



The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary July 2001

Welcome to the third 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.

Mini Rings

Richard Parsons started off the month by asking "has anyone ever learned on a mini ring before ever ringing in the tower or on hand bells? –To what extent do skills learned on a mini ring transfer to heavier bells?" *John Harrison* copied them across with the comment that he has never taught anyone on a mini ring but would expect the answer to differ between a mini ring in the 10lb range to that of 1 in the 1cwt range. Not wanting to open an argument on what is/is not a mini ring, if you take say 10cwt as a typical 'normal' ring, the skills associated with a ring 1/10 of the weight and say 50% of the wheel size would be different to those 1/100 of the weight and 25% of the wheel size. How many people have experience of training people on (any sort of) mini ring before moving them on to 'more normal' sized bells? Is it easier? Does the transfer raise problems? Is the overall two stage process harder or easier than teaching direct on tower bells?

Reg Hitchings Replied, he was just about to find out how people taught on light bells differ from those taught on a 'more normal' weight as he is about to start teaching on a newly installed ring of 6 hung with stays but the tenor weighing in at a hefty 67lbs!! Watch this space!!

Gill Hughes Writes that in July 2000 she took 2 mini rings to the international Scout and Guide camp at Chatsworth, Derbyshire. During the week they gave around 300 young people the chance to have a ring. Within 20 minutes the majority with one to one tuition using single handed strokes, were ringing on their own. If they showed particular 'aptitude' they were invited back for another go and managed rounds and called changes. They always explained to the youngsters that they would not be able to walk into a tower and ring the bells but were given a letter of introduction and the address of their local secretary. She agrees with John that the skills would be more easily transferred from some bells than others, both rings that she used were in the 50-60lb range and the one that most found easiest was the ring with the bigger wheels. The success rate was the same for both rings though and ringers could change between rings easily. In the 10lb range, non-ringers learned to handle the bells sometimes quicker than ringers do! But she has no experience of transferring anyone onto tower bells!

Terminology!

Peter Wenham wrote, "In a talk given at the Ringing World Roadshow Steve Coleman commented that the term 'ropesight' apparently originated with Jasper Snowdon, since he could find no mention of this term prior to J. S's. book of that title. Since then ringers have spoken of 'ropesight' when teaching others. It is a subject which is difficult to explain, thus learners are often told, 'Keep trying and one day you will see it'. Consulting the Tower Handbook one reads, 'ropesight is a visual skill and describing it is therefore difficult'. (p226.)" He has puzzled as to why acquiring this skill should be so difficult and now offers the possible answer that using the word 'ropesight' makes one watch the ropes, but do we (the enlightened) infact watch other ringers hands? He is going to put this to the test by telling all future learners to watch other ringers hands when teaching plain hunt as he recons that it could be the word itself that is causing all the problems!! He will report on the results! Another watch this space!!

Michael Henshaw disagreed, 'watching the hands will have their heads nodding so violently they will all be sick and still not ring in the right place! He recons the problem is that people think that ringing has something to do with a visual skill – when actually it has comparatively little to do with watching if it is to be done well! The predominant skills are listening and timing (rhythm). When you say 'people suddenly get ropesight' He thinks that they have actually got the hang of timing instead. You can only 'spot' bells if you're around the right place, the importance of standing behind a learner pointing out the bells is only any good if they end up picking up the timing, if the only skill developed is the visual sense then they will not be much good when the helper isn't there. He writes " Although Jasper Snowdon did a very great deal for ringing, I really regret his invention of the term 'ropesight.' It has made both tutors and learners think ringing has too much to do with looking at the expense of listening. I really wish we could reverse this somehow. I think that the result is that people can end up picking up the 'timing' thing almost by accident, or at least because they naturally have a sense of timing, whilst they are erroneously focused on 'watching.' " He concludes it would therefore be better to tell learners to listen!

John Harrison Also pointed out that the Tower handbook section 11.9a also says; Ropesight involves looking at the ropes as a whole, and picking out useful information from what is seen'

He agrees that the skill is to listen and wishes that this could be spread more widely but does not agree that ropesight doesn't exist but that it has nothing to do with the ability to strike accurately as alone it is not enough, but you can get useful info from observing all the ropes. When things are going OK, it gives more confidence to see what is happening around you. If you are lost you can work out what is happening by seeing what other people are doing. In a pile up, by seeing roughly who is where, you are more likely to be able to help them.

Alistair Donaldson Wrote that he was sure that the word wasn't necessarily the problem – Does anyone have a similar problem with “Hindsight”? (which he suggests does not involve looking backwards all the time!) He knows several ringers who complain they ‘haven't got IT’ and he feels that this is because he can't tell them ‘how to get IT!’ “Is there a training course somewhere?” He suggests that the main skill in ropesight is anticipation, just seeing what is going on is part of the skill but anticipating what will happen next is more important than keeping the timing/rhythm steady. “I am sure I read/heard somewhere that optimal anticipation is what enables tennis stars to return 150mph serves that few others even see Isn't there a similarity there?”

Michael Henshaw replies that keeping your timing rock steady is what transforms individuals into a good team! He thinks it is generally accepted that good ringing requires the bells to strike evenly and consistently, without changes to the timing. Basically, the visual aspect gives reassurance when the ringing is good and helps the touch to survive when it is bad. Both these things are essentially substitutes to perfect timing by ear, the visual is required as most of us are not good enough to do one without the other. The point he was making was that many of us, in teaching, have let the visual aspect dominate over the listening aspect and this is a mistake with a musical instrument.

S Moore Returning to the question of how to teach a visual skill, suggests that the learner focuses on a point somewhere in the centre of the ringing circle, resting their eyes on that point rather than any of the ropes. This makes it easier to see all the ropes and to hopefully see which rope is coming down first, the first confidence building steep!!

John Harrison was taught to imagine a horizontal line and to observe the ropes crossing it. (The basis of the method he recommends in the tower handbook Pgs 225 – 230 & 193 – 197) He suggested encouraging people to practise ropesight while standing out is much better than just telling them to do something and leaving them to get on with it. Starting with small numbers is obvious sense, I learnt to hunt on 4 bells (in a 5 bell tower but there is a lot to be said for teaching that way, even in an 8 bell tower).

Pam Copson Says, the problem some learners seem to have is with the difference between backstroke (where the first rope is the lower) and handstroke (where the first rope is – except for the first few moments – the higher!) Her strategy is to sit beside them when not ringing and to ask them to observe 2 ringers on the far side of the chamber. (Whilst ringing a method) Asking “which is first?” “when do they swop?” Then add in a third bell etc. Then the same but with “Which is last?”

Mike Davis in reply to looking at the floor, agrees, adding the point, it's best to minimise head and eye movements, take advantage of peripheral vision as we do when driving and above all never panic or the field of vision closes up!

Timothy Mann Took a slightly different approach where he had to teach a lot of learners with only one or two ‘experienced’ ringers. He taught Plain Hunt, Bob Doubles and Grandsire Doubles by numbers. They can then ring without the numbers very efficiently to grandsire doubles. He gives 2 reasons for this, 1 they only have to look for 3 bells, 2 they have by this time learnt to hold up sufficiently when hunting up and to pull in when hunting down. He has found many people who allegedly have ‘ropesight’ problems are just not holding up or pulling in sufficiently. He also runs the rule that no one waits for anyone. If people are not sure which bell to follow they pull in/hold up depending which direction they are going but they do not wait. He adds that he does encourage the band to count places at the same time as learning numbers and has been known to ask them to count out loud.

Frank Beech Says the secret is to keep it simple. If you have 12 bells don't start the learners on plain hunt on 11!! He has found that 6 bells is a good number for speed and pace he recommends that the following be explained on a chart/blackboard before ringing;

“Start, just for the exercise on two bells and while the other four keep a steady beat teach your learner to dodge up and down and make a place with an adjacent bell.

Now move to plain hunt on three bells, use bell numbers 2,3 and 4 with your learner on 4.

Instructions to the learner are on go. “Watch the two bells in front of you change over and the next change the bell you were following will ring behind you, so follow the one that is left. And the next change lead by following the treble. While leading at back stroke you have to find which of the two bells is following you, ring over it and then the other. You have completed the cycle”. As the instructor every time you think they have cracked it or are cheating

(remembering the numbers) change which 3 you are ringing or the order of the bells, and when you are sure they have got it move to plain hunt on 4 bells, then 5 and 6.” He adds that the only problem he finds is with helpers convinced that learning to hunt on less than 5 and by memorising numbers is a waste of time!! He says that this method is easy to follow and you can call the bells into any order first. He has trained learners from good rounds to Cambridge minor in one year with only one practise night a week.

Michael Henshaw Agrees, saying he always starts his learners off on 3 stating his reason is that the rounds need to be perfect to start with. The learner can lead by this stage but often not perfectly. If rounds are variable in speed before they start they will stand less chance of learning about speed changes in plain hunt properly. The most important thing to know is not which bell to follow (so like you I tell them) or even (in principle) which place they are in, but whether to ring earlier, later or the same place, (we say faster, slower or the same speed as this seems easier to understand). Your method of teaching focuses correctly (in my opinion) on this aspect.

Teaching Called changes

Jean Sanderson Sent in a postal comment to this thread, she agrees that walking the changes can make it clearer and can also help on more difficult methods. She found it was worth remembering that her right foot was the handstroke and walked through Stedman slow work as if it were a dance. She points out that there are lots of different ways of calling changes and it is only fair to warn learners that they will meet several of them. If the conductor tells the learner (or anyone) to follow the bell ringing in front of the one he/she is following, the one

being followed knows who is parting him/her from the bell in front. The bell lying behind has to keep steady and watch. Rather than starting from rounds, a better example is this:

132546 to get to queens, call 5 to 3

5 knows where to go: check in to follow 3

2 having been following 3 then knows that 5 has been called forward, so

can hold up over a known bell

4 having been following 5 stays steady and looks for new bell: 2...

It can be quite hard for a learner to see the bell in front of the one he/she is following, and if the two bells are one to the left and one to the right, very few will be able to see it. She feels calling up is confusing and although hears that it helps to develop ropesight, she feels it only leads to despair. Whichever system is used it must be consistent.

On the pupil who opened his left hand late, she agrees that he might be fearful of losing the tail end and may not be tucking the tail into the crotch of the thumb. Most ringers are surprised by the strength of the grip which can be demonstrated by the pupil holding his/her hand out with the fingers flat and the rope in the crotch of the thumb. With the thumb in line with the fingers even a hard tug will not shift the tail end unless the holder releases it.

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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