



HRGB Scottish Newsletter

2023 Issue 2 – July 2023

Chat from the Chair

“I for one had a great time”. “I thoroughly enjoyed the whole event”.

“The venue, facilities and food were excellent, and the workshops most enjoyable”.

“One of the very best National Rallies I have attended”.

Just a few of the comments I received following the hugely successful National Rally held at the Stirling Court Hotel, Stirling from 14-16 April. I extend my sincere thanks to everyone who helped before, during and after the event but particularly to Laura Buist, Lynda Barclay, Ruth Cantlay and Judith Frye.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Joyce Beattie who stood down as Secretary of the Scottish Regional Association Committee at the Annual General Meeting in March. We will miss her cheery smile!

The committee is seeking further representation, particularly from areas outwith the Central Belt. Attendance at meetings (usually January, May and August) can be onscreen or in person, whichever is preferable. If you are interested in joining the committee, please contact me on 07746 742032 or by email at john.s.elcock@gmail.com for further details.

The Scottish Region's 2023 Autumn Rally will be held in the Victoria Halls, Dunblane on Saturday 7th October. In celebration of her award of the BEM in the New Year Honours list for services to handbell ringing, the massed ringing pieces will all be arrangements by Lysbeth Wilson. Doors will open at 10.00am with the rally commencing at 11.30am. With breaks for lunch, coffee and tea, served by Dunblane Cathedral Handbell Ringers, the rally will continue until 3.30pm. Application forms can be found on the HRGB Scottish Regional Association website <https://www.hrgbScotland.org.uk/news/hrgbscot-autumn-rally-2023> – please return your form to Malcolm Wilson by 23rd September. I look forward to seeing you all there.

Best wishes to all our readers.

John Elcock, Chair of HRGB Scottish Regional Association

A Fresh Perspective on the National Rally

OK. Full disclosure: I am a totally newbie bell-ringer. My partner Pat Field and I have an outrageous scheme to start a bell group in Bearsden, but we have no experience of bell-ringing. We do, however, have a beautiful set of bells and chimes! Pat teaches violin and viola, and I play clarinet and viola, so we do have musical experience. We're not completely mad. An introduction to bell-ringing courtesy of our local bell group (thanks lovely ladies of Jordanhill!) and the national rally in Stirling has begun to fill in some of those gaps for us.

The national rally in Stirling in April was fantastic. I was a bit apprehensive, going in with quite so little knowledge, but everyone was so friendly and welcoming. What a smashing community we've joined!

The first "wow" was the range of workshops available: there really was something for everyone. Pat and I both did learning four in hand, arranging for 12 bells, and bell maintenance. While I did change ringing, Pat went off to learn about funding and recruitment. The workshops were well-organised, and extremely engaging. I loved Sandra Winter's straightforward and humorous approach to arranging for 12 bells. The crib sheet of techniques will be really useful when we get into our own arrangements. There were lots of good tips in the four-in-hand workshop too, including a plug for Jason Walker's book "This and That". Reader, I bought the book. It has six very accessible arrangements for 12 bells. Change-ringing really gave a work-out for my brain and coordination. Judith Frye was fascinating on the history and practice of change-ringing, and gave us excellent exercises to try out in our groups. Why should it be quite so hard to time ringing bells in order, I don't know. In the end we were good at simple rounds and Kings and Queens, but switching from one to the other was beyond us. Maybe we needed lunch.

Food was great at the Stirling Court hotel, the venue for the weekend. The evening banquet on Friday was especially nice, with fancy table service and an opportunity to get to know other bell-ringers a bit better. Shout out to the women of Northern Scotland who made us feel included at their table.

Saturday evening meant a concert. There had been a real effort to include all sorts of performances to showcase the many talents present. We heard a couple of solo performances, showing dexterity ringing off-table and the mind-boggling skill of ringing six-in-hand, through small groups of two and three ringers, larger established groups of around 10 from around the country with their well-rehearsed contributions, to the advanced group showing off what they'd practised that day in their workshop (a selection from Aladdin). I



especially liked the contribution of the Far North Bells with pieces written by Katrina Gordon suggesting the waves lapping at the coast at Skirza, Caithness, and a dramatic programmatic piece evoking a Viking raid. You can see this last one on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymsL3gNyrgA>).

The last "wow" was massed ringing on Sunday morning. First: what a lot of bells! Tables and tables loaded with bells! The room was full of animated participants (a bit too animated – we did get told off for talking too much). We rehearsed four pieces with four different conductors. They worked us hard to create musical renditions of Mozart's Andante Grazioso arranged by Malcolm Wilson, Vincent by Don McLean arranged by Ron Mallory, Margareta Aurumque written by Malcolm Wilson, and Fred Gramman's Passacaglia in C minor. What a sound! The Passacaglia made particularly good use of the big bells, which was especially exciting.

All in all it was a great weekend, and I'm looking forward to the Scottish Region Autumn rally in Dunblane on 7th October and perhaps also venturing to Caithness for the [Spring Rally on 16th March 2024!](#)

So when will we put all this new-found experience into practice? The idea of our bell group is to create a space for those without a lot of musical experience to make music. We live in an area where there are a lot of older people: a bell group will add a new community, and making music keeps your brain active. We've certainly found that while teaching ourselves to ring four-in-hand! Bearsden Bells will be open to all, playing a range of music. We are busy launching the [Hub@Milngavie Music Club](#) at the moment. This is a weekly chamber music activity group for string players, and takes a lot of organisation. We plan to start the bell group in Autumn 2024. If you'd like to come along, then please get in touch with pat.field@ntlworld.com

Carron Shankland, Bearsden Bells

Hitting the High Notes with “Musication” – Bell Ringing Fun for all the Family!

After attending the national rally as my first ever handbell ringing event, I can say I'm quite thoroughly hooked. Being able to use what I learned from the classes, after our long journey home, was great. There was such a wealth of knowledge, it was so inspiring – I certainly went away buzzing full of ideas!

The biggest drop of wisdom I gleaned from the teaching kids class run by Helen Secker was about the channel [Musication](#) on YouTube. It is such a brilliant resource, especially being completely free to watch and use the videos they have. I originally thought it would be useful for helping the kids get started on using bells, but after playing with them- and my husband joining in too – we quickly realised it was perhaps even more helpful for the most grown-up kids like us.



Musication has videos that you can play along with, similar to karaoke, Guitar Hero or the Wii Music games where there is a scrolling/bouncing “conductor” that tells you where you are in the tune while the notes/coloured blocks/words are moving along. These videos can be played along with any variation of bells, boomwhackers, even spoons hitting a cushion in time to the beat. This makes it an incredibly accessible resource to use, as long as you have a device that connects to the internet and can access YouTube website or app. There are plenty of songs that will be recognisable to all ages, as well as the more traditional tunes to listen to and play along. Each video is slightly different, but they all follow the same theme of having different colours for each note, the conductor and the music in the background to make it very simple to follow. There are varying levels of difficulty, and you can choose from something a small child could manage, to something that the most experienced of players would still gain something from.

If you are looking for a way to introduce bell ringing to more people, or even encouraging your team members to have a practice tool they can use at home, then I would definitely recommend Musication as a quick and fun resource to use at home, either on your own or with a group.

My husband describes himself as “someone who cannae haud a tune in a bucket” yet after a single 2 minute video he was playing two bell chimes like a pro. We were very grateful that we could borrow a set of chimes, and later belleplates, that we would go on to use every single night after dinner the whole time we had them in the house. It was such good fun for all 4 of us! The kids picked it up so fast and they said it felt like a fun, musical video game. It certainly worked in my favour as I got to play bells at home, and my husband and son decided to join the Caithness Handbell Ringers too!

With the next Scottish rally coming up in October in Dunblane, I am already counting down the days to be able to soak up some more inspiration from all the ringers in one space together. I’m incredibly grateful to everyone being so welcoming at the rally in Stirling, and particularly my ringers in Caithness for being so inclusive of myself and my family straight away. I don’t think I would be this enthusiastic and excited about bell ringing if it wasn’t for the kindness and support of everyone. We are looking forward to seeing some familiar faces at the next rally, and maybe a few new ones too!

Kirsty Hill, Caithness Handbell Ringers

Duddingston Belles

Duddingston Kirk lies on the south-east slopes of Arthur’s Seat, a long-extinct volcano near the centre of Edinburgh. The parish church overlooks Duddingston Loch – once the site of a Bronze Age lake village – and belongs to the family of reformed churches within the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

The Kirk was founded in 1124 so next year we will celebrate our 900th anniversary with many special events during the year. The Church has a long association with the arts. Raeburn’s iconic painting of The Skating Minister depicts the Rev Robert Walker skating on Duddingston Loch although he was not, in fact, the minister of Duddingston Kirk but of the Cannongate Kirk. The Rev. John Thomson a minister of the kirk in the early 19th century and a renowned landscape artist in his own right was a close friend of the painters Turner and Raeburn. The story goes that Thomson was so highly regarded in the parish that even those not members of the Church would say, 'We're all Jock Tamson's bairns'. Walter Scott was also an elder of the church and wrote in the gardens there.

I had for some time wanted to learn to play handbells but I was unable to find a local group. One Christmas my husband bought me a set of the kind of bells that children use in school. My son had the same idea and bought a set of 20 Percussion Plus bells which gave us two sets of one and a half chromatic octaves each. I marked up some music with numbers for the benefit of people who didn't read music and advertised in our church newsletter for people to join me. Eight enthusiastic ladies turned up at the first meeting, three of whom were music teachers! So although we had no idea where to start to ring bells, we had plenty of guidance on clapping out rhythms, etc!!!

The group still only has female members so we call ourselves the Duddingston Belles although Beaux are, of course, welcome. On New Year's day this year, we performed for the first time, hiding in the church gallery so we couldn't be seen. We have since accompanied our church choir at the Easter service and are gaining in confidence. It was a steep learning curve but we can now keep going without someone stopping to say "oh, that was me"!!! We feel that we should move on to playing "real" bells so with the Kirk's 900th anniversary on the horizon, this would seem like an ideal opportunity to take that next step.

Anne McCrossan (Duddingston Kirk)

New Ringers Always Welcome in Paisley

St James Handbells in Paisley are now 140 years old, with the original bells being recast twice. Over the years, we have been privileged to play for Princess Anne at a flower festival, the bell group being wheeled in on a rolling stage! Another highlight was when Scottish Opera asked us to play with them during a pop-up opera in Paisley. This was an amazing experience and one the group will always remember. We were unaware that the media were invited and the bells were featured on (and I interviewed) BBC and STV.

We rehearse most Wednesday nights at Oakshaw Trinity Church, Paisley, from late August until the end of May. Playing all types of music genres, we normally try and play 3 or 4 concerts a year depending on players available. Presently we have 10 members of different abilities and are always looking for new players so please get in touch at elainecolquhoun15@hotmail.com if you or someone you know is interested in joining our team. It is hoped to restart the junior group next session if numbers suffice.

Elaine Duncan, St James Handbells



"Fanfare for a Celebration"

All the excitement of the Coronation in London on 6th May and the concert at Windsor on 7th May was overshadowed by "Fanfare for a Celebration" in Cumnock on 8th May !

Two members of Cumnock and District Handbell Ringers attended the National Rally at the Stirling Court Hotel. Marge won a raffle! The prize was a new composition by Sandra Winter - "Fanfare for a Celebration " - which Marge could copy for us exclusively. How special!

Marge's excitement spread through the group as within two days of winning the raffle we were playing the piece for the first time. It was practised another couple of times and then performed for Cumnock Blind Club and at Trindlemoss Day Centre in Irvine. The highlight, however, was on 8th May when the piece was performed by ourselves for ourselves and was followed by a splendid afternoon cream tea to mark the coronation of the King and Queen. Our coronation celebration was transformed from special to unique! Thank you, Sandra Winter!



Exciting Opportunity: 22nd International Handbell Symposium 2026

The 22nd International Handbell Symposium will be held 4th – 8th August 2026 at The Sage International Conference Centre Newcastle Gateshead Quays. The centre is currently under construction and is due to be open in 2024/25 with HRGB's hosting of the Symposium being an important early international event for the venue.

Please save the dates and consider attending, after all it's only on home turf once every 16 years now!

The event planning team will be chaired by Martin Winter. If there is anyone on your team that would like to be involved in the planning and or delivery of the symposium their help would be greatly appreciated. Please ask them to contact Martin to chat through how they can help.
symposium26@hrgb.org.uk

We all look forward to hosting, attending and enjoying being part of this great event.

With all best wishes

Tim Willetts, Chair HRGB

Safeguarding in the Scottish Region of HRGB

Hello. I would like to introduce myself. My name is Claire Griffiths and I part of the Jordanhill Parish Church Handbell group in Glasgow. I am also a committee member in the Scottish region of HRGB, having the responsibility of being the Safeguarding Officer for the region.

If Safeguarding, being alert to the wellbeing and concerns of others in your Bell group, is not something at the top of your thinking, then let me encourage you to read the webpage on the HRGB website entitled Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. <https://handbells.org.uk/safeguarding-policy-and-procedures> There's quite a lot to read!

This is an area which everyone should be aware of and have an idea of what to do if there are concerns. I am writing to ask if there are others throughout the Scottish region who might be willing to take an interest in Safeguarding, to the extent of undertaking some straightforward on-line training. It will be extremely helpful to have more people trained and willing to be responsible for Safeguarding at any local events. Could you please consider whether this might be something you could undertake and, if so, I'll be delighted to hear from you at claire@griffithsnet.net

Important Dates for your Diary:

- Saturday 7th October 2023** Scottish Region Autumn Rally, Victoria Halls, Stirling Road, Dunblane
(Please return your forms to Malcolm Wilson by **23rd September!** – information and forms can be found on the HRGB Scottish Regional Association website <https://www.hrgbScotland.org.uk/news/hrgbscot-autumn-rally-2023>)
- Saturday 14th March 2024** Scottish Region Spring Rally, Wick Assembly Rooms, Wick, Caithness
Check out the Caithness Handbell Ringers' [facebook event](#) to find out more, register your interest or intention to attend, and to get in touch if you need any advice about accommodation or travel to the far north!
- 4th-8th August 2026** International Handbell Symposium will be held 4th – 8th August **2026** at The Sage International Conference Centre Newcastle
We're giving you 3 whole 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!