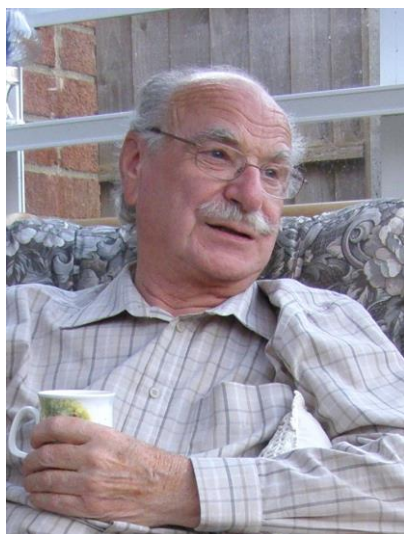


Ringling Around and About in the Huntingdon District



Issue No 9: September 2023



Jim Skillings
1933 - 2023

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Editor's Comment - Phillip George

We are planning our ringing programme for 2024. Caroline and I met to discuss this, and using data from the District Survey we were able to design a varied schedule to include training, learning and advance ringing events.

This suggested programme is being considered by committee members ahead of their meeting on the 21st of October when we will discuss it and prepare a final draft which will be presented for approval at the Annual District Meeting in January.

Thinking more long term I have recently watched the **Central Council** video of their presentation '**Towards 2030**' which gives some ideas about how we should be looking at ringing over the next few years. This is important for all our towers as the average age of ringers increases and the number of recruits diminishes. Initiatives such as 'Ring for the King' have been successful, but we must maintain a continual flow of recruits and follow this with structured training.

The CC video of the presentation can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPLjCZ6VgEc&t=831s>

It was a privilege to attend the service at Warboys on the 21st of September to celebrate the life of **Jim Skillings**. Of course, it was tinged with sadness, but it was also uplifting to be present amongst his family and many friends to remember him, a lovely man, whose life was so rich. Sheila and I had known Jim from his early days as a ringer and we were able to ring at Warboys with other friends after the service in his honour. His son Kevin has kindly contributed to this edition of the newsletter with an article about Jim (page3&4).

Report on the Central Council meeting *by Daniel Stevens*

Saturday the 2nd of September was the 126th annual meeting of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR) held at The Hold in Ipswich.

I was only able to attend the meeting itself and none of the other events around the weekend. The meeting lasted 4 hours and had a lot.

You may have heard about the proposal to reduce the size of the council. I vote against this for multiple reasons. The first point is that a lot of youth members of the council would lose their seats and this year's meeting had the highest ever attended of under 30s as well as the youngest member to join. My other reason is that it would mean some areas are underrepresented including EDA.

For the proposal to go through it needs a 2/3rds majority. The recorded vote was 40 for, 100 against and 4 abstentions.

The other major news is that the council library will be moving to the Loughborough Bellfoundry Trust (Taylors Bell Foundry) and will be open to the public.

Other changes are that Simon Linford and David Kirkcaldy step down as President and Deputy President after their three-year team. The new President is Tina Stoecklin and the Deputy President is Vicki Chapman. there was also a new Strategy called Ringing 2030 but that needs its own article which will be out soon.

Thank you Daniel for reporting back. Ed

Towards 2030 – Creating the Right Environment

We take for granted that we will always have bells to ring. We meet every week in our tower, or sometimes in several towers. We meet our ringing friends and enjoy the challenges of ringing and learning new things. Occasionally we will go to a meeting, or on an outing to enjoy bells elsewhere.

Sometimes we can have a very inward-looking attitude towards our towers. We don't consider how non-ringers see or think of us. One of the most important considerations in attracting new ringers is the environment in which we ring.

By this I mean the physical environment and the social environment. Hopefully, gone are the days when we had to move the mower out of the ringing room before we could ring. In Great Gransden we had two sixty-watt light bulbs and a single bar electric fire to ring by during the winter months. It was pretty grim!

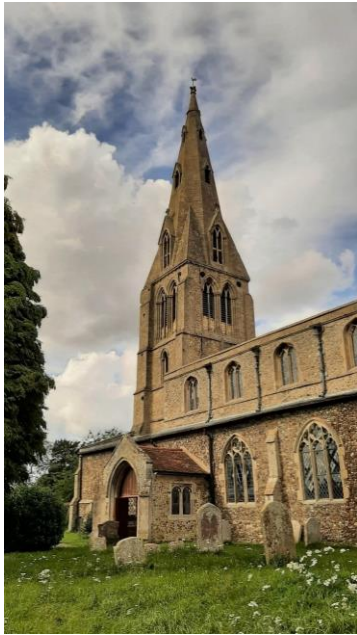
Thankfully, most towers are more comfortable nowadays, but we should still pay attention to them. It is important to make them inviting to newcomers, even casual visitors. For example, make sure that the carpet/floor is clean, store books and magazines tidily, throw out redundant publications, keep notice boards up to date. Assign the task of housekeeping to the steeple keeper or organise it on a rota basis.

The other rooms in the tower are also important. Make sure that they are regularly inspected and cleaned (where possible) to prevent pest and weather ingress.

On the social front, always welcome visitors whoever they are, even if they are not likely to become ringers. Smile, and if there is time, explain simply how the bells are rung. If visitors are greeted with enthusiasm and are welcomed into a clean environment they will go away appreciating the experience, and maybe pass that on to their friends.

Regularly use social media to explain who you are, when you ring and offer a welcome for people just to come and see you. Keep posting different photographs in social media. Let the community know what you enjoy about ringing. Most people are put off by the connection with church, so explain that there is no commitment to attend services or try not to mention church at all! We want to attract those of faith and those of no faith. Present ringing as a modern, exciting adventure, which is what it is.

Let's portray ourselves as enthusiastic and exciting people.



Jim loved bell ringing, contributing to life in the Huntingdon District for more than forty years. He is well known as a gentleman, having a keen, cheeky sense of humour, and a few quirky eccentricities. He felt free to stretch out on peoples' living room floors after a quarter peal, and many ringers would notice a twinkle in his eyes that betrayed he'd seen the funny – or naughty – side of events.

Growing up in Saffron Walden, Essex, Jim had really wanted to learn to ring. He was told “no” because, as a choir boy, he couldn't ring for service and be ready for the choir's procession into the church. Many years later in Godmanchester, the parish church was encouraging involvement in church life. “Is there anything you'd like to do?” “Yes. I've always wanted to learn to ring.”

So, Jim went along to a practice with his son, Kevin, in tow. Jim was 42 and Kevin was 10, and they were taught to ring by Paul Wells. Some months later, Jim accepted an invitation from Harold Peacock to join the practices at Huntingdon, All Saints. Jim and Kevin learned change ringing there and never looked back.

Jim enjoyed supporting a variety of practice nights, including Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Hilton, Holywell, Fenstanton, and Houghton. Jim served as tower captain at Godmanchester for a year and was a faithful Sunday service ringer there until moving to Warboys in 2002.

After retiring from mental health nursing at 55 – mandatory – Jim was freer to ring for more weddings and special events. If the Huntingdon District had a lost property officer, Jim would certainly have kept them busy, forever leaving gloves and hats behind. Ringing for a wedding at Hemingford, he even left his coat behind. When fetching that from Michael White, he managed to leave his cap behind, which was later pushed through his letter box.

Jim loved district meetings, outings, and special practice nights. In the 1980s and '90s, he was an enthusiastic supporter of Friday night Surprise Minor practices. He did ask not to have his brain strained too much, and it was easy to tell if he'd gone wrong, as he used to ring one-handed, look perplexed, and scratch his head with his free hand!

His first peal was in 1982, Plain Bob Major at Trumpington on an Ely DA peal day, also a first for Debbie Wells of Godmanchester, and first as conductor by Kevin. Jim went on to ring 53 peals, 51 for the Ely DA. He rang peals in most years from 1982-2002, mainly Minor (38), plus 4 Doubles, 5 Triples, and 6 Major. His last peal was in 2009, appropriately at Huntingdon, All Saints, to mark the 25th anniversary of Harold Peacock's death.

Jim rang many quarter peals, including his wife's one and only. Another particularly pleasing quarter peal success was to mark his and Gill's ruby wedding anniversary. It was on the actual day of their anniversary and rung at Cherry Hinton, where they were married in 1960.

For 25 years, Jim was a faithful member of the Godmanchester band, then the Warboys band when Gill and he moved there in 2002. At Warboys, he helped teach several new ringers, as well as quietly recruiting new learners. One of the local band, who rang after Jim's thanksgiving service, affectionately recalled how Jim would curtsy to her when she should dodge with him. He was renowned for being so patient and encouraging. Two of his recruits went on to become tower captain there. Jim didn't just stop at introducing people to bell ringing but also persuaded people to join the services and explore the Christian faith.

Remembering Jim (James W) Skillings *cont*

By 2015 Jim was the only experienced ringer at Warboys and he reached out to others for help, including the current Ely DA Peal Secretary. This gave some much needed support. Jim was so pleased in 2016 when local ringers and outside volunteers rang for the Queen's 90th birthday, as pictured below, including the vicar, Garry.

Jim was very sad when age caught up with him and he felt unable to return to ringing after pandemic restrictions were eased. That didn't diminish his enthusiasm for ringing, though, and he was often asking people in his village if they'd consider learning. Yet, there was one more peal to come, arranged as a surprise (pardon the pun) for his 89th birthday – the start of his 90th year. Friends and family who had rung with Jim since 1976 made up 5 of the band at Warboys to ring Cambridge Surprise Minor as a birthday compliment, with conducting in the safe, willing hands of Tom Griffiths, who'd rung with Jim many times. This was a fine peal on challenging bells. Jim was thrilled by this event and to see "the old crowd" again, walking to the church three times to sit and enjoy the ringing.

After a long, happy, and healthy life, Jim sadly suffered a series of strokes. He remained determined to return home, but the final stroke proved to be the point of no return. On August 14th, Jim passed away peacefully and surrounded by family.

And yet, his contribution to our shared art hasn't finished. In his memory, his family settled on using funeral donations to support two causes. One supports people with mental health issues to reflect his professional career, but most funds raised are to help recruit and train bell ringers across the Ely DA. Going to the designated fund of the Recruitment and Training Subcommittee, gifts made in Jim's memory will help to grow and strengthen the bell ringing community and fund the Ely DA team entering the National Youth Striking Competition.

Jim's family thanks sincerely those who have already donated online, by cheque or cash. If you would like to add to Jim's legacy by investing in the future of bell ringing in this area, please consider contributing to funds for Ely DA Recruitment and Training, which will remain open for a while at:

justgiving.com/crowdfunding/Jim-Skillings-ElyDA

Kevin Skillings
September 2023



Jim with the band who rang a peal at Warboys for his 89th birthday on the 12th of November 2022.

L-R: Kevin, Sue Marsden, Phillip George, Jane Hough, Richard Hough, Tom Griffiths



Ringling for HM Queen's 90th birthday in 2016
L-R: Nick Elks, Becky Zarate, Jim, Sue Marsden, Rev Garry Dawson-Jones, Lita Carter, Sheridan Dyer, George Bland



General ringing after the service in celebration of Jim's life.

Harvest Ringing at Croxton *By Hazel Pettit*

A request was received by Elinor Cole, tower captain at Bourn, for the bells of St James's church Croxton to be rung to celebrate the Harvest Festival service being held there on Sunday 10th September 2023

This beautiful church is situated in a dip on the Croxton estate, surrounded by fields, some distance from the main village. The tower houses six bells, the treble (3 3/4cwt) dated 1687, 2nd (4 1/4cwt) dd 1761, 3rd (4 1/2cwt) dd 1804, 4th (5 1/2cwt) dd 1804, 5th (8 1/5cwt) dd 1690 (Dove c.1380?), 6th (10cwt) dd 1624, in an oak frame c.1804. The bells are rung from the ground floor, with a long draught, in a very restricted area. They had not been rung in a while so Elinor and Ruth along with Geoff Burn had inspected the bells prior to inviting a group to try them

So, on a balmy Tuesday evening in early September an intrepid team of ringers made from Bourn, Caxton, Elsworth and Gransden towers led by Elinor met at the church of St James Croxton for a rehearsal. The front four bells were rung up, the general consensus being that they were 'tricky', some were very light set and some very(!) deep set and the long draught with light ropes didn't help (elbows in for a nice straight pull). However, rounds and call changes were achieved with ringers swapping in. Advice to Elinor by Geoff had been to only ring for a short period 15-30 mins to protect the frame, so we then rang down. In the end Elinor had recruited four others to ring for the service.

During the time we were ringing there were some visitors to the church who were delighted to hear the bells and about bell ringing in general

On the Sunday of the service 5 people were able to ring and due to space constraint, the front 4 and the 6th were rung up and rounds and call changes ensued. When they had finished and rung down the team was applauded by a small but appreciative congregation, quite rightly! One Gentleman maintained that he had not heard the bells since his daughter's wedding, 30 years previously,.... probably a bit of hyperbole!

Perhaps someone remembers when they rang there? The only digital record currently existing is a reference to 1996 and Delight Minor (7 methods).

It was well worth the adventure to hear them.



Thank you, Hazel, for this lovely story.

The reference to 1996 was a peal rung on the 12th August and was of 7 Delight methods (details unknown). It was rung for the Oxford Diocesan Guild, and I dare say full details can be found in their records ('though not on BellBoard as it was 27 years ago). Investigation has found that the ringers were: 1. Sally A Brown, 2. Richards C L Brown, 3. Andrew M Farmer, 4. Robert J Crocker, 5. Peter G C Ellis (c) 6. Colin Turner. Ed.

Practice Meeting at Buckden – 16th September 2023



Only ten of us met at Buckden on the last forecast day of warm, sunny weather. On arrival the sound of the bells was proclaiming a wedding, the remnants of the party being ushered away in a variety of transport modes.

As is typical nowadays the flowers which adorned the church were whisked away immediately afterwards leaving no sign of the joyous occasion!

We were welcomed by Philip & Karen Miles and another local ringer and new member this year, Celia (Ce) Walker. As we were short in numbers this gave good opportunity to ring a lot of Plain Hunt and Rounds, to the great benefit of the novices. This was interspersed with Plain Bob Doubles, Grandsire Doubles and Stedman.

After the ringing Philip gave us a tour of the bells and clock, and Ce and Karen provided us with cups of tea, cake and biscuits.

Thank you to the Buckden ringers for hosting the event and making us feel very welcome.

Buckden hold their practice on a Monday evening and you would be welcome to visit them and ring on the very nice 13cwt six.



As We Ring Into Autumn *(A short article to fill a space in the newsletter!)*

The summer is past, although it still hangs on into September these days. It's dusk as we arrive for our practices at half-past seven, and on an evening with clear skies our churches are illuminated from within and without.

They are still warm from the summer sun, but we will feel a chill quite soon as the weather changes after the autumn equinox. So, it will soon be winter coats and torches as we negotiate cold, dark pathways.



Taking photos at every opportunity, I snapped this one of Great Gidding church in October 2011. We had just come from the village hall having had our monthly business meeting preceded by the usual sumptuous ringers' tea. The afternoon ringing had been at Hamerton.

The autumn is a good time to run a recruitment campaign. New hobby, new skill and all that. I know that we are always trying to get new ringers through the door and it shouldn't be a once-a-year campaign but teaching at this time of year helps learners get into ringing before the lighter evening distractions re-emerge.

Good luck with everything that you do, but most of all, enjoy your ringing.

Eight-Bell Practice Meeting at Godmanchester by PG

We met on a beautiful early autumn day on Saturday 2nd September and the windows of the ringing room were flung open to let in the warm fresh air.

When Sheila and I arrived they were ringing up the front six in peal. The tenors soon followed. Andrew Smith, our ringing master, organised us into some Grandsire Triples, and during the next ninety minutes we rang Plain Bob, Little Bob, Cambridge and Stedman.

A couple more ringers arrived during this time to make eleven in all, and we all had a good ring.

As the bells were being rung down it was discovered that the tenor clapper had become loose. Subsequent investigation found the tapered washer had become compressed and compromised the tight fitting of the clapper. Jez, Steeple Keeper Charles Looker and apprentice Steeple Keeper Nigel Strong were able to remedy the situation.

Godmanchester bells are very rewarding. I have rung four peals there, one on each of the back four bells, and one being of Godmanchester Surprise Major.

Peter Arch had met us at the tower and he explained that this year was the 400th anniversary of the tower being built. He pointed out the date inscribed in stone above the west door. It is hoped that a peal can be rung this year to commemorate this and a date of the 18th of November, which is also King Charles III 75th birthday.

Our thanks to Peter for meeting us and to Andrew for looking after the ringing.



From the Archives – 50 Years Ago in the Huntindgon District – from the Association Annual Report

George Bonham was in his first year as District Secretary and he reported that the whole Association was invited to Godmanchesster on October the 6th to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the building of the tower. It is not recorded what type of event this was, but only 10 Hunts District ringers attended!

THE BACK PAGE



The **Peterborough Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers** celebrates its centenary in 2024. It was founded on the 5th January 1924.

The PDG is one of our immediate neighbours, indeed, some of our towers facing theirs across the River Nene in the City of Peterborough.

Helen Allton, Secretary, writes “In 2024, the Peterborough Guild turns 100 and we are marking the occasion with events through the year, birthday cake, a special logo and anniversary merchandise. We’d like to invite you and your members to join in our celebrations throughout the year.”

Details of their events can be found on their website at <https://pdg.org.uk/pdg-100> and a list of promotional merchandise can be found at <https://www.pdg.org.uk/pdg-100/centenary-year-merchandise>.

Wendy Piercy (Eaton Socon) PG

I am sorry to report that Wendy Piercy of Eaton Socon died during the morning of the 20th September.

In her many years as tower captain at Eaton Socon she gave constant encouragement to her ringers, especially up and coming youngsters, including those from St Neots who regularly attended the practices. She always made everyone very welcome at practices.

The close proximity between Eaton Socon and St Neots led to a strong link between the two towers and although Eaton Socon is in the Bedfordshire Association Wendy was also a key member of the St Neots band, and she would regularly come to our monthly District meetings.

Wendy had rung 168 peals for the Ely Association, ringing 55 at both St Neots and Eaton Socon. She was Vice President of the Bedfordshire Association from 1996 to 1998, and President from 2003 to 2007.

On a personal note, I have many memories of ringing with Wendy, and I remember, as a young ringer, she helped me learn how to ring handbells.

Sadly, Wendy had been in poor health in recent years and had not been able to ring.

May she rest in peace.

Wendy’s funeral will be at Eaton Socon church at 11.00am on Tuesday 17th of October. All welcome.

Quarter Peals in September

It has been quieter than usual month for quarter peals rung which include District ringers.

1st **Hemingford Grey** 1344 Plain Bob Major

4th **Little Gransden** (Handbells) 1260 Plain Bob Minor (arranged on handbells formerly belonging to Maurice Thurmott)

8th **Holywell** 1320 Cambridge S Minor, rung on the accession of King Charles III

15th **Great Gransden** 1260 Plain Bob Minor

24th **Godmanchester** 1280 Cambridge S Major, For Evensong and in celebration of the birth of Bonnie Lily Strong, grandchild for Nigel and Sylvie, also in affectionate memory of Wendy Piercy

“**Coming Up Next**” see Caroline’s leaflet and emails.

Saturday 7th October. 10-bell practice at **St Neots** 10.00 – 12.00 midday

Saturday 21st October. District Committee Meeting 10.00 – 12.00midday

Saturday 21st October. District Ringing Practice at **Ramsey** 14.30 – 16.00

Saturday 4th November Surprise Minor Practice at **Somersham** **10.00 – 12.00**

Please come to our district ringing events – meet new ringers, experience different bells.