



# HRGB Scottish Newsletter

*2025 Issue 3 – September 2025*

## Chat from the Chair

Hello again from the Far North!

It has been a very busy summer for everyone by the sounds of it, I hope there has been lots of opportunity for ringing for most of you! I have certainly not had enough time to ring or physically do much surrounding bells, but a little time to ponder about bells. It's a bit rubbish when life keeps you from being able to speak about or ring bells!

When ringing bells/chimes as a group, we all have to rely on everyone around us to know that if (or when for some of us!) we get lost, our teammates can quickly tell us a bar number or count quietly to get us back in time. It is incredibly different from playing a piano for example, where you are in control of 100% of the notes played, speed of playing and even what sheet of music you have up. Team-work is the main aim of the game for bell ringing, as you, dear reader, will know. We are there for each other when we're struggling and can celebrate each other's wins, no matter how small. A smile or "well done" from someone from your team when you finally manage to ring the correct bell when you're all in a muddle; or being able to have a good blether over a cup of tea and a biscuit when life is hard, can make the world of difference. I know you may remember me saying before, but if it wasn't for being able to join in with our bell team, that my family and I would have such a different relationship to music, and life in general! Aren't we so lucky that we get to be a part of something so great? No matter what's going on in your life, you know that at least you have a group of people with a shared interest (or obsession) that you can rely on to have your back at a moment's notice. I know I certainly feel that way.

I am mightily looking forward to this next year of bell ringing! There will be lots of fun events in Scotland to keep us going through the year. Smaller local rallies; like our Autumn Rally in Kirkcaldy on 25<sup>th</sup> October, and the bigger ones like the International Symposium in Aberdeen in August next year. We would absolutely love to see as many friendly faces at these events as possible, so do please register to attend these events if you can.

If you are worried or unsure about whether you would manage any of the events ok - then please get in touch as there is a wealth of knowledge to calm any nerves from all the lovely people that have been to all manner of bell events before. There is something for everyone to look forward to, no matter what you feel you can manage! Looking forward to seeing you at the next event soon! I tend to be a little on the nervous/shy side until you know me (I'm sure everyone that does know me is shaking their heads at me being "shy"! ) but please do feel free to come and say hello or introduce yourself if you see me. If you'd rather me speak to you, then send me a wee message and I'll definitely come and find you!

If anyone reading this would like to get involved more, especially for any of the teams not currently represented in the committee, then please get in touch with any one of us.

Kirsty Hill (HRGB Scottish Region chairperson) 😊



# A Novice's Guide to registering for the Aberdeen International Symposium 2026

**("The Far North Ringers" will see you all in Aberdeen!)**

Since I first realised the International Symposium was coming to the UK in 2026, I have been very keen to learn more about this exciting event. What better opportunity to hear amazing teams from across the world and ring all together – but a bit of a daunting prospect as a “first-timer”!

I was delighted to attend Lynda Barclay's session at the HRGB Scotland Summer Workshops in June. She spoke so enthusiastically about all the friendly ringers she has met and the exciting places which she has been to through attending previous Symposia (Is that the correct plural?!)

Hearing all about her adventures made me even more determined to be brave and attend the next International event – [Aberdeen 2026](#) – on 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> August next year!

I have been keeping my eyes peeled for details of how to register since the workshop and was delighted to receive the email recently. The organisers provided a very useful booklet which told me everything I needed to know about the event and how to register! Here's the link so you can read it for yourself and be inspired to join me at the Symposium in Aberdeen!

<https://ihs26.hanbells.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-08/A5%20reg%20booklet-English.pdf>

## Registering is super EASY!

The form is very quick and straightforward, but here are my top tips for anyone who may be feeling a bit daunted!

- If you are going on your own, or with just a couple of friends, each person should register on the [“Ringers” form](#). You can use “Celtic Carillon” as your team name and let Lynda Barclay know ( [lyndabarclay51@gmail.com](mailto:lyndabarclay51@gmail.com) ). That way, you will be grouped with other Scottish Ringers for the massed ringing sessions and will receive further information through Lynda.
- If you are planning to attend the Symposium with other members of your local team and wish to attend as a team, make sure you first **agree who is going to be “the director”** for your team – they will become the person who gets future information for your team members. (This is an admin role, so this does not necessarily have to be your musical

director.) **That person must register using the [“choir/group leaders/directors” form](#) and they will need to state the name of your team and say approximately how many ringers and how many tables will be required for your group.** You will also have to decide if your team would like to perform a tune at one of the evening sessions - I hope you'll be as brave as we were and say that you will! 😊

- **ALL other ringers in your team who want to attend the Symposium must each complete the [“ringers” form](#) themselves** and they will need to include your Team Name on their form. This form is very easy and quick to fill, but do have your bank details at the ready...
- **Each ringer must pay a £150 deposit when booking** - this can be done using your bank card OR by bank transfer. If circumstances change, meaning you have to cancel your booking before January 16<sup>th</sup>, you would get £125 of your deposit refunded. But if you cancel after January 16<sup>th</sup> you would lose your deposit, so make sure you are fully committed by then!
- Once you've registered, you will get details of possible hotels to stay at, but you can stay elsewhere if you'd like to do that. You should book your accommodation soon – Aberdeen can get quite busy! Please note that the registration fee does not include accommodation, so that will be an extra cost - unless you're lucky enough to live in Aberdeen!
- The balance of the registration fee (£550) needs to be paid by 24<sup>th</sup> April 2026, but if you are able to pay it before 16<sup>th</sup> January you'll benefit from the “early bird rate” of £500. So you have 4-8 months to get fundraising to make it all affordable!

The exciting news from the Caithness Handbell Ringers, the Poltney Ringers and Borealis Bells from Orkney is ... **WE ARE GOING TO ABERDEEN 2026 as “The Far North Ringers!”** And, we plan to play a piece at one of the evening concerts!

We're already getting excited and can't wait to see you all there! It will be so much fun hosting our international handbell friends and enjoying some amazing music making together!

**Register today! It's EASY!**

Susan Watson  
(Caithness Handbell Ringers)

## Mary Penny – 30 Years of Cushnie Handbell Ringers

In 1994, Mary Penny attended a workshop at Dunblane and became focused on having her own local group of handbells. Thanks to Cushnie Church donating some belleplates, she formed a group with six stalwart members and proceeded to enthuse her players with her determination to make music.

The Cushnie Handbell Ringers improvised with obtaining bells (often from antique shops) and adapting them to add to their collection. More donations followed and the group now has full sets of Taylors handbells, as well as chimes and belleplates.

In the early days, Mary persuaded lots of players, achieving 17 at one point, including some children. Which must have been tricky to coordinate!

Now, we have 8 members, but past members that have moved away, or had health issues, still keep in touch. We have moved from Mary's original location of Cushnie Church (now sadly closed) to Tullynessle Hall near Alford where we are warm and spacious and have access to parking and a kitchen. (No requirement now to brave the snow on a single-track road, and huddle in the pews while waiting for the bells to turn up!)

Mary and her Merry Band hosted HRGB rallies at Aboyne in 2009 and 2016, and planned another in 2020 which had to be cancelled because of covid. Both the earlier ones were well attended and attracted some media interest.

Cushnie Handbell Ringers have played at various venues including care homes, day care centres, schools, church services and as an activity for Rendezvous for the Grampian Network 50+. So we have passed on opportunities for schoolchildren and older folk to experience the fun of playing our bells.

We meet on Monday afternoons and would welcome any potential ringers to come and join us if they happen to live in the Alford area. Mary may enjoy some special celebrations as we head towards the 30<sup>th</sup> year since Mary had the Cushnie Handbell Ringers first registered with HRGB in October 1995.



*Mary Penny pictured with the Cushnie Handbells*

## ***To Mary***

*Mary Mary plays the bells,  
She plays the organ too.  
Her oboe and bassoon give joy  
To all who come to view.*

*For many years she's led a band  
A group of ladies true,  
Who ring and count and follow  
And sometimes make it through...  
We wish to thank our Lady Guide  
Who keeps us ringing well,  
And takes us off to places new  
To show us off with pride.*

*We struggle with our stops and starts,  
And miss our special entries,  
But Mary keeps on smiling  
As she encourages our intentions.*

*For many years she's urged us on  
At least for more than twenty!  
And so we thank her once again  
For enjoyable rallies a-plenty.*

*By Val Lyons  
Cushnie Handbell Ringers*



## Caithness Handbell Ringers – a summer of highs and lows

Six of the Caithness Handbell Ringers had a grand day out in Glasgow on June 14<sup>th</sup>, joining other Scottish ringers at the HRGB Scotland summer workshop. We really enjoyed learning lots and meeting friendly ringers from across Scotland. Jordanhill Parish Church Handbell Ringers were wonderful hosts and we found ourselves being a bit jealous of their superb home venue. We all attended the three fantastic workshop options:

Ruth Cantlay led a session about techniques, where we learned all sorts of new things, including how to play the singing bells!



Lynda Barclay led a fascinating session about her experiences of ringing around the world at various International Symposiums and National Rallies, inspiring us all to make a firm intention to attend Aberdeen IHS in August next year! (Get booking now, by the way... 😊)



Finally, Malcolm Wilson led a really fun workshop where we learned, amongst other things, how to make and play a bell tree!



Of course, we enjoyed the generous hospitality of the Jordanhill ringers who provided delicious cakes and wholesome chat. In May, I had newly become a grandmother and my sister Susan Watson had become a great Auntie, and so we excitedly told everyone of our plans to go and visit our tiny baby Agatha in the neonatal unit in Ninewells hospital after we'd finished our day of ringing. She'd arrived 10 weeks early but was doing very well and I'm so pleased that we did manage to visit baby Agatha that evening and had such a lovely time with her and her parents. You can see from the picture that she was a wee cutie!



Baby Agatha continued to thrive and left the hospital just a few days later. She spent two joyous weeks at home with her parents and then I'm so sorry to report that, early in July, she passed away, completely peacefully but unexpectedly, in her loving mother's arms.

We are of course all utterly devastated at the loss of Agatha, but you'll see from the picture that she brought nothing but love, joy and a cheeky grin for the beautiful six weeks she was with her parents, and we all feel so blessed to have known her.

Agatha's parents have set up [a Just Giving page](https://www.justgiving.com/page/agatha-hawes) in her memory, to raise funds for the Ninewells Neonatal Unit where she was so beautifully loved for her first four weeks. Our family is so grateful to the staff there for everything they did for Agatha. Thanks so much to everyone who has donated to the page.

*Rest in perfect peace, sweet Aggie.*

<https://www.justgiving.com/page/agatha-hawes>

Katrina Gordon, Caithness Handbell Ringers  
(aka editor & Granny Tina)



## National Residential Ringing Week 2025, Sheffield

The National Residential Ringing Week (NRRW) was held on 4–8th August 2025 at the Edge, Sheffield University and has been organised in recent years by Aidan Fozard. This is a biennial five-day event that has the format of three conductors with nine different pieces of music of various grades with up to seven octaves of bells. The timetable is intense, starting at 2 pm on Monday ringing until 8.30 pm and then continuing Tuesday to Friday ringing from 9 am until 8.30 pm, with regular breaks, lunch, half day on Wednesday, and concert on Friday evening.

This year at NRRW there was a bit of a theme going on. The conductors, *Sandra Winter* [Radiant Glory (Jason Krug), Shepherd's Hey (Cathy Moglebust), Into the Light (Sandra Winter)], *Matthew Compton* [Seasons of Life (Sondra Tucker), Champaca (Elizabeth Peters), Simplicity (Matthew Compton)], and *Michael Glasgow* [Pas de Deux (Michael Glasgow), A River Runs Through (Sandra Winter), Exultation (Matthew Compton)] were playing their own music, and in Michael's case also honouring his two fellow conductors/composers.

It was a busy NRRW, there were over 90 ringers from all over the UK; the practice room was set up with seven rows of ringers, each row running down the octaves. There were seven Scottish ringers, three from Dunblane Cathedral Handbell Ringers/Blair Bells (Judith Frye, Mary McGregor, and me, Elizabeth Smeaton) and four from Jordanhill Parish Church Handbell Ringers (Ruth Cantlay, Lynda Barclay, Linda Mawson, and Kirsty Richardson).



These were my highlights:

- Playing with a full 6–7 octaves of challenging music with techniques and varying tempos. We cannot do this very often in Scotland, it was a fantastic experience.



- The chosen music, I dislike none and loved them all. My favourite is perhaps *Radiant Glory*, such a joyful piece to play, with *A River Runs Through* a close second, it has a Scottish lilt I love.
- *Pas de Deux* while not difficult has seven different time signatures, many were new to me, and a violin accompaniment (played by Judith Frye). Michael gave his all in helping us to ring this piece to the best of our abilities. He produced in depth notes beforehand with details of how to count the time signatures and gave individual tuition for problematic points. The result was fantastic to play with a real sense of 'wow, I did that'.
- *Shepherd's Hey* is played at a fast tempo and alternates malleting and ringing. Reading dots for malleting and dotted crotchets at speed, with not all of the mallet dots applying to all of the notes, meant that my music was covered in notes and reminders. And I did not have sharps and flats like the trebles. After considerable practice with Sandra, we played well in the concert, and I particularly enjoyed the thumping, rolling tenor bells in their standout part, not often we get to hear them shine.
- Cooperation, handbells are played in teams and teams work together. I played CD4, but I also picked up and played whatever notes my neighbours could not play. There was constant discussion of 'well, if you do the sharp, I'll do the natural' in the trebles and 'I'll play A, if you play B' in the bass and tenors, where picking up big bells at speed has its own issues.
- Martellato, martellato lift, malleting, mallet lift, and playing both bells and chimes were some of the techniques we used. For the record, *Champaca* has at least 70 martellato notes, and Matthew conducted to the martellato rhythm (and it sounded great). We also had valuable instruction to improve our malleting. So, it was altogether a great learning experience.
- C flat. In *Radiant Glory* there are two C flat crotchets. Sandra pointed out that C flat is B, and next time we played the correct notes which made her happy (we like making conductors happy!). Michael took it further, he wanted us to have the full explanation of why C flat is B, so he made a cardboard keyboard and then held an impromptu talk in the bar with his cardboard keyboard.
- The Wednesday evening dinner in the Halifax Hall, an evening of food and excellent company, with entertainment. Matthew Compton sang his contribution to the entertainment, and he has a superb voice.
- The conductors, Michael, Matthew, and Sandra, all worked in different ways, but they were all incredibly supportive and got the best out of us.

One point that came up repeatedly through the week was the 22nd International Handbell Symposium (4–8th August 2026) in Aberdeen, the constant question of 'are you going?' as this is a chance to take part in an international symposium, get the full experience, and not have to pay for flights. Many people are making the trip north and I hope many of you will be there also.

I want to end this with a big thank you to Aidan Fozard, the three conductors Sandra Winter, Michael Glasgow, and Matthew Compton, Judith Frye for playing the violin and everyone who helped out in any way, transporting equipment, loaning bells, sending out music, etc., to make this event possible. Also to thank the lovely, friendly people that I met along the way to make it such a memorable event.

And I also hope that I have inspired you to start saving your pennies for the 15th National Residential Ringing Week which will again be at The Edge, Sheffield in August 2027. It is a great experience, and it would be lovely to see more Scottish ringers there.

Elizabeth Smeaton



## Check out the Members Map!

HRGB website has a beautiful map which shows all the HRGB teams in Scotland – go to <https://handbells.org.uk/members-map> to have a look and find out who your neighbours are. Now is always a good time to befriend some more bellringers! 😊

## Important Dates for your Diary:

### Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October

The Autumn Rally will be held in **Kirkcaldy** this year. Bennochty Bells are our hosts at Langtoun Central Church Bennochty Building, Elgin Street, Meldrum Road, **Kirkcaldy**, KY2 5HR. Doors open from 10am, rally will be from 11.30-4pm. Details, including registration form and links to the massed ringing pieces, at <https://www.hrgbscotland.org.uk/calendar/hrgb-scottish-regional-association-autumn-rally-in-kirkcaldy-25-october-2025> See you all there!

### Date tbc - March 2026

Our Spring Rally next year will mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Scottish Region, so we'll have lots to celebrate and are hoping to make it a very special event! Watch this space for further details!

### 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> August 2026

**Booking is now open** for the **International Handbell Symposium**, which will be held 4<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> August 2026 at The P&J Live in Aberdeen, Scotland! Don't miss it!!

Please register for the symposium at: <https://ihs26.handbells.org.uk/>

If you plan to attend on your own, rather than with others from your local team, please email [lyndabarclay51@gmail.com](mailto:lyndabarclay51@gmail.com) to say you are interested as she will be the team correspondent for Celtic Carillon (HRGB Scotland) and then you will be placed alongside other friendly Scottish ringers at the massed ringing sessions.

[This useful booklet](#) from the organising committee includes the details of the schedule and everything you need to know, so make sure to read it!

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](mailto:katrinathurso@aol.com) or post to

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with all your news and pictures. Thanks!