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# THE RINGING WORLD







## On the cover

The snowy streetscape on the cover was taken by Edinburgh ringer **Julia Forsyth**. In February 2024, St Andrew's and St George's West became **The New Town Church** when it merged with Greenside Parish to form a new congregation. The old acronym, STAG, has now become NEWT – staying true to the animal-themed shorthand!

Julia reports that it is an exciting time up in the bell tower, too. Monday practice nights are buzzing, with often more than 20 ringers of all levels, from beginners to seasoned experts, taking part. They ring everything from rounds and call changes to Plain

Hunt, Plain Bob, Little Bob, Grandsire, Stedman, and even Spliced Surprise Major. They're always delighted to welcome visitors, and after practice, you'll be welcome to join them with a pint at The Standing Order on George Street.

There were several milestones celebrated within the band in the past year, with seven peals and eight quarter peals. There was an all-women quarter rung on 8th March for International Women's Day, a peal on 18th September marking the 50th anniversary of Simon Aves's first peal and a special peal celebrating the arrival of baby Arkady, born in October to band member Irina. And just recently, on 1st December, the bells were rung during the joyful moment when the congregation learned of the appointment of the Reverend Dr Conor Fegan as Minister-elect of New Town Church.

St Andrew's and St George's West featured on the cover of *The Ringing World* in October 2022, issue 5815, and the full story of the restoration of the bells was thoroughly documented by Peter Whyatt in 2006, *RW*4959 p.444 and *RW*4988 p.1141. Based on those articles, here is the short story:



The New Town was a massive expansion of Edinburgh, built in stages between 1767 and about 1850, and retains much of its original neo-classical and Georgian architecture. St Andrew's Church was completed in 1783 as the first place of worship in the New Town. Edinburgh Council wanted a church to accommodate 1,500 people on a site about seventy feet by eighty, on the edge of a ridge with the ground falling away steeply to the north. The novel solution was to create the first oval church in Great Britain, with a grand columned frontage. A 168-ft steeple was added two years later. St George's Church on Charlotte Square was completed in 1814. Over time the New Town ceased to be mainly residential and the two churches merged in 1964.

In 1789 the Council decided to install 'English-style' bells, specifically so that occasions of national importance such as the King's birthday could be celebrated. These bells were remarkable as being Scotland's first ever change-ringing peal and the only ones used for Church of Scotland services until the late nineteenth century. Change ringing had developed in England after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, following the Civil War. In Scotland, however, the Calvinist Presbyterian Church scorned all forms of outward show and forbade instrumental music in church worship. This ring of bells was revolutionary.

The Town Council owned the church and employed the bellringers until about 1860.

Thereafter, the expense of ringing the bells for public worship was borne by the Session and the Congregation.

Full circle ringing ceased in 1903, 'the swinging of the church bells proving dangerous'. An Ellacombe apparatus was then fitted and sounded the bells on Sunday mornings. When it failed in 2001, professional bellhangers were consulted. They all proposed rehangng the bells in a new metal frame lower in the tower. The plans were approved by the Kirk Session in 2003 and work commenced. The four smallest bells were retuned at Whitechapel and the bells now hang from steel canon-retaining headstocks in a two-tier cast-iron and steel frame, two stories lower than before.

This 1788 ring of eight (14-2-23) remains the oldest complete set of bells in Scotland. In 2006 they were rung full circle again, after a break of more than a century. The restricted space and the need to preserve internal architectural features made the installation one of the most complex Whitechapel had tackled.

At the recent AGM, Annie Brechin, Tower Captain since 2019, handed over to Ian Stark, who will take on the role from January 2025. They both have speaking parts in an inspirational video that cover photographer Julia made as part of an advent calendar for the church. Take a look at [youtu.be/LE8qBnY3oFc](https://youtu.be/LE8qBnY3oFc) and be assured of a warm welcome if you visit.

Julia says, "We're looking forward to everything 2025 will bring and wish the bell-ringing community a wonderful festive season."

