



# The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

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## *Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary Mar – May 2006*

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### **Horses and Water**

*Peter Wenham quoted an extract from a letter from JH in The Ringing World.*

'It is sad that many towers with one (simulator) installed fail to exploit it and only use it as a cheap form of sound control.' In our Branch we have offered teaching in 'Ringing by rhythm' and 'Listening for faults', using our simulator. Despite an enthusiastic response from the four persons who have benefited, most of our members show no interest in any form of teaching that is not 'full band' orientated. Any suggestions to overcome this trait will be welcome.

*Doug Nichols* - Negative comments from senior members of the band seem to be the most damaging in that they infect others with the idea that using the simulator is a weird thing to do.

*Most postings were in agreement about the difficulty of 'selling' the use of the simulator to ringers.*

*John Harrison analysed the use of the simulator into three main categories.*

1 - Basic training. The skills needed to ring rounds are: able to handle a bell safely, able to make the bell ring faster or slower at will, able to synchronise with an external rhythm, able to handle the rough and tumble of ringing with other ringers. I teach the first two in single bell, supervised sessions. The third I teach with the simulator. With this approach, pupils learn good speed control, and the ability to listen much earlier than in the traditional approach.

2 - Remedial training. This can be useful to help ringers who are over-dependent on ropesight. By definition, they will not find it easy (because they have not developed the skills needed). How well it works depends on how you handle the session. The simulator is only a tool, and you are the tutor.

3 - Method exercising. This is normally self driven by the individual. It allows someone to practise things without needing N-1 other people who can ring it. It is not as easy as normal practice, because there is no ropesight to provide method cues and to correct errors, but it is better than not ringing it at all, and the machine won't be offended when you go wrong.

I only include (3) for completeness, but it is different from the first two, which are the main tutor-driven uses. There is a need for both, and there is no reason why (1) should not always be used. Some people will balk at (2) but some others, if approached in the right way, will use it and derive benefit. We can't improve everyone, but we can improve some.

*John Norris* - Possible steps to minimise reluctance are to arrange 'one to one' sessions for the apprehensive, avoiding a critical audience, and emphasising that the challenge of trying to ring well on the simulator is actually quite fun. One practical problem is that ringers who find themselves pressed for time are likely to have difficulty in finding time for extra practice on the simulator.

*Tom Farthing and George Parker advocated individual striking competitions using Abel to review the striking.*

## **Plain Hunt Speeds**

*Ernie Runciman* asked for suggestions for a ringer who was having problems changing speed in plain hunt. When ringing by himself, he can change speed at will, i.e. ring six quick blows followed by six slow blows, etc. If ringing the treble he can hunt up to the back OK, but can not seem to speed up to get back to the front, usually ending up in about thirds place when That's All is called.

*Peter Humphries* - What I do is, standing next to the learner, point to each bell in turn saying - 'quicker over the (whatever number)' and keep repeating until they arrive at the lead.

*Catherine Lewis* - Simply stand behind them and say 'Quick!' firmly at exactly the moment when you know they're going to be late, but it can still be fixed. Probably as they pull off at handstroke in 4ths or 2nds. If they do it right with this regime a few times, people get the idea just how fast you do have to go.

*John Harrison* - Maybe the rope is too long. Shorten it a bit perhaps, and tell them to take some rope in when at the back. Maybe turning round is the problem. Is there an overshoot at the back? Is the change of direction made too late? If so, then doing it earlier might help. (Stand by and prompt, as above.) Alternatively, try starting at the back and hunting down. (If the tenor is too heavy, call a lighter bell up to the back before starting.) Then the first run will be down. If that's OK, you know the problem is turning corners.

*Heather Peachey* described ways she used - I say consistently 'up to 2nds, up to 3rds, level in 5ths/6ths' etc when hunting up and 'down to 3rds, down to 2nds' on the way down. I often accompany it with simple hand signals, lifting my hand and pointing it in the direction of the bell being followed for up and lowering it while pointing for down.

*Bernard North* - One of the most common faults in trying to get someone to ring quicker is that they tend to pull harder, but of course this only makes the problem worse. The bell goes further over the balance and they get even slower.

*Peter Robson* - we should not neglect the 'turning round'. Occasionally a learner can ring fast and slow (handling correctly) but will overshoot at both ends. It helps to ensure that they are aware of the need to ring one steady blow (whilst preparing for the speed change next blow) at lead or lie. Failure to do so will prevent the speed change.

*Peter Sotheran* - In plain hunting, we often refer to Pam Copson's allegory of 'climbing slowly up the stairs' (to 6th place) and 'running quickly down the other side' (to the lead). This helps create a mental image for the pupil.

*This prompted a reply from John Harrison which started another thread.*

## **Steps and Slopes (off-shoot of Plain Hunt speeds)**

*JH* - But it is the wrong image! Bump, bump, bump (like Pooh being dragged down stairs).. We shouldn't encourage people to think of hunting as a sequence of discrete steps, but as a smooth hill. If they can point the bell in the right direction (up or down) at the start, then the rest of the slope should be as effort-free as ringing rounds. That is the whole point of teaching about speed change.

*This brought several postings most disagreeing with John to a greater or lesser extent.*

*Alistair Donaldson-*

I disagree completely! Note that there are no intermediate 'landings' in Pam's image - the steps are of even height and go; so that the staircase does form a smooth 1:1 average gradient at one step each stroke. And there are the places clearly marked en route so you that know how high you have climbed. I think the allegory very neatly encompasses both \*Pace\* and \*Place\*, and you do need a view of both to plain hunt accurately.

*Nick Smith* - It seems to me that this is not so from a rhythm perspective as when the effect of the handstroke lead gap is taken into account then it is a series of steps:

To hunt down:

You come in two places at backstroke - one to move forward in the order and one for the lack of a lead gap. You maintain position at handstroke as the whole change moves out past you to allow for the handstroke lead gap and so you have come in one place in the order. Conversely when hunting up you move out two places at hand (one for the order and one for the lead gap) and maintain position at back (you go out one but the change moves in one so net result is nil).

*Peter Sotheran* - .Because most folks think of climbing stairs slowly and the concept of dashing down stairs quickly is not unfamiliar to youngsters, I find it helps to remind them of the variations in speed that hunting up and down require. Nothing more complicated than that!

*Although Derek Livsey liked the image of stairs he felt it did give some problems-*

1) If you are using minimal effort to ring, then, as John says, the only time that real effort is required is when the bell pace needs to be changed, i.e. at the lead, or the back.

2) It gives no indication of the difference in backstroke and handstroke timing intervals.

For 6 bells, the intervals are 4, 5, 6 and 7, approximately 27% variation.

For 4 bells, the intervals are 2, 3, 4 and 5, approximately 43% variation.

It is the change that requires the effort. Ringing on 12 bells is therefore easier than ringing on 4 ? ? ? - Well, as far as physical effort is concerned anyway.

*Catherine Lewis was not so sure* - I don't think this is how it has to be considered. Surely the 'norm' that should be worked from is the rhythm, ie speed at hand and back, required to ring your particular bell properly in rounds. This absorbs the hand/back difference caused by the handstroke gap and also, most importantly, the oddstruckness of the bell. From this basis you do indeed move up one place all the way up, do one level blow, move down one place all the way down and do one level blow at backstroke lead.

### **Is silent ringing bad for learners**

*A question was asked about ways of handling a situation with an older learner. Her main problem at the moment is leading - she seems to have a mental block about how it is meant to be done and insists on knowing precisely who will be behind while she is leading. Various exercises had been tried – e.g. Bastow, and some progress was being made. The problem was that she was also attending another tower where the bells were tied and rung silently. Thus, at this practice only ropesight could be used and the correspondent felt that this was contributing significantly to the problem.*

*There was unanimous feeling that method practice on silent bells was not a good idea.*

*Heather Peachey* - I cannot see the justification for it beyond initial handling and speed change exercises.

*Suggested solutions for the initial problem (learning to lead without relying on ropesight) included handbell ringing, using a simulator to practise and sessions with the ringers facing the wall instead of in to the centre.*

*Catherine Lewis* - An easier way to give people a feel for leading is with student, two helpers and a simulator. Get simulator ringing rounds, put student on treble, one helper on tenor (for visual leading) and other helper with student. She then leads with all the stimuli of doing it for real (a tenor to watch and other bells to listen to) with a band with perfect sense of rhythm.

*John Harrison* - It might be worth trying ringing and leading on four? The gaps are wider, so listening is easier, and you can drift further while still hearing an 'error' rather than 'confusion'.

*Ways of reducing reliance on bell numbers and developing place counting were discussed.*

*Catherine Lewis* - I have just tried something new, for me, with a lady (40ish and quite bright though). She learnt to hunt partly by hunting alone with a simulator. She learnt necessary bellhandling skills and the rhythm. It took a few private sessions. Initially I was telling her to 'hold it up', 'pull it', 'shorten it', etc. She would get so far and then it fell apart. Gradually she got right back to lead! Then we improved it and she got quite reasonable at it. This meant she, without question, learnt to listen. At the same time she rang PH on 3, 4 and 5 and PBD (with the other bells following behind to keep a 6 or 8 bell rhythm) on practice night - all with ropesight and places - no numbers. The more time anyone spends ringing by numbers and not listening at all to the results, the longer it will take them to get out of both habits.

*John Harrison took Catherine up on this.* - This mixes up two separate things. I don't think learning the numbers is the main problem. Forgetting the numbers and finding the bells to follow by ropesight, would not solve it. The key issue is about placing the bell by rope following, which destroys the rhythm and introduces errors, rather than trying to develop a stable rhythm and fine tune the position by listening. I remember when I was learning to ring I was told to lead by following the tenor wide on the opposite stroke. I found that too difficult, and discovered that if I rang steadily and listened, I could probably get my bell in the right place without anybody knowing that I couldn't lead properly! At the time, it felt very scary and took a lot of concentration. Now I can't imagine ringing any other way, and I am extremely grateful that something made me take the plunge quite early, but many people need a lot of help to make the transition.

*Car tyre silencers were suggested as a way of making the tied bell practices unnecessary. The design of these was discussed.*

*Peter Sotheran* - For light bells with small clapper balls, you may need small motor-bike/scooter tyres; larger clappers may need wider tyres off a car. These should be available free from a tyre depot as otherwise they have to pay to have them disposed of. Cut a segment out of the tyre, long enough to cover over the striking face of the clapper but short enough for the clapper to protrude slightly through the ends of the segment. Cut a hole in the tread of the tyre, large enough for the flight to pass through the tread. Punch some holes near the rim of the tyre wall, either side of the clapper shank. This will be hard graft with a good Stanley knife and a hacksaw! Pull the tyre up over the clapper so that the walls of the tyre cover the striking surface of the clapper and the flight sticks out through the tread. Secure with old electrical cable, through the holes, around the shank of the clapper. To ring 'open' turn the tyres through 90 degrees to expose the striking surface; to muffle them, twist back to protect the striking surface. Once done, they should be good for a few years.

*One correspondent had had problems with this type of silencer slipping on new SG iron clappers.*

*Cyril Crouch* - At Shiplake we have solved the problem of muffles turning in two ways. Firstly by use of cable ties to tension the tyre sections on to the ball of the clapper and in some cases by putting a jubilee clip on the flight, hard up against the ball with the tyre section on top. The fastening of the jubilee clip stops the turning.

*John Harrison* - I'm not sure that SG iron can be blamed for muffle turning, though a modern painted clapper is obviously smoother than an old rusty one. To get a better grip, don't 'cut a hole' as has been suggested. Start by cutting a pair of crossed slits just long enough to let the flight be pushed through. Quite possibly, you will need to cut a bit of the end of the triangular points thus formed, to get them on, but leave as much as possible to act as a springy grip against the flight. (This is described in *The Tower Handbook* on p78.)

*Alistair Donaldson* - I have used a few turns of 'gaffer tape' round the shaft of the clapper where the top of the tyre is - with success so far.