

Essex Association of Change Ringers – Southern District

Newsletter

June 2026



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Geoff Doye (1949 – 2026)

By John Harpole

Geoff was born in East London but lived most of his life in Basildon. He did a variety of jobs, ending up as a driver for First Buses working out of Basildon depot.

A chance meeting with an old schoolfriend in a supermarket, Tricia Marshall, got Geoff interested in bells and he started to ring at Downham. After a while he joined us at Basildon and, after a lot of patient teaching, he became a regular member of our band on both Sunday mornings and at practice.

Geoff regularly went to the Prittlewell Ringing School and practices at Stanford-le-Hope. He became a proficient call change ringer and tenor cover. He was elected to the Essex Association in January 2014.

Geoff had some serious health issues around 10 years ago, which included him falling down the steps at Prittlewell. He had to stop ringing and at one stage he could hardly walk and used to ride on his mobility scooter to see us on a Sunday morning. He gradually recovered his strength, and I like to think that returning to ringing helped. By early 2022 he was able to ring again for Sunday service and joined us to celebrate the 70th anniversary of HM Queen Elizabeth II's Accession to the Throne. He rang for the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth, and again for her funeral.

To celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III, Geoff agreed to attempt his first quarter peal, covering to Plain Bob Doubles. Alas, he ran out of strength after 800 changes and had to set his bell, but we carried on to complete our quarter without a cover.

Right:

The Coronation QP band



Geoff loved his fifties and sixties music and was a regular at Helen's ukulele group. He loved singing along to the songs, and we used to joke at his adeptness at playing the air ukulele.

In autumn 2024, Geoff was having difficulty eating and was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer. After having a stent fitted to help him swallow, a course of chemotherapy was followed by surgery. Having been declared cancer free, it returned earlier this year and quickly spread. We last saw Geoff in March when his family put on a party to celebrate his birthday; he looked very thin but was obviously surrounded by a lot of love from his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. A few days later he was admitted to Basildon hospital, and transferred to St Luke's Hospice on April 9th, where he passed away the following day.

On Sunday, April 19th we dedicated our service ringing to Geoff and were joined by Paul Scoggins who used to ring in Suffolk, while his family listened and watched outside. A handbell quarter was rung in his memory, and we dedicated one of our district quarter peal day quarters to Geoff.

Geoff was a lovely, kind man who would do anything he could to help others. We miss him at the Bell Tower. May he rest in peace.

Below: Geoff with his great-grandson in December 2022



District Outing Report

By Caroline Weald

As dawn broke on the 23rd May I took Willow my hound out for an early morning trot to avoid the predicated heat of the day ahead, wondering what my trip to Suffolk would be like. I was not to be disappointed.

John Harpole was kind enough to offer me a lift, and after meeting at Downham church we sallied north to the lovely county of Suffolk. Approaching our first church I spotted plants for sale on the roadside, I couldn't resist and having parted with some pennies, plants stored safely we arrived at St Mary's - Buxhall to hear the bells sounding out across the countryside. I hurried up the path and once inside found Liz busy collecting money, Andrew B conducting our merry band and others milling about amongst the pews or still arriving. Here the ringing chamber was accessed via a trap door, onto the mezzanine level, I like this because a

different perspective of all architecture can be seen, something not available to other church users, perhaps a selling point when trying to encourage new ringers. David Steed was our gracious host, who living just down the road also looked after tower No.2 on our list. His brother also rings further south at Chelmsford Cathedral, perhaps a bell tower with more prestige but the beautiful surroundings of Buxhall would be hard to outdo. When everyone had finished their ringing moment of glory it was time to move on.

Leaving the church, across the rolling countryside, could be seen the very imposing spire of St Andrew's - Gt Finborough soaring high into the clouds, whilst on the ground a brown footpath snaking through the wheat field in the distance was like a piece of string, connecting one church to the other, just adding to the loveliness of the place. Once at the church, on closer inspection it could be seen that the spire was not all one colour. Indeed, as the cone shape rose upwards, different coloured brickwork had been thoughtfully placed to form a distinct band around the base. It is said to be reminiscent of All Saint's Church, St Margarets Street in London. As before, the dinging and donging was carefully controlled, and our merry ringers were invited to ring. As my ringing repertoire is small, I wandered back down the very narrow staircase out into the churchyard to find another bustle of bellringers (my collective noun). Sue and Hady were by the boundary wall contemplating life, but I joined Holly for a philosophical chat about young people and their perceived life problems. However, too much chewing the cud is bad for you, so moving on I saw Mr and Mrs Gisby on a bench away from the heat, Andrew and Liz reading headstones, I wondered if they trying to find something related to the celebrity laid to rest there, John Robert Ravenscroft.

With the heat and gastric juices rising, lunch was the order of the day, no corporate agreement had been made but rather left to individuals. Those who felt that alfresco homemade picnics were best did so, Holly, Sam, Andrew and Clare, stayed put in the churchyard, whilst Sue and Anne sought refuge under a Horse Chestnut tree. I hope it was festooned with its imposing cone shaped blooms that look like candles, I'm sure sitting on the bench that encircled the trunk would

have been a rather pleasant interlude. Sarah and Mark found a Wetherspoons whilst Alan, Catherine and Roger headed out on the road to enjoy the delights of an alehouse at aptly named Onehouse. I understand that a little band of Alison, Carol, Steve and Steve, all popped in the local Italian, very sophisticated, I'm sure. John and I headed to Stowmarket to meet up with Paul Truman and as neither had bought lunch a little shopping trip was needed. As we meandered past St Peter and St Mary church (our next venue) there was another little plant sale was going on. Yes, with more plants purchased, we three then headed into the sterilised (plastic flowers and grass but with a lovely canopy) garden of the pub just opposite the church. In the shaded environment, replenished with snacks and their first pint, the conversation from the men turned to the merits of Guinness Zero. As the name implies, there is no alcoholic content in this drink I couldn't help pondering why you would have this stuff, surely it detracts from the taste, but seemingly not. Meanwhile Liz, Andrew, Jayne and Victoria had chosen to stay inside the pub for their refreshment, but what they wouldn't have seen, near to where we were sitting were 3 little beer barrels, filled with water, complete with spouts and water bowls underneath intended to ensure that no 4-legged friends was left thirsty when their owners supped. Simply charming.

Refreshed we headed back across the road to St Peter and St Mary an imposing gothic medieval large building, which once stood in the very centre of Stowmarket. The interesting combination of names is because years ago, two churches stood close to each other in the heart of the town, St Peter (with St Paul) and St Mary's each serving different areas. The latter fell into disrepair, and so St Mary was added to St Peter. I did start to do some research into this but stopped because if I were to do more reading it would be to finish off all my Rupert Bear annuals that I so love – (what a philistine.)

As expected, another impressive building with wonderful architecture and a sizeable kitchen, come café. This enterprise served hot meals, cakes and desserts for all the community. Our delightful host was a lady who told me that the kitchen had a reputation so good that people came from far and wide to taste the

delights. More ringing and dinging, to entertain the local populace, another trap door to climb through, to access the delightful bells beyond.

Fired up from lunch but slightly weary from the heat, our penultimate venue was St Mary's at Coddendam. This seemingly small village, in Roman times was the largest settlement in Suffolk, the Roman road from Colchester on route to Norfolk, trundled right through the area. Nowadays as our host Colin told me, the village has fallen on hard times, once there were 6 pubs, 3 butchers and a spring festival, now no pubs, no butchers and the children just dance round the May pole. The church was large, Mark found solace sitting just inside the porch before a wander, Sue tried out the interesting architecture trail, looking up at the bosses, the ceiling etc, I'm not sure if she finished it, there was perplexion on her face at times. What was more interesting was the very cosy ringing room that just squeezed in the people we were going to ring. On one side of the tower, an enterprising soul had attached to the wall a long wooden bench, which needed to be put up when ringing took place. Nevertheless, our outing was about ringing, so we did!

The last one, at St Mary – Offton the church set in the middle of a somewhat spread-out village close by the small green. It was close to the road and hidden from view on the neighbouring roads until as you rounded a corner a nice surprise greeted you. The building was nicely persevered with exterior flintstone and inside Minton tiles on the floor, a ground floor ringing chamber that I think was appreciated at the end of the long day. Interestingly the bells were light and apt to break stays, to counteract this, the treble and bell 2 had springs attached to their stays, so that if someone gave them a good yank they would stay intact. Outside, a large graveyard was open with no boundary wall, which gave it a sense of space and serenity, here Liz and myself mused over the Wyard family tomb – a large edifice depicting a female figure with a horse, whilst a figure lies prone underneath a blanket nearby very grandiose, I think.

The last tower, fond farewells said it was time to go home ...

Footnote:

I haven't included weights or number of bells in the chambers; I also haven't commented on the sound the bells made because I'm not accomplished to do so. I hope I have correctly described the spring stays.

Thank you to Clare and Andrew for organising the trip, thank you to John for the lift, thank you to everyone who came, I had a thoroughly lovely time, and my plants are thriving.

Hutton's new rope guide

By Beth Johnson

All Saints Hutton are delighted with their rope guide, installed in March by Nicholson's. As the guide is visible in the church, we proposed installing a circular guide similar to the one at Great Tey, as it looked more elegant than the normal squared off type which can look a bit like scaffolding. In addition to the guide, we moved the positions of the ropes for the two and the treble, making a much better rope circle which gives much improved sight lines, particularly from the treble.

Members of the clergy and several of the congregation have complimented us on the way it looks, rather as if we have installed a new piece of art!

The cost was £4341 & VAT as we provided local labour to reduce the cost; we had some funds and ran a fund-raising quiz night with an additional £500 provided by a grant from the Essex Association. The initial installation date was early January and if that had gone ahead, we would most likely have been able to reclaim the VAT under the Listed Places of Worship Scheme. However, Nicholson's delayed the work until mid-March, by which time the VAT recovery grant had expired so we had to find another £860 from our funds, so we will need to do some retrospective fund raising soon.

If any tower is struggling with a long draft or just awkward ropes then we would recommend looking at a rope guide. The improvement to the handling both for new learners and also for teachers with novice ringers has been spectacular. Always remember the Association has funds which you can apply for under the grant scheme. Details here: <https://eacr.org.uk/about/grant-application/>

If anyone would like to come and try out our new rope guide, you will be welcome at our Tuesday practice, 7.30 to 9pm.



How Modern Technology Has Changed the Ancient Art of Change Ringing

By Rachael Marshall

I started ringing in 1993—the same year the World Wide Web became accessible to the public.

I stopped ringing in the early 2000s and returned in 2018. The difference in how technology is used within ringing in that time has been nothing short of phenomenal, particularly in how we connect with one another and record our achievements.

When I first moved away from my hometown, I was given a diagrams book and a copy of *Dove*. Both became treasured companions. Even now, I still take pleasure in highlighting the towers I've visited. Today, many ringers track their progress using spreadsheets or online tools.

Each December also brought a small but memorable excitement: discovering the colour of next year's *Ringling World Diary*. The diary fitted perfectly into the back pocket of your jeans. In the back, there were pages to carefully record the quarter peals rung throughout the year—our own personal archive of achievements. Now, of course, performances are shared instantly on BellBoard, and we can see what has been rung across the world each day, rather than waiting for the weekly arrival of *The Ringing World*.

Planning a trip meant sending letters—often with stamped addressed envelopes—and hoping for a reply within a few weeks. Today, the same trip can be organised in a matter of hours.

Communication has seen perhaps the greatest change. I remember one ringer who would go to a telephone box after practice to call around landlines in order to arrange a quarter peal. Now, forming a band can be as simple as sending a WhatsApp message. Local towers stay connected through messaging groups, and Facebook communities allow us to reach ringers across the globe. These platforms don't just help with organisation—they also build a sense of shared identity, where we swap photos of staircases, ringing room carpets, and the ever-important sally colours.

Training and learning have evolved just as dramatically. In the past, learning relied heavily on in-person teaching and the availability of experienced ringers. Simulators existed but were rare and fairly basic. Today, there is a wealth of digital support: YouTube tutorials, blue line apps, and online discussion groups all help ringers learn at their own pace. Platforms like Ringing Room even allow us to ring together from our own homes, something that would have seemed extraordinary when I first started.

Despite all these changes, the essence of change ringing remains the same. The bells still swing as they always have, and the principles of teamwork, community, and learning are unchanged. Technology has not replaced tradition—it has enhanced it.

Looking back, the journey from handwritten diary entries and posted letters to instant global communication and digital records highlights just how much has changed. Yet at its heart, ringing remains a shared human experience—one that modern technology has helped to connect, preserve, and grow in ways we could hardly have imagined in 1993.

New Ropes at Navestock

By Rowena Marshall

Navestock ropes hadn't been renewed for approximately 45 years and although they had been repaired many times in the past, things came to a head when first the treble broke, which Paul Trueman spliced as best he could, leaving it very short, even I had to stand on a box! and then a few weeks later the fourth broke during a practice night! Looking at the ropes they looked very manky and frail and I expected another to go any time! Something had to be done or the bells would fall silent.

When Ron Brown died a couple of years ago, (long time tower captain at Bentley and Navestock) he kindly left a small legacy to the church to be used for the bells so it seemed the ideal time to make use of it. Discussions were had with the church who held the money and Alan Moody ordered a new set of ropes, paid for by Ron's legacy.

Anyone who has been to Navestock will know that getting up to the bells is not for the faint hearted! There is a very long ladder which extends to twice its length which has to be maneuvered between the



beams and propped up to access the trap door. It takes several strong people to do this.

Alan, Paul, Nigel, Martin and Hugh (the church rep and man with the key) and myself were the team and fortunately Paul Trueman and Nigel Taylor were happy to climb up the ladder.

While the ropes were put on, Nigel checked over the bells to make sure everything was ok. (We didn't want to have to go up there again any time soon!) The job was done with great efficiency and humour and my thanks go to the team for their help in a most difficult task.

We tried out the new ropes and because they had been kept in the delivery box until they could be put on, they were rather kinky and it was a job to catch the sally so Alan and I tied an old clapper to the bottom of the set of ropes to try to stretch them straight again. After a week this had worked a treat and the first Navestock practice was a great success. So a big thank you to all the people who helped and we hope there will be many good days of ringing ahead!

If you would like to join us for practice nights, we ring on the fourth Tuesday of each month, except December, January and February, when it is far too cold in the tower. They are nice bells and we'd love to see you.



Bell Sunday at St Mary's Shenfield

By Beth Johnson

On Bell Sunday, we always participate in our family service, reading the lessons, leading the prayers and providing coffee and cake (and Bill's meringues) after the service.

Often, we do a little presentation to tell the congregation about ringing in one way or another. This year Mark delivered a talk on the basics of methods, during which we demonstrated plain hunt with handbells. At the end, Bill held up a poster showing the blue line for plain hunt followed by Sarah unfurling a roll of the blue line for Cambridge Minor, which stretched right down the centre aisle to great applause and gasps of amazement!



The Conviviality Engine

A Tribute to a combined century of service to the bells of Thorpe Bay

By Patrick Condon

To climb into a bell tower is to step beyond the stillness of the Church and onto the factory floor of a churning engine of bronze and straight-grained ash; a semi-autonomous enclave of human fellowship and arcane mechanics where discrete algorithms and mathematical permutations meet the convivial magic of day-to-day life.

Just off the Thames Estuary in Thorpe Bay, The Parish Church of St Augustine of Canterbury sits in a vast acoustic reflector on the maritime frontier, where the salt sea air spirits her incantatory chimes away along the brackish coastline and haunts her belfry like an erodent specter.

Cast together in 1946 by John Taylor and Company of Loughborough, the bells of St Augustine's comprise a peal of eight named bells: treble bell Charity; bells two to seven, Hope, Faith, Fidelity, Fortitude, Peace, and Victory; and the eponymous tenor bell Albert and Annie, named for Mr Albert Mitchell who gifted the bells in memory of Annie, the late Mrs. Mitchell.

Although it's often in the still small corners and hidden places of the world that wonders are wrought, what keeps this 'conviviality-engine' running is not the work of a miracle but the dedication of two men. Men who would humbly pledge a life of combined service that supersedes the life of the church they serve and simply say "We have done that which was our duty to do." (Luke 17:10, KJV)

Our roost atop the bell tower is usually a place where people are heard and not seen, but on Sunday the 17th of May we the ringers and the kind congregation of

St Augustine's gathered together in the church, which in 2025 celebrated the 90th anniversary of its consecration. The Reverend Dave Willis led us in worship and, with the presentation of a handsome brass plaque, joined us in celebrating the monumental anniversary of fifty years service (each!) with gratitude to the devotion of our own beloved friends:

To our treasured Steeple Keeper John Crooks, your service is a ministry of bronze, timber, and iron. Of knots, ropes, and wheels; and it's by the dutiful work of your calloused hands that our engine stands ready in the belfry for ropes to be pulled and changes to be called.

To our esteemed Tower Captain, Stephen Halliwell, you welcomed us and awoke in so many the love of bells that had long lain dormant in our hearts. You keep us safe from harm; and it's the work of your voice that steers our hands. You teach us and lead us as a family from within, and always with pastoral grace and the gentle humility to let be.

For so many of us bell-ringing rescued us at a poignant time in our lives, and that we should find ourselves in the tower in the care of men who are exemplars as much for us as human beings as they are bell-ringers is a wonder to hold dear.

We hope for all who visit to see in that plaque the devotion to which we all aspire; and for those who hear us to step beyond the stillness and find a home among family in the tower with us, when the love of bells awakens in their hearts as well.

Long may God bless you both and us all, and long may it be known that it's by the hands and voice of these great men that the blessed bells of St Augustines are rung.



Above: Vicar The Reverend Dave Willis; Tower Captain Stephen Halliwell, Steeple Keeper John Crooks and Assistant Clergy Father Frank Smith with the commemorative plaque.

Association Striking Competition



As you may be aware, the Southern District will be hosting this event on Saturday 11 July 2026 at both North Ockendon and South Weald Towers.

After some serious ringing, what could be better than relaxing with friends over a well-earned cuppa and a delicious selection of cakes and desserts?

To help make the day extra special, we're calling on the talented bakers among our bell-ringing community to join in by baking and donating a cake or dessert.

Whether it's a family favourite, a new recipe you've been wanting to try, something fancy or something simple, every contribution, big or small will be very warmly received.

If you're able to help, please reply to this email letting me know what you plan to donate and we'll then be in touch nearer the time to arrange collection etc.

For those with a competitive streak, there will also be a small prize for the bake that most catches our eye!!

So dust off your mixing bowl and spoon, get baking, and help us make this a memorable and enjoyable day for everyone.

Thank you in advance for your support and happy baking!

Best wishes, Margaret Dunmore