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Dear Guild Member,

I trust this letter finds you well. It is testament to the passion and enthusiasm of the Guild's membership that this summary of our activity over the past 12 months runs to such a length.

We proceed chronologically. The new year was welcomed in with celebrations at Imogen's house in Flitwick (silent 'w'), including a successful 2015 - but alas not 2016 - date touch, ringing in the new year, delicious food, questionable fizz, and unparalleled company. We're anticipating more of the same this time around - but with added trains, paintballs, and peal attempt - at James' digs in Northamptonshire.

Under Rachel's steady hand, we had a successful Lent term in 2016, featuring a number of notable performances. A quarter was rung at GSM by members and friends of Selwyn College for the memorial service of William Owen Chadwick, a past master of that college and vice-chancellor of the university. We marked the OUSCR dinner day, not only by gracing them with our presence, but also with a quarter of "Boat Race" delight minor (Oxford over Cambridge, or is that Cambridge in front, Oxford behind?). A day later, to put the OUS's dinner day peals into perspective, the Guild scored one of their very own, ringing the innovative 'particle' methods at the 12 of St Magnus the Martyr, London. To prove it wasn't a fluke, the feat was repeated just 6 days later.

The (Luton-based) joint outing with the OUS went off without a hitch, and in fact I'm starting to get the distinct yet unnerving impression that we could actually get on with them. May you live in interesting times.

We also scored a hard-fought quarter at Sawston, which have recently had extensive maintenance work to elevate them from "completely unringable" to "just about ringable"; I believe our quarter was the first there for 7 years. To our shame, there has been little enthusiasm for a return visit.

The annual dinner took place at Selwyn College, with peals at GSM, Chesterton and Trumpington in the morning. As ever, this was a great social occasion, and I look forward to seeing even more people there next year, when we're destined for a (debut?) appearance at Peterhouse College.

On Easter Sunday, a contingent met up with the OUS (again!) on the banks of the Thames for the annual Oxford-Cambridge boat races. Each society scored a quarter peal - us Cambridge Major, then Single Oxford Triples - at either end of Putney Bridge, the start line for the races, in the run-up to the starter's gun for the men's race. The Cambridge boat drew the Surrey side, so we rang at St Mary's Putney, with Oxford a stone's throw away at All Saints Fulham. This innovative idea was so successful we plan to attempt the same again next year.

At the AGM in May, an all-star freshers' line-up of junior officers were elected: Joseph Wakeling

as Assistant Master, James Ellison as Secretary (ending Imogen Diver's 3-year-long reign of terror), Jessica Dobson as Librarian, and Matthew Sheasby as Steeplekeeper. Richard Smith and Frank King remain senior officers, whilst Dave Richards was elected Senior Treasurer. Those present also voted to change the rules on eligibility for membership, and it was a great personal pleasure to call the first CUGCR peal with a non-matriculated member the day afterwards.

Sadly the Guild didn't enter the Ridgman competition this year, the date falling too close to exam season for comfort. As it's being held at GSM next year, I doubt we'll find any excuse not to enter, and also a greater opportunity for success (or indeed, embarrassment).

We saw the academic year out with our usual hedonistic flair: the alternative dinner at Robinson College (featuring ill-advised human pyramids), ringing at Fen Ditton for the May Bumps, punting, quarter peals, and rounders all kept us comprehensively entertained.

In July we competed in the Ely DA District Striking Competition at Brinkley, our first entry in recent years. Our ambitious yet commendable rendition of Cambridge Minor sadly racked up a few more faults than Trumpington's highly polished Bob Doubles, leaving us slightly bitter in second place, but an excellent time was had regardless.

Over summer, our newly-employed plebeian set to work giving the CUGCR website a much-needed makeover. I'm sure you'll agree the results are a vast improvement - head to cugcr.org.uk if you need convincing. The Guild's Twitter feed, @cugcr, is also flourishing; please do follow us if that's your cup of tea. While we're on the topic of trendy things, the latest Guild hoodies and Ts were also released over the summer, and continue to take the Cambridge fashion world by storm.

On Guild Week, organised by Alan and Marj Winter, many of you will have enjoyed the ringing in and around Bristol. It was quite the cardiovascular workout, with the average tower in excess of 24cwt. With ringing from the sublime (Redcliffe) to the ridiculous (St Thomas'), an excellent time was had by all. The 2017 Guild Week will be held in St Albans (feat. London) in early August; you now have permission to get hyped for that.

Over the summer, a number of Guild performances were dedicated to Brian Threlfall, a past Secretary, Master and Senior Treasurer of the Guild, who died in June this year. We have also recently heard news of the deaths of Philip Tidswell, member of St John's, and Gill Williamson, the first woman to ring in a Guild peal. Our thoughts are also with Dale Barton, who is presently recovering from bypass surgery.

At the freshers' fair in October, I decided we'd shake things up a bit. Our usual tactics - sitting behind a table waving handbells and spontaneously shouting "bellringing?!" - have been met with questionable success, and it is unlikely we would have been able to withstand another couple of unsuccessful years in terms of recruitment. Instead, we introduced Parker's Piece to The Charnborough Ring, a relatively hefty mobile six, which occupied a prominent position at the front of the CUSU marquee for the duration of the two-day event. With both size and volume at our disposal, we were certainly tricky to miss! The real beauty was that it made it immediately obvious what we do, and very easy for people to successfully have a go for themselves. What's more, it worked! Almost 150 people willingly signed up to our mailing lists, the fools.

This translated into about 30 at our "have-a-go" session at GSM at the start of term, and now, after eight weeks of intense handling lessons, 11 of them are still in regular attendance. Adding in fully-formed ringers acquired, in total we elected 18 people at the Michaelmas Business Meeting - not a bad score! I am heavily indebted to everyone who's helped out with teaching this year,

and heartened to see the excellent progress which has been made so far.

Even apart from teaching, Michaelmas term has been a busy one this year. An out-of-town practice at Ely, Freshers' cycle outing beset by illness, the annual jaunt to London - organised by James Dann (pronounced "Harriet") - and Christmas dinner have all kept us duly occupied. The apogee of term, however, was the Southern Universities' Association Weekend, which we hosted in November. I'm pleased to report the Guild scooped both tankards, being outright winners in the 6-bell (capitalising on home-field advantage at St Bene't's...) and the highest placed eligible team in the 8-bell (second to Southampton Scratch at StAG). We entered two teams in each competition for maximum participation, so congratulations to all involved. Thanks to Jonathan Agg and Max Drinkwater for judging, and Dave Richards for operating the strikometer. The weekend also featured open ringing at towers across Cambridge, and extensive eating, drinking, and dancing throughout the Saturday evening; all-in-all, a very enjoyable weekend.

I am very much looking forward to the coming term with the Guild, principally because I have no idea what is going to happen. There is obvious potential to do something great, and plenty of fun to be had, but how it will all pan out is anyone's guess. One thing we can be sure of, however, is that the friendship which glues the Guild together will remain as firm as it has ever been.

My very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Oliver P Bardsley

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Master, Cambridge University Guild of Change Ringers