

RINGING REMEMBERS



Following the work of Alan Regin, Steward of the Rolls of Honour, who discovered that there were 1,400 bellringers who had died during the First World War, it was decided that the ringing community needed to do something special to commemorate their sacrifice. In the summer of 2017 members of the Central Council, Alan and a non-profit community projects company, The Big Ideas Co, met to agree a project with the main objective of recruiting 1,400 new ringers in memory of those who had died. And so was born the Ringing Remembers project.

In November 2017, Vicki Chapman was invited to co-ordinate the project on behalf of the Central Council and be the main liaison with the Big Ideas Co for the campaign. It was agreed early on the Big Ideas Co would handle external promotion, whilst the CCCBR would handle internal promotion within the ringing community.

It seemed that this project had captured the imagination of the national press, and an official launch was made on 11th November 2017 from Eddington, a tower that had lost its entire band during the war. Alan Regin was interviewed on BBC Breakfast TV, with ringing and a look at the beautiful manuscripts that are the Rolls of Honour.

Funding for the campaign came from Department of Community and Local Government and the Department of Culture, Media and Sports. The funding was to support the development of a recruitment platform to bring together a central database of new recruits and a simple website.

The database collected the details of those who registered an interest in learning to ring for the Armistice Centenary in November 2018. Within the first month, 99 potential new recruits had registered in response to the BBC Breakfast piece.

Big Ideas Co commissioned an artist that they had used for previous projects to create some artwork specifically for the Ringing Remembers campaign and that would be made freely available for the project, and individuals to use if they wanted to create their own publicity materials. Although this artwork was not universally welcomed, it became synonymous with the campaign. 3,000 A3 posters and 60,000 trifold leaflets were produced and made available, free of charge, for anyone holding recruitment events, or for general publicity materials.

By the end of February 2018, 338 new contacts had been recorded, with just over 100 of those having already started lessons. Social media sites were now up and running and providing a useful tool for engaging with new recruits and updating existing ringers with information about the campaign.

Small grants were made available to assist with local recruitment and training events. Grants could be made up to a value of £250.

In June 2018, BBC Radio 4's The Archers started a storyline of one of their characters learning to ring and one episode was practically given over to the details of the campaign. Subsequent episodes followed the character's learning journey. This resulted in another spike in recruitment, a much needed boost at this half-way point in the campaign.

In July 2018, Lord Bourne launched the new recruits badge in Northumberland to celebrate the 1,000th sign up to the database. Work started to ensure that recruits information was up to date so that when ready, badges could be issued promptly. Media interest also started to increase. The Department of Culture, Media and Sports finally confirmed the timing of the (inter)national moment as 12.30 on 11th November, to coincide with the Nations Thank You march past.

August 2018 saw a dramatic increase in media interest with at least 18 interviews across BBC local radio stations on 5th August. Articles were also published in major newspapers and an appearance on Sky News.

By September 2018, the total number of new recruits who had indicated on their registration that could either ring rounds without help, had had their first lesson, or could ring both strokes unaided had reached exactly 1,400, our initial target. A huge sigh of relief. It was agreed with the Ringing World to set up a Bellboard event to enable people to register their intentions to ring, then confirm their ringing on the day to a linked event and be able to download a special certificate so that they could record the names of all ringers who took part in commemorative ringing on the day.

October 2018 saw the total number of registrants on the database at nearly 3,000 however, over 200 had not updated their status to confirm they were ringing and a similar number still claiming that they had not been contacted by a teacher yet. 800 badges for new recruits were issued by the end of the month which created a stir on social media and prompted more registrants to update their status.

The total number of people who registered an interest on the Ringing Remembers database climbed to 3,335, with over 1,000 new registrations in the last 2 months. Inevitably some have dropped out or did not update their status to indicate that they had actually started learning: approximately 10%. That said, 2,759 confirmed that they could ring rounds without help, had their first lesson or could ring both strokes by 11th November. A further 168, some of whom only registered on the last day, are waiting for contact or have their first lesson booked. Either way, it's reasonably safe to say that not only did we reach our target, we almost doubled it and the campaign for recruitment was a huge success.

Even well after the event into March 2019, recruits were still getting in touch, particularly those that did not initially update their status, as they remembered they wanted their badge!

The individual stories behind why some people chose to take part is extremely touching. They wanted to remember relatives who fought, they wanted to remember all who fought, they wanted to participate in something to mark this 100th anniversary of the Armistice. A great sense of community engagement and connectedness was apparent in some of the stories shared on social media. There was a growing conversation around bellringing and wellbeing with a number of stories about recruits who were re-engaging with their communities and highlighting bellringing as an activity that can break down loneliness and social isolation.

The Ringing World Ltd has published a number of wonderful articles from Ringing Remembers recruits and their teachers, with many wanting to contribute / participate / engage more fully in ringing.

The many hundreds of people who have assisted with recruitment, training and encouragement, whether through formal support, such as the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) or less formal routes, has been phenomenal and provided a great insight into traditional ways of recruitment and teaching and the need to rethink how we cope with new learners, particularly in such large numbers. Support from the Association of Ringing Teachers has been extremely helpful with an increase in learning to teach and learners taking part in the Learn to Ring programme.

A final thank you to those who worked behind the scenes on behalf of the Central Council, Alan Regin whose work in researching the Rolls of Honour has been staggering, not to mention the number of interviews and talks he's given over the last few months; Andrew Hall the brains behind the database that has allowed us to capture all this information and process these thousands of entries; Bruce & Eileen Butler who have been connecting learners to teachers and keeping the database up to date with progress; Colin Chapman who posted out 127 separate parcels of posters and leaflets, then all the badges and supported me in so many other ways, and to Christopher O'Mahony for keeping me sane in times of overwhelming frustration.

We must now turn to the task of retention, we have nearly 3,000 new ringers that we didn't have this time last year, and we need to encourage them to stay with it and continue their progress. I'm sure that in most cases that will be easy because of the friendly, supportive learning experience they have received.

Vicki Chapman
CCCBR Ringing Remembers Co-ordinator