



(back, l to r): Ringers Clarissa Turton, Steve Noyes, Hugh Robotham, and (front) Lacey Gulliver, Bailey Gulliver and Emily Mills after Helen O'Sullivan's final service

Ringers recruited for belltower from local C of E school

BELLRINGERS at St Mary's Church, Brighstone, made a deliberate effort to recruit younger members for their team – and it worked.

A couple of years ago, they held a taster session aimed at youngsters during a school half-term. They amassed a dozen or so young ringers, many of whom were from the local school, Brighstone C of E Primary.

The school has a monthly Eucharist at St Mary's Church, so those young ringers were able to herald the beginning of worship by ringing the church bells.

Their efforts won them a prize recently, when they were given the Sarah Beacham Youth Group Award 2016 by the Association of Ringing Teachers. The judges were impressed with their flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of different age groups and clear planning to address retention.

Tower captain Beccy Noyes said: "We've had a tradition of including young people in our band of ringers, and we made this push to get some new ringers.

"We had a good response to our half-term taster, and

we got them to the stage where they could ring for the school Eucharist.

"It was also good in that other pupils could listen to their classmates ringing, and that encouraged them to think about it.

"The process won us the award because we were showing initiative. We should receive a certificate soon from the Association of Ringing Teachers, and there is a small prize. We would like to use it for the good of the whole group of ringers, if we can.

"We now have about half a dozen ringers of primary school age. They progressed well and were a delight to teach. They've got involved in the life of the church too. One of the school teachers got married, and we made sure we had a band of pupils ringing."

The group at St Mary's also includes eight or nine adults. The learners get together on a Tuesday night and the main ringing practice is in Fridays.

The earliest record of bells at St Mary's Church was back in 1536. The current bells were recast and rehung in 1961.

For more details, see www.fivechurches.org.uk and click on 'music' and 'bell ringing'.

Bellringers from across country to celebrate in our diocese

SHE lives opposite St Mary's, Brading, so had heard its church bells ring many times. One day, she popped over to ask if she could join in too.

That's how Lexi Skeldon started bell-ringing in churches. Now she's an integral part of the team at St Mary's Church, and has rung bells across the Isle of Wight too. The 19-year-old has even represented the island in bell-ringing competitions.

But she's not even the youngest ringer in her bell tower – 13-year-old Tristan Allen has been ringing since he was tiny. And the team at St Mary's includes all ages up to 81-year-old June Mitchell.

They all squeeze up the wooden ladder outside St Mary's, and into the 13th century tower to practice every Thursday night, and return to ring before the main Sunday service. It was one Thursday night when Lexi heard them.

"Me and my mates were hanging around when the bell-ringers were practising," said Lexi. "I went in and asked if I could do it, and I became hooked. I had been christened here and we live opposite, but I hadn't been to church here. We used to go to the Methodist Church.

"I enjoy it because you learn quite a lot about history and geography, as you go and ring in all kinds of different churches around the island. It's like school, but better!"

Tristan Allen was literally a baby in a car seat when he was taken into a tower by his parents and pulled his first bell-rope. Now he enjoys being part of the team at St Mary's and elsewhere.

And Kieran Downer, now 22, also became involved because of his parents, Barry and Margaret, who are also part of the bell-ringing team at Brading. He started when he was about six.

He became involved at St Mary's after some work was done to the bell tower back in 2007-8. It's an unusual tower in that it is built on four legs outside the church's west door. The oldest of its eight bells was cast in 1594.

"I originally learnt back in 1999, and I've rung at Whitwell, Shanklin, All Saints Ryde, and Swanmore. Some Sundays I go and ring in four different places in one day!" he said. "St Mary's bell tower is good, as the bells aren't too heavy and they are good to learn on. But I love learning new methods and new skills.

"It's very enjoyable. We do an open day on Easter Monday each year, and



Lexi Skeldon, 19, and Kieran Downer, 22, with (behind, l to r): Barry Downer, 57, Tristan Allen, 13, Andi Blake, 39, Margaret Downer, 54, and Jane Johnson, 34 in the belltower of St Mary's, Brading

invite people to have a go, and we're busy all day. People do like to see what it feels like to actually ring a bell.

"And we do enter competitions, sometimes competing against other towers, or sometimes joining with them. There's a good network of younger bellringers too, and a good mix of different ages across the island."

The Brading bellringers are looking forward to the end of May, when ringers from across the country will come to our diocese for their annual conference. The Winchester and Portsmouth Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers will welcome their counterparts from other dioceses here from May 27-30.

They'll be staying on the Southsea seafront, and will be given the chance to visit and ring bells in churches as far afield as Netley, West Meon and Shanklin during their stay.

They'll be given the chance to join practices in Swanmore, Alverstoke, East Meon and Hursley on the Friday night, and then on the Saturday, they can go on

ringing tours that will take them across the whole diocese.

On Sunday, they'll be invited to join the local band at our cathedral, from 9.30am, ahead of the main 10.30am service.

And then there is a special Songs of Praise service in the cathedral from 4pm. The formal dinner on the Sunday evening will be followed by the business meeting of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers on the Monday.

Bishop Christopher said: "Bell ringing is a unique and wonderful tradition and skill. Those of us who practise or have practised the art know how quickly community forms among the team, as together we work on timing and stamina and the complexity of the sequences.

"And so for many of us who hear the sound of the church bells ringing out across our villages, towns and cities, the bells are a reassuring reminder of our cultural rootedness, and of the continuing place of the church in the community."

Wannabe ringers pay for course

BELLRINGERS at St Nicholas, Wickham, hit on a novel way of recruiting new members – they offered a course that wannabe ringers would pay for.

They advertised the chance for locals to take a nine-week course in ringing for £25. And of the eight people who took up the offer, one has now become tower captain.

James Morgan, who only started ringing on that course in 2014, has now taken over the leadership of the Wickham band.

"It was the former tower captain Simon King who ran the course," he said. "The Guild thought it was a real novelty to get people to pay to learn how to ring.



(l to r): Wickham's Greg Painter, Lisa Ashford, Larry Hunter, Geoff Phillpots, Andrew Wilkinson and Alison Clayton

"There are now about four regular ringers who were on that course. I enjoy learning, and of course I'm still learning – I haven't even done a quarter-peal yet.

"But it's great to think that we are calling people to come and worship, especially for the big occasions like Christmas and Easter.

"We have a prayer every Sunday before we start ringing, and it does make you feel good that you've done something to benefit the village, and remind people that the church is still there."

They hold silent practices, which involve pulling the ropes to feel the weight of the bell, but the noise only comes from a computer linked to the bell.

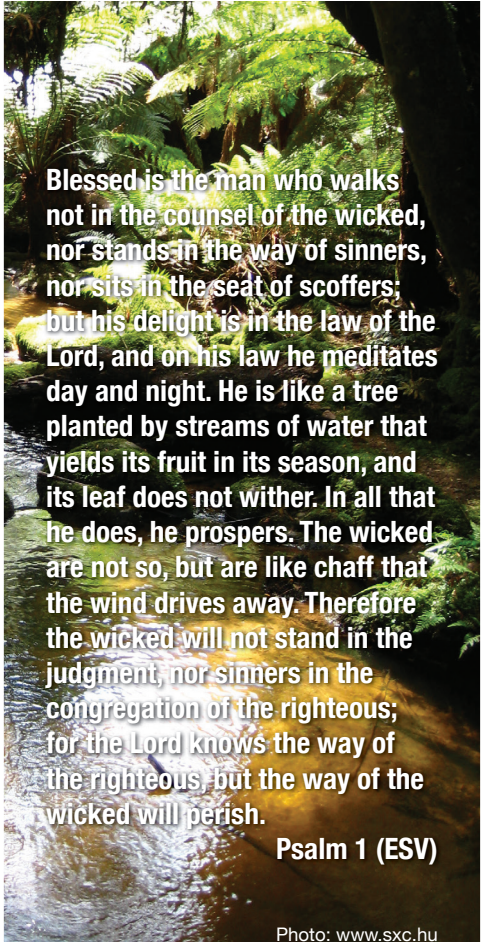
Teams of bellringers from around the country will visit Wickham as part of the conference taking place in Portsmouth this month.



(left): Tristan Allen; (above): Barry Downer at the bellringing open day



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Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 1 (ESV)

Photo: www.sxc.hu