

FORTHCOMING EVENTS – 2021/2
www.wm.hrgb.org.uk or on Facebook at HRGB WM

Sat, 6 th Mar	W.M. Region Spring Rally and AGM, via Zoom
Sat, 8 th May	W.M. Region committee meeting
Sun, 20 th June	Sandra Winter Workshop, Hanley Swan, Worcestershire (to be confirmed)
Sat, 5 th Sept	W.M. Region committee meeting
Sat, 16 th Oct	Joint WM/SW Regional Rally, Churchdown Community Centre, Churchdown, Gloucestershire GL3 2JHG
Sat, 27 th Nov	David Williams Memorial Workshop, (venue t.b.c.)
26 th – 28 th Feb, 2022	Bells beyond belief, Pear Tree Hotel, Worcester

The views expressed in this newsletter are solely those of the Editor and the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of HRGB or the West Midland Regional Committee.

CREAK FROM THE CHAIR

AS I WRITE THIS, the challenge is to keep up to date with what is going on in Britain. I seem to spend inordinately long scanning the BBC News website; barely a day goes by without an announcement from HM Government about some aspect of COVID-19 and there are not a few, who find inconsistency. But no doubt, when, and if, an independent review takes place, all this will come out.

For handbell players, the issues are clear and HRGB nationally has and is giving some thought to how we overcome them.

To what extent we can run events depends in part, on how we comply with the restrictions imposed by HM Government and in part, on whether handbell players attending such events, feel safe. Many of our members fall in to the “at risk” category and may well feel that, at the moment, and for the foreseeable future, attending handbell events is not appropriate.



Making Music, the national organisation representing the pantheon of amateur Music groups, which include choirs, orchestras, brass bands and handbell groups, is doing their best to keep up with the ever-changing landscape, especially, as Britain faces the prospect of Lockdown 3.0 for some time in 2021.

The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, the organisation overseeing the administration and operation of church bell ringers, an organisation with around 40000 members, was equally concerned about the loss of church bell ringing when churches nationally, closed. It was also equally concerned when, with lifting of some restrictions towards the end of June that allowed places of worship to open, it was announced that such opening did not include the ringing of church bells. The CCCBR, with its huge resource base though, produced a detailed, scientifically and medically-backed report by Dr. Philip Barnes and Dr. Andrew Kelso, *Ringling and COVID-19*, published in *The Ringling World* on 15th May, 2020, which looked at what was needed to effect such changes in the world of bell ringing, when restrictions would be eased.

Those of you who have followed this will know that the Church of England's Recovery Group and Public Health England were impressed enough to see that the CCCBR was serious. But with a return date of 12th July set for limited bell ringing to return, there was some last-minute back-peddaling. Fortunately, Simon Linford, President of the Council and Mark Regan of Worcester Cathedral Guild of Bell Ringers, put the case, especially, in light of the Barnes and Kelso report and we were given the go-ahead. At Darlaston, we rang five bells, for 15 minutes; a very public demonstration that St. Lawrence's was open for business.

In our Region, some activity resumed in July, August and September but then things changed again. The Department for digital culture, media and sport, modified their guidelines and most activity, (unless there were just six of you) was forbidden.

One or two counties still allow the gathering of folk for activities, in COVID-secure village halls, provided the necessary risk assessments have been done and provided those attending adhere to the protocol set out by the venue.

The Forthcoming Events list may seem a little sparse. However, we have put dates and venues down, simply, because it's easier to cancel or postpone, should the situation require it, than start from scratch, trying to find a venue. We know that there will be many restrictions but we also know that handbell players can be immensely flexible and adaptable.

Let's hope that activity will resume sooner rather than later and that we WILL be able to return to what we enjoy doing – playing bells.

In the meantime, stay well and stay safe.

EDITOR'S EXHAUST

Richard Hartnell

ON THE 8TH of February, Hurricane Carla hit the north west of Britain. I had made the journey to Ulverston in Cumbria, to ring the church bells. Needless to say, an overnight stay in Barrow-in-Furness ended in a second overnight stay, this time in Lancaster, as the rail network closed down. But Ulverston was a “grab”, as those in the church bell ringing world call it. Three weeks later, I had the dubious pleasure of the bells in Broseley, Shropshire. Apart from Sunday service ringing a couple of weeks later, that would be pretty much it, for the rest of 2020.

At our Spring Rally and AGM in March, I made some reference to the production of our Regional Newsletter, in particular, to what extent people valued the printed version. A printed newsletter, along with posting of same, cost us in excess of £170 and although David, our treasurer is fairly happy about such expense, some would question such a hefty outlay, when our resources are only £2000!

Two weeks after the AGM we were in lockdown and that affected the whole process, so much so, that this newsletter is an electronic version. Personally, I don't want to go down that road in future but on this occasion, needs must. You will have your own views and I hope you might share them with me. Some other Regions produce only electronic versions – masterpieces of word processing excellence – with graphics, colour, and all that wizardry, whilst some national organisations produce both printed and electronic versions of their journals – *The Ringing World* is a good example. I'm afraid that this one lacks glamour and, is extremely late in appearing.

I hope though, that there will be something of worth.

HRGB MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

BY NOW, YOU WILL have received your “letter of invitation” to renew your HRGB membership for 2021. HRGB understands that in these extraordinarily difficult times, it may not be easy for people to renew straight away. As a consequence, the deadline for renewal is being extended to the end of March.

HRGB is also well aware that they need to look to the future, to a time when we can return to ringing, in a way, familiar to us in the past. Such a “return to ringing” event will be available to all HRGB members and be FREE

to all. For our Region, the joint WM/SW rally in Churchdown, (see elsewhere), could be that event!

ROGER'S RALLY

KNIGHTON,
OFFICIALLY
IN POWYS,
(though parts of the
town reside in England),
was our venue for our
Regional Rally last
October. The
Clocktower Ringers had
agreed to go ahead and
host it. Roger, who
passed away last July,
was dead keen for him
and his team to welcome us all and indeed, the welcome was grand.

The rally was opened in grand style when the town crier from Knighton welcomed us, along with obligatory hand bell – rather less tuneful than those set out around the hall.

Wendy Walters agreed to lead some massed ringing and I was particularly keen to hear *Grazioso* by George Philipp Telemann, which I had first heard at a joint rally between our Region and the South West Region 30 years ago. Then, in preparation for Christmas, Wendy had a very straightforward arrangement of *Jingle Bells*, which brought smiles to the faces of the assembled players.

A number of groups made the journey. It was particularly pleasing to hear The Clock Town Ringers, who played *Moon River* on hand chimes, one of Roger's favourite pieces, and The Newtown Ringers, who are so enthusiastic.





And, not surprisingly, there was plenty to eat and drink. Such a welcome was so fitting and a great tribute to the memory of Roger who, like his team, The Clock Tower Ringers, was so enthusiastic about the playing of handbells.

Let's hope that it will not be too long before we can do this sort of thing again.

BELLS BEYOND BELIEF

THIS YEAR'S EVENT, the second to be held at the Pear Tree Hotel and Country Inn, near Worcester, was the tenth that we've run. We've come a long way from the early days in a windswept Borth youth hostel and, hardly surprisingly, the whole thing runs pretty well – until Worcester is inundated and there's only one way across the River Severn.

25 delegates gathered on the Friday afternoon for two days of intensive rehearsals. They came from all over: Cheshire, Wiltshire, Devon, Cornwall and of course, the West Midland Region itself. Once again, six pieces had been chosen and, on this occasion, I decided to choose the composers and arrangers first, then find pieces to fit. Quite frankly, I didn't fancy trawling through a couple of dozen of the CDs issued by publishers. The approach turned out to be remarkably successful and quite refreshing.

I set out my stall. J. S. Bach, The Beatles, Elgar, Mozart, an original and something with a sacred theme. I wanted a Lloyd Larson, a Karen Buckwalter, a Doug Wagner and whatever else would fit! Karen Lakey Buckwalter's *Giocoso* was just the thing and is as good as any of the pieces she has produced. Always a bit of a risk opening the concert with an original piece for handbells; your audience may well not be familiar with bells and giving them music that is not recognisable can be a turn-off. However, the memorable melody, key changes and contrasts was ideal.

There had to be a J. S. Bach, primarily, because J. S. Bach is the best composer, ever (in my humble opinion). But the danger is always that you use a piece that "does the rounds" on Classic FM, gets played over and over and over

and ... I chose *Arioso* from cantata no. 156, which has the potential to be recognisable and is beautifully arranged by Barbara Kinyon. And keeping the alliteration going, Doug Wagner's Beatles medley of *Yesterday, I wanna hold your hand* and *The long and winding road* was just what we wanted.

Lloyd Larson's sensitive arrangement of *Fairest Lord Jesus* offered a nice contrast and, *Nimrod*, beautifully arranged by Robin Benton, kept us in touch with locals! *Allegro* from Mozart's symphony no. 40 would provide the finale. Dan Edwards has arranged this and set at a tempo of 140 crotchets per minute needs some concentration. Fortunately, the style of writing for handbells makes it fairly straightforward to play; the treble players had done their homework.

A Friday night rehearsal gave us an opportunity to familiarise ourselves with the rehearsal room, its acoustics and its heating system. Saturday and Sunday were spent in rehearsing. Then on Sunday afternoon we decamped to the church of St. Martin with St. Peter in Worcester. The church could not have been more welcoming and we had an appreciative audience for our short concert. All too soon, we were done for another year.

The next Bells beyond belief will take place in 2022 from Friday, 26th to Sunday, 28th February, at the Pear Tree Hotel near Worcester. Paradoxically, this scheduling was not a consequence of the current health situation in Britain but more a result of the number of such events available to handbell players during the year.

DWMW XXIII

THIS WAS THE 23rd such, held in our Region. The first, way back in 1997 is but a distant memory but I do still recall our attempts to master FOUR pieces, one with trumpet and organ



accompaniment, in the day available to us. Things have moved on somewhat, these days.

The format may be formulaic but it works. Moving south of the border to Churchdown in Gloucestershire made access to the event rather easier for some than in previous years. The hosting team, led by Jenny

Barraclough and Annie Lade made us all welcome with tea on arrival. It was pleasing to see 35 attendees join us, many of whom have experienced most of the 23 workshops held so far.

For the first time we offered a Christmas item, in this case *Once in royal David's city* with hints of *O little town of Bethlehem*, using the tune, *St. Louis*, arranged by Karen Lakey Buckwalter. *Deep river*, arranged by Peter de Mets provided our second choice and offered a little more challenge with its tied melodic line juicy chords.

Over the years we have used music from a range of levels and this has reflected the sense that such an event should be accessible to as many people as possible. The advantage of this, is that progress can be made quickly and players achieve a sense of accomplishment. Level II or level III pieces work best: enough to challenge yet within reach. It also helps that the environment of massed ringing provides a safety net for those who feel less confident. Knowing that there are three others playing the same bells as you, can be really reassuring.

For 2021, the event is scheduled for Saturday, 27th November, and will be held, provisionally, at Lower Broadheath Memorial Hall, near Worcester.

WM/SW RALLY

NOT SURPRISINGLY,, the planned joint rally involving the West Midland and South West Regions, organised for this October, bit the dust, or more specifically, has been postponed. This was to be a major event, with traditional rally ringing, massed ringing and a mini-concert. We had a venue and some catering and were considering themes for the day.

It is rescheduled it for Saturday, 16th October, 2021, (though the format may be different), and at the same venue – Churchdown Community Centre in Gloucestershire – and, whilst we know that some may not be able to attend owing to the distance, others will.

The two West Midland teams chosen for the mini-concert have agreed in principle, to play and Jason Walker, has agreed to lead some of the massed ringing. It is possible that this event will be our “return to ringing”. This may be the first opportunity for such, in a way that is familiar to us all. Make a note of the date and let’s hope we can make it as successful as our last joint endeavour at Bromyard in 2007.

ZOOMIN' MARVELLOUS

IN JANUARY OF 2020, few had heard of *Zoom* or *Teams* unless you had some understanding of telephoto lenses or recognised that Hallow Handbell Ringers, for example, were indeed a Team. But by March, all had changed and, just as nouns like *text* had transgressed to verbs, so, “to zoom” became accepted language.

Inevitably, most people's experiences came in the form of contact with family and friends; included in such encounters would be the ubiquitous *Daily Mail Zoom* quiz. All good stuff.

On the last Saturday in November, 80 members of HRGB sat in on a virtual workshop run by Malcolm Wilson and Aidan Fozard, which looked at how such platforms as Zoom and Teams could be used to allow handbell players remain active and meet socially, albeit without bells.

The free software, *Musescore*, was demonstrated and we all had the opportunity to participate by air-playing along to the score, as projected on our devices.

Much of this stuff has potential and if you have a reasonable competence with technology, you may want to try this. Certainly, if the evidence of the Scottish Region is any guide, it could provide at least an opportunity to meet up, virtually, and play some handbell music, virtually, at some virtual rally.

As an alternative, if you find the technology a bit daunting, there are plenty of sites available, where you can hear recordings of pieces that you may have, in your repertoire. YouTube and handbellworld.com are great starting points. Find a recording of one of your pieces then, in the absence of bells, a pair of spoons will allow you to play along. Of course, it's not the same but it does work.

Rowena and Stephen Shipley have gone a stage further. They delivered pairs of bells to each member of their team then provided a live piano version of the particular piece. Everyone, on Zoom, then mutes themselves and plays along with the piano version, whilst following their hard copy of the score.

Using *Musescore* requires someone to transcribe the music from the original score in to the software. This is probably best done by one who understands such software and will take some time. However, the rest of the team do not need to download it; simply join the Zoom session and the host will screen-share their *Musescore* screen with everyone.

Our Sunday, five-octave monthly workshop will be running on Sunday, 7th February, where we will trial this. **If you fancy participating, let me know, in advance, so that I can gain permission from the publishers, to share with however many wish to participate.**

VIRTUAL AGM AND SPRING RALLY

Saturday, 6th March, 2021

AND, FOLLOWING ON from the above, the Regional Committee has decided that the annual AGM and Spring Rally should take place, using the above technology. You may already have been involved with AGMs via Zoom but unless you attended the HRGB workshop back in November, the idea of a rally via Zoom may seem daunting.

However, we want to give it a go, simply, to provide an opportunity for us to meet up, virtually, and ring bells, virtually.

More details will come from the Regional Secretary, in due course and the ringing activity will simply be an attempt to get the whole thing working. And, best of all, no one will know whether you got that pesky b^b in the right place, at the end of bar 15, or not!

A Journey Home

Karen Lakey Buckwalter

For 3-5 octaves Handbell Choir with optional 4-5 octaves of Hand chimes

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Commissioned by the West Midland Region of HRGB

English Suite

Michael Helman

For 3-5 octaves Handbell Choir with optional 4-5 octaves of Hand chimes

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Commissioned by the West Midland Region for HRGB's 2018 National Rally

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