



The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary May – December 2007

Welcome to the summaries of discussions on the NRT list for April – December 2007. This is a brief summary of sometime very complex discussions – if you need more detail on any of the topics please contact me. To anyone new to these summaries my words are in italics while the rest are edited extracts with the authors in bold.

New Ringer's Book

John Harrison described a new book being produced by the CC Education Committee to replace the *Beginners Handbook*. It is far more comprehensive, as well as being much more modern in its presentation. It is intended to be useful to the new ringer well into his or her ringing career.

He asked for volunteers to pilot the book and give feedback before the final draft was sent to the Publications Committee. Several offers of help were received.

Intensive courses

*One of the correspondents re the New Ringer's Book mentioned a course held in the Wirral which prompted requests for information and several people describe courses being held. **Gregory Russell** described courses at Trinity Church, Wall Street, New York. They had one class of 3 and one of 6 who completed four or five 2 hour evening sessions, one 4 hour Saturday session, plus optional attendance at regular practices.*

Don Jones described intensive training at the Gordon Halls Centre where they are teaching a band for the new ring of 8 at Hartington. Following an introductory day for all 17 they were split into 3 groups

who were then given an intensive 1 day course with one to one tuition in pairs. By the end of each first day half of the students were handling bells without assistance, the remainder returned for evening sessions on a number of occasions. As they became able to handle bells on their own they were allocated, usually in pairs, to towers local to them and have been attending regular weekly practices. The majority are booked on a DDA training day. Much of the success I believe has been because these learners were asked to and willingly committed to regularly attending allocated practices to gain experience.

Teaching the blind to ring

Muffie King asked Does anyone have any experience or advice for teaching blind people to ring please? We have had a query from someone who used to ring 30 years ago. They would like to try to take it up again but have since become completely blind. I know blind people do ring... I just don't quite know where to start.

This thread continued sporadically throughout the period covered by this summary but the main points are covered below. It was mentioned that this topic had been covered previously and that summaries were available on <http://www.cccbr.org.uk/edc/nrt/summaries.php> Reference was made to the summary of Feb 2002 where much good advice was available.

One of these was an example of a blind ringer who tended to feel things with the tip of his finger – this resulted in the sally being pushed away and he needed to be taught to feel for the sally with the palm of

his hand. Others stated that handling needed to be taught well and a very straight rope cultivated.

Of the new postings **Laura Dickerson** also mentioned the importance of a straight rope and also mentioned method learning. You could either get a sighted person who knows Braille (or borrow a Braille slate yourself) to draw the lines that way, or you could have someone record the line on a CD. The late Henry Brugsch learned Cambridge from a cassette tape that Beryl Nelson recorded for him.

Heather Peachey - I don't think you will have a problem, especially as your enquirer is a former ringer. Remember blind people are experts at living without sight but you need try to look critically at your tower for any hazards. Although I personally tend to teach handling with the bell up, I believe the 'down' method of teaching handling is far better when starting from scratch with a blind person, as the learner is able to have full control from the outset and can quickly develop a feel for what the rope is doing. You might ask your person which they'd prefer.

The one piece of new technology I would make heavy use of is the simulator. Once you've re-established handling control, your person will be able to practise listening very effectively and once method ringing begins this is an excellent practice tool. You can transcribe methods into Braille or you can purchase tactile 'paper' sometimes called 'German film' on which hand drawn images create a raised image. You can also record the instructions for ringing something onto an MP3 player.

Later **Muffie King** (the original correspondent) gave her experiences. *As the blind learner had rung in the past whilst sighted he did not take long to regain bell control. He asked to start with the bell up and start at backstroke.* He then gently and carefully tested how far back the bell was set and what weight it was and how much tailend he had. Once comfortable, he just pulled off and rang - catching the sally the first time. Watching him cover to Doubles is

amazing. Not all of the touches are immaculately struck but he still manages to cover well. In many cases better than sighted people who I suspect get too much info /feedback from their eyes and hold up/cut in too much and thus accentuating the errors in the row - making them progressively worse.

On its third appearance on the list during this period the subject was headed –

Blind ringer redux

Porter Brownlee had started teaching a 19 year old blind male. He was learning from "up" and got as far as continuous backstrokes and just pulling off at handstroke. He also asked if there were any ringing books in Braille.

Richard Pargeter - The rhythm of 'down, very slight hesitation and up' between hand and back, is very close to that between back and hand. I always go through a stage of having the learner pull off at handstroke whilst he/she holds the tail end (and then he/she just looks after backstroke until I can set it) before trying catches. When the pull-offs are going well, I get him/her to consciously think about this rhythm, because timing is the best way of catching for sighted ringers, never mind blind ones! (All this is explained in more detail in the CC booklet "One way to teach bell handling".)

John Harrison - There are two aspects. One is how the hands arrive where the sally is. The other is how they arrive at the right time. A sighted ringer can check that the sally is where the rope was when it last had tension on it, whereas a blind ringer cannot. I've never taught a blind ringer, but I suspect they might be better at ringing smooth vertical strokes, simply because they can't see and chase the rope.

Elizabeth LeMoine said she was aware of 'One Per Learner' in Braille but said it was difficult to find on the RNIB website.

Muffie King's learner- Trevor Baker had been sent details of the thread and had sent a reply which was posted. He advocated using an old rope, preferably

suspended, and controlled by a ringer to demonstrate the action slowly. The student would stand face to face with the ringer (maybe slightly raised on a small box) and place his hands lightly on (not grasping) the hands of the ringer. The tutor should stand next to the student to offer advice and intervene if necessary. Once the idea of the motion and travel has been conveyed then matters may proceed as for a sighted person.

Once the student has demonstrated that he is able to control the bell, the idea of counting places and listening for his bell to strike at his number can be introduced. If ringing on six bells then I find the best way is to count to 13 [i.e. if the student is on the 4 then he should listen and control his bell to strike at 4 (hand) and 10 (back) with a blank at 13 just before treble leads].

John Harrison liked the counting idea but felt it should be modified from 13 to 123456123456_123456123456_123...

Otherwise, when learning to hunt, you would end up having to think: 2nd place, 9th place, 4th place, 11th place . . .

Left or right handed

Martin Mansley - As a very left handed person I was taught to ring left handed i.e. left over right and holding the rope in the right hand.

My wife who is strongly right handed was taught at a tower where the teacher taught his whole band to ring left handed and again has had no problems.

My point is - does it matter which way we teach and does anyone have any thoughts about teaching one way or the other? I now tend to teach everyone the same way i.e. right handed and have had no problems. I would be very interested to hear other views.

Several correspondents stated they always taught right handed (right over left).

Anne Willis mentioned a course run by **Steve Coleman** where he had advocated right handed -

as it is difficult to make coils efficiently when lowering a bell. **Sue Scotter** - I think that is because of the direction of the twist

in the rope.

Right handed advocates included – **Peter Humphreys and Alastair Donaldson.**

Their main reason for advocating it was to prevent problems of interfering with the rope of the opposite handed person next to them in a confined tower.

John Harrison usually taught R over L but would be flexible if the learner wasn't comfortable. Both hands need to be skilled, and the hand holding the tail end (ie the left hand in so called right handed ringing) actually has the more difficult task.

*Another group felt that it should be left to the learner to decide which was most comfortable. These included **Mark Banner** (a left hander [L over R] himself), **Christine Richardson, Fred Bone** and (rather emphatically!) **Peter Dale.***

He suggested - With a spare rope, enter into a tug-of-war with the learner and see which hand and foot they place foremost to give them more purchase and better balance. As for worries about ropes flying in opposite directions, if the teaching is good the rope doesn't fly.

Nick Smith - When I start a new learner I use the technique set out in Richard Pargeter's "One way to teach bell handling" and ask the student to reach up and take hold of the sally with one hand above the other. The exercise is repeated two or three times to ensure that the "natural" alignment is identified.

Peter Humphries suggested trying to ring the opposite way to your normal way - Most noticeable is that my hands tire quickly (due, no doubt, to tension) just as they did when I first started ringing. Try it sometime. Good fun! **John Harrison** agreed that it was a good idea. When I do it, I find my hands tend to overlap occasionally. I suspect my ringing style has one shoulder higher than the other, which makes it harder for the wrong hand to be on top.

Primary school projects

Nick Smith - For some years now we have taken Year 6 up the tower to see the bells

and then given those that wanted to a first lesson on backstroke as part of their end of year activities. *As this was at the end of the summer term it had not been successful in terms of recruitment. They now wanted to try the exercise at the beginning of the school year so that the exercise could fit in with the curriculum and follow-up activity might be more successful.*

Does anyone have any ideas on suitable topics and projects to suggest to the Year 6 teacher (ideally linked to the national curriculum) and / or details of any information sources that we could make use of?

John Harrison - Year 6 is a bit younger than I was aiming for with national curriculum based projects for secondary schools, but you might get some ideas from: <http://www.allsaintswokinghambells.org.uk/ASRinging/Community/Schools.html>

I've not yet had any take up with secondary school projects, but that is mainly down to needing to find the right contacts and then follow them up.

Peter Wenham described a course run at Staverton (Northants) for Year 6 pupils in music lesson periods for the whole of the Autumn term – about 12 weeks. It was run by Geoff Pullin Branch Ringing Master. With ten pupils and two tutors the practical activity was fairly intensive. However, to maintain interest among those not actually attached to a bellrope, Geoff devised a series of written exercises to teach the theory of plain hunt, printing off grids for pupils to fill in. A high level of pupil interest was maintained throughout the project and most of the pupils, assisted by local ringers, rang for the school's Christmas service and for the end of term service when all the participants were awarded certificates. *Whilst checking information for this summary I was told that the headmaster of the school was the husband of the tower captain who was desperate for recruits – his co-operation was a major factor in the success of the course. Geoff has also kindly shown me a copy of the lesson plans which are impressive.*

CC Ringing Centres Seminar

Gail Cater – gave notice of a Ringing Centres Seminar to be held in October 2007. She stated that it was to be one of 3 to be held and would explore what is involved in setting up a conventional centre, including management, finance, needs assessment, teaching, equipment and ongoing support. It will also discuss the new ideas of the Committee and those brought to the Seminar by participants. *It was mainly these “new ideas“ that provoked correspondence. She said that* Since the completion in November 2003 of the scheme kindly set up by the Worshipful Company of Founders, which provided grants to assist with the costs of setting up ringing centres, the CC Ringing Centres Committee has found it difficult to persuade ringers to set up further ringing centres. *She gave several possible reasons such as difficulty raising funds and the amount of perceived work needed to set up a ringing centre.* The Committee has therefore decided to revise the criteria for becoming a CC Recognised Ringing Centre, both to ease the restrictions on what constitutes a ringing centre and to widen the scope of ringing centre activities. This will be done without compromising standards. *The first seminar was to be at Barrow-upon-Humber for people from the north of the country and there would be further ones for south east and south west later.*

Phil Gay felt that Five weeks is not much notice for an important seminar, and the decision about whether to go is all the harder because we don't know where and when the alternatives are. Barrow is about 120 miles from where I live, and I don't suppose 'the south-east' and 'the south-west' will be any nearer. *He felt a fifth Saturday date might have been better.*

As a member of the Ringing Centres Committee which drew up the criteria for CC recognition, and the author of the submission which resulted in the Keele Ringing Centre being the first to achieve recognition, I have to say that I do not

believe the criteria are particularly onerous, and I am curious to know what relaxations are proposed. Could it be that the reason more new ringing centres are not applying for recognition is not that the requirements are too demanding, but that, to borrow a phrase which has been used before, there are not enough dynamic and charismatic leaders who are willing to run them.

Gail Cater *apologised for the delay but defended the attempts to relax the criteria for a ringing centre.* They were fine when the Committee had to be seen to be taking steps to safeguard Founders money, but there are now a number of new initiatives around like Port Sunlight, like Kids.Ring.Out, which might warrant ringing centre status but don't necessarily conform to the original criteria. We would like to see these recognised so that the CC is seen to be recognising innovative ideas which work, and not excluding them because they don't quite fit. We have no intention of lowering standards, rather making them more flexible.

Contrary to what you say there are charismatic and dynamic people about and they in their way are focuses of good practice. We do not want to stifle their initiatives, but rather want them 'on board'.

Peter Dale *also expressed concern. He described setting up the Cinque Ports Centre.* It was clear that a great deal of care and thought had gone into drawing up the criteria and we accepted that they were there to define a standard, not just for our teaching activities, but for the physical environment in which they were to take place, an environment conducive to learning. We took pains to see that the criteria were met, as I am sure other ringing centres did. They too may be as disappointed as we are if standards are "made more flexible".

The philosophy behind moving the goal posts to permit initiatives and innovative work to gain ringing centre status is highly questionable. Yes, these efforts are most laudable and yes, they are worthy of recognition, but does a hive of activity

qualify as a ringing centre in itself? We would do well to remember the original concept of a centre being a blend of people and environment.

Barry Peachey - there is no intention to downgrade or diminish the requirements for what constitutes a ringing centre so far as I am concerned. I was tasked with the job of reviewing the requirements and I have submitted some draft proposals to the committee chairman for consideration which in no way propose to lower standards. What they are intended to do is improve flexibility. For example, they promulgate the concept of a mobile ringing centre run by a team of teaching experts.

Peter Dale *replied that he was happy with Barry's reply and with fuller details of the proposals which had been sent privately.* I'm tickled pink about the mobile element because in Kent we've done little bit of "taking the bells to the people"

Interactive ringing education software

Heather Peachey *asked* Are you a software developer who'd be prepared to voluntarily create applications for ringing education purposes? If so could you contact me please - I have some ideas but don't have the skills!! *She had one offer of help online.*

Duke of Edinburgh etc awards

Philip Dunn - We have a young ringer who is hoping to use bellringing for the skill component of her Duke of Edinburgh award. I would be interested to hear from anyone who experience as a tutor or assessor for this scheme.

Pip Penney - Bellringing can be used for the skills section of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. *She sent details off-list.*

Frank Beech This year we spent a large amount of time teaching a young person to ring and he would be counting this towards the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme. The outcome was when we signed his papers he excused himself early from

practice never to be seen again. I have found over the years that is normal in all these badge schemes.

Laura Dickerson There's a huge attrition rate no matter what originally motivates learners, but my theory is that it's always worth the time it takes to teach them. If they don't stay at your tower, they might eventually ring somewhere else. The kid above might go back to it when he gets to university, or the next time there's a big push like the Millennium ringing. Even if someone never rings again, s/he might end up on the town noise abatement committee or somewhere else that you'd like a sympathetic person. **Phil Tremain** *agreed.*

Frank Lewis I wonder why you "signed his papers". According to the DofE guidelines "The Assessor must be an officer (preferably a ringing master or education officer) of the local county or diocesan association, who is not a member of the participant's own band."

But Alan Bentley disagreed. The DofE Guidelines concerning the tutor's qualifications for signing the book are only guidelines and the tutor, who should be experienced in teaching bellringing, is likely to be more aware than someone from outside the tower of the progress made by the learner. There is a stipulation, however, that the person signing the book cannot be a member of the student's family.

Risk assessment

David Teal *asked* Has anyone produced and would be happy to let me have a copy of a risk assessment for teaching learners to ring church bells?

John Harrison - I don't know anyone who has done this. The principles of risk assessment can be applied to training, but as with any risk assessment, there is a danger in trying to re-use one that applies to different people operating in a different way in a different place.

The essence of the assessment is that you systematically consider what might go wrong in your specific situation, and then

modify how things are done to reduce or mitigate the risks that you identify. So if you feel you need a risk assessment, you are likely to benefit most from systematically assessing your own tower's situation.

Safety is just one aspect of good practice in training. The CC Framework was produced to help people undertake systematic assessments of the way their band undertakes training, and there are quite a few mentions of safety related topics in the supplementary questions that support the Framework.

If you don't already have a copy, you can download the Framework, together with an explanatory leaflet and the supplementary questions, from:
<http://www.cccbr.org.uk/edc/fwk.php>

New ringing program

Doug Nichols Pardon the shameless self-promotion, but a new ringing program (written by me) is now available and it occurred to me that it might be of interest to others, like myself, who teach ringing. It features real bells animated using photography (capable of full-screen resolution) and moving realistically using lots of real-time calculations. Watching them holding up and cutting in while they perform some method or other, and at the same time listening to the perfect striking they produce, is an interesting experience.

It was available on

<http://www.belfryware.com>

Pullometer

The idea of a "pullometer" has been discussed for some time. It was again discussed in depth. The thread was fairly long and mainly technical. I will, therefore, only give a brief description here – the full text is available to anyone who would like to know more. As **John Harrison** *said*

I'm aware some of this may go over a lot of heads, but hoping that by discussing in public, more people may be inspired to try to do something.

Alternatively, perhaps someone with

connections in academia might perhaps be able to entrain the enthusiasm of a PhD supervisor. If someone could develop a pullometer that could be made widely available, it would be the biggest advance in training aids since Peter Cummins invented the simulator.

So, in brief, the idea is that a device could be attached to a bell to show the way the pull is applied both in different circumstances – e.g. pulling and checking but also the difference between an experienced ringer pulling correctly and the learner. By this means the learner would be able to understand and apply the correct pull sooner. The main protagonists were Philip Dunn, John Harrison, Andrew Chin, Gregory Russell, Richard Major and Nick Smith.

Training without ropesight

Bernard Taylor What experience do others have of trying to teach beyond rounds entirely by listening? I'd imagine anyone who's taught a sight-impaired person would have an answer. This is what we are attempting to do at Worcester Cathedral and I wondered if anyone had any tips?

Barbara Le Gallez answered right away
It's easy - proceed as follows:

1. Practise continuous dodging and place making with them until they can easily put their bell into any required place.
 2. Teach them the theory of the method you want them to ring.
 3. Get them to ring it on handbells.
- Any of these steps may take a long time, but, once they are all mastered, the learner will be able to ring the method accurately on tower bells almost straight away.

Others were not so sure.

David Teal - The question that comes to my mind is 'why on earth would you want to do that?' Listening is extremely important as a means of knowing whether or not you timed the previous stroke correctly and a feel for the rhythm of the ringing is an essential aid to good striking, but the primary method of putting your

bell in the right place is visual. I know there are many who might disagree with that statement. *And they did!*

The main argument was where the emphasis should lie between listening and ropesight.

John Harrison described a typical progress in his tower with a combination of simulator and "real" ringers.

Learn to ring rounds by rhythm and listening (with perfect other bells).

Learn to cover by rhythm and listening (with perfect other bells).

Develop ropesight by standing with others while ringing.

Integrate rudimentary ropesight while ringing rounds with others.

Develop true ropesight while covering (by rhythm and listening).

Learn the rhythm of hunting (may be done earlier).

Practise hunting by rhythm and listening (with perfect other bells) AND

practise hunting (on small then larger numbers) with others.

Repeat combinations of above to refine rhythm and ropesight.

He added: If you treat rhythm and listening as add-ons, they are likely to remain peripheral and under-developed.

Doug Nichols - With a band of perfect strikers (i.e. using a simulator) it is possible, using hearing as the only source of information, to a) put your bell in the right place, and b) know that you have done so (or have not done so). I'm quite sure you could never do that with ropesight alone, although I accept you could stay nearly right most of the time (but then "nearly right" is a striking error!).

So what **is** ropesight the "primary method" for? I suggest that it is the means by which we continue to feel that we are on top of the situation and not lost. Rhythm keeps me going, but it is always a relief to pick up the ropesight again. Learners must feel that sort of anxiety all the time until they have acquired some ropesight.

Andrew Chin Rhythm is an essential skill to developing ropesight because it is quite common for a learner to sight the wrong bell and follow it. They would

either check their bell hard in an effort to catch up, or stand their bell and wait to ring after a particular bell (who in turn might be waiting for them....deadlock!)

David Teal *was unrepentant but*

explained: I do not treat them as add-ons, nor did anything I said suggest that I do. What I said, and stick by, is that the primary method of putting your bell in the right place is visual, particularly for learners.

We are not talking about how an experienced ringer places a bell, we are talking about teaching a raw beginner. You do not start teaching differential calculus in Year 1 with 5-year olds: you start with 1 add 1. You keep in mind your ultimate objective but you guide your pupils through a measured progression based upon your experience of the sequence in which most learners are able to pick things up modified by the specific aptitudes of the particular pupil in your care.

The main reason I feel so strongly about this is that much of my early days of ringing was marred by well-meaning 'helpers' telling me to do things that I simply couldn't do at the stage I was at. Encouraging learners is the name of the game, not unrealistic expectations.

John Harrison – *felt that using visual clues only* is very common, but that doesn't mean it is the best way to do it, or the most helpful way to start.

You would not rely on visual clues if you were taught to ring rounds in easy stages, ie first learn to control the rhythm with perfect striking around you, and then progress to the more difficult condition of coping with real ringers.

Andrew Harper *asked for more details about how you would teach rhythm.* I have a new learner who is desperately trying to ring rhythmically but his inexperience and the tension in his body that comes from being a newcomer prevent him from achieving it. A ringer cannot achieve rhythm until they are able to relax and they can't do that until they feel comfortable on the end of a rope. In my experience that only comes with time spent on the end of a rope.

John Harrison It would be more accurate to talk about how you teach rhythmic ringing. Most people have some sense of rhythm, and if they didn't, then there would

be nothing to build on. But they can only develop a rhythmic ringing style when they overcome all the barriers that Andrew mentioned: tension, inability to feel what the bell is doing, lack of confidence, handling problems, and so on.

Time on the end of a rope is certainly important, but time alone is not sufficient - it depends what they are doing while on the end of the rope.

Practising bad habits is not the best way to learn good habits.

Early experience of ringing to a rhythm helps (ours start ringing with a simulator as soon as they can handle a bell reasonably steadily). Ringing bells of different weight and style as early as they can also helps them to feel what the bell is doing.

Doug Nichols - I spent a lot of time coaching someone who suffered from tenseness. It can be overcome.

You need a simulator attached to a bell and you need a weekly session with him.

Rounds, covering and eventually hunting and more will be possible. You may need lots of patience. You might also find that his understanding of the blue line of a method is well ahead of his ability to ring it, at least for a while. But being able to push through a course of something on the simulator, with questionable striking, is not good use of the time - the real benefit comes from striving for excellent striking achieved with an efficient style, and hunting and maybe Plain Bob or treble to a treble-dodging method are as far as you need to go.

Another thing that helps is to ring a heavier bell to rounds (or as cover bell) at practice. This is a big help to slow down the action, lengthen the stroke and smooth out erratic pulls.

Listening (at home) to good ringing can help educate the ear to the timing and rhythm of proper striking. Get hold of some ringing software that produces an

authentic sound and try to get your learner enthusiastic enough to use it. Saying (or thinking) “handstroke” and “backstroke” at the instant of the first blow of each stroke while listening to good ringing may be worth trying.

John Harrison *agreed about using heavier bells as did Nick Smith* - I have also found that this can be helpful, particularly if a learner is relying on a short hard pull to ring the bell.

One point I try hard to get across is that it is much easier to keep a rhythm to your ringing if your arms are always moving, albeit slowly, rather than stopping and restarting. Hence, when first putting a learner into rounds I always put them on the 4th of 6 so that they are ringing a bell that does not need to be held up but that does need to go to the balance. This arrangement also allows the more experienced ringers on the front and back bells to damp out any wobbles.

Vicki Hodgkin - I found that handbell ringing can really help with rhythm - some of them only rang rounds but others got as far as plain hunt. There was a noticeable difference in their striking on tower bells after a bit which I hadn't anticipated at all. I guess handbells remove the bell control issue and allow people to focus more on the rhythm. Having two bells also makes people feel the relationship between them and as part of the group. I've found it quite a good way of teaching people how to leave the right gap when leading too.

Finally Bernard Taylor who instigated the thread said - thank you for all your input. Those who detailed specific exercises confirmed pretty much what we are trying to do. For those who disagreed with the whole approach I would only say that we are not trying to avoid ropesight - just to make the PRIMARY method for adjusting the bell one of rhythm with the SECONDARY method being ropesight. My experience is that ‘traditional’ teaching adopts the opposite approach and the listening bit gets overlooked all too frequently. I actually had someone say to me the other day, after I'd been trying to get some half-decent rounds on 12 with a

largely visiting band, ‘You must be actually listening to make all those comments’, as if that were something only ‘experts’ did!