

Remembering John P

9th September 1934—31st March 2018



Honorary Life President of the North West Region

Handbell Ringers of Great Britain

THE HANDBELL SECTION OF THE EULOGY GIVEN AT JOHN'S FUNERAL

John's connections with handbells evidently went back to his early years when his grandfather, as a member of the Handbell team at St. Luke's, Heywood rang in the famous annual contests held at Belle Vue Gardens in Manchester. After university he took up a post at Ashton Grammar School and established a team there. Through, presumably, Tower bell ringing contacts he rang with the Handbell team at Moorside in Oldham. Moorside were one of the Handbell teams taking part in a gathering of 'known' teams held at Norbury (Stockport) in 1966. This led to another gathering the following year which John arranged at Ashton Grammar School. At that gathering on 7th October 1967 the Handbell Ringers of Great Britain was founded and John was elected as its first secretary. Fittingly the first piece of music performed (by John's Ashton GS team) was 'Home Sweet Home'.

John handed over the role of secretary in 1970 but continued as editor until 1976 when he was elected as Chairman of the society, a role he filled with distinction until 1979. In 1978 he had the honour of being the second person to be elected as an Honorary Life Member of HRGB in recognition of the enormous amount of work he had contributed to the formation of the society and to its first twelve years.

In the late 1970s the growth of HRGB led to regions being established and John served for many years on the committee of the North West region including a period as chairman. He was appointed as Honorary Life President of the region. Over all this time his vast knowledge of handbells provided much needed input to the development of the society.

In 1984 he took his Ashton team on tour to the USA and whilst there represented HRGB at the first International Handbell Symposium in Arcata, California. He built many friendships with ringers in various parts of the world.

Over further years he was a regular supporter and advocate of both the society and handbell tune ringing. In 2017 he was very happy to be part of the celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of HRGB.

In addition to Ashton GS and Moorside teams he also organised the Phoenix Handbell Ringers for many years and ringers at St. Luke's, Heywood (following in his grandfather's footsteps).

John was responsible for my initial formal involvement with HRGB when the NW region was formed in 1975. My wife, Christine, and I also had the pleasure of ringing with John in the Phoenix Ringers for many years.

Roger Lazenby

12th April 2018

JP

I can't remember when I first met John. He's just always been there. Every time I attended a North West Region event, at National Rallies, at small handbell ringing assemblies, John was there. Rarely the centre of attention but always with something relevant to contribute, usually in the form of 'something that I came across the other day'. At which point a photograph or newspaper cutting would appear from the inside pocket of his jacket and lead to a conversation about things past. And then the buffet would be served and John would be the first in the queue: 'one of the privileges of being President of the Region'.

Having the custody of the HRGB Archive has given me access to the involvement of JP along with my father William (Bill) Hartley in the early days of HRGB. The early minutes of the Society are wonderfully and succinctly preserved in John's neat handwriting (no word processors or PC's in those days!). The setting up of the organisation is recorded in great detail from the Inaugural Meeting on 7th October 1967 through Officers' Meetings, sub-committee meetings and Annual General Meetings all involving John who then also agreed to produce the first editions of our journal, 'Reverberations'. Everything shows JP's dedication to the success of HRGB. I'm so pleased that he was able to join in the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the organisation he helped to create.

*Alan Hartley
Patron WHMF
Acting Archivist
Past Chairman of HRGB*

MEMORIES FROM SCOTLAND

John was one of the first people we met when we joined HRGB around 1978. He was friendly, welcoming and helpful to our small, very new group. We had been allocated to be part of the North West region and felt very apprehensive when joining such an established group, but we were immediately taken under John's wing and encouraged to take part in the rally at Tarporley. We were invited to play in the final concert at Bury where John's school team opened the concert followed by Wales, Scotland and South Africa and the second half was a group from the States, if memory is correct Walsh Memorial Choir which was a completely new experience to us. I recall these young girls in long, flimsy dresses and long white gloves. It looked quite spectacular. John managed to make us feel so much part of this event and we were privileged to have his help. John also loved the Barn dances which were usually part of the NW Rallies and he could be found happily jigging about on the dance floor.

John could be funny in a shy sort of way and I recall having a photograph taken in 1996 when I asked a trio of ringers to pose with handbells, chimes and Belleplates. No prizes for guessing who held the bells.

John was quiet and courteous but was a huge part of HRGB and his presence and guidance will be sorely missed by all who knew him..

Lysbeth Wilson, Dunblane Cathedral Handbell Ringers

John Partington and Blacon/Bishops' Handbell Ringers

The original incarnation of our handbell team was in 1972 - as Blacon Handbell Ringers based at Blacon High School in Chester. Our first rally was at Gresford, where we rang 'Yellow Bird' (with tremuloes!) on a very old set of Whitechapel bells. I now realise how hard the leather clapper pegs were - it must have sounded horrendous. This was the first occasion any of us had ever seen or heard another handbell team and it was an eye opener. John was present that day, together with Bill and Peg Hartley and the ringers from St. Mary's Reddish (who for years always made a fuss of our young ringers!) They were all so welcoming and so supportive to this 'rookie crew' !

This was the first of the regional rallies we attended and we have missed only a couple since then. John always took a great interest in our teams, as he had founded the Ashton Grammar School Ringers. Like us they were a secondary school team and, like us, they toured the United States. I always felt that after John stopped ringing at Ashton he took a particular interest in our young people. He often chatted with our ringers and occasionally supplied music for us.

In the year 2000 the Blacon High School Handbell Ringers morphed into Bishops' Handbell Ringers as I moved to Bishops' High School and John was very helpful and encouraging to our new ringers. Again, we missed very few rallies and played at National Rallies, performing in the concerts at some of them, including Brentwood and Glasgow. Our last contact with John as a team was at the Golden Jubilee Rally at Lancaster University, when, again, he was very complimentary about our ringing.

The ringers and I have valued John's interest and support for over 45 years and, like so many others, have benefitted from his vast experience throughout this time.

Derek Jackson

Musical Director, Bishops' Handbell Ringers, Chester



Self-explanatory—probably in the 1960s

John Partington

'Oh' said Mum (Wendy Swain), when I told her I was being sent to Ashton Grammar School for my first teaching practice in autumn 1980, 'I think that is where John Partington teaches maths and where the HRGB was formed'. Not really knowing who John Partington was, I was very relieved to find a really warm welcome, both from John, and the various teams of student handbell ringers he led each lunch time. He had seemingly inherited a vast quantity of music arranged by William Gordon and this was the staple diet of all the various teams. We met on the top floor of a somewhat crumbling technology building (it was the only room big enough to ring and with enough storage for all the boxes of bells, folders of music and equipment involved). After my 6 week teaching practice at the school, I was very sad to leave. At the end of that year on hunting around to see if I could find a job, to my delight I discovered that Ashton Sixth Form College (as it was to become) was looking for another physics teacher and so it was that I got to know John really well.

During the 3 years I worked at the school, John encouraged so many young handbell ringers, giving them opportunities of performing in large national venues and taking one group of young people on tour in the USA. Although I was not lucky enough to be invited on this trip, it was a delight to hear from the youngsters on their return, the opportunities they had been given by John. I am certain that there will be many many adults today throughout the world, with very fond memories of their bell ringing while at school in Ashton.

At the end of my third year, there were big changes at the school. The number of teaching staff needed to reduce as it finally turned into a sixth form college. It was time for me to move on, and much to my surprise, John announced that he was retiring too. He was lucky enough to receive a good offer and took the opportunity. However he did have to go back for the first few days in the following September, as he wasn't yet 50 and this was the minimum age that teachers could be eligible for retirement.

I have known John since, and he along with Linda Parkington, the Lazenbys and others gave John and Wendy Swain the opportunity of carrying on their handbell ringing once they moved to Blackshaw Head in 1993.

Ian Swain



Guildford Rally 1983—Ashton Grammar School team, showing Ian Swain (third from right) and John

LINDA PARKINGTON'S MEMORIES OF A LONG FRIENDSHIP

I first met John in January 1984, a fortnight after joining the team at St Stephen's, Bury. We were at the NW Region AGM at Higher Walton and I sat between John and Roger Lazenby. Throughout the afternoon I had a stereo running commentary, much needed as I hadn't a clue who anybody was or indeed what they were talking about. Consequently, I came home somewhat wiser and rather better informed! A few weeks later we were at the Spring Rally in Dunblane, as at that time Scotland was part of our region. John was there with two of his lads from Ashton Grammar School and I heard that this was to be a farewell performance as the school was to become a 6th Form College and John was taking early retirement. Some weeks later I was at Wolverhampton Civic Hall at the National Concert when they appeared again. I was confused by how many times one sees a 'farewell performance'.

I got to know John better in the early days of being on the North West Committee, when in the late 1980's three or four of us took turns to drive to the meetings. These were usually on Tuesday evenings and we often travelled back from Maghull or West Kirkby at getting on for midnight. I seem to think that John was one of the people who nominated me for the NW Committee in the first place. After Roger and Christine Lazenby moved to Leeds we kept the team in Bury going and John often came across to our Monday evening practices after his own tower bell practice had finished at St Luke's in Heywood, particularly if we had a concert looming. It was about this time that John had another go at re-forming the Phoenix Handbell Ringers, based in Heywood, and he asked me if I'd be interested in joining. My reply was words to the effect of I'd be interested but only to go and watch... I should have known better! Most of the time there were 10 or 12 of us, ringing a full 5 octaves with duplicates and we played tunes which became firm favourites such as Radetzky March, Bellringers March, Cubley Brook and William Gordon's arrangements of Ash Grove and of course, Home Sweet Home [*played at John's funeral*].

John and I often travelled to handbell events together, living within 5 miles of each other. We had some wonderful evenings up at Blackshaw Head with John and Wendy Swain and then at the North East Region Summer Ring in Leeds. Way back, we went to an unforgettable concert in Cambridge for East Anglia's 10th Birthday celebration. John's main aim when he was driving was to get through the gears as quickly as possible to maximise speed and petrol consumption. He wasn't hugely tolerant of drivers who drove much below the speed limit or were out to enjoy the view. Eventually, I launched a cunning plan that I would drive and he would navigate. This worked a charm as he never went anywhere without appropriate OS maps. Who needed Sat Nav when it first came in? I had John.

John was very proud of the part he played in laying the foundation stones of HRGB and to see it flourish and develop as it has. He was also quietly proud of being our Region's Honorary President. He liked a verbal report of our committee meetings before the formal minutes arrived. He didn't always take kindly to change, particularly for change's sake, but anything which encouraged the love of handbells he fully supported. I remember an article he once wrote pointing out, with particular reference to handbell ringing, people do their best most of the time and don't intentionally make mistakes. He wasn't a great one for post-mortems after a concert as to who should have rung what and didn't or who shouldn't have rung what and did. He loved his family links with both tower bells and handbells and could (eventually)

lay his hands on archives from many occasions. I used to ever-so-slightly tease him about the filing system in his jacket inside pockets, which inevitably held an old programme, article or photograph from the past which he had come across and thought would be of interest. He reckoned of late that his memory wasn't what it was but his recollection of events he'd been involved with or attended was still amazing.

We all come across people in our lives who influence us or affect the decisions we take and to whom we will always be grateful. Knowing John has been a huge privilege. I would never have developed my love for handbell ringing or taken part in regional events over all these years if it hadn't been for John. His quiet but strong faith, his unfailing belief in the good to be found in others and the enthusiastic passing on of his skills and knowledge be it teaching Maths, change/peal ringing or handbell ringing made him the man he was. One could go on and many of us have all kinds of anecdotes and stories about a man who has left a wonderful legacy. Oh that the world had more people like John, with his generosity and willingness to further the things that played such an important part in his life.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

AN INTERNATIONAL CONNECTION

THE SAME WRISTS

By Kay Sittig, Director of Belles and Beaus Handbell Ringers, Canfield, Ohio

From a 1998 Concert Programme

My all time favourite story to tell audiences is about my first viewing of "off-table" ringing, in 1975 at Jekyll Island, Georgia. A marathon concert situation with one ringing group followed by another ringing group. Wonderful bright-faced kids, marching in orderly fashion to tables, properly dressed alike. Everyone wore gloves, rang the same kinds of tunes, each lacking the contrast of light and shade.

Suddenly a team from England was introduced - "Ashton-under-Lyne Grammar School, John Partington, Musical Director". I had not even pressed the "record" button on my little cassette recorder when they were off and away! Clean, clear, direct - a fast tempo, grand to hear and fascinating to watch.

At the concert's conclusion I approached their conductor with the question "Do you think that I could teach my group to ring in the manner yours did?" Quite a pause followed, and I thought I had been unwise to have bothered this busy man with my query. Then he replied "It occurs to me that you have the same wrists that we have!"

Back at the high school in Canfield, the newly formed "Belles and Beaus" started with little save enthusiasm and a desire to learn, work and improve. We had 61 sparkling new Whitechapel handbells but only because John Partington patiently responded to my letters, could we even begin.

The events which have followed make up an ongoing and awesome story. Ashton-under-Lyne visited the USA in 1977, 1981 and 1984. "Belles and Beaus" students enjoyed four memorable concert tours of England, Scotland and Wales in 1978, 1981, 1984 and 1987. Friendships and visits have continued on a long term basis.

We take this opportunity to once again welcome John to our community. We wish to thank him for being the very most important person in our story - the man who from square one was willing to move us ahead and far beyond our wildest dreams. We are so thankful that we have the "same wrists" as our friends in Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire, England !

MEMORIES FROM FRIENDS IN YORKSHIRE

We first encountered John in the early 1970s. At that time we rang handbells with the team from St Barnabas church in Morecambe and met John at one of the annual rallies held by HRGB, probably in 1971 at Lancaster. We knew him then as the editor of Reverberations.

In 1975 work brought us to Bury and this coincided with the formation of the North West region of HRGB. Somehow Roger let it be known to John that he'd be interested in being involved with the region so as to keep our connection with handbells. John suggested he take on the role of secretary of the region and so began our long connection in various official ways with HRGB. Or, to coin the famous phrase 'the rest they say is history!'

In, we think it was 1976, John was looking to form a new handbell team and invited us to join. And so the Phoenix Handbell Ringers were established and we continued as members until in the mid 1980s work again moved us on, this time over the hills to Yorkshire. Joining Phoenix was a steep learning curve as we had to learn ringing off-table style from staff notation rather than the numbers and in-hand we'd used in Morecambe.

A couple of significant events in which we were all involved spring to mind. Firstly in 1979 the NW Region, and Phoenix HBR in particular, were the hosts of the HRGB National Rally held at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester (this is now the Raddisson hotel). John and Roger were both involved in local radio activities around that rally. Secondly in July 1980 Phoenix HBR appeared on national BBC television in the first programme of a biographical series about Peter Skellern. Peter having been a handbell ringer in his youth in Bury. We appeared as the 'Scar Face Mob' with Al Kapone as director.

After our move to Leeds, regular contact with John continued through HRGB. Not only was he a fount of knowledge on all things handbell but was instrumental in fostering our love of Handbell tune ringing and in embracing a wide set of local, national and international friends through that common bond. His friendship over more than forty years has given us much to be thankful for.

Roger and Christine Lazenby

Phoenix Ringers at the National Rally held in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, 1979



ANOTHER INTERNATIONAL CONNECTION

At St George's Memorial Church, Ypres, John commissioned an inscription on one of the newly installed bells. Margaret Hubbard, a handbell ringer with Maghull Parish HR, posted this on the church's Facebook page.

"John was a passionate Tower and Handbell ringer. A founder and honorary member of Handbell Ringers of Great Britain, he also found time for 1,185 peals, 208 quarter peals and 4,654 towers visited.

Though I'm almost sure that he did not get the chance to visit St George's following the installation of the bells, I only found out after his death that he was very interested in the Ypres project and he commissioned the inscription of the name of Pte Harry Millett, his great uncle, on the 2nd bell. John will be sadly missed."

Margaret received the following reply from Liz Millward, Tower Captain

"I am so sorry Margaret, sending condolences to you and to John's family: We will be forever grateful that he commissioned the inscription on the 2nd bell; We shall say prayers on Sunday in his memory and get the ringers to ring rounds also in his memory: Rest in Peace"

A couple of memories of JP.

1. Rally information from John did not include detailed directions to the venue or a post code. Just a 6 figure Ordnance Survey map reference. (His house was full of O.S. Maps.)
2. At my second meeting of the N.E.C. as NW Regional Representative, John took me aside in the lunch break and explained that the Treasurer had health problems and he suggested I take on the job temporarily.

The temporary period lasted from 1988 until 2001!

Simon Rennie, Maghull Parish Handbell Ringers

In 1991 five of us – Judith, Mo, John, Joy and me – following Judith's initiative contacted a bell ringer (Alan Collings) in the South East who had 5 octaves of bells to sell. Judith negotiated with him and eventually he sent us 3 cases with 2½ octaves. At the time we had no knowledge of bells and bell ringing so one Sunday evening we arranged to take these boxes to John Partington at St Luke's, Heywood to ask his advice as to the quality of the bells and their value. And that is how Sale Handbell Ringers began. John set us on the right path and he continued to take an interest in us at the various rallies.

Also when Debbie formed a handbell team at the school where she taught, John loaned her a set of bells for some time for which she was very thankful.

We will be ever grateful for John's interest and guidance.

Thank you, John, from Sale Handbell Ringers.

Albert Graham

I first met John soon after starting a handbell team in New Mills, probably 1982. John's school team were playing in a concert at our local church and afterwards we had quite a chat. I mentioned that we were on the lookout for some bells to replace the 15 borrowed ones that we were using at the time. Of course, John knew of a church in Fallowfield who wanted to sell 3 octaves and he was instrumental in arranging for us to view them and subsequently to buy them.

As I am a tower ringer too we found that we had several acquaintances in common in the North West, which led to some interesting conversations. He also encouraged me to ring my first (and only) peal, which was to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the formation of HRGB. John was part of the band who successfully rang that peal on 7th October 1992.

I became a committee member for the NW region of HRGB so attended many meetings with John over the years. When we met he would often bring along snippets of information from his archive that he thought would interest me. He was a most helpful person and although my team don't ring in John's style, he always encouraged and supported us in everything we did.

Anne Hopley Kinder Ringers



Ashton-under-Lyne Grammar School Handbell Ringers at Washington Cathedral in 1977

I send my condolences to you and all friends in the NW region. We have certainly lost a founding father of HRGB.

John Atkinson, Chairman, NE Region

Thank you for your email - very sad news, which I'll pass on to the team, but on a positive note, what a huge, wonderful legacy he has left behind for so many of us to enjoy and benefit from. We all owe him so much.

Jill Roberts, Gresford HR

HIGHER WALTON HANDBELL TEAM

ENID CATTERALL AND HARRY CALDERBANK REMEMBER

Way back in the mists of time, ie the 1960s, the newly re-formed handbell team were struggling to ring a recognisable tune on their handbells. Help came in the name of Tom Ogden and his team from Oldham, of whom John was a member. Progress was made and we persevered in our ringing.

In the summer of 1966 we received an invitation from William Hartley to a rally which he was organising at Norbury. We decided to attend as spectators –not feeling sufficiently confident to ring in front of “the experts”. At that rally it was decided to make this an annual event and a young John Partington offered to host the next get-together at Ashton-under-Lyne Grammar School. We attended again in 1967 and played three tunes.

Since then we have been to many rallies and have come to look upon John as a friend. Hence in 2007, when we were celebrating the one hundredth birthday of our bells, it was only right that we invited John to join us on the special occasion - see below a copy of his acceptance letter. We were delighted that he was able to attend alongside many other old friends.

Both of us have fond memories of John and treasure the times we shared and the help he gave us over the last 50 years.

1 Bailhness Road,
Rochdale,
Lancs OL11 5PB.
Sept. 5, 2007.

Dear Enid,

Many thanks for your invitation to your centenary celebrations, and all being well I hope to be there. Certainly please put a copy of your booklet on one side for me.

Looking at my records I see that I first rang the church bells at Higher Walton on April 19th, 1958 - almost 50 years ago!

Handbell wise I remember coming with the roadside HR in the early 60's to "assist", soon after the team was restarted. and of course many AGM's in your school & committee meetings at wator & Ruth's. Happy memories.

Looking forward to the evening.

Best wishes,
John

AND FINALLY – IN JOHN’S OWN WORDS

John had kept a copy of this piece, which appeared in “Reverberations”.

SIR – Recently an article was published giving some details of why and how HRGB came to be formed back in 1967. I joined the Moorside Handbell Ringers in 1961 and used to often pick up Tom Ogden on my way there, and would be brought up to date on which handbell team he had managed to visit on his travels that week, or other things that he thought I might be interested in – such as the occasion he reported that he had had to return home early as his car had been broken into and two boxes of samples stolen. He wasn’t too sure how the thieves would appreciate their haul, as one contained shrouds and the other coffin handles (he was a Commercial Traveller in Funeral Accessories!).

At the end of the first gathering in 1966 I invited teams to Ashton-under-Lyne Grammar School, where I had a handbell team, the following year.

Some 20 teams and 350 people were present, and at a meeting of leaders held during the tea interval we (eventually) did agree to form a Society, when Bill Hartley agreed to be Chairman, and I agreed to act as Secretary. But we obviously also needed a Treasurer – and nobody was interested! However a few years earlier, on an Ian Oram church bell tour, John Allen (then of Wolverhampton) had said to me that if ever a national handbell society was formed and a Treasurer was required he was quite willing to help out. He was there that day, tape-recording the whole rally, but not at the meeting – but was told of his new job that evening! Definitely an appointment that could not have been bettered. The three of us decided on the Society’s name, subscriptions etc., etc.

I had said that I would try and produce a newsletter, and so had to think of a name. However I woke up in the night with the name REVERBERATIONS in my head – and wrote it down there and then just in case it had left my memory by the morning! Tom was excellent at writing articles for me, both under his own name and the pseudonym “Jingling Geordie”, and also produced simple music, mainly for 12 bells and aimed at tower bell ringers, especially at Christmas, in what he called the “Red Rose” series. John Willis produces a marvellous magazine these days, but I typed it on wax stencils at the very beginning, it was duplicated in the school office, and the girls of my team (plus friends) collated it, a job taking many hours. They, in a unique way, really did help in the formation of the Society.

Over the years we have had a hard working and committed group of officers and committee members, and even extended internationally, with International Symposiums held every two years. The very first one was held in Arcata in California, USA, in 1984. My school team was the only British team present, and that was their last appearance, with Ashton-under-Lyne Grammar School transforming into a Sixth Form College (and still doing well I believe!)

John P Partington,

Rochdale, Lancs



HRGB was formed:

“To advance, provide and encourage for the public benefit the art of handbell tune ringing in all its forms.”

Not only in the North West, but throughout this country and further afield, John never missed an opportunity to uphold the aims of the Society he did so much to create and develop. We will be forever grateful for the tremendous contribution he made.

The Committee of the North West Region