



## Go ...

We all pull off into rounds, the ringing settles to a steady beat and the confident tones of the conductor ring out "Go ...". The conductor of a touch might not be as prominent to the audience as the conductor of an orchestra, but everyone knows (s)he is in charge. From some conductors we expect miracles sorting out our careless mistakes, but from most we simply have confidence that they will put (most of) the calls in the right place, and that should the need arise they will call the bells round before inflicting too much unpleasantness on the neighbours.

Conducting is something we ought to take in turns, rather than always leaving it to the same few people, but many of us have never taken charge of the ringing, and many more do so only rarely. Perhaps you are one of this silent majority. Perhaps you think that your hands (or more likely your head) are full just ringing, without worrying about anything else. Maybe you think conducting must be very difficult - best left to ringers with superior ability. Or perhaps no one ever gave you the opportunity. Whatever the reason, it probably seems more daunting than it really is, so why not have a go.

## Where to start

The first thing to realise is that you can do it in easy stages, starting with very small beginnings. Think about the things that you need to do as a conductor. In order of priority they are:

- Make the calls
- Ring your own bell
- Decide if it should be called round
- (Help to correct mistakes)

Notice that correcting mistakes is in brackets, and last. You can make a very useful contribution just doing the others without this, yet it is the aspect that frightens many people off calling. The first three are most important.

The first is essential. You must make the calls, audibly and in the right place, or things will rapidly fall apart.

The second is pretty important too. Unless you call from the sidelines (see below) you must ring your own bell properly or you will put off other people, and almost certainly put off yourself too and then mis-call.

The third is easy to overlook, but important. If the ringing gets to the state where it ought to be stopped, either because what you are inflicting on the audience is too awful, or (in a practice) because no one is gaining any benefit, then you are the person to call it round or to stand. It is not an easy decision, but one for which you must accept the responsibility.

Surely you can't call if you are not ringing! Well yes you can, although it is not done very often. Some people find this easier when they first call call changes. In some bands the minder normally calls go and stop when ringing plain hunt for someone who is struggling. It is easier to

give advice between attempts if you are in control of when to stop and start.

We will look at keeping people right in a future article. Now we will focus on calling.

## Where to call

All calls should be called a whole pull before they take effect, so everyone has time to prepare their bells to make the change accurately. That means a whole pull before the first row that differs with a call from what it would have been without. If you are not sure where this is, draw out the structure of a plain lead (a few rows before and after the lead end) and then overlay the lines of bells affected by the call to see where they differ. Figure 1 shows a lead end of Plain Bob Doubles, with the grey lines in the middle showing the effect of the bob. For most methods like Plain Bob, the change occurs at the Treble's backstroke lead, so the call must be at the previous backstroke when it is in 2nds place. Draw out a lead of Grandsire and you should see that things happen a blow earlier, so the call must be at the handstroke when the Treble is in 3rds place. In call changes too, the change takes effect at the handstroke, with the call at the previous handstroke.

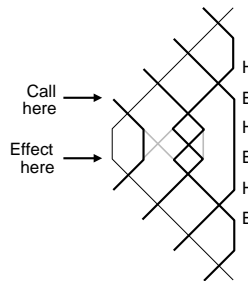


Figure 1: Call position in Plain Bob Doubles

## Who's handstroke?

This is a trickier question that some people never ask. You probably think of 'the handstroke' or 'the backstroke' as the moment when you pull your own bell off. This might seem the most natural time to call, but the bell at the front is almost on the opposite stroke to the bell at the back. So if you use your 'natural' position, the calls will be a couple of seconds later when you are at the back than when you are at the front. That confuses people, and they get understandably upset. The solution is simple. When you are near the back call a little earlier and when you are at the front call a little later than what seems natural. Then you should always be consistent, and keep everyone happy.

## Calling call changes

Ideally everyone would learn to call changes when they learn to ring them, but even if you didn't, it's still a good place to start. Build your confidence and get you used to hearing your own voice. Every one else must hear it too - so it's better to risk being too loud than not heard.

With call changes you have much more control than you do with a method, where the calls come at fixed points, and missing one can doom your touch to be called round or to go on much too long. (Experts can repair some touches, but not always, and it needs quick thinking). Call changes are more forgiving. Calls can come anywhere, so if you are a bit late working out what the next call should be, just call it a few blows later. And if you call the wrong thing, don't worry - at worst you can just swap back the pair you didn't intend to swap, and at best you can take

a slightly different route back to Rounds.

Don't feel pressured to start by trying to call a complex sequence. Everyone else might call Queens and back (or whatever the local favourite is) but it's much easier to start just by swapping a pair of bells and then swapping them back again. Do that several times with different pairs, then as you are more confident you can move someone further, for example calling a bell to the front and then back again.

You can then move on to sequences that take in musical rows. Most people learn the sequence, which can mean learning a lot of numbers! A better way is to learn the pattern of the calls. There is less to learn, but you need to be able to see who is where as you go along, and work out which pairs of bells to swap. For example, the sequence Rounds - Queens - Tittums - Rounds on 8 bells takes 18 calls. You can remember it as a very simple pattern, shown in figure 2, that you use three times over. Each X is a change. You can call those in a row in any order (or all together).

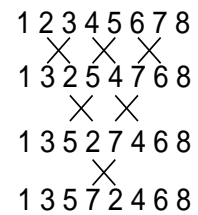


Figure 2: Pattern of changes

If you call a sequence that takes you a long way from Rounds, remember that you have to get back again. If you are leaving long gaps between calls, either because you need time to think what to call next, or because the striking is a bit nervous and you want to let the bells settle down after each call, then it can take quite a time. So by half way through your intended duration, you ought to be thinking about how you are going to get the bells back to Rounds.

## What if you get lost?

It's a good idea to have a plan before you start, working it out on paper if needed. But if the bells get all mixed up, and you are not sure how they got there, don't worry. Accept what you have got and start from there. There is a simple way to get back, and you don't need a super brain to do it. In rounds, every bell has all the lighter (lower numbered) bells in front of it and all the heavier (higher numbered) ones behind. So if you see any bell following a heavier one than itself, they are the wrong way round and need to be swapped. It doesn't matter which pair or what places they are in. If you swap them over you get a little closer to rounds. Then find another pair the wrong way round and swap them over. Keep going, and when no one is following a heavier bell, they are in rounds. What is more, you will have got there in the minimum possible number of calls.

There are other ways - for example, you can move the Treble to the front, then move the 2nd down to follow it, and so on, but the ropesight needed to make sure you always swap an adjacent pair is a bit harder than just finding any pair that are together the wrong way round.

## Calling methods

That is the next step, and we will return to it in a future article. In the mean time, if you have not already done so, try calling some call changes. Try working up to calling them every few changes.