

Guild of Devonshire Ringers – Ringing Recruitment & Retention Workgroup

Report for Guild AGM 18th June 2022.

Following the workgroup report submitted to the Guild Committee meeting in January 2022, the workgroup held its third meeting on the 21st May 2022.

The workgroup continues to share learning and ideas for recruitment and retention activities at the local level which may help towers with some 'quick wins'; while encouraging the branches to develop longer term strategies including rolling programmes of recruitment and the setting up of bell handling and other training opportunities appropriate to the needs of the towers in the branches. Where branches lack the necessary resources, they should seek assistance either directly from the Guild or via the R&R WG, as well as from neighbouring branches where possible.

The following branches gave an update on their recruitment and retention activities:

South West Branch

There are some tentative plans for a recruitment drive in the Lifton and Whitchurch areas of the branch. Tied bell practices will be held at Tavistock and these ringers will then move into the home towers. For Lifton, it has been suggested that taster sessions could be held at the local farm shop using the Devon Association's portable dumb-bell. Any interested recruits would then be directed to suitable towers and training sessions. A potential issue for Whitchurch is how the recruits will manage the continuation of their training once in the home tower which only has three regular ringers.

Progress has been made with regards recruitment for the tower in Tavistock. A short concentrated advertising campaign was run over the course of one week encouraging interested persons to come to a taster session. The campaign used posters, a video clip (called Heavy Metal <https://youtu.be/cBqs0qVFOfE>) and the posting of information on several social media sites around Tavistock. This has resulted in 3 potential recruits, 2 of whom have been to a taster session and will start their bell handling training soon.

North East Branch

The church at Hemyock held an event on the 14th May. It was a general church event for families with activities held in the church yard but which also included the bells. The band gave a demo of ringing and handbells. The event generated goodwill but no recruits as yet.

St Peter's are currently holding 2 bell handling sessions per week during the day on tied bells. Of the 3 learners, one is for the tower, the second is from a tower where there is currently no regular ringing (but has future hopes/plans) and a third is a new ringer in an established band

who is learning bell handling. The second learner is nearly ready to join a regular practice but as there is no ringing in her local tower, St Peter's are establishing contact and support at a nearby tower where she will be able to get regular ringing. All 3 learners will continue to have bell handling sessions at St Peter's once a week as well as extended weekly practices either at their own tower or another local tower. It is important that new ringers continue to have more than one weekly practice to increase their rope time. As these learners are all available during daytime this has been easier to manage.

The Troyte ringing centre has put recruitment on the agenda for the Trustee meetings and has a recruitment plan for a joint band for Bampton and Huntsham.

The branch will be using the Heritage open week in September, not necessarily as a big recruitment drive but more as a general PR opportunity to raise awareness of bell ringing. They did the same last year and have done so for some years, and every few years it seems to result in some new recruits

Mid Devon Branch

After some consideration the branch decided to cancel the recruitment event they had originally planned at St Leonard's Tower in Newton Abbot after consulting with all branch tower captains and finding the towers most in need of recruits were not especially close geographically to Newton Abbot.

The branch is now planning to have a ringing stand at the Torbay Steam Rally over the course of the first weekend in August. The branch will use the Frank Mack mini ring, and will run the event as a general awareness raising event in collaboration with the Association. It is known that some steam enthusiasts are also ringers so the branch hope that they might attract some lapsed ringers back to ringing and any new recruits will be a bonus.

Several towers in the branch will also join in with the Heritage Open week in September. Dawlish, Teignmouth and Kingskerswell have already been utilising this opportunity for several years and this year St Marychurch are planning to join in. The branch also has two ringers on the ART teacher training course.

Aylesbeare Branch

As a branch they are at a critical point with only 3 towers out of 10 being fully active, and only a little activity in the other towers. The branch feels it needs some outside help. Thankfully there are several ringers who are happy to help out to ensure Sunday services are rung for. Woodbury recently held a village do and Oliver Coldrick had a stand with a demo bell. We understand this was very successful and identified six potential recruits.

Other Information

There is some interesting information about a ringing recruitment approach taken by the Truro Guild in the Lizard area of Cornwall. This is the subject of a new "Fun with Bells" podcast which can be heard at: <https://funwithbells.com/on-the-lizard>

The key takeaways from the Lizard campaign were : effectiveness of teaching in groups, bringing on younger teachers and leaders, having time limits on projects, being strategic in planning for an area, keeping it fun. A transcript of the programme is available on the funwithbells website.

The original recruitment workshop presentation led by Matt Lawrence for the Truro Guild can be found on the TDGR website and this covers the planning aspects of recruitment quite thoroughly: <https://tdgr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Virtual-Recruitment-and-Retention-Workshop1346.pdf>

Key Takeaways and Recommendations from Work Group Discussions

1. Inter tower cooperation / hubs are a good way of supporting learners and towers, especially in more rural areas, but this may require a change of "mind set". Recruitment of new ringers works best when they have the option of receiving good quality intensive training at the outset and having learnt to handle a bell, on-going training and support in their home towers.
2. Branches and individual towers would benefit from the Guild having a comprehensive communications strategy to complement local level advertising. Guild advertising could support branches and towers by smart use of Guild advertising in targeting key areas. To begin, the Guild could send out a survey to towers and branches to find out where they are currently advertising. This would provide an overview of where to target Guild resources either to compliment local advertising or to cover gaps in local advertising.
3. The Guild could also provide a better recruitment page on the website, perhaps using QR codes in advertising to link to an online interest form on the website. The website front page could also do with updating to include a bold link to the recruitment / Learn to Ring page, making it more accessible to non-ringers. Although it may be more effective to have a joint recruitment page with the Devon Association as a central enquiry point for prospective ringers. Having a recruitment email address would also be helpful, as this could be used on recruitment materials as well.
4. However, before the Guild can launch a central enquiry point a directory of towers capable of teaching well across the county needs to be compiled. At present this information is severely lacking. It often takes hours of web research and telephoning to place those interested in learning in an active tower with a capable teacher.

Therefore, as a Guild we need to be better organised to support recruitment drives with a central enquiry point.

5. It would also be very helpful if the Guild could provide a range of recruitment posters, leaflets and other materials which could be modified by branches/towers to include local information, and which would be suitable to be used in shops/notice boards, as well as electronic versions which can be uploaded to social media.
6. The Devon Ringing leaflet is still considered to be a valuable resource; it is simply and clearly written and it would benefit from a quick update which would enable towers and branches to use it whilst a newer range of materials are created. It is only the back cover which needs an immediate update with the addition of a reference to the health and wellbeing benefits of ringing. The Central Council leaflet is slicker and more concise, but emphasises method ringing only.

Those involved in the creation of the Devon Ringing leaflet are asked if they still have an electronic copy of the original document which the workgroup could adapt.

Next Meeting

The workgroup will meet again towards the end of September to report back on progress over the summer, including the Heritage Open week which provides an opportunity to promote bell ringing, and potentially identify new recruits.

The workgroup currently lacks representatives from East and North North-West branches. If a ringer from these branches would care to join us it would improve communication and make the workgroup more representative. Anyone interested should contact either the Guild Secretary or Phil Dunn (phil.dunn.3cc@btinternet.com).