

Cambridge University Feshers Fairs

Since 2016 the Cambridge University Society has hired one of our mobile belfries each year (except during Covid) and recruited and trained many freshers, some going on to become very accomplished ringers.



While the teaching officer came to lessons to teach ringing theory and assist at practices, they did not themselves teach handling to absolute beginners (which often formed the bulk of lessons for most learners). We have come to view this as a strength rather than a drawback: it reinforces that the teaching officer's role is predominantly in organising and promoting lessons, thus taking responsibility off other teachers so they may more easily devote their spare time!

Freshers Fairs

Our teaching campaign kicks off at the fresher's fair in October, where we hire a mobile belfry which we use to give two-minute tasters to hundreds of the fair's attendees over the course of two

CUGCR was founded in 1879 and ring in and around the city of Cambridge; mostly at the towers of Great St Mary's, St Andrew the Great, and St Benet's. We recognise that the recruitment of new ringers is essential to sustain the large and vibrant community of student ringers Cambridge has had for many years.

Teaching Officer

In 2016, our guild master at the time set out to make CUGCR into a university society which can be enjoyed the fullest by ringers of all abilities.

The most prominent area in need of improvement was the teaching of new ringers, and so in each year since, a guild member has devoted themselves to coordinating and organising lessons.

In the first two years, this role was performed unofficially, however in 2018 we affirmed our commitment to this goal by voting to create a sixth position on the guild committee: the teaching officer. The new position was promptly filled by a ringer who was themselves part of that first cohort of learners in 2016, a testament to the success of our endeavours so far.

Having our teaching officer be someone who themselves learned with the guild has had several benefits. This fact proved to prospective ringers that, despite seeming difficult at first, ringing is a skill that can be picked up well within the timespan of a university degree, thus dispelling concerns people may have had about joining the guild as absolute beginners.

days. This gives a clear and exciting snapshot of what we do to people who perhaps have never even heard of change ringing before.

This really captures the imagination of the student body in Cambridge – well over 100 students sign up to our learner's mailing list each year. We then offer two have-a-go sessions at Great St Mary's in the first weekend of term, in order to ensure as many people as possible are able to come for a first taste of ringing. Typically 20 or more attend across both sessions where each are given their first go on tower bells, as well as a few fun exercises on handbells. The attendees also have a tour of the tower, including seeing the bells, the spectacular view from the top, and the opportunity to ask questions and chat with the guild master.

**We can now proudly say that
several of our most active
members are students who
learned with us.**

After these sessions we open up registration for our programme of lessons. Learners are able to attend up to three lessons each week: Thursday and Friday evening (before our usual guild practices), and Sunday afternoon.

The success of our recruitment efforts, as well as the flexibility of the programme on offer, means the response we receive is often overwhelming - with every single lesson signed up to maximum capacity, and more keen learners getting in touch to ask when more lessons would be on offer!

Running so many lessons for a sustained period of time may seem like a big commitment for our teachers, however the positive atmosphere at each session and the excitement that comes with sharing our hobby with new ringers means that we enjoy the lessons just as much as our learners!

Integration

By scheduling lessons to take place directly before our regular practices, our learners are soon ringing alongside the rest of the guild. Our simulator has been extremely helpful for this, as it means some learners can be ringing as part of a band while other learners are still being taught handling.

Making this transition from just being a learner to joining in with the rest of guild is something that can be difficult. However, much credit must be given to our (unofficial) anti-curry officer, whose job it is to organise socials (which do not involve going out for a curry - that very important job is left to our, also unofficial, curry officer).



Guild 145th Birthday Brunch (4th February 2024)

Alongside our teaching, there have been dinners, games nights, pub trips, a cycle outing, and a Christmas party, which have all been well attended by our learners, who already feel part of the community of student ringers in Cambridge. These social activities have also helped welcome those who could already ring upon arrival at university - in particular our fresher's dinner in October.

Retention is also helped by the breadth of the practice sessions we offer – with practices at so many different times in the week, students are able to integrate ringing into their busy schedule with ease. Moreover, the variation between different sessions also helps meet the range of abilities: for example, the Friday evening session is very popular with people who have learned more recently (perhaps with the guild), whereas on Thursday we often ring quite advanced methods (although many ringers like to attend both of these sessions every week!)

The Future

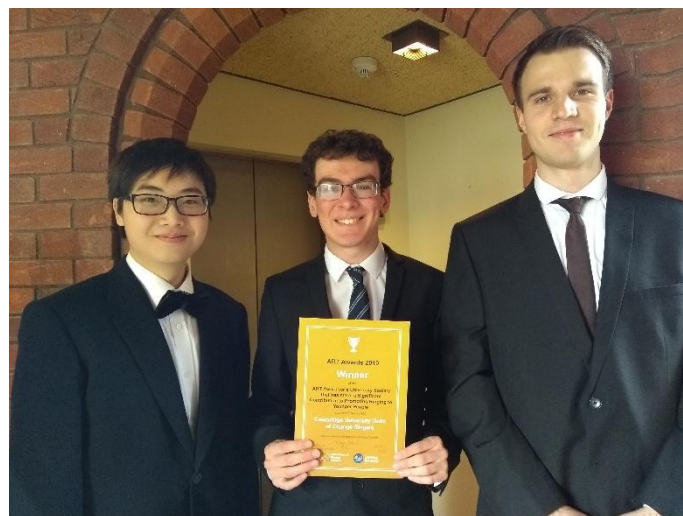
We usually kick off in the first week of term in January with a “ringing bootcamp”, reinforcing and building on the skills already learned. Towards the end of term, some learners will be ringing their first quarter peal on our annual dinner weekend. The focus will then turn to having more of our experienced guild members attend ART modules ready for next year. Increasing our pool of trained teachers is vital if we wish to continue to expand our teaching programme in the years to come, as well as improve its effectiveness.

One unexpected side effect of our recruitment aims has been how international the guild's membership has become. Change ringing is an activity practiced almost exclusively in Britain, yet among the 24 who had lessons with us this term we had students from Hungary, Hong Kong, USA, Lithuania, Germany, China, and Singapore.

One rather exciting prospect from our efforts is the potential for word about ringing to spread beyond the British Isles and spark an interest elsewhere in the world. In addition to this, in encouraging the members we already had to give teaching a go via ART, we hope they will be ready to teach others across the country in the many years to come after they graduate.

In summary

We have come a long way since setting out to make CUGCR a place where learners can really get involved in ringing for the first time and feel welcome in the ringing community.



2019 Winner: *The ART Award for a University Society that has made a Significant Contribution to Promoting Ringing to Younger People*

CUGCR
Cambridge University Guild of Change Ringers
Michaelmas 2023

October
Thurs 5th 20:00 – 21:30 First practice at St Andrew the Great
Fri 6th 19:30 – 21:00 First practice at St Bene't's
Sat 7th 14:00 – 16:30 Have a go at bell ringing! At Great St Mary's
Sun 8th 13:30 – 16:00 Have a go at bell ringing! At Great St Mary's
Sat 14th Freshers' cycle outing around Cambridge

November
3rd – 5th Southern Universities' Association Weekend, Bristol
Sat 25th London outing

December
Sat 2nd Guild's Christmas Dinner
30th – 2nd Jan Guild's New Year celebrations

Weekly Ringing
Thursday 20:00-21:30 Practice, St Andrew the Great
Friday 19:30-21:00 Practice, St Bene't's
Sunday 09:00-09:50 Service, St Bene't's
16:00-17:00 Service, Great St Mary's

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Further information

The Association Ringing Teachers and Learning the Ropes:
<https://bellringing.org/>

The Mobile Belfries Trust:
<https://www.mobilebelfries.org/>

*The Mobile Belfries Trust
Registered Charity 1126164*