

# Cambridge Youths have fun at the Folk Festival

by George Unsworth, Society of Cambridge Youths

With the 300th anniversary of the Society of Cambridge Youths in 2024 in mind, we wrote to Cambridge City Council to see if they'd be interested in us appearing at the annual Cambridge Folk Festival. Making it clear that this was going to be an 'outreach' opportunity meant they were not only keen but also happy to make a significant contribution to our costs as well.

We wanted to focus on showing the public what ringing is about and, through that, provide a pathway for any interested person to be put in touch with their most appropriate local teacher, so we hired the Charnborough Ring and recruited 11 volunteers to run it and a set of handbells for the four days of the Festival. Here are some of the tips which may be of help to others contemplating something similar:

- Choose volunteers that (most importantly) are happy to enthuse to strangers, can make the first five minutes of ringing fun (particularly for young children), can teach, ring basic changes on handbells, explain a bit of theory and be prepared to smile for up to 10 hours a day!
- Don't let anyone onto the bells before taking their email address, then make sure every volunteer is alert to making a note of those that might be interested in follow up. If you can, record information digitally to avoid bad handwriting...
- Provide some info/pop-ups that explain some basic introductory information that you can expand on in discussion depending on the individual's level of interest. We also had leaflets and business cards advertising the new teaching facility at St Clement's for locals.



- Don't irritate your neighbouring stalls! We tied the bells for most of the day but advertised specific times for 'performances' on a whiteboard. (These were rung 'open' and aimed at zero-knowledge from the audience with the sounds of individual bells progressing through rounds, call changes, plain hunt and Cambridge all with a few words of explanation in between.)
- Make provision for wet and hot weather. A 4x3m tent worked really well for us.
- We (ok, I) expected to be able to schedule volunteers into neat rotas. Ha! In fact everyone was more or less fully occupied and happy to grab food during occasional quiet times.

- Contact those that need follow up really quickly afterwards while they can remember the experience!

Having a central source of advice from different events right from the start would have been really useful in the planning process. We learned a lot as we went along.

As many others have found in the past, this is a great way of advertising what we do to the general public and, given the time and effort involved by Roger Booth and the Mobile Belfries Trust, is remarkably good value for money. About 650 people had a go, which generated approximately 40 follow-up contacts. We'll probably never know if/how many started (or re-started – we had loads of lapsed ringers stopping by) so if you find you have a new recruit who arrived on your doorstep because of the Folk Festival, please do let us know!



Top: Catriona, Richard, Ben & Lesley teaching  
Left: Richard explains change-ringing aided by pop up stands from St Clement's and CCCBR  
Middle: Luke and Jonathan with very young recruits  
Below: Luke, Ben and Catriona ringing handbells (Photos Dave Richards)