



The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary #26 Jan/Feb 2004

Special Needs Learner (Jan 15)

Mike Till writes:

I have been teaching a 12 year-old with learning difficulties to handle a bell. He's very keen, but it has taken us 12 months to get from nothing to him ringing very rocky rounds with some supervision. My technique has been to break down all the usual small steps into even smaller ones, and to try to teach him just one thing at a time. He still has a few handling faults that I need to sort out, but that will come over the next few weeks. In that time I will start to teach him how to make the bell ring quicker and slower.

What I am thinking about is, when he can ring rounds competently, how to move him on to call changes and even further to methods. I am not a teacher, and even teaching people with learning capabilities accepted as "normal" can be quite a challenge. His concentration span is extremely short, and he is very single-task oriented (it took us 6 months to put the hand- and backstrokes together). For example, an order to move his hand straight from the sally to the tail end after the handstroke, followed by one to let his hands go all the way up at backstroke, leads to confusion.

I'm sure people have done this sort of thing before, but are there any Special Needs teachers out there with advice on how to present the concepts in a simple way, using current educational techniques/technology? I have stipulated that because such approaches are likely to be familiar to him and therefore more understandable.

The other problem of course is to persuade the rest of the band not to expect lightning quick progress - something I shall manage when required!

Alison Barnett responds:

One way to teach called changes I have seen would be to use numbered blocks. These are used in schools for maths so would not be alien to him. Flower pots were suggested some time ago and in my last tower were used with great hilarity by all. Changing the pots or numbered bricks whilst the changes were being called, with someone with him helping, making it into a game that would stick. Like you said, small steps and lots of repetition is the key.

Raymond Kefford responds:

We have a visitor who comes occasionally to ring who suffers from cerebral palsy. One problem he has is that he doesn't easily put numbers into their correct sequence. We used to call the changes by the names

of the ringers instead of the numbers of the bells. He can see the order of the bells in those terms. Also it avoids confusion between the number of the bell and the number of the place it is in.

Now, however, he has developed a technique of relating the position of each ringer to a position on a clock face and thereby associating them with a number. As you say, it is linking the learning to something that is familiar that works.

The problem of certain prejudiced individuals amongst the other ringers is still there. We have failed to change that but as they are very few and are not members of our own band we can protect him from them while he is with us.

Handbells...and stuff (Jan 18-20)

Jon Beale, Wolvercote writes:

We're looking to buy a set of 12 handbells in the near future to complement tower ringing and maintain the interest / diversity of activities at practice. Has anyone got any advice/suggestions on:

- 1) What would be a good set to start with - 95% tune ringing prob. 5% rounds call changes / Plain Hunt etc. (the set we have borrowed has tenor 15C up to 5F with an 10A sharp in the middle)
- 2) Is there any difference between Taylors and Whitechapel?
- 3) What tunes are good / easy to start with...
- 4) Any recommendations of good publications - beginners to handbells?
- 5) Suggestions on how to teach basic handbell ringing / any useful advice?
- 6) Has anyone got any tunes that can be chimed on a set of 6 tower bells? We have managed 'twinkle twinkle little star' as it sounds well ... + adds a bit of fun to the end of a practice!

Reply from Lucy Dawson:

I'm by no means an expert, but I found call changes on handbells far harder than method ringing, and my group never even tries them, we just ring Bob Minor and Kent if we're lucky! I would recommend the Beginners Guide to Change Ringing on Handbells by William Butler, and for later on Change Ringing on Handbells by C W Woolley, both CC publications.

Reply from Roger Booth:

I have found the HRGB very helpful, and their 'begin to ring' course targeting people who want to set up a new band was excellent. In my opinion the HRGB is

much more forward looking than a lot of tower bell associations. Their web site is:

<http://www.hrgb.org.uk>

I would strongly recommend buying a set of belleplates or handchimes first. They are considerably cheaper and if they are to be used 90% for tune ringing, you can get two chromatic octaves for £500, considerably less than a set of twelve handbells (£2,250), which are very limited musically.

<http://www.belleplates.com/>

HRGB will help with loans for purchase, but you should also consider approaching the lottery 'awards for all' programme. If you search their web site you will find that they have given over £100,000 in grants of up to £5,000 for purchasing handbells and training people to ring handbells. Therefore you could probably afford two or three chromatic octaves if you were successful. I would be happy to provide a few tips on applying. <http://www.awardsforall.org.uk/>

Reply from Peter Humphrey regarding belleplates:

The plates are ingenious. They're fine for practice, or for special effects in performance, but I can't imagine anyone claiming their tone to be even close to that of real bells. You get what you pay for.

Reply from Raymond Kefford:

We found call changes difficult on handbells and so start a new ringer in plain hunt.

We have a set of two octaves (plus some sharps/flats) belonging to the tower that we are familiar with, which are Taylor's bells. When buying my own (personal set) I gathered the information from the Web sites and went to Whitechapel to compare theirs. They are a different alloy (more brassy than the silvery Taylor's), feel heavier in the hand, have a different tone (more mellow to my ear) and cost a bit more.

There are other (cheaper) makes - Schulmerich, Malmark, etc - but we use ours primarily for change ringing.

We ring ours (so there are no repeated notes) but our favourite is 'Pop goes the weasel'.

Ringling by Numbers

This was a fairly long thread that started in mid-January as an offshoot of the thread on covering. It started with an inquiry about the pros/cons, and an assertion by **Fred Bone** that "There's nothing wrong with using the numbers ... Just make sure you point out that ringling by numbers is a bit like riding a bike with stabiliser wheels: you want to get rid of them as soon as you can, because they get in the way when you want to do anything adventurous."

The discussion continued with debate about whether it can be prevented - whether learners will figure it out. It seems many people learn without numbers, if

instructed to "count [your] place and listen". There seems some likelihood that ringling on handbells may provide the right mindset. But "It's useful as a check, to make sure you are where you're supposed to be, but if you wait until you see the proper bell in front of you to pull, you'll be late." (**Laura Dickerson**).

The greatest concern is that "some people *never* learn another way." John H also points out - "It also means that if someone else goes wrong in front of her, then so will she."

Peter Robson points out that "ringling entirely by numbers is limiting and self defeating - as you progress you cannot get beyond plain courses/simple touches into the fertile fields beyond. ... no accurate striking as you have little knowledge of what place you are in only who to follow." Returning to the original context, he continues:

"However when you start ringling a tenor to cover there are things that can be done to help. I agree with John that probably the best way is to use your ears and develop your listening, however this is not an approach that all beginners find easy, especially if the ringling in front of them is ragged and difficult to follow. The advent of simulators has made practising this skill much easier and hopefully fewer people will get stuck here - its much easier to follow accurate ringling."

He finally points out that for people struggling with listening while covering, perhaps it is a good opportunity to "introduce the method and its structure - you could get them started by helping them to see who they are following and that it forms a pattern, then progressing on from there. Tell them that this pattern is the coursing order, introduce the idea that when they ring methods knowing who they take off lead and who takes them off helps etc. This seems a sensible use of numbers to get them used to the bells moving in front of them in a pattern."

There was a brief discussion of the role of numbers in conducting, using elements like coursing order and transposition. **Heather wrote:**

"However I am aware that when I am ringling something I can conduct, I am ringling it in a different way, which is number based.

"We in fact had to teach by numbers in the early stage of developing a band from scratch - with just 2 of us we simply didn't have the framework into which a novice could be slotted. One of our adults was ringling S Major in 3 years though, due to being taken out of the immediate area at later stages when necessary. She originally learned by numbers and managed to leave them behind very easily - she's not really sure how it happened, it just did. It is an interesting debate which will always feature strong opinions on both sides. I used to be very strongly on the NO numbers side - I'm not so sure now.

“The most important things are that people's skills develop, that they see themselves making progress even if it's slow and that they enjoy the process. The tutor needs above all to know their learners and be sensitive to their needs and willing to try alternatives rather than stick rigidly to a single formula. One size does NOT fit all.”

Peter Humphrey continued with some interesting comments on conducting:

“No doubt an expert conductor will come along in a moment to correct me (I'm at the well-meaning-enthusiastic-amateur-poor-thing stage), but I think there's an awful lot more to conducting than juggling the numbers.

“[What follows is an abstract line of thought; it is not meant to challenge anyone's integrity or self-image, nor anything else. Please accept it in that spirit.]

“It's more about an abstract visualisation and reasoning ability, such as a mathematician, physical scientist or engineer is accepted as having; perhaps the sort of ability that the visual-reasoning section of an IQ test assesses. I don't know to what extent this abstract thinking can be trained, but I do know that some people have more of it naturally than others. Also that practice does help, eventually if not sooner.

“A clear, innate sense of logic has to underpin the reasoning I've just described and to that extent can go without saying.

“An ability like this lets you see the structure of the method, whether as a diagram or as a sequence of operations, and gives an understanding of how it all fits together. This leads immediately to being able to see what has to be done next, blow by blow. The rest of us have to make do with an advanced form of ropesight, in which you can see when someone has turned round in the wrong place, or whatever.

“That's the first requirement: a sense of the method. To conduct well, you also have to be able to run several thought processes at the same time, and remember intermediate results from all of them. You have to be able to ring your own bell, follow the blue line, watch for slips around you, be ready to decide instantly what to do to correct one, follow the calling throughout the composition, remember the current coursing order, and anticipate who will do what at the next call and watch them do it. This requires absolutely that you be able to run two complex processes in parallel: the practical business of ringing with the team, and the abstract process of calculating and applying coursing orders. I need hardly add that I fail on most counts.

“(As a fine example of this in operation, here's a little tale of a conductor I know in a peal attempt a couple of years ago. After about two hours of good ringing, he suddenly spotted that two bells had crossed. He said so, and told them what to do to swap back. Another
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ringer demurred, saying he thought the two had been right before and were now wrong. The conductor then proceeded to run the whole two hours' calls through in his mind, which did take a few leads' worth of ringing to complete, including another bob which he put in its proper place. Then, with a sigh, he called “stand”. The other ringer had been right.)

“Bob-calling requires a good memory and little more: a fixed memory of the whole calling, and a dynamic memory of where you are now. Oh, and being able to hear or see when the treble approaches the lead.

“I'm not sure what happens in between, progressing from bob calling to conducting, but perhaps there's the stage Heather describes, in which you come to see progressively more aspects of the method, including its coursing order and how that will be affected by the next call.”

Peter Robson also added:

“It seems as ever that the numbers are one way of helping your ringing. As with any of the other methods if it is your sole method of coping you will find difficulty and your progress will be limited (in the same way that using only rope sight or only listening {though not to the same extent} will do). The best ringers seem to use all these methods at the same time, allowing themselves to be aware of the structure of the ringing and the rhythm as well as who to follow.”

And finally, John Norris adds:

Well I'm very happy to speak up for the 'no numbers' side. I accept that there are ringers who have learnt initially to plain hunt by the numbers and have successfully gone on to develop ropesight but I would say from my own experience:-

1. It isn't necessary to ring by the numbers.
2. Some ringers may indeed learn the numbers incidentally (particularly if they plain hunt to too much of the same thing) but this does not apply to all ringers.
3. I've certainly met ringers who learnt by the numbers and wish they hadn't but I can't recall meeting any who learnt without using the numbers and wished they had!

Rude Visitors (Jan 13)

Rodney Stevenson raises this thorny issue:

I wonder if someone has advice on how to deal with rude and over assertive visitors without having to create a scene and descend to their level? I hope this is a relevant topic for this list? I see retention as very much allied to training, and I wonder how many ringers we lose because of perceived alienation by the treatment they receive? I have posted here before about a similar topic, and this time am asking for others' ways of dealing with it please.

Here in Adelaide South Australia we are plagued by (admittedly a minority) of (admittedly advanced/expert) visiting ringers who make plain their

disapproval of our standard of ringing and the way we run things. They take it upon themselves to bellow at anybody they think is not ringing to their own standard, in particular our mature age learners. Of course they have no knowledge of the backgrounds of their victims, nor of any physical problems. They seem to think that beginners at ringing are also beginners at life, which is certainly not true these days. If we are to ring at all we depend on our mature age people, as compared with when I started in 1961 we were all school-leavers.

When I visit another tower I consider myself an extra person on the end of a rope, and if the band can therefore ring something they couldn't have rung without me, then that is reward enough for me. Unless asked, I never offer instructions, even if it is plain to me what is going wrong.

As a TC I have privately commented to these visitors about the inappropriateness of their actions, with answers along the lines of "it doesn't matter if it achieves the end, and I'll be gone soon". Generally it just makes for a very tense atmosphere, with a marked deterioration in the striking. Surely we come to ring because we enjoy it, and if people stay away because of such unpleasantness it is in fact achieving an undesirable end?

I have heard the comment from other well behaved visitors, who are also embarrassed by such behaviour, that the perpetrators "just can't help themselves anywhere", using the exact same phraseology which makes me assume it is a common predicament? I wonder if there is a definitive answer as to what to do? Apart from staying away when visitors invade?

Giles Blundell responds:

I'm following the list on digest, so apologies if I am way behind everyone else on commenting on this. And I should give the caveat that I've never been hugely successful at defusing tower arguments, so maybe you could do worse than read what I have to say - and then do the exact opposite.

But to my ears, it sounds as if you have already done a lot of what you can tactfully do. You have had a quiet word with the visitors, and they don't seem to have taken any notice.

So you've got a choice. Either be tactless, and risk alienating your visitors, or do nothing, and risk alienating your local band. Neither of these is a particularly desirable route, especially given that ringing lives in a small world and we don't have all that many towers to choose to ring at.

But given this grim choice, I think that I would go for upsetting the visitors. They aren't the people you will be seeing on Sunday morning. None the less, I think there may be one or two things that you can try before getting to that point. The most important is to make it clear whose job it is to give out advice when ringing. Some conductors have a very

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clear view that it is up to the conductor - and no one else - to make comments while the ringing is going on. There are a number of arguments in favour of this. For a ringer who is drifting, it's easier to cope with advice from one source (the conductor) rather than from all across the room. And the conductor hopefully has some idea of where the touch is going so will give out advice which is self consistent. And it's easier for the conductor to cope only with the touch, any mistakes, and the advice (s)he is giving out without having to absorb what another 'helpful' ringer is saying. And if the conductor isn't 100% certain of what they are doing, it's a good learning opportunity for the conductor to sort things out by themselves. And if the whole thing goes wrong, there's only one person to blame - the conductor.

By the same count, if you have someone ringing who is learning, it is worth assigning a stander-behind. Whether the stander-behind says anything or not, they can be deemed to be the only person able to advise the 'learner' (excepting the conductor).

If you do this, and make it clear to everyone in the tower where the advice is meant to come from, then I think that most ringers will take the hint and keep quiet. If they don't, then as the resident tower captain, you are well within your rights to tell them to be quiet. That's the tactless bit, but hopefully you won't have to get there.

It has to be said that I know of many tower captains who fundamentally disagree with my view on who should give advice during ringing, and encourage their band to support one another with advice during a touch. But I think that both angles need to be considered.

Peter Robson responds:

There seem to be a number of sensible approaches adopted by towers as to who should conduct/shout/assist etc. This works well within the tower and their beginners will get used to this approach and assume there is no other. However, this will fall apart if a visitor who is used to a different approach arrives on Sunday. Surely there is no simple way that everyone should do it- each tower will do what suits them and what suits the level of competence of their helpers. It is important that as ringers we try to ascertain how the tower runs before jumping in with our size 10's in an effort to help (as you would in your own tower).

A good example of this is occurring in my own tower. We are a socially isolated tower in that prior to my learning there was limited contact with the Branch and visitors were discouraged. The problem was that our bells are loud in the ringing chamber and therefore any visitor asked to help would naturally shout to be heard. Also we never had a conductor and therefore people were unused to being put right. Our ringers were unused to this and would get very tense that they were being shouted at! This is when visitors are asked to conduct - who knows what it would be like if they did this without being invited to help first. The problem is

one of perception - our ringers perceived that all visitors were unfriendly because they shout.

Since then things have settled a little and I am slowly introducing everyone to the joy of other towers and meetings, etc. We will slowly get there and perhaps in time visitors will be made welcome in our tower.

When we arrive as visitors to a tower it is only polite to wait to be offered a chance to grab hold, in the same way it would be polite to offer help with conducting/putting right. However if that help is not wanted then surely we must abide by the locals' wishes - in the same way that if they only let you ring once you would not complain.

This seems to be just polite behaviour - but what to do with those who (probably meaning well) will not fit in with the wishes of the tower? If a quiet word does not solve the problem then a stronger word is the only alternative. After all they are the one that is being rude - not yourself. The joys of being a tower captain!!

Laura Dickerson writes:

Perhaps dealing with rudeness should be part of a new ringer's training, along with bell handling and method theory.

The first phase of this would be an overview of how to be a polite visitor - if possible you've written/mailed the contact person in advance to say that you'll be visiting. When you arrive (early or at least on time!), give clear answers to the questions about what you can ring, what your limitations might be, and what might be a treat for you (if you're visiting a tower with ten bells you might say "I can hunt on seven but I'd love to try hunting on nine"). It's then up to them where to put you. If nobody asks, the politest thing is to wait until something you can ring is announced, and take a rope around the middle somewhere. This will sometimes mean that you hardly get to ring. On the other hand, once you have more skills, you can be very useful and might be placed in every touch. This still doesn't mean that you should take over someone else's ringing session unless they ask you to do so.

Once people have a clear idea of the proper way to behave, they can easily recognize the opposite. Being shouted at or otherwise treated rudely is unpleasant and intimidating, but at least the victim(s) can go home with the feeling of having behaved correctly and the knowledge that the visitor didn't do so.

Mike Clayton writes:

I think that I would be much more inclined than Rodney, gentleman that he is, to make it very plain to such visitors that they have a duty as guest to respect the local setup. If they weren't prepared to do that then they would be politely but firmly shown the door. I hasten to add though, that I have never had to resort to this course of action!

John Preston writes:

I wonder sometimes whether many of us - and I guess Rodney too - are so afraid that we might cause offence, that we wrap our "request to behave as we would prefer" up so much that the target doesn't realise he's being asked to modify his behaviour. I suspect we often need to be more straightforward about what we say in these awkward situations - more so than we feel comfortable with. Such visitors - and I've met them in UK as well - do really have to be told in clear language that the TC is in charge of the ringing, and the conductor should be the only person to correct the ringing (I'll accept an exception for whoever is piloting a learner).

Does anyone have any clues as to what turns a perfectly reasonable sort of person into one of these boorish visitors? I'd hate to unwittingly become one myself.

Peter Humphrey responds:

And if the whole thing goes wrong, there's only one person to blame - the conductor.

Why do you want someone to blame? Or am I reading you too literally?

Giles Blundell responds:

I think that you're reading me a little too literally. The main point of this comment was as a throw-away remark to entertain amongst the serious case I was making, but with subsidiary points of (1) making it clear that the approach I suggest does have some drawbacks (2) hoping to stimulate further discussion.

For what it's worth, I think that blaming someone for something going wrong (literally 'the conductor is to blame') is not constructive - if anyone leaves the tower at the end of ringing feeling got at, there's less chance of them being back next week. But on the other hand, it's important for ringers AND bands to learn from experience. I have (occasionally) seen the position taken that there should be no inquests to such an extent that a second attempt at the same piece of ringing founders at exactly the same point for exactly the same reason. So (to drop into management babble for a moment) we don't need a blame culture - but we do need a learning culture all the time.

John Harrison:

Agreed. But not blaming people is not the same as not attempting to understand why things go wrong.

A no-blame learning culture is not a soft option. People have to be able to admit their deficiencies to themselves and to other people if they are to help each other to perform better.

I think as ringers we are so frightened of being negative to each other that we ignore poor performance, which is why it so often falls short of what it ought to be.

In fact, from my own experience, and from observing learners, a lot of blaming is self blame - you make a slip which you shouldn't and feel guilty about it. Then feeling annoyed with yourself distracts you and you make another slip. I tell learners not to worry if they make a mistake - they can't unmake it - but just to focus on not making another one.

Learners moving on before they are ready at another practice (Jan 27 – Feb 5)

Caroline Stevens wrote about this topic:

Does anyone have experience of any of their learners visiting a nearby practice and being moved on a stage before they are ready?

We have a keen learner ... can plain hunt on five to things like Plain Bob and Grandsire where the order of the bells down is the same as up and has rung two quite reasonable quarters.

We wanted her next to treble to St Simons and St Martins etc, where she needs to look around for the bells ... to help extend her ropesight ability and also plain hunting minor and then some dodging practice, and had begun to do this. ...

This week at practice she told us she had had a go at Plain Bob Doubles at the nearby tower but hadn't really "seen it". We let her ring it and she needed lots of help. She had not had the theory explained, didn't know how to dodge, thought she dodged with 2 bells, not one ...

...we feel annoyed another tower has moved her on, we wouldn't dream of doing that with other people's learners.

... ringers from the nearby tower attend our practice fairly often, so they know what she is ringing with us. As a tower we try and concentrate on striking and talk about this at an early stage with our learners. We annually run a listening course as a tower training day (to which the nearby tower is invited and they usually attend).

Peter Humphrey writes:

My experience won't hearten you, I fear. Even after 40-odd years of ringing, learning and helping, I still can't always shake off the impression that "we ought to be able to go faster than this." ... It's a constant effort to be reasonable, needing a minute-by-minute private readiness to be corrected by what I see... So I can understand if your neighbours have succumbed to the temptation to press on a bit too fast. Wrong, no doubt, but understandable.

There must be many whose characters make them ask, "What can we ring next?" instead of "What would be best for Sally Holder for us to ring next?" You can see that I, for one, have to work to do the proper thing.

Raymond Kefford adds:

We have a 'mature' ringer who can ring Plain Bob, but struggles as soon as a bob is called. At Longwood she would have been expected to learn Little Bob (via Bastow) as her next method while practising bobs, treble bob hunting, etc. However attention has mainly been given to her striking (which does need work).

There is a neighbouring tower ... The TC there has a policy of taking learners from PB directly into Surprise. Last Autumn they (after discussion with her) set her the challenge of ringing Cambridge, supposedly within six months.

The result has been that she normally attends their practice night (where she is a learner) and not ours (where she is needed as a helper). She seldom even rings for service now.

1. Her striking has deteriorated. This would happen anyway when her mind is concentrating on the new method, but it seems to have become a habit in all her ringing now, even call changes
2. The less experienced learners have been held back ... an extra learner in the method
3. These learners are now starting on Little Bob but she hasn't learned it
4. She is showing signs of frustration as she repeatedly fails to get through a plain course of Cambridge Minor.
5. She has not yet extended her PB to Major as her time has been largely spent on six bells. When she attempts PB8 she gets lost.

We have discussed the situation in our tower but not come up with any answers except to carry on without her. Suggestions will be welcomed.

Heather writes:

Yes, I have experienced this. Every tower is of course different. Some teach more effectively than others, and there are many ways in which good teaching is achieved. ...

I would never discourage our learners from going to other towers as they get the support and good teaching they need at home, and I am all in favour of them getting as much time on the end of a rope as possible, provided that it is in a safe environment. ...

I would only be worried if a learner took the attitude that their home tower was holding them back and that they would get on faster 'up the road'. A sensible learner from a good home tower will not be 'spoiled' by the experience of other practices. ...

Peter Marshall:

I would ask the question - 'Who decides when they are ready to move on?' It seems to be inferred that there is some great decision making process that determines when it is right to move on. Also there seems to be a presumption that there is a preferred route on to the 'next' stages. Surely it is a matter of opinion as to

when someone is ready to move on and to what? In the tower where I am being taught we tend to move from Bob Doubles through Bob Minor to Cambridge. That seems to be working for me and my wife who are following this path. I know of other towers where quite a different route is followed but can't see that one is more right than the other. As long as we all progress as we want to where is the problem?

Phil Dunn replies:

I have known a number of "itinerant" ringers, very keen to make progress, attending 3 or more practices per week. Consequently there is no overall control of their progression. Frequently I find they are trying to ring things which in my opinion they are not yet ready for, but who am I to judge. As Peter Marshall says "Who decides when they are ready to move on?"

In this situation, if I am running the practice, I tend to take them back a few steps, and probe their ability, eg. rapid fire call changes, call changes with questions to test their rope sight, plain hunt, but with the bells swapped around etc. so that it is (hopefully) less obvious that they are taking a step back.

John Camp replies:

I think you have to look at this from the learner's perspective, as well. It's 46 years since I learned to ring, but I went to a practice somewhere every night of the week. I remember feeling that I was being held back in my home tower. Ringing as much as you can is the best way to learn. Being over-protective of learners doesn't help them.

Martin Mansley replies:

Possibly but care is needed. A balance needs to be struck between holding back learners' progress or getting the learner thoroughly put off by the enormity of the steps expected of them. The initial posting involved a learner expected to ring a method with no theory training first. It is particularly important at this stage of first proper method inside that clear instructions are given as this is the basis of all methods learned subsequently. It is very easy for a ringer to become disheartened if they do not understand what they are doing. I suspect that the "parent" band would not have felt so annoyed if the progress had been made sensitively with good theory instruction.

Caroline summarized and responded to some of the posts. Here are some of her replies:

Peter Marshall: ... 'Who decides when they are ready to move on?' ... Surely it is a matter of opinion ...

Caroline: My feeling is that this should be a joint decision between the learner and the teachers. ...

Peter Marshall: In the tower where I am being taught we tend to move from Bob Doubles through Bob Minor to Cambridge. ...

Caroline: If it is working for you then fine, but I have seen in another tower near here where the same happens, that ringers don't understand basic method

construction and for example there are surprise royal and max ringers who are unable to "simply" (in my opinion, where I have learned several "building blocks" methods in between) plain hunt at the lead end of Cambridge S to get Primrose S and after several weeks of trying to ring Primrose and not succeeding this was given up on.

Raymond Kefford: 1. Her striking has deteriorated ... 2. She is showing signs of frustration as she repeatedly fails to get through a plain course of Cambridge Minor.

Caroline: These 2 are my biggest worries.

Heather: What is needed is discussion at the home tower as to why that tower does things in certain ways without any open criticisms levelled at any others

Caroline: Yes, I think, and hope, that this happens anyway, several things are done differently

Martin Mansley: ... It is very easy for a ringer to become disheartened if they do not understand what they are doing. I suspect that the "parent" band would not have felt so annoyed if the progress had been made sensitively with good theory instruction.

Caroline: Exactly my feelings! We spent a few minutes last week going over some theory and the importance of it and Sally has been lent books in addition to a few she has bought herself. This week we discovered she has written out PBD on a large piece of paper which is hanging on the kitchen wall (the cat is learning it too!!) ... So perhaps it isn't the disaster I'd feared, but it has meant a rushed and hurried theory session and it is a jolly good job Sally had already bought a few books from our district book stall.

Listening Courses

On Jan 28, Doug Nichols writes:

In a recent thread about learners moving ahead at other towers, Caroline Stevens mentioned an "annual listening course as a tower training day".

I would appreciate a summary of how a listening course and a "tower training day" might be run. It sounds exactly the sort of thing we need here.

Caroline replies:

Initially we used the CC listening course which was hosted by John Harrison. Since then we have run a similar course ourselves having got hold of the equipment needed.

It involves 3 sessions:

- Listening to tapes/CDs of ringing and answering such questions as how many bells are ringing, what is happening (raising in peal, firing etc), what the fault is and so on.
- A computer program called !Strike (runs on an acorn) which simulates a repeated fault.
- A simulator in the tower.

We purchased the CDs, a copy of !Strike, an Acorn laptop and already had a simulator. We have found it

useful to repeat the day (we squeezed it into an afternoon for the repeats) and follow it with dinner in the village pub. We are about to do it for the 3rd time by ourselves.

I would recommend that anyone do it "properly" the first time and approach the CC Education committee, there are several handouts and books which are very important and useful.

We have also had a morning session of raising and lowering in peal, inviting a ringer from a nearby tower with a discussion session, followed by a practical session in a nearby tower with a light ring of bells.

An hour and a half once a week is often not enough to really have a go at something, and we have found that a morning or afternoon session at a weekend is a more relaxing, concentrated and social way to do things, food is always involved somehow, even if it's only tea and cakes!

A tower training day could be used at any level, get some outside helpers (if it would help) and ring Bob Doubles or even Surprise if that's what the band needs help with. I have found that people generally listen harder to "new voices". The "new voice" may also have a different way to you of explaining things. That certainly helped with our raising and lowering day.

Try it and have fun!

!Strike runs on any RISC-OS machine, and also on either of the RISC-OS emulators that run on a Windows PC. See: www.virtualacorn.co.uk

Listening course material is available at: www.cccbr.org.uk/edc/courses/cands.php#listening

Contact John Harrison for more info.

Peter Humphrey:

Is there a RISC-OS emulator for Linux? I haven't come across one in my travels.

Rgds, Peter Humphrey
Buxton, Derbyshire

Fred Bone:

I suppose you could try running VirtualAcorn under WINE. You'd probably need a pretty fast machine though ...

Ringling with the good hand (Feb 5-13)

John Harrison writes:

My broken wristed husband ...is still attending practices as he can still be of great assistance standing behind

From time to time, people have a hand or an arm out of action. If they can ring one handed, then they need not stop ringing.

I don't suggest that every one should do this, since some people will not be comfortable with the thought of doing everything with one hand. But for anyone who doesn't often get the chance to learn anything really new, learning to control a bell one handed could be a useful extra skill to develop.

Some years ago I had problems with my elbow, and ringing one handed meant that I could give it chance to recover without the need to stop ringing or let the band down. I had to keep round the light end though.

Peter Wenham

A useful ploy when practising to ring one-handed is to loop two rubber bands (as frequently dropped by postpersons) together. Loop one end round the tail-end, slip the other band over the wrist. This is insurance against dropping the tail end (which rarely happens) and, should a stay break, the rubber bands form a weak link. Thus safety in either situation. We used this device when a keen 12-year-old broke his wrist, and he just kept on ringing, including a Branch meeting.

Martin Mansley

If you become proficient with one hand whilst the other is in plaster you are half way to double handling when the plaster comes off!! ☺

John Harrison:

Somewhat less than half way In my experience.

The easy bit is manipulating the rope with one hand. The hard bit is sharing the brain in such a way that the right arm doesn't compensate for what the left arm feels.

Heather

I agree with John about the difficulty of ringing two bells. One hand often involuntarily wants to do what the other should - eg if the left hand bell drops, the right often wants to pull harder! 20 years ago both of us learned to ring double handed - there was a village with a 4cwt 6 in a tight circle and for a short while there was only one other ringer and he could already do this. We got as far as plain hunt with me on 1-2 and Barry on 5-6. However what we never quite managed (because things changed - more ringers), was plain bob, because I found it particularly hard to ring my two bells on opposite strokes. While the pair was coursing, either way round things were ok because one hand was following the other, but ringing them on opposite strokes was considerably harder.

I still can just about ring two in rounds, but the skill has definitely not remained with me at the level I had got to!

Richard Pargeter:

I had one ringer who habitually over pulled. Then she broke a finger. Not wishing to give up, she took to ringing single handed for a while. Now, overpulling single handed is not an option, and her handling

improved no end. The trouble is, breaking people's fingers is rather a drastic remedy for overpulling!

Peter Humphrey:

Oh, I don't know ... I sometimes wish someone had done it to me 40 years ago.

Vandals in the Belfry (Feb 27)

Hilary Rose, St Paul's Sketty, writes:

This is not strictly a ringing training issue, but it has put an end to training at present. On Sunday morning the rope of the 5th bell fell to the floor, and at evening ringing the 6th rope followed suit. On investigation it was found that 3 more ropes had been gnawed and the simulator wires bitten through. We think the vandal has 4 legs and a bushy tail. The ropes have all been removed and Swansea City Council has put down poison. The steeple keeper is going to try to find out where the vandals are gaining access, and block all possible holes in louvre netting before we hang any ropes. We do not know if it will be necessary to have new top-ends spliced onto our ropes (only two and a half years old) or if it might be advisable to have synthetic rope spliced on above the sallies. What we do may be governed by whether this damage is covered by our insurance. Meanwhile we would welcome any advice, comments, sympathy etc.

Chinsta00:

A peal, ala "The Nine Tailors" might flush them out :-)

John Harrison:

If you replace top ends, I would definitely recommend pre-stretched polyester. Even if you don't have a long draft, or trouble with damp, the sheer durability is worth it. We are still using tops that I bought over 20 years ago. They have easily paid the small premium on initial cost.

Re nibbled cables, I can't help. My daughter's hamster once ate through some loudspeaker cables, so rodents obviously like PVC.

Reporting this List (Jan 2-4)

John H raised for discussion the opportunity to have NRT publicized through John Camp's column:

As you know, this list is restricted to NRT members. About 40% of us actively subscribe, while the remainder receive monthly summaries of our discussions.

We all share an interest in training ringers, and so far we have had none of the sniping that occasionally affects other e-mail lists. Being a closed list means that none of us is anonymous. When we joined NRT, we all agreed to our contact information being provided to other members if required. (Did you know that you can get contact details for members within a given distance of you if you ask?)

Being semi-closed in this way has enabled some very open discussion, including problems of individuals, which would probably not have happened with an ordinary, open e-mail list.

We don't want to keep NRT a secret though, and some publicity of the type of things that we discuss would help make other trainers aware of the value that we all get from membership of NRT, and encourage them to join us.

You will have noticed that so far this list has not featured in John Camp's regular e-list summaries in the Ringing World. John recently joined NRT and has subscribed to the list. He has offered to mention NRT in his summaries. I am sure we can all trust him to be suitably discreet in what he reports, so it need not affect the open way that we have conducted ourselves so far.

I hope you will all see this as positive exposure for NRT, and the role of training, but if anyone is unhappy to have aspects of our discussion reported on a regular basis outside NRT membership, please contact me.

Following comments from Laura D, John later clarifies: "... the contents of the discussions are only available to NRT members. ... Anyone who reads something in John Camp's summary and thinks that NRT sounds an interesting and worthwhile community to join would have to do so before being able to access the information by any route."

Additional comments about NRT services followed:

- the summary by e-mail is now available to all, including those who read the daily posts
- interactive discussion list (40% of members)
- "who is near me?" service
- conferences (second just held in May)

[More detail is contained in the welcome message, which is appended below]

Peter Humphrey responded with a number of comments, summing up with :

"More courses, please! I've never yet heard of any course, whether NRT, CC, guild or district, that has not been warmly received and commended. (Well, I suppose there's always an occasional exception...)

I'm sure the Derby Guild is not alone in having several people with enough time and enthusiasm to take matters into their own hands and run whatever training days are needed, wherever the need is seen. This runs parallel to Association events that have wider publicity and coverage, and to the programme of the Ringing Centre - both of which are valuable too of course.

Should NRT sponsor local or regional task forces? I understand the resentment of those who have felt descended on, but with sensible handling it could be a worthwhile scheme. A database of teachers, their subjects and their willingness to travel ought to find some use, it seems to me. On the other hand, informal,

personal knowledge often works better than any fancy computerised nonsense, and perhaps this is one such case. (As a personal aside, I might note that I was in the computer-applications business for 30 years, but I long ago learned just a modicum of humility in expecting miracles from new methods.)

This summary is made up of posts from January '04, with varying degrees of summarization, that spilled over from the previous summary. I apologize for the late delivery, and please forgive any mis-interpretations.

Sincerely, Greg Russell

Do you have e-mail? John Harrison, Chairman CC Education Committee writes:

You receive this summary by post because, when you joined NRT, you did not have an e-mail address (or cannot use it for some reason) – a key principle of NRT is that anyone interested in training can be a member.

If, since you joined, you now do have e-mail, please let us know. It will give you better access and it will help to control postal costs.

With e-mail you have two options:

- You can continue to receive the regular summaries, but instead of being delivered by post they will be sent by e-mail.
- You can subscribe directly to the discussion list and participate.

Currently about 60% of members use the discussion list, 25% just receive the summaries by e-mail and 15% receive postal summaries.

Please send an e-mail with your name, stating which option you want, to: NRT-DBA@fredbone.waitrose.com

Copy of Welcome Message

Thank you for subscribing to NRT. I hope you will use the service and find it useful. How it develops will be very much determined by the way people like you choose to use it. Different people will find different aspects useful, and we have tried to cater for most likely needs. If there is something you think we could do that has not been mentioned, then please let us know.

When we set up NRT, we had in mind four things that ringing trainers might like to do:

Discuss things with other trainers:

This is for all of us. A mix of more and less experienced trainers, should encourage useful exchange of ideas and help with problems. This service is modelled on the e-mail service (for any ringer to discuss learning and training) that preceded NRT, but the new service includes trainers without e-mail access, by providing an interface between post and e-mail.

Make direct contact with trainers 'near' you

This is aimed at those of us who might organise an event for trainers, but who are deterred by the difficulty of contacting enough people via the usual routes to make such events viable. It might be particularly useful near association boundaries. With NRT, not only can you make direct approaches to people likely to be interested, but you could reverse the usual order by finding who is interested and then fixing a date, time and place to suit you all. This principle has already been used with great success in some places.

Gain direct access to a pool of expertise

This is intended to supplement the contacts you probably have through your local association, by allowing direct access to a potentially wider circle of experienced tutors. That could help you if you run courses and need more (or different) tutors. It could also help you as a tower captain if you would like help or mentoring with teaching in your own tower.

Initiate new types of activity

We are hoping that NRT will provide the climate for new ideas to emerge. Of course we don't know what they are, but collectively the people subscribed to NRT represent a lot of experience and a lot of creativity.

We also had in mind things that we (the Central Council Education Committee) could do. Our role is a combination of providing services to the CC's member associations and of developing new techniques, courses, books, etc. for ringing training. NRT gives us the chance to communicate directly with ringing trainers such as you. We can remind you about services we currently offer, but more importantly we can listen to your ideas about how you would like ringing training to progress. Some of these ideas we might be able to develop for the benefit of us all.

Enough of the vision. We all have practical things to do, but please find time to share your ideas with other trainers. Think about how you could exploit the contacts provided by NRT. Use it to meet other trainers, socially or seriously. Try out new ideas. Let us know of your experiences.

And finally - please bear with us if there are teething problems with NRT. We don't guarantee perfection on day one, but if you feed back comments, we will try to improve the service as we gain more experience of it in use.