



IN THIS ISSUE:

CHATTER FROM THE CHAIR

NOTICE OF THE NW REGION AGM, 2025

REPORT OF THE NORTHERN BELL ORCHESTRA CONCERT, JUNE 2024

AN UNUSUAL RECORDING EXPERIENCE FOR TANTONY RINGERS

SUMMER RING AT LLANDUDNO, 13th JULY 2024

REMEMBERING NORMA PARKE

A CELEBRATION OF SOME NORTH WEST HEROES!

DING DONG MERRILY IN MORECAMBE, 2ND NOVEMBER 2024



Chatter from the Chair

Hello everyone and welcome to this final Oyez of 2024.

I'm writing this the day after our *Ding Dong Merrily in Morecambe*. An opportunity to ring seasonal music was probably well overdue, and we had a wonderful day hearing splendid performances from teams, a trio and a duo. Kate Worthington and Beth McCord took us through two Massed Ringing pieces; in addition Beth led a variation on a Read and Ring, demonstrating how to encourage audience members to take part in Have-a-Go sessions. An opportunity to 'drop in' on a rehearsal by the brilliant Bronze

Carillon completed the day. A couple of changes from our usual ClusteRing programme, but ideas to be built on in the future. As always, thank you to all who supported the event and assisted in any way to lead/deliver it and provide bells and foam. Hopefully, a report appears elsewhere in this issue. There were HRGB members

attending a regional event for the first time, four teams who were (more-or-less) complete and over a dozen 'significant others'. We had interesting family and friend connections: Beth's mum and Jocie's grandma, Linda, joined us from East Anglia and so we had three generations of the McCord family performing together – a first for the region! The duo was Irene Merson and her daughter, Eleanor, from the North East region. Roger and Christine Lazenby, also from the North East region, returned to Morecambe where handbell ringing began for them. On a personal note, I was really pleased to welcome them as Roger was the team-leader of St Stephen's, Bury back in 1984 when I joined HRGB. How can that be forty years ago?? Following Christine bringing handbells to a Bury Family History Society Christmas Party and me being encouraged to have a go, I went along to the first practice of the new year and it opened up a whole new world!

Looking back with happy memories leads me to mulling over the past year. The National Rally back in April and our summer event in Llandudno seem a long time ago now. I know that many teams have had a more consistent year and their programmes of giving concerts and playing in public have returned. All very good news indeed. Do remember that the Region has a web-site and Facebook page and we are keen that you take up opportunities to publicize and report your events.

So, what of next year and beyond? Many of us will be looking forward to the 2025 National Rally in Milton Keynes. Our Region is 50 years old next year so a Golden Jubilee can't be passed by. Our AGM with some ringing will be in Bolton in March and then we'll anticipate a major celebration later in the year. You're likely to hear specific details first through our wonderful team correspondents, and I know Irene has written a little more about them elsewhere in this issue.

As we head towards our AGM, please think about how you may contribute to our events and plans for the future. The North West Committee has the fewest number of members it's ever had and it's rather become the norm that we organize everything that happens, rather than teams hosting some events, with support and input from the Committee if required. This was not how it used to be and it shouldn't continue beyond our Jubilee year. Too few people with too much to do is a recipe for disaster! Surely we don't want to wait until we haven't got a Committee or National Executive Committee Reps, let alone a Chair, Secretary or Treasurer, before we have some volunteers. We are not alone in worrying about the future but please, please do think about how you could ensure we also have a Diamond Jubilee to look forward to...

As this is the last edition of Oyez in 2024, I'd like to thank our Officers, NEC Reps, Oyez Editor and Committee members for all their input, enthusiasm and expertise during the year.

With warmest regards for the Christmas season and all good wishes for the coming year.

Linda Parkinson

**ADVANCE NOTICE OF THE
NORTH WEST REGION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 2025**

This will take place on Saturday, 15th March 2025 at 11.30 am in the
Parish Hall of St Augustine's Church, Tonge Moor, Bolton.

NORTHERN BELL ORCHESTRA CONCERT, CHESTER, JUNE 2024

On a beautiful day in June the NBO made a welcome return to the region when they performed a summer concert in All Saints Church, Chester, supported by Bronze Carillon. The large audience were promised a variety of music which would demonstrate the versatility of the handbell as a musical instrument, and this is exactly what they got. Under the overall direction of Kate Sawallisch the conducting duties were shared between herself, Robert Pettener and Rona Gager.

The programme began with an original work by Josh Bauder called Exultate. This was followed by an arrangement of the contemporary choral piece, "All is Well", a song recorded by Michael Crawford amongst others. From the pop world we heard Katy Perry's very successful "Firework" from 2010 and then "Africa", first released in 1982 by the American rock band, Toto. It had reached number 3 in the UK charts. This piece was enhanced by the steady beat played on a genuine African drum. The first half concluded with a beautiful Malcolm Wilson arrangement of "Mountains of Mourne", accompanied by cello, flute and violin.

After the interval came the exciting group that is Bronze Carillon, with over 3 octaves of bells. They began as a quartet playing Bach's "Praeludium No 1 in C Major". Then came "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" played by 3 ringers, followed by the duet performing "Yankee Doodle". Watching the speed and accuracy involved in swapping bells between the ringers was truly amazing. The trio then played the more calming "Greensleeves", before finishing with the quartet ringing the frenetic "Pick a Winner". Wow!

Whilst the table layouts were being reset Kate encouraged the audience to try some hands and feet coordination exercises before the NBO returned to begin with Handel's Passacaille. The rousing Sousa march "El Capitan" followed and had us tapping our feet once more. Next came a piece by Michael Coe which had been composed for the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. No-one is sure which of the tunes for "Nearer My God to Thee" was actually played at the time so a combination of three was put together for this arrangement. The concert ended with "Toccata on King's Weston" by Ralph Vaughan Williams, the arrangement making good use of the chimes to complement the bells. The 30 ringers with over 130 bells and chimes had certainly achieved their aim of showcasing what can be done with our special musical instrument.

Anne Hopley

TANTONY RINGERS RECORDED FOR "REST UNDER THE STARS"

"Rest under the Stars" started at Carlisle Cathedral. People could sit in deck chairs or lie on bean bags whilst listening to a sound scape through headphones. Prism Arts have organised the canvasses painted there to travel round Cumbrian Churches over the last few months. During early in June it arrived at Egremont and was set up in Egremont Parish Church.

As part of its visit, Prism Arts came and organised another canvas to be painted here to represent Egremont and St Bees, who will be hosting it next. Running alongside the painting were recording sessions of people talking/living life and musicians were also invited along. We didn't have much notice, but four of Tantony Ringers went along and were recorded ringing St Anthony Chorale on twelve bells.

We understand an extract will be used in the soundscape created for when the exhibition returns to Carlisle Cathedral, complete with canvasses from around the county, during August. The soundscapes will combine voices speaking over music, so handbells won't have a prominent part, but should be featured: the man recording also left his machine on for a while afterwards so he has us chatting about our performance and he also recorded me explaining about ringing four-in-hand. An unusual but interesting experience. We'll have to go and hear the end result now!

More information can be found here: <https://carlislecathedral.org.uk/rest-under-the-stars-goes-back-on-tour/>

Jane Holland, Tantony Ringers.

12th June 2024.

REPORTS FROM THE SUMMER CLUSTERING AT LLANDUDNO, 13TH JULY 2024

On Saturday 13th July, four of us, Kate Sawallisch, Marise Maddison, Penny Tatt and myself, got together for a trip to Llandudno.



We did not take buckets, spades and swimming costumes because we were going to the North West Region ClusteRing! We didn't really know what to expect but we knew it would be interesting and well run as we went to the same event last year.

It started well with a concert from three of the teams attending and then we got into the really meaty part of the morning – Old

MacDonald had a Farm! This was an exercise in ways of bell ringing, from ringing and malleting to touch damping and echoes. We did find out that echoing quavers is not that easy but it was a lot of fun.

After lunch, again we enjoyed another concert and then, in a massed ring, practised using marked or unmarked music and number notation. We think we did rather well.

We all enjoyed it immensely and would like to thank our hosts, Llandudno Handbell Ringers, for a great day out.

Sheila Ashdown, Waverton Handbell Ringers

As a relatively new member to the bell-ringing scene, I attended my second rally in Llandudno in July. With about 20 people there, we started with a group exercise which was quite taxing but very amusing, and certainly put us all at ease. Three teams then rang pieces of their own choice and showed us their skills. Lunch gave us time to get to know each other. Activities after lunch gave us a chance to see how non-music readers can ring! Altogether a friendly, relaxing and enjoyable day! Thanks to the organisers who made it so!

Penny Tatt, Waverton Handbell Ringers

I had never attended a Rally before, and as a relatively recent handbell ringer was rather apprehensive about the whole thing. However, as soon as we arrived at the lovely venue and received such a warm welcome and cup of tea, my worries melted away. Everyone was very helpful and supportive, the day being led by Irene whose calm, organised approach, with humour, was most welcome.

Our group played first (!), but all went well & I didn't lose my place in the music. It was lovely to listen to the other groups ring – when your head is down and you're concentrating on your own playing, you don't fully appreciate the wonderful sound which handbells make. We then had a very instructive & helpful session led by Kate on all the musical notation specific to handbells, many of which I had never seen before (gyro?!). However, everything was very well explained and we all got a chance to experiment with each one: this was great fun and we learned a lot.

During lunch we had the opportunity to meet some folk from other groups and I had a very interesting and enjoyable conversation with Annie from the Llandudno group. Later we did some sight reading of unfamiliar tunes, led by Irene and Anne, and even managed to conquer some initially baffling numerical notation!

The Rally was a very pleasant, helpful and informative day and I am now looking forward to the next one!

Ian Kenna, Marple URC Handbell Ringers

The host team, Llandudno Handbell Ringers



AN APPEAL FOR HELP!!

Is there anyone in the Region who is conversant with Musescore 4, and could help one of our members with it? If so please reply to Irene: irene@mersons.co.uk.

Thank you.

REMEMBERING NORMA PARKE – 1949 TO 2024

It is with great sadness that we lost our friend and a great ringer on 6th June 2024, after a short illness. Norma joined Marron Valley Handbells in 2003 and was an enthusiastic member. She later joined Dean team and also rang with Tantony Ringers. She once told me she had heard the team ringing at a concert and said “I would like to try that” and that is where her love of handbells started; she was very musical and played the piano as well. Norma was also was a member of the North West Committee and could be found selling raffle tickets at events.

She will be sorely missed, especially seeing her smiling face at the end of playing a piece, looking up and catching my eye.

Sheila Harris, Dean Handbell Ringers

Norma was amongst the first people I met when we had moved up to Egremont in September 2012. The Parish Church was advertising for people to join the new handbell team, so I went along and Norma was there helping the others learn how to ring a simple tune on the eight handbells which the church owned.

The group soon moved onto using my handbells which opened up the ability to ring more notes. It wasn't long before the team grew and became known as Tantony Ringers. When we had progressed onto ringing three octaves, Norma rang the 12F and 11G, which she stayed with until we shrank back to being a twelve-bell team when she moved to 9B and 8C. For a time her husband, John, rang with us too.

Norma last came to our Tuesday morning practice in April. She was the last of the original group still involved with handbells: the others have either died or moved on.

Norma was also a member of Marron Valley and Dean Handbell Ringers and was keen to have a HRGB membership card for each, which wasn't easy for the Membership Secretary to do because it made it look as though there were more members than there really were. Norma served on the NW Region Committee and at rallies she rang in the solos for each team.

After meeting at handbells, Norma invited me along to an ecumenical choir that she sang with in Egremont called Celebration Singers. We sang together in that choir for several years until going out in the evening and leaving John became more problematic for Norma. Our paths crossed at other church events: at church services where Norma also sang in the church choir and at church fairs, before covid struck, Norma would be one of the people running the bric-a-brac stall.

As well as being friendly, Norma was also generous. Several years ago she gave me a hand-held bell tree. I use it in the percussion section of Egremont Town Band. If she came across us playing somewhere, she often came over with a request. It would vary what she requested, but Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen featured quite often.

John died earlier this year and was buried at Beckermet Low Church in February. Little did we think then that on 20th June we would be laying Norma to rest in the same grave. At the family's request, representatives of the three handbell teams combined to make a twelve-bell team which rang a



couple of pieces during the graveside service: Hyfrydol and Where is your Heart? from Moulin Rouge. Fortunately the weather was favourable: dry and hardly any wind. It seemed fitting to lay Norma to rest with the sound of handbells as they had been such a large part of her life. R.I.P. Norma.

Jane Holland, Tantony Ringers

CELEBRATING SOME UNSUNG HEROES

In our HRGB family, there are many “heroes” who are recognized at regional, national and even international level. We appreciate all their hard work in making the organization function smoothly, and in giving their time and expertise to offer so many opportunities for us all to meet together and improve our ringing.

However, there is one set of people whose work is often taken for granted, but without them the North West Region would not function at all well. I am referring to Team Correspondents – those wonderful people who year in, year out receive all the information about what’s going on in the Region, pass it on to HRGB members in their teams, and usually act as the contact when the team decides to take part in our events.

Without them, my work would be much harder and the Region’s finances wouldn’t be so healthy, because every communication would need to be sent to all members individually, and posted to those who prefer not to centre their lives around electronic devices (and why should they?).

So on behalf of the Committee, I just want to say a huge THANK YOU to all our Team Correspondents. You do a wonderful job, and I hope your team appreciates your efforts in keeping everyone up to date on our Region’s activities.

Irene Merson

DING DONG MERRILY AT MORECAMBE, 2ND NOVEMBER 2024

Saturday 2 November dawned bright - at least it wouldn’t be raining. We arrived in Morecambe and had time for a quick trip along the promenade (there were no waves, and it looked very peaceful) before moving on to our proper abode for the day, the War Memorial Hall. There 10 of our bells team joined 6 other groups for “Ding Dong Merrily”. It was a Christmas theme and everyone wore their Christmas jumpers. Unfortunately we couldn’t see them very well, for although it was November there was no heating on in the hall, so I certainly had my coat on throughout the day!

We started with “Away in a Manger”, a massed ringing event. We then sat and listened to all the teams, playing at least three versions of Ding Dong Merrily on High, yet they were all so different - some played with mallets and some syncopated. The final item before lunchtime was A Session with Bronze Carillon. We’d no idea what that was, however it turned out to be four players with 42 bells!

In the afternoon we started with a session on “Have a Go” which was useful for children or audiences at the end of a concert. The next session was another massed ringing where Irene Merson had put together three well known tunes for While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks By Night (including Ilkley Moor Bah’tat) to produce “Three Shepherds Watching”. The team ringers played again in reverse order, and we left very cold but slightly wiser, and pleased with our day.

Our thanks must go to Sue Ardern, our leader, for arranging transport, not only for ourselves but for tables, foam, music, stands and bells, which went perfectly.

Janet Burridge, Marple URC Handbell Ringers

Editor's response on behalf of the Committee: We're really sorry that the hall was so cold – we tried to get the heating switched on, by phoning the contact number we had been given, but our call went to voicemail and a week later, we're still waiting for a response to our urgent message! However, we're sure that they were "experiencing a high number of calls" and our call was "important to them". So that makes all the difference, doesn't it?

Here are some photos taken at Morecambe: Marple URC HR seem to be ready – but is Beth?



Kinder looking festive – how long did the bells stay that tidy?



Teamwork makes the dream work! Bronze Carillon's amazing "Open Rehearsal"



NEXT EDITION OF OYEZ

NEXT PRESS DATE: 20th January 2025 - For the February Edition of Oyez. Tell us all about your Christmas ringing! Please submit articles / photos to Irene Merson – irene@mersons.co.uk. Articles in Word, and photos as jpegs, please.

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