



2023 Newsletter



Officers for Year:

Master	Cathy Hampson
Deputy Master	Emily Vallow
Social Secretary	Patrick W Wheeler Poppy Wheeler
General Secretary	Ainsley Gilbert
Catering Officer	Iwan Cotgreave Grace Dooley
Mascot Keeper	Morgan Rook
Romance Officer	Roger Haynes
Webmaster	Stephen W Penney
Central Council Rep	Paul Parker

Events held:

Master's Tour (QPs)	6 th to 8 th January	Brierley Hill
Dinner Tour	17 th to 19 th February	Southwark & City of London
Easter Tour	13 th to 16 th April	Northumberland
Summer Tour	26 th to 30 th July	Cambridgeshire & Essex Border
Camping Tour	31 st July to 4 th August	Norfolk
Autumn Tour	26 th to 29 th October	Wrexham

New Members:

Ordinary	None
Associate	Oliver Buckley

Society Ringing Events

Master's Tour

The tour organised by Rose Horton followed the tradition of simultaneous QPs being rung at a variety of towers in the Brierley Hill area. St Michael's, Brierley Hill was the hall for those not staying in alternative accommodation. A total of 15 QPs were planned with successes as follows:

Friday 6 th January	Halesowen (St John the Baptist)	1260 Grandsire Doubles
Saturday 7th January	Belbroughton (Holy Trinity)	1272 Carlisle Surprise Minor
Saturday 7th January	Chaddesley Corbett (St Cassian)	1264 Plain Bob Major (handbells)
Saturday 7th January	Clent (St Leonard)	1250 Yorkshire Surprise Major
Saturday 7th January	Hagley (St John the Baptist)	1280 Stourbridge Surprise Major
Saturday 7th January	Kingswinford (St Mary)	1250 Yorkshire Surprise Major
Saturday 7th January	Kinver (St Peter)	1260 Plain Bob Triples
Saturday 7th January	Old Swinford (St Mary)	1280 Plain Bob Major
Saturday 7th January	Stourbridge (St Thomas)	1319 Grandsire Cinques
Saturday 7th January	Wollaston (St James)	1260 Plain Bob Minor
Saturday 7th January	Wordsley (Holy Trinity)	1260 Plain Bob Minor

Lunch on the Saturday was held in the Duke of Wellington at Stourbridge which served a variety of excellent local real ales.



Clent QP band (left to right: Kaye Mundy, Matthew Jeffery, Adam Turner, Matthew Turner, Edward Lupton, Sarah Lupton, Chris Mundy and James Mundy)



Kinver QP band (left to right: Grace Dooley, Rebecca Drysdale, Morgan Rook, James Stonham, Caroline Stonham, Martyn Owen, Iain Scott and Roger Grieve)



Chaddesley Corbett handbell band (left to right: James Mundy, Tim Payne, Iain Scott and Chris Mundy)

Dinner Tour (Southwark & The City of London)

Our annual dinner tour started with a successful Quarter Peal of 1250 Yorkshire Surprise Major at St James, Garlickhythe, followed by a celebratory pint at The Sheaf.

Saturday morning's first ring was at St Giles, Cripplegate, for those of us able to get there and were not stuck at Crewe by Network Rail's fantastic efficiency! Everyone had a go at something - with a mixture of Rounds and Called changes, Plain hunt, Grandsire Cinques and a well applauded attempt at Stedman Cinques.

Our next tower was another twelve at St Mary Le Bow, after a quick stop at Greggs for those whose stomach was feeling like their throat had been cut. After annoying the flower arrangers, we had another go at rounds and called changes, plain hunt and Grandsire Cinques.

Lunch was around the corner at the Rising Sun (when they eventually let us in). Service was slower than an overweight Labrador ascending a slight incline. The waitressing was aided by Rhianon or we would've still been there by Dinner time. The Landlord, however, found us "a lot better than the Masons", if that is a compliment and a half! The AGM was kept short and sweet to allow our esteemed Secretary to watch 14 (?) men kick a ball round a field whilst those left popped to St Vedast for a go on six bells.

St Vedast were an interesting bunch of bells with manual sound control by the aid of the door. Those who could make it were rewarded with Grandsire Doubles, Cambridge Minor, Plain Bob and Double Norwich. To finish, the tower contact gave the final challenge of setting the bells at back stroke ready for Sunday service, a feat well performed by everyone bar the 4th which didn't want to co-operate!

Dinner was held at The Refinery in Southwark. As is traditional, bets were made as to how long the Master's speech would be. It was kept short and sweet to only 4 minutes. Then followed an account of the year's relationships by our Romance Officer (speech written by Vic Evans, performed by Iain Scott). This was rounded off by a very inspiring speech by Guest speaker Tim Sunter, invited from Brierley Hill by the Master. Several wines were taken with the Master throughout the evening, recognising the achievements from everyone in WCs for the year. After several pointed remarks to the DJ, he finally got the music on track to a more appropriate Welsh Colleges disco that was well received by all.

For those able to get out of bed in the morning, Sunday service ringing was at Southwark Cathedral, another twelve bell tower; a fitting end to our 2023 Dinner Tour.

Morgan Rook

Easter Tour (Northumberland)

I will preface this report with the fact I know little of the intricacies of ringing methods with my current standard being renditions of "rounds", with the occasional change called if we're feeling particularly ambitious. So, if you are after the details of the methods rung, this is not the report for you. However, if you are interested in the events that took place during a great tour of the Northeast of England, then do read on.

The Easter Tour was centred on the village of Thropton, 30 minutes North of Morpeth, with the Social Secretary Pat Wheeler being adamant the location was decided based on the beautiful surroundings and convenience of positioning for towers, and absolutely not on the fact that his father lived three doors down from the hall. Thursday night saw a small group of us ring in Rothbury before retiring to the Three Wheat Heads which provided excellent food and good beer, with Emily Vallow looking impressed at the prospect of a 40-mile round trip to Morpeth station to pick up Ainsley Gilbert at 10pm.

Friday morning started with a trip to Morpeth clock tower which I entered to be greeted by a horde of bleary eyed ringers packing the tiny ringing room to the rafters. The second tower of the day was Cramlington, boasting a tenor requiring a two person effort to ring up

and later saw Kevin Rogers accidentally standing on the backstroke, and then being unable to pull off again proclaiming "I'm only small!" Next up was a trip to the Blackbird Inn for lunch, who claimed advanced food ordering was not required and they coped exceptionally well with the influx of 36 people, possibly helped by a lot of people all ordering fishfinger sandwiches. After lunch Richard Wolfgang had a little snooze, and I'm not saying Percy's (Stephen Penney) conversation put him to sleep, but he was the only other person at his table. Next tower up was Ponteland which gave us all chance to see one of the Northeast's famous events - a sudden downpour on an otherwise pleasant day. Friday evening was practice night back in Rothbury which saw a small group joining the locals, who were very pleased with their new temporary recruits. A Quarter Peal of 1282 Lincolnshire Surprise Royal also took place at Hexham Abbey which was successful, and this was followed by another trip to the Three Wheat Heads.

Saturday morning started with a trip to Berwick-upon-Tweed, and for those of you thinking this was a long drive first thing in the morning, my driver agreed, complaining halfway through how far it was, even though he was the one responsible for organising it. The tower in Berwick was located above the Town Hall which was accessed through the old Court Room and Jail Cells providing interesting insight into history. And it was nice of the locals to have laid on a coffee morning below which a few of us indulged in. It was here I learnt that Richard Wolfgang had over done his drinking the night before and was unable to complete his stand-in catering officer breakfast duties. The second tower was a lovely scenic coastal route south to Bamburgh, where we were told to park in a farmyard near the Church. We were getting some funny looks from the locals as we directed 10+ cars and a campervan off the main road and into the farm. Lunch swiftly followed at the Cottage Inn which again had great food, the highlight was definitely the Giant Yorkshire Pudding filled with basically a whole roast dinner, and this thing was absolutely massive. Ainsley Gilbert looked very pleased with himself after polishing his off. Next up was Embleton which had an open winding metal staircase which took some negotiating and witnessed some gingerly descending, Percy celebrated his excitement of this by re-potting a plant he had inadvertently kicked over. The final tower of the day was Alnwick where we arrived around 30 minutes early in the blazing sun which saw a large group find the same ice cream parlour, thanks to some local knowledge from Tanya Walker. On entering the tower, we were informed that someone would need to watch the external door, which Pat Wheeler was very quick to volunteer to do as this allowed him to sit in the sun and eat his ice cream. Alnwick had a slightly unusual request to leave the bells stood on the backstroke which saw a few of the shorter ringers demonstrating some impressive stretching to achieve.

Then it was back to Thropton for a meeting which saw myself voted in as an associate member and Leicestershire decided as next year's tour location purely based on the fact it wasn't the Tyne valley. Dinner was produced by catering officer Iwan and the late stand-in catering officer Pete Hampson. The meal was bruschetta, followed by lots and lots of potato croquettes with a tomato and chorizo sauce. Dessert was cake and ice cream that was basically cream owing to the lack of a freezer in the hall. Some more drinks were had after dinner, and I then retired to bed whilst some more seasoned members decided one last trip to the Three Wheat Heads was on the cards. Where I am reliably informed that Harriet Haynes, who had been staying at the pub for the whole tour, confidently left the table and strolled into the gents' toilets by mistake.

This concluded a very enjoyable tour of some of the most Northernly towers in England. I would like to say thank-you to everyone for allowing me to join the Society and a special thank-you to Roger Haynes for patiently standing with me in my efforts to learn to ring.

Olly Buckley

Summer Tour (Cambridge Essex border)

The tour started on Wednesday night with ringing in the evening at Ashdon. We were met at the church by a large welcome sign at the entrance announcing our arrival! The local team also then insisted we had a group photo for their village Facebook page! We were clearly celebrities for the days we were to be in residence! After the (fortunately respectable) ringing, we retired for the first of many trips to the Rose and Crown where the kitchen was opened especially for us: serving pizzas and much needed beer.

Thursday began with a long cycle to the first tower – Ickleton. The bells were rather unusually a ground floor chancel crossing. It was great to see so many members in attendance, with cycling proving very popular this year. The route to the next tower, Pampisford, followed a couple of cycle paths which provided some light relief from the rough roads. And, despite the weather forecast's threat of rain, it never hit. We then made our way to Linton where a pub lunch was had, and Chris Mundy enjoyed plenty of Woodford's Wherry. Fortunately, it was only a short walk to the next tower where Doubles and Minor were rung – notably Ipswich and Carlisle Surprise. There then followed a short cycle to Hadstock – a 2 cwt ring of six. These bells, with sally lengths to match their weight, were especially good fun. Several Surprise Minor methods were rung including Carlisle, Bourne, Cambridge, and Ipswich. A few stopped off at the Three Hills pub on their way back to Ashdon, before making their way back to the pub in Ashdon for the evening. Meanwhile, a Quarter Peal of 1344 Plain Bob Major was rung at Ashdon, Essex – Grace's first of major! The band then joined the rest of the society in the pub in Ashdon where their "house" burgers were enjoyed by many.



Ashdon QP band (left to right: Grace Dooley, Iain Scott, James Mundy, Iwan Cotgreave, Elizabeth Menhinick, Pat Wheeler, Roger Haynes and Chris Ridley)

Friday promised better weather. On the way to the first tower, only a few miles away, I suffered a catastrophic de-chaining, getting the chain well and truly wedged behind the cogs. Fortunately, Rhyan came to the rescue with his chain splitting tool and, after returning the chain to its rightful place, we carried on our journey, arriving at Radwinter only slightly late. Here our ringing included Cambridge, Yorkshire, and Stedman, but the bells were hard to ring well. Another short cycle followed to Hempstead where cake was enjoyed as well as Beer (Delight Minor). Some real beer was consumed at a pub in Steeple Bumpstead with three excellent ales on tap and two beer barrels fashioned into urinals. Jacket potatoes and baguettes were the lunch choices which were enjoyed in the garden where Puff was spotted having had too much to drink. Only a short walk to the tower – Steeple Bumpstead – where Barbecue Bob Minor failed to light, and Norfolk also met a similar demise. The 5th was particularly difficult, and the tenor was 19 cwt which didn't make for easy after lunch ringing. It was also here where Rhiannon Meredith brainstormed her idea of Welsh Colleges' masterclasses. We look forward to these taking shape. It was only a short cycle to the final tower of the day, Heliens Bumpstead, where it transpired all the bells had stays despite rumours from the locals at the previous towers. Here we managed to score Bristol, Cambridge and St Clements. Puff was rescued from the tower after almost being abandoned. Curry was enjoyed by many in Linton before heading back to the hall.

Saturday was another long cycle to the first tower – Newport (in Essex). This was a rather “rustic” ring with a rather “wobbly” tower which made the bells rather interesting to handle. Despite this Norfolk and St Clements were scored. An investigation by Pat Wheeler revealed a foot thick layer of pigeon poo in the belfry up to the height of the sliders. Fortunately, the next tower – Wendens Ambo – were better going which made for better ringing. Carlisle, Barbecue Bob Minor and Spliced National Insurance Contributions (Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge) were rung here. We then cycled to the pub for lunch, some opting for the longer route to avoid the busy roads, along which I suffered another de-chaining, although fortunately much less severe. The lunch pub was the Queen's Head Littlebury, where we broke the beer pumps shortly after arrival. Despite this, we had a good lunch and handbells were rung in the garden afterwards – much to the interest of the other pub customers! From the pub there was an even shorter walk to the church than on previous days. Here more beer was consumed (but of the Delight Minor variety) as well as Norwich and St Clements under the watchful eye of all those in the Church thanks to a camera in the ringing room. From here we had a short cycle to our next tower: Saffron Walden – a twelve. Here we managed Stedman Cinques; Little Bob Max; Plain Hunt 11 and 12; and, of course, some Rounds and Call Changes. We then made our way back to the hall where many enjoyed pints from the pub. We had an informal meeting whilst the Catering Officers and some other volunteers prepared food for the barbecue, during which time some commotion outside revealed the barbecue almost being knocked over, but carefully rescued! After the meeting concluded, some handbells were rung outside with the barbecue providing a suitable distraction (or was it the other way round). We then enjoyed the feast from the barbecue with sausages, burgers, vegetable skewers, and a selection of sides. A vast amount of tiffin was prepared for dessert and a lot was consumed! After as much food as possible had been consumed, the usual end of tour socialising took place into the early hours. The idea of ringing at 8:30 am for the service at Ashdon was dismissed by many.

Many thanks to Pat and Poppy for organising a great tour and to all our officers and volunteers for making it all work so well and be such great fun. We look forward to meeting up again in the Autumn somewhere in Wales.

Camping Tour (Norfolk)

John Goldrick organised a week's ringing around Diss with an emphasis on towers located next to or within a short distance of a thatched pub. This provide interesting venues for frequent refreshment stops.

The Willows Campsite at Scole near Diss was the camping venue with a total of 17 towers visited, although some members additionally managed to join other local tower practices in the evenings as well. Access to some towers involved very steep and/or long ladders which required a degree of bravery if members were keen to ring at the location – not all were willing to make such a sacrifice!

Autumn Tour (Wrexham)

As with most things in life, it's generally easier to complete tasks when they're due. I write this report in the post-Christmas/pre-New Year lull, having procrastinated for a good couple of months after the conclusion of the 2023 Autumn tour to Cheshire - more specifically *checks calendar* - Wrexham (and surrounding areas.)

Upon arrival on the Friday evening of 'clock weekend', I parked the car outside the hall, got out, and shivered at the cold weather but also the prospect of a return once more to sleeping on an airbed for a weekend. It was a short walk to the local pub to seek the company of fellow society members. Pleasingly, one of the social secretaries and some of the usual faces were already seated at a table. Many other members were tackling a curry in a restaurant nearby and arrived sometime later. The usual conversations followed: "how are you/what's new?", "where are you staying?", "what are you drinking?", etc. Naturally one of the first things to organise was a tour report author. I volunteered as I haven't written one since *checks website* 2008 – so I figured it was overdue. My offer was readily accepted, even when I said I couldn't comment on Thursday's activities as I wasn't there.

At closing, the pub slowly emptied and we made our way to our respective lodgings. I can't remember the last time I slept in a hall, but it soon came flooding back: get all one's stuff into the hall without treading on anyone; blow up air bed without waking anyone; locate the toilet in the pitch black and make a mental note of where it is for later; locate the kitchen to see if toast/whiskey is on the menu. I must have missed a few kitchen parties on tour because whiskey now seems to play second fiddle to much more exotic offerings. This weekend it was Martyn Owen's moonshine (at least three different flavours, I recall) which was enjoyed by him, myself, Grace Dooley and Iwan Cotgreave. It was quite nice despite initial apprehension!

Saturday dawned murky, grey and cold. A splendid breakfast was produced by the catering officers, before we set out to the first tower which was *checks toursheet* Malpas. It was clear that the tour was going to be very well attended as there was a sizeable crowd outside the tower when we arrived. We waited for the tower contact. And waited. Eventually the prospect of a lock-out reared its head, leading to a phone call and a lady finally appearing, looking very flustered, who at least had the honesty to say she forgot about us visiting. We duly started ringing.

I've always said that I'm not very good at remembering towers, so I apologise that this report is a bit thin on detail. I do recall us ringing a plethora of methods in the first three towers (two sixes and an eight) which included Plain Bob and Grandsire Doubles up to surprise major.

I do remember lunch, as the Social Secretary had kindly booked the entire pub exclusively for our use! There was a lovely fire burning and an interesting selection of beers. The group I was sat with happened to be near the front window and it was particularly entertaining to see locals turning up looking forward to a pint before seeing/being told they couldn't come in. After lunch there were three distinct highlights:

- We managed to find a small café by the river which provided some excellent post-lunch chocolate brownies and hot coffee;
- Upon arrival at St. Giles, Wrexham (10), the car I was in was following the Stonham's massive campervan – more like an American RV from what I can remember of it. As we turned into the public car park, it was clear that their vehicle was much too tall for the height restriction. At the last moment they seemingly realised the impending danger and cleverly avoided it by entering the car park on the wrong side of the road. Once successfully in the car park, it became clear that there was nowhere to accommodate their vehicle, so they exited. Like them I suspect, I was pleased that no damage was sustained to their vehicle!
- Once in the ringing room at St. Giles, we embarked on some ten bell methods – the usual suspects being rung. The Master provided some nuanced guidance on how we should ring these tricky bells. Dave Powell enjoyed the most dramatic incident which was mechanical failure of his bell!

With the ringing duties concluded for the day, we headed back to the hall for tea and cake. The meeting ensued and it was decided that the next Autumn Tour would be held in Brecon. The dinner menu was two courses: chilli and rice and sponge cake and custard – both delicious! Once the washing up was done, everyone relaxed in the hall with drinks of their choice and conversation flowed late into the evening.

Sunday on tour always has an odd feeling as it's the end of the tour so is slightly anticlimactic but there are still obligations to meet: clean the hall (normally leaving it in a better condition than found), provide service ringing at local towers, and perhaps grab a coffee before hitting the road home.

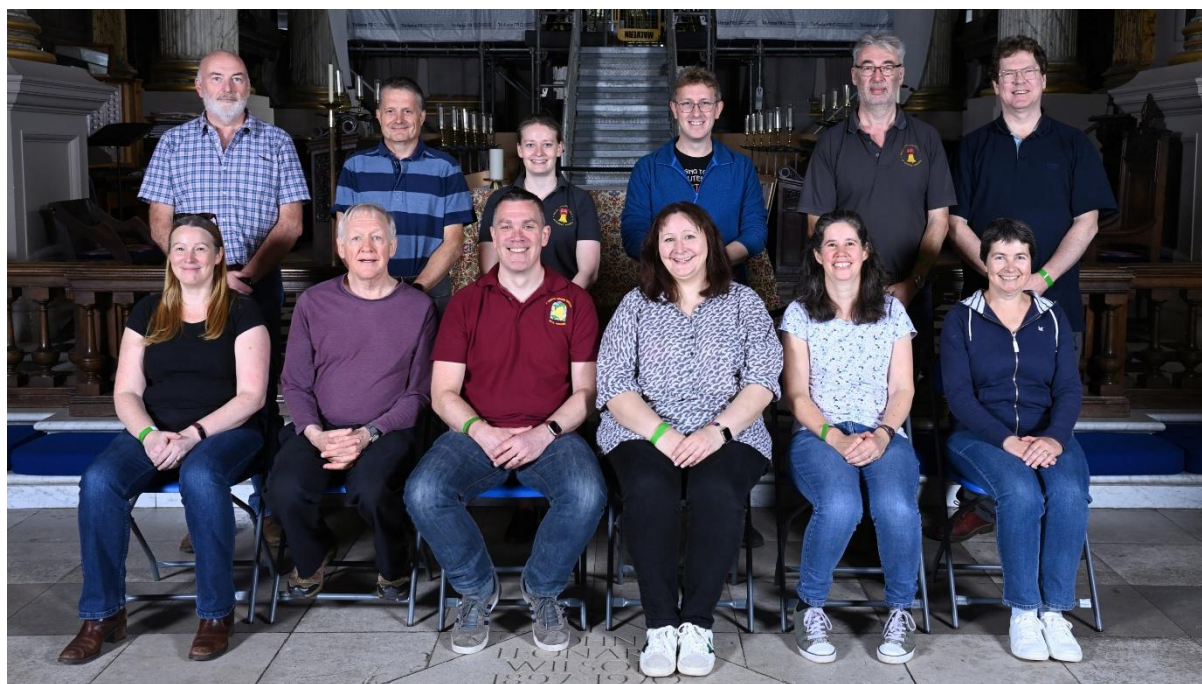
Thank you to those on the committee who put together such a well-organised tour. The Autum Tour has always been my personal favourite, perhaps because my first in 2001 involved two successive lock-ins on the Friday and Saturday night and is where I first met most of the Society's members. The 2023 edition was no different in terms of fun, but it is noticeable that the amount drunk these days is much less than twenty-odd years ago!

Ross Hartley

Other Society Achievements

Bob Smith 12 Bell Competition

The 2023 competition was held at St Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham on Saturday 23 September 2023. The test piece was a touch of Erin Cinques (207 changes) judged by Julia Cater and Cecilia Pipe assisted by Hawkear. The WCs were placed 7th with a score of 68% having rung with a peal speed of 3 hours and 14 minutes. A Birmingham Cathedral band were declared the winners – not surprising given the home advantage.



Society band: Hilary Child (Treble), Susan Healy (2nd), Rhiannon Meredith (3rd), Jason Carter (4th), Tim Hine (5th), Debbie Turner (6th), Roger Haynes (7th), Rob Child (8th), Cathy Hampson (9th), Matthew Turner (10th), Richard Wolfgang (11th)(C), Roger Lawson (Tenor)

Other Ringing Performances

No peals were attempted during the year.

Member Obituaries

The Society learned with regret of the death of the follow member during the year.

Allin Michael Green (A Michael Green in official ringing records)



It was a shock to learn of Mike's death just after his 81st birthday on the 28th December. Only two days earlier his friends in the Society had been exchanging birthday greetings over social media.

Mike was brought up in South London and attended the local technical college to learn engineering skills which he later put to good use through his enthusiasm for steam trains and Land Rovers. He had also learnt to ring as a youngster and was a member of the St Peter's South Croydon band, then a ten-bell tower. He also rang at the nearby Croydon Minster, a fine 36 cwt Gillett and Johnson ring of 12 bells where he designed and helped to install a clapper turning mechanism to correct the tenor which always went up wrong at the time.

Mike's steam train interests led to him being employed by the Tallylyn Railway. Around 1974 he met Iolo Davies, a former Grammar School Headmaster who had become disillusioned with then educational policy changes and ended up working temporarily at the Tallylyn. They both rang at the nearby tower which was Machynlleth, but given the ringing repertoire there, Iolo had started to join the Aber students on a Wednesday evening at Llanbadarn Fawr. He soon started to bring Mike along so starting his long association with both the Aber and WC societies.

Transport for ringing outings at Aber were scarce at the time and former students will remember Mike's outstanding contribution using his Land Rover to transport both members and broken bikes when required (in effect the WC 4th emergency service!). One of his favourite tricks involved the Newport tunnel on the M4 when tours took us there. He made his Land Rover backfire by keeping his foot on the accelerator while switching off the engine temporarily causing alarm amongst other the traffic who thought something catastrophic had happened. He always noted afterwards this should not be attempted often and required all the cylinder head bolts to be tight to avoid damaging the engine! He was duly elected a member of the WCs at the time its name changed on 1 May 1976, serving as Mascot Keeper for 3 years (1977 to 1980) before being elected a Life Member on 5 February 1983.

He rang two peals, both for the Society. His first at Newtown, a ring that no longer exists, on 23 June 1976. He was ringing the tenor to a peal of multi-Doubles (13 methods/variations) conducted by John White, who became anxious as the tenor started to drift at frequent intervals. It was only when we realised this was happening in line with the train timetable as Mike was watching for train arrivals and departures through the tower window. John was soon telling him to concentrate on the ringing and put aside his interest in trains as were nearer the end and didn't want to lose it (or words to that effect!). His other peal was Plain Bob Triples on 19 March 1977 on the then 8 bells at Llanbadarn Fawr.

While Society members had provided ringing opportunities for Mike, he was keen to reciprocate by educating us all about steam trains. An academic year frequently finished with a day trip up to Tywyn and a special trip on the railway - in more recent years with Mike as train driver, although Mike had to give up driving after he reached the age limit for drivers a few years back.

Mike was a family man with Liz and his children Hannah and Josh, all attending the WC outings and becoming members themselves. The numerous tributes posted after Mike's death have spoken of him as a friendly, warm and engaging man with a heart of gold. You could also mention his catalogue of stories which highlighted an interesting life well lived. He will be greatly missed on future tours, but his memory will live on.