

It becomes this amazing team effort

Bill Gibb discovers what's so appealing for those who have a hands-on approach to bell-ringing.

COME Christmas morning, the sound of festive bells will bring joy to many as they ring out at churches across the country.

Mary Jones will find the noise even more appealing, as she'll be at the end of a rope in one of the nation's many church bell towers.

For Mary, though, becoming one of Britain's thousands of bell-ringers is something she couldn't have imagined when she retired from primary teaching just a few years ago.

Her later-life hobby has now become her passion, and it's helped her make new friends.

To her amazement, she's also become a bell-ringing blogger.

Mary's involvement began in 2018, attracted by Ringing Remembers.

During World War I,

1,400 bell-ringers from across the UK lost their lives, and an appeal was launched to recruit the same number of new recruits to ring together to mark the centenary of the Armistice on November 11, 2018.

As it turned out, double that number rallied to the call.

"I wasn't actually interested in being a bell-ringer," Mary, who's sixty-three and lives just outside Norwich, says.

"I just wanted to get into the ringing room at the church in Norwich that was holding a taster session.

"I knew my great-grandfather, Philip Sadler, had rung there and I thought his name was on a peal board.

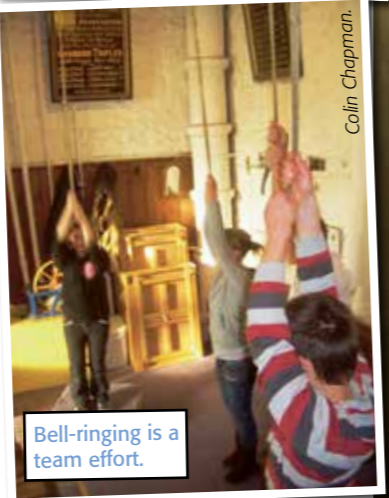
"It was really an excuse to have a nose around, but the lady who was teaching asked me back again a few days later.

The Accidental Ringer

Mary keeps everyone abreast of all that's going on with her entertaining "The Accidental Ringer" blog.

Having been a real novice when it began, she admits the popularity has taken her by surprise. "I didn't have a clue and had never read a blog before I started this," Mary laughs. "But it went down incredibly well."

Mary's blog is at dingdong887180022.wordpress.com.



"Once I started, it was like something I'd been waiting to do for my whole life. It was quite extraordinary."

Mary admits it was both a physical and mental challenge, equating it to learning to drive when you have a number of things to master at the same time.

"You can have something the size of a small car maybe forty feet above your head which you're attached to by a piece of rope," Mary explains.

"You have to control it minutely by feeling where it is in its swing.

"It can be difficult and it takes real determination, so you shouldn't go into it in a light-hearted fashion.

"But it's thrilling when

you get it right, and when you start doing it with other people it becomes this amazing team effort. There's a sheer joyousness to it.

"It's not like an orchestra. There are no solos in change ringing, and everyone gets exactly the same number of dings on the bell."

Studies have shown the mental as well as physical benefits of bell-ringing, with increased confidence and improved social skills for those affected by loneliness.

New bands have been



almost all our close bell-ringing friends have taught their children to ring.

"Children tend to take to this quite quickly, and it works well when we have a group of young people ringing together and feeding off each other's enthusiasm.

"Simon and I will ring at least twice a week at the cathedral, and we also do some hand-bell-ringing, which doesn't necessarily take place there.

"The Association has been doing well, so much so that we actually have a waiting list for teaching people in Glasgow as we're at capacity for training.

"All those who have joined in the last two years have stayed and joined our Sunday service band."

Mary says the festive period is definitely one of the busiest, as well as the most positive and uplifting.

"It is absolutely lovely. We start off doing carol services for schools, then the Guides and all sorts of others.

"Christmas morning is just the most wonderful ring as it's the one the congregation really appreciate because it's so traditional.

"We also ring in the New Year, breaking into something fast and joyous after midnight." ■

Open To Everyone

Change ringing dates back to the 16th century when church bells began to be hung with a full wheel.

That enabled the bell to swing in a full circle and back again, allowing ringers to take control and ring sets of bells in a continuously changing pattern.

Music is created by moving bells up and down the ringing order.

Change ringing towers are almost uniquely British, with almost 5,500 towers in the UK, but only 150 in the rest of the world.

"There are probably about 40,000 or 50,000 change ringers in total, and the vast majority of those are in Britain," Vicki Chapman of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR), says.

"Not every bell has a ringer, and there are ringers who are nomads. They don't have a particular tower and travel around ringing where they want.

"That's one of the good things: you can pretty much go anywhere, introduce yourself and just ask if you can ring the bells. It really is open to anyone.

"You can be a churchgoer, but you don't have to be. The vast majority of bells are in churches but there are secular rings of bells and some churches have been deconsecrated.

"I've rung bells in a cowshed, in a barn, in a Roman Catholic church and a Greek Orthodox church!"

Information on the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers can be found at www.cccbr.org.uk, and the Scottish Association of Change Ringers at www.sacr.org.