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Dear Member of the Guild of Clerical Ringers,

On behalf of the Guild Committee, I write to wish you all a very happy and blessed Christmas and good health for the New Year. I am conscious that several of our members no longer actively ring for several reasons, but you wish nevertheless to be kept informed of Guild activities. So, this newsletter goes to all in our membership directory who have supplied an email address, with some copies going by post to members who do not make use of email communication.

The membership directory has recently been updated to include all our known membership and a copy will be emailed to you either this month or early in the New Year. However, a paper copy will be posted to those who have requested it. There is a certain irony that some may not receive (hopefully very few) a copy of the directory. Consequently, should anybody spot a member's address that you happen to know is incorrect, then do please contact Tim (the Guild Secretary) – the committee members with contact details are listed at the end of this newsletter.

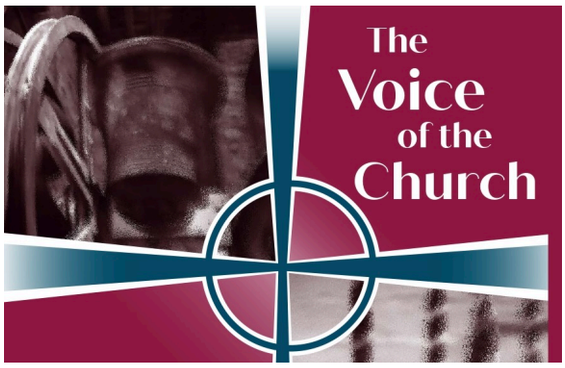
Summer 2023 Survey of Guild Membership

You will recollect hopefully receiving from me during the summer months (May and June) a couple of letters requesting an update from all members on their current ringing activities, your interest in meeting regionally for Guild ringing, and taking part in the historic Annual Guild Low Week Tour (set for 8th to 12th April 2024).

I also passed on our thanks to Tony Ellis for his many years as Guild President and all he had undertaken and achieved during his presidency. I heard back from about 60% (slightly more) of you, with the vast majority indicating they would like to be kept informed of Guild events and news. There was not, unfortunately, a significant number who said they would like to come definitely on the Low Week Tour next year although a reasonable number said they would join perhaps for a day or two or more depending on where in the Country it was being held. It was good to hear from three-fifths of our 100 or so members and I was heartened to have a better response than most surveys! Of course we always welcome hearing from members at any time.

Assessing the returns and a bit of further analysis, I did establish that our around 43% of our membership is at 70+ years of age with 72% at 60 plus. When you look at ringing nationally I would suggest there is not a vast difference in these percentages. Having said that in my own tower at Sidmouth, Devon, we are recruiting younger members and ringing for the King and the Queen's Platinum Jubilee have brought in younger blood. But it takes time to train but even with some loss, it is very worthwhile.

It would be heartening to discover more clergy in the younger age groups who ring regularly or even occasionally and to bring them into Guild membership. **Please do let me know if you know of any in that regard and the Committee will contact them.** I do recognize the burdens placed on younger, non-retired clergy, in multi-parish benefices or mission communities. Supporting curates as I do in the Exeter Diocese, I am conscious that incumbents are working their proverbial socks off to keep the mission and worship moving forward progressively, often with financial strains ever increasing. Although, I might add if you hold PtO then I imagine many of you will feel from time to time that you have fully retired.



I assume the best proportion of you will now have heard of this book which the Guild finally published (via the Ringing World publications) in April 2023. While the authorship involved several of us, we are very much indebted to Max Drinkwater (yes, one of our very busy younger members) for his major contribution to the publication and his editorship. We are also very grateful to Will Bosworth, Editor of the Ringing World, for his being prepared to hold faith with us and see the publication produced with his very helpful input.

I do not have precise sales figures, but it has started well; we could have sold more at the CCCBR AGM in Ipswich in early September; and apparently according to Will sales are picking up again as we approach Christmas. So how about buying one as a gift for a non-ringing clergy colleague? We always saw the non-ringing clergy as one of the principal recipients to aid them in their appreciation and understanding of the place ringers can have in church life!

Should you still not be aware of the Voice of the Church and its content and purpose, then you will find full details about it, reviews, and how to purchase a copy on the Guild website here.

The Guild of Clerical Ringers' Website and Facebook Page

Ivan Howitt (Vice President) continues weekly to place items on the Guild Facebook Page including mainly the Ringing World *Thought for the Week* contributions made by some of our members; but Ivan also places from time to time interesting photographs of former Guild events and other noteworthy items.

One of our good ringing friends of the Guild, Heather Davis, from Halse in Somerset, has undertaken valiantly to update the Guild Website over the last 6 months or so. And, while she would say it continues to be a work in progress, she has done sterling work in making it attractive and accessible. Please take a look at it and you will uncover all sorts of quite fascinating items relating to the Guild, its history, towers we have visited, as well contemporary items relating to, for example, Bell Sunday.

Heather has requested that as members we can send her (perhaps best via the Tim, Guild Secretary) items of interest that we would like to share with other members – particularly old photographs relating to former Low Week Tours or just simply useful updates on what you are doing now...and how you are...anything to stimulate our sense of fellowship and togetherness, however distant.

On that note, I would report that Felicity Marshall, the wife of probably one of our most senior and still active members, Christopher Marshall, passed away at the beginning of December. We offer Chris our love and condolences at this time. Felicity has, as some of you will remember, come with Chris on Low Week Tours in the past, and was a proficient ringer herself. Please do let us know about illness, or sadly, any deaths of members should you hear by any means. The Guild presents an opportunity to keep contact with members who are poorly, or be notified of funerals when the time comes.

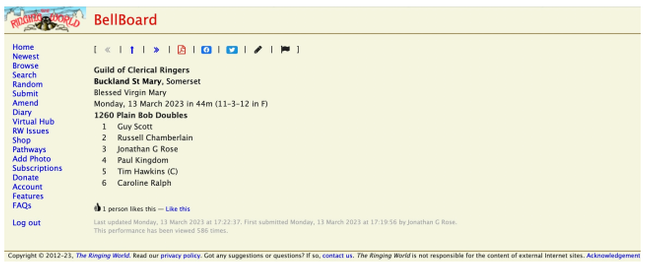
Bell Sunday

I am aware that several churches up and down the country, where we have Guild members, did support and encourage their churches and ringers to come together for Bell Sunday last May. In my own Church at Sidmouth, Devon, we had ringers take part in our services during the day and one of our oldest members (age 90) talked about her 70 years plus ringing at the Sidmouth Parish Church and the strong links forged with the church fellowship and the wider community. We also put up an exhibition in the church which, brilliantly, attracted some recruits from the congregation.

Bell Sunday next year is set for the **12th of May** and the Central Council is encouraging us as Guild members, as we are able, to promote it in our churches locally as a means to help forge stronger links between the tower, clergy, and the people we serve. Here is the link to the CCCBR resources for Bell Sunday.

Should you have any items or photographs of Bell Sunday this year in your churches you could let us have them please, if possible, so we can place them on the Guild website for members' interest.

Guild Regional Gatherings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Guild of Clerical Ringers
Buckland St Mary, Somerset
Blessed Virgin Mary
Monday, 13 March 2023 in 44m (11-3-12 in F)
1260 Plain Bob Doubles

1 Guy Scott
2 Russell Chamberlain
3 Jonathan G Rose
4 Paul Kingdom
5 Tim Hawkins (C)
6 Caroline Ralph

1 person likes this — Like this

Last updated Monday, 13 March 2023 at 17:22:37. First submitted Monday, 13 March 2023 at 17:19:56 by Jonathan G Rose.
This performance has been viewed 586 times.

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Several Guild members from the SW have met on two occasions this year. Both times proved to be most enjoyable and, in some cases, meeting each other for the first time. With one tower in the morning and one in the afternoon, we enjoyed a convivial hostelry lunch in between.

March saw a small number of us assembling to ring at two South Somerset sixes – Buckland St Mary and Whitestaunton. Quarter peals were attempted with one being successful.

With a slightly different mix of members – from Cornwall, Dorset, as well as Devon, Wiltshire and Somerset, we gathered in October, again to ring at two six-bell East Devon towers: Kentisbeare and Plymtree…where once again we socialised over a happy pub lunch. However, despite failing to achieve successful quarter peal attempts of Cambridge and Plain Bob, we remain, nevertheless, sufficiently enthused and heartened to repeat our intent to ring together as early as we can arrange it in the New Year.

Given the widespread Guild membership around the UK, and relatively few active members, regional gatherings are not straightforward to arrange. The distance required to travel for a day's ringing (and mingling) can prove somewhat daunting – but I still feel more can come together – and I would throw down the gauntlet to the SE, the Midlands, and possibly further East, where there are members who might gather with some encouragement. Of course, it does require somebody to (a) look at the Guild Membership Directory and assess who might be able to make up perhaps a six or even an eight; (b) seek out known ringing clergy who are not presently Guild members but who could potentially be so; and (c) for somebody willing to have a go a calling a quarter peal…or just overseeing a day of ringing at any level, ie. let the momentum develop.

On a positive note, the Guild Committee has strongly mooted the possibility of a two-day gathering in the Midlands in the autumn of 2024 – dates to be firmed up. This could involve a peal or quarter peals as well as general ringing. The Midlands do provide a better opportunity for some of our more northerly members to travel south. When dates are certain for this venture, early in the New Year, the membership will be circulated with further details.

Guild Low Week Tour 2024

The annual Low Week Tour 2024 for Guild members, prospective members and friends is planned for Monday 8th April until Friday 12th April 2024.

Next year the tour will be centred around some 24 or so towers in mid -Devon – mainly six bell towers, although with a sprinkling of 8s and 10s too. Usually, we aim to ring in some 5 or 6 towers per day: Tuesday to Thursday; with 3 towers on Monday afternoon as we arrive and probably a further 3 on the Friday morning before departing our various ways. The aim is to have short travel distances between towers and pub lunches.

During the week we normally conduct evening prayer at the final church visited for the day (Tue to Thur) and on one evening a Zoomed AGM of the Guild will be held. There could also be a possibility of including a quarter peal or full peal for the Guild as we feel able to do so and can manage. We have also joined local tower practice evenings – as if some have not had enough during the day.

In the course of the week, we always ring to suit all levels – so don't be daunted by the fact that we are all expert and accomplished ringers – because the majority of us are not! The week aims to be convivial, social, and enjoyable in each other's company.

Good accommodation has been arranged at the Fishermans Cot Hotel and Pub and for the middle three full days, a small coach has been booked. We also make tower donations, as is customary. There may still be some accommodation available should you wish to join those who have already booked for a part or full week. A provisional tower list will be available in January – as soon as possible.

Do contact Jon Rose (07969 008091) or Tim Hawkings (01225 684908) should you want to join in part or for the full week, there is still the opportunity to do so.

Safeguarding

In line with all Guilds and Associations, we have produced a Safeguarding Policy. This can be found on the website. Please take a look. If you have a issue that you would like to raise, please get in touch with Tony Ellis (01432 820759), our Safeguarding Officer.

THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

Central Council of Church Bellringers (CCCBR) – update on some current issues

The Central Council is eager for member societies to be kept up to date with their activities, so here is a summary of their key areas of interest at the moment. We are very grateful to Max Drinkwater (Guild Committee member and Priest in Charge, Haverhill (St Mary the Virgin) with Withersfield), who attended the last AGM of the Central Council (September), held in Ipswich, for his observations below and indeed his continuing engagement with CCCBR officers. Presently, our CCCBR representative is your President (Jon Rose) which will make travel to the 2024 AGM relatively straightforward given it is to be held in Devon not far from Jon's home in Sidmouth.

Ringing 2030
The biggest focus for the Council now is the vision and strategy document known as Ringing 2030. This was initiated by Simon Linford and is still being overseen by him, although implementation is now with Tina Stoecklin and Vicky Chapman as president and vice president. The strategy is essentially a recruitment campaign, although as such it affects the whole structure and focus of the Council, including the various working groups which are due to be reconfigured in line with the strategy's three 'pillars':

- *marketing*
- *recruitment, teaching, and development*
- *ringing environments and infrastructure.*

Clergy will no doubt be familiar with vision and strategy from within the church, and the Central Council's version seems to be no less pervasive. Theirs is being developed by professional marketing company YellowYoYo, to make ringing more attractive and engaging to younger people, and to establish good practice in areas such as local leadership, safeguarding, and teaching and training. Does this sound familiar?!
I am concerned that the current documentation for Ringing 2030 makes no mention of the church, which is deliberate. While I understand and appreciate the need for ringers to look beyond the church and even to some extent to establish ringing on a sustainable basis without the church, that will not happen by 2030, and I hope that ringing and church communities will continue to support one another long after that. At the very least, I expect ringers to be asking local churches to post YellowYoYo's bright new marketing materials on their Facebook pages and websites, so I have a meeting set up with Tina, Vicky and Allison Devine, the Council's PR officer, to discuss how to promote Ringing 2030 to the church, and hopefully to re-introduce engagement with the church to the official documentation. I have asked, for example, where Bell Sunday fits in with their vision, as it is something that Allison is keen to continue.

National Ringing Centre
There are still plans to create a National Ringing Centre in some central location, which would be a hub for teaching, promotional work, and also a home for historic and educational resources. At one time, this was going to be at St Peter's, Northampton, a church now in the care of the CCT, and include the relocation of the Council library, but these plans have stalled somewhat. The library is instead going to be rehomed at Loughborough Bell Foundry. Interestingly, this means that the focus for the NRC has shifted from a church venue to a secular venue, for very practical reasons, but perhaps representative of the shift in focus betrayed by Ringing 2030 too.

Legacy of Julie McDonnell
The Council is still considering how best to address the legacy of Julie McDonnell, and is still in a period of consultation and consideration. There seems to be a reluctance to redesignate methods that bear her name. Although it may seem like a fairly superficial debate, this seems to be something that touches on other issues, including what authority the Central Council carries, how we relate to the past when the past is not always constructive, and what we are doing when we ring 'for' certain causes or intentions. Those are certainly not superficial questions but go to the very heart of performance ringing.

Review of CCCBR Membership
The final key area of interest (at least as identified by me) is the review of Central Council membership. The motion to reduce membership size by giving societies fewer representatives was overwhelmingly defeated at the last AGM, but it is clearly not the end of the debate. Other models are being considered, including a direct membership model more like the National Trust. I do think that Ringing 2030 needs buy-in from societies rather than individuals, so that will colour the debate to some extent.

All in all, much of the Central Council's work at the moment does not have an immediately obvious impact but does have wide-reaching implications for ringers right across the country (and the world). I think the need for encouraging good relations between ringers and churches is more pressing than ever, both at a local level and at a higher, dare I say more strategic level.

And finally…

Thanks for wading through this newsletter. I am enjoying the Presidential role although like several non-territorial ringing associations/ Guilds, our longer-term future is not as secure as one might hope.
Our membership is aging and recruiting younger clergy into our midst to assume responsibility for the Guild's future is not straightforward. However, if we care for our fellowship and the enjoyment of clergy ringing together, as that can be managed, given our distances a part, then we all have to contribute to finding ways forward. This will be a topic – the future, I feel certain at our next Guild AGM in April. One issue I log now is how much longer we can maintain the annual LWT given the need to visit other parts of the country and members coming forward to undertake the necessary arrangements – your thoughts on this will please be welcomed. It may be that, while not wanting to disregard the annual LWT, we plan for shorter events around the country where members can meet within easier travel hours and where all ringing clergy 'locally' are invited and where we not only ring together but worship too.

I imagine many of you like me are pretty busy. I spend a certain amount of time working with clergy in training, continuing (too many) pastoral and worship commitments and some enjoyable research projects…and as possible I ring moderately well. And all of this as an aging but still energetic priest with PtO.

With all blessings for a peaceful and blessed Christmas for you and yours,

Jonathan (Jon) Rose, President of the Guild of Clerical Ringers

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