

MASTER'S REPORT FOR 2023 TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY ON 18TH MARCH 2024

Many thanks for the support shown in this year. Special thanks go to the dozen or so people who have covered my numerous absences during the year. Many thanks also go to the officers who keep things running smoothly – as has been commented in previous years, some of the roles have been expanding gradually over time and account for very significant numbers of hours contributed outside the tower.

As we start this 300th anniversary 'year', I would like to emphasize the goal of friends celebrating ringing with a connection to Cambridge. The window for anniversary celebrations is open until November 2025 – some great events are already planned, but do you have an idea for something to achieve in the next year? Share your thoughts!

Ringling at GSM

One of the long-standing difficulties at GSM is that we encompass a very wide range of activities, often within the context of a single session. Sunday mornings are perhaps a pinnacle of this tricky ridge – five or six touches which need to provide engagement at the right level for everyone.

There are at least four distinct goals with obvious benefits. The natural desire is to try and push ahead with all of them, but we should recognise that the alignment is not perfect:

- Increasing average service ringing attendance
- Increasing the average quality of ringing
- Increasing the quality of the best ringing
- Individual growth and improvement of ringers

Of these, service ringing attendance is perhaps the only trend where there is a long-term concern – despite the apparent health of practices, this hasn't halted the slow decline in service ringing attendance. As mentioned last year, this can be partly explained by the fact that it's difficult to ring at both the student tower (St Bene't's) and Great St Mary's now that the service times are aligned. If there is concern about this trend, I would like to suggest tracking of attendance at morning and evensong ringing separately, given that Sunday morning is the de facto focus of Society service ringing.

A possible criticism is that the best ringing has not improved as quickly as we would like, given that the current band is as strong as at any time in the last decade. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be consensus on the way to improve.

I think the basic facts are agreed by all – improvement comes from ringing in touches of excellent quality. Avoidable striking errors and method mistakes are very strong detractors from the ability to produce excellent quality ringing and should be minimised as far as possible.

The main divergence in opinion is what practical measures can help to reduce method mistakes and improve striking quality. Whilst these are somewhat strawmen positions, I would characterise there as being a group in favour of higher pressure to try and improve focus and a group in favour of lower pressure to allow a more natural performance. Clearly we cannot pursue both routes simultaneously! I would note that Great St Mary's is amongst the most geographically isolated of the

regular entrants to the National 12-bell contest, and that adds to the need to accommodate differing styles and approaches to ringing.

In terms of practical actions, I can only suggest the following:

- Try to develop an understanding of how others are trying to improve and support them if possible.
- Recognise that we are all fallible (to annoyingly different degrees, I can say from personal experience!) and that a failure to reach or maintain a high standard cannot be simply equated to effort or desire to reach or maintain that standard.
- Trying to find a positive way to move forward on occasions we have missed what we could be capable of.

I understand ringing can sometimes have a 'conveyor belt' feeling as we try to pack ringing into sessions – that's largely a practical concern and certainly not designed to starve conversation about ringing. If there is a positive or open discussion to be had, I am keen for it to be shared.

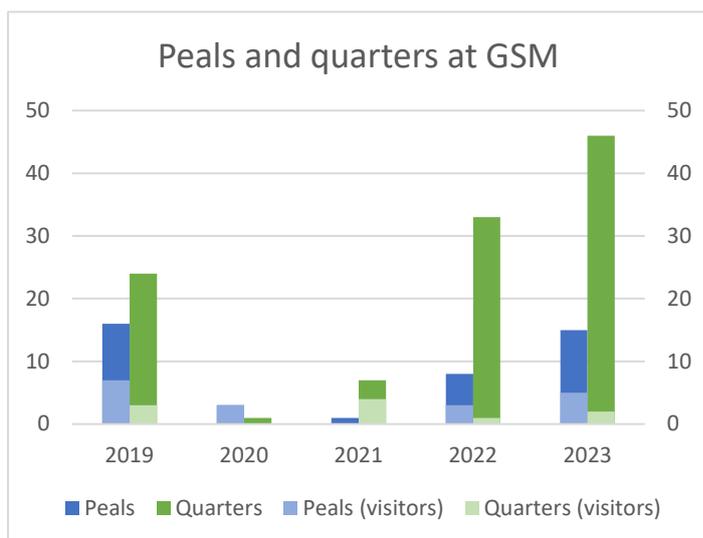
Following on from the suggestion at last year's AGM, I have tried to bring forward some of the best ringing in their respective sessions (i.e. trying to emphasise that it's not only the last one or two pieces which are expected to be of high calibre). This has been manifested as a goal to ring a touch of three stars or higher at or soon after 8pm on Monday nights, and similarly at or soon after 9.30am on Sunday mornings. The risk is that it 'flattens the peak' (average level is higher, but peak is lower) – this doesn't appear to be the case so far.

I feel that 'standing behind' culture has been reasonably well embedded in the last year – certainly the number of incidences of people giving 'additional advice' to the person who is being helped has decreased, which is good.

Ringling trends

Average service ringing attendance is again slightly down from pre-pandemic levels (16.9 in 2019, 16.2 in 2022 and 16.0 in 2023). Median practice night touch quality has improved from the directly post-pandemic levels (~50ms) back to its pre-pandemic levels (~40ms). The top 5% of practice ringing shows a similar trend – it peaked at 35ms immediately post pandemic and has now returned to around 29ms as before the pandemic.

The number of peals and quarters rung at GSM is now similar to pre-pandemic levels – thanks to Patrick for the coordination this year. It should be noted that there is a slow upward creep of total ringing at GSM – more quarters rung, 12-bell practices as independent weeknight sessions and reduced silent period during Easter term. Both the Youths and, perhaps more importantly, the church are alert to the risk of noise complaints. As far as we are aware, there was only one formal complaint made in the last year (complaint to Environmental Health, June 2023). The church confirmed our ringing times and no further action has been taken.



Year	Peals		Quarters	
	Total	Visitor	Total	Visitor
2019	16	7	24	3
2020	3	3	1	0
2021	1	0	7	4
2022	8	3	33	1
2023	15	5	46	2

Ringling for the 300th Anniversary

Hopefully people will have seen the BellBoard event for the 300th anniversary – it can be found at <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/event.php?id=18024>.

The goal is to use this event to celebrate ringing with a connection to the Cambridge Youths and/or Great St Mary's. Ideally, I would like to cast the net as far and wide as possible – especially to those who have been ringing regularly at GSM in the past but are no longer doing so. All ringing is accepted – from short touches through to quintuple-peals!

The plan is to have celebration ringing primarily led by members - i.e. providing an environment for members to do what symbolises ringing in Cambridge for them (past, present and future). To that end, we have tried to make GSM as available as possible. The majority of peal slots for 2024 were allocated shortly after the November 2023 EGM where this strategy was first announced and the expectation is that a similar number of slots should be available to members in 2025.

The anniversary arc is due to close in November 2025, after the tercentenary of the first peal at GSM, and a book will be produced for the Cambridge Youths archive. It will include all the performance summaries of ringing associated with the BellBoard event and any other relevant ringing which people make me aware of. It will also include a refresh of the general description of ringing in Cambridge in 2024 (analogous to the description recorded in the minute book in 1999). Whilst BellBoard is an excellent resource for recording and collecting the ringing, I am interested in any additional information for performances – as much or as little from the following list as you would like:

- Details of lost attempts (without any bitter recrimination please – that can be saved for 'Volume 2' of the book!)
- Video or audio of some or all of the ringing for the Youths digital archive
- Photos of the band and/or venue (if not already published on BellBoard)
- Why or when the venue was selected
- Whether there is a special background to the ringing not otherwise obvious
- How ringers got to the venue
- Any activities before or after the ringing (e.g. cafés / pubs visited)
- Thoughts about how the ringing fits into other contexts (e.g. other ringing at GSM, ringing in and around Cambridgeshire, other comparable ringing)

- Any other observations of interest (e.g. any well-wishers come to find out who is ringing, loud protests outside, shop staff or clergy coming into the ringing room to ask how much longer a peal might go on for)

Please send these details to me directly and they will be collated for inclusion in the book. If the ringing itself is not recorded on BellBoard, I would be grateful for equivalent details for publication.

There are a few 'commissioned' pieces of ringing for the 300th Anniversary:

- Ladies peal, 9th March at GSM
With congratulations to the band and Liz for organising, a peal of Cambridge Surprise Major [was scored](#)
- Long length attempt, 1st April at GSM
The goal is 10,300 Stedman Cinques.
- Peal, 29th October at St Mary, Redcliffe
- Long length attempt, 28th December at GSM

At the moment, there is no specific plan for a 'peal weekend' – if there is a strong desire for one, please feel free to suggest a location and a date in 2025.

Teaching

Thanks go to Jonathan Shanklin for provision of the 6pm handling sessions and 6.30pm 'improvers' practice on Monday nights. It's good to be able to offer continuity from initial handling through to ringing on 12, but it's also good to appreciate that people need to build their 6 / 8 bell repertoire in parallel at other towers.

National 12-bell Contest

David Pipe organised the entry to the 12-bell contest on behalf of the Cambridge Youths. He writes

For the third time in succession, the band representing Cambridge came first in the 12-bell contest eliminator - this time at Hursley. This consistency is not down to luck. In recent years, the preparation and build up ahead of the eliminators and final have been a positive and rewarding experience. Having a slightly larger core squad has worked well both in terms of giving those not ringing in the contest exposure to a higher standard or ringing as well as practice dates being easy to find because of having a larger squad.

Unfortunately, we were not able to convert the solid preparation into a result at the final at Sheffield and the team were placed seventh out of ten. The teams in the middle were tightly bunched and our score was only 6% off third place. Although Birmingham once again won, their ringing was definitely beatable - and potentially by us. We need to take that belief forward with us in 2024!

Thanks to everyone for their continued support in terms of our contest entry.

Use of HawkEar in the tower

HawkEar continues to be a useful tool for improvement. Whilst there are possible enhancements that could be made to the ergonomics, the system has remained largely stable since 2019, providing automatic analysis of striking and feedback which can be reviewed during each session and then afterwards by a unique link which is typically circulated by email. If you wish to receive these emails, please sign up at <https://bellringers.org/listinfo/gsm-hawkear>

One benefit is that we are building a library of touch summary information of more-or-less all ringing back to 2019. Information about ringing trends within this report can be backed up by HawkEar data where relevant, which I am happy to share with interested parties.

Other news and events

A submission was made on behalf of the Cambridge Youths to the [Consultation on the 2003 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage](#). Bell-ringing clearly fits within several of the defined activities given in the proposal, so it appears that there will be no barrier to recognition if the convention is finally adopted.

The [Market Square Project](#) is on-going, but seems to be focussing mainly on cosmetic issues relating to the space. Bell-ringers are mentioned as stakeholders in the project, but no further consultations have been announced.

It was confirmed that a termination and mutual release agreement was signed with NET in January 2024, meaning that there is no longer the threat of telecoms equipment installation in the tower.

An intercom between the shop and ringing chamber was installed in May 2023, with 100% of the cost covered by donations from the ringers. Despite some initial (literal) snagging issues, it has been quite reliable and beneficial to communication.

Dave Richards

Master, Society of Cambridge Youths

Appendix – Performance details

Peal details

18 peals were rung by the Society in 2022 and there were 8 further peals at GSM:

Date	T/H	Location	Performance	Society	Footnotes
05/01	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5040 Stedman Triples	EDA	
19/01	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5016 Spliced Maximus (6m)	SCY	
26/02	Hand	Risby (Risby Manor South)	5040 Treble Dodging Minor (7m)	SCY	
07/03	Hand	Willingham (53 Covent Garden)	5040 Stedman Triples	SCY	First as conductor in hand: Cecilia Pipe First woman to conduct Stedman Triples in hand in 65 years
08/03	Hand	Willingham (53 Covent Garden)	5040 Bristol Surprise Maximus	SCY	First on 12 in hand: Jadd Virji
11/03	Tower	Leighton Bromswold (St Mary)	5040 Doubles (14m)	SCY	In memory of Rev'd Anna Matthews
16/03	Hand	Willingham (53 Covent Garden)	5040 Spliced Fourths Place Delight Minor (35m)	SCY	First of this composition in hand
26/03	Tower	Tibenhams (All Saints)	5040 Surprise Minor (7m)	SCY	
15/04	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5088 Bristol Surprise Maximus	ASCY	First maximus: Charlotte Linford
01/05	Tower	Exeter (Cathedral Church of St Peter)	5009 Stedman Cinques	SCY	
06/05	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5042 Cambridge Surprise Maximus	SCY	Rung immediately following the Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla at Westminster Abbey.
04/07	Hand	Willingham (53 Covent Garden)	5040 Spliced Surprise Minor (41m)	SCY	
15/07	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5060 Stedman Cinques	EDA	
27/07	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5088 Yorkshire Surprise Major	EDA	
05/08	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5088 Spliced Maximus (3m)	ASCY	
10/08	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5090 Bristol Surprise Maximus	SCY	Engagement compliment to Stephanie Orme and Mark Deans. Ruby wedding anniversary compliment to Phil and Liz Orme.
19/08	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5040 Cambridge Surprise Maximus	Suffolk Guild	A Suffolk Guild centenary peal
07/10	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5042 Cambridge Surprise Maximus	SCY	To welcome the Rev'd Canon Jutta Brueck as Vicar of Great St Mary's. First on 12: Kirsten Hawkins First of maximus: Greg Chu, Melissa Nash
28/10	Tower	Wisbech (St Peter and St Paul)	5200 Stedman Caters	SCY	
28/10	Hand	Willingham (53 Covent Garden)	5040 Spliced Surprise Minor (41m)	SCY	

Date	T/H	Location	Performance	Society	Footnotes
28/10	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5040 Spliced Surprise Maximus (4m)	ASCY	
09/11	Hand	Cambridge (3 Ditton Lane)	5760 Spliced Surprise Minor (41m)	SCY	Composition rung in hand for the first time
12/11	Hand	Willingham (53 Covent Garden)	5040 Spliced Treble Dodging Minor (120m)	SCY	
18/11	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	5042 Cambridge Surprise Maximus	ASCY	
05/12	Hand	Cambridge (102 Mawson Road)	5056 Cambridge Surprise Major	SCY	
16/12	Hand	Willingham (53 Covent Garden)	5040 Spliced Treble Dodging Minor (76m)	SCY	

Quarter-peal details

The following 51 quarter peals were rung either for the Society of Cambridge Youths or rung at GSM:

Date	T/H	Location	Performance	Society	Footnotes
02/01	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	2023 Plain Bob Major		First inside for Lena van Dongen, Henry Morley
15/01	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1295 Grandsire Caters	CUGCR	First on 10: Sam Spencer
22/01	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1346 Cambridge Surprise Maximus		
29/01	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1313 Stedman Cinques	SCY	Welcoming Alexander, son of Emily and Dale
11/02	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1259 Grandsire Caters		
12/02	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1320 Grandsire Cinques	CUGCR	First on 12: Andrew Roberts
18/02	Hand	Willingham (53 Covent Garden)	1260 Stedman Triples	SCY	
26/02	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1344 Bristol Surprise Maximus		In memory of Roger Kendrick
05/03	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1260 Stedman Triples		
09/03	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1260 Plain Bob Minor	CUGCR	First inside: Lucy Hennessy First for the Guild: Alessandra Learmount Rung to celebrate the life of Rev'd Anna Matthews
12/03	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1344 Lessness Surprise Major	CUGCR	Rung in memory of Anna Matthews
18/03	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1259 Grandsire Caters	CUGCR	
18/03	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1260 Plain Bob Doubles	CUGCR	Rung by a band all taught from scratch by the Guild
18/03	Hand	Cambridge (GSM)	1320 Kent Treble Bob Minor		
19/03	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1311 Stedman Cinques	CUGCR	First Stedman Cinques: Greg Chu Remembering Shona McKay
18/03	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1320 London Surprise Minor	CUGCR	
26/03	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1378 Spliced Maximus (7m)	SCY	
30/03	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1311 Stedman Cinques		First quarter of Stedman: Rachel Arnold First quarter of Stedman Cinques: Alice Kirk
16/04	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1376 Superlative Surprise Major		
23/04	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1260 Stedman Cinques	SCY	
22/04	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1280 Grandsire Royal	CUGCR	First royal: Kate Jennings, Thomas Haslam
30/04	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1282 Cambridge Surprise Royal	SCY	
07/05	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1270 Stedman Triples	SCY	Marking the coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla
28/05	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1344 Bristol Surprise Maximus	SCY	First of maximus: Greg Chu
18/06	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1344 Bristol Surprise Maximus		70 th birthday compliment to Philip Hensman
05/07	Tower	Cottenham (All Saints)	2160 Spliced Treble Dodging Minor (180m)	SCY	
09/07	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1361 Stedman Cinques	SCY	

Date	T/H	Location	Performance	Society	Footnotes
15/07	Tower	Westminster (St Martin in the Fields)	1250 Cambridge Surprise Major	SCY	
15/07	Tower	City of London (St Giles without Cripplegate)	1260 Stedman Triples	SCY	
16/07	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1250 Cambridge Surprise Major		
23/07	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1280 Spiced Surprise Major (8m)	CUGCR	
30/07	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1259 Grandsire Caters	EDA	First of caters: Lena van Dongen
13/08	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1287 Stedman Cinques		Wedding compliment to Benedict and Lucy Todd
20/08	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1340 Stedman Caters		
03/09	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1296 Little Bob Royal		
10/09	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1287 Stedman Caters		Wedding compliment to François and Verity Sherwood.
30/09	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1320 Surprise Minor (2m)		To mark the induction of Rev'd Canon Jutta Brueck as Vicar of Great St Mary's
08/10	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1296 Stedman Caters		First of Stedman Caters: Sam Spencer, Andrew Roberts
19/10	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1282 Cambridge Surprise Royal		
22/10	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1282 Yorkshire Surprise Royal		Rung for the 40 th wedding anniversary of Richard and Diana Pargeter
29/10	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1250 Yorkshire Surprise Major	CUGCR	
11/11	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1265 Stedman Triples	SCY	
12/11	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1299 Stedman Cinques	SCY	
17/11	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1250 Pudsey Surprise Major	CUGCR	
19/11	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1360 London No. 3 Surprise Royal		
26/11	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1282 Cambridge Surprise Royal		First of royal: Sam Spencer
02/12	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1299 Stedman Cinques		First on 12: Chris Winkless-Clark, Ben Gladwyn First of Stedman Cinques: Melissa Nash
02/12	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1344 Superlative Surprise Major	CUGCR	
06/12	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1260 Stedman Cinques		
10/12	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1313 Stedman Cinques		Engagement compliment to Imogen Brooke and Andy Nash
17/12	Tower	Cambridge (GSM)	1344 Bristol Surprise Maximus		First of Bristol Maximum: Melissa Nash With best wishes to Callum Brittain, leaving GSM after seven years