



The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary June 2002

Welcome to the 9th Summary of NRT postings. There were two main themes to this months postings. Please note my change of address at the bottom of the page.

Paid tuition

Roger Booth sent in this request. In the Docklands area of London, we currently have eight people learning to handle, plus a similar number learning to ring rounds and call changes and plain hunt. This is all very healthy, but our existing instructors are more or less fully committed, and there are still several towers where more ringers are needed.

We were planning to run a recruitment campaign in July, by opening up some of these towers and providing ringing demonstrations at various Parish fairs and community events, but realistically we couldn't cope with very many more recruits at the moment without either them or our existing ones not getting the attention they need. We could end up putting a lot of effort in, for no net gain. As we have built up a fairly healthy position financially, we wondered if we could set up a 'ringing school' say between 9.30am and 12.30am, to meet for say four or six Saturday mornings during July/August. This would cover handling from scratch up to assisted rounds stage. About 12 - 18 hours tuition would be required, we believe.

If successful, we could then look at further courses to cover rounds and call changes and plain hunting. If Saturday mornings are not convenient, Sunday afternoons might be suitable instead. In order to find the additional tutors needed to run such a venture, we wondered whether we should offer the following incentives

* To pay travelling expenses

* To pay subsistence (e.g. pub lunch afterwards).

* To pay a fee for each session attended. £10 seems to be the going rate for weddings. Would this be enough? We would welcome comments on such a scheme. Does anyone have any experience of operating anything like this?

If your reply would be of general interest, please reply direct to NRT.

Specific offers of help etc. can be sent direct to me at r.booth@which.net

John Harrison replied, Rogers request is timely as it raises an issue that we shall all probably have to face sooner or later. It is rapidly becoming apparent that the availability of skilled manpower, and not facilities, will increasingly become the factor limiting the ability to train people. Busy lives and expectations of rapid progress, make the traditional hour a week increasingly unacceptable. With a ringing centre it is possible to train at more or less any time and as often as you need, but equally busy trainers are unlikely to be able to match this.

Our society is increasingly polarizing into those in work with no time, and those out of work with plenty of time (and in many cases skills) but limited finances. Phil Gay pointed this out several years ago. The exercise has been spectacularly successful in recent years at obtaining financial support and investing in towers and bells, but in the way we have traditionally operated, we would be hard pressed to 'turn money into training' on a large scale, if it were on offer. This topic is currently under active consideration by the CC Education

Committee, so we would be most interested to hear your views. Could money help the exercise to provide significantly more training, or training of a higher quality than would otherwise be available, and if so, how would we overcome the barriers to making it happen?

Phil Gay points out, since starting the Keele summer school they have aimed to minimise the extent at which all ringers who come to help on the course, (not just course leaders) are out of pocket. Paying travelling costs and/or a subsistence allowance. This constitutes half of the fees for the non-residential course. (Students book their own accommodation) The great advantage of this is that we can invite people to come to the course as tutors without having to feel guilty that they are going to be seriously out of pocket. You may have noticed that we have never advertised for volunteers. As a result we have a well-deserved reputation for the quality of our tutors, who are a mixture of established teachers and ringers and youngsters who are brought on. Some may consider our courses a bit pricey, but our students get a lot of ringing (approx 14 hours of group ringing sessions) and most of them want to attend the course more than once. This year we received 59 applications for the 24 available places, and as a result we decided to allocate those places entirely to new students, and run two overspill courses to cater for twelve students who had attended previous courses.

David Pope replies, At Gwennap Ringing Centre we originally budgeted to pay travelling expenses to tutors and helpers at about 33p per mile. When we attempted to implement this a few months after setting up we found quite a verbal resistance from tutors and helpers, one of whom has a round trip of 50 miles. The first time we asked for claims for expenses we asked them to write to the treasurer if they did not want to claim: the onus was very much on them to write and they all did. They all felt they were doing their bit to repay the time and trouble taken by others to teach them in the past. We do have a tutor-recruiting problem. Helpers are more forthcoming. We are not at all sure money is the problem, it's much more a question of willing people having many other commitments, often church commitments.

Practice makes perfect.

John Harrison writes, in a discussion on another list, someone threw in the adage 'practice makes perfect'. Several people picked holes in this, but it made me think along slightly different lines. We like to think that we can 'teach' people to do things, and that if we tell them enough, in the right way, at the right time, then they will improve. In practice, I think we rely on pointing them at something they can just about do (hence the benefit in small steps) so that they can learn by doing it (badly) how to do it better. The feedback we give them should certainly help them to realise what is bad and what is not, but I suspect it plays a smaller part than we imagine. I think the biggest driver for them to improve is probably their own rudimentary ability to feel that some aspects 'are not right' and to notice on those occasions when they seem to be a bit better. If so, then our ability as teachers to influence progress is very dependent on their in-built sense of things being not right, and their motivation to accept that we say, when it does not coincide with what they think they are feeling. That suggests that the most valuable thing we can give them is to help them to experience the difference between less good and more good. As an example, consider someone who is snatching, over pulling, rope throwing, (... insert your pet fault). Standing watching them, you will see strokes that are poor, and occasional ones that, for whatever reason, including chance, are better. You can see the beneficial effect on the behaviour of the bell, but did they notice it? A quick comment of 'that's better' or 'keep doing it like that one' might be more

valuable than telling them what they are doing wrong all the time. (Quite apart from being nice to give positive as well as negative comments). One other aspect of 'practice makes perfect' that we should heed, is that it can work both ways. If it includes the experience of which bits are better, then it more opportunities to improve are likely to lead to improvement. But simply repeating something done badly, without either feedback or self awareness that it is inadequate will merely make one perfect at what one is doing, i.e. ringing badly!

Derek Eastell makes the point, since I started ringing about 4 years ago, I have often noticed how many similarities there are between learning to fly and learning to ring. I should explain that I am a glider pilot, hold a Pilot's Licence and until two years ago had been a gliding instructor for over 25 years. I used to say that, as an instructor, you cannot teach people how to fly, you can only create the environment for them to learn. You can demonstrate, brief, prompt, correct and de-brief and by these means the pupil can learn. You cannot push the knowledge into them, which is what teaching implies. The instructor's task is to create the environment for them to be able to safely make mistakes, see what these mistakes are, to recognise the standards to be aimed at and to be encouraging along the way.

Mike Winterbourne replies that, whilst agreeing with Derek in principle. I'm sure he made sure his pupils had the best glider available. This was the point I was trying to say about only "perfect practice making perfect". Perhaps perfect is too high an ideal but a good place to aim. Lets ensure that the trainee is placed in the best possible Band / Ringing situation to allow maximum development in an ideal a situation as possible.

Heather Peachey says, John Harrison comments on the importance of telling people when they're getting something right rather than just pointing out faults. Excessive negative feedback when a learner is apparently ignoring the given advice can be detrimental to their confidence, especially for the older learner. That is not to say one must not point out what is being done incorrectly - on the contrary this needs to be done. However, when teaching bell handling, for example, no amount of talk can tell a learner what it FEELS like to have proper control of the bell - they need to experience it. If, though, someone seems to be failing to improve, another way has to be found. I have found sensitive use of video to be very useful as it helps a learner relate what they feel they are doing to what they are being told they are doing. Several have said to me that they didn't believe they were doing what I said they were until they saw it for themselves. It can be daunting to be filmed, but I have found people soon get over this.

Doubles to Minor.

A request was sent in to solve a problem of a fairly inexperienced band that could just cope with PB5 but when moved on to hunt on 6, had trouble leading. Paul has tried the 'look at the floor and listen' approach and does not have enough steady ringers to put only 1 learner in at a time. He asks, what about ringing doubles, not with a cover, but with a *Front*? i.e. the treble leads continuously and the method is rung on 2,3,4,5 & 6. G5 might be more useful than PB5 because of the dodging at the back, but it would probably be harder to begin with for the same reason. A bit unorthodox I know, but I thought it would force the treble ringer to concentrate on leading off different bells, without having to think about hunting. There might even be just enough people to put one experienced ringer to watch the treble. I've not tried it out yet. Has anyone else tried anything similar, or do they have any other suggestions for this problem of learning to lead when there is no cover.

Bill Buckner replied, the method that helped me (quite by accident!) was to ring minor with the bells half muffled. The hand strokes and backstrokes remain well differentiated. And the rhythm is therefore easier to follow. It also helps if the band (including the learner) adheres to good open hand strokes (practiced on PH5).

Rebecca George suggests that perhaps minimus would help. Theoretically it should be easier for them as there are fewer bells to choose from, and it would give them practice at looking for the right bell. Also, perhaps ringing rounds but with the treble ringer facing outwards, to practice leading by listening, best done with someone standing by to correct them if necessary. Call them into 2nds place then to lead again once they have got the hang of leading. I have never tried these, as the tower where I teach hasn't enough ringers try to teach the learners to hunt on 6 (or so I thought, perhaps I should try again!). I would be interested to have any feedback.

David Bryant replied, I've seen people do that sort of thing - all or some of the ringers facing out of the circle. Personally I can't really see the point of it. Ringing is a skill, which relies on both looking and listening, and I don't see how removing one element can help much.

Peter Humphrey added that if all ringers were equally capable of looking and listening, I'd agree with you. However, my experience is that almost nobody, ringer or not, can hear as well as they can see, so it is sometimes useful to prevent seeing for a while to force concentration on hearing. This must have benefits for the ringer's ability to hear the bells - and just as importantly for developing their rhythm, since it is only by adjusting their rhythm that they can properly use the information supplied by their ears. Since two of the four main components (ropesight, rhythm, hearing and method knowledge) are thus improved, the result should be an improvement in the whole exercise of ringing in peal.

John Preston made the point that this is one case where learning the numbers has a value, or at least a lead into getting plain hunt 6 to work properly in the first instance. We concentrate on two aspects: 1 - continuing the hunting down process from 3rds place to 2nds place to handstroke lead to backstroke lead - which I emphasise is effectively -1 position, (or should it be zero position?) 2 - knowing who takes you off lead so they get started properly on the hunting up process. I see no harm in learners knowing whom to follow for subsequent blows, if it gets the overall process going. OK so step 2 does have to be unlearned later, but by that stage rope sight is beginning to appear anyway. We've found that plain hunt on just 4 is of no help because the speed differential between hunting up and hunting down is so great (though plain hunt 4 + two covers is fine, though no use for this particular problem). Conversely once you get up to PB Minor level, starting the evening off with plain hunt 6 has great value.

David Bryant disagreed, I've started people off with plain hunt on three (when there were only three of us there!), and although the speed difference between going up and coming down is great, I think this emphasises the point about slow on the way up and fast on the way down.

It's relatively easy to teach people the lesser extreme needed for doubles afterwards. So many learners don't seem to be taught to speed up when coming down, and this poses problems. I think it is particularly important to teach them to take up rope when coming down, and again three or four bells exaggerates this and makes the point clearly.

Heather Peachey made the point that if the band are really a bit shaky, it all could go pear shaped as the person leading off of the treble might well follow it wherever it went! It might be better to ring minimus on 3,4,5,6 and have a shaky treble practising lead, but a steady 2nd to maintain the rhythm.

Karl Grave replied that leading skills are just the same as covering skills, i.e. you follow the last bell (except it's the opposite stroke). I find that ringers who have done a lot of covering don't have a problem leading on 6. Can you ensure all your band practice covering, or is your 6th too heavy for some of them?

Mike Winterbourne suggests that to break the habit of looking at the Tenor when leading, call Changes with the Tenor being included. Start by informing the lead bell who they are leading off, then omit this information to make them work it out.

Joan Kemp suggested ringing each stroke 'whole pull' - this would give the band more time to think & make it absolutely obvious what was (hopefully) happening.

Peter Dale agrees with this. There are several musical changes that 'involve' the tenor - try 153264 for a start. If the learner's only experience is such that the tenor always stays behind, in both call changes and methods, it's no wonder that they find Minor difficult. Teaching Doubles from scratch, like cigarette smoking, should carry a warning - it can stunt progress!

Personally, I teach Doubles only when I have to - at a 5-bell tower! There's an "old boy" anecdote I rather like. When asked whether his learners might find PH on 5 easier than on 6 he replied, "Perhaps, but they won't know that if you don't tell 'em."

This is a brief summary of June's postings. If you would like any greater details on any of the points raised, please contact me. Please note my change of address!

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