

Gt. Gransden Church Bell Ringers

Blog 2015

20th December 2015

As we approach Christmas and the year draws to an end it is a good time to summarise our life in the tower during the last 12 months. It has been a busy year, not least because we have recruited 5 new ringers; Jonathan and Jenny, Sam, and Matt and Susanne, all of whom are progressing well. Particular attention has been paid to Jonathan and Andrew who have successfully completed their DofE bronze award in the skills section. Alasdair has now started his and will complete it in the early part of 2016.

To help the new ringers, tied bell practices have been held on most Wednesdays since the spring and have only just ceased temporarily for the Christmas break. Half an hour before practices on a Thursday have also been a popular time too. The more experienced ringers are managing Plain Bob Doubles and when possible attempt Grandsire. There have been 11 quarter peals on the bells, two of which were for Andrew as part of DofE award, and most have included local ringers, one of which was by an entirely local band.

The training facility has been enhanced by linking the treble to Abel. This enables us to ring two bells simultaneously which will help with listening skills. A clapper stay has been fabricated to facilitate quick silencing, using the same model as for the second bell. Another great enhancement to the system has been the acquisition of a new laptop, kindly arranged by David and donated by Johnson Matthey. In addition, we have improved the CCTV set up. The previous system was monochrome and had to be set up every time it was used. Now, with a newly installed colour monitor in the ringing room a flick of a switch immediately allows us to see the bells.

The training facility has been used on three occasions for ringers at other towers.

We have welcomed four groups of ringers to the tower for general ringing, one group for a quarter peal and another for a peal. One of the highlights was a visit by the senior management team of Jonson Matthey who, whilst not ringers, were fascinated by their tour and several were given the opportunity to try their hand. We also hosted a visit by the 1st Gransden Guide Unit and shuffled 15 guides up to see the bells.

For some time and up to the summer we regularly welcomed Dan Stevens and either of his parents (Swavesey), and Matthew, Michelle and Megan (Littleport). Other domestic arrangements meant that they can no longer come to our practices, but we usually meet with 10 or 11 of us, slightly fewer on Sundays.

One final thing for David and I to do before year end - install the new handrail rope in the spiral staircase.

I hope we will continue to work hard in 2016 and I am sure that we will succeed in our ambitions and further develop our skills. Thank you to everyone who has supported the team during the year.

19th November 2015

We have been running tied bell practices all through the spring and summer, partly for basic bell handling and also for other exercises such as dodging, ringing up and down and ringing with the simulator. Until now we have had only one bell (the second) connected to the sim, but in the last week we have rigged up the treble too and this has immediately enhanced and improved our training facility.

This was ably demonstrated on Wednesday this week when our youngest and newest recruit, Sam, rang the treble as the tenor, to Rounds, with Phillip ringing the 2nd as the 5th. What was immediately apparent was that by following another ringer the learner is able to use some visual reference to ring in the correct pace, whilst also being able to hear his bell (on the sim) to adjust the striking. Previously, with only one bell wired up the learner has had to rely entirely on listening with no visual help and when first using the sim some ringers struggle with this.

Sam's error rate was 49% - sound a lot but for a first attempt this is very good indeed. His self-set target for the next sessions is to get less than 40%.

Well done Sam.

5th November 2015

A few away from practice this evening, on holiday, fireworks parties, birthdays, work and etc. Never mind, eight of us were able to ring Rounds, call changes and Plain Hunt on 5. Jonathan rang the tenor very well, Victoria called some changes, Matt rang Rounds excellently, Jenny is getting to grips with call changes, and highlight of the evening was to fire the bells. We do this when practice night falls on Bonfire Night. Two of the team had never fired before but the result was very pleasing and we had some very cacophonous synchronised striking.



Victoria, Jonathan, Alasdair, Phillip, Sheila G, Janet

23rd October 2015

What a great practice last night? Mostly rounds and call changes but we did include several plain courses of Grandsire Doubles. Sheila P and Tamsyn rang a working bell - David's turn next week. Well done to Sam for achieving his ten-bell badge in the Sherbourne Teaching Aids Scheme.

The practice was preceded by some 1:1 on a tied bell for Susanne, who is doing extremely well and is in competition with husband Mat. I will leave that to them - I don't want to get involved. But, friendly competition can be a good thing to help progress.

Jenny is beginning to ring call changes and Jonathan is learning how to call them. Alasdair rang the tenor behind to PB5 so well that we didn't have to even consider he was there - very accurate and with some good striking.

Half-way sweets and announcements reminded everyone that ringing is at 5.15pm on Sunday and that Jenny was now very welcome to join us.

Phillip said that he was hiring a carpet cleaner and will take the opportunity to give the ringing room carpet the once over (done on Friday afternoon at the time of writing).

18th October 2015

Only 8 of us last Thursday due to school trips, business trips and school parents' evening, but we had an excellent practice which enabled us to focus on our newest recruits. Rounds and call changes were the flavour of the evening and clear progress was made by everyone - well done!

1st October 2015

The Association Young Ringers met at Gransden last Saturday evening with their leader Barbara Le Gallez. Unfortunately, only two ringers came from other towers but three of ours, Andrew, Alasdair and Sam attended and so had a good 90 minutes of ringing, with a break for cake and squash. The intention was to go on a short walk around the footpaths of Gt and Lt Gransden beforehand but this was cancelled due to lack of numbers. Barbara paid complements to our ringers on their handling and striking. Praise indeed, so well done everyone.

Twelve of us at practice this evening and lots of opportunity for everyone. Sheila G is recovering from a bad cold so handed over to David as deputy t/c to take the practice. We had an excellent time which included Plain Bob 5, Grandsire 5 and call changes, with a chance for some learning of new things.

Alasdair has formally started his DofE bronze award. One of his objectives is to learn to call changes, so he had a go this evening. No problems actually, so we will have to make sure he does a bit more than just calling them. e.g. conducting, making sure the changes have been made, and keeping the ringers right.

Andrew succeeded on the tenor behind to Plain Bob Doubles and we have tentatively set a date for his quarter peal on this bell. Saturday the 31st October - to be confirmed.

Sam had a go on the treble, following the 2nd in Rounds. He started off on the floor and half way through I switched him to standing on a small box and asked him which he preferred? A box, was the answer, so for the time being that how it will be. More tied bell practice for him next Wednesday.

We rang down all six pretty well to round off a nice evening under David's leadership. We are definitely improving in our skill and accuracy. New objectives have been set

for everyone with a promise to try to make sure they are followed. Everyone is working very hard which is paying off. Keep up the good work.

25th September 2015

A good practice last night with some new objectives announced and tried for the first time. Alasdair - calling go and stop for plain hunt 5, Jonathan calling call changes and ringing the tenor to Rounds. Jenny - consolidating Rounds in readiness for call changes. Andrew needs a quarter peal ringing the tenor behind to PB5 to complete his DofE award. Sam - more tied bell practice, but his ringing in Rounds (treble following the 2) is coming on well. So, we continue to be busy need to get everyone up to speed so that we can continue to progress.

Alasdair announced that he is going on a school trip to Germany and should he bring back sweets? Of course - that's what we live for!

20th September 2015

120 Plain Bob Doubles this morning for Sunday service - local band. That's good!

18th September 2015

Thirteen ringers at practice last night - all local. And now the challenge of making sure everyone gets to ring. Many have only been ringing for a few months so are still at the Rounds adage. Some, learning even more recently are just being given the experience of ringing with others. At the intermediate level we have Plain Bob Doubles and plain courses of Grandsire Doubles. The evening is busy, noisy and fun as usual.

At half time Phillip gives a little pep talk encouraging everyone to work hard because our lack of experienced ringers is adding to the challenge of progressing - but we can do it!

Jonathan and Andrew are finishing their DofE project and Alasdair announced that he had just started his, so we must now meet to discuss his targets. A summer of hard work training new ringers is paying off, and now we just have to compete with the Rugby World Cup over the next 6 weeks. Good luck England!

5th September 2015

First real practice after the summer holidays but some ringers were still away. During August we have held two sim practices which have been very beneficial if only for me to realise how difficult it is for some people. Ringing the tenor behind seems to be ok but Plain Hunt on the treble is much more challenging.

Our practice this week was very successful with most of the objectives being met, as set by tower captain Sheila G as she works towards her accreditation in Module 2 of the ITTS training scheme. This included Plain Bob Doubles inside for Andrew, Call changes by Andrew and Alasdair and our seemingly obligatory Mexican Wave, which we are mastering pretty well now.

The half time break included a new supply of sweets, this time from Malaysia. The Durian is regarded by people in south east Asia as the king of fruits. It has a distinct and overpowering aroma described variously as rotten onions, turpentine, and raw

sewage (Wikipedia). The extract has been made into hard cylindrical boiled sweets. When first tasted they are sweet and toffee like but they seem to last for ever and difficult to crunch up. After a few minutes they reveal their true colours and even the hardiest of us had to abandon our efforts to finish them! I had to have a drink of water and we all chose a fudge sweet afterwards to take away the taste. Nought out of ten I think but great fun trying them and it all caused much amusement. Thanks to David and Sheila P for giving us the opportunity to try them!

It seems likely that some of our regular visitors on a Thursday night will no longer be able to attend our practices. This will put us back in terms of progress so we must now strive even harder to advance our ringing capabilities. Thanks to those who have helped us out in the last year or so and we look forward to seeing you whenever you can visit us.

3rd August 2015

A treat to ring this Sunday with 10 ringers, one non-ringer and two dogs in the ringing room. It was the occasion of Victor Hughes' retirement as organist and Matthew, Michelle and Amy, together with guide dogs Una and Merlin, came down from Littleport to join in the "thank you" ceremony after the church service. Local ringers were there in force and we all enjoyed call changes and the very relaxed and friendly occasion.

I forgot to mention that during our practice last Thursday I assessed Jonathan for his level 1 ITTS award in bell handling. He passed with flying colours - well done Jonathan. Certificate to follow, which means watch this space for the presentation photograph.

31 July 2015

A great practice last night. Only seven of us (holidays are kicking in) but we did some really good work. I assessed Jonathan on his level 1 ITTS, which he passed. He also rang some good call changes and Mexican wave (for the first time). His mum Jenny is growing in confidence at the handling stage but is keeping pretty much right in Rounds, so progress is steady and certain.

During the week I started the bi-annual tower clean up starting at the top in the old belfry. It's mostly dusty with cobwebs and small leaves which blow in through the louvres but it takes about 4 hours to complete. The worst bit is working in the old bell frame where space is limited especially managing Henry the Hoover. Job well done and it's the belfry next.

On Tuesday we rang a [quarter peal half muffled](#) in memory of David Staughton of Abbotsley. David had been church warden there for 36 years and had requested that church bells be rung for him which we were pleased to do. The ringing was very good and it was a pleasure to ring half muffled to really appreciate the bells and good striking.

25th July 2015

Well, it's been a while since I made a report, what with holiday and the lack of news. Thankfully ringing has continued but with the approaching summer holidays some ringers will be absent during the next few weeks.

We had a very good practice on Thursday last and rang Plain Bob, Grandsire and call changes pretty well. Thanks to our visitors for this, but our ringing is gradually improving and striking is betting better.

I have now tidied up the cables for the cctv camera and monitor, so it is all in trunking now and very discreet. The next job is modifying the simulator box by making it a more practical piece of furniture for the simulator which is now driven by a laptop. We are finally more up to date with flat screen portable technology. The old crt tv and obsolete laptop will be dispatched to the tip, the latter minus its hard drive!

Two weeks ago we had some new recruits, Matthew and Susanne. Matthew saw our ringing advertised locally and contacted Sheila for details. They have had a couple of lessons and are doing well.

27th June 2015

Only seven of us this evening with work commitments, school activities and holidays eating into our attendance. Nevertheless, we had a good practice. David and Sheila P successfully stood the bell 10 consecutive times at backstroke, thereby acquiring another bell in the Sherbourne Teaching Aids scheme. Alastair managed 9 times and Jonathan 6. Standing at backstroke is a difficult skill so congratulations to all.

The low numbers enables Jonathan to practice call changes and we introduced him to leading. He has made good progress since starting to learn in March. We will soon be able to assess him for ITTS Level 1. His mum Jenny is coming on too and although progress has been slower I am confident that she will soon catch up.

Some of our "out of town" ringers will not be able to attend so frequently now so our numbers for practice will be lower but they will always be welcome and we thank them for their enthusiastic contribution over recent months.

12th June 2015

Although I have not blogged for a few weeks we continue to be very busy on the ringing front.

Several tied bell practices have taken place for Jenny, Jonathan and Sam, with good progress being made by everyone. These have come to a halt for the time being due to other commitments but will re-convene as soon as time allows.

The acquisition of a new laptop PC has been a great benefit because we now have a reliable system with which to use the simulator programme, which is easier to use and the hardware is more convenient to manage. Our grateful thanks to David for making this possible through his workplace, Johnson Matthey in Royston, who made one of their redundant laptops available to us.

The last week has seen the installation of a new CCTV camera and monitor. The old monochrome system, which was very tedious to set up can now be disposed of. Before getting rid of the TV, which incorporates a VHS video playback system we had to transfer the 1980's VHS tapes of the bells to DVD. This was kindly done by Keith Tritton who lives in the village and was one-time trustee on the Tower Project.

On Saturday the 6th June we rang for a wedding blessing. It was Hunts District quarter peal day which is organised by Sheila G. Sheila arranged a quarter peal to be rung in lieu of general wedding ringing. This was successful and several of the guests at the service commented on how nice the ringing was. This was Sheila G's 200th quarter peal on the bells - wow! well done!

24 May 2015

Many thanks to David (Deputy Tower Captain) for taking the practice on Thursday last. Sheila G was in St. Neots being sworn in as churchwarden. We were short of change ringers but had a good practice nevertheless which included call changes, plain hunt, Rounds and a lot of fun, including sweets half way as usual.

Our new learner Sam has had one formal bell handling lesson and he was able to demonstrate his knowledge so far by ringing a solo bell at backstroke and tying up the bell rope, something that many new ringers have difficulty with!

A few people had to leave at 8.30pm but the ringing finished with some dodgy Mexican Wave and then all six down in pea, with Andrew L on the tenor - well done Andrew!

10th May 2015

We continue to be busy on Thursday evenings. Last week we had a visit from the 1st Gransdens Guide Unit. A request was made to visit the bells and we were very pleased to do this. I think the whole troop turned up and Sheila and I, assisted by Helen Jackson, one of the leaders, ran a continuous ferry up and down the tower to enable the Guides to see a bell in action, visit the clock room, and the ringing room. It was a whistle stop tour but we managed to fit it all in within an hour, although this slightly delayed the start of our practice. Thanks to all the ringers for your patience. It is always a delight to welcome visitors and let people see what actually happens in a typical church tower.

The practice which followed was busy as usual and several ringers accomplished new targets as part of their ringing development. Well done to Andrew L for a competently ringing the tenor behind to Grandsire Doubles, and to Alasdair for ringing a 120 Plain Bob Doubles on the treble. Congratulations to Daniel for ringing his first quarter peal at Swavesey last Sunday.

Well done to Jonathan for achieving ten-bells on his progress card and being awarded his ten-bell badge. Jenny will soon achieve the same. Jonathan is progressing well in his DofE award and is now ringing Rounds fairly competently.

2nd May 2015

An exciting practice on Thursday last with 4 young ringers including Sam Hadden, a potential new recruit. We also welcomed Jo Miles visiting from Fen Ditton. Jo is part of my safeguarding group in the Diocese of Ely and wanted to know something about bell ringing. Gransden was an obvious choice of venue because it is a small tower with easy access and a very energetic and fun team of ringers.

After a brief visit to see the bells we started the practice during which Jo and Sam both had a go at ringing backstroke, and were very successful in doing so. Ringing included call changes, Plain Bob Doubles and Grandsire Doubles. Tenor and treble ringing was

the focus for some of the youngsters who are benefitting from additional resources in the form of our regular visitors from Swavesey and Littleport.

18th April 2015

We had a good practice on Thursday with plenty of opportunity for Plain Hunt, Plain Bob and even some Grandsire. We made mistakes and had some glitches but the ringing was generally successful. Thanks to Alasdair for bringing a fresh supply of sweets from his holiday in Scotland.

Practice as normal this Thursday the 23rd, but no service ringing until the building work on the nave floor has been completed and the church thoroughly cleaned. We will keep you informed.

On Thursday 23rd Sheila and I are going to St. George's Littleport in the afternoon to ring for St. George's Day with Matthew, Michelle, and hopefully Megan, as part of the Ringing for England campaign organized by the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers. See <http://ringingforengland.co.uk/> We will return for our practice in the evening sporting our Ringing for England tee shirts. Sheila has let the organiser know of our escapades and received an encouraging email of support.

Now that we are regularly meeting with enough experienced ringers to ring Plain Bob Doubles we need to actively continue to focus on this, and encourage the youngsters in treble and tenor ringing, and learning the method on an inside bell. We will continue with Plain Hunt. We should also move on where we can to other things. Sheila P is learning Grandsire and we should include this when we can. Please come to practices with these objectives in mind.

The recent ad hoc simulator practice was very enjoyable and a useful session, being excellent for developing listening skills. We are happy to organise further practices on a different night if there is interest. Obviously subject to availability because I am sure most of diaries are pretty full. Let us know which other nights of the week you are free. (Mon, Tue or Wed only because Fridays are out)

Jonathan and Jenny are doing well with bell handling, Easter slowing us down a little bit, but they will very soon be ringing Rounds with us. Tamsyn tells me that Sam might be joining us soon, so we look forward to welcoming him too.

I can confirm that the Gransden/Swavesey outing will be on Saturday 12th September and Andrew (Swavesey) is going to arrange ringing in towers in the Newmarket/Bury St. Edmunds area. No details yet but everyone is welcome, whatever ringing ability - it is usually a grand day out and includes FOOD. Please make a note in your diary.

11 April 2015

Easter week and most of our ringers are on holiday or with families, so only five of us for the practice last night. Never mind, we made good use of the time by using the simulator. We rang the tenor behind to Plain Bob Doubles, then on to 8 bells by ringing tenor behind to Grandsire Triples. Using the sim is a completely different skill and really helps focus on listening when there are no other distractions of ropes and ringers. Most of the ringing started off rather inaccurately, but after several whole pulls

Rounds was established and once a consistent rhythm achieved the method was started.

We had a very enjoyable evening and improved as we practiced. We don't usually have time to practice on the sim, but it will be worthwhile arranging another session because as Victoria said "It was REALLY useful last night and helped me to hear 'my bell'. Makes me realise how I need to listen more accurately! Would be useful to use again in future".



L-R: Victoria, Sheila G, Phillip, Sheila P and David. Picture right - the modified clapper stay

27th March 2015

Had a fun practice last night. It started at 7.00pm with our annual tower meeting when we re-elected Sheila G as tower captain, David P as deputy t/c and Phillip as secretary/steeple keeper. The accounts were approved, and we discussed what we might do this year for an outing. Several suggestions were made but ringing in London with a trip to the Whitechapel Bell Foundry was favourite. So here we go - planning again.

Ringling started at about 7.40pm and included rounds, call changes, Plain Hunt 5 and 6, Plain Bob Doubles and Mexican Wave, the latter which we performed very badly!!! Phillip presented Megan with her ITTS level 1 certificate in bell handling, accompanied by applause from everyone and the obligatory photo was taken, as reported on the front page. The place was full of noise and laughter, rounded off with a chorus of Happy Birthday to me and a gift from the family which had to be opened at the time. A very nice surprise to me and thank you to everyone. We also send our good luck to Andrew who sets off to Ghana today for a week long project with school to help teach less advantaged children some basic IT skills. We look forward to hearing of his adventures.

New learners, Jonathan and Jenny were there and had a couple of rings in rounds at backstroke alone, which they rang very well. More tied bell practice tomorrow to bring both strokes together. Alasdair is improving on the treble to Plain Bob Doubles and getting the hang of counting places. Victoria stuck to me like glue on the second as I lead down in peal, and she stayed with me all the time, when sadly, others were not so steady. But, as Sheila G says, if we don't practice we won't learn. How true is this, but most important is that we enjoy ourselves too!

19th March 2015

Progress continues as we are able to go into the realms of Grandsire Doubles at our practice this week when we managed a 120 with Sheila P on the 3rd, ringing the observation bell. Daniel rang the treble and then later the treble to a 120 Plain Bob Doubles. Not so many of us on this occasion but we still kept busy and were able to give our new recruits, Jonathan and Jenny, a couple of pulls at backstroke on the trebles. Jonathan has started in order to learn a skill for his Duke of Edinburgh Award, and we persuaded his mum Jenny to come along too. They have had one tied bell practice so far.

Other items on the agenda included Mexican Wave, call changes, and Plain Hunt and a PC of Plain Bob Doubles for Andrew who is also doing his DofE award.

A good ring down at the end - all six, and Michelle stuck with the treble all the way down - well done Chelle.

26th February 2015

After a quiet week last Thursday during half term this week was almost back to normal. We managed a young ringers band (ok, there were two adults, but they were of the younger variety). The usual menu of call changes and Plain Hunt. No Plain Bob today because we were one too many short, but the boys rang it inside following a theory lesson at 7.00pm before the practice started. Megan rang the treble, so consolidating her leading, which she did very steadily. Half time chocolates were not welcomed by some for two reasons. 1. Giving up chocolate for Lent. 2. We only had coconut ones left. Can't please everyone! Anyway, we said we would not buy anymore until Easter. And finally, Victoria took a quick trip to France recently and brought back some pictures of the bells at Notre Dame, so hopefully we will be able to post them soon!

14th February 2015

Today is Valentine's Day so we decided to ring a quarter peal with help from John and Cass Boocock from Gamlingay. A very creditable quarter peal of Plain Bob Doubles was achieved in 45 minutes, which boosted our confidence because we lost our last attempt a couple of weeks ago. Interestingly the ringers were three married couples with a total of 122 years of marriage between us! Phew!!!

Also - Facebook Communications

Bill Dargue - ringer at Castle Bromwich Birmingham posted on the Bell Ringing Facebook page inviting people to submit links to their tower website. I posted mine and shortly afterwards received a comment back from him saying "Well done, Gransden - this is good!", with particular reference to the video on the front page. How good is that??

13th February 2015

On Wednesday 11th February David P invited a group of business colleagues for a tour of the tower. We showed them clock room and belfry amidst many questions and comments. David and Sheila P, Sheila G and I then rang up the back 4 in peal to demonstrate ringing. The CCTV was used to illustrate the movement of the bell whilst ringing. Everyone had the opportunity to try the backstroke to give them an idea of what ringing is like and this further amazed everyone adding to the overall tower

experience. It was a truly international group with members from the USA, Australia and China, and we were delighted to welcome everyone to the tower.

There were only seven at our practice on Thursday 12th but we made good use of the time. Highlight of the evening was when Megan achieved her 25 bell badge in the Sherbourne Teaching Aids scheme, by leading competently without assistance. She has only been learning this for a couple of weeks. She also rang down the treble without being given any instruction - she just watched how it was done and with great confidence did it herself. The coils weren't bad either though she admitted afterwards that it would have been helpful to know how to take the second and subsequent coil before she started.



30th January 2015

A short but useful practice last night after knowing that we would meet short, one helping backstage with the village pantomime, two at dress rehearsals, and another two who were not able to be at practice. But we had seven, so some good call changes were rung and a course of PB5. Megan rang up the treble and had her first attempt at leading, which she did quite well. She is keen to get her 25 bell badge in the Sherbourne Teaching Aids scheme and leading will clinch it for her in the next couple of weeks.

Planning ahead for some of our activities, we are thinking about our tower AGM (proposed date 26th March), a quarter peal for David and Sheila on the 14th February, a ringing skills morning on the 28th, and a few weddings during the summer. The date of the Gransden/Swavesey outing has yet to be decided but the proposal is Saturday 12th September. A busy year!

9th January 2015

First practice of the New Year last evening and what a great start. Sorry that not everyone could be there but the fun and laughter continue as we embark on a new season. The ringing started with a good raise on the front 4 followed by A&A ringing up the tenors. Rounds and call changes, Plain Bob Doubles and a bit of Mexican Wave were successfully rung. Particular mention to Dan Stevens who rang the treble to PB5 without any significant problems. The same too for Andrew L and Alasdair. Victoria rang a plain course on the treble pretty well too and all made a promising start to the year.

Caroline and Dan arrived bearing gifts - a box of chocolates to replenish our dwindling stocks. Thank you! So we finished the last of the Argentinian chocolate bars and started on the Quality Street. They will keep us going for a few weeks - I hope!

Subs are now due and two were collected, Victoria raiding her purse and coat pocket for the last 2p to make up the fee, so that I go home with a pocket full of change.

We agreed to a series of quarter peals alternating with Swavesey every other month when our respective churches have Evening Prayer. The first one is at Great on the 25th Jan. This is a trial project and we hope that more ringers can be included in due course.