

**MASTER's REPORT**  
**to the**  
**Annual General Meeting of the Society**  
**on**  
**8<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

**Background**

With so little ringing, you may wonder at an 8-page report! I feel that it is important to record in detail the last year as an historical record of the impact the pandemic has had on the Society of Cambridge Youths.

**Summary**

This is the end of my second year as Ringing Master and by any measure the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic heralded a most extraordinary year for the Society, partly summed up by the following ringing figures:

<b>Ringing activity by calendar year</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>since March 23rd<sup>1</sup></b>
Tower bell peals at GSM	16	3	0
Tower bell peals for the Society	9	0	0
Tower bell quarters at GSM	21	1	0
Service rings (tickable <sup>2</sup> )	81	14	0
Monday practices	50	11	0

Following the AGM on Monday 9th March there was service ringing for just two services on the 15th. The practice on the 16th was cancelled at short notice because that same day the government advised against non-essential travel and contact with others. The first lockdown was announced on the 23rd.

With ringing severely curtailed the intentions as set out at last year's AGM have sadly gone by the wayside. Instead, my focus for the past year has been on keeping the band together in the absence of any normal tower bell ringing whatsoever; the very thing that we all have in common.

The only open ringing at GSM since the pandemic started was a continuous stretch of almost four months from July to October when it was possible to ring GSM bells for Sunday services. Covid-secure measures meant that we rang for only 15 minutes and usually on just four bells.

Many alternative ringing activities have been introduced in a bid to find something that we can do together and enjoy. "Ringing Room" has become a main feature, this being an online platform for change ringing in a virtual bell tower, enabling ringers to continue ringing with one another even when socially distanced. Although not everyone's idea of fun there is a core of around 10 ringers who come along to Monday Ringing Room sessions, currently taking place monthly. Tuesday Ringing Room sessions for more advanced 12-bell ringing have taken shape and happen monthly. With everyone joining Ringing Room sessions from their homes, network unreliability and bandwidth limitations have been a significant problem, especially on higher numbers of bells. Thanks to the efforts of Jonathan Agg and Dave Richards the SCY has its own instance of Ringing Room and this has resulted in a marked improvement in the quality of our performances.

Ringing Room is not a complete substitute for ringing on tower bells, it utilises many of the same techniques but the balance of skills required is quite different. Ropesight and bell control are not much in evidence whereas hearing your place in the change and having a sense of rhythm are essential. The way mistakes develop is different too, for example, the ringing can pause suddenly because no one wants to lead; this is something that obviously cannot happen when ringing tower bells. Despite its unique qualities and limitations there are many positives to Ringing Room. It provides much

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<sup>1</sup> Date first lockdown started

<sup>2</sup> Confers members' voting rights

missed method practice, it is an enjoyable get-together and most importantly, it helps keep the band together. With little prospect of normal tower bell ringing resuming any time soon I would encourage everyone to have a go.

Many social activities have been organised during this period, including Sunday morning virtual coffee sessions, outdoor Sunday morning coffee sessions when ringing at GSM, webinars and quiz evenings. I see regular communication as essential and my monthly updates have become an important means for keeping everyone in touch with what is happening.

I would like to take this opportunity to look at the longer-term scarring this pandemic may have on ringing at GSM. The ringing figures in the table above can be used as an indication of the healthiness of a band and it is clear that the impact of this pandemic on the Society is immense. It impacts the very fabric of our Society, for example, current rules mean that only five members will have voting rights at the start of the 2021 AGM. Whether we are able to bounce back once normal ringing resumes or whether we must rebuild from a lower base will depend upon many uncertainties and factors outside of our control.

My working assumption is that we will need to rebuild, to some degree, the GSM band once normal ringing resumes. There are good reasons for thinking this. On previous occasions when ringing has stopped abruptly for many weeks there has been a measurable drop in Sunday service attendance that has taken years to recover. In 1993 the 9th bell was sent away to be welded after it cracked. The bells were out of action for about two months and average attendance fell from 18 to 16; it took five years to recover. This may not sound like much but bear in mind that average attendance in 2019 was below 17 and consider how many times that year we could not ring to the full potential of most ringers present.

The new bells project in 2009 was the last time ringing had to stop for a significant period, over three months from mid-April to late July. This stoppage was planned, and many ringing activities were organised to keep the band together and in practice. When ringing restarted there was the significant encouragement of having a high-quality new ring of bells to enjoy, and yet average attendance dropped by one the following year, picking up again the year after.

Another reason to assume that we will need to start rebuilding the GSM band once normal ringing resumes is because the duration of this stoppage is substantially longer than anything that has gone before. You would have to go back to World War II to experience countrywide ringing stoppages on a scale commensurate with this pandemic. By the time of the 2021 AGM we will have gone a whole year without any normal ringing on GSM bells, or anywhere else on the UK mainland (I spotted only two tower bell peals posted on Bellboard since 23rd March).

Whilst this pandemic continues to disrupt ringing at GSM there will be alternative Ringing Room sessions, Zoom coffee mornings, webinars and other ringing and social activities whilst staying Covid-secure. First and foremost, these have been organised to help keep the band together and I have been delighted by the amount of support for the different activities and the general sense of goodwill from so many GSM ringers.

As soon as restrictions are eased we will restart ringing GSM bells in line with Central Council guidance and with the consent of the vicar. Even though the vaccination rollout is well underway, there are good reasons to assume that it will take many months for restrictions on tower bell ringing to ease fully. It is plausible that initial relaxations will simply mean we are back to being able to ring four bells for 15 minutes on a Sunday. For this reason and to ease us back into ringing on 12 bells, the simulator in GSM ringing room has been set up to enable ringing of up to two tied bells either separately or in the same simulated touch. This offers the opportunity for small numbers of ringers at a time to get some real bell time and to try out method ringing on higher numbers. It's not a substitute for proper change ringing but it is closer to the real thing than Ringing Room. As the vaccination rollout progresses and restrictions are further relaxed, we will expand our ringing repertoire whilst continuing to be Covid-secure.

One clear aim for 2021 once tower bell ringing at GSM on higher numbers is possible is to re-establish our top-end ringing. This is not simply a case of getting our best 12 ringers to ring Bristol

max and spliced again, we need strength in depth and to re-establish all levels of ringing that took place on a typical practice night and Sunday service before this pandemic.

Another aim will be to invest in the future of ringing at GSM. My expectation is that the number of regular ringers at GSM will have reduced once this pandemic is over, and therefore it is likely that we will need to rebuild our numbers. If we want to remain at the forefront of the exercise it is probably not sufficient to expect this to happen without some active investment on our part. In the longer term we will have a new training centre at St Clement's, which has the potential to be an excellent feeder of new talent into ringing. In the short term my intention is to set up a small working group to explore new ways of increasing the scale and reach of GSM by making use of the close links we have already, e.g. at District level, and becoming more involved in ART<sup>3</sup> accredited training activities. By reaching out we can benefit by encouraging talented ringers to experience ringing on higher numbers, GSM being the only 12-bell tower in the Ely diocese. Ringers who come and ring with us at GSM will gain new expertise and knowledge that they can take back to their home towers.

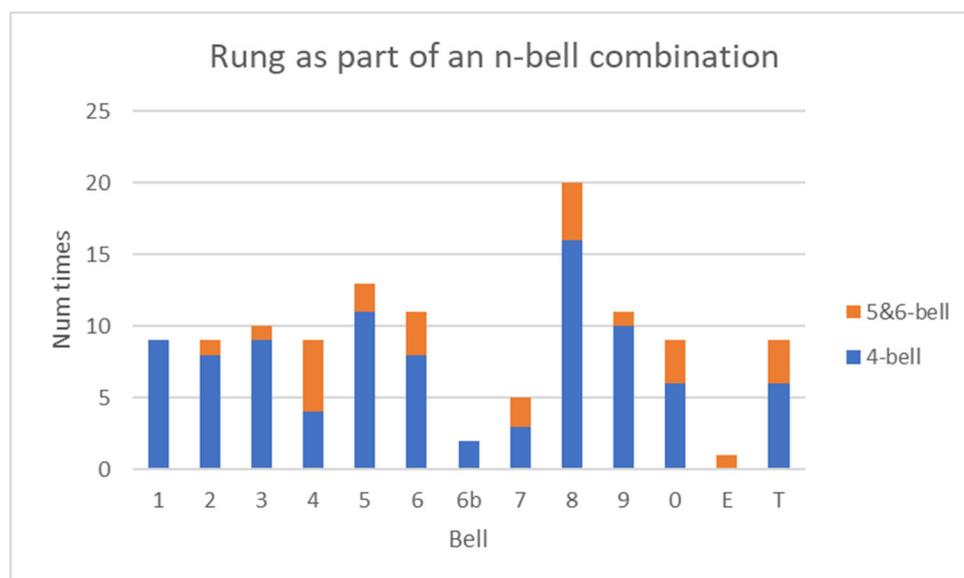
This pandemic gives us an opportunity to consider how we might shape the future of the GSM band.

### Service ringing at GSM

Sunday service ringing took place as usual until 15th March 2020. Then, following lockdown all ringing stopped and there was no ringing at GSM for four months.

In July Cambridge was placed in Tier 1 and with the agreement of our vicar and with appropriate Covid-secure measures in place we began ringing again. From 12th July to the end of October there was limited Sunday morning service ringing. This constituted no more than 15 minutes of ringing by usually no more than four ringers. The Central Council guidance on which we based our Covid-secure measures kept being updated, though not in its fundamentals. During this period we rang for 16 Sunday morning services and a total of 25 GSM ringers volunteered to ring, which is a great turnout given the limitations. Most often we rang four bells but on three occasions we rang five bells and once we rang six.

Method options were constrained by our lack of familiarity with 4-bell methods though some bands branched out and rang demi-Bristol and demi-Belfast Alliance minimus. Working out which combinations of bells to ring became a feature of each time we rang. We managed 11 different combinations and the most popular were 1,3,6,8 and those ending 8,10,12. We managed to ring every bell in the tower at least once, the 8th featured the most times in different combinations and the flat 6th, 7th and 11th the least, as illustrated in the figure below.



<sup>3</sup> Association of Ringing Teachers

When we recommenced ringing on Sunday 12th July it was noted in the GSM eMagazine:

***Ringling resumes at Great St Mary's***

*After more than three months of silence,  
last Sunday the bells of Great St Mary's  
rang out once more across Cambridge.*

*Risk assessments, method statements, and  
guidance materials prepared.*

*Routine checks of bells and frame made, and  
the ringing room Covid-secure. All set.*

*Then, last Sunday, the majestic sound of one of the  
finest rings of twelve in the country was  
substituted by four bell arpeggios.*

*A small but important step.*

*A joy and a pleasure to take part.*

Evensong ringing also recommenced briefly with a University Guild band ringing for evenings on the last two Sundays of October, each time ringing a different sub-set of bells to the morning ringing session.

Service Ringing came to an end again when a second lockdown came into force at the beginning of November and all ringing at GSM was suspended forthwith. On coming out of lockdown at the beginning of December Cambridge moved into a revamped Tier 2, which meant ringing at GSM still could not resume.

However, on Christmas Day with the one-day lifting of some restrictions we were all delighted that four members of the Pipe family volunteered to ring and rang five bells (David Pipe double handling) for the morning service. On Boxing Day Cambridge moved into Tier 4 and once again ringing continued to be not possible.

**Ringling for special occasions**

We rang for the Ordination of Shirley Holder on Saturday, 26th September, and this is what appeared in the GSM eMagazine.

***Ringling the bells for the ordination of Shirley Holder***

*The ringers of Great St Mary's were delighted to be given the opportunity  
to ring out the bells not once but twice last weekend and celebrate the  
ordination as priest of Shirley Holder.*

*The first time was for Saturday's ordination service. Fifteen minutes of  
ringing by four ringers immediately before the service was duly  
accomplished. With twelve bells on a diatonic scale in the key of D there is  
plenty of scope to choose a melodic combination of four bells. Bells chosen  
gave the descending arpeggio A, F#, C# and A. It was particularly fitting  
that this was the first occasion we have rung for besides Sunday morning  
services since limited ringing resumed in July.*

*The second time was for the Sunday Eucharist service officiated by Shirley  
Holder. To comply with guidelines on bell ringing we had to ring on a  
different combination of bells; this time the descending arpeggio G, E, B, G  
and E was chosen. With ringers from only two households we were able to  
ring five bells whilst still adhering to guidelines.*

## Practice nights

No practices have taken place at GSM since last year's AGM.

In their place, virtual Monday evening ringing sessions using Ringing Room were organised weekly throughout June and July. Following a break in the summer they resumed on a monthly basis from September. We typically ring on eight bells and methods range from Kenninghall and Lancashire to Bristol, Lessness and Stedman. It has been fun yet challenging and well worthwhile.

Throughout June, July and early August there were Tuesday evening attempts to ring a quarter of Bristol max using Ringing Room. Technology tended to get the better of us and Internet latency problems were difficult to ignore. With the much-improved performance when using the SCY instance of Ringing Room, monthly Tuesday evening sessions resumed in November when we rang Bristol, Phobos and Bristol spliced, and Zanussi.

## Tower bell peals

There were no tower bell peals rung by the Society in 2020.

## Handbell peals

The Society rang nine handbell peals in 2020. The Pipe family featured prominently in all of them, with seven rung by Pipe family members only and all conducted by David Pipe.

09-07-2020	3 Ditton Lane, Cambridge	hand	5040	Treble Dodging Minor (7m)
04-07-2020	59 Town Green Rd, Orwell	hand	5040	Bristol Surprise Maximus
10-06-2020	53 Covent Garden, Willingham	hand	5040	Treble Dodging Minor (7m)
09-05-2020	53 Covent Garden, Willingham	hand	5040	Treble Dodging Minor (7m)
08-05-2020	53 Covent Garden, Willingham	hand	5040	Treble Dodging Minor (7m)
03-05-2020	53 Covent Garden, Willingham	hand	5040	Treble Dodging Minor (7m)
21-04-2020	53 Covent Garden, Willingham	hand	5040	Treble Dodging Minor (7m)
18-04-2020	53 Covent Garden, Willingham	hand	5040	Spliced Treble Dodging Minor (120m)
11-04-2020	53 Covent Garden, Willingham	hand	5040	Spliced Treble Dodging Minor (120m)

## Tower bell quarter peals

Reported last year, there was one quarter peal involving SCY ringers rung at GSM in 2020.

02-02-2020 1250 Phobos Surprise Maximus

## Handbell quarter peals

There were two handbell quarter peals rung for the Society in 2020.

29-10-2020	Lundy (Castle Keep South)	Devon	1344	Bristol Surprise Major
28-10-2020	Lundy (Castle Keep South)	Devon	1280	Yorkshire Surprise Major

## Ringing Room and Muster quarter peals

A new genre, there were three quarter peals rung for the Society in 2020 using either Ringing Room or Muster.

04-08-2020	Ringing Room	Cambridgeshire	tower	1344	Bristol Surprise Maximus
30-06-2020	Ringing Room	Cambridgeshire	tower	1344	Bristol Surprise Maximus
14-04-2020	Muster	Cambridgeshire	handbell	1344	College Bob IV Delight Minor

## Competition ringing

The 2020 National 12-bell contest eliminators and final were cancelled. The March 2021 eliminators have been cancelled.

All 2020 Cambridge District and Ely DA striking competitions were cancelled.

David, Henry and Alfie Pipe entered the Central Council's YouTube competition in May and received a "Highly Commended" rating. They rang Pevensey Delight Minor on handbells, a favourite of Rod Pipe's. The aim was to have sustained, consistent, rhythmical and accurate ringing throughout the entire recording.

## Non-ringing matters

### New website

Early in 2020 the Youths website had a facelift and is where to go for ringing updates. The website can be found at <https://www.scy.org.uk/>

### New church access control system

The new key fob system introduced by the church is now fully operational.

### St Clement's

This project is making steady progress following the successful Faculty application. A number of significant donors have made pledges and things are looking promising. There is still a great deal to do and we can expect Barry Johnson to be moving things forward in the coming year.

### Recordings of GSM bells

In the absence of any normal ringing, there have been a few occasions when we have provided recordings of GSM bells being rung, including for Easter Sunday, Remembrance Sunday, and various carol services. Thank you to Dave Richards for compiling a list of readily available recordings that can be shared.

### Antennas in GSM tower

There has been no news in the past year, which should be seen as positive.

## Social and other non-ringing activities during Covid restrictions

### Talks and webinars

A range of talks and webinars were organised throughout the year, many by the Cambridge District, and GSM ringers participated in some of them, including:

Gareth Davies	Ringing in Cambridge in the 16th and 17th Centuries	April
David Pipe	An introduction to conducting	April
Gareth Davies	Ringing in Cambridge in the 18th Century	May
Michael Williams	Lundy island	May
Barry Johnson	St Clement's project	June

### Quiz evenings

There have been Quiz evenings organised and GSM ringers have joined in the fun. In particular, as an alternative to the annual Youths vs. Guild rounders match, which we usually win, the Guild challenged us to a quiz match; best not to dwell on the result. A festive quiz evening was held in the runup to Christmas, thank you Jonathan and Catriona for being such highly proficient quiz masters.

### Lundy island short break

In late October a group of around 20 Cambridge Youths took a short break on Lundy island in the Bristol channel. It was a holiday almost two years in the planning which survived in diaries against all

odds. We even got a bonus day owing to 'fog grounds helicopter'! All the ringing and socialising originally intended was swept away, however, by this time we were grateful to still be able to go. A big thank you to Phil Orme for a tremendous amount of organising and tenacity to make this happen.

### Castle Inn evening meetups

Many thanks to Patrick Brooke for organising several enjoyable Friday evening meetups in the Castle Inn beer garden for food and drinks. Quite a few Youths took the opportunity to socialise and relax.

### News and Celebrations

John Sherwood had major surgery in May. We were delighted to see him at one of our Zoom coffee sessions later in the year and look forward to when we can all ring together again.

There have been a few big birthdays with small celebrations, including Barry Johnson celebrating his 70th birthday in June and Chris Seaman celebrating her 60th birthday on a very wet day in July.

On 22nd August Catriona Shearer and Jonathan Agg were married at GSM church. No church bells were rung, so instead there was some rounds on handbells rung by family members.

Many congratulations were conveyed to Phill Wilding and Vic who in August became proud parents of twins, Charlie James and Evie Frances.

### **Covid-secure measures for ringing at GSM**

It was not until July 4th that national restrictions were further relaxed and church buildings were able to open for worship again. In the lead up to this the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR) representatives worked closely with the Church of England's Recovery Group and the Church's Adviser for Medical Ethics, Health and Social Care Policy to establish the part ringing has in the return of church activities.

The CCCBR had the foresight to publish a set of Guidance Notes that were endorsed by the Church of England's representatives and these are what formed the basis for resumption of ringing at GSM. We used this guidance to help identify the hazards, decide who might be harmed and how, evaluate the risks and decide on suitable precautions. We prepared a detailed Covid-19 risk assessment and implemented the risk control measures that enabled us to ring safely. These materials were shared beforehand with the vicar and church operations who were very happy with our approach.

The risk assessment ran to 38 hazards and over 80 separate controls. From this, separate guidance for those running ringing and for those attending ringing was prepared and distributed. These guidance notes were updated every time a change to national or local restrictions affected ringing, which was often. Behind the scenes, risk assessments and method statements were prepared for ringing the bells up and down, and for carrying out routine maintenance, i.e. anything that required multiple people to be in the ringing room or bell chamber.

By far the biggest constraints on ringing at GSM were the maximum duration of 15 minutes and the minimum distance, interpreted to be 1.5m between adjacent ropes rung. At most, this meant six ringers could ring for 15 minutes, which happened only once.

The logistics of maintaining Covid-security were non-trivial. Ringing room key holders took turns to run the ringing sessions. Before each band rang GSM bells there was a requirement to let the church know who needed access to the church so that key fobs could be activated. It was agreed beforehand which bells would be rung to ensure that Covid-secure measures were adhered to. When the Guild rang for evensong, which meant there were two ringing sessions on Sundays, this became even more of a logistical challenge.

Although it was a great disappointment that ringing had to cease at the end of October, the prospect of ringing during the first half of November whilst keeping Covid-secure was daunting, as this included ringing for Remembrance Sunday (8th), ringing for Evensong on the 8th, ringing for the birthday of the Prince of Wales (Saturday 14th) and ringing for morning service and evensong on the 15th.

### **In conclusion**

It is a relief to know that in 2020 none of our regular GSM ringers caught Covid-19 and became seriously ill. However, all of us know of loved ones and ringers who have not been so fortunate, and my thoughts go out to them, their families and friends.

For me, at a deeply personal level and as Ringing Master of one of the most prestigious societies in the country, 2020 is a year to largely write-off and forget. Let's hope for better things in 2021.