



The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary Jan 2002

Welcome to the 6th Newsletter for the NRT, many apologies for the silence over Christmas but I think we all just get 'overtaken' by the event.

Ropesplicing

The beginning of December we received a mail from *Caroline Birdsell* telling us of her experience when her request for new ropes was limited to 2. After buying 80ft for the price of 50ft, she arranged a rope splicing course with her guild and spent an interesting afternoon learning about splicing and general tower maintenance. Their success rate is good, turning top-ends and removing worn parts and the PCC now realising that they are 'serious' about having decent ropes have allowed them to order a couple more. Her point is that there must be other towers who, like her area, have recently re-started and found the ropes to be in poor condition but with a little bit of wear left in the sallies, she suspects many ringers are unaware of some work done by very few people in bell maintenance and upkeep, and though courses often include a 'sideline' workshop for steeple keepers – splicing is something we can all try. (And the gungy rope conditioning stuff is wonderful handcream!)

John Harrison replies splicing is indeed something everyone can try. We could beneficially teach more people to splice. Not only is it useful, but it is a way to involve members of a band who might not be particularly experienced or proficient on the end of a rope. Splicing can be very satisfying and rewarding. If you can splice, why not organise a course, if you cant, find someone that can. You will need plenty of rope cut into shortish lengths, somewhere comfortable and easy to clean for a venue and a knife to cut the rope and anyone who can splice should bring their own tools. You can make useful progress in an evening and have a sample of your handiwork to take home!

Peter Wenham said he would be prepared to run a workshop at Braunston(Nr Rugby) or at any convenient venue for dates early 2002. Send in a request to me if interested.

Heather Peachey ran a successful course in the churchyard of a 5 bell tower during ringing at a summer meeting last year. With plenty of ringers about, there was always enough to ring indoors and something to occupy those waiting outdoors. They provided enough small pieces of rope so that some could be taken away to practise on. It is quite possible to run such sessions any time of the year given somewhere suitable within a church. This means that participants don't have to pay but you could suggest they donate something to the BRF.

Wedding Traditions

Caroline Birdsell kicked off the newyear with a question about wedding ringing for ringers weddings. She wants to know any traditions performed in any towers like " how do you perform a guard of honour with bell ropes?" or any other suggestions?

Paul Loxton replied In the tower he rings at they fire the bells. This is an 18th/19th century tradition to represent canon fire to bring good news. It is done by the Tenor leading followed by the next heaviest bell a very short interval after and so on. The tenor taking the longest time to complete a stroke so as the bells pull off they all strike together to produce the affect. It's recommend you practice first!!

Heather Peachey said that a member of the band getting married is a very special occasion and naturally the bells should be provided free of charge. The happy couple may want something memorable on the day, maybe something captured on film/video. If you chamber is accessible, may be they could briefly join in the ringing or pose for a photo. If this cant be done then how about a display with some newish ropes or hand bells. Even if the bride isn't a ringer she could pose with them either outside the church or at the reception.

Caroline Birdsell queried, how many times do you 'fire' bells and then how many 'rounds of canon fire' would you do – over how long a period?

John Preston commented that they had always shied away from firing bells as it is remarkably difficult to get it spot on, it really does take a lot of practise to get it right and the difference in sound between right and almost right is significant. It should sound like gunfire when you get it right. Instead they opt for jumping from rounds into queens then back into rounds again. Even this isn't easy but it seems to be fairly common practice in the NW of England. Although why - He hasn't a clue!

Paul Loxton replied they normally ring the couple out of the church with some well struck rounds, then fire the bells for 3 consecutive handstrokes and backstrokes. Then off into some form of change ringing depending on the band. He has never seen anything in writing as to how often and when and yes they did have to build up their experience and started by only doing one handstroke and backstroke at a time.

Joan Kemp recalled one recent ringer getting married took part in the ringing herself before the service, then changed into her wedding dress in the corner of the tower. Others have been contented to let us ring as well as we could for them. NB they always ring before & after the service – about 10 mins each – you don't want it to be too long! Ringing for friends children at other churches they have similarly rung before and after, ringing standard methods and rounds. No firing within earshot. She suggests to ring whatever the ringer particularly enjoys – if he's a Stedman ringer then ring Stedman, though his mind may just be elsewhere as you ring....

A Question?

Alison Barnett asked how to overcome handling faults which only really appear on a different draught of rope? Their recent band of recruits seem to have higher than average, handling faults which just don't seem to be fixable, but they can all ring their bells perfectly and bell control is now almost spot on. BUT and here's the but, if you don't exaggerate the 'flick' at the bottom of the backstroke on the middle 3 bells, you get the 'rat in a drainpipe' syndrome. Visitors from the local towers all have long unguided draughts. They struggle with the 3 lively bells as they don't have such a flick. Her ringers due to the flick, (she can't see the arms going out anywhere else.) throw the ropes out dreadfully away from home.

Francis Mitchell suggested that one way of making ropes wave around when the holes are a long way up is to not swing your hands right down at Handstroke. Letting go with the right hand when the arm is horizontal tends to shoot the Sally forward. Cured by keeping elbows close to your sides and following through so both hands go right down, and come up on the end of the rope. There are of course many ways of ringing badly, but it sounds as though this is not "Bad" just "Different".

Heather Peachey commented, You say your learners tend to throw their ropes out as they 'flick' at the bottom of the backstroke pull. A common cause of the rope looping quite wildly is a learner separating their hands too far before catching the sally. This won't be as apparent in a tower with a low ceiling but in a higher one the effects can be quite dramatic. It's of course a natural enough thing for a learner to want to separate the hands quite widely so as to have a good stab at catching the sally.

Peter Humphrey replied, Is it really a problem? It could work itself out over time as my own experiences show. I learnt in a tower with a clock case occupying the space the tenor rope wanted, so a notch had been cut in the corner of the case to let the rope pass. The result: solid wood meets hand at hand or back stroke. I soon learnt to ring without reaching up. That was over 40 years ago, and I still ring with more-bent elbows than your typical tutor would approve of today - though of course I'm a bit more relaxed about it. Provided that I make sure to include a do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do clause, with explanation, when helping a learner, there doesn't seem to be any real problem.

Michael Barnicott added, I also learnt to ring in a chamber with a low ceiling and our treble does the "kicking sally" trick. However, it wasn't until I rang in a tower with a very long draught that all my handling faults were fully exposed. Ropes were flying around and the sally never seemed to come down in the same place twice. Advice was sought, and offered, and I found that ensuring both strokes were long and fully "pulled through" helped. Additionally, when I "threw the rope through the hole in the floor" on back stroke I found that I was not throwing it close enough to my feet - on a low draught that fault was remedied by the rope guides, but on a long one it led to a wild sally.

John Preston works on the basis of two principles with bell handling problems: 1 - the rope, and therefore the hands pulling them, needs to descend precisely vertically and in a straight line. (There is a possible exception when rope chutes run at an angle.) A long draught simply accentuates the need for this. 2 - the rope should be under tension for the greatest possible proportion of the stroke. These two principles suggest any number of tips and if the pupils understand the principles of what we are trying to achieve, they are more likely to get there. Do try to push the rope through the imaginary hole in the floor, and do make sure that imaginary hole is exactly under the rope guide boss. Bear in mind that unless you force them to do otherwise, hands at the end of straight arms describe a circle centred at the shoulder joint. You need to get them running straight up and down.

Fred Bone said he finds it easier to stand slightly forward with a long draught and slightly back with a short. "Looping ropes" is also sometimes caused by the ringer holding the tail end in the wrong place when catching the sally. If the tail end is held in front of the sally (away from the ringer) in the ringer's fingers rather than at the back (near the ringer) in the ringer's thumb, then the rope can loop quite wildly, sometimes right across the ringer. He's seen some learners quite frightened by this.

Calling

Mike Winterbourne requests ideas for a course about 'calling', covering those who have never spoken in a tower to simple touches. He wants ideas for the real starter i.e. 1. Keep breathing 2. Rehearse in the mirror at home 3. Speak in the correct place but relative to whom?

Dumb Bells

Peter Dale sent, Dover restoration is about to get under way and alongside the main scheme is the installation of some dumb bells in a roof space over a vestry. The PCC are happy about this, provided the ceiling won't fall down. We plan to construct up to eight dumb bells along the lines of the Bermondsey design. Appreciating that this may not be an exact science, but is there any data available on the horizontal and vertical stresses exerted by dumb bells? He guesses that a function of the point mass and its distance from the pivot is probably involved.

Burton Area Meetings

Alison Barnett sent in details of the next 4 meetings if anyone is in the area, they are: Rolleston on Dove, Staffs. Sat 16th Feb 7.30 - 9.00. Tutbury, Staffs. Sat 16 March 7.30 - 9.00, St Chads Burton on Trent. Sat 20 April 7.30 - 9.00, Stretton Sat 18 May 7.30 - 9.00.

NRT Conference

We have now fixed the date as Saturday 9th November, 2002. Please put the date in your diaries. The venue will be the Towcester Ringing Centre, which has excellent facilities for hosting such events. (For anyone unsure where Towcester is, it is 10 miles west of Northampton, on the A5). The detailed programme for the day is still being finalised. It will include practical demonstrations and discussion of training techniques and training aids, as well as discussions of important issues for ringing training. We have deliberately not produced a detailed list as we wanted to get your input, but to start the ball rolling here are a couple of points we would like to cover: - Some sort of discussion or review of the material we have developed in the MTM (Management, Teaching and Maintenance) courses. We would like to make it available for more widespread use. - Practical ideas on how to make local training events easy to run, effective and successful. Please say what you would like to see included and what you want to get out of the event, along with any other comments. Especially, say what topics you would like to be covered. We will organise some ringing in the early evening for people who wish to stay on and sample the quality of local towers. Further details will be sent out as they become available. Meanwhile, please make sure that the date is in your diary and, if possible, confirm your interest in attending to Catherine Lewis, Mallans, Main Rd, Sundridge, Sevenoaks, TN14 6EF, 01959 563767, CatherineMLewis@cs.com.

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

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