

OYEZ



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NUMBER 26

AT LAST - LIVE EVENTS IN THE THE NORTH WEST REGION!!

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Chatter from the Chair



Hello everyone and welcome to this early spring edition of Oyez. 'Chatter from the Chair' – the question is, 'Which chair?' Last week probably a deck chair enjoying the late March sunshine and way above average temperatures along with a glass of something long and cold; this week a fireside chair, probably with a fluffy blanket and a mug of hot chocolate! However, the daffodils are still wonderful, the blossom seemed to suddenly appear and tulips are about to burst into a riot of colour. The world is full of the most terrible news and images but surely even those who have been through unimaginable distress and sadness can take some comfort from the glory spring has to offer.

This edition of *Oyez* has been edited by our regional Secretary, Irene Merson. David Kerry, who has been our editor for some years, decided that it's time for someone else to have a go at putting articles together and wielding the editorial pen. Huge thanks to David for his time and effort, as a regional newsletter is a very important part of communicating with our members of HRGB. We are looking for someone to take on this role – could it be you? It doesn't come with a commitment to being a formal part of the North West Committee and attending meetings but it is useful to be able to attend events, if only to persuade others who are there to write something about what they've been to! The aim is to go into print three times a year, so nowhere near as time-consuming as a monthly magazine such as some groups and many churches have. Please, please do consider it.

When I took over being Regional Chairman (as it was then) from Beth, I had one or two very minor things I wanted to change. I am a ringer with no team to play in (let's not go there) and took great exception to being referred to as an 'Orphan' when we look at providing spare bells and music for individual ringers at events. Well, I managed to change that to 'Significant Others' and so I moved on to my other gripe. The term 'Rally' has, I think, always been used for an event for handbell ringers to gather and play together in a variety of different formats, both nationally and regionally. I've never been very keen on it and now it seems very dated. Mulling this over one day with Irene during the First Lockdown (the restrictions in our homes were obviously being strictly adhered to, as we were clearly short of items for conversation), I suggested we had a go at an alternative term. Describing Irene as a person who 'has a way with words' is a vast under-statement, and she didn't let me down by coming up with several suggestions. The best was '*GatheRing*' and you'll read further on a report of the *GatheRing* at Sale Moor on the last Saturday of March. This is not a one-up on the reports from Newbiggin last autumn or from Reddish last November, it's just that we've become formal with it! No, my computer doesn't like it (and tells me so with red line under it) and I'm not usually a fan of mixed upper and lower case but I hope you'll agree it just does the job. You never know, it may catch on in other regions. Watch this space...

It's great to hear that most teams have managed to resume ringing and wonderful to have three smaller *GatheRings* since restrictions were lifted enough to allow us to proceed with caution. The NW Committee is next meeting in May and plans will be discussed for events during the rest of the year.

Time will tell what we can arrange but I look forward to seeing you at something, somewhere.

With best wishes

Linda Parkinson

Get Together at Newbiggin Village Hall

Saturday 9th October 2021

There was great excitement as the Dean and Marron Valley team set off to Newbiggin for the first get together of the Northwest Region handbell ringers since lockdown. The other teams there were the newly formed Eden Valley team, Greystoke, Tantony and Kirkby Lonsdale.



Irene had sent a varied selection of music, some relatively easy and some which needed a great deal of attention, such as Danse Macabre, which really gave us a workout. Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves was a lovely piece to play. The beautiful gentle Blue Danube followed and the tempo was changed with the Trumpet Chorale and the Grand Old Duke of York which ended up with missing certain notes when Up or Down was

mentioned – this caused great hilarity.

Chris Ellison and Irene had done a great job in making sure that we could adhere to Covid Guidelines. We all did a lateral flow test before leaving home and took our own cups for tea and coffee. All snacks were individually wrapped with fruit as a gluten free option.



During the tea break, we were taxed with a quiz of Places of Interest around England – here are Betty and Irene puzzling out their answers. At the end of the afternoon, we all agreed that it was wonderful to be able to play together again and thanked Irene and Chris.

Hilary Windsor, Marron Valley Handbell Ringers

DEAN HANDBELL RINGERS

On November 18th we could see the light at the end of the Covid tunnel and went to play our first concert in 2021. The members of Graysouthern (pronounced Graysoon) Women's Institute invited us to their monthly meeting; we had played for them before so they must have liked us the last time.

The afternoon didn't start well because, when we arrived, no one had the key to the hall. The person who did have it was in Spain! We couldn't park outside the hall either as the weekly fish and chip van was expected at 3pm! After a lot of car movement we managed to get all the equipment inside when someone found a gentleman who could let us in.

We started with "Messing About on the River", followed by "Winter" from "The Four Seasons" by Vivaldi. Then, to get us in the mood for Christmas, "O Holy Night" and "O Come, O come Emmanuel", getting the feet tapping when we played "Come and join the Celebration". We went on to the much loved carols "Away in a Manger" and "The First Nowell" and for a rousing finish, "Jingle Bells" and "We wish you a Merry Christmas".

We were a little rusty after so long in lockdown but the ladies sang along with the tunes and seemed to enjoy it. Afterwards, we were treated to tea and lovely cakes.

OPERATION BELLS

What do you do with a collection of bells hanging on a presentation frame?

That was the dilemma facing Leonora Castledine when looking through the many possessions of George, her late husband. During a long career in nursing, George had received many presentations connected with a multitude of interests including Tower Ringing; however, of all those gifts, the bells presented a problem. It was obvious that they were old and well used. How did you find someone who could assess them? Who would want them in their present condition?

Fortunately, her sister had a friend who was a member of a handbell ringing team, Marple United Reformed Handbell Ringers. After a lengthy Committee discussion, we agreed to take on the bells. Mrs Castledine asked that any money raised from them should go to a nursing charity in memory of George Castledine. We had no problem with that.

So "Operation Bells" began. The bells began the first part of a long journey, travelling from Shropshire to Derbyshire whilst chiming gently together, despite careful packing, and were delivered to her sister. From there to a car park rendezvous in Buxton where bells and frame were transferred to a third vehicle and brought to Marple. When the bells arrived, our troupe leader, Sue, took charge so that she could go over them with an eagle eye.

Very quickly we realised the condition of the bells was a concern. Some of the bells were very old, some were cracked and the condition of the handles, whilst great for a hanging display on the frame, was impractical for hand bell ringing. We knew that these facts would discourage interest as the amount of money needed to restore so many bells was considerable. We wondered if a museum would be interested and began to research possibilities.

And then, lockdown! Everything was on hold, including decisions about the bells because, even if we found homes for them, we could not deliver them. We found a safe place to store them and set about dealing with Covid.

When we were able to meet again we decided to ask for suggestions from the wider world of hand bell reading. We sent photographs and details of the bells to the North-West Regional Secretary of HRGB and Irene was fascinated. She suggested that they might have come from a church group to practice their "changes" without using the main tower bells.

Irene referred us to Alan Hartley, the Acting Archivist of HRGB. We duly sent him all the information. Two of the bells had the name "Mears" on them which made them of great interest as they were Whitechapel Bells, the source of all things good in 'belldom'. Alan put out the word and we got a query from a newly-founded troupe in Devon. They were only interested in one bell but they had the means to refurbish it. We had a decision to make. Did we keep the bells together or did we split them up?

After a lot of discussion we decided on the split. Bells are living things and if we could only get one a new life, we thought that was worth it. We agreed a price and sent the bell on its way.

Shortly afterwards, our leader went to ring with another local group called “Kate’s Bells”, (we don’t mind loaning her out occasionally) and she came back with a name –Ian– and a phone number. We duly texted him and sent him the photographs.

Ian used to work for Whitechapel Bells and, although retired, is totally dedicated to bells and spends a lot of time collecting and refurbishing them. He wanted the remaining bells and the frame (especially) and we agreed terms. One problem! He lives in Devon, too. Posting the bells would be simple but how to get the frame from Stockport to Okehampton? Another matter entirely!

By chance, our secretary happened to be visiting a friend and ‘happened’ to mention our problem. “You don’t know anyone who is going down to Devon, do you?” got the response “Yes, I do. And they are going this weekend.”

Matters moved quickly after that. Her kind friends agreed to transport both bells and frame. Bells and frame began another journey to their house and arrangements were made for a meeting at Exeter Motorway Services for the exchange.

So, after plans and operations that would do credit to a spy novel, bells and frame have gone to new lives in Devon with people who have the means and the skills to make them ring out again and we have a generous donation to give to the Cavell Trust.

Mrs. Castledine is happy with what we have done and we are confident that we have achieved the best possible outcome for the bells and are slightly amazed that things managed to fall into place so nicely.

It has been an amazing adventure! We have had a lot of help, a lot of luck and we are very grateful to everyone who pitched in and helped. Our thanks to you all.

LESLEY WALKER

MARPLE UNITED REFORMED HANDBELL RINGERS.

HRGB NORTH WEST REGION

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY, 7TH MAY 2022 AT 12.15 PM

THE CENTRE @ HALTON, LOW ROAD, HALTON, NEAR LANCASTER, LA2 6NB.

All postal nominations or Proposals for consideration at the AGM must be received by the Secretary by Wednesday, 20th April, 2022.

Secretary – Irene Merson, 9 Bowfell Drive, High Lane, Stockport, SK6 8HZ.
irene@mersons.co.uk

REDDISH, NOVEMBER 2021 – OUR SECOND NORTH WEST GET-TOGETHER

We'd held the first Get-Together of the North West Region in early October 2021 at Newbiggin, near Penrith, and this had been attended enthusiastically by our "northern" ringers. But now we needed a similar event for those teams further south – so what was the problem? Well, you've guessed it – COVID!! Finding a venue was a real challenge – church halls and community centres were still not available for hire, and keeping up with Government requirements, as new variants came along, was a job in itself. However, eventually we managed to hire the Church Hall at St Mary's Church in Reddish, near Stockport, and it turned out to be a good venue – close to the motorway, easy parking, big enough for a few teams and with the all-important catering facilities.

So – we took all the necessary Covid precautions, did our special risk assessment and planned carefully, using HRGB guidance. The one thing we didn't anticipate was the weather – we woke up on the morning of 27th November to snow! As it happened only two people were snowed in, so the rest assembled as expected.

Knowing that many teams had only recently re-started their rehearsals, the Committee had decided to concentrate on four massed ringing pieces. Bach's "Trumpet Chorale", conducted by Kate Worthington, got us off to a good start and there were smiles all around as we listened to a roomful of bells being played together for the first time in over two years. Beth McCord took us through "The Blue Danube" (the waltz, not the river), so that we could all wonder why counting to three is so much harder than counting to four.

Then we had a tea break with a quiz, followed by a bit of silliness (sorely needed after the last two years) as Irene conducted a very simple version of "The Grand Old Duke of York", then introduced a slight difficulty – leave out any note that matches the word "up" in the rhyme. Having failed miserably, ringers were told to put those notes back in, and leave out the "down" notes. Results were no better, so Irene gave up and let us go back to proper ringing.

Beth, who had led an online workshop on "Danse Macabre", took us through it again for real, with techniques and dynamics which made a great addition to the atmosphere of the piece. After that there was time for a quick run-through of Verdi's "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves" to end our afternoon's ringing.

It was wonderful to find ourselves back together, and members of the Committee hope that our planning for future events will be more straightforward than it was in 2021.

MARRON VALLEY CHRISTMAS RING

As we started the new year, we were able to reflect on 2021. We were only able to give one Christmas concert at the Cockermouth Methodist Church for the Cockermouth Women's Institute.

We started with the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves and went on to play the Can-Can - that really got the bells flying. We slowed down with the beautiful Winter from the Four Seasons by Vivaldi and to get us in the Christmas spirit we ended with a Christmas Medley.

We were then treated to a lovely tea provided by the members of the group.

Although not a concert, we joined the congregation of the Methodist Church who were playing Christmas themed songs, poems and short plays.



The GatherRing, a personal view by Alan Cox

It was with a feeling of unreality that I set off for The GatherRing at Sale. I know we had a sort of micro-rally last year, but only two of Kirkby Lonsdale attended, (plus a potential recruit who enjoyed it so much that he has now joined up!), but this was a real genuine rally. A full-sized Rally with individual and massed ringing, a raffle, quiz etc. and lots of teams meeting together to ring handbells and enjoy themselves. Cor.

There had been the usual Rally-centred anxiety. Who could go? One having an operation, one going on Holiday very early the following day. Great! that leaves a potential team of eight! If 'S' takes over the B and C, and 'L' moves up to the upper bass, a whole world of possibilities opens before us. Well, a quick burst of realism: 'C' and 'A' are doing very well, for absolute beginners, but we had better keep it simple. A couple of Sandra Winter Folk Songs will do nicely. Well-known tunes, simple but effective arrangements, and no sharps or flats to confuse the unwary hand. The William Gordon Ash Grove was already in the repertoire, Danse Macabre ("Its gloomy!" "Yes, Mother, the clue is in the name") holds no real difficulties for the middle and lower bells, and Four for the Fourth is more Sandra Winter, and rather good fun to boot.

The final rehearsal, 'A' is missing, full of sniffles. Okay, plan "B". We'll just do the one piece, very simple bass line, block chords, simple but effective. And if 'A' recovers we can put the other one in as well. Meet at the Hall for 8-45 to load bells and tables.

Saturday was an early start for me. Consult check list. Music, check. Raffle prize, check. Coffee mug and lunch, check. PAT machine, spare batteries, tools for re-assembling bells when screws drop out, check. Directions, check. Into the car, meet at the Hall. 'A' is still hoarse-de-combat, so we are missing one car as well as a ringer. Can you take another person? Well he won't rattle, that's for sure. We get all the bells, all the tables and foams, the music and stands; and as an after-thought, all the people, into the available vehicles and we are good to go.

Stop en-route to pick-up the last team member, then hit the M6. Traffic is light and moving well; the satnav is predicting an arrival time of 10-25, everything is looking good but signs are showing trouble on the M56. Onto the M61, traffic is building up but we are still making good progress. Then south onto the M60 and...oh well, thankfully we don't have to unlock the hall.

We reach Sale at 10-45, instantly find the Church as advertised, and pull up outside. A swarm of rather relieved looking team members descends upon the car and swiftly remove the tables and foams. The passengers fend for themselves. Round the corner to park the jalopy, then back inside to help with the setting up. Sign in, sign the copyright form (no dodgy music today), check that raffle prizes have appeared (they have, very nice), find the PA speaker and microphone, plug it in and test it (working but not very loud). Whew, time for a coffee.

A quick discussion with the rest of the committee, Sale and Waverton are both seriously short of ringers, and in one case the bells as well (stuck in traffic, the closure of the M56 has had serious knock-on effects). Kinder, Maghull and Kirkby Lonsdale have all got a workable percentage of the team present, so they will do the team ringing in the morning. We agree to delay the start in the hope that missing ringers and bells will arrive, but eventually decide that we can't wait any longer.

After the traditional welcome, safety announcements etc (I once suggested that in the event of fire we huddle round the flames, they haven't asked me to do it again) the GatherRing proper started with the Danse Macabre. Taken at a mercifully steady pace, Beth led us well and it sounded good. It sounded even better when she got us all doing the dynamics and special techniques in the score. Then she took it faster. Still pretty good, but hard work.

The Team ringing was a chance to relax a bit. Kinder brought an old favourite, the Radetsky March. I suspect that with three ringers missing it was a bit light in the bass, but as a light and jolly piece it works well. Kirkby Lonsdale played the La Mourisque, a popular dance of the sixteenth Century, collected by Tylman Susato and arranged by Sandra Winter. A lively dance in the treble with block chords in the bass it is easy to play but tuneful, and works well with a drum and tambourine. Unfortunately sometime over the lockdown our team tambourine has vanished so we had to make do with bells. Maghull had dug out some of their "archive" twelve bell tunes, and played the Mango Walk and What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor? These pieces show that twelve bells are not a limitation for they are both rich arrangements with plenty of detail and structure.

To take us up to lunchtime, Kate led us through the Ash Grove. These old William Gordon arrangements have stood the test of time and still ring well but with enough of a challenge to be interesting. Perhaps wisely she chose to omit the multiple repeats, although one of Kirkby Lonsdale had to be reminded not to play the first AND second time bars!

The lunch break having been enjoyed, more so than a rather dubious sandwich purchased locally by one of KL ringers, we resumed with some further massed ringing. I don't know how the conductors were chosen, is there a defined gullibility scale? but I ended up with Four for the Fourth, a Sandra Winter arrangement of four American songs strung together. I had a lot of fun with this, I hope everyone else did as well. Although the music is fairly simple, there is a lot of detail with tempo changes, dynamics and "special effects" to consider. After going through all nine pages a couple of times, you begin to realise why orchestral conductors take their coats off before starting!

Team ringing resumed with Sale, who had secured a temporary transfer of Beth from Maghull, and thus reinforced rang Singing in the Rain. Normally for a town on the fringes of Manchester this would be highly appropriate, but on Saturday we all enjoyed continuous unbroken sunshine. Maybe Manchester laid it on specially. Beth then returned "home" and Maghull produced two more from their back catalogue with Waltzing Matilda and Short'nin' Bread. There is a lesson here for us all. Every team that attended the GatherRing was short of regular ringers, but if ringers are prepared to relinquish their favourite bells (I know, I know, it can take the use of a crowbar); every team there had the potential to ring something similar.

Time for a tea break, and the quiz, which Kirkby Lonsdale won by a fluke! And of course a detailed knowledge of Malcolm Sargeant's carnation! The raffle was drawn, and prizes distributed by the efficient means of putting winning tickets to prizes and then letting people check them. Kinder rounded off the afternoon team ringing with a Ryan Price piece, Let's Ring! Previously called Let's Dance, in its current form it is dedicated to... Kinder. If you've got it, flaunt it I say.

The day finished with the traditional massed ringing of the three pieces, and the decisive "Plonk" at the end of Four for the Fourth was a suitably dramatic way to finish. That only left the packing up, loading of cars, a final check of the building for stray bells, music stands, relatives and the like; and the tricky decision of what to do with the four unclaimed raffle prizes. Despite several reminders there were still four prizes sat there, waiting for grateful recipients who would never see them. Well, we found homes for them, and if you had numbers ...Oh never mind, it's too late now.

Rallies are hard work, but if you put nothing in, you get nothing out. Those who attended had a grand day out, a return to near normality after two long years of weirdness. And if for whatever reason you didn't come to this one, see you at the next!

GatheRing Together at Sale

After the long dearth of Regional meetings during the pandemic, Soo and I were able to ring with our local teams at Newbiggin as guests of Greystoke before Christmas, but the GatheRing was the first time we were able to meet with ringers from further away. We were perhaps the most travelled ringers there, having flown back from Prague the previous night.

We were welcomed to Sale Moor Methodist Church by the NW region chair Linda Parkington who as a fellow ringer without team support joined several of us on the "*Significant Others*" tables.

After set up and tea, coffee and biscuits we launched into:

MASSED RINGING 1. "*Danse Macabre*" arranged by Robert Willis, at 170 b/m, or near to it. Beth McCord reminded us that we have been practising for 2 years so it was very familiar to most of us. She led the session giving firm, but always encouraging, support letting us away with very little.

TEAM RINGING. All the represented teams were short of ringers, and **Waverton** had to wait for bells to arrive; they were stuck in a traffic jam caused by a road accident. Later, they were recommended for an award for the quietest set-up when the delayed ringers arrived.

The team ringing was led off by **Kinder** who gave a resounding performance of "*Radetzky March*" originally for nine but rearranged for seven by Irene to account for shortages. We were treated to a wonderful rendition showing contrasts between damped Bass bells followed by the fullness of open bells in glorious harmony.

Kirkby Lonsdale followed with the sonorous tones of their large "C". They played "*La Mourisque*", arranged by Sandra Winter. Their team included a new member who had only been ringing for 4 weeks.

When **Maghull** first met back after lockdown they had a full turnout, but chose 12 bell music for their pieces today. They started with the Jolly music of "*Mango Walk*" followed by a melodic arrangement of "*Drunken Sailor*" with some challenging variations and ending with a flourish.

MASSED RINGING 2. "*The Ashgrove*" arranged by William Gordon. This was led by Kate from Sale. We had a mix of old and new print HRGB music for this piece. We quickly discovered that bar numbers were different by one, after which we moved on quite smoothly. It was a long piece so we ignored all repeats and after we had mastered it Kate threw in a googly. We split the groups into

three and each group played a different variation from the piece – all together. It worked to great effect and fullness, much to our surprise and I suspect also Kate's.

LUNCH AND QUIZ. Once again the tea urn was working its magic and we ate our sandwiches as we renewed friendships and made new ones. Then came the quiz.....Kate had put together musical introductions with an eclectic mix of popular, classical and show tunes, singers and composers. Our table of significant others got a creditable 18/35 but it fell to a cliff-hanger tie break between **Kinder** and **Kirkby Lonsdale** both on 23/35. I'm sure Kate was getting desperate when she reached her last remaining question which **Kirkby Lonsdale** won.

MASSED RINGING 3. "*Four for the Fourth*" arranged by Sandra Winter. This is a celebration of American melodies which was led by Alan from Kirkby Lonsdale. He explained the layout of the tunes and how they joined together in his own special way. We started at the end to make sure that the final shake and Martellato "Plonk" was good when we got to it, then we were taken in 4/4 time from the gentle tones of "*Alma Mater*". We imagined a lonely figure playing a mouth organ, leading into the magnificence of the "*Battle hymn*" with multiple octaving in treble and bass clef with the march getting louder before fading into the evening and back to the imagined sound of the mouth organ playing "*Aura Lee*" - a civil war love song which was reworded by Elvis as "*Love me tender*". The music filled out before coming to a gentle climax only for us to be returned to a march rhythm leading into "*Marching through Georgia*" and finishing with a mighty flourish from the shakers in the treble and a martellato plonk..... 9 pages tidied away after some powerful stuff from Alan.

TEAM RINGING 2. **Sale** started off the afternoon team session with help from Beth. They played "*Singing in the rain*" while the sun blazed outside. **Maghull** then transported us to Australia with a rendition of "*Waltzing Matilda*" followed by "*Shortening bread*". **Kinder** were gifted a piece of music by Ryan Price called "*Let's Dance*" which he renamed "*Let's Ring*". I could hear lots of familiar phrases in the arrangement which all melded together to make a delightful piece of music.

TEA BREAK. More tea, coffee and biscuits

MASS RINGING SECOND ROUND. "*Danse Macabre*". After proving we'd had too much tea, we eventually succeeded in a reprise of this lovely piece. We must have been a bit more relaxed by now because we were looking around and noticed that Beth's daughter, the youngest ringer there, was in action too. Kate moved our sections around in "*The Ashgrove*" so we each had a different variation from the morning to play. We then moved on to "*Four for the Fourth*" and rang it magnificently. Thanks to Sale Ringers, the Committee and all the people who put a lot of hard work into organising and running the GatheRing. It was a great venue, easy to find, except for the road closures and accidents and I loved the music choices. A great day out. See you all next time and happy ringing.

Gordon Gray (Tantony)

SUBMITTING ARTICLES

For the time being, please submit articles and photographs to Irene Merson –
irene@mersons.co.uk.

Further information about future editions of OYEZ will be sent out after the AGM on
7th May 2022.

NORTH WEST REGIONAL COMMITTEE, 2021 - 2022

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