

President's Blog End of Year message 2016

I am writing this on the shortest day of the year when perhaps we all feel the dark restricting our lives, However, it does mean that from now on we have turned the corner for spring with plenty to look forward to. The Year 2016 has not been the easiest for ringers but equally there has been a lot to celebrate and progress in many areas. The following reflections are just personal involvement, you will have your own highlights.

Wellesbourne, being not too far from Meriden, itself considered as the centre of England, was again the ringers' magnet for a conference organised by library and Biographies Committees. This was very successful and if you haven't signed up for the Public Relations gathering next February do so now.

The now Annual ART conference hosted at Loughborough foundry was a marvellous affair and the success of many students and their receipt of prizes heartening. Apart from anything else it shows that with hard work young ringers can be attracted. I am also pleased that the CC will be sponsoring a prize from next year.

A personal highlight was meeting the Verona ringers at Easter with whom some of you may have had contact through holidays and reciprocal visits to UK. I hope that we may see some of them in 2017. With regular peals at Dordrecht and hand-bell activities elsewhere our continental connections seem to be growing. The prospect of a ring of bells in St Gorge's memorial church, Ypres is exciting and should be supported.

Whilst there might be cynics, the marking of the 125th Anniversary of the founding of the Central Council in April was an important event. Not only did it recognise the pioneering work Arthur Heywood, but it was wonderful that Sir Peter Heywood and family became involved.

During the same week in April there occurred the Queen's "real" 90th birthday together with the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. Both events attracted considerable amounts of ringing although the "official" birthday of the Queen in June aligned to the Trooping of the Colour was equally celebrated.

The Central Council meeting in Portsmouth was an extremely enjoyable affair, expertly organised by the Winchester & Portsmouth Diocesan Guild. The open meeting produced lively debate and the formal meeting saw a motion which resulted in the Council Review Action Group. The recommendations will be received in 2017 and could shape the way we organise ourselves in the future. The Ringing World AGM held over the weekend was able to report success in its appeal for support and, for the time being, its weekly publication continues to be a bedrock upon which many rely.

Summer smiled on both major competitions, the 12-bell in Birmingham and the Ringing World National Youth Competition in London. The usual crowds gathered at Aston and were able to enjoy picnics outside while the Birmingham band added to their record number of wins. The RWNYC attracted a record number of 24 bands with Bedfordshire winning again. It was a pleasure to see so many young ringers

enjoy the opportunity to ring on prestigious bells such as St Martin's and the Jubilee ring at Garlickhythe.

Looking to the practical side of ringing, July saw the annual Diocesan Advisory Committee bell advisers conference held in Warwick. This was followed by meeting the Church Buildings Council in London. Both events look at the future needs associated with churches, their bells and the involvement of ringers – an essential exercise in co-operation.

It was pleasing to see many churches joining in the Heritage Open Days weekend in September with the doors, or should I say belfries, open to the public. It is good that we should display our activities, which are a mystery to many, and hopefully encourage some new recruits.

A fresh approach to exchanging ideas and experience in pursuit of best practice and problem solving was initiated with the first of a series of seminars in Southwark in October. Specifically involving officers of guilds, much useful information was shared and this was repeated in Derby in December with further meetings arranged in Bristol and Doncaster.

There is no doubt that since mid-October the ringing news has been dominated by the suspension of ringers at York Minster and the ensuing media coverage which has not been helpful to either church nor ringing. Whilst there have been understandable strong feelings and concerns it is to be hoped that the situation will be resolved and that ringing at the Minster will resume before long.

The final sad news of 2016 was the planned cessation of bell founding at the Whitechapel Foundry site, the end of an era but perhaps the start of a new one. The legacy of Whitechapel bells across the world remains and latterly the work of the Hughes family acknowledged.

This is my last end of year message as my Presidency finishes in May next year. There are challenges ahead for ringers everywhere with recruitment, organisation and the future of church buildings themselves being to the fore. I sincerely hope that all ringers will continue to play their part in what is one of the oldest international activities, complete with its unique inclusiveness combined with ever expanding physical and mental challenge. Your ringing sends out a message of constancy and hope in a troubled world, long may it continue.

It just remains to wish you and your families a very Happy Christmas and every good wish for the New Year.

Chris Mew, President, Central Council of Church Bell Ringers December, 2016