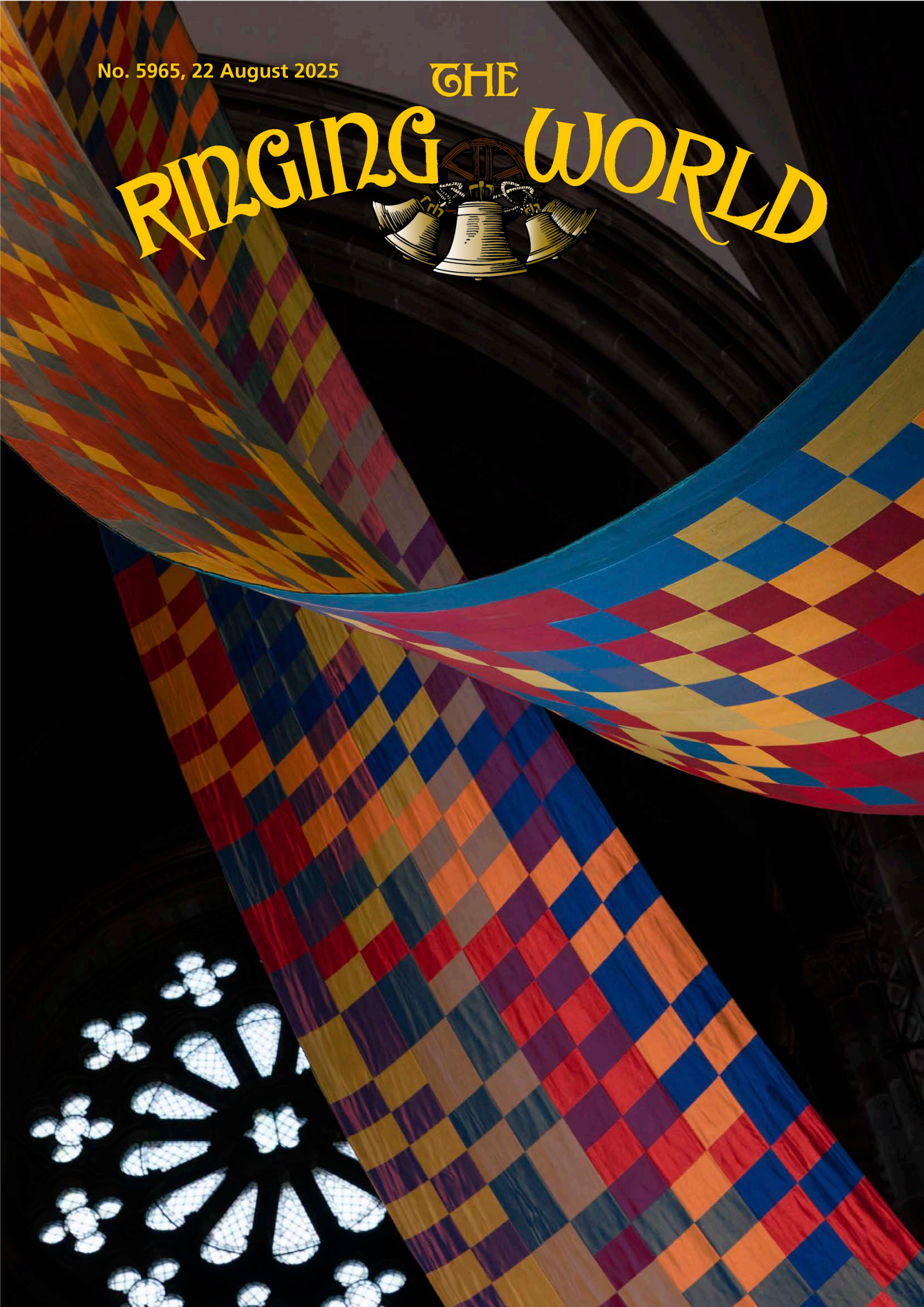


No. 5965, 22 August 2025

THE RINGING WORLD





On the cover

The Scottish capital, Edinburgh, has three cathedrals. Fortunately, one of them is not dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The High Kirk of St Giles on the Royal Mile, belonging to the Church of Scotland, is the most visible with its ventilated crown spire. The Metropolitan Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption is the Roman Catholic Cathedral in a trendy area at the east end of the New Town. St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral is this Gothic masterpiece by George Gilbert Scott, in a residential street at the west end of the New Town. That is the one that holds a ring of twelve bells (41-1-15), rung

from a huge ringing chamber. And that is the one that is hosting this stunning art exhibition called Ringing the Changes, captured in our cover image by Alexander Hoyle, and a performance piece by Jo Clifford.

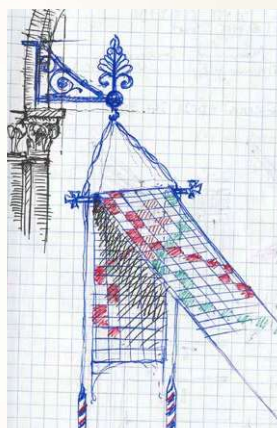
Ringing the Changes is a sonic and visual celebration of bellringing, bellringers and weaving that reveals the art of change ringing through the craft of woven textile. It forms the centre piece to St Mary's Festival during August 2025 and will remain on display until 20th October 2025.

The installation consists of four woven textile banners, two 33-metre and two 11-metre, by Glasgow-based artist Edward Bruce. They combine bellringing, weaving and architecture into one work: Edinburgh architect Nick O'Neill of aaltspace architects, has designed a dramatic configuration, suspending the longest of them from the crossing of the cathedral beneath the bell tower and 20m above the choir. The banners swoop down and cascade from the oculus through which the bells were raised. Two are suspended on each side of the nave from the triforium, framing the whole display. Bruce's artwork is dazzling, and the technical challenges to install the banners in such a unique configuration, at height and in a historic setting, presented a daunting challenge.

Bruce has translated four ringing methods into patterns woven in vibrantly coloured metallic yarns. Asked about his inspiration, he said he had been "struck by the similarity between bellringing notation, which goes back centuries, and jacquard weaving which is also very old, and how they both appear very modern to our current digital age." Originating in the eighteenth century, the jacquard loom once used punch cards (a precursor of early computers) to store information from which predesigned patterns could be woven.

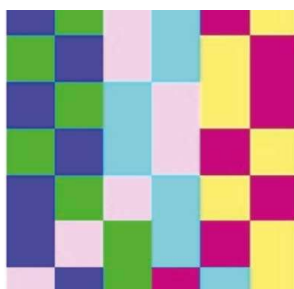
He knew that ringers use diagrams to memorise the sequences of bells to be rung. "When I rendered the numbers that represent each bell into a colour, I was astonished how this revealed amazing patterns that seemed to dance and move. They were so beautiful. I knew I had to find a way of showing this to people and so I came up with the idea of woven banners."

The banners were woven by Herbert Parkinson Ltd/John Lewis & Partners, a textile mill in Darwen, Lancashire, using a computerised jacquard loom. Heather Metcalfe, former Design Manager at Herbert Parkinson, who oversaw the weaving of the banners, explained that the yarns were dyed to specific colours. "We had jacquard looms, which allowed the full width of the loom for a pattern repeat, the latest CAD technology and a sample warping machine. The sample warper was key, this allowed short individually designed warps made to suit each design, unlike longer production warps, where one common warp was used to weave several designs. So, the only limitation to a design or pattern repeat



Ringing the Changes by Edward Bruce and Nick O'Neill (aaltspace) 2025

Cotton and viscose woven textile, 11mm Beal Kernmantle polyester-nylon semi-static rope, Petzl Anneau polyester slings, Petzl Mobile Pulleys, ISC Steel ISO Oval Karabiners, PVC rope sleeves, 75kg counterweights x4Nr, 48mm dia painted steel tubes, 3M gripper tape, Acuna anti-slip mat 300GSM, Iazzco 25mm J-Hook Polyester Ratchet Straps



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was the width of the loom and the length we could make on the sample warper...”

In 2017, six months after Heather retired, John Lewis announced the closure of the weaving operation at Herbert Parkinson’s. Sadly it is a dying industry and there are very few UK weavers left.

The banners were briefly displayed in Liverpool Anglican Cathedral during Liverpool’s European Capital of Culture celebrations in 2008. For the Edinburgh installation, architect Nick O’Neill was inspired to raise Bruce’s banners once again, and he determined to find a suitable setting, large enough to do them justice and rooted in a ringing tradition.

It was crucial to find a venue with a connection to ringing that was well established and flourishing. It was also important to the team to find continuity through context. A direct architectural link exists between Liverpool and Edinburgh cathedrals through the lineage of the Gilbert Scott architectural dynasty: Liverpool was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880–1960) in 1903, while Edinburgh was designed by his grandfather, Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811–1878) 30 years earlier in 1873. The bells that hang in both cathedrals were cast by Taylor’s of Loughborough. While evaluating St Mary’s as a potential venue, O’Neill felt a synergy between the Cathedral’s Millennium Window (2002) by renowned artist Sir Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005) and Bruce’s banners which had unmistakable overtones in scale, colour and abstract pattern making. The idea that the two artworks could sit side by side was tantalising and spurred the project along.

The Cathedral has been a great ambassador to art in all its cultural forms, and this ethos and openness to experimentation was important in approaching the venue and client body. The Revd Canon Dr Marion Chatterley, Vice-Provost at St Mary’s, has been instrumental to the work, right from the start of the project.

Inspired by bells and banners

Beneath the banners, a specially written performance piece by award-winning playwright and actor Jo Clifford is being performed several times during the Cathedral’s Festival, featuring the St Mary’s Cathedral Ringers and Jo, captured in the image below.

Jo is a writer, performer, poet and teacher based in Edinburgh. She is the author of about 80 plays, many of which have been translated into various languages and performed all over the world. ‘Ringing out the Changes’ is a meditation on the idea that bells symbolise all we need for a good life, as they “ring out life’s changes, announcing births and deaths, sounding the alarm, and calling us to worship, think, and reflect”. Thanks to Jo for pointing us to Julia Amour’s four-star review of the piece. Julia said: “It is very special to see the St Mary’s Cathedral Bellringers front and centre in this performance. They work, note-by-note to piece together a chime, in a visible demonstration of selfless skills and the amazing ability of human beings to co-operate.

“By coming across as utterly herself, Clifford is a beguiling storyteller who speaks profoundly to those who need joy and hope to continue engaging with a world in chaos. She emphasises ‘quiet

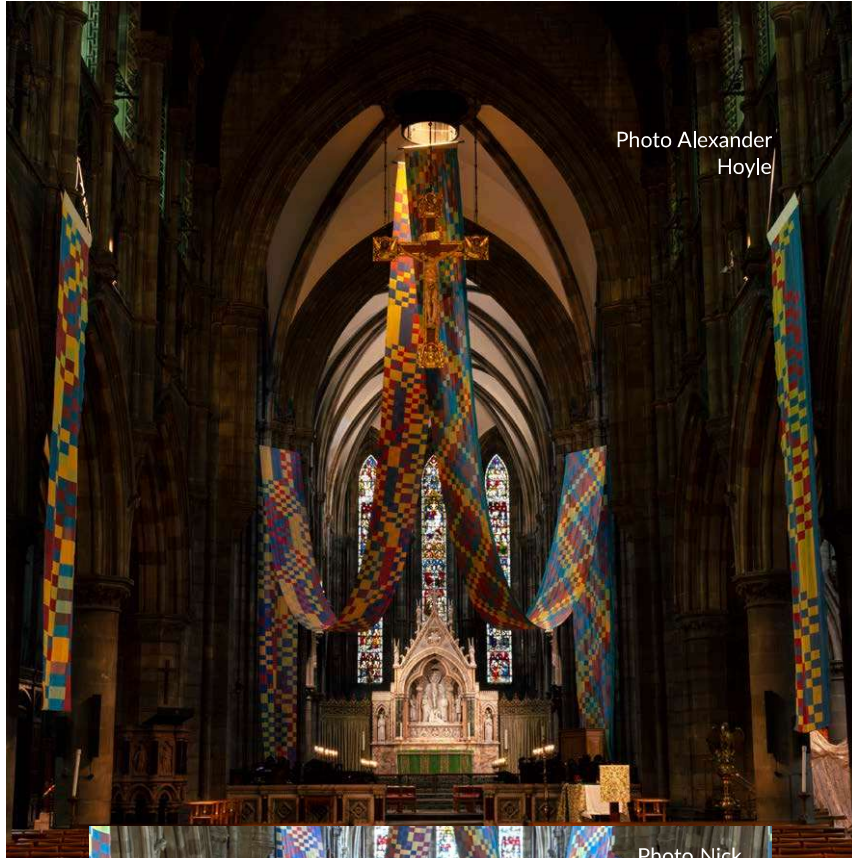


Photo Alexander Hoyle



Photo Nick O'Neill

revolution’ as she brings us courage by focusing on the things that can change. Charisma, from the Greek, originally meant a divine gift of grace freely given. Jo Clifford shows her magnetic gift of charisma here – to those who can slow down and listen – as she joins with the bells to sound out this call to quiet revolution.”

It sounds like a fascinating piece, where ringers have worked closely with another artist to create something very unusual.

Finally, we hear from another of the cathedral ringers through Martin Mellor that the Provost preached about the Cathedral’s bells and the banner installation for the Patronal Festival last Sunday, in a sermon which is available online: <https://www.cathedral.net/items/sunday-of-st-mary---year-c>

The final performance of ‘Ringing out the changes’ is on Thursday 28th August and the banners remain in place until October – we hope to hear from readers who have managed to catch it!

Thanks to Martin Mellor, Susannah Ewens, Jo Clifford and Edward Bruce for the information gathered in this article.



Photo Marion Chatterley

St Mary’s original ring of ten was cast at Loughborough, to weight ratios defined by Lord Grimthorpe, the leading bell designer of his day. This is one of only a few complete Grimthorpe rings still in existence. They were dedicated on 29th October 1879 and retuned in 1935. The new trebles, Justitia and Fortitudo, were cast by Taylors in 2008 and sit in their own cast iron above the original ten in their wooden frame. They are slightly heavier than the old trebles. The full ring of twelve was dedicated on 12 November 2009. The cathedral ringers, led by Ringing Master Ian Bell, are a central part of the life of the cathedral.