

PENSIONER Jack Harris is

**By PHILIP
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keeping alive the traditional music of handbell ringing.

Mr Harris, 85, of Crotch Crescent, New Marston, Oxford, was inspired to teach handbell ringing 70 years ago when he was turned away by bellringers at the former All Saints' Church in High Street.

He said: "I used to watch other people ringing bells in ' the church tower and I longed to have a go but they wouldn't let me join in."

Jack bought his first pair of handbells shortly afterwards and he has been teaching people how to play them ever since.

Handbells can be played with one or two bells in each hand and with as many as 15 bells used in a single performance.

Before retiring, Mr Harris used to fit his lessons around his work as a cabinet maker in Wheatley.

On Tuesdays he invites musicians to his house to practise. And he continues to perform in public.

He said: "I belonged to the Oxford Blues Concert Party and we gave concerts all over the place. I also play in churches and I even played in York Minster once."



Jack Harris, Cabinet Maker

STAR OF THE RING: Jack Harris practises with handbells Picture: Ed Nix

Jack Harris was born in St Ebbe's, Oxford, on 22nd January 1915, although his family were centred mainly around Shabbington and Towersey, and the family tree has been confirmed as far back as Thomas Harris of Thame in 1600. He spent most of his life in Marston, where he died on 12th April 2005, ten days after his 90th birthday.

He was, by profession, a cabinet maker and his workshop was in Church Road, Wheatley, where his son continues the family business today. At one time as many as twelve men were employed there. He bought the old forge in 1947 from Mr Arthur Sheldon who had recently retired. The two men had a great deal in common because they were both passionate bell-ringers. Jack was Tower Captain of in Marston and Arthur Sheldon was Tower Captain in Wheatley.

At that time Jack Harris' workshop was open on Saturday mornings and, if there was a wedding in St Mary's Church, Mr Sheldon would often ask him to take part in the bell-ringing there.