



The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary July 2002

Welcome to the 10th summary of NRT postings. The themes this month, I feel, raised a few eyebrows as to how 'experienced ringers' are viewed by the more 'novice ringers'. If you wish a copy of the document sent in by Linda Coles or Peter Wenham, please contact me.

A few later postings on last month's **Paid Tuition** arrived mid month, *Paul Wilkinson* said, I think that this is the basis of a very good idea and in many respects better than having a ringing centre. I realise that a ringing centre can have all the technological bells and whistles needed to help people to learn but there are drawbacks. The whole focus of this event is the learner, the raw beginner, and they are often not comfortable, in any real sense at least, ringing in their own tower let alone a strange one.

John Harrison replied it is easy to focus too much on the hardware. You need it, and having more or less unlimited access to the full range of facilities is an excellent basis for improving things, but it is only the start. The main resource for training is people. That applies to ringing centres as much as anything else. In theory can be 'available to book – bring your own tutor' but some are at the other end of the spectrum with 'here is our range of courses, please sign up'. From what I know of Roger's centre, it is very much based on people, and his message showed that he has identified human resources as the factor limiting the training they can deliver. The rationale behind NRT is also about developing the human resource of the training community (in or out of ringing centres). Paying tutors could be part of that process, but how much impact could it have? When should we think of paying and when should we rely on unpaid resources? Should we be thinking of other ways to spend money to develop the human resource in the training community, as well as for primary teaching? And if we were to look for money from a major sponsor, as the Exercise has recently done for bell restoration, how would we demonstrate that we were delivering value for money - which is the sort of thing that sponsors often want to see? These are all difficult questions, but as I said in my earlier posting, the CC Education Committee would very much welcome your views and ideas.

Raising in Peal

Peter Wenham kicked the month into action with this observation, when we formed a new band I made the rule that, when raising in peal, the tenor ringer calls 'Stand'. The logic for this is that, assuming the bells have been rung up correctly, the tenor is the last bell to reach the balance; thus if the tenor ringer can set the bell, all the others should be able to do so. It makes sense to us but nobody else does it. Is this because of tradition or is there another reason?

David Bryant replied that, as leading up requires some experience, they should be able to see when the tenor is up and as they have started the raise so it makes sense to finish it.

Peter Dale agreed but made the point that it is also good manners for the tenor to indicate to the treble that they are ready to stand just by a nod or a wink.

John Harrison agrees we do this too, and in Raising and Lowering in Peal (CC 1989, p11) I point out that it is more logical than the conventional way.

Tim Ford added, probably not such a bad thing, but I'd always been told that the treble ringer should confirm (by some means or other - maybe a surreptitious nod or wink!) that the tenor was 'up' before calling stand - it seemed sensible to me at the time and I'd always assumed this to be 'normal'. Is this maybe a piece of common sense that is being missed out in the rush to get people ringing 'more' before 'better'??

Joan Kemp replied, when ringing up the treble invariably checks that the tenor is up, there doesn't seem to be a problem doing this and it is a useful courtesy.

Peter Humphrey added that it is easy to see how the convention arose but the treble ringer is quite clearly in charge of the operation, whether raising or lowering, so would need a particular delegation of responsibility on their part before anyone else could be allowed a say!

Course Bells and Place Bells

Peter Wenham sent in a copy of some draft notes he has written for a forthcoming talk, which he thought may be of interest to other NRT subscribers. If you would like a copy, please ask.

Joan Kemp asked, the information I'm trying to suss out is how to quickly work out what other folk are doing if you are trying to conduct a touch - this is particularly after last night when I made the classic boob of calling Grandsire Triples 'In & Out 3 times' from the 6, realising that the 3 was lost & then getting lost myself trying to work out what the 3 should be doing!!

Any hints really welcome - I'm not much good at juggling coursing orders in my head whilst concentrating on ringing a heavy-ish bell + ringing the method correctly + putting in the calls; the last 3 tasks I can usually manage OK - the next step of trying to work out where folk are to try & help them (all in the small bit of brain left over from the other tasks) is the part currently eluding me! We have two (bright) learners currently learning to Plain Hunt. Last night the TC had them Plain Hunting on 7 instead of 5. Asking them in the pub afterwards whether they found it easier to see what was happening on 5 or on 7, they said that initially 7 was rather daunting, but after the initial shock of the extra bells, it was actually easier because it was slower & there was more time between the 'front' & the 'back' - i.e. they could stay at the same pace for longer before having to turn round & ring faster or slower.

John Preston agreed, I can't manage juggling coursing orders in my head while ringing (and as for transposing them at bobs on the fly - my poor brain gives up at that). However if you've learned what the coursing orders should be in advance, if the band is capable enough then telling someone who to follow down to lead may well get them back on track, especially if they can pick up where they pass the treble. If, like me, you can't see what everyone should be doing, try concentrating on just one or two bells, such as the ones that work with you. So in Grandsire Triples, if you've just dodged 4/5 down with someone, they must have done 4/5 up, and therefore they must be making thirds when you're doing 6/7 down. If that isn't the bell that needs help, then accept your limitations for the time being. Eventually you begin to see a bit more. Paper and pencil work with the numbers helps too. However I do have one golden rule that is to say nothing unless I am certain! Does anyone have any recommendations on books/leaflets that help with conducting skills? I used to have a booklet published years ago by the Surrey Association which was very good - (but it seems to have gone from my shelves!)

Catherine Lewis pointed out that Joan produced a formidable list of the tasks one needs to accomplish while conducting. She's missed one - working out the actual words to say in time to say them!

John Harrison concluded, for what they are worth, here are a few thoughts.

Apart from being super human, there are several things you can do to make life easier.

a) Choose a touch where you know something about what the person you think might go wrong is doing. For example, if you call a bob every second lead in Grandsire Triples, the 3rd dodges up or down with the 7th on all the in between leads, and at the bobs either makes 3rds or 6-7 up, whichever the 7th is not doing. b) Work out what he or she is going to do at the next lead. That sounds difficult as well as ringing your own bell, but there are lots of clues, e.g. when you dodge with it, when you pass it shortly before a lead, if you pass it shortly before or after you pass the Treble. c) Note his or her course bell. If you can't work it out, just spot it next time you pass them. d) Learn how to transpose the coursing order. This is not as hard as it might seem, and you can make it easier by choosing your touch. I don't like calling myself in and out, because it is harder to transpose the coursing order than in the other positions. Note that I use the scheme in *The Tower Handbook*. I find the scheme for Grandsire in John Longridge's book too difficult. Superman knows where everyone is all the time, most of us can only manage some people some of the time. If you know the coursing order and the rest of the band can keep going long enough for you to meet where the errant bell is, you can start by saying 'pass me now'. If you can see they are nowhere near, then give some gross advice before then, e.g. 'much higher'. If you can get the wanderer back onto roughly the right track, there is a chance that whoever they should be dodging with next will spot them and tip the wink. If not, you might be able to have worked it out by then. It all sounds jolly hard, but remember - something is better than nothing. Even if you can only put right some mistakes when you happen to be in a favourable place, that is worth doing. I wouldn't worry about getting it wrong sometimes either. If the touch was heading for a fire out anyway, what have you to lose?

Striking/Ringing Competitions

Heather Peachey started this very long debate with, I ran a listening course as part of the Horncastle residential school yesterday and towards the end there was an interesting discussion about competitions. Views were varied, but seemed to go towards the idea that there must be a fair way of holding one, but nobody could quite think what it was! I got the feeling that many people liked the event and atmosphere of a competition, but were worried about an inexperienced band feeling dejected or perhaps not even entering if they perceived no chance of coming anywhere but last. Thoughts included:

- a) Should everyone be required to ring precisely the same thing?
- b) Should there be bonus points for ringing more complex methods?
- c) Should there be a 'handicap' system?
- d) Should there instead of a competition outright, be a 'ladder' such as a squash ladder?
- e) Should there be different leagues?
- f) How do you prevent a band of 6 Surprise Max ringers storming the local 6-bell contest with PB Doubles? - Or is this OK, because the rules allow it?
- g) Should a band be expected to have 'morals' and not put on their best show in case they win yet again?
- h) Should the judge pick out, say, 3 joint winners and call the rest equal 4th without revealing any numeric faults scores to save feelings?
- i) Should the judge not give any scores or order but just say 'you all did very well!' instead?

I deliberately did not give my own views at Horncastle, and am not doing so here as I'd like to prompt a lively discussion! Do you agree with the points raised about competitions being unfair, or do you feel that it's equally unfair to skew results so that the worst team can win and the best have little chance? Would that make the better teams lose interest? Is it like the current trend in schools where competitive sports are often discouraged so that there can be no losers? What do you do in your area? What do you think of it? What have you perhaps experienced as a judge? What is ideal? It would appear to be a minefield!

Peter Wenham sent in his personal view on the above answered in order, a) Not at ranch level. In my experience the better teams like to ring their pet method and this can have a levelling effect. It's also more interesting to the audience. b) No as before. c) No - this will lead to argument. Best is best. d) I would like to see this tried, but see below re team content. e) Good idea - IF there are enough teams entered. f) Any competitive event MUST be judged strictly by the rules. If the rules have loopholes then change the rules. g) I think that a better solution is that if a band has won the contest (say) twice then at least three of the band must stand down for (say) two years, allowing others from that tower to take part. h) No. If we enter a team (and we are not high scorers) we like to know how we fared. However, places below third should not be shown on display certificates. i) As before.

Caroline Birdsell sent in, C&NY branch have 2 sections - "Funday" & "Sunday Service" - Funday being those novice teams ringing rounds & call changes and maybe a bit of basics PH - SS being the competent serious change ringers - the winner of which represents the branch at the Assoc. level. One of the main benefits is that towers with experts + novices can enter a team in each section which encourages those lower down the learning ladder - especially if their Funday team comes higher in their section than their SS team in the advanced! it's more interesting for the Funday's to hear the judges give full marking procedures along with constructive criticism - just giving placings - or worse, naming the winner & the rest as equal follow-ons, does not encourage the competitive spirit or the determination to do better next year. The main benefit gained from these competitions is the improved standard of striking in the home tower during regular Sunday & practice ringing times.

Lynda Coles adds, I'm enclosing two 'letters' that I have put around Chertsey district (Guildford Guild) lately, in response to an attempt by a different district to look into whether the Guild needs modernising. The 'Mamill' document was submitted to RW in March but is, as yet, unpublished. The strike comp is actually a diversion for me from my pet subject, which is the treatment of newcomers, which, in my experience, leaves room for improvement. (Copies available upon request AB)

Roger Booth replies, I would agree that striking competitions in their traditional form are one of the aspects of the exercise that need modernising. If ringing had only been invented yesterday, would we even consider including a striking competition in a programme of events for a new ringers organisation? There are much better ways of promoting good striking. I also know that many of my local ringers feel that there are far more interesting things to do for a whole Saturday afternoon, rather than spend half an hour or more travelling each way, then spend 1 - 2 hours waiting around with many other ringers and only spend 10 - 15 minutes ringing. To get all those people together for 2 - 3 hours seems such a waste of resources when so much more could be achieved. True, the national 12-bell competition is a popular success, but there the difference in standard between teams is nothing like the disparity that often exists between towers at Branch/District level. If things were more equal, I am sure many District/Branch secretaries would have much less difficulty getting more towers to enter teams in a true competition. It's much the same argument as is taking place in Formula 1 Racing at the moment. Rather than drag the top teams down, they are sharing their resources, such as engines and other technology, to bring the those at the bottom up to achieve a more level playing field. As much as I admire Michael Schumacher, it's really quite boring if there are only a few competitors who have cars good enough to get close enough to challenge, and at least F1 recognise that it's not good for the long term future of the sport. Although I would be interested other people's ideas for a more modern approach to ringing, I would like to suggest one. Training days are a bit of a 'scatter-gun' approach to teaching. The effort goes towards providing a small amount of training to many disparate individuals, often without any follow up till the next training day six months or a year later. Instead, how about a striking 'master class' perhaps given by one of the top teams to one or more of the less proficient teams. To work well, all or

most of the team would need to take part (like F1, ringing not an individual but a team activity) and the idea would be to make the less proficient team more proficient and reach a level where they can then sustain this by themselves. Half a dozen sessions over say a six month period could make a discernible difference, and this could include theoretical and simulator sessions as well as practical sessions. I also suspect attention to some people's handling will also benefit the striking.

Once the goal had been achieved, there would be no need to continue. I know this goes against the comfort of an annual District/Branch programme, with regular monthly events, but if we are to modernise we will need to question everything we do.

Paul Wilkinson says this sounds as though the whole point of the evening/afternoon has been overlooked. If it was as bleak as this, spend 3 hours or more and only ringing for 10 - 15 minutes, the idea would have died away a long time ago. Isn't the idea much more complex than this? Don't SCs present many different but simultaneous opportunities to us? One is to simply listen to other people ringing and compare them with ourselves. There is comfort to be had in being close to the recognised good ringers and in listening to those who are worse. One may be to out-judge the judges by asking each team to judge every other teams' performances, a prize could then be awarded for listening as well as striking. Another is the opportunity to meet old friends, to make new friends and generally to meet different people who all share the same hobby/passion (or both?).

The SC itself could be publicised in the surrounding area and used as a recruitment tool. People who were mildly interested could attend without feeling any pressure and can be introduced to their local Tower band. As SCs are usually held in the summer, why not use them as a social event as well?. The 3Bs sound good to me, bells, barbecue and beer!

Peter Humphrey makes the point, you don't like it, don't take part. Everybody I've met at a striking competition was pleased to be there and keenly interested in the outcome. I agree that a graded competition might be more attractive to the less accomplished band. That's often achieved by having a change-ringing section and a called-change section, but you might say that this is a bit of a blunt instrument! What is this "more modern" you seem to like? We're upholding a centuries- old tradition here, where any plan to change the atmosphere must be carefully considered: there's a good chance of driving away even those ringers we still have. Re training, I agree that a closer focus on specific objectives for specific ringers or bands would pay dividends, although I think some of the strictures we see do tend to promote the influence of handling to an almost devilish degree. Many proficient ringers have styles that one might consider, er, idiosyncratic, but they've worked at refining their techniques until they're satisfied with the result. Training would have to continue as there's always going to be another candidate when the first one has finished!

Lynda Coles replies, 'More modern' surely has to be an ongoing process. Yes, centuries old tradition, but I believe sallies are a 'recent' innovation...and have you heard the latest? Women ringers! I bet that caused a few resignations, yet I guess that now we make up roughly half the membership. I think there was a photo in RW about 6 months ago of a gathering in Croydon(?) just post war(?) with just one woman in view, out of a crowd of well over a hundred. In the 5 years that I've been involved, I've heard and read countless deliberations as to how to get more ringers into the towers and out on district events. If 'traditional' methods are not solving the problem, if it is a problem, there is surely a need for an open-minded debate to look for new ways? Many small changes really should not frighten off anybody. For instance, simply introducing oneself to a newcomer from another tower who has never been to a district event before. I'm not suggesting that everybody in the room does so, just a handful of people. I would have appreciated that enormously at my first outing. Tiny change, phenomenal impact, frightens off no old hands, makes the new girl feel good. Win, win, win.

Frank Lewis states, I've always believed in the old adage, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it".

I've been involved in many striking contests over the years, both as a player and as a judge, and I'm sure that on balance they do a lot more good than some would have us believe. So long as a team doesn't reckon it has a God-given right to win, and another team doesn't mind coming last, then listening to some reasonable striking and meeting a crowd of other ringers on a Saturday afternoon must be a good thing. Anything that gets ringers thinking about quality of striking is a useful exercise. Leagues, knockouts and ladders are all very fine, but don't let us get too enthusiastic about change for change's sake - there are still plenty of well-attended striking contests around, and long may there be so.

Striking Ladders (Heather Peachey point d)

John Harrison says there are several attractions to this point, Matches are between two teams, and therefore simpler to organise, e.g. being held on one of the competing team's practice night. Teams compete with others of about the same ability (once the initial order has sorted out). That means much more genuine competition. Matches can be held as often as teams make and accept challenges, i.e. a lot more activity per year for those keen enough to be involved. Bands that are not keen on competing would drift down the ladder by default - below the struggling but keen bands that do compete. Some years ago we set up a ladder in our Branch, but it fell into disuse, which is a pity. Part of the problem was to do with the initial order that was drawn at random. The good teams found themselves underneath quite weak teams and did not want to be the first to challenge them. I suspect you need to push it initially to get people into the habit. Does anyone know of it working well? And does it help motivate more than just the crack bands to try to improve their striking?

Michael Henshaw replied, yes, but we ran a league, rather than a ladder, a few years ago that worked very well indeed. The basic principles were that all teams had to ring changes, but that plain courses were allowed, so as not to disadvantage teams with no experienced conductors (so for instance, 24 plain hunts was okay). The fixtures were home and away on practice nights. The fixtures were programmed from the start, but the teams were allowed to fix the actual date, so long as it was within 2 weeks either side of the 'fixture date' this worked well and no one defaulted throughout the season. We had a list of judges (about 8 or 9, I think), and the home team would arrange for one of them to come and judge. The basic plan was that the competition took place at the beginning of the practice, so that the visitors then stayed for the rest of the practice. The increase in visiting was a major benefit of the league, and this had a more general effect on improving visiting for quite some time. The number of changes, length of practise etc. were all defined. Usual scoring 1 pt for a draw, 3 for a win. Now, one of the most gratifying aspects was that teams did not just field their star ringers - it was seen as a way of giving everyone a chance to ring in a competition and this proved an outstanding success. I don't know that there was anything deliberate to make this happen, but the spirit in which people engaged in the competition was excellent. The league positions were announced at our monthly meetings. I can't remember exactly, but it ran for about 15 months.

Philip George added, we ran a ladder in the Huntingdon District (ELY DA) for several years. The same team always won. One year it was drawn top of the ladder and won without even striking a blow!!! So I changed the rules. Every team started at the bottom of the ladder. Briefly - it was based on incentive. Each team had to challenge and ring against every other team before they could challenge the same team again. One point was awarded for a challenge (awarded only if the competition took place), three points for a win and one point for not winning. Most teams were of about the same standard so if they took the trouble to challenge they got more points. The winners at the end of the year were those with most points, but they could not win if they made no challenges, even if they were the best team and always one the heats. If there was a tie in points, certain selection criteria were invoked, e.g. the number of wins, the number of "away" wins, how any challenges, how many competitions rung. The system produced some very interesting results and sometimes a frantic race took place towards the end of the year to gain more points. There were the usual rules about ringing deadlines and also get out clauses in case a team had to drop out. Several District ringers became involved in judging the heats. We had some very close competitions and because it was fairer to everyone there was more willingness to take part. The heats took place on practice nights and were a good way of getting ringers together. Sadly, it ran for only about three years in its revised format due to the need to make fairly regular commitments to ringing the heats, and the various fortunes of bands. In the three years it ran like this, three different

teams won. The trophy was presented at the annual dinner. If anyone would like a copy of the rules and more details please send in a request.

Offering Help

Lynda Coles wrote, picking up on the master class paragraph, it looks a brilliant idea to me, not least because one of my enormous frustrations as a learner has been a feeling of inaccessibility to the skilled ringers, apart, obviously, from those I meet on a weekly basis.

Peter Humphrey replies, this is the nub of the problem, I think. Far too few ringers take the initiative in helping others, seeming to prefer to wait to be asked. At a recent meeting I noticed a ringer having difficulty taking the first coil while lowering in peal - a common problem, you'll agree. Putting on my best "friendly" face, I went over later and showed her my method (which does seem to work quite well, at least for me) and how the process works in general. Much gratitude came back. This is just a single example from my own memory - the scope is enormous for anyone who really does want to help others to improve. Don't wait - take your courage in both hands and start the ball rolling. You never know where it might lead you.

John Harrison, added I think this is quite a serious problem, and if we could change it, things would be a lot better. I am sure there are towers and areas where there is a culture of offering and accepting help, but I suspect most of us are far too conscious of the risk of offending people. It is a cultural problem, so probably not easy to solve overnight, but I think as teachers, we have somewhat more responsibility than most to help develop a healthier culture by offering reasoned and constructive criticism, as our protégées make the transition from being 'pupils' to being 'colleagues'. I do try to offer help when I can, but I am acutely aware of strong forces holding back any intervention in many situations, especially with people who are not 'learners' (and even then in some situations).

Lynda Coles, added, from the learner's viewpoint, we are desperate for help; we find the initial handling difficult, the methods difficult, and strange towers (even after 5 years ringing) difficult. We feel totally stupid, and we don't know what questions to ask. For 'we' read 'I' of course, but I could introduce you to many others who I am sure would endorse every word of this. I have always been grateful for every scrap of advice and reassurance; I have only been upset twice in the ringing chamber, on both occasions because the perpetrators were openly critical, and delivered their opinions in derogatory and critical terms (That sounded awful, said in a complaining voice). I always ring to the best of my ability on the day (why should I do otherwise?), and if anybody can spot any problems and help me correct them I am extremely glad of their help.

Paul Wilkinson replied, you have hit the nail on the head here. Help should go to the learners so that they can be comfy in their familiar surroundings and we need to be careful about how we - for "we" read ALL ringers, experienced or not - offer and give help and advice. We need to encourage rather than criticise, explain rather than bellow, be patient when people who aren't as good as "we" are make mistakes. Anyone who wants to see this in action is very welcome to come to our practices on a Monday evening at 7.30pm.

Master classes

John Harrison wrote, that is an interesting idea. Do you know of it being done, or have you any ideas how it could work in practice? The idea of ringing master classes has cropped up several times in the last few years, but not as far as I know been developed to fruition. It is easier to see how one might have a master class on bell handling than on striking, for example, and also easier to see how a teacher would give a master class than how a whole band would.

Paul Wilkinson agreed, this is a very good idea and is something that we do on a regular basis, although not one good one leading one not so good but merely a coming together of equals and old friends who are probably nearer 4 miles apart. There was a panic in the parish last week when our vicar was due to preside at a wedding in another neighbouring parish only to be told that he would have to tell the bride and groom that they could not have the bells that they had already paid for. After a quick ring round, we had ringers from four other towers, one about a dozen miles away and we all learned something from each other.

Demi Gods!

Lynda Coles sent, I am reminded of a recent kind offer from our neighbouring tower, only 3 miles down the road geographically, continents apart in skill; they win SCs, we're right at the bottom. We never dared to visit their practices, as we knew how inappropriate this would be. Equally as importantly, we did not know the human beings who are these unapproachable demi-gods. The offer was that we, as a band, should visit their practice one evening a month, and the TC would ensure that we were given a good practice. We have not taken them up on the offer, as we have luckily recently had a good teacher move to the area and help us. So it was not talked through in full, but I imagine that it could have worked along the lines of everyone arriving at the beginning of practice, all of them standing behind all of us for whatever we were working on (PBD/PBM/Grandsire) for the first half of the practice, then we could watch their expert practice at the end. [In our case, Victor, as senior ringer, became TC before he had even rung a QP, (our previous TC moved house), so practices were grindingly difficult]. The experts under this scheme would lose one eighth of their practice time, but I would guess that they would derive a glow of satisfaction from watching our improvement, and our gratitude would be huge.

Fred Bone replied, they presumably knew what they were doing when they made the offer.

I'm sure they don't regard themselves as unapproachable demi-gods. Why not try? - if it all turns into a disaster (which I doubt), you aren't committed to a second visit. Even if it does end up as one piece of ringing for each of you followed by their normal practice, you can get a significant benefit just from watching, and listening to, good ringing. To make decent progress, you need to cultivate an ear for striking. One excellent way to do this is to listen to some pretty good (not perfect) striking, until you can notice the bits that aren't so good. Once you can do that, you'll be better placed to make constructive criticism of your own striking, and that's a major part of improving it. Harking back to a different thread, this is (I feel) an often-overlooked benefit of striking competitions - assuming people turn up for substantially the whole competition and not (as seems to be fashionable these days) just for their own pre-booked slot. Listening with a critical ear to other people's ringing can contribute hugely to your own improvement. That's apart from the social side, also overlooked.

Bobbie May added, I think it's a pity you judged them before taking up their offer! In our branch we have regularly 13-14 entries in our striking competitions, even though we always know who will win the first three places. You have to have standards. We all know that those people will go on to represent us at Guild level and often at national level. We all know that the REAL competition is for 4th place. Some of these 'demi-gods' open their tower to us for higher numbers practices, join us for humble branch practices and don't in any way throw their weight around. They are there to support us in the best sense of the word and they do not show off. A family of these such have joined our church, though they are paid up members of the 12-bell tower. They come along for all sorts of extra practices that I have put on at the Ringing Centre even if it is only PBD even though in one case I know it means a dash back from London without any tea first. I think if you get to know them on a personal basis you will find that they are just like you and are desperate to help learners, as they themselves were once learners, in the future interest of the Exercise. If ringers don't help each other, nobody else will and that's not in anybody's interests. A further comment on striking competitions: one of our branches runs a league competition as well as the more customary sort and this attempts to engage all towers of the branch. I know from visiting the various branches in the Guild at their annual meetings that they are all very anxious to involve all their towers as fully as possible and develop the potential of all their members. I learned the lesson very early on, as a stumbling bob doubles ringer attending a Guild training weekend, that the greatest ringers are the most humble and self-effacing and anxious to help. Give them a chance!

Bill Buckner added, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR??? You need to be running to that other tower every chance you get! Go individually if the rest of the band will not follow. You don't know how fortunate you are to have an expert band down the road willing to train you. Fortunately, we have had an expert band and teachers up the road from us here in Atlanta (Marietta, 20 miles north). Otherwise, the Atlanta band would be nowhere near as advanced as they are. Unfortunately, the next closest tower is in Hendersonville, North Carolina, 4-hours drive away. After that it is a 6-hour drive to Charleston or Raleigh. But, some of us do the travelling to ring every chance we get. You describe the other band as "unapproachable demi-gods." Is that their attitude or your own perception? I would guess it is your perception since they have actually invited you to join their practices. Remember, you are their future ringing partners. They have a vested interest in your ringing skills. It has been my experience whenever visiting towers in the UK that the bands have been most welcoming and hospitable, even to a rookie such as myself. In fact, I have made some of my best ringing breakthroughs" in British towers under the tutelage of local TCs and bands - some of which had no advance warning that I would show up at their practice. I would definitely bring up the subject with your new teacher. If s/he knows what is good for your band they will recognize and take advantage of the opportunity to work with the nearby "expert" band. There is no substitute for having the opportunity to ring with (or indeed, even observe!) a more advanced band. If you will do this, you will, no doubt, start seeing your ringers' progress by leaps and bounds.

Frank Lewis said, if you've been ringing for 5 years you must know that ringers are the most helpful bunch of folk you could possibly wish to meet. I've been ringing for over 50 years and I've never met a demi-god ringer yet! As a matter of interest, how come you've not met these people? We've taught three complete new bands locally over the past few years, and nearly all of the new folk know most of the people in the district - in fact two of them are now on the district committee. Few of the newbies are very experienced yet, but they can all help with trivia evenings, barn dances, local teas and so on, as well as go around improving all the while. You'd probably be better to go along a couple at a time on a regular basis. This way you can ring with a good band all the time. With the best will in the world, having 6 of you in at once is not going to be the ideal way to do it. Our own practice varies from enough to ring London Minor (rare) through to just enough to ring Bob Minimus with a cover (also rare).

Sometimes we have just 6, of whom one or two are visitors who need, and therefore get, a whole evening devoted to plain hunting, with a ring almost every time. The point is that you need to be regular or you miss the opportunities! I always tell learners (maybe slightly tongue-in-cheek, but definitely true when I was learning as a teenager) that going out ringing 7 days a week is only just enough in the early stages.

Caroline Bierdsell wrote, don't be frightened of those super-human demi-gods - they are only people like you & me (well - some of the male kind as well!) they also used to be learners once - and when you get talking to them, 99.9% will admit that with ringing, you never stop learning. I'm now in my second ringing life having taken 25 years out of the towers! - so I know what it feels like to be helped, as well as to help others along the road. As TC not getting much further than PBD & PBM, but keen to advance other members of the team, I take (not send) one or two occasionally to one of several towers with a different practice night where I know we will be welcomed and helped along the learning curve. When I think someone is ready for their first 1/4, I call "help" to the big guys and they are only too willing to make up a strong team to pull a first-timer through. - being able to ring for a sustained period with an expert team is what I would call a master class. Taking time to visit & ring at the "better" towers gives you the opportunity to get to know the more advanced ringers and more importantly, for them to know you - one day someone will phone you up asking you to make up numbers somewhere else for a wedding or other special service when they are short of their own band but that won't happen if nobody knows who you are or what you can ring.

Lynnda Coles replies, I feel 'shy' about being the newcomer and outsider, and would have found it extremely difficult to be the one to initiate contact. Conversely, at a recent meeting where I was the 'old-timer'(!) I found it relatively easy to introduce myself to a couple of newcomers. Maybe I am unusual in this, but I rather doubt it. This still doesn't look quite right on the page! I certainly would not describe myself as having judged them, much more in awe, but this was not the reason for not taking up their offer. The reason is that (at present) the new teacher who has moved in and now helps us frequently brings along his mates to sort us out, and we are totally sated with our present level of help. A wonderful feeling! I repeat, it was a very kind offer, and I would hate there to be any misunderstanding about our gratitude for the offer having been made. And in response to Fred, were we to go ahead with the visits, we would certainly stay around to listen to the expert practice and learn from it. I hope this makes my meaning clearer.

Learners Venturing Out

John Preston wrote, one area where we've had some limited success is where, by invitation, a group of more experienced ringers descend on a struggling tower on their practice night to concentrate on something specific. In one case where even plain hunt with the all-local band was a real struggle, we were able to have a pilot behind each learner and provide sufficient competent ringers to ensure that plain hunt went properly. By the end of the evening we had six locals ringing with a pilot behind each, and they all rang plain hunt well together. The concept can obviously apply to more advanced work too. I think it is vital though that the experienced ringers go by invitation, and that they go to the struggling tower rather than vice versa. Yes, a relatively extrovert learner will gain much by visiting more experienced towers, but the reality is that many learners feel they will be out of their depth, especially those who are lacking in confidence. Which brings me to the issue of demi-gods and a thought:

Most people will feel comfortable amongst those who are just one stage more advanced than themselves. They can identify with them, and aspire to their level of competence. Many people will feel uncomfortable amongst those who are two levels above themselves, feeling that level to be unachievable. Those who are three levels or more above their own level are likely to be viewed as demi-gods who (however incorrectly) won't understand the learner's difficulties. It really is unrealistic to expect someone struggling with Bob Doubles to go along to a tower where Surprise Major is regularly rung without some considerable persuading. Similarly for the Grandsire triples ringer to go to a tower where Surprise Maximus is rung.

I think the message of this is that those who are highly competent must recognise that they are likely to be viewed as demi-gods, and be prepared to go out to meet the learner on his home ground rather than inviting the learner to join him or her at the high power tower.

Paul Wilkinson sent, I would agree with this. We had an occasion recently where we didn't have enough people for practice night but wanted to ring so, by invitation we went along to a nearby tower to help and guide them. None of us are experienced enough to take over, or to begin teaching them but we did work under the leadership of their TC and at least provided a solid foundation for rounds and PH. This might not sound much but it seemed to be a delight for them and we had a whale of a time.

David Bryant replies, while I agree with what's been written to an extent, I think there is a limit and we should expect learners to make some effort themselves. I went to lots of other local towers when I was learning, and I think that is a good way to learn. Learners shouldn't expect more experienced ringers to be at their beck and call and to turn out to help at the learner's tower as and when the learner chooses. There seems to be an attitude problem amongst some learners / learner towers towards the towers with large rings of bells (10 or 12) and / or competent band in an area. Many seem to assume that the bands at 10 or 12 bell towers will be highly competent and won't be interested in helping learners. When in my teens I was deputy tower captain of a 12-bell tower (Taunton) with a struggling 6-bell band for a couple of years, and certainly met this response when visiting other towers on occasion. I now ring at another 12-bell tower that really does have a top band (York), and the same attitude seems to exist in some quarters. We have a secular tower (an 8 cwt 6), which we use for teaching, and it is also used

for various courses, special practices and the like, which are advertised around the local towers. Minster ringers run most of these practices, but some learners still won't come and continue to believe that Minster ringers do nothing to help others! Learners are not encouraged to come to the Minster, but I think that most people will agree that a 59 cwt 12 with a treble of over 8 cwt, 25+ ringers at most practices and a surprise maximus band is not really the place for those learning bob doubles! I don't think the situation I've described is at all unique - I've heard of it happening in a number of other places. Learners will inevitably be led by the more experienced ringers in their tower, and in some cases these seem to have an unreasonable dislike of the towers with ringers more experienced than they are, and discourage learners from getting involved with them. Whether there is anything we can do about this is another matter! I think the bottom line is that while we are happy to make the effort to teach learners and ring lots of bob doubles, learners have to make some effort themselves in return, and taking help when it is offered would be a good place to start!

John Preston added, I think these comments illustrate the disparity in perception of attitudes between the visiting learner (or even just less competent) and the highly competent ringers. We all need to be very careful about the perception we create, illustrated also in *Lynda Coles'* message.

Pushed too far!

Lynda Coles wrote, I wrote an article entitled 'The Mamill that Roared' which Fred Bone uploaded on 23 July. (Please ask for a copy. AB) this explains in graphic detail why it took me a long time to emerge from my ringing chamber! I would also like to add that I think that I have now grabbed around a hundred towers, (and yes, I still find many of them difficult) so I am not responding in self-defence. This seems like an appropriate moment to throw in an actual experience that happened to a friend of mine 'somewhere in England since the millennium'. I have pondered on it and come to no satisfactory conclusion. I shall call the players Mick (man in charge), Nell (nervous lady learner, my friend) and the Fairy (a fairly competent ringer from Nell's tower). The Fairy took Nell with her to an event in their district, Nell's first. When they arrived Mick asked what they wanted to ring. Nell said that she did not like the look of the long drop, but Mick said he'd stand beside her whilst she rang treble to a minor method, which, unknown to him, she had only attempted twice before; the fairy said that this was pushing her own skills to the limit, but Mick was very persuasive. As soon as she pulled off, it was obvious that Nell was unhappy, and after half a dozen blows Mick took over, and Nell legged it out of the ringing chamber. After a couple of touches, the fairy asked whether she should go and get Nell back in for rounds and call changes, but when she found her, Nell refused to return. Nell and I discussed this a few months later, and she was adamant that, had she initially been gently nursed in rounds and call changes, she would have stayed in the tower and had a couple of goes. She also said that Mick did not say anything to her at the end of the day to reassure or encourage her (although others did). So she left with less confidence than she arrived, and, as far as I know, has never ventured away from her tower since. Although this is an extreme example, I have encountered a few similar situations. Obviously it could be said that she should have put her foot down and refused to attempt something which she felt sure was beyond her capabilities; but this still puts her, the learner, on the defensive against the experienced ringer. Should somebody else in the tower have intervened? Obviously the situation developed in a matter of moments, so it's difficult to think how. Should somebody have had a word with Mick afterwards, and if so, who, and what could they have said? Should nothing be said, thus sparing Mick's feelings, but leaving him ignorant of the effect, which his action had on Nell, therefore, likely to repeat it another time? The end result however is all too predictable. A ringer who returned to her tower and either said nothing (which is my guess, because she felt like a pathetic wimp) or that she had not enjoyed the experience. With a very small alteration in the way she was treated, she would have gone back telling other newcomers what a good day she had had, and that she was looking forward to the next similar opportunity, and encouraging them to go along as well, which makes it more likely that they would. I feel very strongly that until these basic problems are tackled, training in the early stages is going to be an uphill battle. It goes without saying, I hope, that I am making no such accusations against David Bryant, and I will also add that for every similar bad experience which I have encountered personally, I have had a dozen good ones. I have been coached by some excellent teachers, to whom I am deeply grateful. In a different life I have been the one repeating mind-numbing basics ad nauseam, and do recognise and appreciate the patience shown to me, as I'm sure do most others. But when a negative influence happens in the early days, it takes a lot of counteracting for that individual. Especially women. Especially middle-aged ones. Any answers?

Peter Wenham replied, This reminds me of an incident many years ago when I pushed a learner a little too far at a Branch meeting. Her embarrassment when the touch folded was so acute that we lost a learner. A lesson I have never forgotten.

David Bryant wrote, it sounds to me as if 'Mick' is inexperienced when it comes to teaching. No experienced teacher of ringing would try to push a learner beyond their capabilities, because it is disheartening for the learner to be made to look hopeless and nobody will benefit from it.

Peter Humphrey agreed, but on the other hand it's common experience that a nervous beginner needs a little encouragement to overcome their nerves. The problem, as ever, is in knowing when to stop. It would be fine if everybody were as sensible as I am ;-) but that just isn't what we see - common sense is nowhere near as common as it's supposed to be. Of course, Mick could have asked a couple of questions to get some idea of the likely difficulty facing Nell. Hindsight has such wonderful clarity.

John Harrison wrote, Much of this discussion has had a 'them and us' flavour. I believe we need to see teaching (and learning) as much more of a partnership. This is especially true in this era when adult learners are used to taking extensive responsibility in other walks of life, and many of the youngsters are far from passive in terms of what they do. An experienced ringing master or teacher might know a lot more than the person (s)he is trying to help, but the interaction is still one between two people, and it requires a degree of co-operation to make it work. Some times this is jolly hard, and all of us have got it wrong on occasions. Learners like Nell come out of failed encounters feeling awful. How many of us would feel similarly awful if we realised that through thoughtlessness, inattention or misjudgement we had played the role of Mike?

This is a brief summary of July's postings. If you would like any greater details on any of the points raised, please contact me.

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