

## North West Twelve-Bell Striking Competition 2019

The fourth weekend in January is traditionally the time of the fourth round of the FA Cup. The North West is famed for its footballing prowess, both past and present. Seven of the regions teams, ranging from current Premier League champions Manchester City to lowly Accrington Stanley, had made it into the draw for the fourth round. The noticeable exceptions were the two best teams in Merseyside, with Liverpool and Tranmere Rovers deciding to concentrate on the Premier League and League Two respectively. Since 2017, the fourth Saturday in January has also seen the rise of a smaller, less historic, more friendly but no less competitive a competition; the North West Twelve-Bell Striking Competition. After previous competitions held in Chester and Bolton, the venue for the 2019 renewal was the fine 12 of Our Lady and St Nicholas Pierhead in Liverpool and was held on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January.

Ringers from five centres of twelve-bell ringing arrived at the church for the 11am draw. The hosts, Liverpool were joined by two bands from Chester (Devas and Festerers) and bands from Macclesfield and Manchester with a scratch band made up of members of the Ancient Society of College Youths. There was inevitably some overlap between some of the bands but this is covered in the rules to maximise participation. The competition organiser, Paul Hunter, himself a scouser but now living in Chester, kicked off the draw by welcoming those present to “the greatest city in the world” before highlighting some of the highlights of 12-bell ringing in the region since the previous contest and also discussing some of the football teams who were taking part in the other competition that day and, as an Evertonian, some of those who weren’t. With Everton losing to Millwall later on in the day leading to the inevitable reminder to him from at least one Liverpool supporting ringer, he may have regretted it. A quick breakdown of the rules was provided and then we were down to the business of the draw.

Like the 2018 draw, the team that came out of the hat first chose which slot they rang in. As with the previous year, Chester Festerers came out first and again they chose to ring second. The rest of the draw took place in a conventional manner. Some final instructions were issued to the conductors and then it was time for the first team to ascend the stairs. First up were Manchester, followed by Chester Festerers, Macclesfield, Chester Devas and Liverpool with the North West ASCY closing proceedings.

The touch for the day was an interesting one for a striking competition, a 220 Grandsire Cinqes (SSSSBx2). Those used to, or expecting it to be like, a conventional bob course had a bit of a rude awakening. Fortunately, all six bands managed to complete the touch and ringing was generally of a good standard.

Whilst the ringing was taking place, those not ringing were well catered for by the local band. Tea and coffee was ready on arrival, a reasonable beer was sourced from our friends at Liverpool Organic and was available earlier than the advertised noon start time, and a ready supply of pasties was available, all aiding the inevitable socialising.

A short time after the last band finished, it was time for the results. The team of judges, led by Peter Hughes with assistance by two young ringers, Alice Etherington and Nathan Cox, appeared from their spot in the parish office and were soon in front of the massed ringers gathered in the nave. Opening general remarks were made by Peter, Alice providing comments on each of the bands and Nathan providing the all important results. All comments were constructive and well made. Unexpectedly, the Liverpool band, only finalised as the band was ascending the stairs, were declared as the winners. It may not be the FA Cup but at least one piece of silverware was proudly held aloft in the city of Liverpool in 2019!

Celebrations and selfie-taking, commiserations and drowning of sorrows, further drinking and more socialising carried on in the regular Liverpool post-ringing hostelry, The Lion Tavern, ending a thoroughly enjoyable day. Old friends were caught up with, new friends were made.

Thanks to those who provided the comestibles and to our judging panel. Mention should also be made to highlight the role of Paul Hunter, the competition organiser and the person who worked so hard to get this competition off the ground. In his opening remarks he mentioned the progress of twelve-bell ringing in the North West. His hard work and commitment is a major part of this success.

By the end of the weekend the seven football teams in the FA Cup from the North West had dwindled to the two Manchester clubs. The others returned to concentrate on winning their league, searching for promotion, staving off relegation and in some cases battling for financial survival. Likewise the ringers will no doubt have returned to their respective centres of 12-bell ringing with the focus on concentrating 12-bell ringing firmly in mind. The following day, three members of the National 12-Bell Competition committee attended the monthly 12-bell practice at Chester Cathedral and a quarter peal at Macclesfield to check out their suitability for hosting eliminators. To be even considered shows the progress that has been made in terms of 12-bell ringing.

The North West 12-bell competition reminds everybody taking part that we should all concentrate on three things; method ringing, striking and having fun. Surely that is what ringing is all about. Plans for the 2020 edition are already being hatched. It may not have the tradition or the history of the FA Cup but this competition is here to stay.