



The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers

Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary September 2001

I hope everyone had a good holiday? I must give my apologies for missing out on August but there were only a handful of emails in so the executive decision was taken to leave it until September. We are certainly making up for it this month though!

Watching hands or ropes?

John Harrison kicked off the month with a thought from last month's tread about watching people's hands rather than ropes. Whilst at a ringing session he observed a lady looking up at the sallies at backstroke, he had already spoken to her and found that she was still a bit nervous and when raising the point about keeping her eyes at head level, she surprised him by immediately replying it was much to intimidating with everyone's faces as well as ropes and hands at head level!!

Michael Henshaw Agreed with John saying he could think of at least 3 other people who suffered the same thing, one of whom was a comparatively experienced ringer though always very nervous. He said an additional disadvantage was that when she rang with beginners she did not really help them much as she never looked at them.

Peter Wenham adds, all but 1 of his learners at present are mature persons. He is finding that they need a great deal more explanation compared to youngsters who work things out on their own. Mature learners are more analytical, needing to work out each step along the way. This is why he started the hands on theme and early trials are proving successful. He has written a help sheet that he hopes to include in his next Guild newsletter. *If anyone would like a copy, please can they contact me.*

John Harrison wrote that he believes there to be several other issues tucked in here. A lot of experienced ringers tend to look down slightly while ringing, as a better all round view of what is happening is obtained by their peripheral vision, rather than letting their attention be drawn to one or two particular bells. These people are usually more confident. He has heard the criticisms about learners not being helped by ringers not moving their heads to look at them, but is not entirely convinced. If he were an uncertain learner, he suspects he would be more interested in who to follow rather than who is/was just following him. He points out an advantage to not looking directly at the bell you are following leave your head free to issue encouraging signs/instructions to whoever needs it instead. A friendly face signalling me next is much more helpful. Of course someone avoiding faces due to nerves is unlikely to offer such helpful gestures.

Confidence

John Harrison continued from above with the question, should we merely assume that confidence will follow getting the technical details right, or should we seek to develop people's confidence as an end to itself? (If so how?) This is pertinent as lack of confidence is often the major factor undermining the development of a smooth, rhythmic style of ringing.

Rebecca George replied, she tries to teach, if not confidence, then at least a respect and lack of fear for the bell. The pupil being relaxed often helps a smooth rhythmic style of ringing. She demonstrates how there is no need for quick jerky movements. She has found that lack of confidence is what puts people off. At the moment she has a learner who feels she is letting them down as she cannot grasp call changes. To counter this she is trying to find other things for her to do like tenoring and plain hunt on handbells. Has anyone else tried this and does it work?

Caroline Birdsell wrote she also has a couple of inexperienced ringers who lack confidence, one who can only plain hunt and won't try trebling to anything else. What she did was to swap two bells before going plain hunt so the bells came out of rounds at that's all. She soon got to grips with it and it kept the more experienced on their toes. One of her problems is trying to move ringers on from all plain

hunting to plain hunt one the treble, too much of the first creates problems converting from numbers to places and rope/hand sight.

Peter Wenham added he goes strong on 'rhythm' but finds getting people to relax, especially mature persons, difficult. You can tell and demonstrate ad infinitum – but still they don't relax, until one day, it just happens. Until then we have a cycle of over pulling and lack of bell control. Any practical suggestions to encourage relaxing welcome. Replying to Rebecca he wrote, they regularly use a set of handbells for the last half hour of the Monday Club (of mainly mature learners) one person per bell, ringing PH3 with 4-5-6 cover, advancing to PH4, 5 and 6. They wouldn't win any striking contests but it is a good teaching aid and the covering and leading is beneficial. Most of the regular band learned PB5 on single handbells before ringing it on tower bells. It works! Replying to Caroline he says for the transition of PH to PB. When pupils have accomplished the mechanics of PH (via the 2,4,5,3 routine) He stands with them and points out the 'hands' following them at the start of each pull, the objective being to give them a visual appreciation of how the 'right' pair of hands looks. Then try this for PB5, preferably still standing with them.

John Harrison wrote, he has a youngster who is currently ringing call changes. She has a tendency to over pull a lot, struggling to keep the bell from being very wide until she drops the bell a bit then rings too close – so she repeats the cycle. Generally improving, she started one touch that way then relaxed and got better. Then, perhaps triggered by a trip, got sucked back in to over pulling. After the touch he told her she was ringing much better in the middle when she was relaxed, she nodded in agreement when he said it probably felt better too. He makes the point of moving learners onto different bells very early. Apart from being good in itself, it probably builds confidence and having been stretched a bit, on moving back to a less demanding bell, helps them to relax. People learn to do things accidentally, realising (or being told) that it is better, and then remembering what it feels like.

Peter Humphrey added "Odd ... I thought every ringer started this way. I know I did, 40-odd years ago, and it took a decade or more for me to get over it. Okay, perhaps I'm not well co-ordinated, but I'm sure there is a widespread problem in getting muscles to do new things. Of course it can only get worse as we leave our mid-twenties behind. I still don't know how to help a learner to discover the escape from the cycle. Any ideas, anyone?"

Peter Wenham replied, it takes practice and patience – practise by them and patience from us. One distinct cause of over-pulling is letting the bell go too far over balance; this leads to an escalation of energy needed until the pupil is 'fighting' with the bell, trying to keep place in rounds. Another self-induced cause is muscular tension. Tense arms absorb energy on the upswing, which is replaced by over pulling. Teaching more mature pupils to relax whilst ringing is easier said than done but is necessary and there is no instant solution, so back to his opening statement!!

Ringling Centres – Training Courses.

Roger Booth sent in the following information - Subscribers to NRT may be interested in plans for future training courses aimed at those who manage and use Ringling Centres. We do not restrict these courses to those who have received grants under the Worshipful Company of Founders scheme, but those who have not will have to pay their own costs. Up to now, Centres in receipt of grants from the Founders scheme (see Ringling World page 836) have been offered two weekend residential training courses. This has been held at a central location, and has necessitated providing two nights accommodation for most of the people involved. However, the Ringling Centres Committee has now decided that it will offer the training in a different way.

1. There will be a single residential weekend course aimed at those managing the centres, and this will cover such topics as setting objectives, management structures, assessing outcomes, finance, fund-raising, PR etc. The next of these courses is planned for London on 24 & 25 November 2001.
2. Now that there is a network of centres up and down the country, and often these are little more than an hour apart, we will hold a series of local one day training courses aimed at those that will use the centres. The topics covered will be teaching bell handling, teaching listening skills and how to use ringling centre equipment. The day would last from about 9 am till 6 pm and the ideal group size would be 4 - 6 delegates. However, timetabling of groups may enable us to accommodate up to 12 delegates. We feel that each centre will be considerably more effective if it is used by ringers further afield rather than just the local band, and does not rely on just one or two individuals. The second course will enable us to reach and enthuse many more people, for example neighbouring Tower Captains and District, Guild and Association Officers. It will also be a much more cost-effective use of our funding. Dates identified for these second courses are 16th February, 23rd February, 13th April and 20th April 2002. We would welcome expressions of interest from current or prospective Ringling Centres to hold one of these courses at their local Ringling Centre. Please reply to me off list at r.booth@which.net

If you would like to apply for funding under the Founders scheme, please contact Gail Cater on 01962-856112 or gailcater@8salters.freeserve.co.uk

Re-training without offending.

Micheal Hatchett sent in by letter, We have a problem here in Devon with so many people being taught to ring call changes "Devon Style" with long ropes, spliced tail ends, coils and floating top hands. Then when they wish to develop method ringing skills they find they cannot control their backstrokes. Thus for us moving from call changes to plain hunt frequently presents severe handling difficulties. We are keen to train the trainers and to recognise good trainers in some way, but we run the risk of offending those tower captains and instructors who are only interested in call changes and who don't see the need to make frequent adjustments to the length of the rope at backstroke. So we have two problems; first to train a new generation of trainers and secondly, to recognise in some positive way those trainers who teach good handling practice. It would be useful to exchange views and experiences on these and other related issues.

Karl Grave replied, he has only little experience of such towers but if you consider the phenomenal standard of striking achieved by ringers who 'can't control their backstrokes'. May be they could teach us something. If perfect striking is dependant on the rhythm of the ringing, then keeping the bells below the balance removes countless opportunities to destroy that rhythm. It would certainly be an interesting experiment to lower the bells slightly before attempting change ringing!

John Harrison added, that is an interesting suggestion, many people do already ring changes with the bell just below the balance, they are called heavy tenor ringers. They do generally get a better than average rhythm, but he wonders what is the main cause? Is it as Karl suggests that there is less chance to mess up the rhythm or is it because of the 'flywheel' effect? Or is it just that people who ring heavy tenors just need to be better ringers anyway? It would certainly be interesting to ring changes on lighter bells below the balance! Anyone like to give it a go? Please report back.

The really interesting angle would be if it could be used to help people who don't ring heavy bells to ring more rhythmically.

Peter Humphrey replied, drawn from his experience, he doesn't think it is the 'flywheel' effect. He finds striking easiest on the lightest bells, then the heaviest then last on those in the middle. With a standard band on standard bells the speed will settle with the tenor below the balance, the treble above it and the middle bells fluctuating between the two. This last condition is the hardest to control simply from the physics of the operation! (*A detailed description of this then followed which if anyone would like a copy of, please contact me.*) He once rang with a band that decided to ring the bells partway down then ring a course of Grandsire then continue bringing the bells down and it was remarkably successful and it would be a good idea to try it again. Any takers?

Dumb Bells

Alison Barnett asked, having heard and read about the use of dumb bells, After starting to teach in a largish tower but in a very built up area, with a lot of new learners, she wondered if any one could provide details of what installing a dumb bell entails and any uses/pitfall

Peter Rivet replied, there are definite advantages in having a dumb training bell in the tower away from the rope circle if you have room. Teaching learners during a normal practise can be rather disruptive, as everything else has to stop. On a reasonably light ring of eight, you can of course have a practise on the back eight, while the learners are taught on the (silenced) front two. Not always practicable on bells with a 30cwt tenor!

Peter Wenham sent in the details of the web site detailing how the Docklands Ringing Centre built theirs. If anyone would like a printout please contact me.

Peter Trotman wrote, his limited experience with wood-disk-iron-weights type dumb bell, is that it really doesn't feel much like a bell of several hundred weight as it turns much too slowly. He has had one for several years, which he used for ab initio handling, but now uses his 4th with the clapper tied and with simulator sound from the very beginning. This gets the student accustomed to the rather long draft (approx 60ft) from the start. He would really like to have a dumb bell of similar weight and weight distribution to the bell they use for teaching but has been quoted £2000 plus installation, so start saving the pennies!

This led to Silencing Bells

Tim Philips *wrote*, what dumb bells are trying to achieve is to teach learners to handle a rope/bell, without upsetting the neighbours with a constant single bell. But you can achieve this by two means.

1. Tie the clapper to the side of the bell. The disadvantage being the learner doesn't feel the clapper swinging and the absence of sound makes it harder for the learner to appreciate the delay between pull and strike. 2. Make and fit muffs out of a section of car tyre. We use these extensively when teaching new learners. They produce a very muffled but just audible sound and far outweigh the difficulty of acquiring a dumb bell, then fitting it somewhere, etc.

Christine Richardson uses both the methods detailed by Tim, a tied bell for initial handling then an equivalent of the car tyres (actually rubber used by cobblers for soling shoes or old belting is another source of these highly effective muffles) for 'open' ringing to get the feel of the bell moving and for initial rounds or 'following' practise. With a large group of learners it is best to have two teachers on

the go at once so unless fitting two dumbbells is an option, this different approach is probably more cost effective.

Frank Lewis suggests the best way to tie a clapper is to the centre of the bell since this gives better balance and does not make the clapper work loose and hitting the bell. (A clapper tied centrally can work loose but is less likely to hit the bell.) He achieves this by making a sort of noose around the canons (or padding if you don't have canons – and some folk put a noose around the waist) of the bell and turn it through 180 degrees so that the long bit of rope is hanging from the side of the bell away from you. You then lean under the bell, grab the loose end and tie a clove hitch around the flight of the clapper as it hangs centrally. If you then pull hard on the end of the rope and try to swing the clapper it will tighten the whole thing up. You then take the end of the rope and tie it firmly to the noose at the top and bingo! So long as you make sure the rope really is tight you will never have a problem. Removing the rope is just as simple, being a reverse of the tying process. A detailed instruction sheet, complete with diagrams, is available if anyone is interested. For a lot of learners, clapper ties made of wood are probably better, THB pg 77 shows several options.

Peter Trotman wrote, for a video demonstration of tying a clapper see the CCCBR video Bellhandling – a tutor's companion. This differs slightly from Frank's method, in that the initial loop is hooked onto the top of the centre bolt where it protrudes from the top of the headstock. Placing a small piece of rubber-like carpet underlay under the rope at each side of the bell reduced the risk of slippage and using the centre bolt as a fixing point allows the use of a pre-tied loop at each end of the rope. (Which seems slicker but probably doesn't save that much time!) He also feels that a new learner would not be able to appreciate the difference between a clapper swinging or not. He normally ties the clapper in the middle so to feel the same on either stroke and says one advantage is that it reduces the effective depth of set of the bell, reducing the effort required to pull the bell off so reducing the tendency to over pull. While still appreciating the need to teach pulling up to the balance etc you have to acknowledging that in the heat of the moment focusing on some other factor, this will frequently be forgotten. With a simulator hooked up, the sound of the bell is not an issue.

Pam Copson wrote re the suggestion of using Launton bell ties that the following may be of interest; 1) They were made out of crossbars of old style telegraph poles! 2) They have little metal dingler bars swinging right at one end so to hit the bell to make a small ding at each stroke. The learner who made them carved inscriptions on the bars i) Silence is Golden & ii) Hold you Tongue. 3) At nearby Barford we noticed was loose and making a noise against the bell. After ignoring this for a week or two, they realised that the whole tie had slipped lower down the bell due to the clapper bolt coming unscrewed – no cotter pin!!

Richard Pargeter said after watching the video that it took 2.5 minutes to tie the bell and it still wasn't completely finished, fitting his wooden ties takes a couple of seconds, it takes longer to climb in and out of the pit!

Hands and Tail Ends

Jenny Cornwell posted that she is teaching a learner with many of the classical handling faults, including taking one hand off at the top of the hand stroke with the tail end going out in a good arc! Watching her and other ringers, she notes; Where the sally is caught from behind, i.e. between the ringer and the rope, (1) it is easier to get the end of the tail to lie in the crutch of the thumb; (2) the rope does not normally swing out into the centre of the rope circle; (3) then one can concentrate on bringing both hands down together. It is better to put one fault right at a time as often the learner is trying to cope with call changes as well. Certainly her learner has improved since catching from behind!

The suggestion was made for the learner to practise on a 'dead rope' and Jenny said she would lend her one to practise at home. *John Harrison* said to make sure she had got the detail right before practicing it unsupervised.

Peterborough Guild Training Day.

Peter Wenham advertised the above training day to be held on Saturday 24 November based at Barton Seagrave. For groups ranging from a handling clinic to Cambridge Minor. Any volunteer helpers most welcome. For details please contact Hilary Aslett 01327 830486.

Frank Lewis question the request for volunteers saying one of the mistakes they have learned is to never ask for volunteers. All helpers must be hand picked reliable good handlers and strikers, capable of offering advice on handling or ringing the method perfectly as appropriate. They must also be capable of discussing problems on a 1-to-1 footing with the learners. We always start off our quarterly training days with an admonition to helpers warning them that they will be criticised too if they don't get it right. You do need to keep a good sense of fun with this sort of thing, but it can be done. If a learner spots that one of the helpers is not getting his/her arms up at backstroke we ask him why not. You can lose the odd helper this way, but the ones who stay the course and come again are worth their weight in gold.

There are plenty of such people around, but you must ensure that they, and they alone, are your

helpers.

Phil Gay notes with interest Frank's horror at the thought of 'volunteers' and asks has he not seen the ads in the RW for helpers for weekend courses. Making much bigger demands on helpers in terms of sustained quality over a longer period? One of the features that distinguish the Keele ringing course is that in 14 years it has never advertised for helpers. They are all invited and also paid subsistence and travel costs so not to be out of pocket!

Catherine Lewis added, What Frank didn't continue to explain (because you can't write a complete treatise with every posting) was that we often discuss why it is that "experts" do not always handle in the way that learners are being taught. That is that most good ringers are able to handle according to the book, but don't necessarily do so except when life gets difficult (e.g. when on a bell that's a bit big for them). This is a fact of life - look round at any practice. At present, for the learners, life is always difficult (they'll agree) and so they must always handle properly. There are also a few good ringers who never handle according to the book, but manage to ring really well in spite of it, but we want our learners to find it easy to ring well, don't we?

Peter Trotmen concluded, Absolutely: I always stress that this is why they shouldn't emulate those who can get away with less than good technique, at least while they're learning.

Classroom Aids

Caroline Birdsell in reply to a question from last month, sent in her office supplier OSY Ltd, Dormy House, Boroughbridge Road, Ripon, HG4 1UE phone 01765 690490 fax 01765 690292 can supply A1 (flipchart size) squared paper in packs of 5 pads - 25cm squares - they deliver next day to anywhere.

Jenny Cornwell suggested drawing 1/2" squares on a sheet of A3 then having them blown up onto a piece of A1 paper. If you can get some one with a CAD or Drawing Package to do it for you, then it can be taken to be printed from paper or from file.

Joan Kemp sent in, this doesn't totally answer the question, but there's a brilliant wee program called 'Graphpaper' which enables you to print out your own paper. My version is 'Postcardware'; Its shareware now. Good for printing out squared paper for pricking out ringing methods...

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

Alison Barnett. (NRT Information Manager)
9 Galahad Drive, Stretton,
Burton on Trent, Staffs, DE13 0GY
Tel. 01283 515840