West Midland Regional round-up – Spring 2026

Sadly, this is not the longed-for Newsletter. Rightly pointed out at our recent AGM, the Newsletter hasn't appeared, when the Constitution indicates it would. I'm sorry for that, as perversely, I actually enjoy sitting down and putting together something for our membership. On this occasion however, a small matter of house-moving has come in the way and it's only now that I'm in a position to provide something.

Looking back

Sandra Winter Skills Day

The Region was delighted to host Sandra Winter in June last year, for one of her Skills Days. The first of these had been organised by Ursula Howes but ill health has prevented her from repeating such. The committee felt such a day was long overdue.

25 folk came along and were exposed to the full range of handbell techniques in three pieces. For me, the *Twinkle Rock*, was particularly enlightening. Sandra had worked in variations on the *Twinkle Twinkle little star* theme. And, best of all, Sandra's infectious approach has everyone (well almost) smiling! The success of the day begged that we run it again in 2026.

Regional rally

Some last-minute changes meant that our annual Regional Rally had to decamp to Lower Broadheath. Rowena Shipley and Jenny Barraclough led to massed pieces, *Around the world in eighty bars*, a Sandra Winter piece, which featured tunes from eight countries, in the space of eighty bars, and *Simplicity*, a Matthew Compton piece, which had been used at HRGB'S National Residential Ringing Week in August. This was an original from Matthew, with a haunting melody.

It was particularly pleasing to welcome Oranges and lemons, the four-in-hand group from Knighton. Graham's arrangement of *Jesu joy of man's desiring* for twelve bells was especially pleasing. And we were able to welcome an ad hoc group featuring folk from Chaddersley Corbett, Areley Kings, Border Bells and Knowle.

The event however, highlighted the issue of travel, for many a reason not to attend. The previous year's Regional Rally had been in Chaddersley Corbett and again, only a handful of complete teams were able to attend. With spiralling oil prices it's inevitable that the prospect of a round-trip of 120 miles simply won't be considered.

Bells beyond belief

It's hard to credit that this event, BBB for short, has run for fifteen years and still draws in a hard core of folk. We have been inordinately lucky to find a quality venue in the Worcester Whitehouse Hotel, in the heart of Worcester, at a consistently competitive price (no change for the past four years).

Six good pieces. My favourites were *Jesu joy of man's desiring* (five octaves) and *Do, Re, Mi*, a piece arranged back in 1985, but still as good as modern-day handbell arrangements.

AGM and Spring Rally

Early in March, our Spring Rally and AGM brought enough folk to make us quorate. We organised plenty of twelve-bell music along with one or two other "fun" activities to make the occasion worthwhile.

Again, turnout was low, even though Lower Broadheath is about as central to the Region as anywhere. The conundrum: move it around the Region and hope to garner support from teams nearby whilst those in far-off places, stay at home, or hold it centrally; then all will have to travel some distance.

Looking forward

Sandra Winter Skills Day.

Sadly, the event for 2026 had to be cancelled. A turnout of 20 is needed to make the event viable. With just twelve signing up, it wasn't going to be worth running. However, we have booked ahead for 2027, on the first Saturday in June, (5th), so hope that this very advanced notice will do the trick.

I'm well aware that there are events coming up nationally, that make people think twice about supporting such local events, but the event does serve the needs of handbell folk.

Symposium

Obviously, for HRGB the big event of 2026 is International Symposium, held in August in Aberdeen. It's pleasing that a dozen or so folk from our Region will be attending. This is a great opportunity to ring with a lot of like-minded folk, meet up and share ideas. It is also a chance to play music composed and directed by some of the best from the world of handbells.

October Regional Rally

Last year's event was due to take place at Alton, Staffordshire, but a clash of dates meant it couldn't take place there. This year, however, we are more fortunate. The Alton Handbell Ringers are able to host the rally. The first Saturday in October, the 3rd, is to be the day.

Now I know it's a long way to Alton. M5 + M6 + some other roads, but when Alton held it ten years ago, you could not move in the hall. And because it's always good to get around the Region – Alton, Worcester, Knowle, Knighton, Churchdown, Kenilworth, Withington, Chaddesley Corbett, Lower Broadheath being the last nine venues – it's fitting to come full-circle to Alton.

To ease the burden of getting to the event, the committee has decided to offer a transport option, but before we sort it out, we need to assess the likely take-up. We're planning a coach, which will pick up, starting in the south of the Region, and work north. Likely pick-up points will be Lower Broadheath, Bromsgrove, West Bromwich and possibly Stafford. Early plans at this stage, so we need to know whether folk would opt for this. **David Hampson, our treasurer, has suggested that the Region covers the cost of the coach hire, though should you feel inclined to make a donation, I'm sure he'll accept such.**

It does mean, though, that the cost to you will be simply that of the Rally. And what will you get for that? Hopefully, an opportunity for your team to play and three opportunities to participate in massed ringing. Already, Rona Gager and Rowena Shipley are leading two of the pieces, with a theme of Earth, Water and Air.

Bells beyond belief

BBB XVI is scheduled to take place during the last weekend of February, 2027 at the Worcester Whitehouse Hotel in Worcester. And pleasingly, we have managed to negotiate a rate, which is slightly less than this year's. Three options available. Double room as a single occupant, double room shared, or non-residential. Look out for details in the autumn.

HRGB Diamond Jubilee

60 not out in 2027. 9th – 11th April at the Majestic Hotel in Harrogate is where it will all happen. There will be much more information in the Autumn issue of Reverberations. Remembering the Golden Jubilee celebrations in 2017, I know that this milestone will be just as spectacular.

Other stuff

Regional resources

I draw to your attention the hardware owned by our Region. Besides the five-octave + 1 Sampson bells, we have a collection of bells donated by Gwen Sampson from her Kington St. Mary's Handbell Ringers. There are 34 bells, but they don't form a complete set. However, they are available to borrow. There are also four Singleton bells, G_4, A_4, G_6 and A_6, donated to HRGB by the late Jeff Singleton and shared out amongst the eight HRGB Regions. We also have two three-octave sets of hand chimes + a bottom octave of hand chimes. A three-octave set of BellePlates® is also available to loan.

We've also now acquired a complete three-octave set of Whitechapel bells, which belonged to Sue Threlfall and Border Bells. These, along with the five-octave set and the chimes, are used each month by the Sunday five-octave workshop, also known as West Midland Bell Ensemble. The whole lot is rounded off with 28 or 29 three-foot covered foam pads and two sets of mallets.

We're happy to loan out these resources. Give me a call or email me for details.

Sales table

We don't currently operate a Sales table, though the stock, primarily gloves, is still being sold.

Five-octave monthly rehearsals

This activity started in 2003 and takes place in Lower Broadheath Memorial Hall, usually on the first Sunday of the month. It runs from 10.30am to 4 pm and is open to anyone who would like to experience the joy of playing music written for five octaves of bells and chimes.

Currently, there are 20 regular attenders from across the Region, and our intention is to perform for a public audience at least once a year. There is no auditioning process, though you need to be comfortable with music written in conventional staff notation.

Some of our current repertoire includes *Adagio*, by Albinoni, arranged by Kevin McChesney, *Air in D*, by J. S. Bach, arranged by Lloyd Larson and *Nimrod*, by Edward Elgar, arranged by

Robin Benton. We also have lively pieces such as *When the saints go marching by* and Lord of the dance, arranged by Jason Krug.

The cost is £10 per session, which covers hire of the hall and all music. The new academic season begins on Sunday, 6th September and runs through to Sunday, 4th July, 2027.

John Langley

Keith Hemming from St. James Harvington contacted us with the sad news that John Langley, their Musical Director and arranger, had passed away whilst on holiday in India.

John was a consummate musician and enthusiast for the medium of handbells. He made Harvington what they were, always keen to try pieces that were outside the mainstream repertoire. He was a great supporter of the Region and attended many of our David Williams Memorial Workshops, and was an enthusiast for HRGB. In 2022, as a show of support for Ukraine, he penned an arrangement of their national anthem for handbells, which he made available to all HRGB members.

Our thoughts are with his family and all those at St. James, Harvington.

Vacancy

Following the retirement of their music director at the end of May, Shrewsbury Handbell Ringers are looking to recruit someone to fill the vacancy. If you are interested and would like further information, or know of anyone who might be, please email carolemartin432@gmail.com.

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