

Dorset County Association reaches 40th anniversary.

On the 1 January 1983 the Dorset County Association (DCA) was formed at a meeting in Dorchester.



In the rural backwaters of Dorset a bit of a ringing revolution (or rebellion, depending on your point of view) was occurring in the early 1980's. For some, the long established Salisbury Diocesan Guild of Ringers (SDGR) was seen, as too large (covering a south west to north east area from Lyme Regis to the M4 south of Swindon), too unwieldy and lacking flexibility. A group of enthusiastic ringers led by Tim Collins, a larger than life character and well known ringer, voted to establish the DCA following an open meeting that invited views on the organisation of ringing in Dorset.

Regrettably, strong views were held by some which led to opinions such as "you can't ring a DCA peal in my tower". The intention was never to seek the demise of the SDGR and, thankfully relations between the DCA and the SDGR are now very cordial, with many being

members of both.

Some have said that the DCA was 30 years ahead of its time with direct membership (where have I heard that recently?) via a one off life membership fee, non-territorial (i.e. not tower based) and day to day income derived from steeples collected at practices.

Administration based on one business meeting a year (the AGM) and the minimum of small committee meetings; so the minimum of process and the maximum time spent ringing. An, arguably, more responsive bell fund (fewer fixed rules to meet modern financial conditions) was established, which, although relatively modest in size, has helped a number of rings of bells in Dorset. The rules of the DCA were based ironically, given their later demise, on the London County Association.

Practice schedules have varied over the years but have averaged one per month, catering for all abilities. Six week training courses were popular in the early years and, in recent times, promotion of ART courses has been undertaken.

With Tim Collins as the expert conductor, many have had the opportunity to ring a number of peals and quarter peals in anything from Plain Bob Doubles to Surprise Maximus.

The DCA sought membership of the Central Council in 1994 and, despite some diehard opposition, was elected by a large majority. Over the years the relatively small DCA has been seen by some as "punching above its weight",

supplying at various stages, a Ringing World Director, a CCCBR auditor and, more recently, a CCCBR Treasurer. The late David Strong, a founder member, on relocating, became the Master of the Winchester and Portsmouth DG.



Like all Associations there have been low points and, indeed, the DCA had to be mothballed for about six months in around 2009, when long serving officers "ran out of puff". Thankfully new blood and new puff was found, reinvigorating activities and over the 40 years over 650 ringers have joined the DCA.

As I write this from Cornwall, having moved from Dorset, I would commend some of the ideas of the DCA to other Guilds and Associations, as they consider "what next?" in these rapidly changing times. Indeed the DCA itself also needs to consider "what next?" in a rural area with declining numbers. In the words of a previous chairman, the late Ryk Bugler, ringing must be 'fun' to thrive.

I am told that the 40th anniversary celebrations will include attempting quarter peals at as many Dorset towers as possible and a series of 'Ruby Workshop' training sessions.

Andy Smith - Truro (DCA founding Member)



Photo's: Nick & Andy at a DCA Dinner, Winning a grant for training (2017), Teacher Training (2018) and Kingston Maurward public recruitment (2018)