



# The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

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## *Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary May 2003*

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Welcome to the 20<sup>th</sup> posting of NRT summaries. This month starts with a very emotional subject first featured in a letter in the Ringing World.

### **When training fails – No hoppers**

*John Walton* sent in, I'm sure many of you will have seen the letter in last week's Ringing World from a lady who has been told she is a 'No Hoper' (the RW's term) when it comes to ringing. I do not want to discuss the particular circumstances of that case, as I do not believe it is right to do so without the full facts. I do know the tower involved, and the Tower Captain, but not the ringer herself, as I am not a regular visitor there. There must be some circumstances in which it is the right course of action for a learner to call it a day and recognise that they are not going to make it. Hopefully this situation can be reached by mutual agreement, but sometimes it will be the case that the learner's desire to carry on is at odds with their ability. I would say that there are two ringing situations in which a Tower Captain would be justified in making a decision which is against the wishes of the learner: - after a reasonable period of time, the learner is still unable to ring a bell safely - after a reasonable period of time, the learner is still unable to ring a bell to a reasonable degree of striking accuracy The use of the word 'reasonable' (three times!) is clearly critical. What do people consider to be reasonable? Are there any other ringing situations which would be justified? Has any one on the list actually had to go through this, despite their best efforts to help a learner to

succeed? A thorny subject, but one that I'm sure people will have views upon.

*Peter Wenham* replied, I have had learners decide 'It's not for me' - OK, but I have never given up on a learner who wants to continue. This paid off in the case of a pensioner learner of considerable determination who took a full 12-month to ring rounds with sufficient confidence for me to 'walk away'. She is now a Sunday service ringer at her own tower, attends branch meetings and takes much pleasure in ringing. Even if she never progresses beyond call changes, it was worth it!

*Alison Barnett* wrote, but there are cases when it is time to call a halt especially if the learner concerned is a danger to themselves or others. Mostly in the case of children I have found, where, if they can be persuaded to leave it maybe another year or so until they have the concentration and the attitude to want to do it, it can then work. But surely there does sometimes come a time when it will become apparent that it is just not for that person. Another case of treating everyone as an individual.

*John Preston* wrote, I was appalled to read this. If this situation is reached, then surely it is a condemnation of the instructor rather than the pupil. Yes, of course, some pupils have greater natural abilities than others, and of course some learn much quicker than others, but I am absolutely convinced that with sound instruction every adult can be taught to ring to a point where they will be an asset to at least one local band. There may be temporary exceptions in the case of insufficiently

mature children. Of course if you have a surfeit of very capable ringers, then you may feel that you can do without a problem learner, but in that case you live in a different world to the majority of us (and perhaps you ought to be setting up a separate band at an otherwise silent tower). My most problematical learner is also my most dependable ringer in turning up for Sunday service ringing! I wonder if this suggestion is symptomatic of a tower captain who tries to do all instruction himself, and consequently hasn't time to persevere or improve his own tuition methods.

*Alison Barnett* replied, Not everyone has the ability or hand eye co-ordination to deal with more than 1 thing at a time. There are many work arounds but there are people who will never be able to ring just as there are people who will never be able to ride a 2 wheeled bike.

*Greg Russell* wrote, there is another case - lack of commitment (or conflict with other demands of life) makes progress difficult or impossible. There are times when between the tower/instructor schedules and the learner schedule, the learning opportunities are too infrequent to overcome slow learning and backsliding. I imagine there must be a point when one must say something like: "Take a break until you can dedicate more consistent time to it"...

*John Harrison* wrote re every adult can be taught to ring, that is a fairly sweeping statement. Ringing requires a degree of skill and co-ordination. How would it sound if we inserted other comparable skills like perhaps cycling or swimming in the same statement? Like ringing, there is 'not much to it really' and people have even been known to pick them up without much instruction, but to assert that all adults could be trained to do them well is surely an over statement, as I believe it is for ringing. Good instructors can certainly achieve better results than less good ones, but let us not kid ourselves that we are all powerful. The best we

can do is to provide good learning experiences, help, advice and encouragement. The pupil does the actual learning.

*Caroline Birdsell* wrote, don't give up on them just because they don't learn at the speed at which you expect - There may be other duties in the tower which are available. We have one middle-aged learner - mental agility and hand/eye co-ordination are not his strong points - he's now been handling on silenced bells for 18 months. However, he's a valuable asset to the team - quiet, calm, friendly, willing, patient, reliable..... He does the silencers for us, winds the clock, keeps the belfry & stairs tidy & clean, and enjoys the social side of après-practice. More importantly, those who have known him all his life have said what a difference it has made to him since he has belonged to a team & been treated as an 'equal' - becoming more self-assured & outgoing. We all recognise his limitations & there are doubts whether open rounds or Sunday service ringing will ever be achieved apart from occasionally asking him to take one stroke with a helper doing the other.

*John Walton* replied, let me reiterate that the tower in question is not my own, but it, and its tower captain, are known to me, although the learner is not. As I mentioned previously, I do not want to discuss the specifics of that case, as I do not have the full facts. You make reference to my own tuition and tower circumstances, so I can respond to those points: - I ring at a tower which was very isolated from the local Branch and where very little ringing has happened in the last ten years. - I took on the role of Ringing Master (not Tower Captain) about two years ago and have been involved in recruitment and training local ringers - we now get a significant amount of active support from local towers which enables us to achieve ringing at practice of a standard and complexity which would not otherwise be possible. Our helpers give their time

willingly, some occasional, some every week, and our learners benefit from their steady ringing and coaching. - I also take people to other consenting towers, branch practices, and when they reach an appropriate standard, I encourage them to go without me to towers where they are known.

- On Sundays we are on our own, but have progressed from at best rounds on three to regular rounds on six and plain hunt on four with a cover. Although modest, this is the achievement of which I am most proud. - our band currently stands at eight (we are an eight bell tower), which includes two young learners (unable to handle on their own), two older learners (at the rounds and plain hunt stages), one steady adult ringer (plain bob doubles), one older gentleman (plain hunt and good covering, returned to ringing after a fifty year gap), one very capable young adult (progressing as fast as the opportunities we can provide will allow) and myself. Six of the ringers have learned / returned to ringing in the last two years. There are a couple of other people locally who I hope will take up ringing over the summer. I would still assert that, after a reasonable length of time, and with a reasonable standard of tuition, if a learner cannot ring safely or to a reasonable standard of striking then there may be cause to ask them to stop ringing. I do not wish to imply that 'reasonable' should have a specific time definition, nor that someone who contributes in other ways to the tower would not be a loss (Caroline Birdsell's example). John (Preston), would you say that the striking of your reliable Sunday service ringer is of a reasonable standard? Would you allow them to ring on Sunday if it were not? Are they a danger to themselves or others when ringing? Again, what would you do if they were? I'm sorry if my initial posting came across as though failure must be entirely the fault of the learner. I certainly do not think I am a perfect tutor - I joined this list, and posted this query, to learn

from the views and opinions of others here. This subject seems to have split the NRT down the middle and I hope that I will be a better tutor as a result of listening to and learning from the replies.

*Ray Taylor* replied, If ringers are dangerous or unpleasant it makes it easy to "invite" them to leave, and rightly so. However, we have someone who has been ringing for 3 or 4 years, has been on a couple of Plain Hunt training days, has had a number of competent and respected trainers help with her instruction, but quite clearly just isn't understanding. She doesn't seem to hear her bell so her striking is very erratic. Everyone who has been involved in her training agrees that she is just not going to cut it. She doesn't contribute to the band or tower in any particular way like some of the people mentioned in other messages. But she turns up without fail on practice nights and she wants to learn to ring. It's the hardest thing in the world to tell someone like this, that they should consider dropping ringing even though you know he/she is very unlikely to progress beyond rounds. I believe that we can only persevere as John Harrison suggests, however frustrating, and hope that eventually the penny will drop.

*Heather Peachey* wrote, we have never given up on anyone, and would never do so. A mum & daughter who were both really struggling gave up of their own volition, and the whole band was very sad at the loss. We value everybody and hope that they feel equally valued. Yes we have people who have caused us to feel frustrated, but perseverance and patience pays off. It does help that there are two of us doing the teaching, as we can share problems, and have found that swapping over sometimes helps a learner over a difficult patch as we do have slightly different teaching styles. In the past we have taught teenage twins with spastic limbs - sure, they were never going to get beyond the basics, but both were capable of ringing

rounds safely and striking reasonably - not perfectly, but not dreadful. We are currently teaching someone for another tower, who declared that person unteachable. He can now ring rounds safely and is ecstatic at his progress, although it can be painfully slow, and tells us that the practice exudes confidence. I think we need to ask ourselves what we'd prefer on a Sunday - excellent Bob Minimus on the back 4, having invited only those ringers who come up to scratch, or variable quality rounds and call changes on 6 or 8 with all the band welcome, each playing the part they can. Yes, I know we strive for perfection in striking - of course we do - but we live in the real world, with real people and we must keep things in perspective. Please don't imagine that our service ringing must therefore be dreadful - we ring within the capability of the 'weakest link' and try to limit the number of those ringing at the same time! On practice night the local band is just about up to PB Triples - we ring mostly rounds/call changes on Sundays. The world, particularly in rural areas, is simply not full of learners who will make excellent progress and become first class ringers. If we're too selective and critical, we'll end up with more silent towers on Sundays.

*Phil Dunn* wrote, a change of tutor can work wonders. I know there are times when I become frustrated / exasperated / disinterested. A fresh tutor, with new enthusiasm, a slightly different approach can help both me and the student. Clearly, in isolated rural areas, with limited experienced ringers around this is not so easy to arrange.

*Alison Barnett* replied, I feel very strongly that if all else has failed we must allow ourselves the option to opt out. Those that know me know I ring and teach with my husband, swapping learners as we both pick up on different faults and, as said many times in this thread, teach things slightly differently. To this end though, we both had to give up on one lady who after 8 months was

still letting go of the tail end to catch the sally. We even tried elastic bands around her wrists which kept the tail end in place but she did not/could not hold onto it. It became distressing for her as she was determined she would ring and had apparently tried earlier in her teens. Now whether this hang up was due to the teaching she received then I don't know. But after 8 months of still not managing both strokes together and this was after quite a few special lessons just for her, it was a sad time but the decision had to be made if only for her own sanity as she would get very frustrated and cross with herself which only made matters worse. Everyone has different skills, accepting that has to be a way of life even as a Christian, otherwise we would all be preachers and there would be no one fund raising or maintaining the beautiful churches we ring in!

*John Harrison* replied, there seem to be two separate debates on this thread. Some people are asking questions about the real problems of people who are on the verge of being incapable of controlling a bell - a rare situation, but one that any of us might face. Some of the answers are phrased in terms of whether or not to reject people who can't become super ringers. Not surprisingly, these two lines of argument are failing to meet.

*Martin Mansley* wrote, in my experience it is often the ringers who take longer to learn who are the best stickers. Many of the quick learners burn themselves out and move on to do something else - the others are the back-bone of the Sunday band. Progress is good and should be encouraged at all times but sometimes very fast progress can lead to disillusionment just as much as if very slow progress is made.

**Camcorder in the tower** (from last month)

*Alan Bentley* wrote, update on camcorder availability- According to Jessops the Sony DCR TRV 140 has

now been superseded by the 145 with an "apparently" better spec., although I'm not entirely convinced. Jessops price for the 145 is £330. We too, at Barrow-upon-Humber bought this same camera - its steady slow motion playback is the most valuable thing in analysing handling issues. Analogue camcorders do not have a steady slow mo facility. Another benefit is that Digital 8 works with standard 8mm tapes at virtually the same picture quality, and these are now inexpensive. It can be nice to keep old tapes and show people how far they've come when they're feeling as if their progress has slowed/stopped! We bought a 14" (normal portable size) TV-Video (£130) as a playback monitor which also plays ordinary VHS tapes such as the central council ones. The camcorder does have a small monitor of its own, but it is useful to see it on a larger screen. Additionally we have a Micromark home security camera in the bell chamber which attaches to the same TV and allows the bells to be seen from the ringing chamber whilst ringing - it can be quite hypnotic!

*Heather Peachey* wrote, our TV/Video was the cheapest around! (About £130) The only connection requirement we looked for was a Scart socket, and found that most have them these days. The video camera (Sony TRV140) came with leads that connect either to two/three jack points (left & right audio and video), or to a Scart socket via the adaptor provided. The CCTV security camera connects only to a Scart. To record onto VHS tape, all you do is connect the video camera via either the jack plugs or Scart and ensure the TV is tuned to receive that input source. There's a button on the remote that cycles round the input options and you can tell you have it right as you see the picture on the screen. Then put a VHS tape in the slot and press RECORD on the TV/Video, then PLAY on the video camera - that's all there is to it. You can record from the CCTV camera simply by putting a tape in the slot and pressing

record while you can see the picture on the screen. There are some models of such cameras that have PIR movement detectors that will trigger recording when movement is sensed, but we felt that was not necessary. As for light levels, daylight through the louvers is sufficient, and at night we have two domestic light bulbs - one is on the wall under the frame, the other's a roving inspection lamp clamped to the frame the other side of the room. We were astonished at the low level of light needed. Our CCTV stuff came from the largest B&Q, I think they call it a 'Warehouse'.

*Cyril Crouch* wrote, we bought the DCRTV250 at £342.99 - it was a one-off, but worth watching out for.

*Rodney Stevenson* wrote, while I'm not qualified to make suggestions as to brands, I thought I might pass on an extra way of using camcorders. As well as the 'normal' way of playing back through a monitor, I've had remarkable success with a 'private' showing using just the playback in the viewfinder to the one specific individual needing correction. I'd arranged for the operator to frame on the particular aspect I wanted to correct, just during normal ringing, and with one subject only. Made it not 'a big deal' for the subject, with no nervousness; and not a lot of wasted time as the bigger production seems to be. Indeed, was an instant fix!

### **Wooden Spoons.**

*Lynda Coles* wrote, I had suggested that there should be a 'wooden spoon' award for the team that comes last in the striking comp. In the last 3 years, our band has come second to bottom, fired out and bottom. People keep on telling me that I shouldn't mind, it's the taking part that matters, etc. What is noticeable is that it's always the people who never come last who say it! I genuinely wonder if they can remember how it feels to come last in anything, if the last time they did so was a few decades ago. People are expected to

be pleased if they win something, why are they supposed not to feel the opposite if they lose? I hope you know me well enough to know that there is no way that I would stop entering because I knew that my team would probably come last. However, I genuinely feel that it does take a certain type of personality to be prepared to turn up in that sort of scenario, or maybe knowing that you are weakening a much stronger team who could not otherwise enter. My idea was actually to present a 'prize' - ? a bike hooter/ bike bell/old clapper to the team with the most disastrous result, so that they could aim to pass it on the following year. I suppose we could even say after 3 years it was theirs to keep, and they have to supply a new prize and have it named after their tower! On the day, 9 teams entered from 7 towers. I was aware of the following. 1. A lady who is relaxed about delivering speeches to quite high powered audiences was a 'quivering wreck'. She said that she always hates being in the situation of potentially letting a team down, and said 'never again'. 2. A lady who detests sc's and was there only to enable her team to enter felt much more relaxed when a novice ringer joined the band, and the pressure was off them to have any expectation of coming anywhere above last. 3. A lady came down the tower stairs and sat on the seat at the bottom shaking like the proverbial leaf. I can see the benefits of sc's for strong/competitive bands. What actual purpose do they serve for the less skilled?

*John Harrison* replied, if it is any consolation, we came last in our Branch competition a few weeks ago. We are a band that used to win every competition in sight 15-20 years ago but we haven't won anything for several years. We go up and we go down, but we still enter and don't feel badly about it. You see people you don't see at a normal Branch practice. There is a lot more standing around chatting in the churchyard than at a practice where you

are expected to be quiet. If you practise beforehand, you should get some benefit from that. It is always worth trying, even if you are only competing among the bottom three. You never know, you might surprise everyone. *Chris Maslen* also replied, we enter because they're good social events and good fun if the emphasis is not on the contest but on the social side. This doesn't mean that no-one takes it seriously. Everyone rings to the best of their ability when they're in the tower, and wants to win. (We never have a serious chance of winning, but we still hope) We listen to the judges' comments hoping to learn from them, but the contest is not as important as the event.

*Patricia Newton* wrote, we have a knock out competition in our branch and for a few years there were three bands in the final. When a second trophy was given to the branch for the runners up, I presented a wooden spoon for the bottom band so that every band got something. It was presented to our "B" band and well received. To prevent any of our ringers stirring curry with it the spoon remained in our tower, and has caused many amusing comments from visitors. Our "B" band received this trophy several times, but when at last Cookham tower got it one of their ringers engraved the handle beautifully with a very suitable comment (sorry, can't remember what it was). We now have a "final" competition with about 6 bands and the wooden spoon is presented to the bottom band. It is received in good spirit and adds a little more interest for the less able bands *Ben Willetts* wrote, re listening to the judges, it really helps to have a judge who is (a) good, and (b) helpful. They need to know what they are talking about, and they need to phrase their comments so that each band can listen to what they say, identify with it, and learn from it. I was in a striking competition once at a 20-something cwt eight, where the judge confidently

opined, "This band is not used to ringing on such heavy bells." The band in question was from Liverpool Cathedral. *Frank Lewis* wrote, you must come from a very sensitive neck of the woods. I've been entering competitions for years (probably over 40 - they didn't have 'em when I was a kid). I've been in situations where our team has won the guild trophy year after year, and I've been in situations where our team never gets anywhere even in the district contest. I've never met anyone who could be described as a "quivering wreck" or was seen shaking like a leaf after an event. Just keep on entering - our tower nearly always comes near the bottom, but, as John says, it's a great chance to meet people. Don't worry so much - we've only a limited time on this planet and it's a pity to spend it all fussing about trivia. If your ladies are so bothered about competitions then either they must have pretty beastly tower captains or they shouldn't enter in the first place.

*Ian Broster* added, I understand that a striking competition adds a little extra pressure to ringing. However ringing in a striking competition is no different really to ringing normally on a Sunday. You are still making just as much noise/music, just as many people are listening to you, and exactly the same levels of care, listening and other skills are required. Therefore, if as much emphasis can be placed on accuracy (etc.) during practices, then the striking competition is 'routine'. ("Placing emphasis on accuracy" does not mean turning people to 'quivering wrecks' every week of course!)

*Alison Barnett* wrote, there is certainly something wrong with the attitude of the contest if anyone is reduced to that level, but on the plus side if the lady can tell that it 'was her bell' at fault then that is a good point as many bad strikers have no idea what they are doing so carry on blindly. Oops we are back to listening again. Ian hit the nail on the head with it should be no different than

what we are normally trying to achieve. Put back the fun element, wooden spoons rule ok.

*George Francis* added, competitions do enable the less experienced ringers to hear good ringing and to socialise but ringing is not a competitive activity. Of course it is nice to win, but if you can say that your performance was better than the last competition you entered, then you are a winner. In any case, all competitors have beaten those that didn't bother to take part. Much in ringing is about beating your 'personal best'.

*Caroline Birdsell* wrote, I'm fortunate to have large enough numbers at practice night to have selected two "group leaders"(experienced) & their teams (of mainly novice ringers). At the start of each practice night we let each team "do" their 3 minute piece. Non teams members are standing around with pen & paper doing (not very qualified) marking - but we come out usually with a unanimous decision & we are keeping a record week by week. Its not always the same group who "win" it helps with assessing needs of particular people to be addressed during the rest of that practice, and it makes the others listen. We mark faults at 1/4 if we can hear it, 1/2 if the public would notice & 1 point if there's a horrible clash - cricket scores are gradually getting lower!

*Ian Broster* replied, nice idea.

Encourages everyone to listen, and is something to do for people while they are not ringing. I will probably try this tonight. I said to the band at the last AGM I had a target for them to reach next year: to be able to score over 100 (of 120) in a mock-up striking competition. Getting the rest of the band to help assess each other seems better than just me doing it.

*Lynda Coles* replied, how is it possible to get this through to ladies such as the ones I described when the title of the event contains the word 'competition'? Even more importantly, to the dozens of others who do not turn up because

similar hang-ups stop them from entering? All three ladies are from different towers, and meet pretty regularly at one of their practice evenings. All are friendly. Two can ring Cambridge, which from my vantage point makes them skilled ringers. I would not describe any of them as over sensitive (if they were, I don't think they'd have got so far as they have!).

*Joan Kemp* wrote, there is an interesting debate going on in Scotland at the moment where a 'scratch team' won the striking competition on points (BUT the 'scratch' team was somewhat blue-blooded in ringing terms & just happened to consist of several of the best local ringers.... ) Debate on the ethics & other issues surrounding this situation has been heated & led to much discussion in the pub after ringing.

*John Harrison* wrote, not strictly a training issue, but relevant to team morale.

We too have an engraved wooden spoon hanging on the ringing chamber wall at the moment, except that it is for the winner (not loser) of the periodic choir v ringers bowling competition. The bowling contests don't do anything for our striking, and the results are even more unpredictable. We all try to win, but no-one gets upset about losing. Re ringing Cambridge, It does not follow. 'Skill' in my book is about the ability to produce a quality result. Cambridge can be badly struck the same as anything else, and the ability to get through it is no guarantee of quality. I agree that there is some positive correlation between people who can ring Cambridge and people who can strike well, but it is mainly caused by the fact that people who cannot properly control their bells, or who do not adequately understand the mechanics of speed change, find ringing so difficult that they are deterred from attempting anything complex.

### **Hard Hats.**

*Heather Peachey* wrote, I have just visited a tower where they use a teenagers' discarded (no longer 'cool'?) cycling helmet as a hard hat for working amongst the bells. I thought what a sensible and cost effective idea this was and decided to share it.

### **NRT Conference 2004**

*John Harrison* has written, everyone who attended the first NRT conference agreed it was very successful. The CC Education Committee recently discussed organising a second conference for NRT. We felt an interval of 18 months was sensible.

The provisional date is Saturday 8th May 2004. In picking a date, we realise it will be impossible to avoid every ringing event in the country, but we would not like to find that the selected date clashed with lots of society events, especially training events, so if you know of any good reason why that would be a bad date, please let me know.

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

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