

Sparks Will Fly in Essex Finale – Hylands House, Chelmsford on Friday 6th July 2012

Mud, mud, glorious mud ... We thought we'd better take our wellies to Hylands Park and this proved to be a very good idea indeed. In true festival style, the park was very wet and muddy and we were all a bit concerned to tell you the truth. When I arrived on site, vehicles of all different shapes and sizes were starting to gather for the day's events and while I waited to be told where I needed to be, I had been listening to the commentary on BBC Essex following the Olympic Torch's journey through Colchester, Hatfield Peveral, Maldon and Southend. That certainly built up the excitement and sense of occasion.



Neil was determined to get to grips with this mini ring malarkey!

Not long after I got there, vehicles were actually stopped from going onto the exhibition area because of the mud. I had got there just in the nick of time, but unfortunately Alistair Donaldson hadn't and he had his mini ring on board. How on earth were we going to get all that equipment from the car park to the display area? We were allowed to use trolleys, but in the end everyone else was in the same boat, so there was only one thing for it – good old fashioned manual labour!

I had lots of help from the Writtle youngsters on the day and as they are strapping young lads, who better to help with a bit of fetching and carrying? They duly obliged and there was a minor first aid incident. However, all was well and Adam didn't seem to be any the worse for wear if his appetite was anything to go by!

We just about had a hour to relax before the grounds opened to the public and after that we were kept busy all afternoon with people of all ages trying the mini ring and hand bells. Hopefully we have potential new recruits for Downham,

Springfield and Writtle among others. We were also very pleased to see Simon Gowler and his two daughters Kate and Becca who ring at St Mary's Maldon. They came over to say hello and they also had a go on the mini ring. It was really nice to see all the youngsters getting stuck in with trying it out and learning how to show their non-ringing friends what they do. Who knows, we may see some of them in a ringing room before too long.



Charmane and Wendy demonstrating lapping on handbells to some enthusiastic youngsters

There was a pause in the Feast, Drink and Play! Event site between 5.30pm-7.30pm as the Olympic Torch arrived in the grounds. The torchbearer was John Bowman, who ran the relay in memory of his wife, and he performed the lighting ceremony. He was interviewed live by BBC Look East and gave an emotional account of his reasons for taking part.



John Bowman lighting the Olympic Cauldron in Hylands Park

After that ceremony and the interviews were over we then had a little warm up for the evening performance. The two Sparks Will Fly in Essex characters Marina Mightier and Boreas Zephyr took to the stage to compete for the final Glass Bead so that the Glass Bead Game could be played later on. They were both competing for the bead from the City of Chelmsford and had to answer quiz questions with the help of their supporters and the audience.



Boreas and his entourage roar onto the stage on their customised Ford Cortina!

Among the other activities in the Feast, Drink and Play! Event site there was the Tankton Slightly Odd Village Fete, which was a curious fete with Element-Tree and performances by Three Bears. There was also a Story Telling Area; Bollywood Bling which featured Bollywood Singers and Junghu Bhangra among others. There were community workshops, an outdoor display area for bands, cheerleaders, and the Blue Falcons gymnastic display team. On the two Community Stages there were performances from school choirs, Chelmsford Gospel Choir and Funky Voices and others. On the music side there was also an Acoustic Music stage, a Dance Tent and a Cabaret Tent. There were loads of different refreshments on offer ranging from homemade cupcakes and sweets, to Indian food and a hog roast. There certainly was something to see and do for everyone.



Festival goes in the storytelling area

By about 8.30 we were all pretty exhausted and were beginning to look forward to the evening's performances, so we decided to take a lull in visitors as our cue to begin dismantling all the equipment. This would then allow us to pack everything up and make our way over to the main arena to enjoy the Finale. So mission was accomplished rapidly and everything was moved across the arena and into to Alistair's car. We all ended up going our separate

ways at that point so that we could get the best view point or visit the beer tent for a well earned pint!

At around 9.30pm we all looked up into the sky and could see a plane circling the display area. On board were the Red Devils display team, and they eventually made a colourful descent into the grounds, with flares streaming from their ankles. The parachute display team were given an assortment of oohs, aahs, gasps, cheers and applause from the audience on their way down.



The Red Devils Parachute Display Team Descending on Hylands Park

Then we all moved towards the main performance area which was on a downward slope at the back of Hylands House. We perched there and looked down towards another stage which had what can only be described as a helter skelter kind of tower with all sorts of Catherine wheels, propellers, signalling levers and all sorts of bells and whistles on it.



Here the Glass Bead Game got underway, with Marina Mightier and Boreas Zephyr and their crews all answering the quiz master's questions about all the areas of Essex they had visited during the last 6-8 weeks. The stilted characters we had become used to changed into 20ft giant figures which emerged from the stage. At the end of the quiz we all shouted une, deux, trios and the firework Finale began.



Sparks definitely Flew!

So, after months of planning, more meetings and emails than I can shake a stick at, it's all over, and the Olympic Torch Relay has passed through Essex on its way to Stratford. I hope those that have helped me at the events in Harwich, Saffron Walden, Dovercourt, Waltham Abbey and Chelmsford have all enjoyed themselves. It's been a great deal of work, but tremendous fun on each of the days and each event has been different from the last. This project has brought the best out of us and has shown all the diverse localities in which we live and ring the work of the Association.

Taking ringing out into communities across the County would not have been possible without an awful lot of help. Thank you to Alistair Donaldson, Andrew and Christina Brewster, Brian Holden, Wendy Godden, Charmane May, Richard Wilson, Adam Sloman, Neil Passmore, and Ellanor Collop for all their enthusiasm on Friday.

I must also say a special thank you my parents who live not too far from Hylands House. I stayed with them on Friday night which was so helpful to me and it meant I didn't have to keep having trips up and down the A12. Mum fed me well and stayed up late on Friday night so that I could tell her all about it, and Dad fielded a couple of anxious phone calls about equipment that didn't arrive (all was sorted in the end) and he even cleaned my muddy wellies for me.

Proceedings came to an unexpectedly pleasing conclusion for me as I was invited to take part in a peal on Saturday 7th July at Writtle, where I learned to ring as a youngster. I'm pleased to say the peal was scored and there are a couple of memorable footnotes.

Essex Association

Writtle, Essex

All Saints

Saturday 7 July in 3h 12m (31-2-12)

5040 Plain Bob Caters

Arranged: C F Chapman

- 1 Tracey E Southgate
- 2 Christina D A Brewster
- 3 Paul A Cammiade
- 4 Christopher G Newton
- 5 Vicki L Chapman
- 6 Andrew P Brewster
- 7 David L Sparling
- 8 John A Hall
- 9 Colin F Chapman (C)
- 10 John G Harpole

To mark the Finale of the "Sparks Will Fly in Essex" events at Hylands Park on 6 July and the departure of the London 2012 Olympic Torch Relay from Chelmsford on 7 July.

First on 10: 1. 475th peal: 9.

There is no more for me to say apart from I hope that you all enjoy the Games if it appeals to you. If you are lucky enough to have tickets, have a fantastic time. Let's hope the transport network and the weather conditions behave themselves, but that's all a totally different ball game. I shall be watching from the comfort of my own sofa, glass of something nice in my hand. One of the lasting images I have of Hylands is the Blue Falcons display team carrying their pommel horses and gym mats across the site in bare feet, up to their ankles in mud. They were tired but they didn't care, because they'd had so much fun. That just about sums it up for me. Now I really must get on with cleaning my car as it looks like I've been to Silverstone grand prix circuit, or I've been to Glastonbury or the Isle of Wight music festival! I've even got mud inside the car. How on earth that happened I've got no idea.

Tracey Southgate
Public Relations Officer

9th July 2012