The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers

Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary May 2001

This is the first of a series of regular updates for postal subscribers. It contains a summary of the topics discussed on the e-mail list. If you would like to add any comments, please send them to the address at the end of the bulletin.

Training courses

The month started with a thread about various training courses being organised around the country. The point was raised that trainers should not aim too high and should ensure that their pupils' ability was up to what the course was trying to teach them.

Courses advertised were:-

- Making the most of your simulator – Braunston – 19 May
- Ringing up/down & plain hunting – Chesterfield District – 21 July
- Improving Striking (full Derby Diocesan Association event) – 29 September

If you wish to publicise a course or seminar through NRT, contact me at the address below.

Using simulators

A long discussion about simulators followed, covering their use, abuse and a few ideas. Using simulators as a form of electronic sound control seemed to be the norm for most people who had them and it was pointed out that they were missing out on a great training aid.

(John Harrison) Simulators were originally designed for use by one ringer with the other n-1 bell sounds being generated automatically ... this provides the person ringing with a valuable experience that is hard to generate by other means.

- All the other bells ring perfectly
- They will do it indefinitely without boredom or fatigue
- They do not need lots of (skilful) other ringers
- There are no ropes to follow.

The first three are obvious pluses in terms of giving someone an ideal environment. The last one might not seem so, but it is in fact extremely valuable. The only way to ring well is to ring smoothly and rhythmically, and to develop accurate listening to know when you are striking in the right place. Ropesight is not needed for good striking, though it is extremely useful for knowing where you are, seeing what is going on, checking what you are doing and putting right mistakes. It is also comforting since we are visual animals.

Following ropes is also addictive, and many ringers come to rely on it to the extent that they do not develop good listening skills and they do not learn to develop and trust a good rhythm. Using a simulator to ring rounds as soon as you can handle a bell forces you to use rhythm and listening. It is a very benign environment for doing so, because the rhythm around you is perfect, the sound is (or should be) clear, and there are no psychological pressures of letting down the others if you make mistakes.

In my experience raw beginners do not normally have a problem doing this, unlike some 'experienced' ringers who have become so hooked on seeing ropes that they cannot relax and ring at a constant speed. My pupils spend several hours ringing rounds (and covering) with a simulator before I inflict other ringers on them. Some people have reported that this stunts the development of ropesight. It could if that was all you did, but there are plenty of ways to develop all three skills in a balanced programme of instruction. The two books you ought to look at if you have not already done so are: 'Simulators and Teaching' and 'Ringing Skills', both from CC Publications.

(Richard Laing) - Ringing without a rope to follow was a big leap to make. Having more than one person ringing allows someone to follow another bell in rounds using both ears and eyes as a first step in using a simulator. *(John Harrison)* It isn't a leap if you do it at the start. In fact going from no other ropes and your own bell sound (or no sound) to lots of other ropes, lots of other bell sounds, lots of other people and lots of irregularities is a much bigger leap than just adding a rhythmic sound to fit in with ringing your own bell.

(Ian Friend) - Uses a Cummins simulator with learners once they can handle a bell competently. We turn on the simulator to introduce sound. Just the learner's bell to begin with - to associate the strike of the bell with the position of the hands during the cycle. Next make the pupil's bell the tenor for rounds on six at a fairly slow speed. ... the speed was increased until we had attained a more normal speed for our bells. ... progressively more difficult by making the pupil's bell the fifth, fourth, third and so on. We left the treble and leading till last, as this seemed to cause the most difficulty.

We found that learners could fit in when ringing rounds with a "live" band much quicker. During the simulator exercises, full explanations and details were given as to what we were trying to do and achieve. Advice was given to pupils in terms of speed, e.g. "you need to be quicker at handstroke".

For more experienced ringers the simulator opens up many possibilities: Ringing methods you may not be able to ring otherwise. Ringing on higher numbers. Two or even three ringers using the simulator together to ring a method is really demanding and requires a lot of concentration.

I think the greatest advantage of having the simulator was to allow us to have a second practice night without annoying the neighbours. Increased time on the end of a rope made a real difference.

(Mike Henshaw) Having a rope to follow as well as the sound is good preparation for ringing with other people. Rhythm in ringing is not just about sound, but rhythmic movement of the arms. The skill we are trying to develop is co-ordination between sound and pulling. The visual aspect when people are first trying to develop the physical aspect is very valuable - but the ringer the learner is trying to follow must be good! I have found that this is more helpful than the learner just ringing on the simulator by himself/herself. Later, when one is moving them on from rounds (say covering) then ringing one bell with the simulator putting in all the rest is very helpful. By this stage their co-ordination of listening and pulling has developed sufficiently.

(Mike Worthington) Two major benefits of a simulator: the ringer can be trained to listen from the outset and can acquire many key skills irrespective of the standard of the band they ring with.

(John Harrison) Since only one person can use a simulator at once (as described) it is not sensible for everyone to turn up at the same time. But since there is no external sound you can use it whenever you want

Installing simulators

(Paul Martin) attended the seminar at Braunston and said it was both interesting and educational. He asked if anyone could show him different types installed. *(Ian Friend), (Don Jones)* and *(Roger Booth)* all offered. Roger told us that grants were available through the CCCBR 'Sponsored Ringing Centres' scheme for the purchase of equipment like simulators.

Silencing the bells

(Peter Wenham) responded to hassle tying clappers - We use clapper locks, 3"x2" wooden bars across the soundbow of the bell, clamped to the clapper shank. Two of us can lock or unlock all six clappers in under five minutes, with good access to the bell chamber.

(*Ian Friend*) Said tying the clappers centrally with rope only took about 5 minutes as it is quite easy to move about from bell to bell.

Time on the end of a rope

(Mike Worthington) Time on the end of a rope is the key factor in progressing (given a few pre-requisites such as a decent teacher and some half decent bands to ring with). When learning bell handling they get typically half an hour to an hour a week Time On The End Of A Rope and usually make good progress. The moment they have to share time with a band this time drops to minutes a week and their skills go through the floor with it.

Teaching a whole band

(Timothy Mann) If you put a group learners into rounds together, then after the first dreadful racket they gradually sort themselves out and develop a proper rhythm.

(Catherine Lewis) Yes, but you do need a bit of structure - like someone steady on the Treble (yourself if you know their handling's safe) and hopefully the tenor. You do of course have to do a lot of theory - talk about listening to the whole rhythm, spreading out evenly, open handstrokes and closed back, keeping an eye on the one in front of the one in front, etc - before you start. All this is really useful, but often neglected. People brought up this way are often more useful in rounds and call changes than supposedly more advanced people from more privileged environments.

You don't have to be teaching entirely single-handed to need these strategies. The argument about how much ringing they get of an evening still applies even if you have numbers of willing helpers from outside.

Teaching children

(Paul Martin) has four new starters, all aged 12, uses Pam Copson's OPL and "Bell Club" stuff. Is there is any other literature aimed at young children? His daughter is 9, understands all the theory, but has fairly small hands, and finds it difficult holding the sally and tail end together. His 6 year old son wants to come too. He did not want to let him loose on tower bells, thought about starting handbells, and asked whether anyone had any experience or advice for teaching the very young?

(*Phil Gay)* once produced some worksheets for use at a children's Saturday activity club where he ran a handbell group. and offered to look for one. He said he was mean with ropes, and so nearly always has a used one with a very thin sally, which he puts on the 2nd, used for initial teaching. He had taught under-10s on a very light (tenor 1cwt) ring of bells, getting them up to hunting fairly easily.

(Liz Raynor) Suggested the method maker that comes in the Pam Copson range. Her two learned at 10 and 9 and for the next couple of years found weaving methods on a peg board a much more enjoyable way of learning them than reading a book. They found Steve Coleman's books about the best for reading. The language level is not too difficult and the print size makes them friendly to young readers. She suggested: teaching them to call Call Changes from the side (you can teach them the theory using a pack of playing cards) and getting them to stand with other ringers so that they learn methods. Her two learned on a 26cwt ten. She felt an advantage of learning early, when all bells are large in relation to their weight is that they developed techniques for ringing larger bells naturally, moving round the circle gradually. At 17 and 14 they're keen as ever and thoroughly addicted.

The Training Directory

Copy of the letter from the CC Education Committee to the Ringing World. A copy of the *Training Directory* is sent each year to all branch secretaries and known education officers. The questions being asked were:-

•How many people see the directory?

•How many of these find it useful?

•What improvements, if any, would people like to see?

•Any suggestions on how to get a greater circulation of information?

A summary of any feedback will be posted later.

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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