

St Albans District Newsletter

Volume 31 Issue 2 – November 2025

St Michael's Tower Outing to Buckinghamshire

By Alison Evans

It's quite a responsibility to organise an outing. Initially, I thought of going to South Cambridgeshire as we haven't been there before and I spent quite a lot of time trying to identify suitable towers, planning a route to avoid bottlenecks and roadworks, and looking for a pub with a decent lunch menu. But, struggling to meet all these requirements, I gave up and decided that we would head to Buckinghamshire instead.

I often organise the day so that we go to the furthest tower first and then work our way back towards home so, this time, the first tower was Cuddington, southwest of Aylesbury. It is an eight-bell tower (9 cwt) with only a very short spiral staircase up to the ringing chamber. The lady who let us in warned us that the trebles could be a bit flighty and asked us to stop ringing if a touch went spectacularly wrong, which wasn't unreasonable but not something I have experienced before. In the event, the bells went very nicely so we managed the trebles without any problem (we're from St Michael's, after all!) and avoided crashing out any of the ringing, so it was a good start to the day.



Most of us succeeded in picking our way round the road closures caused by building works for HS2 and reaching the next tower on time. The ladies decorating the church at Quainton for Harvest

Festival explained that the contact had gone to get the keys, and there was a bit of a wait for him to return. Unfortunately, when he did, he was only able to open the door into the ringing area but not to undo the lock on the spider, so the ropes remained out of reach. He departed to seek a different set of keys. By the time he finally managed to lower the ropes, even the ringers who had got lost en route had arrived and there were less than twenty of our allotted forty-five minutes left.

Quainton is a ground floor ring of eight with a 17cwt tenor. I had picked them in part because I had rung there on my first ever tower outing and had not had any problems. However, it turned out that the ropes were quite new and had not been used very much, so they were still quite stretchy and hard to ring evenly. The tenors were also very light set. This resulted in a communal reluctance to ring, and I wondered if filling even fifteen minutes would be beyond us! However, everyone had at least one go, although all we rang was rounds. The Ringing World for the week of our visit reported that a peal of Ecuador Delight Major had been rung there a couple of weeks previously and the band included a ringer who helps at St Michael's sometimes. When asked, he compared the ropes to knicker elastic...

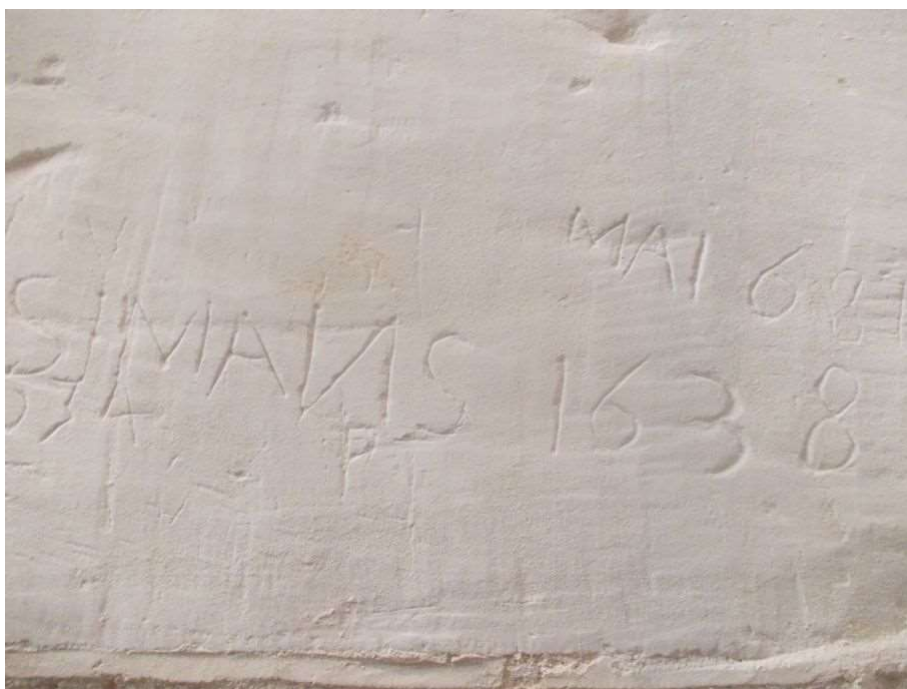
On a more positive note, the church earns an entry in Simon Jenkins' book, England's Thousand Best Churches, for the finely detailed funerary monuments on the walls of the ringing area, especially the one on the right of the group photo, which he describes as Quainton's treasure.

The next tower was the ground floor six at North Marston (13 cwt) where the ropes come down behind the font and the sallies have an unusual colour scheme of yellow, maroon and purple. We were made very welcome. Although the bells are a bit heavy, I found they went pretty well and enjoyed the ringing here.

By this time, we felt we had earned our lunch and adjourned to The White Swan in Whitchurch. I had been advised when I made the booking that there would be a party of Morris Men there and there certainly were a lot of them! This led to there being a bit of a wait for the food to appear, so it was as well that we had ordered ahead, even though the autumn menu had only been published two days before our visit and it had been a rush to collect everyone's choices.

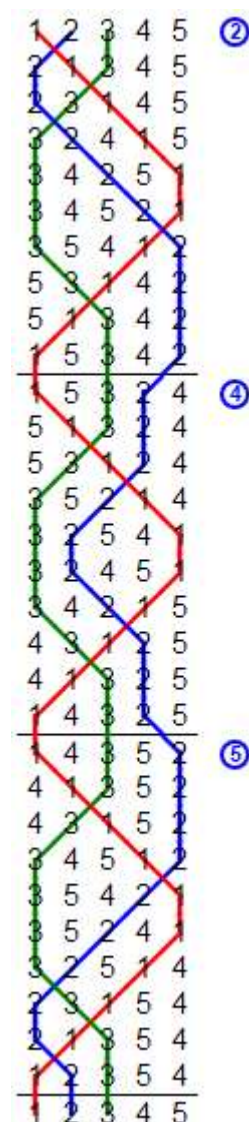
After a leisurely meal, we moved on to Hardwick, another ground floor six (12cwt). Again, we received a warm welcome and had an enjoyable ring, although I didn't think they were the most tuneful bells of the day.

The last tower of the day was Slapton, another ground floor ring of six, with a 10-cwt tenor. The Oxford Diocesan Guild's map shows this tower as an unringable five, although luckily the tower page has been updated to reflect the fact that they were overhauled and augmented in 2024. They were quite weighty but smooth and easy to ring, with a lovely rich tone. I also like the deep red sallies. The ringing area is nice and light, and there is quite a lot of old graffiti on the walls. Although Slapton was quite a long way from the other towers on the itinerary, it was close to the road to Hemel Hempstead, so the route home was straightforward.



Graffiti at Slapton

Over the course of the day, we rang a good variety of methods including Plain Bob Minor and Major, Grandsire Doubles and Triples, Stedman Doubles and Triples, Union Doubles, Reverse Canterbury Doubles, Little Bob Minor and Norwich Surprise Minor, as well as rounds and called changes. We also revisited Buckinghamshire Place Doubles which we learned for a previous outing. One notable point was that all the bells we rang were already up and all the churches we rang in were expecting a band for service the next day, so we didn't have to ring up or down at any of the towers we visited. (In fact, at North Marston, we had expressly been told that we weren't to ring them down at the end because, if we did, the local band would not be able to ring them back up again!)



Buckinghamshire Place Doubles

Although the St Michael's band now has eight ringing members, not everyone was able to come so we were very pleased to have support from ringing friends and family, as well as ringers from other local towers. I hope everyone enjoyed it and I'd like to thank everyone who helped make it a success.

Alison Evans,

St Michael's, St Albans

Towers Update

Practice nights at **St Mary's North Mymms** have been... shall we say, *quiet* lately. With ringers in short supply, sessions are often cancelled, Sunday service ringing is a bit of a scramble, and we've been relying on borrowed bellringers for weddings.

St Michael's St Albans

We began ringing again on Easter Sunday after the works on the tower roof were completed. We are very grateful to the Debenham Bell Fund and the HCACR Bell Restoration Fund for their grants towards the cost of this work.

Although we haven't missed any sessions on account of not having enough ringers, attendance fluctuates between six and ten ringers. When we have had at least eight, we have enjoyed Middlesex Bob Triples and are mastering singles in Stedman Triples, as well as keeping our hands in with Plain Bob, Grandsire and Little Bob. We are looking to expand our repertoire, especially of Major methods, when numbers allow.

When we have had only six ringers, we have tried to maintain everyone's interest by taking inspiration from the Doubles of the Month column at the back of *The Ringing World*. We've learned Daffodil and Bluebell (variations on Grandsire Doubles with Wallflower bobs and singles), New Bob and Reverse New Bob which we spliced with Union Doubles. We also revisited Buckinghamshire Place Doubles ahead of a generally successful tower outing to Buckinghamshire at the beginning of October.

Hatfield

On Wednesday 20th August, there was a peal attempt by a visiting band, some of whom had travelled from South London and Norwich. The ringing was of a very high standard but unfortunately it had to be stopped early due to a frayed rope on the tenor. A full peal of 5,000 changes takes about 3½ hours to ring on 10 bells at Hatfield and they'd been ringing for over 2 hours when the peal was stopped.

We put one of our spare ropes on the tenor for a few weeks whilst the frayed rope was re-spliced below the sally. We also noticed that the 5th rope was showing signs of fraying so this one has now been re-spliced.

Our Thursday evening practices are very well attended with around 15 people turning up each week. Some good progress is being made and we usually ring Plain Hunt, Plain Bob Doubles, Grandsire Doubles and Stedman Doubles and we very often get the chance for the advanced ringers to ring some spliced Doubles methods and a couple of weeks ago when some visiting ringers from Yorkshire turned up, we were able to ring Cambridge Surprise Minor. We are very fortunate in having great support from ringers at Lemsford, North Mymms and Sandridge – and this is really helping our local ringers to practice various methods.



On 30th August, one of our ringers (Joshua) married his childhood sweetheart Mollie and we rang all ten bells as they walked down the aisle. Bobby (aged 12) rang that day – his first time ringing on 10 bells – well done Bobby!

Hertfordshire Association
Lemsford, Hertfordshire
St John the Evangelist
Monday, 25 August 2025 in 39m (3–2–4 in Eb)

1260 Doubles (3m/v)
St Simons, St Martins, Plain Bob

1. Ron E Titmus
2. Judith E Titmus
3. Dianne E Crowder
4. Mary E Goss
5. W Robert E T Goss (C)
6. Joshua W J Gearing

To celebrate the forthcoming wedding of Joshua Gearing and Mollie Mardel on Saturday 30 August 2025. 1st Quarter 6.



Kimpton church has a ring of eight bells but only six ringers. Accordingly, regular Sunday ringing is usually on six. However, regular visitors from neighbouring towers enable us to be more adventurous at Tuesday practices. We are usually one short for Surprise Major, but we ring a variety of Surprise Minor and plain methods. Particularly favoured is Stedman Triples which we ring most weeks. Two recruits have joined us and they are now beginning to do call changes. The band has outings and an annual dinner. Visitors are always welcome to any of our practices.

Wheathampstead is widely regarded as one of the most ‘difficult’ towers to ring at – due to the long draught, but Ben Quinn writes: " The practice on Mondays is well attended, thanks to the support of our neighbouring bands who are instrumental in helping our local band to develop. In late September, a course of Plain Bob Triples was achieved – the first time this had been rung for a number of years and on 28th September we had all eight bells going for Sunday service ringing”.

St Albans Cathedral

Jonathan Humbert writes on Facebook: The bells of the Cathedral rang out in tribute on Remembrance Sunday as the Abbey ringers performed a quarter peal of Grandsire Cinques. As well as being for Remembrance, this was also in memory of Deryck Hannaford, long-serving Steeple Keeper whose funeral was held in the Cathedral on Tuesday 11 November.

Hertford County Association
St Albans, Hertfordshire
Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban
Sunday, 9 November 2025 in 55m (21–0–19 in E)

1253 Grandsire Cinques

1. Dorothea M Mayne
2. Bjørn E Bradstock
3. Richard Sales
4. Claire C Nicholson
5. Brian D Crawley
6. Stephen P Haynes
7. Jennifer V Johnson (C)
8. Julie Grimwade
9. Jonathan P Humbert
10. James W S Crawley
11. Stephen J Crawley
12. Andrew M Reeve



Half muffled for Remembrance, and in memory of Deryck Hannaford, steeple keeper for many years, whose funeral is at the Cathedral on Tuesday.

First Grandsire Cinques inside 9

Earlier in the weekend, the ringers gathered for a practice session ahead of the City's Fireworks Spectacular serenading those gathered in Verulam Park. The Ringers enjoyed 'epic views from the tower' before turning their focus to the more reflective tones of Sunday service.

Lemsford Monday practice nights are always very well attended at and supported by ringers from Kimpton, Sandridge, Hatfield, South Mymms, North Mymms and Knebworth with around 15 people turning up each week.

The great interaction between the towers enables us to ring Call Changes, Plain Hunt, Plain Bob Doubles, Spliced Doubles, Grandsire, Stedman, Plain Bob Minor, St Clements and Cambridge encouraging and enabling all those attending to improve and learn new methods.

The Lemsford band are grateful for the additional support received from members of the Wheathampstead band on Sunday mornings when we have been short and would not otherwise have been able to ring for Sunday service.

News from the Debenham Bell Fund



The Debenham Bell Fund (DBF) is available to churches in the HCACR St Albans District, and can offer grants towards the cost of repair, purchase, maintenance or renewal of bells, fittings, ropes or related church fabric.

In recent years, we have streamlined our grant approval processes so that awards of up to £1000 can be made by the trustees without needing to call a meeting, while grants of more than £1000 can be made but are subject to approval by the members.

Applications can also be made to the HCACR Bell Restoration Fund, as an alternative or in addition to an application to the DBF.

Seen here is the vicar of St Michael's, St Albans, receiving a grant cheque from the Secretary and Treasurer to the Fund towards the cost of repair work on the tower roof which was carried out earlier this year.

If your tower needs some work relating to its bells, it could be your vicar!

About five years ago, taking account of the number of grant applications and the value of our assets, the trustees suspended collection of additional donations into DBF's funds. However, in view of the number of grants made since then and the present economic position, we have decided to encourage donations again. You may see the collection box at District meetings in the coming months but, in the meantime, if you would like to make a donation by bank transfer, we would be very grateful. Here are the Fund's bank account details (it is a business account):

Account Name: The Debenham Bell Fund

Sort code: 23-05-80

Account number: 38487401

If you would like to apply for a grant or for further information, please get in touch with me: my email address is alison.evans@btinternet.com.

Alison Evans, Secretary to the Trustees and Treasurer to the Fund

Wheathampstead bell ringer stories from the Herts Advertiser

Supplied by local historian Ruth Jeavons and submitted by Susan L'Estrange (bell ringer of this parish).

... Oh for the merry peals of yesteryear – and more people like Mr James Dover!

January 30th 1858 The Princess Royal's wedding day – On this day the bells of the village church rang forth merry peals, in honour of this auspicious event. A subscription was started by Mr James Dover, of Bury Farm, to pay the ringers for their services; the ringing was much admired.

March 14th 1863 Wedding of the Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra

A report of the celebrations at Lamer Park, "given by the well known benefactress of Lamer Park." "At an early hour the fine old bells (sadly neglected) sent forth a merry peal which was continued through the day". 250 women, young and old, including widows, were liberally regaled with tea and cake, etc. Several triumphal arches filled up with various devices, flags of Great Britain and Denmark as well as splendid illuminations combined with fireworks of every kind. Further enlivened by the Tradesmen's Ball – given in honour of the Royal Marriage. "Such a social gathering was never known before by the oldest inhabitant and long will the day be remembered by all." We noticed the Rector and Lady, Drake Garrard Esq., and Lady; T. Baxendale Esq. and lady, etc.

Fictional Bells

By Susan L'Estrange

I'm all steamed up because I've just finished an otherwise perfectly enjoyable novel ('A Particularly Nasty Case', by Adam Kay) which was marred by having a character purporting to be a bell ringer. It isn't at all clear from odd comments whether she rings church bells, handbells, or something else entirely. Is she some sort of deliberate red herring? Was her comment about 'having a meeting of the finance committee to discuss swapping over with a neighbouring group' some sort of code. Or is it, yet again, an author who thinks that because they've heard church bells ringing they're qualified to write about 'campanology'. (No! I ring them, I don't study them.)

TV's no better. Nice lady walking out of the bell tower door says to new friend "Oh do come along. I'm sure the peal will be delighted." And even Dan Brown (in 'The Secret of Secrets') talks about the cathedral bells (plural) overhead beginning to toll. (All of them? All together?)

We forgave Dorothy L Sayers because at least she made the bells central to the plot of 'The Nine Tailors' and Lord Peter Wimsey was able to ring up his own bell. And then he obviously needed someone to take over and give him the odd break from ringing in the peal so he could do a bit of detecting. But we all know that the peal wouldn't have been accepted!

I don't mind that in conversation people glaze over when they hear that I ring church bells – frankly it's better than them telling me about it. But people who write books and TV scripts and presumably check (or get someone else to check) their facts obviously don't think that these bell bits need checking.

And don't get me started about 'Bells on Sunday' when we're given good info about the bells, church and the cracking good surprise method we're about to hear, and then the surprise is that we hear people ringing up in rounds, possibly hearing the two take the lead just as it fades out. It's the BBC! Professionals who do this every week!

The only bell bit I've encountered (can't remember where) that I didn't take exception to was the perfectly reasonable "Oh, don't mind them, they're the bell ringers, they won't be staying for the service". Maybe I dreamt that.

Young@Herts

By Jen Johnson on Facebook

The Young@Herts October practice was held at Wheathampstead and Sandridge. Everyone was nervous (Wheathampstead have very long ropes which come down in the chancel crossing) but all the youngsters did brilliantly and rang call changes on 8. We had 7 (of the 9 attending) young ringers in together a few times. Several of our senior ringers had a go on the front two and made it look easy! The adults rang Plain Hunt – just to show it can be done! It was a new tower for all the youngsters and co-manager Mike Below.

Massive thanks to our brave adult helpers (strangely a lot of folk seemed to be unavailable for this meeting) Ben Quinn and Chris Male from Wheathampstead for letting us come and ring. Thanks also to Richard, Liz, Brian, Mark, Kevyn, Alan, Rob, Mary and Young@Herts alumni Tommy, Toby and Daniel.

After the excitement of Wheathampstead we headed down the road to Sandridge for an hour of 'normal' ringing. Thanks to Callum and Vivian for hosting us. All our young ringers are now at Plain Hunt +, so we had a very productive hour of pretty decent ringing. A faultless course Cambridge Minor by Nick. Grandsire Doubles for Joe and Diego. Miriam and David both trebled to touches of Bob Doubles, one called by Nick. Bobby and Otis rang Plain Hunt. Diego had a first go at saying go and stand to Plain Hunt. Well done all the Young Ringers!

St Albans District Outing, 18 October 2025

By Anne Pegum

Normally, the District outing would have been in June, but unfortunately this year our organiser, Vivian, fell while out walking and injured his shoulders and arm swiftly followed by his wife, Christine, falling and breaking a leg. The decision was made to postpone the outing to October but use the originally planned churches and pub. So, on a warm but cloudy day nine of us met up at our first church.

Aspendon (9-3-7)

Interesting; the request to ring was met with silence and when I rang to follow up the response was, "Well, it's in the Parish Diary". It would have been useful if the Parish diary person had thought to confirm it was OK. On arrival there was no-one to let us in but luckily Richard S had rung there before and knew where to get the key. A nice ring of eight, if a trifle noisy on the 7 and 8 as the trapdoor to the bell chamber had been left open. Ringing was mainly call changes and plain hunt during the day as we had two improvers in our midst, who really benefitted from this opportunity.



Barkway (14-2-3)

An old church tucked away up a side road off the main road through the village; another ring of eight but with a bit more weight to them. Ringing the 5 and 6 was made interesting by the enormous memorial monument attached to the West wall of the tower loomed between them. This also meant that the ringers on 4 and 5 were close together and had to be careful where their arms and ropes were. And so to lunch at the Chequers in Barley where we were made very welcome and quickly served with our chosen meals. I think all the choices were excellent but those of us who had the warm filled Ciabattas definitely had an excellent lunch. The chef even came out to check that we were happy, which we were.



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Barley (7-3-2)

Only six bells this time with the ringing a few steps below the level of main church. The ringing area was dominated by a 300+ year old, very worn ladder leading up the tower. With a smaller number of bells we were able to ring a couple of methods in this tower.



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Royston (12-3-19)

A grand finish to the day. St John's in Royston was badly damaged by 2017 resulting in a complete refit of the church interior. The bells, cracked when firemen aimed their hoses at them, had to be recast and gained a little weight in the process before being rehung with all new fittings. We ended the day with some very well rung plain hunt on 7. photo shows the new ringing room at Royston and all but one of the ringers;



fire in
which

photo shows the new ringing room at Royston and all but one of the ringers; left to right Vanessa, Rita, and Kaz who joined us from Finchley, Richard, Alison, Rosemary, Anne and Jules. Neil who had pulled a muscle in his arm is not in the photo.



The

A good day's ringing which would have been even better if more people had joined us. We were only able to ring all the bells because three ringers from Finchley had joined us for the day. Many thanks to Richard for leading us so well.

HCACR Workshop Report: 'Plain Hunt and Beyond', Sat 4th & Sun 5th Oct

By Lucy Hornberger

I signed up for this HCACR-organised course with a mixture of anticipation and trepidation, but also the firm conviction that devoting a day and a half to improving my ringing could only be a good thing. And of course, it was great – both in the sense that I am now quite a bit better at tackling Plain Hunt, but also because it has made me more confident in my ability to ring at 'strange' (i.e. not my home) towers!

There were just five learners, meaning that we all got plenty of chances to ring. I was the least advanced and, I'm pretty sure, the most nervous. But I needn't have worried. Course leaders Kevyn and Mark put everyone at ease immediately and encouraged (and sometimes cajoled) us to try new things and when we – almost inevitably – messed up, to try again.

Our first tower of the weekend was Datchworth, a ground floor ring perfect for building confidence, but oh my goodness it was chilly on this sunny autumn morning! After several hours of helpful tuition and increasingly confident ringing, several of us were chilled to the bone and we all gratefully headed to Plume of Feathers in Tewin for a hot lunch and liquid refreshment (coffee in a few cases, but a pint in most others).

Very conveniently, as it is just around the corner from the pub, our afternoon tower was Tewin, another ground floor ring with nice, well-behaved bells, where we tackled Plain Hunt Minor for those (me included) who had never rung with 6 hunting bells. I pleasantly surprised myself by not finding it as hard as expected.

The following day, Sunday, was an afternoon session only and the tower was Bennington, east of Stevenage. The church is in a lovely location and has a balcony ring (and thankfully, effective heating!). Buoyed up by our successes the previous day we allowed ourselves to be talked into experimenting with bobs. Good fun and a nice sense of achievement once we started to get the hang of it.

Overall this was a thoroughly enjoyable and very satisfying weekend. Huge thanks is due to the organisers, and to Kevyn, Mark and their small army of helpers for their patient, exact and always kind and good-humoured teaching and support. It was wonderful value at £20 for the whole weekend. I hope there will be more training workshops of this kind and I'd encourage everyone who fancies a bit of improvement to their ringing to sign up.

HCACR Belfry Maintenance Course (18 Oct)

By Rob Goss

The belfry maintenance course was held at Hatfield on the afternoon of 18 October. Hatfield was selected because we have both a wooden frame (for 8 bells) and a steel frame higher up with the two trebles. Hatfield is also reasonably central in the county.

11 attendees with one having to drop out at short notice and we were split into two groups. Group A went up into the belfry with Rod Bickerton (Watford) whilst Group B did rope splicing down in the church with our County President Peter Cranfield (Hitchin).

Up in the Belfry all the bells were down and Rod went through the various things to look out for including ensuring the stay bolts were tight, sliders were not damaged and the clapper bolts (also known as staple bolts) were tight. He had brought up with him a torque wrench but unfortunately the Hatfield staple bolts were of an unusually large size and he did not have the appropriate socket with him. The clearance between the floor of the belfry and the underside of the bell at Hatfield is very small and to show the 'play' in the clapper on the 3rd, we had to ring this bell up – and although working in the belfry with the bells up is not recommended, we were able to see the 'slack' in the clapper on this bell. We also replaced the rope on the tenor as this bell had been fitted with a temporary rope.

After a cup of tea and some cake, the two groups swapped over and Peter gave us an excellent introduction into rope splicing. We all had a go at rope splicing to make a continuous circle. This photo is my attempt – with the loose ends not quite finished in the time available!



Editor: Rob Goss