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Devon Calls

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Then and Now - Devon Association Competition at Zeal Monachorum 19th October 1929 and Devon Association Centenary Competition 14th June 2025



Photo Alan Quick



Devon Association of Ringers 6 Bell Major Final Zeal Monachorum – 14th June 2025

Zeal Monachorum seemed quiet and sleepy when I arrived just after midday on Saturday 14th June. There were some early signs that something exciting was happening though. I caught sight of some gold balloons attached to the church door, then Mr Facey drove past with a tree loaded in the back of his truck, which was to be a feature of the day later on. The lanes and designated car park soon filled up with vehicles and ringers began gathering in the churchyard just before 1pm. I was very pleased to see Alan Quick, known both as the captain of ringers at Coldridge and the Editor of the Crediton Courier, who had been asked to coordinate a group photo outside the church recreating the image from the competition in 1925. But, before he could start organising the crowd, there was some ringing to undertake.

North Tawton ringers rang a tribute peal at 1pm, acknowledging the winning North Tawton competition team from 1925, and in memory of Brian Drake who sadly passed away at the end of May. The judges, scrutineer and competition secretary Andrew Vincent then stepped into the tower and rang the judges' peal with many keen ears listening outside!

Alan then got to work organising the crowd into position for the group photo outside the church. It was determined that we couldn't use exactly the same position as the 1925 image due to lack of seating for a formal photograph. So we moved down the slope slightly so that everyone could be in the shot with the church in the background. The Ross Shield was positioned in the middle of the photo as it was in 1925. Alan also took some video shots of everyone shouting "Centenary!" before he was satisfied with the results and we headed to the church for the service and roll call.

Margaret Down introduced proceedings with a wonderfully warm welcome, before settling at the organ. After a very uplifting service, for which we had specially designed Orders of Service to keep as mementos, Andrew Vincent gently 'evicted' the judges and we undertook the roll call and draw with the usual excitement and anticipation.

The competition proceeded smoothly and with very few pauses between peals, with Andrew ushering people in and out of the church as needed. Tea was taken in two sittings in the cozy village hall, in which great care had been taken not only to provide the most delicious fayre, but also to decorate the room in the colours of the Devon Association! Blue and gold bunting was hung artfully from the ceiling, and the tables sported alternating blue and gold napkins. There was also a very interesting display board about the Devon Association and Zeal Monachorum bells.

The rest of the ringing continued in fine style until just after 7.15pm, at which time people gathered outside at the eastern end of the church to witness the planting of the Centenary Tree, which has been given a lovely prominent position next to the church path. Ian Avery and James Steer oversaw proceedings, with some applause from the small crowd. Most sincere thanks go to Steven Facey for supplying and donating the tree, which is not only a living monument to our predecessors but also a symbol of growth and camaraderie for the future. And then into the church for the results! Jereme Darke spoke warmly of his own experiences of ringing in and winning this competition at Zeal Monachorum in 2008. How fitting that a previous winner and competition secretary should be announcing the results on this occasion. The certificates were handed out in reverse order at the request of the judges. Every team was congratulated with enthusiastic applause and presented with a Centenary certificate that emulates the intricate designs from 1925.

The tension was certainly running high towards the end! When it was announced that Shaugh Prior had come third with their very stylish peal, everyone knew that the Ross Shield would be heading to North Devon for the second year in a row. But, would it be Down St Mary or Bow that would take it home? All were agreed that it would be too close to call; there was no stand-out winner due to the high quality of the striking. Jereme and Andrew then announced that second place had been awarded to Bow, which was met with tumultuous applause. Autumn and Ewan were two of the youngest ringers in the competition and rang extraordinarily well. Beating Bow by only one fault were Down St Mary, who lifted the shield for the second year running. Down St Mary also incurred the fewest faults in the top ringing - a masterclass in classic striking. Congratulations must go to all our ringers for an absolute showcase of ringing on lovely but tricky bells.

And so ended one of the most highly anticipated and enjoyable Major Finals. The event was made outstanding due to the generous efforts of Margaret Down and the Zeal Monachorum team, a joyful service led by Reverend Matthew Tregenza, the calm organisation from Andrew Vincent, and the contributions of the North Tawton ringers, the judges Martin Sharland, George Rogers and Owen Borlase, scrutineer Jereme Darke, and Ian Avery, James Steer, Alan Quick, Julia Jarvis and Steven Facey.

This was a day of commemoration, celebration, talent, pride and optimism. The Devon Association of Ringers came home to the parish where the tradition became a fellowship, and in doing so created an unforgettable occasion from which to flourish in years to come.

Victoria Tucker.

CONGRATULATIONS DOWN ST MARY

I'm sure like everyone else I set off for the Centenary Final full of excitement and anticipation. I had the feeling, given all the preparation that had taken place that it would be a success, but you can never be quite sure how events will turn out. I have been to ringing competitions before which have been marred by, bad weather, the judges not being able to hear the bells, a rope breaking and on one occasion a clapper falling out! Nothing untoward occurred this time though; the weather was good and the event went off extremely well.

I thought at 83 I might be the oldest ringer there so it came as quite a relief when I saw Don Roberts from Torquay arrive. Don is 94 and whilst talking to him I learnt that he had only recently been discharged from hospital.

I was surprised that he needed to be admitted given his record for fitness. He told me that with Babbacombe ringers he entered his first Devon Association competition when it was held at Bickington in 1959; the team actually cycled there and back! Then there were my old friends, Mervyn Way from Chawleigh, Bert Conibear from Barnstaple, Graham Parker from Burrington to name but a few, all people who could go back a very long way, each providing enthusiastic accounts of ringers and events which had taken place many, many years ago. These were recalled with such clarity it were as though they had only recently taken place and that some of the characters were still around! Harry Bardens and his wife Ellen would no doubt have been present had they not recently moved to Bristol. My son Scott came along with his wife Charlotte. As everyone knows Scott was a very enthusiastic ringer and a loyal supporter of the Devon Association until ill health curtailed his enjoyment of ringing. It was good to see him catching up with so many of his ringing friends.

The older members were however offset by the presence of the young. It was a pleasure to see four young ringers taking part in the competition and they all acquitted themselves extremely well. Autumn Avery and Ewan Kaczanow ringing with Bow, Esme Kerslake with Kenton and Esta Snell with Swimbridge; all teenagers. Congratulations to them.

I couldn't help but think about the number of teams that took part in the competition at Zeal Monachorum back in 1925 and whether the teams consisted entirely of men? I expect they did but if I am right 11 of the 12 teams competing in this year's final had at least one lady in their side, and some even had two. What was the average age of the ringers in 1925 and what was life expectancy like 100 years ago? At a rough guess I would say the average age of those taking part this year must have been around 48. Life expectancy in 1925 was 57-60 for males and 60-63 for females. In 2025 it is about 79 for males and 83 for females. {Source - The Office for National Statistics}. It is likely that the ringers taking part all those years ago came from a rural community where by today's standards housing and sanitation was poor. The men did mainly manual work and worked long hours. Such work no doubt equipped them well for raising and lowering



Winners Down St Mary Defend Their Title (L-R: Gary Quick, Ian Fielding, Bob Robinson, Andy Cleave, Jenny Sparling, Ali Waterson.)

in peal, particularly on heavy bells and peals that were hung on plain bearings. However, at the end of their working life many were worn out and didn't live long after their retirement.

A great deal has changed over the last 100 years and for the better, yet the physical action of ringing has not changed at all. The ringing that took place in this year's final was no different to that which took place in 1925. The standard of striking may be better than it was or it may even be worse, we don't know. There are no records to draw from which is why we should do all we can to record in audio or written form what is taking place now. A good start has already been made by the work undertaken by Bernadette, Darrelyn and Martin.

Victoria has already thanked those who played such an important part in making the day a success. I want to add my thanks to all those who have worked quietly and enthusiastically in the background to bring about such a memorable year so far. There is still much to look forward to and enough to reflect on and record for years to come.

Colin Adams.



Runners Up - Bow (L-R: Ewan Kaczanow, Lee Avery, Autumn Avery, James Steer, Linda Steer, John Enderson.)

The Devon Association Minor Final.

St. Andrew's Church, Kenn

Saturday 24th May

In many respects this was a well chosen venue for the Minor Final being just off the A 38 Exeter to Plymouth road. The village of Kenn sits in the valley of the river Kenn with the hills of Great Haldon rolling down from the south west. Steep land behind the church leads towards the neighbouring village of Exminster situated just a few miles to the east. In this sense Kenn lies in a sheltered spot surrounded by agricultural land and water meadows.

The village remains unspoilt with just a few houses next to the church. Close by is The Ley Arms which is said to have been in existence since 1300, thus around the same time that the church was built. A mile to the west of the village is the village of Kennford. In the early 1980s a United Benefice was created between the parishes of St. Andrew's, Kenn and St. Martin's, Exminster. The Priest appointed to unify the two parishes was the Reverend John H. Good.

The tower at Kenn is about 60 feet high and is constructed of a mixture of limestone and flint. In the south east corner there is a spiral staircase constructed of Heavitree stone. This provides access to the organ, ringing chamber, belfry and the roof. The tower contains a peal of 6 bells the tenor weighing just over 13 cwt. (660.43 Kg) and is in the key of F.

In his book Towers & Bells of Devon, J.M.S. Scott et al [2007] states "4 bells are listed in the Inventory of 1553." There is also reference to "Kenn's bells being cast in 1688," without stating how many or by whom. Scott also states that "Various founders cast bells for the church between 1702 and 1750" and "In 1826 the old bells were exchanged for a new six by Mears of London at a cost of £155 - 8 shillings and 8 pence. In 1882 the bells were hung in

an oak frame by Stokes of Woodbury. The bells were removed from the tower, tuned and re-hung by Mears & Stainbank in 1948. In 1952 the organ, which originally stood in the St. John's chapel where it had stood since 1867, was re-positioned to a gallery under the tower where the bells were originally rung – Morter I. C. 1997.

In 2000 the cannons were removed and the bells were quarter turned and fitted with fabricated steel headstocks and SABs (self aligning ball bearings) by Robert Parker of Taunton. Due to the position of the organ the work needed to be carried out in the bell chamber.

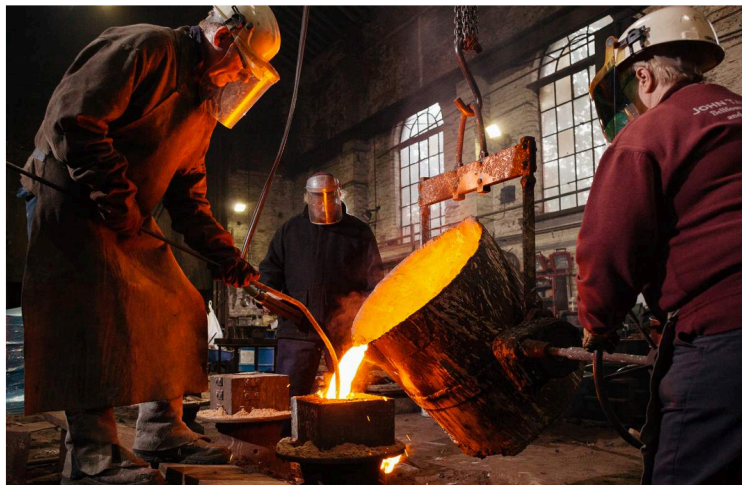
The afternoon began with a service conducted by the Reverend Mark Bate. Although not a ringer himself Mark is well versed in ringing matters having at one time been the vicar at neighbouring Alphington. In his address he spoke about faith and commitment and touched on the enthusiasm which ringers demonstrate towards their hobby. His address was sprinkled with humour especially when he referred to English change ringing being quite a contrast to that which he had heard once during a visit to France. The lesson was read by the Association's President Mr. Ian Avery. Music consisted of the hymn, O Happy Band of Pilgrims and the Ringers' Hymn. The service closed with the National Anthem. The organist was Mrs. Marion Wilson widow of the late Cliff who was a loyal and faithful ringer both at Kenn and at Exminster.

Just five teams took part in the competition. Kenton were the winners and were presented with the Thomas Oatway shield by the President. Ide were second. Kenton and Ide qualified to compete in the Major Final at Zeal Monachorum on Saturday 14th June.

1. 53 1/2 Kenton
2. 72 3/4 Ide
3. 85 3/4 Tiverton St Paul
4. 197 1/4 Drewsteignton
5. N/R under time Leusdon (scored 84 3/4)

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Two teams from South Brent, 1 and 2, who had previously competed in the Novice Competition rang but did not feature in the main results. South Brent 1, with 12-year old Emma in the team who hails from Ukraine were 1st with 43 1/2 faults which turned out to be the lowest number of marks recorded during the afternoon's ringing; congratulations Emma. Her mother rang with South Brent 2 who scored 75 1/4. Neither had rung at Kenn before making their respective performances even more outstanding.

Thanks go to: the PCC at Kenn for granting permission for the competition to be held there and to Tower Captain Clare Redstone and the team for the way in which they hosted the event. A great deal of time and effort had clearly gone in towards making the day 'special' and it really was, in every respect.

My brother Michael and I rang at Kenn regularly during the late 1960s until the early 1980s. Returning there to ring with Kenton was particularly meaningful and tinged with a mixture of sentiment and nostalgia. How lucky we were to have been able to return and participate in the Minor Final and to hear those beautiful Kenn bells sounding out once more.

The judges were: Owen Borlase, Reed Partridge and Paul Wright. The scrutineer was Yolanda Burgoyne.

Colin Adams.

References:

Scott, John GM, Mack, Frank D. & Clarke, James M. [2007]: Kenn St. Andrew. Towers and Bells of Devon, Vol 2. [Exeter Mint Press] pp.222.
Morter Ian C. [1997] The Parish of Kenn. A Guide & History. Westprint, EXETER, EX5 1SA.



Devon Association of Ringers - Novice and Intermediate Competition

Saturday 8th March 2025
Down St Mary (6 Bells, 7-3-16 in Ab)

As some ringers will already know, 2025 is the centenary year for the Devon Association of Ringers. Founded in 1925, this is the only geographical organisation dedicated to the Devon Call-Change style of ringing, which is notable for the omission of the handstroke rest and the emphasis on rising and lowering in peal. Our centenary committee is hard at work planning a year of fun and festivities to mark this milestone.

The first event in our centenary calendar was the fantastic Novice and Intermediate Competition on 8th March 2025. Like all the DAR competitions this event moves from place to place each year, alternating between South Devon and North Devon venues. Following a very well attended event at Dunsford in 2024, Down St Mary in North Devon took on the responsibility of hosting this year's competition. Competition Secretary (North) Andrew Vincent invited interest early in the year so there was plenty of time for planning, but no one was prepared for the deluge of entries received. This year was a true record breaker, with 34 entries from 17 different towers in 3 sections. The whole of Devon was represented, from Ilfracombe and Berryarbor in the north to Kingswear in the south, Lamerton in the west and Tiverton in the east.

Very unfortunately Andrew was taken ill the day before the competition. Stepping in with less than 24 hours to go, our Master of Ceremonies was Tim Jones, DAR Webmaster and Tower Captain at Tiverton St Paul's.

The three sections were as follows:

1. (Novice) Round ringing off the stay (1 minute practice then 5 minutes marked)
2. (Novice) Peal of Queens changes off the stay (2 minutes practice rounds then marked changes)
3. (Intermediate) Peal of Queens changes with rise and lower (no practice, no time limit)

Our hardworking judges were Paul Wright and Reed Partridge for sections 1 and 2. Paul judged section 3 on his own (after a fortifying buffet tea!) as Reed wanted to ring with his own team for the Intermediate section, having won section 2 last year.

We kicked off with the roll call for Section 1 very promptly at 12pm. After sorting some last minute alterations to the entry list, the draw was made and most people vacated the church to allow the first team in the round ringing section to get started. The short ringing time allowed swift changeovers between teams and everyone presented themselves as required to fill their slot. It was efficiently done and it helped very much that Down St Mary bells are rung from the ground floor.

While the ringing got underway, many people headed over to the village hall, handily located right next door to the church. This is where Competition Secretary (South) Julia Jarvis, with Nicky Cleave and Linda Steer were serving soup (carrot and coriander or chicken noodle) complete with bread roll, followed by a pasty and tea and coffee.

At 2pm, while the judges were compiling their scores, the ringers from both section 1 and section 2 gathered in the church to witness the draw of ringing slots for the next section. It was standing room only! We then did the results and there was tumultuous applause for the round ringing winners from Ilfracombe (full results shown below) but also huge support for the younger and newer ringers in the room. Our youngest ringers on the day were 11 year olds Isla from Tiverton St Paul and Emma from South Brent.

Section 2 started just after 2.15pm and was as efficient and organised as before. By now people had identified that our centenary gifts coordinator, Charles Conibear, was selling centenary commemorative badges and clothing and he was doing good and steady trade all day.

At 4pm everyone gathered in the church again for the section 2 results and the draw for section 3. Section 2 was won by the team from Dolton, featuring 16-year-old Henry Gent who started ringing in November 2023. This was his first competition and the whole team were delighted in their well-deserved win.

During the day everyone had the opportunity to admire a special centenary cake made by Ukrainian baker Elyzaveta (Lyza) from Chagford. There was a cake-cutting ceremony with DAR President Ian Avery and DAR Centenary Committee Chair Jon Bint. They were accompanied by Tanya and Emma Chekanovska, mother and daughter ringers from South Brent, who also hail from Ukraine and have been ringing for just over two years. They were joined by fellow Intermediate teammate Sofia Hines-Gonzalez and their teachers, Suzanne Driscoll and Graham Sharland.

Throughout section 2 the catering angels laid out a fabulous buffet tea, which opened early to accommodate the sheer number of ringers milling around the village. The village hall was a welcome warm space during a dry but chilly day.

At 8pm the results for section 3 were read out, with the first and second places being taken by South Brent (team 2) and South Brent (team 3), featuring Emma and Tanya respectively. It was noted during the day that the competition coincided with International Women's Day, and that every team included female ringers, with Kingsteignton fielding an all women's team for the first time.

Special thanks must go to Tim Jones for being so calm and collected on a day of epic proportions. He executed the plans laid out by Andrew Vincent to the letter and of course we were all thinking of Andrew and hoping for his speedy recovery. Also huge thanks to Julia, Nicky and Linda who worked as a seamless team to keep everyone warm, refreshed and fed; to Bob Robinson for running a fantastic raffle; Andrew Cleave for hosting the judges and acting as coordinator-in-chief; President Ian Avery for presenting the prizes; Jon Bint for acting as temporary MC while Tim was on Judges Liaison Duty and to all our novice, improving and experienced ringers for making this day a fantastic success. In a year in which we want to showcase our traditions, our hopes for the future and our brilliantly skilled ringers it really couldn't have gone any better and has set a truly joyful tone for the rest of the centenary.

Victoria Tucker.

Novice & Intermediate Competition Down St Mary Saturday 8th March

Section 1 - Round Ringing

1. 191/2 Ilfracombe Holy Trinity
2. 21 1/2 Kingswear 2
3. 21 1/2 Morchard Bishop 2
4. 30 Lympstone
5. 311/2 Kingsteignton
6. 32 1/2/ Bere Ferrers
7. 34 3/4 Swimbridge
8. 35 1/4 Tiverton St Paul
9. 40 1/2 Christow
10. 57 3/4 Morchard Bishop 3
11. 63 Kingswear 1
12. 63 1/2 Morchard Bishop 1

Section 2 - Change Ringing

1. 253/4 Dolton
2. 27 Kingsteignton
3. 283/4 Berrynarbour 2
4. 29 1/2 Chagford
5. 30 Stoke Canon
6. 40 Swimbridge
7. 421/4 Tiverton St Paul 2
8. 441/4 Berrynarbour 1
9. 451/2 Lamerton
10. 461/2 Tiverton St Paul 1
11. 471/2 South Molton
12. 55 Lympstone

Section 3 - Change Ringing Rise and Lower

1. 303/4 South Brent 2
2. 531/2 South Brent 3
3. 62 Tiverton St Paul
4. 64 South Brent 1
5. 65 South Molton
6. 71 3/4 Kingsteignton
7. 731/2 Ashreigney
8. 781/2 Berrynarbour
9. 82 Chagford
10. 103 Bovey Tracey

Judges: Paul Wright and Reed Partridge

Centenary Major Final Zeal Monachorum – 14th June

1. 16 2/3 Down St Mary
2. 17 1/2 Bow
3. 19 2/3 Shaugh Prior
4. 20 1/2 Swimbridge
5. 23 2/3 Combeinteignhead
6. 29 South Brent
7. 39 Egguckland
8. 45 1/4 Sampford Courtenay
9. 75 Kenton
10. 93 1/2 Ide
11. 106 3/4 East Anstey
12. No score off course. Broadhempston

Top Ringing Prize: Down St Mary

Judges: Owen Borlase, George Rogers,
Martin Sharland Scrutineer: Jereme Darke

Old Moreton Deanery competition North Bovey on Sat. 7th June

Intermediate, from the Stay:

1. Bovey Tracey 42
2. Moretonhampstead 101

Main competition:

1. Widecombe 54
2. Bovey Tracey A 91
3. Ilsington 117
4. Bickington 133
5. Buckland 180

Judge: Jereme Darke

Okehampton Deanery Bridestowe on the 7th June

Intermediate Section

(half a peal off the stay)

1. North Tawton 33
2. Hatherleigh II 38
3. Hatherleigh I 47
4. Exbourne 55
5. Bridestowe 60

Main Section

1. Honeychurch 47
2. Sampford Courtenay A 52
3. Sampford Courtenay B 63
4. Chagford 71
5. Hatherleigh 139
6. South Tawton 140

Judge: Paul Wright

All-Devon Challenge 8 Bell Chagford on the 19th April

1. 94 North Central
2. 127 South Central
3. 158 South West
4. 160 South East
5. 187 1/2 North East
6. 196 North West

All-Devon Challenge 6 Bell Throwleigh on the 19th April

1. 12 North West
2. 313/4 North Central
3. 413/4 South West
4. 57 South East
5. 711/2 North East
6. 801/2 South Central

All-Devon Challenge 5 Bell Gidleigh on the 19th April

Round 1 - 361/2 North
Round 1 - 45 South
Round 2 - 32 1/2 South
Round 2 - 37 1/2 South
Round 3 - 271/4 North
Round 3 - 36 South
Winners - North 21 & Under

Judges: Steve Facey, Paul Wright, Reed Partridge, James Kerslake.



Under 21 All Devon Challenge Competitors: Back L to R - Tom Squire, Will Rout, Esme Kerslake, Ian Avery, Lucy Campbell, Archie Edworthy, Front L to R: Emma Chekanovska, Ewan Kaczanow, Autumn Avery, Clara Waller, Dylan Hulme.

Devon Association of Ringers Centennial All-Devon Challenge

Saturday 19th April 2025 started like many a Devon morning – rather overcast, with definite wetness falling from the sky. And it was in this mizzle, at 8.30am, that several members of the DAR Centenary Committee came together to unleash months of planning on an unsuspecting DAR membership.

The first sign that something new was happening was the massive cinema screen that was being erected in the Jubilee Hall. Martin Pailthorpe and the team made it look easy, but there was a considerable amount of 'structure' holding that 15' screen in place! And lots of wiring to ensure the projector and sound bars were working and in the best places. In the kitchen, Ruth Bint and the Chagford catering team were taking delivery of rather a lot of food, most of which they had made themselves.

With both lunches and teas available later in the day, preparation was key to make sure everyone was fed and watered. In the entranceway to the Jubilee Hall, Darrelyn Gunsburg, Bernadette Brady and I set to work arranging the DAR mini-exhibition which included a screen showing Bernadette's presentation of the Devon Association Roll Call – very interesting facts and figures about our organisation which are also woven into the fabulous film.

It seemed no time at all before people started arriving – Jon had requested that the competition judges and I join him for a quick run-through of Stannary up in the tower before the first film showing. What a beautiful sequence to ring on those glorious bells! Towards the end, James Kerslake invented a new change, "4 to...something!" which thanks to a friendly wink and some guesswork we managed to execute without a hitch.

Immediately after the peal we headed back to the hall for the first screening of the film, which started just after 11am. We didn't get a full house of bookings through the ticketing system, but the advertising evidently worked as the film played to a full house, with more people trying to come in as the film progressed. This film really is a joyful expression of what we do and the people exhibiting our style of ringing in their communities. Showcasing a lovely juxtaposition of the traditional and the innovative, our brilliant Film Committee has captured both our history and our hopes for the future in a delightfully clever way. Please do explore the film and the added extras that can be found on the Devon Association of Ringers YouTube channel – search @devonassociationofringers to find it.

Immediately after the lights went up tummies could be heard rumbling and the catering team swung into action. With over 100 people in the room and more turning up for the competition elements of the day, the food and drinks were efficiently laid out and made to look very appetising! Those of us that were present all day can't thank this team enough for everything they did to keep us fed and



North East L to R: Lee Avery, John Warne, Keith Bavin, Sheila Scofield, Steve Ford, Bob Robinson, John Crotty, Linda Steer.



North West L to R: Ron Kenwood, John Barnes, Jo Tucker, Barbara Dart, David Barnes, Ed Edgecombe, Bev Gould, Andrew Snell.



South Central: Sam Lavin, Mark Pring, Suzanne Driscoll, Will Carew, Alan Brown, Frank Martin, Andy Teed, John Kelly.

watered. The crowds thinned noticeably before 2pm as ringers headed off to the various towers for the competitions.

Jon's vision for a competition-done-differently was initially an awkward one to pull together, but the regions found their stride in time and every area of the county (North West, North Central, North East, South West, South Central and South East) was represented in both the 6 bell and 8 bell competitions. Two brilliant youth teams were chosen and supported to represent North Devon and South Devon in arguably the most thrilling part of the day – the best-of-three ringing matches held on the five bells at Gidleigh.

The 3pm film screening wasn't quite as packed with people as the first one, but there was still a very engaged audience and there were questions from the floor afterwards. We also had a trickle of people visiting the exhibition, and as ringers came back from the competitions there were noticeably more people for the 5pm screening of the film, which again generated lots of praise and questions.

After the film finished Jon officiated to announce the results of each of the three competitions, with the Northern teams putting forward three winning sides. The biggest applause of all went to the 21-and-under youth teams (both North and South) for a tightly contested competition with improving scores across the three rounds at Gidleigh.

While not a traditional Devon Association competition, the feedback from this event has been overwhelmingly positive and there is no doubt that Jon has created a new model of competing that should be executed again in the future. The tangible benefits included fabulous cooperation across multiple towers, increased practices in the regions so ringers could get to know each other, the showcasing of our young talent and the focus on a non-ringing element (the film screenings) which had the effect of both bringing ringers together and sharing our traditions with the public. Chagford was the perfect location in terms of bells, facilities and the wonderful hospitality.

It's not often that every single ringer leaves a competition wearing the same big smile. But this event was so much more than that, and it has truly left its mark.

Victoria Tucker
Photos: Clare Griffiths.



South East - Back L to R: Martin Sharland, James Kirkcaldy, Ryan Brodie, Joe Tucker. Front L to R: Chloe Sharland, Clare Griffiths, Kathryn Kerslake, Colin Adams.



Inaugural Winners - North Central - L to R: Karen Squire, Stuart Bennie, Andrew Gist, Robin Canniford, Del Jones, Steven Herniman, Ali Watterson, Chris Lock



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Centenary Ringing

On Saturday the 31st of May, towers rang out across the county to celebrate one hundred years of the Devon Association. Pictured below are the Great Torrington and Monkleigh ringers who joined this celebration.

L to R - Steve McWatters, Jonathan Eveleigh, Clive Ward, Lewis Dart, Phil Middleton, Heather Middleton, Barbara Dart. Also present were Gill Armstrong and Supervisors - Kathy Wyke and James Ward.



Centenary Badges

We hope that you are wearing your Centenary Badge with pride. But if you haven't got round to ordering yours yet there is still time. They come with a plastic case and cost just £7 each. Post and packing is £2 but this can be for up to 6 badges so you could send a group order with some of your ringing colleagues. Either pay by internet banking DAR 53-50-28 09202153 and send an email with your order details and bank reference to: non-treasurer@devonbells.co.uk or send a cheque with your order to DAR 2 Anning Crescent, Exeter EX2 8NG

100 Ringing on 31 May

Did you join in with the Ringing throughout Devon? This is just a gentle reminder that a donation of £1 per ringer was agreed for the Devon Bells Restoration Fund. If you have already contributed - many thanks. If not your donation via your tower captain or treasurer would be much appreciated. The same bank details as in the badge reminder notice. In theory we should be able to raise at least £600.



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EGGBUCKLAND and FRIENDS SPRING TOUR OF HEREFORDSHIRE April 2025

On Friday 4th April twelve ringers departed from various corners of Devon and headed for the ancient fortress town of Chepstow on the England/Wales border. We set off on a cool morning in a typical Devon 'mizzle' but by the time we had crossed the Severn Bridge the sky had lightened and it promised to be a beautiful day. The Priory church of St Mary's was built in 1072, just a few years after Chepstow's castle and although greatly modified since, the original long vaulted nave can still be admired from the ringing chamber. The original eight bells, with a 16cwt tenor, were made locally by William Evans in 1735 with two lighter Taylor's bells added in 1959. The ten bells were nice to ring but those front two were difficult to hear and a final ring on the back eight was much more conducive to good striking.

We then enjoyed a lovely scenic drive along the delightful Wye Valley to the market town of Monmouth, founded by the Romans around AD 55 as the fort of Blestium. A Benedictine Priory was built here in 1075 but the current church of St Mary's, with its impressive 200 foot high spire, dates from the 18th and 19th centuries. The 17cwt peal of eight rang their weight but went up well and were lovely to ring, even drawing some applause from bystanders outside. By this time the weather was glorious and we were able to sit in the sunshine outside The Punch House before our lunch. This pub sits on a corner of Agincourt Square, named after the famous victory won by King Henry V who was born at the town's castle in 1837.

After lunch we crossed the border into rural Herefordshire and were at once struck by the amount of roadside daffodils blooming all along our route. Perhaps it shouldn't have been a surprise that the national flower of Wales should be so prolific in this south-west corner of the county which in medieval times was a predominantly Welsh speaking, shadowy borderland, lying neither in England or Wales, known as Archenfield. It is thought to have been a Celtic saint that founded the village of St Weonards, our next destination. The church has a broad, solid tower, thick walls and small windows, features which turned out to be typical in the county. Five bells were installed by the Rudhall founders of Gloucester in 1801 with a new tenor added by Taylor's of Loughborough in 1882. They proved to be a very nice 10 cwt six to ring, if not the most tuneful.

Then it was on to St Andrews at Allensmore, another ancient church with a broad tower housing an 11cwt six which were totally refurbished in 2005. These were a nice ring to end the day before we moved on to check in to the Red Lion at Bredwardine. This traditional country hotel dates back to the 17th century with low beams, oak panelling and lead-lined windows. It also incorporates a fishery and is very popular with coarse fishermen but this early in the season we were able to book the entire place for ourselves. Friday is busy with locals coming in for fish and chips so we enjoyed a few drinks, including Wye Valley's Butty Bach ale and Hereford's own Stowford Press cider, before a good dinner.

Saturday dawned with clear blue skies but a chilly breeze was blowing as we made our way to the church at Bredwardine, dedicated to St Andrew in the 11th century. This is another historic church in a lovely, peaceful setting above the River Wye, whose one time vicar, Francis Kilvert, published a Victorian diary of parish life. The bell tower was refurbished in 2007 with the old oak frame replaced and the bells tuned and rehung with a recast, almost 10 cwt, tenor. We had been warned that the ringing chamber was a bit cramped but that was clearly only in comparison to the spacious belfries of Herefordshire as by usual standards it seemed to be of perfectly normal proportions. This six went very well and were one of my favourites of the whole weekend despite the second occasionally jumping it's wheel in one of the peals.

We headed west again for our next ring, the 12cwt eight at Clifford, a village very close to the Welsh border with wonderful views from St Mary's churchyard towards the Black Mountains and the Brecon Beacons beyond. This was a ground floor ring and although the bells were lovely to handle they sounded very faint and far away until the trapdoor was raised a little more. Outside in the glorious weather a memorial sundial seemed the perfect spot for a group photo before heading to Almesley for lunch. This journey involved crossing the Wye once again and one option was via the Whitney Bridge, one of the few privately owned toll bridges still operating in the UK. At the delightful Bells Inn everyone enjoyed a good lunch and some took advantage of the quiet sheltered garden for a spot of sunbathing.

This northern area of Herefordshire is renowned for its 'black and white' villages and our next stop, Eardisley, is one of the smaller examples of these with traditional timber-framed and white plastered cottages lining its single street. The parish church of St Mary Magdalene mostly dates from the 14th century and is home to one of the finest carved Norman fonts in England. The westerly tower contains an 8cwt ring of six bells which went well despite the long draft and new ropes but for a light set they couldn't be rushed.

We travelled north again to the village of Kington which sits directly on the Offa's Dyke national trail. The 12th century tower of St Mary's was originally free standing until the church was extended and in the 18th century five Rudhall bells were installed and the tower topped with an impressive broach spire. A sixth bell was inserted as the second by William Evans of Chepstow before the bells were refurbished by Whitechapel in 1978. Although heavy for an 11cwt six, the front five being between 6 and 9cwt, they were nice to ring and had a wonderful deep tone.

It's a short drive to the hillside church at Lyonshall which sits alongside the ruins of a moated castle about half a mile from the main village, which relocated after the Black Death. Here we found another Rudhall six, with a 12cwt tenor, that were cast in 1727 and rehung in a steel frame in 1924. These proved to be quite a tricky set, not helped by the long draft and the evening sun pouring in to blind the treble and second ringers. This golden time before sunset enhanced our drive south as we passed huge fields full of sheep with their new lambs, apple orchards, magnificent magnolias and swathes of blackthorn frothy with blossom. It is especially easy at this time of year to spot the abundance of evergreen mistletoe hanging in great balls from host trees that have yet to come into leaf. So much of this semi-parasitic plant grows on the apple trees, hawthorns, poplars and oaks in Herefordshire that mistletoe auctions are an ancient traditional and it's no surprise to learn it is the county flower.

Herefordshire is also renowned for the red and white breed of cattle which bears its name and is said to have originated at Weobley, our last tower of the day. This is another pretty village where black and white buildings line the main street leading to the church of St Peter and St Paul whose commanding spire is attached to a tall, sturdy tower by elaborate pinnacles and flying buttresses. The 17cwt six were tuned and rehung by Taylor's in 1983 and went very well for their weight. After a great days ringing we enjoyed a good meal at The Boat in a lovely riverside setting at Whitney before heading back to our hotel for a few nightcaps.

The weather continued to be glorious as we set off for the village of Hampton Bishop where we were going to ring before the morning service. St Andrews is a beautiful, historic church whose ancient organ is reputed to have been played by Edward Elgar when he lived nearby. Its red sandstone tower is topped with a black and white timber framed belfry whose six bells mostly date from the 17th century and are hung in an oak frame.

The plain bearings would have benefitted from a little more oil to say the least as these bells proved hard work just to keep up and combined with springy ropes were certainly the most challenging of the tour. Although the locals were very welcoming and delighted to hear the bells ringing none of us were keen on a second peal and we moved on to Holme Lacy.

St Cuthbert's is set in lovely grounds on a bend of the River Wye and it's isolated position over a mile from the modern village perhaps explains why it became redundant and passed into the care of the Churches Conservation Trust in 1994. The solid 14th century tower houses a Rudhall's peal of eight bells with an 18cwt tenor which are nice to ring but the lighter bells were difficult to hear. Then it was on to the unusually named Bunch of Carrots for lunch where some of the group had worked up enough of an appetite to opt for the impressive looking carvery.

Our next destination was Fownhope where the church of St Mary's boasts much Romanesque stone carving including the unusual arched bell openings featuring columns and capitals. It is one of the county's longest churches at 119 feet and the tall broach spire is clad with over 20,000 oak shingles. The 13cwt ring of six, cast by Rudhall's in 1792 and rehung in a metal frame by Gillett and Johnson in 1936, were lovely to ring but didn't like to be rushed.

Our last ring of the tour was the pretty light eight at Bridstow where Sue and I had rung the back six on a ladies trip to Herefordshire in 2007. The captain there recalled this occasion even before we mentioned it and it was particularly poignant for us as one of our ladies, Sue Belton from West Down, sadly passed away just over a year ago. The bells went very well but needed a light touch at the front as the stays never seemed far away. We said farewell to Janet and John here while the rest of us made our way to The Merry Monk at Monkton Heathfield for our evening meal. We hadn't realised the pub only served a carvery on Sunday evenings so some had to indulge in another roast dinner, in true Vicar of Dibley style, while others could only squeeze in a pudding!

Huge thanks must go to Dave for organising the whole thing and everyone who joined us to make such a lovely weekend of ringing, blessed with amazing weather, good bells (mostly!), historic villages, beautiful countryside and great company.

Hilary Trout.



Standing L – R: Janet Dietz; Sonia Andrews; Steve Freeman; Paul Wright; Ali Waterson; Graham Pascoe; John Dietz; Sitting L – R Hilary Trout; Chris Lock; Sue Ashton; Martin Sharland; Dave Trout.

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The Barden's Farewell at Bigbury. Saturday 15th March 2025.

On a bright but Chilly Saturday afternoon visiting bell ringers and friends came to say farewell to Harry and Ellen Bardens as they prepared to leave the village. In addition to Harry and Ellen, we had seven other Bardens include 4 grandchildren present. The Devon Association of Ringers (DAR) turned out in force and treated us to some stunning bell ringing. They made the bells positively sing.

Ian Avery, President of the Devon Association of Ringers reminisced about the times both he and his late father Bill had shared many a bell tower with Harry and Ellen and thanked them for their contribution to the DAR over the last six decades. Harry has been the Bell Captain at Bigbury for the last 67 years. Now that must be a record of some sort? Many in the DAR know the Bardens as bellringers and competition judges. Yet Harry and Ellen are the last of a long line of Bardens who have continuously lived in the village for over 400 years.

They were presented with a copy of a book prepared for the event "The Bardens of Bigbury" that was freely available during the afternoon that gave real insight into the true enormity of how much the Bardens had contributed to the fabric of the village over the last four hundred years. They had run pubs, a shop, the post office, the garage and Barden's tea shop as well as fishing the waters of Bigbury Bay. Similarly visitors were also encouraged to write memories and messages to the Bardens in the memories book. A really enjoyable afternoon was had by all.

Henry Wainwright.

Bigbury Flower and Ringing Festival 8, 9 and 10 August 2025

After twenty years of silence the bells in the Bigbury tower are now back in action. In December 2024 we have added an extra floor to the belfry to reduce the sound of the bells in the ringing chamber. On Friday 8 August to Sunday 10 August the St Lawrence's Church is holding a flower festival. To coincide with this I would like to invite visiting bell ringing bands to come and ring and see the church at its best.

Interested? Please contact: Henry Wainwright 07716 262293 or henry.wainwright52@gmail.com



Brian Drake, who was one of the longest serving members of the Devon Association of Ringers, passed away on 27th May 2025. His funeral service took place at St. Peter's Church, North Tawton on Monday 16th June 2025. We send condolences to his three daughters, Linda, Susan and Kathryn and his son Stephen. A eulogy to Brian will feature in the Late 2025 Edition of Devon Calls.