murder of the St Woolos steeple keeper!

After a number of delays the new treble bell, donated in memory of “Paul Williams” was finally installed, and the first quarter of Grandsire Caters on the light 10 was rung for evensong on Sunday 3rd December. This meant the bells were all back in time for Christmas service ringing, as well as the 2000th quarter in the tower (Grandsire Caters) on New Years Eve. Peter Bennett rang the 4th on this occasion, which is a notable achievement, as he also rang for the 1000th quarter in the tower 27 years ago - Yorkshire Surprise Major on the Daisy 8, in 1997 !

It's also great to see our new and younger ringers progressing. Two new learners, Francis Tanti and Josh Booth (yet another generation of the Bennett family!) are growing in confidence with rounds, and Josh has recently joined us for Sunday service ringing. Meanwhile John Deer (Long John from the murder mystery play!) rang his first quarter of plain bob doubles inside on Sunday 14th January. Learners are the lifeblood of any tower, so it is particularly encouraging to see their progress, and we look forward to hosting the next Branch Ringing Course on Saturday 17th February at the Cathedral. Who knows? Perhaps one day, someone attending this course will be ringing in the 3000th quarter at St Woolos!

Rob Bruce

MONMOUTH BRANCH OFFICERS

Following the AGM we have a new set of Branch Officers - here's a list of who's who, and what they do...

Chair - Aled Jones - overseer of the Branch and chairs the 4 committee meetings and AGM. Ensure everyone has a say and is listened to, represent the Branch (or send a substitute) on the Association Management Committee (also 4 meetings a year) - monmouthchair@llanmon.org.uk

Master - Anne Hayman - runs the ringing at the open practices and the AGM, organises other practices as they occur, prepare a report to the Branch Committee every quarter - monmouthmaster@llanmon.org.uk

Treasurer - Jen Mundy - does all money related things including gathering in subscriptions, prepare the year end accounts for examination by the elected examiners, prepare a report to the Branch Committee every quarter - monmouthtreas@llanmon.org.uk

Secretary - Karen Evans - organise, draft the agenda and take the minutes of the 4 committee meetings through the year. Organise the AGM and generally act as a point of contact for the Branch - monmouthsec@llanmon.org.uk

Training Co-ordinator - Andrew Phillips - runs the ringing course in February, and the other training days throughout the year, prepare a report to the Branch Committee every quarter - monmouthtraining@llanmon.org.uk

Newsletter Editor - Simon Lockhart - publish a quarterly newsletter - monmouthnews@llanmon.org.uk

Rumney - St Augustine

In the last newsletter, I reported that Lynn Bowles from BBC Radio Wales had visited one of our practice nights and recorded some interviews with ringers and had a go. The resulting piece, which was around 10 minutes long, was broadcast at the end of November. We were really pleased with the outcome, which we hope shows ringing in a really good light. The recording and the accompanying video that went out on social media are available on the Association website.

On 2nd December, we rang a peal in memory of Mike Matthews, a ringer at Rumney, who sadly died in November 2022. Despite it being very cold, we rang a really good peal and were delighted to score it for Mike. We raised a glass in his memory in the pub afterwards too. The details of the peal are as follows:

Rumney, Cardiff

St Augustine

Saturday, 2 December 2023 in 2h 45 (9–1–27 in F#)

5040 Doubles (5m/1p)

(Two extents Stedman, eight extents each St Simon's Bob, St Martin's Bob, Reverse Canterbury Pleasure Place, Plain Bob, Grandsire)

- 1 Wendy Reilly
- 2 Adam M Turner
- 3 Jane Craddock
- 4 Andrew M Muir
- 5 Matthew S Turner (C)
- 6 Debbie J Turner

Rung by members of the local band in memory of Mike Matthews, much-missed ringer at this tower, who died 15th November 2022.



We rang for several services over the Christmas period, including a quarter peal for the Crib Service on Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve saw three lots of ringing – normal Sunday ringing, the quarter peal in the afternoon and then ringing for “Midnight” Mass (at 2100!). Thank you to everyone who supported all the extra ringing.

Our newer ringers continue to make good progress and are working on perfecting their bell control. Our younger ringers recently joined the Association Young Ringers group at their event at St John's in Cardiff city centre, which they enjoyed.

Practices continue to be well supported and we generally ring everything from rounds to surprise minor and lots in between. In January, we rang a quarter featuring nine different Doubles methods for the Epiphany Carol Service.

Looking forward, Debbie Turner has organised a visit to the Tulloch Ringing Centre in May, which many of the Rumney ringers are going on. This will be a good opportunity to stretch ourselves a bit as well as enjoy the spectacular location.

Matthew Turner

Shirenewton - St Thomas a Becket

The Shirenewton ringers had a full programme over Christmas. As is tradition we brought the ropes down into the nave so that any assembled congregation could witness the art of full-circle change ringing. We rang for midnight mass on Christmas Eve and for Christmas morning. For New Year we rang either side of midnight, with before having the bells half-muffled to mourn the passing of the year.

During the morning service on Sunday 18th February two of our ringers, Carol Stoker and Cheri Oliver were presented their recently achieved Learning the Ropes certificates by the Arch Deacon of the Ministry Area, the Reverend Ian Rees. Carol has achieved Level 1, and Cheri achieved Level 2.

Michael D Penney

In a moment of foolishness, and possibly, under the influence of a small dry sherry, I apparently volunteered to write an article for the branch newsletter about our winter tour to Cornwall & Devon this January.

Now Mike (Penney) wrote a thoroughly decent article for the Shirenewton Church rag full of pertinent details, such as weights of bells, bungee unstretched ropes, quirky vicars and Cornish ringing, so if you want some proper informative and technical bell detail I suggest you buy the Shirenewton Church mag. (I do have a few copies going spare. For a reasonable fee)

But as I have been reminded (more than once) that I did say that I would write something, I must get on with it – so under pressure, here is a brief and amateur recollection of the trip.

Normally, our winter tours are only a day long and we might visit, maybe 7 towers? But this year because it's quite a trek down to Cornwall, it was to be for a full weekend. What? Camping in winter? No. Not my bag, no matter how many togs. But as it panned out, it was brilliant because we all stayed in Mike and Pip's wonderful gaff down in Mawgan Porth. Yes all 19 of us and it wasn't a squash. Plenty of space. And what a lovely place. Many thanks.

So, Friday 5th January we all met up at lunchtime at the Wrecker's Bar at Hartland Quay and then nicely refreshed, we went on to ring at two St Nectan's, one in Stoke and the other in Welcombe and we finished the ringing for the day at Morwenstow. What a beautiful little church. And if you enjoy looking at the fabric of churches, the quality and craftsmanship of the ancient carved pew ends, the rood screens and the roof rafters down that way is wonderful



Then on to the 13th century, Bush Inn and as you can see by the photo, we are all looking happy and relaxed. Back to the Penney's pad for a communal meal – where oddly, all the ladies all congregated in the kitchen to talk about... well I don't know what they talked about as there was no space left for me but I do know what the men talked about in the lounge: grit, gravel and aggregate. Who knew that this could be so fascinating...

Saturday saw us setting off for another 7 Devon towers. We were blessed with wonderful weather – blue skies and sunshine. The air, clear and beautiful. The towers? Well sometimes Mike arranges some curve balls and odd bells for us but on this tour, all were reasonably ring-able. Back to Mawgan Porth for a fine evening of pizza, wine and beer.

On Sunday morning, four stalwarts remained to attempt some Cornish round ringing but most of us left for home before the holiday rush back.

And no, it is not true that one of the bell ringers was seen skinny dipping in the cold sea at sunrise on Sunday morning. They are fake photos.

Glynis MacDonald

Treddunock - St Andrew's

As Tredunnock does not have a local band to keep the bells ringing you will find anywhere from seven to seventeen ringers from various towers converging on this little well-kept church on most Friday evenings between 7.30 – 9.00. There are currently four learners who are able to handle a bell and ringing ranges from rounds and call changes to Stedman. Usually on the last Friday of the month we go to the nearby tower at Usk, which gives people the opportunity to ring a heavier set of 8 bells.

The later part of last year saw one of our regular ringers celebrate their Diamond wedding anniversary. To mark this milestone I suggested we try and ring a couple of quarter peals with as many of the regular ringers that wished to and were able to taking part. Overall there were 11 different people involved in this.

As I had learnt Stedman touches here I wanted to consolidate the learning and thought an attempt at a Quarter peal for this special occasion would be appropriate.

We achieved our aim on Monday the 13th November, 1260 Stedman doubles in 43 mins the band comprising of:

- 1 Peter S Bennett (C)
- 2 Pauline P Morris
- 3 Kenneth Phillips
- 4 John Hopkins
- 5 Philip J Huxley
- 6 Richard James

As well as celebrating Ken and Pats Diamond wedding which was actually on the 26th October it was also a first in method for the ringers of the 2nd and 4th.

Unfortunately we weren't so lucky with the 2nd quarter, which was organised for a few days later. Hopefully there will be other opportunities in 2024 to enable us to attempt this one again.

Pauline Morris

LESS CAN BE MORE!

On some Wednesdays at Caerleon practice we have a lot of people there – occasionally as many as 14. Trying to cope with everyone's needs is a challenge and, sometimes, the newer ringers leave early so that we others can have a concentrated go at Plain Bob Doubles (our limit at present).

However, sometimes numbers are lower and 7th February was one such day. With just 8 of us there we had the opportunity to really concentrate on both theory and practice. We started with Plain Hunt Doubles and that went well. Then we did Call Changes followed by Mexican Wave. As a spectator I realised that one of our learners was looking very confused and a bit 'lost'. When she finished I asked her if she'd ever had either really explained to her. "I don't think so but I might have and I haven't been ringing for a while so I've forgotten in any case" was her reply.

Here was my challenge! While the other 6 people rang Plain Hunt again I could give the necessary theory lesson. It worked! Her next attempts at Mexican Wave and Call Changes were much better. High five!!

Someone else asked to ring Plain Hunt Doubles on the 5th. She tried but was not managing to control the bell to make it go slower or quicker. I suggested we ring Plain Hunt on 3 but using the back 4 bells so that she was ringing the same bell but with less bells to worry about. She would also have to shorten her rope considerably to get down to lead and then steady it up afterwards to get back into the correct position. We tried. We succeeded. Now augment to Plain Hunt Doubles and hope..... Success! High five!

Another of those there has been trying to master covering for Bob Doubles using purely ropesight as he has very little hearing. But, with an often unsteady band, he wasn't having much luck. We realised we had had a Bob Doubles band – just – so we rang a course which went very well BUT the conductor didn't stop after the plain course..... That threw the tenor ringer into a panic because he didn't know what was happening. There was no call "Go again" and he didn't know that you just continue ringing the method until the conductor says "That's all". Basic? Yes. But how much do we sometimes take for granted in our towers? We did ring another course and, again, the tenor was struck very evenly. Another high five!

Our practice on 7th February achieved a lot, partly because there were fewer people there – thus proving that, sometimes, with less you can achieve so much more – but also because people were willing to have things explained in language which they understood and then could have a 'minder' as they tried again.

It was also a reminder that many things which we experienced ringers take for granted, or which we assume people know about, have been overlooked when we've done basic teaching – or the facts have been forgotten by those being taught. And that's, maybe, a lesson to all of us who run or help at practices.

Jenny Mole

200 CLUB DRAW

November - Tues 21st at Bassaleg

Prize	Number	Winner
£30	120	Catherine Jones (Llantilio Pertholey)
£15	101	Richard Rowe (Llanishen)
£10	133	Martin Batten (Penarth)
£10	95	Newport Cathedral Tower
£10	141	Jon Prince (Usk)

December - Sun 17th at St Woolos

Prize	Number	Winner
£60	6	Jane Craddock (Rumney)
£30	1	Adrian Fawcett
£20	143	Coity Tower
£20	185	Kevin Musty (Aberavon)
£20	26	Perry Turner (Rumney)

January - Sun 28th at St Woolos

Prize	Number	Winner
£30	64	Peter Jones (Caerphilly)
£15	20	Sheila Denison
£10	7	Wendy Reilly (Rumney)
£10	80	Phillippa Shaw
£10	96	David Mundy (St Mellons)

TOWER ACCIDENTS & SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT

Accidents When Ringing - The Top Risks

1. **Holding on to the rope after a stay breaks** - This is the number one cause of serious injury from ringing, according to the Central Council. Every few years, The Ringing World reports another case of life changing injuries from this type of accident. Maintaining stays and sliders in good condition is VERY important. But ringers MUST also be drilled to let go of the rope IMMEDIATELY if they do break a stay!
2. **Hooking the rope around things when ringing** - All ringers should be taught good rope control, and told not to wear large jewellery, loose clothing, or big items in pockets, which might become caught up in the rope. It is also vital to make sure boxes are always correctly positioned, and that your feet never project over the edge of the box.
3. **Making coils to raise a bell BEFORE checking it is down** - All ringers must be taught to check a bell is down before making coils, even if someone else has told you the bell is down. (This should be a habit, just like checking a car is in neutral before you start the engine).
4. **Standing on a rope during ringing** - More of a risk on heavier bells that have longer tail ends! Ringers should be warned not to "walk around" while ringing. Special care is needed for trainers who may have to step in to help a learner, or if a big bell is being strapped by an assisting ringer.

Learners and Visitors - A Special Duty of Care

The people most at risk of ringing accidents (1-4 above) are clearly learners and non-ringers visiting the tower, because they will not be familiar with the risks. Learners should always be looked after by a trainer (ART qualified where possible) or experienced helper, on a one-to-one basis, until they are at least capable of ringing in rounds with good rope control. Learners are far more at risk of breaking stays, so it is important both to supervise them carefully, and teach them from day one that they MUST let go of the rope immediately if the stay breaks.

Non-ringing visitors must be told never to touch ropes, and asked to remain well clear of the ringing circle whenever the bells are being rung. Young children present a special risk, so must be in the care of a responsible adult at all times in the tower.

Belfry Access & Maintenance

For safety ALL bells should be lowered before entering the belfry to carry out maintenance, including fitting of muffles, lubricating plane bearings or just adjusting ropes. Maintenance tasks that require some bells to be left up require special "safe systems of work" that are beyond the scope of this piece.

However, one task that needs to be considered in most towers is what to do if a bell goes up wrong? Ecclesiastical Insurance now state that a written procedure is required for turning the clapper, with precautions which will depend on your own belfry layout, and access to each bell. It is likely that several other bells may need to be lowered in order to safely reach the one that needs the clapper turning. Depending on the layout, a long pole with a hook or belt loop might assist in making this safer, although the pole itself might then become a hazard, if a bell was pulled off accidentally!

Safety Precautions When Leaving Bells Up

The Central Council and Ecclesiastical Insurance recommend that bells are rung down after every ringing session. However, they do recognise there are times when it may be necessary to leave bells up, either because bells are particularly large (over 20 cwt) or are due to be rung again on the same or following day. Whenever bells are left up it is absolutely essential that any keys giving access to the ringing chamber and belfry very strictly controlled. It is vital that no-one without suitable experience is able to gain access to either the ropes or the bells, while they are left up. It is also recommended that ropes are put up on a spider where possible, and that a warning sign is hung from the ropes, clearly stating that bells are up.

When assessing the overall risk of leaving the bells up you may also consider whether you have some bells that often go up wrong. Depending on the risk of going up to turn a clapper in your tower, this could be another argument for leaving bells up, even if they weigh less than 20 cwt.

Safe Access & Egress (Exit)

All the points above concentrate on risks from the bells, but don't forget for experienced ringers, your biggest risk of injury is likely to be falling on the stairs! It is vital to keep steps in good repair, free from any obstructions, dry and well lit at all points. Most important of all, is to keep a strong continuous rope or handrail all the way up the stairs, which will dramatically reduce the risk of injury if someone does slip.

Fire Safety

A risk rarely discussed in ringing circles is that most towers lack smoke alarms to warn of any fire starting downstairs, during a ringing session. Worryingly, most upstairs ringing chambers only have one exit route, which is quite likely to be impassable by the time a fire in the church has grown enough for the ringers upstairs to notice. Ask your church if they have a fire safety risk assessment (which has actually been a legal requirement for all public buildings since 2006)? If you decide in conjunction with your church that a fire alarm system is needed for your tower, this can often be done relatively cheaply, and without installing any wiring. Modern RF linked smoke detectors can be bought with 10 year lifetime batteries, and a radio frequency communication range of upto 30 metres. This means a smoke detector carefully positioned in the church, should be able to communicate directly with an alarm in the ringing chamber above, provided there is no stonework in-between.

Conducting your own Tower Safety Risk Assessment

It is good practice to produce a written "Safety Risk Assessment" which deals with specific risks for your own tower. If you are interested in doing this, the Central Council have published a guidance note on "Tower Safety & Risk Assessment" . It is recommended that you do risk assessment as a small team including the Tower Captain, Steeplekeeper, and whoever trains your learners. You should also include someone who is professionally qualified (or at least experienced) in risk assessment techniques. For further advice on risk assessment please contact me, as I am more than happy to discuss any questions about health and safety. I can also now provide two examples of completed tower risk assessments from St Mary Redcliffe in Bristol, and St Woolos in Newport.

Please remember that ALL accidents are preventable. And the best time to make changes to your safety procedures is BEFORE an accident happens.

Robert P Bruce
31 January 2024

BELL MAINTENANCE GROUP UPDATE

17th November was a return visit to Michaelston-y-Fedw to complete the alleviation of odd struckness in the peal, service a pulley and replace a missing wheel bolt. A comprehensive set of measurements of the clapper swing timings was taken as requested by Matthew Turner and sent to Philip Pratt for possible adjustments to the clappers. This took longer than expected so the planned inspection of the peal at St. Mellons was postponed until December.

15th December found us at St. Mellons doing an inspection and showing Michael Byrne, St. Mellons' new steeple keeper, what he should look out for and do when carrying out routine inspections and maintenance. While there, we moved two ropes on the wheel to give unworn rope passing through the garter hole. A loose twiddle pin was tightened and the rusting bird proofing was repaired with plastic pond netting. In the afternoon, following an unexpected detour via Caerleon, we visited Tredunnoch. Here we moved a rope on its wheel to give an unworn portion of rope where it passes through the garter hole. Four crown staple nuts were tightened along with a number of loose wheel nuts. The perspex sheeting which acted as bird proofing was repaired with plastic pond netting secured with cable ties.

Our first meeting in 2024 was to inspect the bells at Magor and at Redwick on 12th January. At Magor, three clapper pin nuts were tightened or replaced. Loose shrouding was screwed back into place on one of the wheels. The failed bird proofing mesh on the louvres was repaired with more chicken wire. The twigs and debris were collected and bagged. A plan was agreed with the local ringers for them to remove all the ropes at a time when there was little ringing planned and get the ropes to the BMG for new polyester top ends to be spliced on. The day concluded with an inspection at Redwick where we serviced a double pulley and advised that the inaccessible top louvres have their rusting bird proofing replaced and, on the uncovered louvre, bird proofing should be installed as soon as possible.

Joy Kipling
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TRAINING UPDATE

The annual Monmouth Branch Day Ringing course was held on Saturday 17th February. This year the course was based around the southeast of the Branch and used Newport Cathedral as the central meeting place. There were 6 ringing groups which utilised 8 different towers during the day and involved 27 students and 44 tutors & helpers. There were originally 34 students on the courses, but there were several drops in the final week and at the last minute.

Originally there were about 44 people who applied to be students, and only about 30 helpers. I would like to thank the people who wanted to be students on the doubles courses for agreeing to become helpers instead for the day, allowing a better balance of student to helper ratio across the courses. Some of the ½ day courses will be used to allow these people a chance to attend a course as a student sometime during the year.

The courses that were run this year covered Bell Experience, Call Changes & Kaleidoscope (2 groups), Plain Hunt, Advanced Plain Hunt, Learning Plain Bob Doubles.

This year included about 20 new learners that that learnt to ring in 2023, which is good to see.

Thank you to all the tutors and helpers on the day, as well as towers for allowing us to use their bells for the courses.

I would also like to thank Anne Hayman and the other St Woolos ringers (Catherine Walsh & Helen Mould) for helping with refreshments and clearing up on the day.

Looking forward to the rest of 2024, there are four Saturdays that are set aside for training events instead of Branch Practices. These are: -

20th April Conducting Plain Bob Doubles & Minor

20th July Grandsire Doubles (Plain Course & Touches - Priority for those unable to do it on the Feb day course)

21st September Course type to be confirmed

16th November Course type to be confirmed

I've had a request and a suggestion to organise a basic conducting course, and I will utilise some of the dates for the Plain Bob Doubles touches and the Grandsire courses that I was unable to include in the day ringing course.

If there are any other thoughts on what course could be run, please let me know.

I will send out an email about six weeks before the date using the Llandaff & Monmouth Mailing lists with the course type and request for students and helpers.

If anybody is interested in being on any of the courses in advance of the request for course members, please contact me in advance, and I will add your name to the list.

Sending information out about courses can be improved if more people were to sign up to the Llandaff & Monmouth website emailing lists for the Monmouth Branch, especially the "Monmouth Branch Training Communications".

Whilst you're there signing up for "Monmouth Branch Training Communications", how about also signing up for other Monmouth Branch communication lists as well.

More Monmouth Branch Training Communications will be carried out through this method going forward, so if you want to be in the know, be on the list 😊

Andrew Phillips

MonmouthTraining@llanmon.org.uk

MAILING LIST SUBSCRIPTIONS

Are you subscribed to the Association and Branch mailing lists? Do you want to change which lists you receive? Scan this QR Code with your mobile phone, or visit <https://llanmon.org.uk/mailling-lists>



CRICKET COACHING

One of my other interests is cricket. Recently I went on a foundation cricket coaching course with the ECB, as part of my activities within Newport Cricket Club. You may be wondering what this has to do with bell ringing; the principles of coaching are transferrable between activities.

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1. Instruct | 4. Analyse | 7. Use Silence |
| 2. Demonstrate | 5. Feedback | 8. Question |
| 3. Observe | 6. Praise | |

One of the key objectives of coaching is getting the players/ringers to work things out for themselves. The key point from the course was the importance of questioning. Many of us just tell somebody what the activity is and what we expect. Do we ever question that the learner understands what we are looking for? Rather than just say: "do you understand?", we can ask them a question in a way that asks them to repeat back to us what we want.

For example: When the coach is demonstrating the backstroke, should the coach demonstrate from different angles? We want the rope coming down nice and straight. Is this clear to the learner? Does the learner understand how? Does the learner understand why? If the learner is watching front-on, can he/she, see the rope coming down straight and where the hands finish at backstroke? Or, would it be useful to have learner watch from side-on? Could we then provide ask the learner to provide feedback on what they noticed? Or we could perhaps lead with "What did you notice about the rope?", "Where did my hands start and finish?"

Furthermore, when engaged in an activity such as practicing the backstroke; do we say to learners "make sure you finish the backstroke"? Or do we ask; "where should your hands be when you finish the backstroke?" This is assuming they understand the correct technique.

Could this also apply to learning bob doubles? Perhaps instead of only telling the learner what their next piece of work is; could we ask them "what is your next piece of work?" Or when we get a learner to stand by and watch a particular bell, do we ever ask questions afterwards? For example, I am on the five, and I could ask "what did I do when the treble took me off the lead?" or "which place bell did I become"? Assuming they understand the terminology.

Or perhaps this could be concurrent. When demonstrating a touch of bob-doubles; could I ask what piece of work I have just done and what is next? However "Bob" makes an appearance, could I then ask what I did instead of the 3/4 down and what comes next?

The other importance of questioning can come at the end of the activity and/or practice when we give feedback. What are the takeaways from the activity? What does the learner think can they improve upon or what they need to work on? This is also useful for us who coach, in making sure that learners know what we are looking for, hence the importance of clear instruction and demonstration.

Peter Bray

AVOIDING INJURIES FROM BROKEN STAYS

A lot of our towers are actively recruiting, and we have quite a few people learning to handle at the moment - learners, especially adults, often don't know their own strength.

Here are a couple of tips to reduce the risk of breaking stays:

1. Think about changing the order we teach, ART now advocates that learners always start with their bell down and ring up each time, developing the backstroke first, then adding in the hand stroke in time. This helps develop the muscle memory of the up-down action with the right amount of pull and the rope is much more controlled and the chances of things going wrong are hugely reduced.
2. Learners often get to the stage where they're ringing on their own in rounds, but still over-pull. It's really important to make sure ringers don't allow the bell to go over the balance unless they're trying to set the bell. Being able to ring the bell consistently from balance to balance is a big help in developing good striking too.
3. When they first start out, learners find it difficult to judge how hard to pull, and stays do get bumped - it's worth checking the condition of the stays on your teaching bells on a regular basis, and replacing them when cracks appear.

Helen Philips

CHAIR'S CHALLENGE

Having people with good organising skills is going to be important if we're going to have a thriving association in years to come, and that's why I've launched the Chair's Challenge 2024.

What is the Chair's Challenge?

I want to challenge all of you to organise 3 things during the year for the benefit of you and your band – it could be an outing to some nearby towers, a quarter peal attempt, a special practice to focus on learning a particular method, a joint practice with another tower, or a social event like a picnic or a meal out.

Why should I do it?

I was encouraged to organise ringing and social events when I was a teenager and I'm especially keen to see more people bring their own enthusiasm and ideas to ensure we're going to have a thriving association in years to come.

You don't have to be an expert ringer to organise a ringing event and you don't have to wait to be asked. If you want to have fun and make quicker progress, why not get stuck in and organise something yourself rather than wait to be asked?

How can we encourage and support each other's challenges?

Each time you organise something, write a short report for the branch newsletter, and maybe share it on Facebook too. It doesn't have to be complicated - just who you are, where you're from, what you ring, what you organised, and why. Something like this:

"I'm Fred Bloggs from Newport, and I'm learning Plain Hunt. I wanted to be able to ring the treble to Grandsire, so I organised a special practice at Llanedeyrn, with a few drinks in the pub next door afterwards to encourage people to come along".

If you need helpers and you don't know who to ask, or you don't know how to go about organising a ringing event, then get in touch with one of your branch officers and they'll make a few suggestions.

What's in it for me?

Well as well as hopefully improving your ringing, enthusing your band, and giving you a sense of achievement in doing something new, when you've organised 3 events, I'll present you with a certificate, and there will be a prize presented at the AGM next year for the best effort.

Helen Phillips
Association Chair

Chair's Challenge 2024



Why don't you...

... organise some special ringing.

... arrange a tower outing.

... do something fun with your ringers.

Do three special things, tell us all about it, enthuse others and be in with a chance of receiving the Chair's Challenge prize.

Helen Phillips
L&M Chair