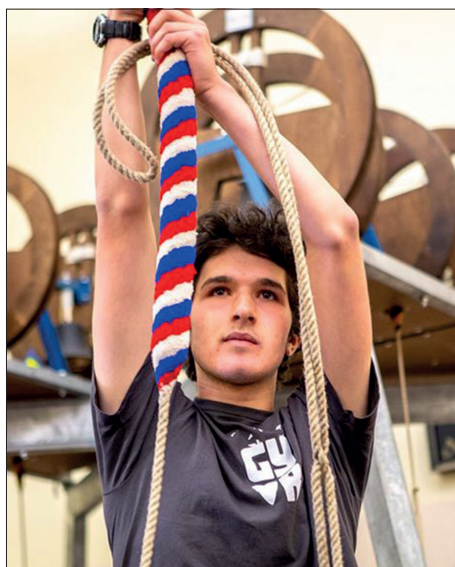


A word with ... Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas is a 16-year-old bell ringer hailing from Pukerua Bay, New Zealand who within the last year has learnt the ropes at Wellington Cathedral. Through the encouragement of the Wellington band and the *Learning the Ropes* scheme, Dylan has progressed from learning to handle a bell in January 2019 to completing 75 quarter peals within a calendar year. For this reason, he stood out as the best candidate for the 2020 *Learning the Ropes Achievement Award* which was presented at the ART Conference in March. Following his success, he spoke to the Assistant Editor about his award and his experiences of bellringing and beyond.



Congratulations on receiving the 2020 Learning the Ropes Achievement Award. How does it feel to have been presented this award?

Thank you very much. It's a great honour to be receiving it, given that I live on the other side of the world.

What is the award and what is it for?

There are 5 levels in the ART Learning the Ropes program from level 1 where you learn bell handling through to level 5 where you become an experienced change ringer (for which you have to ring at least 6 quarter peals including 3 on an inside bell). I completed level 1 just 4 days after I started and I signed off level 5 on 8th June 2019, 5 months after I started. I went on to complete 75 quarter peals in 2019 and have rung 85 in total before the lockdown in New Zealand started due to coronavirus. I think ART were particularly impressed by the volume of quarter peals I had rung in a short space of time. But, that's also a tribute to the band at Wellington Cathedral.

Where do you live? How far do you travel?

I live in Pukerua Bay which is 36 minutes by train from Wellington. From the house to the bell tower takes 45 minutes in total.

How did you find out about bell ringing?

About 3 years ago a video of German bells came up on my recommendations which spawned my interest in bells. As I started watching more bell videos, change ringing turned up on my recommendations and I thought that looked interesting. I had a look around at Wellington Cathedral one Sunday morning not long after and asked for lessons but then forgot about it for about 2 years. I then said to myself, what am I doing with my life, I'm still interested in bells, so I need to get lessons! At this point I got back in touch with the Tower Captain, Derek Williams, which was about December 2018/January 2019.

How have you found learning bellringing through ART and would you recommend it to your friends, or anyone interested in learning?

It has a very good structure to it. You know what you've achieved, and you can tick it off. The basics are solidified, and you can build on those foundations so I would definitely recommend ART.

How would you attract youngsters into bellringing?

No one knows about it – that's the first barrier. There are not many towers. It's a secret, hidden thing in New Zealand. You could run it as a school co-curriculum program or advertise in newspapers. Open days are good but most people aren't actually serious about starting – but it does give exposure. We have a local street festival called CubaDupa Festival that a lot of young people go to. It would be great to take a mini ring to that to get people interested. Obviously, I use Facebook and Instagram too. I think you can advertise for volunteers on Facebook and also pay for ads to distribute posts to a wider audience.

What do you think motivates youngsters to keep ringing?

Depends if they really like it. It's not instant gratification but it becomes satisfying after a while. It's not instant gratification. People like satisfaction. However, you have to be patient to get the satisfaction from it.

What have you found most/least satisfying about your experience of ringing so far?

I like it when I can finally fix mistakes that I've had a long time. For example, I've had handling problems while I've been learning – I used to throw the rope out quite far. When I was ringing the 11th one day, I was told that my ringing needed sorting out before I could ring there again. Thanks to them I became aware of my handling problems and could work on fixing them, rather than just getting by. I also particularly find finishing quarter peals of

previously daunting methods like Cambridge Surprise Major satisfying. Ringing is so amazing. There isn't anything least satisfying. Although it does hurt losing a quarter peal.

What are your next ambitions or challenges in bell ringing?

I'd like to ring a peal. I'd also like to ring a quarter of Stedman to prove I can ring it properly. I'd also like to ring Spliced Surprise Major, particularly the spliced step on the *Ringing World* 2020 Pathways Yellow Pathway.

Who do you look up to or admire in bell ringing and why? And outside bell ringing?

Gerald McIlhone. He's an amazing ringer, a fountain of knowledge in theory, particularly conducting and composing. It's going to be a tragedy when he stops. Not just for our tower but for New Zealand.

Outside of ringing I admire my Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern. She's done so well in handling the crisis and tackling the virus. If she hadn't acted quicker a lot more people could have died.

What inspires you and motivates you?

It's the constant aspect of always learning and it never stops, there's always something new to learn. You've never learnt everything. It's a rich, diverse hobby. There are always new challenges.

What other hobbies do you enjoy doing and how, if at all, do they fit in with or complement bell ringing?

I play tennis. It fits in well with bellringing as it keeps your hand-eye co-ordination sharp. I've also played piano since 2016 but it's an entirely different skill and type of music. However, it is useful to have a good sense of rhythm.

Which subjects do you enjoy at school? What are your ambitions for after school?

I love mechanical engineering. It's a brilliant thing. It's so hands on and I love working with metal. I also enjoy physics and maths, particularly calculus. After school I am hoping to get a job and save up and come and ring in the UK and meet UK young ringers in person that I have met through social media and video call apps. I would also be able to visit family in Europe. I'm excited about experiencing the gloriousness of UK ringing with all the different towers and variety. In the future I'd maybe like to be an engineer. I could work at Taylor's bellfoundry or any other bell-related job – the mechanical side of it would be pretty cool.

If you were marooned on a desert island and you had to pick one method to listen to, what would it be and why?

I do like Cambridge Major but if someone does it well, Stedman, you can put lots of musical rows in it and on any number.

What are your tips for overcoming boredom during isolation?

I'm learning new methods. It's important to challenge yourself. I'm also reading a few ringing books learning things I didn't know. I would say that you should do anything that you don't usually have time for just go and do them. My village is full of nature so it's good to go out for a walk. There are lots of native plants that you find nowhere else.