

On Saturday the 28th of January, Chester Cathedral held the very first North West 12 Bell Striking Competition. Despite typical January weather, ringers of all ages were not discouraged from coming from across Cheshire, Merseyside, Lancashire and Shropshire to make history with this exciting day.

With 6 teams entered, the day kicked off with the draw and the rules, as well as a selection of judges from each of the participating bands. Each band was given 30 minutes to practise and complete their test piece of Grandsire Cinques; 220 changes, taking approximately 10 minutes to ring. Chester Cathedral's Tower Captain, Paul Hunter, ensured everyone that the day was about having a good time, enjoying some ringing and advertising 12 bell ringing to all those in the North West.

The chance to take part, judge and compete, in this competition gave many the opportunity to try a new ringing experience, as well as opening their eyes to new and exciting aspects of 12 bell ringing. With the ringing order selected and many commenting that they had never had the opportunity to take part in a 12-bell competition before, it was a delight to see the smiling faces of teams as they came and went from the Addleshaw Tower, over the course of the day. The team spirit was high, with many people helping each other out by ringing for more than one team, the team work and determination of each and every person meant that the day went without a hitch.

The winners of this first North West competition were decided by the application of Hawkear. This software has been used extensively by the National 12-bell Competition for several years but never before at Chester. As well as this, in the spirit of raising awareness and enthusiasm for 12-bell ringing, organiser Paul Hunter had asked for representatives from each band to judge the ringing. This, for several, was the first time they had had the opportunity to sit outside quietly and listen critically to 12-bell ringing. Their results were amalgamated to provide a back-up in case of technical failure of recording the test pieces. In the event, the technology performed perfectly.

Hawkear and the judges agreed on the top two teams, though there was a difference of opinion for the remaining four. Both Hawkear and judges' results, as well as some general comments, were presented to the teams by Ray Helliwell, who had spent much of his spare time in the last few weeks making sure that the ropes, sound and equipment were up to scratch for the big day. Ultimately, as planned, the Hawkear output was the decider and the results were as below:

BAND	RANG	FAULTS	%age	Peal Speed	POSITION
Chester DG	1 st	396	55	3.18	4
Shrewsbury	2 nd	418	52	3.37	5
LACR (L/pool branch)	3 rd	342	61	3.30	3
Liverpool	4 th	311	65	3.33	2
Macclesfield	5 th	459	48	3.27	6
Chester Cathedral	6 th	297	66	3.32	1

In terms of the event itself, there are many who must be thanked, but without the extensive advice from Ian McCallion and Dave Richards, Hawkear installation and operation would have been impossible. Now it remains in position to help improve our ringing on a routine basis at Chester.

Subsequent to the results being delivered, Canon Precentor Jeremy Dussek thanked everyone for coming and enthused his desire for a good relationship between all bell ringers and their respective churches, as well as the gratitude he has for Paul's energy and passion to advertise ringing across the North West. He presented the sparkling new shield, in memory of the late Duke of Westminster, to Chester's young conductor, Jack Bendrey.

With smiles all around, it was clear that everyone had had a good day in Chester. Every team had put in a decent amount of effort to ensure that the day had been enjoyable for all, as well as the help that people had given to ensure that the public were made aware of the event, so that it can continue as an annual occasion with local support. A report in both the local newspaper and the Ringing World, will hopefully mean that this event will be bigger and better next year, with more teams entering and knowledge of the fun of 12 bell ringing can spread the world over. A huge vote of thanks goes out to the organiser Paul Hunter, who has put endless work, not only into the organisation of the competition, but into the improvement and advertisement of 12 bell ringing across the North West. Also, to all those who helped out on the day, including the cathedral staff and bell ringers, without whom the day would not have been as successful in setting precedent for excellent days such as this to come.

Craig Chaplow, a local ringer of a light eight in Wistaston, experienced his first 12 bell striking competition on Saturday and said "So that was kind of scary! Many years of ringing, but not much real experience on 12, made me feel honoured to be asked into the CDG band for the inaugural North West 12 bell competition. The task was simple enough; tenor behind to Grandsire for a little over 10 minutes. The pressure comes from the other 70+ people sat in the Cathedral refectory at 11am awaiting the draw, and even more, from our computerised friend Hawkear, who was going to make any attempt to hide impossible. All in all, a great day out, 4th place and good camaraderie! Thanks to Paul Hunter and his team for organising, the people make me aspire to ring more on 12; Hawkear, to improve my striking... 12 months to practice for the next one!"

People, such as Craig, show the North West the development that the improvement and need for 12 bell ringing has for those who wouldn't otherwise get the opportunity. With only two rings of twelve in Cheshire, at opposite ends of the county, it is imperative that the enthusiasm and desire for learning and teaching the art of 12 bell ringing continues. Without the monthly 12 bell practice at Chester, Craig would not have had the opportunity to have practiced for this event and improve his Cinques and Maximus striking.

Brian Harris, a well-respected and key figure head in Cheshire ringing (and beyond), has been ringing peals of Maximus since 1957, subsequent to completing his national service and a degree. He talks about the history of 12 bell ringing in Chester since the bells were

installed in 1975 and the vast improvement leading up to today, which has meant that days such as Saturday were possible to take place. "The peal of twelve bells at Chester, in the new Addleshaw Tower, was opened in June 1975. The first peal on the bells was of Kent Treble Bob Maximus, rung by a band representative of the Chester Diocesan Guild, conducted by the then master of the guild, Basil Jones, happily still with us. It took place on June the 25th 1975. Henry O'Baker, who had arrived in Chester from Bridgnorth, Shropshire, after the Second World War, was the secretary of the Chester Guild at the time of conception of the new tower and its peal of bells. He immediately, with the support of Dean Addleshaw, began to train ringers from the congregation, in anticipation of the new bells. Regrettably, Harry died before the plan came to fruition. Sunday morning service ringing began therefore from the ringers of the now closed OSM church, together with ringers from other local towers who could fit this into their ringing schedule. On Sunday afternoons, the branch of the guild took it in turns to provide service ringing. It was on these latter occasions that Maximus was rung. This often took the form of a Quarter Peal in one of the standard methods and included, from time to time, Stedman Cinques and Cambridge Maximus. For most of the time, from the opening of the bells until the present regime, it has been only rarely that Plain Bob Cinques and Grandsire Cinques have been rung on practice nights. It's fair to say that Paul Hunter has revolutionised both Sunday afternoon ringing and the Monday practice nights, since he took charge. Sunday morning ringing still needs an increase in supporters, and others continue to organise Quarter Peals on Sunday afternoons. Paul's 4th Sunday afternoon session ensures that Surprise Maximus is rung; this has often been preceded by a Quarter Peal in advanced method ringing and a standard that has been previously unknown in Chester. From the very opening of Chester's new peal, the difficulty in hearing the bells in the ringing room was a serious drawback. Attempts were made in the 1980's to improve the acoustics; not until Ray Helliwell set about the task last year, was a significant improvement made. Ray is to be congratulated on his efforts thus far."

We hope that this event will encourage others to take part next year and support us as well as they have this year. With the continued eagerness to improve the North West's 12 bell ringing, we hope that the only way is up from here when it comes to performance and practice on 12.

By Carrie Hyde



The winning band – Chester

Left to Right: Jack Bendrey, Liz Helliwell, Ray Helliwell, Fiona Harrison, Brian Harris, Jenny Christian, Simon Christian, Diana Anderson, Peter Furniss, Paul Hunter, Andrew Rawlinson and Carrie Hyde. (Front 1-6, back 7-12)





Jack and Paul “socialising”



Jack receiving the trophy from Jeremy

Photographs by Andrew Rawlinson and David Adams