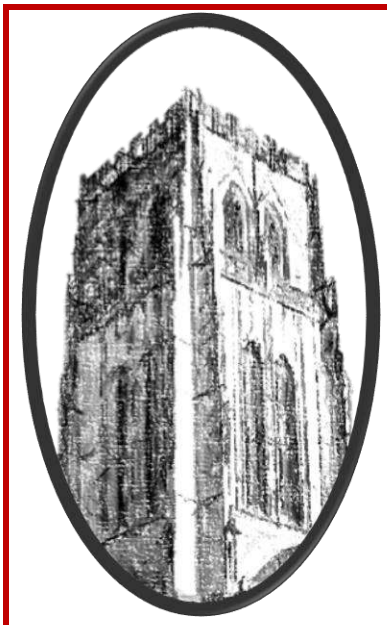

D&N Times



Featuring all the latest news from the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Association of Church Bellringers.

October 2026 Edition

A Message from the Editor

Welcome to the 10th edition of the D&N Times, now for the month of October (even though we are well into November, by the time you are reading this!).

I have a couple of congratulations to give out for this month, which is great! Well done to Moe Harrison, for ringing her first quarter peal of Treble Bob, Grandsire Triples and Stedman Triples – there's no stopping her now! I'd also like to mention the large number of 'firsts' scored at Tulloch over the week of the Southern District tour there this month. I counted a total of 36 firsts, including firsts in methods, as conductor and on different numbers of bells. Altogether it sounds like it was a very productive week!

Following on from last month's edition, I would just quickly like to remind people about making sure the contact details and ringing times for their tower is correct on the D&N website. If you spot something that needs changing, you can email me at edsec@dandn.org, or our webmaster Mike Chester, at webmaster@dandn.org.

Stephen Bean

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4: A Few "Ramblings" from Iris.

6: Tower Spotlight: Durham, Cathedral Church of Christ, Blessed Virgin Mary & St Cuthbert

9: 50 Years for Sonia!

Featured Performance

South Shields, St Hilda

Thursday, 1 October 2026 in 44m (9–3–27 in G)

1280 Spliced Surprise Major (3m)

1 Moe Harrison	5 James Thacker
2 Kris King (C)	6 Christine Richardson
3 Clair Crowther	7 Jim Crowther
4 Theo Kendrick	8 Robert Wallace

First TB: 1

Most spliced: 4

President’s Update

October has been another enjoyable month, with two particularly notable events bringing ringers together for some excellent ringing and, of course, plenty of socialising!

The first highlight was our annual dinner, held at the Northern Counties Club in Newcastle. It was a very successful evening and a wonderful opportunity to enjoy some good food and company. Our guest speaker, Andrew Aspland, provided an entertaining and encouraging speech, which was thoroughly enjoyed by those present. Following the dinner, some of Newcastle's bars played host to us for further merriment - with the D&N contingent helping to significantly improve the standard of dress.

Another highlight of the month was the Southern District's trip to Scotland, staying at the Tulloch Ringing Centre. With its’ two rings of bells, Tulloch provided an excellent base for our ringing, with visits to Inverness Cathedral and the Balnaferry Campanile providing further opportunities. In total, 35 quarter peals and 1 peal were rang, with countless numbers of firsts. Methods ranged from Plain Bob Doubles to Plain Bob Cinques, and Yorkshire Surprise Major to Spliced Stedman Triples & Bristol Surprise Major. A particular well done to Elspeth Criag and Cleo Robinson-

Kaye from Hartlepool, who rang their first peal during this week, being 5056 Cambridge Surprise Major, shown here:

Thursday 22nd October 2026
Tulloch, The Last Tower
5056 Cambridge Surprise Major
1 Cleo Robinson-Kaye
2 Michael H Anderson
3 Elspeth F Craig
4 Jack Hanlon
5 Patrick W Wheeler
6 Helen L Scott
7 Ashley D Law
8 Christopher M Rudd (C)
First peal: 1 and 3.
50th peal for the association: 8

With the dinner behind us and another successful Tulloch trip completed, I'm looking forward to some of the last few events of the year, such as the D&N Carol Service at South Shields in December. There is plenty happening around the association, and I would encourage everyone to make the most of opportunities to get involved.

Jack Hanlon, Association President

A Few “Ramblings” from Iris

“I was impressed about Oscar, the young ringer at Whitley Bay and his experiences so far in ringing. It made me think about how ringing has been involved in my life.

I learnt to ring to ring at Benwell and ended up being a member of the band at Newcastle Cathedral. I used to go to a different practice nearly every night at first, enjoying the company of other ringers. I have rung in a few peals for the D&N and the St Martin's Guild in Birmingham (two in one day!!!) and have visited towers of different shapes and sizes, one comes to mind in particular at Pershore Abbey where the ringing chamber is a cage suspended high up above the font.



Benwell, St James – learning to ring here would be enough to put anyone off!

In the time of 'apartheid' in South Africa I visited Shirley and Andrew Bolton, former ringers at Jesmond, and I remember being told when I went into Johannesberg to shop 'Don't get on a black bus'. I came back and said that ‘I hadn't seen a black bus?’ and they told me they meant a bus for black

people only! We visited the Kruger Park, which covers an area the size of Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland, and saw lions walking in a line down the road, zebras and a herd of elephants and slept in a fenced compound, guarded by armed rangers.

At the Cathedral I met my husband, Jack, and we had a daughter Hazel who learnt to ring too. We represented the Cathedral at the National 12 Bell Striking Competition, coming 4th once and also ringing in the D&N's 6 and 8 bell Competitions; Jack and his family donated the Anderson Rose Bowl in memory of his father.

We rang for the Queen when the Maunday Service was at Newcastle Cathedral and we received four Maunday coins for our services. We had special passes for entry and, before the doors were opened, we watched the 'sniffer' dogs go all over the area. When we finished ringing we found a poor policeman on the stairs up to the belfry - he looked shell-shocked, no one had told him to have earplugs! The service was quite an experience with beautiful music and flowers and the Yeomen of the Guard in their splendid red and gold ceremonial uniforms marching around carrying big silver plates with the white leather purses to be given by the Queen to the recipients. The Queen was dressed in red coat and hat and carrying a posy.

These are some of my experiences that would not have happened without my involvement in ringing, I am not very mobile now but have great memories of District meetings and the 'teas' and meeting lots of people with different stories of how ringing was and is part of their lives”.

Iris Anderson

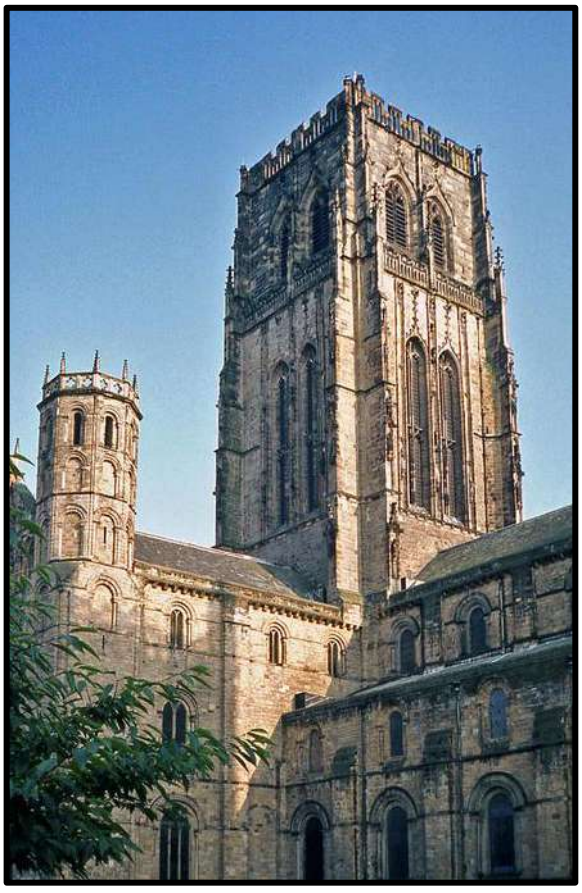
TOWER SPOTLIGHT:

Durham, Cathedral Church of Christ, BVM and St Cuthbert

There are at least **75** rings of bells hung for full-circle ringing (with at least 3 bells) in our association, located throughout the north east from the Tweed to the Tees, and chances are you won't have seen all of them! Going forward, each edition of the D&N Times will 'spotlight' a different tower, in order to show what a great variety of unique localities we have in our association, and to perhaps inspire you to plan a visit! All contact details can be found on the D&N website.

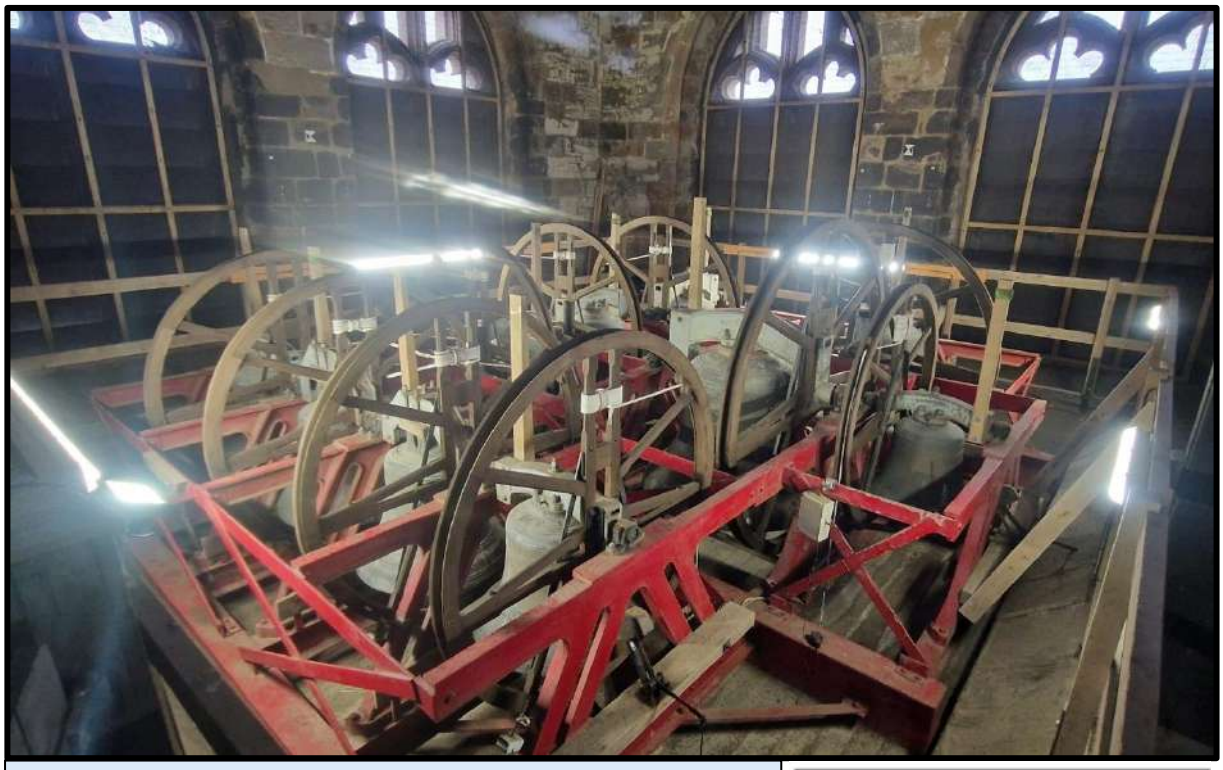
If you would like your tower to feature in a future edition of the D&N Times, do get in touch (edsec@dandn.org)!

Within the D&N there are plenty of churches, but among them there are two Cathedrals, one Minster and one Abbey. In this month's **Tower Spotlight,** we'll be visiting the first of these 'big' churches, which is Durham Cathedral, an iconic landmark in the middle of this historic city.

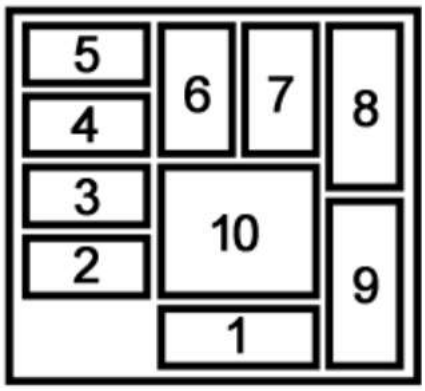


The cathedral as we know it today began its' construction in 1093 and took 40 years to complete the main body of the church. It has then been extended multiple times in the 1170s, early 1200s and then in the 1400s, when the central tower that now contains the ring of 10 bells was constructed.

Before 1980, the central tower was home to a ring of 8 bells, which had become notoriously difficult to ring throughout the 20th century, to the point where ringing was limited on the bells due to the movement of the tower. The last peal on the ring of 8 was in October 1949, leading to a 31-year gap before the next one, after the bells were rehung. 5 of the bells in this ring (2, 5, 6, 7 and Tenor) date from 1693, cast by Christopher Hodson after he moved up North for the last few years of his life. He also cast the original 6 bells at St Oswald's church in Durham, 2 of which are displayed at the back of the church and are the latest examples of Hodson's bells.



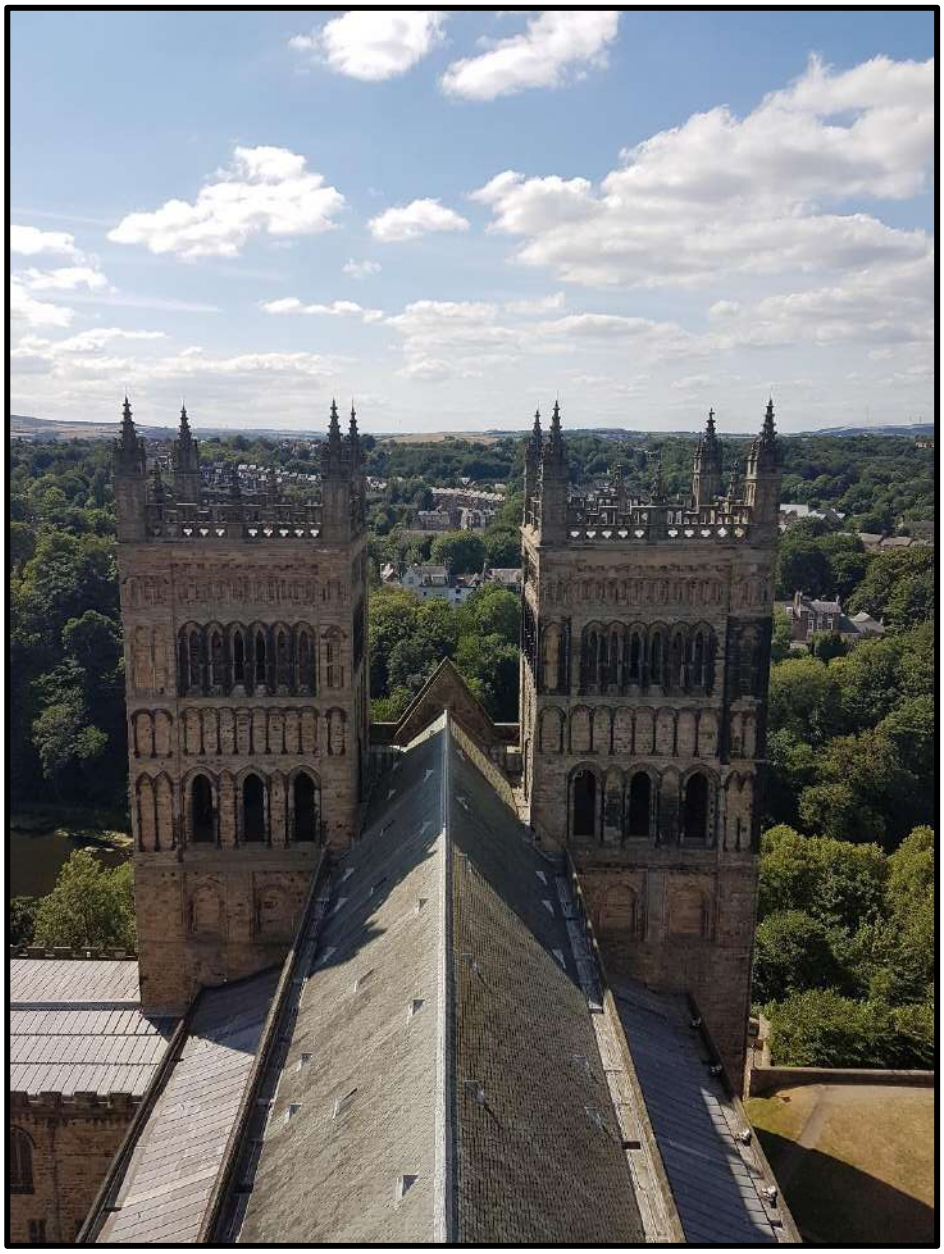
The 10 bells of Durham Cathedral. The treble is on the right, next to the Tenor in the middle.



In 1980, the bells were lowered from the tower to be retuned and augmented to 10, and hung in a new cast iron frame, replacing the over 200-year-old wooden frame that was in place prior. These are currently the heaviest ringable bells in the D&N, with the Tenor weighing in at 28-0-6. The total weight of the bells comes a whopping 128-1-4, which is nearly 6.5 tons! There have been 86 peals on the bells, and although there have been bells in the tower

since the early 17th century, the first ring of 8 was completed in 1693. Using this date, we get an average of 0.26 peals a year, but considering the first peal in the tower wasn't until 200 years later in 1893, the 'true' average comes to 0.65 peals a year; approximately one every two years.

Durham Cathedral offers one of the best views from any tower in the Association, whether that is from the "Ringer's Walk" – a walkway right around the tower below the louvres, or from the small windows in the ringing room itself. The photo to the right was taken by myself, looking out to the west over the two smaller towers, which each used to have bells in them before they were moved to the central tower in 1693.



Further information about the church and the bells can be found on the North East Bells website, and contact details can be found on the D&N website.

50 Years for Sonia! *– by Elizabeth Forster*

“My mother is Sonia Thompson, Chairman of the Central District.

The family connection to bell ringing goes back to the early years after WWII when my mother’s paternal grandma answered the cry for help for new ringers due to a shortage of men following the years of conflict. This was a St. James the Great, Norton Canes in Staffordshire, then a lumpy 6 with all bar the treble on plain bearings and a reputation for having square wheels. It was a tower where only call changes and plain courses of Grandsire Doubles were rung by numbers. Everyone had their own bell and great grandma’s was the treble. In the 1950’s, then a young man in his 20’s, my grandfather also learned to ring, as did a young woman from the other end of the straggling mining village. With a certain degree of matchmaking skills



“A very fierce looking Great Grandma Cartwright, on the left.”

from great grandma the rest, as they say, is history, my grandparents marrying at that parish church in 1962.

My mother's earliest memory of ringing was not altogether a pleasant one. Access to the ringing chamber at Norton was via a wrought iron spiral staircase from the base of the tower that appeared very steep, very high and very wobbly to a 3-year-old. She has a clear memory of going up those stairs clinging onto the bottom of grandma's coat and being helped by grandad from behind. Once in the ringing chamber mum was sat on one of the benches placed around the walls and told in no uncertain terms that she was not to move or make a sound. She remembers being unsettled to the brink of tears by the noise, the rattling of ropes and a room full of strangers.

Fast forward to 1975 when my mother was 11. The family had moved to the neighbouring market town of Cannock and the connection with ringing had been lost. That was until a family day out in Shropshire. It was a Saturday in the summer holidays and there was the sound of ringing coming from one of the churches in Bridgnorth. The comments of 'I think they must be ringing for a wedding' and 'Ooo! They are firing the bells' sparked interest in my mother and a conversation about bell ringing followed. Mum asked if she might be able to learn to ring. Grandad thought it best to leave it another 12 months until she was older and a bit taller and then he said he would take her to learn at Cannock. Granddad kept his promise and in the autumn of 1976 he and my mother turned up one Wednesday evening at St. Luke's to join the practice. When entering the ringing chamber there was a very pleasant '***Hello Roy***!!' from a couple of the ringers. It turned out they knew my grandparents from their 'Norton days' and were pleased to see my granddad again after a number of years.

My mother was taught by the eminent Geoff Pick and his wife Linda, and was able to handle a bell independently by the end of October. She was soon ringing at other towers, for weddings (at the princely sum of 75p per rope) and rang her first quarter peal early the following year. In 1977, Prince Charles (now HM the King) came to Cannock to open a grand flower festival

to mark Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee. My mother was asked to ring for his arrival but was unable to as she was booked to go on a week-long school camp. This is something she has always regretted. My granddad returned to ringing having to start from scratch where methods were concerned knowing nothing about dodges, lead ends or place bells, and continued until ill health prevented him later in life. Grandma also took it up again but only for a short while.

A year or so later the Rev. John Linford took up the position as Rector of Cannock and once settled in his 3 children Diana, Peter and a certain Simon Linford learned to ring. Along with 4 other young teenagers this was the beginnings of what is still referred to as the Golden Age in the tower at St. Luke's. The 'Junior Band' took themselves out on ringing tours, rung quarter peals after school (easy when your father is the Rector or your father is the Steeple Keeper and there's a tower key hanging up on a hook in your kitchen) and covered for many of the vast number of weddings that took place at Cannock in those days. Now increased to £1.50 per rope it was a lucrative business at St. Luke's as it was a wedding production line with one wedding being rung out and another one in at the same time. They thought nothing of ringing for as many as 5 or 6 weddings on a Saturday in the height of the season. All good things must come to an end and the 'Junior Band' fizzled out as one by one they left for university or to pursue careers beyond the borders of Staffordshire. 5 out of the 8 of them still ring.

My mother enjoyed student life in Leicester joining the local band at Knighton in the suburbs to the south of the city and rang with the University Society that, at the time, had adopted the 8 at Great Glen, about 6 miles out of town. Living in a city had its ringing benefits as there was a practice night somewhere every night of the week within cycling distance. The bright lights of London beckoned after that, my mother working in Baker Street as a graphic designer at the head office of a well-known high street store. She rang at many of the city towers occasionally with The Cumberlands but mostly with London County Association. As well as a trip to the pub, practices were usually followed by a visit to Brick Lane for a great curry. What a life!



“Mum and Philip’s wedding in 1990. L-R: Grandma, Katherine (Philip’s sister), Grandad, Mum, Philip and the Ushers. This was at Cannock, Staffordshire.”

It was at a practice night at Tooting Graveney that my mother met Philip, a Rector’s son from Norfolk. They were married at Cannock in 1990. At this time, living in Lewisham and working in Croydon, my mother’s ringing was mostly with the Kent County Association, she being Ringing Master and then Chairman of the Lewisham District for several years. Only two years after being married Philip sadly died, and it was ringing and her ringing friends that saw her through those initial dark times after Philip’s death.

Whilst that was all going on down there, my father (Peter) was living near Chester-le-Street and working for a sign manufacturing company at the end of the Team Valley, Gateshead. Dad's company had a large ongoing contract with Croydon Borough Council (my mother was senior designer for said council) and it was through work that my parents met. It was something about dad's soft Geordie accent that appealed to mum and after deciding to meet in person a whirlwind romance followed. Only a few months after meeting, mum left her job, sold her house and moved to the North East. You just know when something is right and the only regret was leaving her ringing friends behind.

Initially mum rang at Chester-le-Street but once she and my father moved to Ebchester near Consett she joined the band at Benfieldside where she has now been Tower Captain for over 25 years. My dad learned to ring (if you can't beat them, join them) and they were married at St. Cuthbert's 30 years ago. I arrived in 1998 and was taught to ring from the age of 7 by, you guessed it, my mother - the 4th generation of my family. And that brings you up to date!



"Mum and Me, at Benfieldside".

Although she has rung a handful of them (16 to date, including one for the D&N, which was my first), my mother has never been one for peal ringing, much preferring a quarter peal or date touch. It's rare that she is missing from the tower on a practice night or a Sunday morning and is dedicated to keeping the 'home fires burning' at Benfieldside. My mother loves ringing for weddings, visiting new towers (especially quirky 3s) and if possible, when on holiday, joins a local band for Sunday ringing. Out of all the things that my mother has done ringing-wise in the last 50 years, there is one that gives her a great sense of satisfaction. She has rung in the New Year every 31st December, in a tower somewhere in the country, except once, and that was in 2020 because of the Pandemic.

Here's to many more New Years of ringing!"

Elizabeth Forster

Benfieldside, St Cuthbert
Saturday, 31 October 2026 in 67m (12–2–17 in G)
1976 Minimus, Doubles and Minor (3m)
720 Plain Bob Minor, 1240 Plain Bob Doubles and 16 Plain Bob Minimus
1 Stephen Bean (C)
2 Sonia Thompson
3 Rachel Bean
4 Elizabeth Thompson
5 Gillian Appleby
6 Andrew Wallace
Rung to celebrate 50 years of ringing for Sonia.

"A date touch containing 1976 changes was rung at Mum's home tower of Benfieldside".

Until Next Time...

If you have any corrections from this month's edition of the **D&N Times**, or ideas for articles you would like to see or write yourself, please do get in touch! You can contact me at edsec@dandn.org.

I hope to see you again next month!

All of the articles written here are by the editor unless stated otherwise.