

SCACR Northern District

Secretary's Report (2021) – Steph Pendlebury

2021 started very quietly, in lockdown once again. Throughout the year, the committee kept in touch with all District towers (thanks also to Stella Bianco (Cowfold), who assisted with this). During lockdown, we advised on how ringers could keep in touch with one another (e.g. using social media and Zoom) while meeting up in person wasn't possible. We also asked whether enough ringers were likely to return to ringing for towers to continue practices and services. Initially, most tower captains and correspondents were quite positive: they thought that numbers might be slightly down, but they'd have enough to continue. However, it has become apparent that many towers are struggling to have enough ringers for weekly practices or to ring for services regularly. This is clearly a very serious situation, and needs to be addressed. Continuing with a "business as usual" (see below) approach to District support for training (and essentially no District support for recruitment) is not going to address this challenge. We need to plan how to do things better. We need to retain the ringers we currently have, and recruit and train new ringers. How can we make best use of the resources (volunteer time and Association funds) available to us?

The latter half of 2021 saw a return to some sort of normality. Six days after national COVID-19 restrictions were lifted on 19th July, we broke with tradition to hold an event on a Sunday – a walk around Slaugham, with ringing, coffee and cake in the church afterwards. Many thanks to Ian Oram (Warnham) for running the ringing, and to Linda Richardson (Worth) for organising the walk (the latter sadly didn't actually happen as the weather was so dreadful on the day!). August saw another event involving ringing, cake and walking – this time at West Grinstead and Cowfold; many thanks to the local ringers for providing such a wonderful spread of refreshments, and to Guy and Anne Ekins for leading the walk. Then petrol shortages caused us to cancel October's event. But the situation improved, and ringing events returned to the usual pattern of first Saturday of the month: new members' welcome with coffee & cake at Cowfold in November, and mince pies and mulled wine/juice at Balcombe in December. Thanks to everyone who provided refreshments, or just came along to ring and support these events!

All ringing and events took place with COVID mitigations in place: good ventilation, limited numbers in the ringing room, face masks recommended, and lots of hand sanitiser! We introduced sign-up-in-advance; partly so that events could be cancelled *beforehand* if there weren't enough attendees, but also so that we knew in advance

what everyone wanted to ring, which is very helpful for planning and running practices.

Monday night District practices restarted in October; thanks to Susie Bowen (Bolney) for booking the towers. We made use of towers with good ventilation which are located centrally in the District, so that the practices were accessible to as many members as possible. Each month had Advanced 8-bell (Stedman Triples and Surprise Major), “Moving on to Methods” (focusing on Kaleidoscope exercises and Plain Hunt), Minor Methods, and rounds-onwards 10-bell practices.

Thanks to the District committee – Susie Bowen, Rosie Gregory (Slaugham), Chris Westwood (Hartfield) and Richard Pendlebury (Horsham) – for helping to plan and organise practices and events.

Newsletter editor Katherine Potter was sadly taken seriously ill while on holiday in September. Thankfully she is making a good recovery and was discharged from hospital in January. On behalf of the District’s members, enormous thanks to Katherine for her hard work over the past 6 years! Kye (Crawley) has now volunteered to become newsletter editor.

Our BRF rep, Simon Alford, has provided advice to a few towers over the past year (see his report).

As ever, if Northern District members have requests or suggestions about practices, training, events, or recruitment please do get in touch: sec-north@scacr.org.