



HRGB Scottish Newsletter

2024 Issue 2 – August 2024

Chat from the Chair

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the sudden deaths of Katy Penn (Borealis Bells of Orkney) and Margaret Davidson (Parish of Dunkeld Handbell Ringers). Our sincere condolences are extended to Katy's and Margaret's family and friends.

The 2024 Spring Rally, held in the Assembly Halls, Wick on Saturday 16 March was a fabulous event, thoroughly enjoyed by representatives from Borealis Bells of Orkney, Caithness Handbell Ringers, Cushnie Handbell Ringers, Dunblane Cathedral Handbell Ringers, Holy Trinity Handbells, Inverness Handbell Ringers, Jordanhill Parish Church Handbell Ringers, Poltney Bell Ringers, Kilwhang Handbell Ringers and Blair Bells as well as a number of ringers from south of the border. There is further reflection on the event elsewhere in this issue, but I for one thought it was amazing. Thank you to all who made it happen.

I would like to welcome onto the committee Michelle McGowan (Jordanhill Parish Church Handbell Ringers) who was elected treasurer at the AGM. Thanks are also given to Sam Payne (Borealis Bells), already a committee member, who was elected NEC representative.

I am very pleased that the Birnam Bells, donated to the Scottish Region by the Parish of Dunkeld Handbell Ringers, are being put to good use by the Duddingston Kirk Handbell Group, led by Anne McCrossan.

Our Autumn Rally will be hosted by Cumnock and District Handbell Ringers at the Netherthird Community Centre, 65 Ryderston Drive, Cumnock, on Saturday 12 October. The massed ringing music all has an Ayrshire theme, with two arrangements of songs by Robert Burns and Malcolm Wilson's arrangement of a piece by Sir James MacMillan. I look forward to seeing you there.

Best wishes.

John Elcock, Chair of HRGB Scottish Regional Association

DUDDINGSTON KIRK HANDBELL GROUP



After two years of playing the coloured bells often used by children, the Duddingston Kirk Bell Group was delighted to be able to borrow the two octave set of Marmark handbells known as the Birnam Bells. It has taken us some time to get used to this new way of ringing but we finally played in church on Palm Sunday. Duddingston Kirk is celebrating its 900th anniversary this year so we have several special services during the year and hope to be able to play at some of these services.

We are indebted to HRGB (Scotland) for allowing us the opportunity to borrow the bells.

Anne McCrossan

Holy Trinity Handbells Venture North

The Scottish Regional Association Spring Rally took place in Wick on Saturday, 16th March, celebrating 25 years of Handbell Ringing in Caithness. There were teams from across Scotland and from further afield including the N.E. region, the S.W. Region and West Midlands. Our group had been practicing three pieces for massed ringing over the last few weeks and a small contingent of handbell ringers, led by John Elcock travelled to Caithness for this event.

Arriving on Friday evening, we met some of the Ringers from across the region and were invited to participate in a ringing event after dinner. This was quite a surprise, as the bells in question were cowbells arranged in three octaves. I certainly had no experience of cowbells, but the tunes, including 'Over the Rainbow' were readily recognisable.



On the Saturday morning, we all met at the Assembly Rooms and laid out our bells for the three pieces we were to practise. We were joined by Irene, an experienced ringer from Scone Bellplates who greatly assisted in our team effort. The massed ringing pieces were conducted by Susie Dingle, a freelance orchestral and choral conductor and the pieces comprised:

- 'Judy Gees Goes Overseas' - a sea shanty composed by Katrina Gordon, Caithness Handbell Ringers
- 'Reflective Contemplations' - a more serious piece, also by Katrina Gordon, featuring a ground bass and the opportunity for some of the ringers to improvise
- 'Over the Ord' written by Donald Sutherland from Wick and arranged for bells by Katrina Gordon. This provided a sing-a-long opportunity for audience participation during the informal concert on Saturday afternoon.

We were also treated to individual group ringing sessions between our practice sessions and during the informal concert, Caithness Handbell Ringers played 'Confluence' a piece written for piano by Blythe Bullen, a local schoolgirl. The piece was arranged for handbells by Katrina Gordon and Blythe was in the audience for the afternoon performance.

As a new Handbell Ringer, who can hardly read music, I learnt so much from the Conductor and started to watch the Conductor rather than simply trying to count time whilst focusing on the music sheet. The music came alive when the bells were played as one and we recognised the natural rests and timing intervals.

Our thanks go to everyone who attended and supported the event, and especially Poltney Bell Ringers who laid on lunch and served refreshments throughout the day. A raffle was held, and the money raised was divided between HRGB Scottish Regional Association to support young ringers and 'Arran's Appeal' raising funds and awareness of the Anthony Nolan Stem Cell Register.

I am certainly looking forward to the Autumn Rally on 12th October, hosted by Cumnock and District Handbell Ringers.
David Hinley, Holy Trinity Handbells

From Jordanhill Parish Church to Wick Assembly Rooms

This year's Scottish Region Spring Rally was held in Wick, the furthest north the rally has ever ventured. With a round trip of 540 miles, the nine Jordanhill ringers attending the event were having a weekend away. In all some 60 ringers from around the country travelled by car, boat, train and plane to participate in the event hosted by Caithness Handbell Ringers and Poltney Bell Ringers.



The massed ringing pieces, written and arranged by Katrina Gordon, allowed us to stamp and sing as well as ring. Susie Dingle led us through the massed ringing pieces with great patience and humour. An informal performance of these pieces finished off the afternoon to a very appreciative audience.



The Scottish Region AGM was held at lunch time. This saw Laura Buist standing down as regional treasurer and NEC. She was presented with a gift to recognise her many years of service. Michelle McGowan, Jordanhill HR, has taken on this post.

The hospitality at the event was second to none with a wide range of home-made soups to choose from in addition to delicious home-made baking. As many of us had to stay overnight, the Saturday finished with an informal evening meal in the Norseman Hotel giving us all a chance to relax and mingle. This was a great weekend of good music, renewing friendships and making new friends. Thank you Poltney and Caithness Ringers.

Christine Reid
Jordanhill Parish Church Handbell Ringers

Poltney Handbell Ringers back to Business As Usual

Still riding high from being part of the Spring Rally held in Wick earlier this year, the team has welcomed some new ringers, one of whom was inspired to join after being an audience member at the rally concert. They joined us as we were preparing a programme of music for a visit to a local day care centre. So 'in at the deep end' describes their introduction to Handbell Ringing perfectly.

Luckily, we have the luxury of two sets of bells for those used in 12 bell music. So our newcomers were each paired with experienced ringers. Very soon all the 'C' words were ingrained in our beginners' memories: counting, concentration, co-ordination, clapping, crying (with laughter when not all ringing from the same piece of music), chatting (only allowed while having) coffee and chocolate biscuits.

On the run up to the gig date we were delighted to have several visitors to our Tuesday morning rehearsals. One day it was the parents of a new ringer. Another was a sister and friend of a couple of ringers and then a visit from a family of four including a grandad, whose birthday it was. By good luck, in preparation for our up-and-coming gig, we were brushing up on 'Ringing Happy Birthday' from the Mayola Jubilee Book of music for twelve bells or chimes. We have been caught out before not being able to ring this tune when a birthday was being celebrated at a gig. Our visiting grandad was highly impressed that we could just turn our hand to ringing 'Happy Birthday' for him.

Our new ringers are settling in nicely and enquiring about getting their sets of polo shirts and sweatshirts in our team colours. I think this shows they have discovered the joys and fun of being a Handbell Ringers as pictured below. Footnote: We've booked the minibus for the Autumn Rally and look forward to join you in the Netherthird Community Centre, Cumnock on the 12th of October.

Lyn Ball, Team Leader, Poltney Handbell Ringers



Children's Summer Holiday Handbell Ringing Week at Dunblane Cathedral

The final day of a week of music making with handbells for children aged 8-12 at Dunblane Cathedral, during the school summer holidays, concluded with a performance for family and friends. And the music worked on through the week, all specially written arrangements of music chosen by the children after they had registered, comprised Taylor Swift's "Wonderland", rock band AC/DC's "Back in Black" (with violin and cajon), "Let's go fly a kite" from Mary Poppins, and finishing with Olivia Rodrigo's "Deja Vu."

Some children had little to no prior music reading experience, while one could play several other instruments, and so the first few days had included everyone becoming familiar with music notation (note values and rhythms, time signatures, repeats, key signatures, dynamic markings), handbell techniques, and stagecraft, learning music notation while ringing – so it was all hands-on practical music making. By the morning of the final day, all the children demonstrated their developed music reading skills by being able to switch parts in one of the pieces so that each time they played the piece they played every other part in turn! They might have just even surprised themselves!

During the week the children played on handbells and on Belleplates. Throughout the week they had been introduced to the HRGB Crescendo Award scheme, and by the end of the week all the children had achieved all of the requirements of the first level of the Crescendo Award, and also gone on to achieve all of the requirements for the second level!

This was the second year in which Dunblane Cathedral Handbell Ringers had organised such an event. Much advertising had been undertaken locally, from emails to local schools, and posters distributed locally, to print media and social media advertising, and sharing on online "what's on" websites. This year was the first time children were asked beforehand what music they liked, to see if handbell arrangements could be made of some (with no promise that it would definitely happen – though it did this year!) And this was the first time the HRGB Crescendo Award scheme was incorporated – with the requirements of the first level award built into planning. As it turned out, the children really liked the idea of working towards the certification so much they were eager to rise to the challenge of doing more, and unexpectedly achieved the requirements for the second level.



The aim of the event had been to introduce more children to the fun of making music together with others using handbells. The smiles and laughs when they were learning, mixed with faces of concentration when ringing, and conversations with parents through the week certainly indicated that the children had enjoyed the week. We certainly hope that the seeds of enjoyment for making music with handbells for these children may in the future see them join a handbell group, whether that's right away or some years in the future.

Malcolm Wilson

Margaret Davidson

(14/03/44 - 06/07/24)

It was with great sadness and shock that the ringers of Blair Bells learned of Margaret Davidson's sudden death in July.



A talented musician, Margaret began playing the organ in Blairgowrie at just 15 years old- going on to play regularly at churches in Coupar Angus, Blairgowrie and the surrounding villages throughout her life.

When Heather McLean formed the Parish of Dunkeld and Birnam Handbell Ringers in 2002, Margaret was one of the founding members of the group. Her musical skill, adaptability and enthusiasm meant she quickly became an active leading player, performing solo, duet and four-in-hand contributions. Margaret and Heather often played popular duets during the summer months in Dunkeld Cathedral, a fitting setting for their talents. The pair were also part of the Celtic Carillon - a very accomplished group of players from across the region. Margaret was well known across the handbell fraternity and really enjoyed the fellowship of meeting up with other ringers at both local and national rallies.

When Heather sadly passed away in 2017, Margaret took over as leader of the Dunkeld and Birnam group; a role she carried out with calm assurance giving lots of support and encouragement to the members. Margaret led the ringers until falling numbers and the impact of the pandemic led the decision to disband the group in October 2022. This had to be carried out in accordance with the constitution and Margaret's knowledge of the history of the group and its collections of bells and sheet music was invaluable when it came to dealing with their dispersal. It is encouraging to note that the set of Birnam bells which were designated to be given to the Scottish HRGB are currently on loan to a newly formed group who are enjoying playing them.

Margaret went on to join the Blair Bells group where she will be very greatly missed, not only for her musical skills but also the friendship, warmth and kindness she brought to the group. We send our love and condolences to her husband Andy and the rest of her family. Rest in Peace, Margaret.

Appeal for help to transport bells from East Anglia back to Scotland!

The Caithness Handbell Ringers were excited earlier this year to be authorised to borrow an extra set of bells from the William Hartley Memorial Fund, to accommodate our increasing number of ringers.

However, the bells are currently located in East Anglia and we are having some trouble getting them north. If any HRGB member is able to help to transport these bells safely from East Anglia to anywhere in Scotland, we'd be delighted to pick them up and take them the final 200-300 miles north to Caithness! Some of our team will be at Cumnock for the Rally in October so maybe we could arrange a handover there?

The set requiring transportation is the two octaves of Malmark bells which were donated to WHMF by the wonderful Heather McLean after her death in 2017. They are in 4 smaller boxes, handmade for Heather by her husband, so not too heavy for one person to lift. We're so much looking forward to welcoming these bells back to Scotland and giving them a caring home. If you will be visiting East Anglia any time in the coming months and have space in your car to transport the bells, please get in touch with me: katrinathurso@aol.com

Thanks so much!

Important Dates for your Diary:

- Saturday 12th October** Scottish Region Autumn Rally, Netherthird Community Centre, 65 Ryderston Drive, Cumnock, KA18 3AR. Hosted by the Cumnock and District Handbell Ringers who are looking forward to welcoming you. Application forms have been sent out by email to all teams and should be returned to Marge, please, by 21st September (paterson-j6@sky.com) to assist with the organisation of the event. Massed ringing music is now available to download for free at <https://tinyurl.com/CumnockOct24>
- Saturday 15th March 2025** Spring Rally and AGM, Holy Trinity Church, Haddington. Save the date!
- 4th-8th August 2026** International Handbell Symposium will be held 4th – 8th August **2026** at The P&J Live in Aberdeen, Scotland! Don't miss it!! You have just two years to plan, dream, save up and fundraise to make sure your whole team makes the effort to attend this AMAZING event!!! The next time the International Symposium might come to the UK could be 2042, so please don't miss this unique opportunity – get the date in your diary now and get talking with your team-mates!

Whatever you've been up to, please do send me your article about it for inclusion in the next newsletter. 😊

Please email katrinathurso@aol.com or post to 26 Grove Lane, Thurso, KW14 8AE with all your news and pictures. Thanks!