

### **In the Bleak Midwinter...we need lights.**

We are quite a good team at Gresford Handbell Ringers! Sometimes sixteen of us, sometimes ten or eleven depending on work, holidays, grandparenting duties etc. This doesn't always make it easy for our musical director to select pieces and keep them up to standard. Venues vary. We started our Winter ringing at All Saints' Church Penylan, where Trish, one of our ringers, is a member of the clergy, on All Saints' Day 1.11.24 and ended at All Saints' Church Gresford for our Blessing of the Crib service 24.12.24.

All Saints' Church Penylan is a lovely little church although quite a challenge space wise. It involved a setting up journey in daylight prior to the concert and a packing up journey the following day. We had to arrange our six tables in four rows so the players at the front two tables were miles – well it felt like that – away from the back bass bell tables. Two tables were just about squeezed between pews one behind the other so that the players had to climb under tables to find their playing positions. Empty bell boxes had to go elsewhere instead of underneath those tables. Obstacle course for players who needed to move between pieces. And it was dark, even with our usual lights on our stands. We needed new lights!! Our programme included Highland Cathedral and of course All the Saints Came Marching In.

Eighteen cushions, fifteen music folders, seven bell boxes, six tables, three chime boxes, two stand bags, one mallet bag, bag of table covers, box of lights all take up a lot of space don't they!

Our second venue was Llanasa Village Hall for the seventy fifth anniversary of Llanasa WI on 12 November. Quite a distance along dark, winding roads. We decided that a bus was a must for this journey. The venue was a Grade 2 listed brick building which had been renovated providing a large bright hall with lovely long tables. Our programme of Birthday Rag, Plink Plank Plunk, Hallelujah, Beatles Medley, Les Mis, You Raise Me Up, Ashokan Farewell was a pleasure to play and well enjoyed by the audience. A bus ride home such a comfort, we still had to unload everything back at base.

Our next venue was closer to home and an afternoon event at Borras WI. Great, another bright hall with plenty of suitable tables. Early December, Christmas head gear allowed – Santa hats, Reindeer antlers - so we included a few Christmas items to the programme and the opportunity for some of the WI group to come and practise a few carols with us. People are always surprised by the weight of the bigger bells. Some very reluctant to come and have a go. Christmas Carol Celebration, Nutcracker, Walking in the Air, Joy to the World, In the Bleak Midwinter, Ding Dong Merrily.

In the same week we performed to our own village Gresford WI. Almost a full complement of players and a chance to play the more challenging pieces including Carol of the Bells.

On Saturday 7 December we had been really looking forward to a concert with the Sirenian Singers at our own Gresford All Saints' Church. But guess who put a stop to that - a storm called Darragh with its Met Office Red Warnings! Such a shame, but safety first.

Then came our visit to Gresford Retirement Group. A local afternoon event which we visit annually. They are a great group joining in for carol singing at the end of our programme. As usual, some of our handbell ringers who are still at work are not able to attend a concert during the working day, so the programme reflected a smaller number of available players. We all still enjoy Rudolph and Jingle Bells don't we.

Then Christmas Eve, Blessing of the Crib Service at All Saints' Church Gresford. The New Vicar had a selection of newer carols to sing during the service. Some syncopated rhythms. We could sing them, but could we play them? Of course we could. We needed to move from our usual front spot because the children taking part would be there, and so they should be.

Sound projection would be more of a challenge though. We set up the tables, with a lot of help from our friends, in the section where there are no ceiling lights at all! Thank goodness for our new, bright, music stand lights. Hark the Herald, Come and Join the Celebration.

Bleak Midwinter? – no I don't think so, plenty to do. And there was Light.

Blwyddyn Newydd Dda!

Gaenor Taffinder. I would like to thank my fellow players as I am no longer able to do the lifting and carrying involved with handbell ringing. Keep fit!