

ART Awards

In 2024, Hana Booth and Carys Hughes Blagden were winners of ART's Sarah Beacham Youth Award.

Here's an edited excerpt from Andrea Haynes's nomination to explain how they've turned Sheffield student ringing around.

Hana and Carys have made a huge positive impact on student ringing in Sheffield in a very short time, despite being relatively novice ringers themselves. Student ringing had declined to the point that there was no regular student band or tower, and only four ringers at the beginning of the 2023/4 year.

At the end of their first year, they started planning how to re-establish student ringing, and consolidate and sustain SUGCR. Their achievements between June and December 2023 were remarkable, overcoming significant barriers in a very short time.

They ran a campaign over the summer to attract students and other young ringers to SUGCR, including an article in the Ringing World, posts on Facebook and Instagram and a lively stand at the Freshers Fair. This yielded ten learners and two existing ringers, with a total of twenty student ringers now on the SUGCR books.

Hana and Carys forged good relationships with local bands at St Marie's, Walkley, Ranmoor and Sheffield Cathedral. This gained them support for student ringing sessions to take place in addition and complementary to the local band ringing. They threw themselves into arranging practice nights in collaboration with the local band, and also arranged weekly quarter peals there to embed learning. They secured a Sunday afternoon practice and service ringing slot prior to the 18:30 Mass. This is very popular with the church, as the bells were not previously rung for this service. Some of the student ringers continue to support the local band and other towers such as Ranmoor and Walkley, and the local bands reciprocate by enabling student quarters and extra rope time for learners.

A quarter peal attempt takes place every Friday evening, focussing on the needs of the student band. A practice then takes place after the quarter peal attempt, followed by a visit to the nearest pub, where the band have an opportunity to socialise and bond as a group. A practice also takes place on Sundays for an hour, followed by 30 minutes of service ringing. The distinction between the two is clearly emphasised, with service ringing focussing on ringing within capabilities and striking, rather than learning.

By the end of November everyone who joined in September had been taught to handle a bell. Three of those were ringing rounds competently. SUGCR rang their first all-student quarter for 16 years on 12th May 2023. They had an objective to get everyone to ring a quarter by the end of the 2023/4 academic year, with a clear plan.

SUGCR were awarded third place in the Northern Universities Association (NUA) striking competition – an excellent result as the first NUA competition for all but two of the ringers, and the first all-student SUGCR band for years. Everyone that attended rang at York Minster, where one of the learners rang rounds on 12 unaided after only five weeks ringing.

An annual dinner was arranged in March 2024, the first since before Covid, followed by a dinner weekend peal at St Marie's.

Hana and Carys have also increased their own skill sets, enabling them to teach others and to conduct and pass those skills on to others. Both are also really busy with other groups and societies, as well as their studies.

Neither had taught anyone to ring before, so they sought guidance from experienced local ringers and attended an ART Module 1 day course. They use the Learning the Ropes scheme to teach and track progression. They encourage others to take part in teaching, including one autistic student who has gained a huge amount of confidence.

Hana and Carys recognised early on that they needed to work on their own capabilities in order to allow them to teach and conduct, which is vital to grow and sustain the band. They both attended a conducting course, and have now conducted quarters. Hana has joined the Facebook "Ringing Full Circle" group called to gain support and insights from other female ringers, to help her with learning to ring back bells and then pass these skills on. This is another important skill given that the student tower is a 25cwt 8! Hana is also receiving coaching from local ringers in Sheffield on ringing bigger bells.

Hana and Carys are relentless in their efforts to arrange worthwhile practices, good quality Sunday ringing and quarter peals. They work really well as a double act during the practices, making sure that everyone is getting the most out of the sessions. Their styles are complementary and engaging.

They work hard to cement the friendship groups within SUGCR, mindful of the need to make sure that the guild is set up for the future. They have experienced some challenges and have needed to re-evaluate their approach. They seek feedback from experienced local ringers and make adjustments. They continue to use social media to excellent effect, including Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. Their main communication method is via Instagram, which is accessible and popular with young people. But they also leveraged established approaches like the RW and Facebook Bellringers to appeal to existing ringers.

There are a number of activities in the pipeline aimed at growing and sustaining student ringing in Sheffield. The city will host the NUA in November 2024 and they are spearheading a proposal to establish an annual Yorkshire students' striking competition and social. A SUGCR band was entered into the Sheffield Branch striking competition in Spring 2024 for the first time in many years. Other young ringers who may not be students are also welcomed.