

Striking, steeples, and student life with DUSCR

by Jennifer Ellis

The Durham University Society of Change Ringers (DUSCR) welcomes all students attending Durham University whether you can already ring, or want to learn.

What do we do?

We meet for practice on Wednesday evenings at our home tower, Brancepeth (8 bells, 14cwt) and also ring there for service on a Sunday morning. Practice nights have something for everyone, from basic handling to Stedman Triples and Surprise Major. Practices are well attended, and we usually have at least eight student ringers at Brancepeth on a Sunday. There are good relationships between DUSCR and the local Durham ringers; we often help out at local towers on Sundays. Some of the more experienced members of DUSCR also ring quarters and peals with them too. Quarters are rung fairly regularly by the society too, and in the past academic year five members of DUSCR rang their first quarter peal.

Our termly tours, organised by different members of the committee, cover areas close to Durham, and sometimes allow us to visit further away places such as Leeds and Edinburgh. The main tour each year is the Summer Tour, taking place after exams. We explore areas further afield, often visiting around 20 towers, get matching T-shirts and play lots of Wok (a traditional society game which is a bit like rounders).

We are very sociable, and can often be found in the pub after (and/or before) ringing. Many socials are organised each term, including bar crawls, Pancake Day, and board games. One highlight in the social calendar is the annual DUSCR dinner.

What have we been up to this term?

This year our Summer Tour was expertly organised by our Master, Alec Bell, and took us to Lincolnshire for four days.

It started with the traditional pre-tour trip to McDonalds for breakfast, before heading down to Lincolnshire, via Stockton, Helmsley, Beverley and Hessle. We ate our lunches by a stream to make the most of the sunny weather. We stayed in Claxby, and very quickly made the place our own – turning the porch into a bar, and setting up a slack line between the trees in the garden. Much Wok and other outdoor games were played, pints were drunk and the sunset was watched.

The second day started with some nice ringing at Louth, before some questionable parking in Grimsby. Lunch in Stallingborough was followed by ringing there, as well as at Goxhill before the final tower of the day, Barrow-upon-Humber. Here, we managed to ring Little Bob Royal and Plain Bob Cinques – well done DUSCR! After a late meal of meat (and veggie) chilli and rice, a contingent then set off for a pint-and-a-walk up a nearby hill; an event which we all hope will become a tour tradition.



DUSCR on Summer Tour 2025, outside Holy Trinity, Barrow-upon-Humber

The promise of bacon sandwiches after ringing encouraged more DUSCR members than expected to be up early enough to ring for the 8.30am service at Claxby. After also ringing for service at Tealby, we adventured through many fields to Walesby, where we rang for the Ramblers Service. Lunch, ice creams and ringing in Market Rasen followed, before the last tower of the day, Caistor. A brief walk then led us to the highest point in Lincolnshire, before retiring to our accommodation, where a pleasant evening was spent climbing trees (and some attempted to drink the bar dry).

The final day started in Barton-upon-Humber, before queuing our way down the M62 to Knottingley. People began to disperse from here (due to dissertation weeks, summer balls, having actual jobs, not living in Durham and ticking off stations on a local railway line), so an ever depleting group headed towards the final two towers: Bedale and Shildon. As if there hadn't been enough ringing over the past few days, some keen ringers joined the practice at St Oswald's back in Durham. All in all, a very good tour, which was enjoyed by everyone.

There were many other social events after exams. This year, the main social was a trip to the beach, which included ringing, fish and chips, swimming in the sea and lots of Wok. There was also the usual termly college bar crawl, and an end of year Quiz.

Upcoming DUSCR events

Our first events next term are in Freshers' Week, 27th September – 3rd October. As well as being at the Freshers' Fair, there is also a Freshers' practice, mini ring, and a Freshers' College Bar crawl a few weeks into term. If you are coming to Durham, please contact our Master, Alec Bell at alexander.bell2@durham.ac.uk! All are welcome. Around half of the current society members learnt to ring with DUSCR!

Current and Life Members are all encouraged to attend the annual DUSCR dinner, on Saturday 6th December this year. There is a Dinner Day Tour in the daytime, followed by a three-course black-tie dinner at the Masonic Hall in Durham.

DUSCR Life: If you're DUSCR alumni and haven't been receiving our emails, contact duscr.life@gmail.com to be added.

Members have their say

Ophelia: Things are always going on at DUSCR, whatever your ringing ability. Jokes about our striking aside (see the Bellringers Facebook page, where we gained credit for providing testing for development of a striking app), there is a strong sense of belonging. The annual dinner is proof of this, and it is an enjoyable – and often very long – evening.

Alec: DUSCR has enriched my university experience by giving me the chance to socialise with people from different academic disciplines, who all manage to get along very well. Some members have never touched a rope before they arrived at Durham; others can ring eight-spliced. It is a great privilege to get involved with the very active wider ringing community in Durham, which I hope will continue after I finish studying.

Matthew: When wandering around the freshers' fair, a model bell (and an enthusiastic ringing master) convinced me to try out bell ringing. Three years later, the ringing tours, post-practice-pub, and various socials have been highlights of my time as a student.

Caitlin: I wasn't sure what I would end up investing a great deal of my time into at university. I happened across bellringing quite accidentally in my second year at Durham. Becoming a member of DUSCR has taught me a skill and given me a community that I hope to carry through my entire life, and I couldn't be more thankful for it.