

# The Essex International Jamboree

by Beth Johnson

In late 2023 a combination of the Central Council, Essex Association and Mobile Belfries Trust was alerted to plans for the Essex International Jamboree which was to take place from 27th July to the 2nd August at Boynton Hall Farm near Writtle in Essex. The idea was put forward to take a mini ring for the week-long event and we discovered that the Jamboree organisers were very keen to include us.

Mini rings had been taken to Jamborees before, notably to the Derbyshire Jamboree at Peak Camp which was held regularly from the 1990s until recently, but we had little idea of how an event would actually work. How many children would visit the mini ring? Would they book sessions or just rock up? How many volunteer ringers would we need? What queue management activities should we organise? Well now we know for the future!

## The helpers

The first thing to say is it was a fabulous week with around 5,000 Guides and Scouts plus over 1,000 leaders and helpers in attendance. The weather was sunny and hot; we had a great band of smiley helpers each of whom was keen to tell our visitors what a great activity ringing is, how you can use it for your Duke of Edinburgh award and how a group visit to a local tower could be arranged.

We had four stalwarts who camped throughout the week and provided continuity of approach. Each day we had extra helpers making the numbers up to between eight and ten. Some helpers enjoyed it so much they came back again for an unplanned day. Helpers' roles were: a 'sweeper' who persuaded groups to come over to us, 'queue managers' – one or two running handbell sessions, a 'tower captain of the day' co-ordinating the mini ring activity, a social media coordinator and at least one person who didn't mind scampering up the ladder to reloop the ropes or free the pulleys. We had at least one young ringer per day to show the Scouts and Guides that ringing is a great activity for their age group.

## The Motion Zone

Our daily tally was between 150 and 200 visitors. The whole Jamboree was divided into ten sub-camps and each sub-camp came to our 'Motion Zone' on rotation. In addition, we had a leaders' evening and the last day was a free-to-choose session when lots of children and adults came back to us to have another go. The stream was pretty constant, we taught backstrokes, then got the visitors to ring rounds with helpers on the handstrokes and making up the six. Four learner ringers in a session worked best. We had several lapsed ringers come through, who we encouraged to get back into their towers, and several competent ringers who joined in and one who rang a quarter.

Most attending groups were local to Essex, the rest coming from across the UK as well as from overseas (Ukraine, Kenya, Australia, Sweden, The Netherlands to name just a few). We had produced posters and small takeaway cards with a QR code that led to a landing page which ART had set up ([bellringing.org/essex-jamboree/](http://bellringing.org/essex-jamboree/)).



Above: Day one crew ready for action.

Left: Next group please! Sarah is giving the information talk and demonstration before starting to teach the next set of visitors.



ART agreed to handle the follow up – and we specifically focussed on suggesting leaders might organise a tower visit rather than particularly recruiting new ringers although there is a link on the landing page for anyone who might like to learn to ring. All the helpers gave cards to the ringers as they finished their session ensuring that each Scout/Guide group got at least one card and also that anyone who showed extra interest or promise had their own card too. We had banners provided by the Central Council with their new branding and a stock of newly branded T-shirts too.

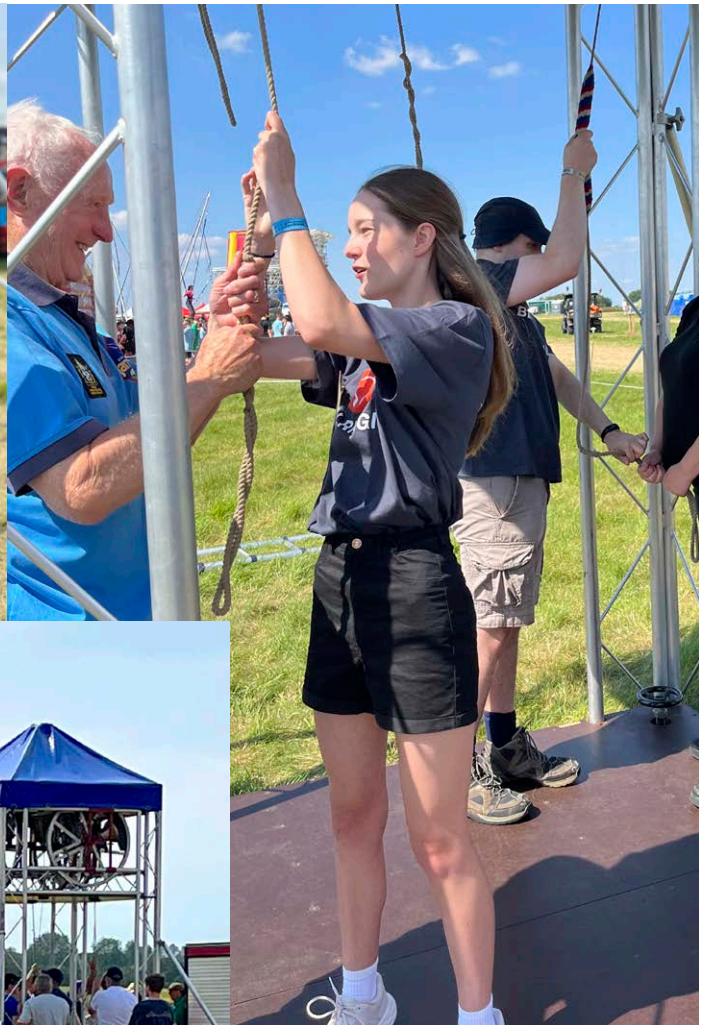
## What went well?

The enthusiasm shown by the helpers and the visitors was inspiring – as our first 'Tower Captain for the day' said, it was such a positive experience. There can't be a better way to showcase bell ringing to these young people. We are in awe of the organisation needed for an event of this size – the site was a mile long by half a mile wide – and how well it all worked, from the catering to the toilets! The Touring Tower is easy to manage and quick to erect and remove by just one person. It could do with being rather more robust as it seemed to 'creak' quite a bit with a whole week of concentrated activity but repairs were speedily done and we were never waiting more than a few minutes to get the bells going again.

Right and below: Roger and Caroline from Basildon model the new branded t-shirts.

Far right: A group of Scout leaders are given a lesson.

Bottom: Two gazebos plus the Touring Tower with feather banner. Two pull-up banners are facing out where the visitors arrive.



### What didn't go so well?

We needed more cover due to the heat – and the same would apply if the weather had been bad. At first, we only had one gazebo. We put up a second one after a couple of days, which was a relief. More branding is needed – of the canopy of the tower and on the gazebos – along with many more T-shirts. We had 25 helpers over the full week (but only 18 T-shirts provided) and those camping needed two T-shirts so they could wash one while wearing the other. The co-ordinated look does make us look much more professional and avoids us appearing rather a raggle-taggle mob.

### Queue activities

It is essential to have some queue activities and it would be good if the Central Council could think about providing some quick, informative resources. I was told when I asked for some help that the 'kids would just be on their phones' but I didn't see one child with a phone during event. The handbells worked well, simple rounds and basic tunes were taught in a matter of minutes and proper

handbells were treated with respect so we had no damage. We also had a set of mini-handbells which gave us back up and were good for the Brownie-age groups.

### The future?

All the helpers had a fabulous time; all were keen to help again. We do hope that we can support the next Essex International

Jamboree and would definitely recommend any Guild or Association where a Jamboree is taking place to get involved. How many contacts will be made as a result? Well, that remains to be seen – we'll be keenly watching for reports from ART. This type of awareness-building activity may not result in immediate direct action but we felt it was really worthwhile for the long term.

What we'd also like to state is that when teenagers often get a bad press, it was a delight to take ringing to such a polite, engaged and considerate audience. We would love to have any of them in our towers!

*At lunch or at the end of the day the helpers had enough energy left to ring some touches and quarters to record the event.*

**Touring Tower, England.** 28 Jul, 720 PB Doubles: Sarah Holland 1, Alfie Holland 2, Daniel Calvert 3, Nick Holland (C) 4, Gemma Crouchman 5, Samantha Bradford 6. Rung during lunch break while teaching many young people to ring at the first day of the Essex International Jamboree. £6

**Touring Tower, Essex.** 1 Aug, 1320 PB Doubles: Anne R Bray (C) 1, Daniel T Calvert 2, Peter Dykes 3, Paul A J Bray 4, Matthew Brown 5, Simon Mann 6. 1st on a mini-ring 3, 5 & 6.

**Touring Tower, England.** 1 Aug, 1260 PB Doubles: Kevin Nicholas 1, Ann Woolley 2, Daniel Calvert 3, Peter Dykes 4, Andrew R C Kelso (C) 5, Gemma Crouchman 6. Reprinted from p.748.

**Touring Tower, England.** 30 Jul, 720 Doubles (3m): Gemma Crouchman 1, Daniel Calvert 2, Ann Woolley 3, Ryan Faulkner-Hatt 4, David Hengeli (C) 5, Ian Kerwin 6. Rung at the end of another hot day on site at the Essex International Jamboree.

**Touring Tower, England.** 2 Aug, 120 PB Doubles: Sarah Brown 1, Gemma Crouchman 2, Daniel Calvert (C) 3, Joshua Tagg 4, Matthew Brown 5, Simon Mann 6. 120 of Bob Doubles for 4 who is currently on EIJ 2024. At the end of another hot day. Assisted by Mother Nature (The Wind!).

**Touring Tower, England.** 2 Aug, 120 PB Doubles: Sarah Brown 1, Ann Woolley 2, Matthew Collier 3, Daniel Calvert 4, Matthew Brown (C) 5, Simon Mann 6. 120 of Plain Bob Doubles for 3 who is currently attending the EIJ 2024.