

SACBR 1926 – 2026 Newsletter - October

This month, Brian Rothera has given us a detailed account of how the Oswestry band have carried out an ambitious scheme to expand the ringing possibilities in their tower. Congratulations to them on the successful completion of a project that clearly benefited from much teamwork and a lot of skills.

Our first Open Towers Day for many years was very well supported and great fun, if exhausting. The photo shows 11 year old Josiah Perry from Kent, ringing at his first 12 bell tower.

Now we are looking forward to the autumn Ceilidh! All the info is in this edition.

Happy Ringing.

Ed.



Oswestry Training Bells (and a simulated augmentation?)

In February 2024, our dear friend and most valued ringer, Andrew Harris, lost his battle with cancer aged only 57. Andrew's father Peter was Tower Captain here at Oswestry for many years, both Andrew and his sister Jennifer (Ferguson) learning to ring. Andrew loved calling musical touches of Stedman on our 8 bells but harboured a strong desire to augment to 10 and got a detailed report on the bells and a quote in 2011. Unfortunately, the quotes were beyond our means at that time. Andrew also successfully gained a faculty from the church to adjust our ringing circle, buying six pulley blocks to draw three of our bells across the clock room. (We think his plan was to make room for two new bells

should we win the lottery!) Unfortunately, Andrew's illness ultimately prevented him from carrying out this work.



Andrew Harris

Andrew requested that all donations at his funeral go toward bell training and this spurred us into action to decide how to use these, alongside prize money that Richard Major won in 2017 for his design and construction of a "Pullometer".

With these amounts and our general ringing fund, we had around £3,000 and could see the possibility of installing a training bell in our clock room. We had a recruitment drive and, despite 7 new ringers managing very well, this reminded us that our bells are not particularly "learner friendly" for first steps. A meeting of our band was convened to discuss ideas and decide between 3 proposals:

- 1) Re-visit and pursue augmentation to 10
- 2) Install one training bell
- 3) Improve sound control
- 4) Install 2 training bells, integrating into our circle and connect to the simulator.

The last idea had come from reading about what John Norris had done at Hurstpierpoint, making his own training

bells and including them in their ringing circle. John was very helpful in answering our various questions. It was agreed that we would do more fundraising and go for option 4.

We knew that making our own training bells was beyond our means (in time if not capability) so myself, Chris Hoare and Richard Major went to Lilleshall and Codsall to see and try training bells supplied by Matthew Higby and Taylor's respectively. We decided that Matthew Higby's version would work well for us. We thought we could probably install them ourselves, saving costs. We had also seen how Matt Lawrence at Lilleshall had theirs connected to a simulator and Abel and this gave us more confidence that we could incorporate two into our existing 8 to give more training options.

Time to investigate what grants might be available in addition to our own fundraising! Our main event each year is a Boxing Day Teddy Bear Zip wire from the top of the tower which brings in a modest £100-£200. We gained grants totalling £1700 from Veolia UK and Shropshire Council, Oswestry Town Council, Oswestry Rotarians and Whittington Parish Council. These along with our general ringing fund, brought our total to just over £5,000. We will also receive assistance from the Bell Restoration fund of Shropshire Association of Church Bell Ringers now that the work is complete. Steve Coleman was also incredibly helpful in walking us through the process of gaining extra gift aid by donating our fund to the restricted fund "Bell Training" in the PCC account, thank you Steve!

Now, should we go ahead and order the training bells from Matthew Higby or get the faculty in place first? Unfortunately, our scheme did not fit with either of the Lichfield Diocese lists that don't require a full faculty application, and it was quite a long drawn-

out process taking several months. Once the faculty was approved, we placed the order with Matthew Higby and started work on adjusting the ringing circle.



Scaffolding ready to carry up the tower

We were very grateful to a local tool hire firm for free demountable scaffolding (which went up the stairs and through the doors by a whisker!) in return for social media coverage, Andrew Davies, one of our new ringers and our webmaster, was key to this activity. John Hobley (steeple keeper and photographer) and I spent the first two weeks of January adjusting the rope positions of three of our bells to make space for the training bells. John positioned and secured the pulley boxes and created 3 beautiful chutes to support the drawn ropes through the clock chamber. We also created simple rope guides for our two lightest bells and the training bells.

Collection of the training bells followed in May with the DAC Bell Advisor kindly offering his car and trailer for the drive down to Somerset and back. Greeted by three more of our ringers back at St Oswald's, we carried the pieces up the spiral staircase and into the clock room without incident. In June, John and myself did the DAC recommended strengthening work to the clock room floor using oak beams from North Shropshire timber. This was followed by positioning, securing and constructing the training bells. We got David Bagley to upgrade our simulator and provide two new leads so the training bells are connected to the simulator via Abel. Richard Major positioned and secured the sensors and got it all working via the computer.

The total cost of the project was £5,987.96 which includes milage costs, but we had no installation costs as we did it all ourselves.

Jacob, the seven-year-old son of one of our ringers, had a first go at backstrokes on a training bell and on the 23rd July we rang (through the simulator) various combinations of our "augmented" ring, culminating in a plain course of Grandsire Caters. We still need to improve the sound from the speakers, finding the best location for them and our new larger screen. Andrew Gordon, the SACBR bell advisor, visited practice the week after to assess the work in regard to our application to the Bell Restoration Fund.

One extension to the project we have considered is the creation of a hybrid 10, by using speakers that could sound outside and in the ringing room. This would be our 8 real bells

ringing open, with the training bells creating the appropriate sound to join in. Whilst I'm sure many purists will shudder at the idea, we wondered if anyone has experience of merging real bell sound with simulated speaker sound and could give us tips on the equipment required?



Oswestry training bells

Alongside this project, myself and Chris Hoare have attended Association of Ringing Teachers RT courses on Module 1 and 2F, gaining accreditation and we have been awarded the status of an ART Hub. Our plan is to use our new training facilities to continue to develop our existing bands and train new ringers across this part of North Shropshire.

We are extremely grateful to all the ringers who helped at various points along the way and the bodies previously mentioned for their generous financial support. We hope to have a dedication from the Archdeacon (President of SACBR) at some point in the near future and we trust that Andrew would have been very satisfied (in the absence of a real 10!) with the work we have done. He will have been smiling down as we attempted our first course of Stedman Caters last evening!

Brian Rothera

Autumn Ceilidh, Saturday October 17th

The autumn ceilidh will be held at Mereside Community Centre, Shrewsbury, SY2 6LH (<https://meresidecc.co.uk/>) on Saturday, October 17th. Doors open at 6:30, with dancing from 7pm to the music of The Devil's Chair Ceilidh Band. Hot food will be served. There is no bar, but we have a license, so please feel free to bring your own drinks.

Tickets are £15, to be paid by BACS or in cash on the night. Let me know on socsec@sacbr.org.uk if you are planning to attend.

Vicki Sivess

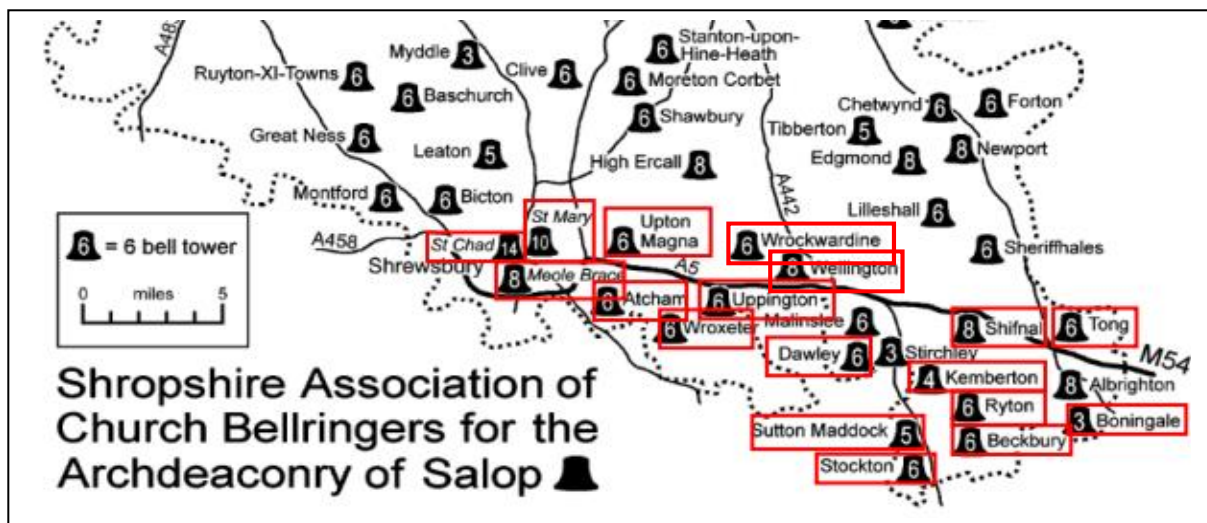
Open Towers, Saturday 12th September

On 12th September our Association did something it hadn't done for many years, we staged a Towers Open Day (TOD). This was part of our centenary celebrations.

A TOD is where a Guild or Association opens up a selection of its towers to visitors. Visitors on our TOD included those from outside our Association Area and our own members. 46 visitors came from outside our area, from as far away as Kent, London and Somerset, and our own members took the opportunity to visit towers where they hadn't previously rung. The non-Association visitors ranged in age from 11 to 83 (at least that's what I was told by the ones I talked to)!

'During the day we met ringers of all ages, and they came from Yorkshire, from Kent, from all over, it seemed. One young man from London came for just one tower – Atcham – and then drove back to the city. Others attempted to get round all 18 towers – quite a feat.'

The route was along the M54/A5 corridor and involved 18 towers each open for 45-60 minutes between 9am and 7pm. We started with St Chad, Boningale a newly ringable 3 and finished with St Chad, Shrewsbury, one of the great heavy 12s in England. The route of the day went from Boningale, to Tong, Shifnal, Kemberton, Ryton, Beckbury, Stockton, Sutton Maddock, Dawley, Wellington, Wrockwardine, Uppington, Wroxeter, Atcham, Upton Magna, Meole Brace, Shrewsbury St Mary and Shrewsbury St Chad, with only one ringable tower along the route unable to join in. The map below shows the route and



participating towers marked with red boxes.

'Of course there were also quite a few of our own members, mostly visiting towers that were new to them. At Dawley most of the band came to greet the visitors and get in some practice on their own bells.'

I was so impressed by the enthusiasm shown by our towers to participate, thank you. I owe a huge thank you to all the tower captains and tower correspondents who made the day possible. They included: David Cotterell, Phil Murphy, John Burton, Andrew Gordon, Si Rice, Nicola Adams, Paul Bevis, Revd Chris Tough, Steve Tarling, Steve Evans, Mike Lloyd, Michael Carding and Jacqui Barden. I realise this is a selected list as behind every tower captain is a group of enthusiastic and committed ringers, and I thank you too.

In addition to our tower captains and their ringers I must include in my thanks the teams of volunteers who travelled from tower to tower making sure visitors were well looked after and nothing went wrong. The volunteers were: Gill Glover, Alan Glover, Nik Galton, Alistair Brierley, Ruth and Paul Partridge, Gareth Jones, Chris and Jenny Hoare, Frances and Richard Major, Jeanne Spinks, Michael Carding, Peter Eves, Sue Dancey and Shifnal ringers (whose modesty prevents them being named and who volunteered at Sutton Maddock as well as their own tower). All in all, about a quarter of the Association members were directly involved in the day and without them (you) our first sojourn into Tower Open Days for many years would not have been possible.

'Tony asked four of us from St Chad's band to steward some of the towers on Open Towers Day. Our first tower was Beckbury. We arrived twenty minutes early, thinking we would have a crafty coffee break, to find half a dozen ringers and dog Hector, waiting in the porch. They are old friends, and had driven from Portsmouth, Loughborough, and Northants to meet up and 'grab' a few new towers. Hector has apparently visited over 1,000 towers in his five year old life.'

The Association owes a special vote of thanks to Andrew Gordon for his incredible work in making Boningale and Wroxeter bells ringable as well as helping ensure Dawley bells were back in action in time for our TOD. He also volunteered across the whole day. We had one casualty during the day, a cracked stay at Tong, which again was sorted by Andrew.

Was the day a success? Unquestionably yes! 16 visitors emailed me to thank us for the quality of our organisation that made their day so enjoyable. Our visitors grabbed towers not previously available to them and revelled in our hospitality. Through Andrew's expertise and hard work we have more ringable towers than before the TOD. We all made new friends, our reputation for friendship and efficiency has been enhanced nationally and the volunteers, although tired, to my eye appeared happy and satisfied as we sat down at 7.30 to a welcome evening drink in the Coach and Horses in Shrewsbury. Although not a primary aim of the day we also earned a few hundred pounds for our Bell Restoration Fund.

Thank you all, and here's to our next TOD!

Tony Freemont, Ringing Master

Training Morning – Saturday 26th September

Our fourth Training Morning of the year took place at Kemberton on Saturday 26th September, from 10.00 to 12.30. This proved to be an excellent venue, with facilities adjacent to the ground floor ringing area. We worked on a good variety of skills and methods, and all the students were able to transform into helpers, to practise covering or plain hunting the treble.

Our thanks go to Andrew Pooler, for making the bells available, to the bakers for providing the traditional morale-boosting goodies to go with our coffee, and to several experienced leaders who shared the instructors' role, including several theory lessons.

The last Training Morning of the year will be held at **Edgmond**, on **Saturday 14th November**. There will be 6 student places, and you can nominate what you would like to work on. To book a place, contact Gill, training@sacbr.org.uk



Kemberton training group

Newport Fundraising Challenge

On 3 October 2026, Newport Bellringers will take part in the Telford T50 Challenge with a walk in support of the restoration of the bells of St Nicholas Church, Newport. Two teams will be walking 25 miles each, every step will represent our commitment to preserving something truly special for the town and for everyone who values its history and spirit.

We are aiming to raise £1,000, and every donation will bring us closer to that goal. Please support this appeal, share it with others, and help us keep the bells ringing for years to come. Your generosity can make a lasting difference.

https://www.justgiving.com/page/newport-bellringers-1?utm_medium=FR&utm_source=CL

John Stokes

Calling All Tower Leaders, Teachers and Would-be Teachers

On **Saturday 24th October** we plan to hold a **meeting for tower leaders**, at Lilleshall from 10 to 12. We intend to focus on training, and any related issues. Two of last year's ART students have offered to speak on their experience of the day course, and of teaching their first students. I will lead a discussion on some of the things learners find difficult when they start to ring with the band, and I hope we can exchange ideas for helping ringers at that stage to improve. Matt Lawrence will demonstrate the simulator at Lilleshall, and we can all have a go at ringing with the computer (quite scary!)

So far, the response for this morning has been slow; it would be great to have a few more participants. If you intend to come along, **please let me know by 10th October**, so we can decide if the event is viable. Last year it proved to be a very valuable occasion for your committee to meet and chat with a group of tower leaders. I really hope we can do this again.

Gill Glover, Training Officer, training@sacbr.org.uk

Association of Ringing Teachers

Module 1 Course, for ringers wishing to explore the teaching of bell handling

On Saturday 28th November, we will hold an Association of Ringing Teachers Module 1 day course. This deals with methods of teaching bell handling to new recruits. It combines theory and advice with plenty of hands-on practice, in which attendees work in pairs or threes. The course aims to provide a structured approach to developing a beginner's skills, but it is not prescriptive. There are 12 places available. Priority will be given to Association towers where there is currently no-one able to teach, or only one teacher. The course is also recommended for teachers with some experience, who would like to gain some fresh ideas, or perhaps mentor a new teacher in their tower.

The course will be held at Oswestry, from 9.30 to about 17.00. It will make use of the well-appointed church rooms as well as the tower. Hot drinks and light refreshments will be provided; attendees should bring a packed lunch. The course costs £35 per person and this helps fund the work of the Association of Ringing Teachers. There will also be a cash payment on the day to help cover heating, morning and afternoon refreshments and the hiring costs of Oswestry church rooms. All attendees will receive a pack of ART's teaching books and literature and be given access to SmART Ringer, ART's online portal of teaching resources. To book your place, you will need to register on the ART Events website, and make your payment, but at this initial stage we are collecting names of those who would like to attend so that the registration details can then be provided. Please let me know (training@sacbr.org.uk) by 14th October if you wish to attend this day course.

As a follow up to the day some may wish to go on to become ART certified teachers; this is entirely optional. In this case you would be assigned a mentor who is a member of ART, and would have to complete some reflections and be observed during your teaching of a beginner.

Gill Glover, Training Officer, training@sacbr.org.uk



 SACBR
AUTUMN CEILIDH

SAT OCT 17TH | 6:30 - 10:30
MERESIDE COMMUNITY CENTRE,
SHREWSBURY, SY2 6LH

HOT FOOD AVAILABLE
PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN DRINKS

£15 PER HEAD
PLEASE BOOK WITH THE SOCIAL SECRETARY
SOCSEC@SACBR.ORG.UK



Helping Shape the Future of Ringing

How many active bellringers are there today? How often do we ring? Who is joining the exercise? Where are we succeeding, and where do we need to do more? Surprisingly, we do not know the answers with any confidence.

The Ringing Census 2026 will provide the most comprehensive picture of bell ringing for nearly forty years. It is a key initiative supporting the ambitions of *Ringing 2030*, helping us to understand the current state of our community and providing the evidence needed to support recruitment, retention, training and long-term planning. Rather than relying on

estimates or anecdote, the census will give us a robust evidence base to help shape the future of ringing.

Building on Previous Surveys:

The census builds on the valuable work of previous ringing surveys, including the landmark 1988 Ringing Survey and more recent pilot studies. Over the past few months, a small project team has reviewed what has worked well in the past, learned from previous experience and designed a modern, fully digital census that can be repeated in future years. By repeating the census at regular intervals, we will be able to measure changes in participation over time and understand the impact of initiatives such as *Ringing 2030*.

How the Census Works:

The census will take place during a single week, from 16–22 November 2026. Participants will be asked to complete a short online questionnaire describing their ringing activity during that week. The survey should take no more than around ten minutes to complete. Participation is entirely voluntary, but every response counts. The more people who take part, the more accurate and representative the picture of ringing will be. Whether you ring every week, only occasionally, or are just beginning your ringing journey, we hope you will take part.

Find out more, particularly how the census is designed, under *Census Methodology*, and how **you can help by volunteering to be an Enumerator**, on the CCCBR website.

Nik Galton