

Ringling Trends Committee Report for 2009

The Committee met once last year in February 2008 with contact being maintained electronically for the remainder of the year. At the Council meeting in May four members were elected to the committee. Frank Lewis, one of the co-opted members, who was no longer a member of Council, decided to stand down, although he has continued to assist the Committee with work on updating the website. In addition, invaluable assistance continues to be provided to the Committee by Jennifer Holden, who is not a member of Council.

Survey Results

Phase 1 of the programme was completed during the year with responses from all areas contacted except one, although this was due to circumstances beyond their control. Some of the information available from Phase 1 was presented in a leaflet at the Ringing Roadshow and is available on the Ringing Trends website.

As reported last year, Phase 2 of the project was considerably delayed and, in the event, it was late 2008 before this second phase was underway. The response to the Phase 2 questionnaires has been excellent and results are already available from the Carlisle Diocesan Guild and the Bath and Wells Diocesan Guild. Phase 2 includes counties covered by some of the largest Societies with data still expected from the Oxford Diocesan Guild, Yorkshire Association, Sussex Association, Essex Association and Leicester Diocesan Guild. We are very grateful to all of the Societies involved in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 for their considerable help in assisting with data collection and inputting information into spreadsheets.

All of the results obtained so far have been transferred into the database from the spreadsheets and the resulting datasets used to prepare the various charts. Although the data has not yet been statistically analysed the responses that we are getting are totally consistent. At this stage the Ringing Trends Committee wish to apologise to members of Council for a graph showing the age of learners shown at the Council meeting in Newcastle last year. This graph caused much consternation and it was subsequently found that the data was erroneous because, in one of the spreadsheets, several of the columns covering the ages of learners had been transposed. All of the information in the database has now been rechecked and verified.

To date responses have been received from 1019 towers and nearly 7000 ringers and a number of graphs are presented using this information. The age range of ringers is shown at **Fig 1**. All of the recently obtained data from the various areas throughout the country is consistent with earlier data in showing a trend towards a much older ringing population. Compare this with a 2008 Office of National Statistics study, which calculated the average age of the general UK population as 39. There are many reasons for this trend but it is clear that many people do not learn to ring until they are over 40 (**Fig 2**). In the 1988 survey just 17% of ringers were over 40 when they learnt to ring and 58% were less than 20 years old. Those figures today are 35% and 42% respectively, which emphasises the trend towards older learners. Of the ringers that have responded so far nearly a quarter of them have been ringing for less than 5 years (**Fig 3**).

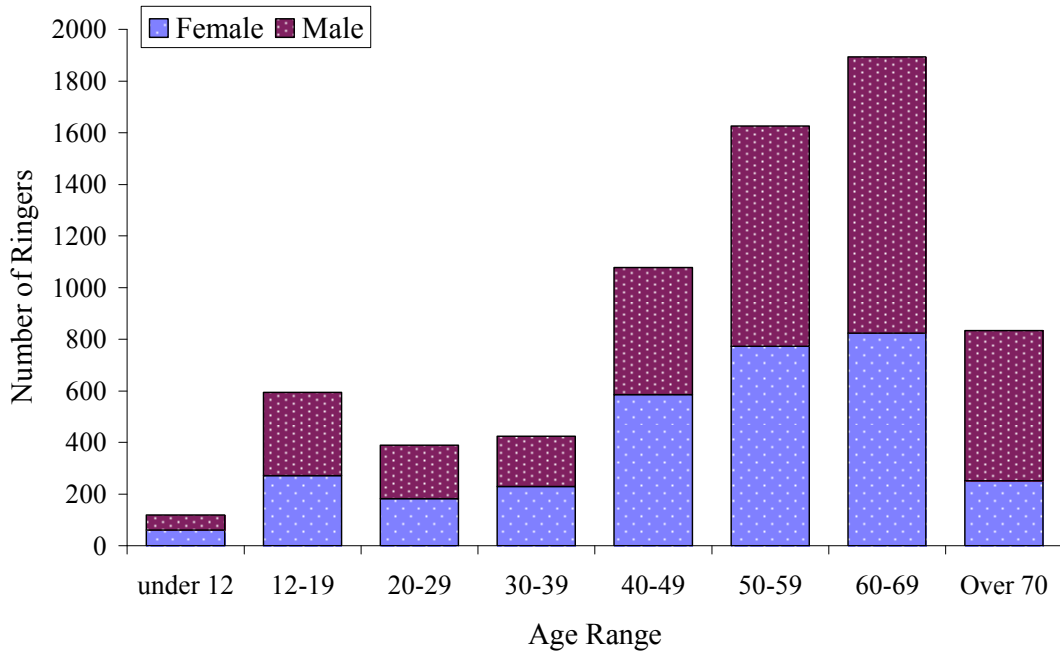


Figure 1: Ringers responding to the survey by age and gender (*Number surveyed = 6957*).

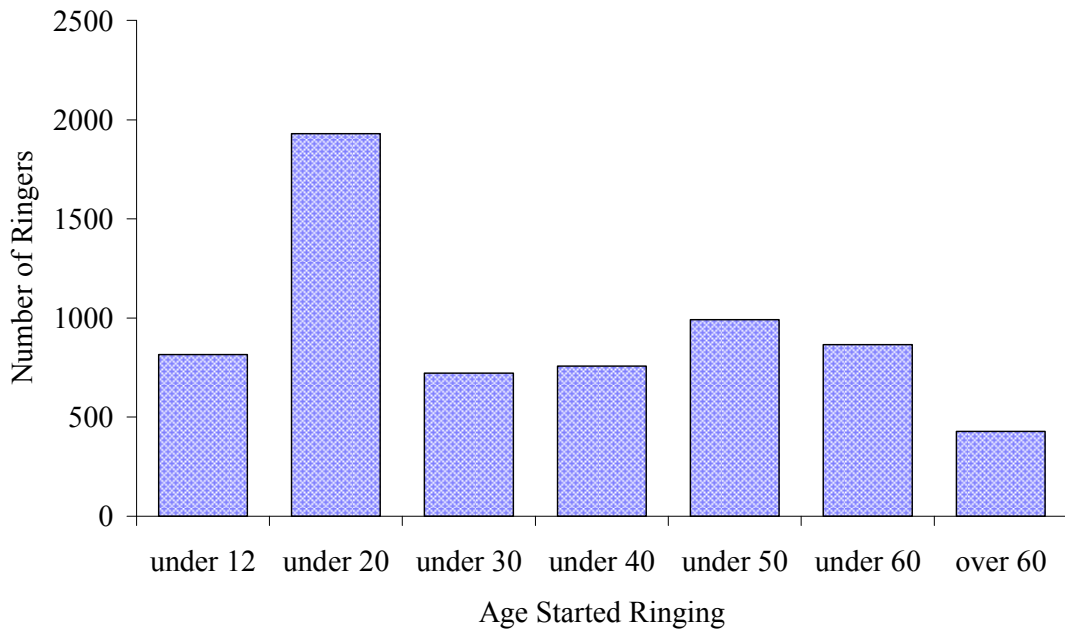


Figure 2: Age at which ringers started ringing.

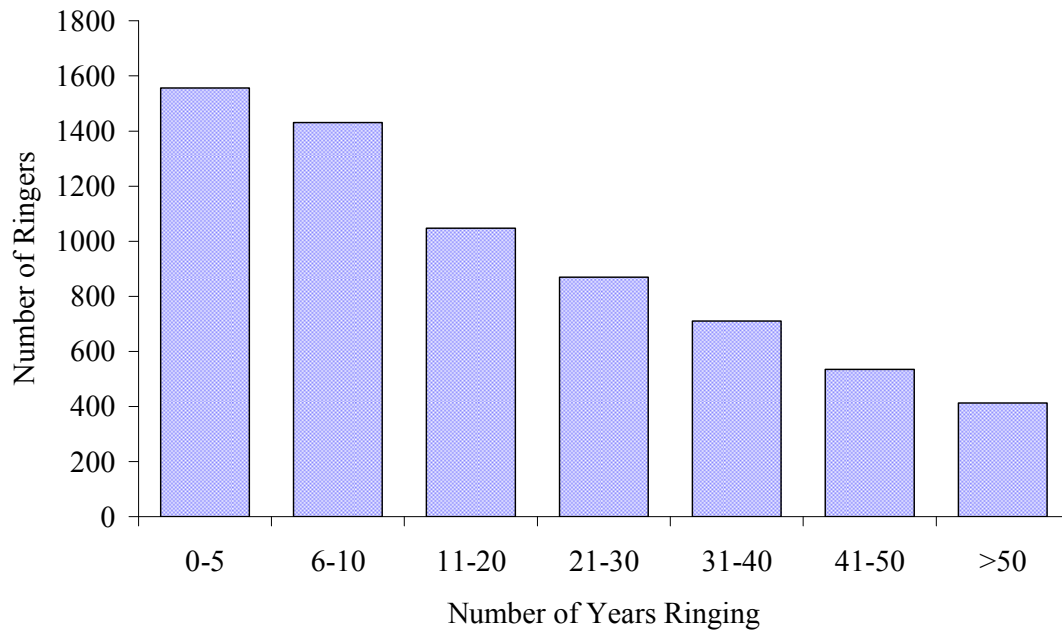


Figure 3: Length of time ringers have been ringing.

One of the questions asked in the survey is how many towers had a regular band and it is clear from **Fig 4** that the greater the number of bells in the tower the more likelihood there is that there will be a regular band. **Fig 5** shows the age range of tower captains and, not unexpectedly, 80% of them are over the age of 50. The state of ringing in the towers surveyed is at **Fig 6**, which indicates that 68% of bands are steady or prospering. Towers were also asked which methods they rang on practice nights and the results are at **Fig 7**.

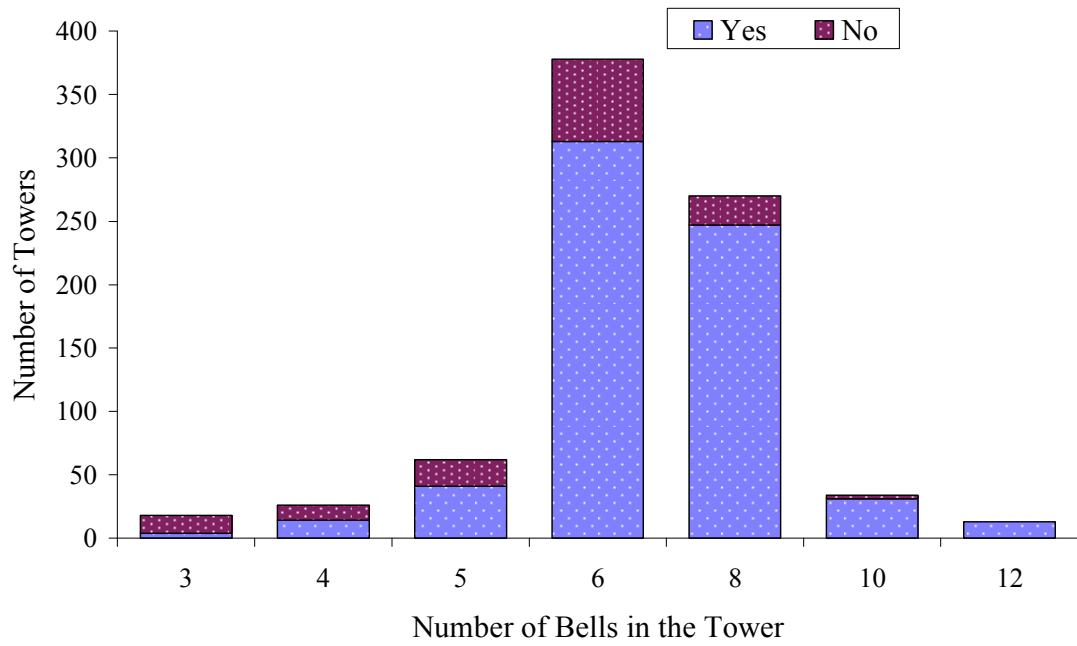


Figure 4: Towers with regular bands by number of bells in the tower. (yes = regular band, no = no band)

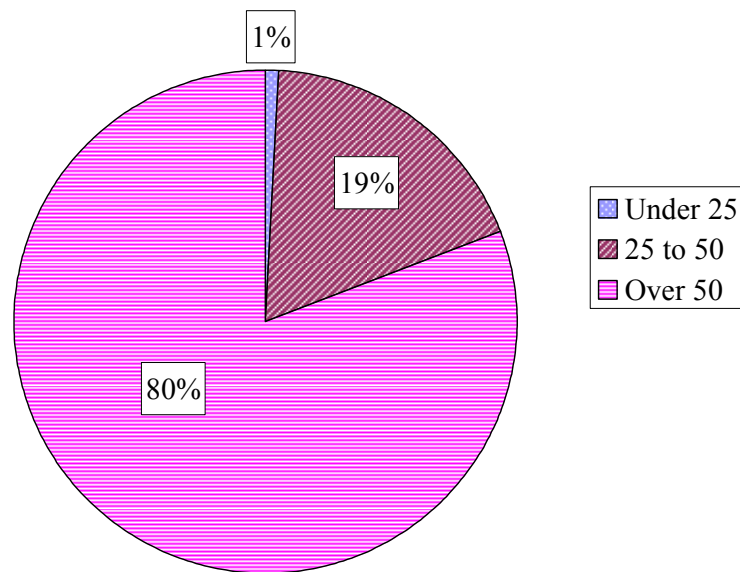


Figure 5: Age of tower captains (in years).

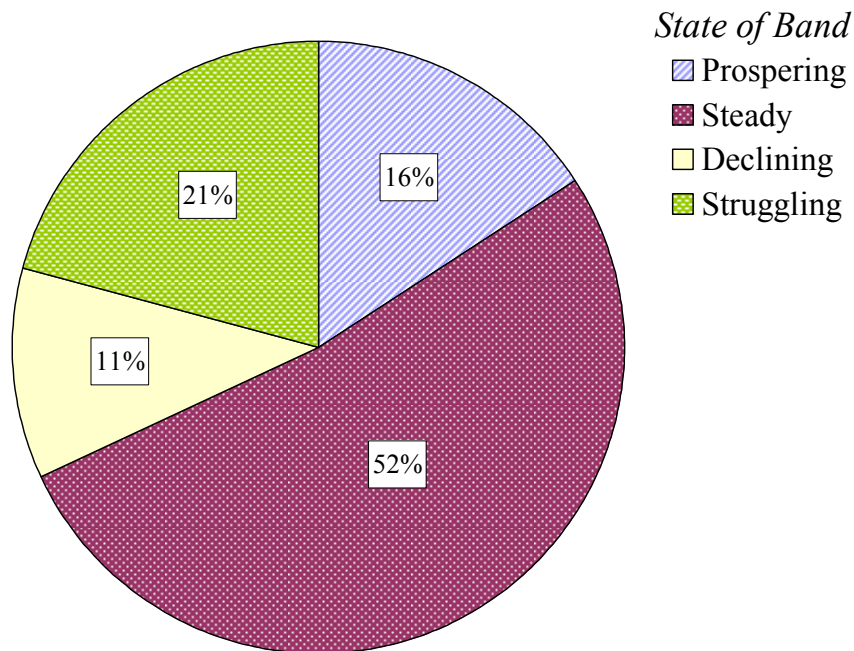


Figure 6: Reported state of bands in towers.

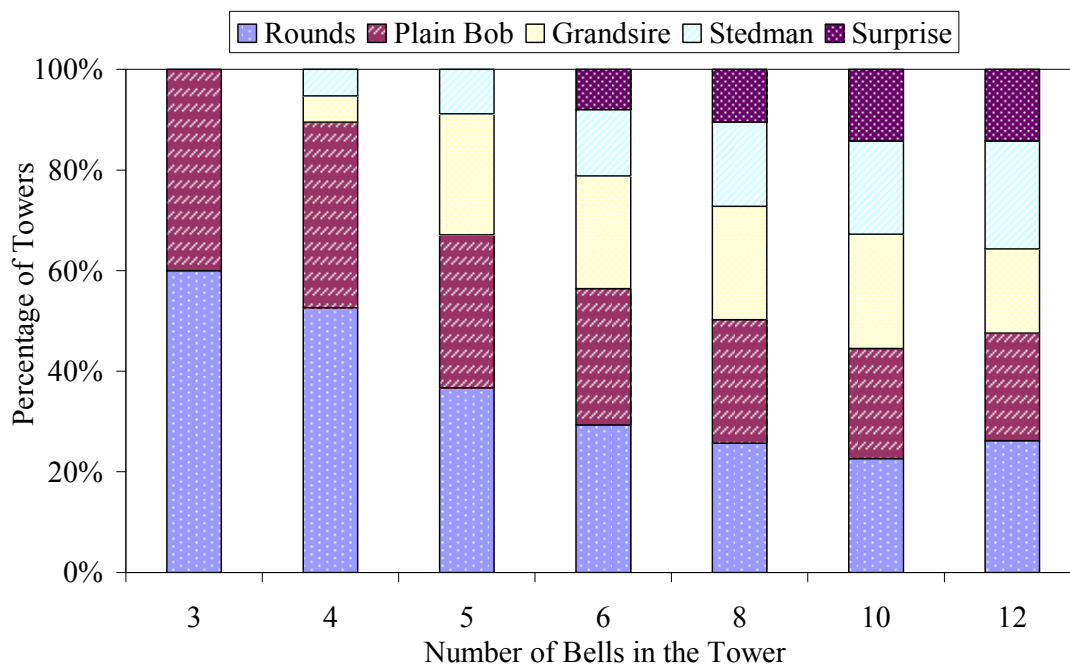


Figure 7: Methods rung on practice night by number of bells in the tower.

One question frequently asked and not easy to answer is ‘how many ringers are there’. In the sample survey carried out over 20 years ago, it was calculated that there were ‘probably’ about 41,000 ringers in the British Isles’. Our findings are that this number has probably reduced. Using the records kept by the Secretary to the Council, there were 35,612 ringers that were members of Societies in the UK in 2008. Within this number it is highly likely that there is duplication, with many members belonging to more than one society (eg. SRCY, ASCY etc), which could bring this figure down by up to 2,000 ringers. Of the ringers that have responded to the survey so far, 87% say

that they belong to a society and the assumption is made that the remainder do not belong to a society. If this is applied to the CC figures the total number of ringers could be 39,000. **Fig 8** shows the average number of ringers per bell by county. Here, as in all of the survey answers, where a tower gave no answer or did not respond, they were excluded from the summary. Where they gave a zero answer (110 towers), this was included in calculating the average.

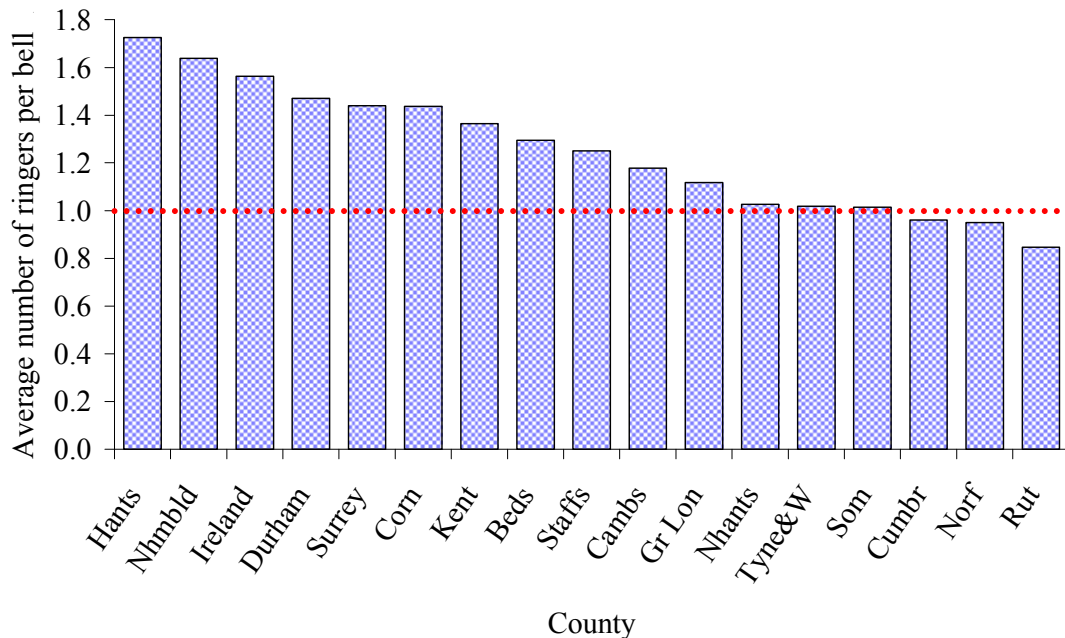


Figure 8: Number of ringers per bell by county

University Ringing

University ringing societies are being used as an indicator for ringing amongst university students and a questionnaire survey of university societies in the United Kingdom is in progress. This involves questions similar to those of the main ringing trends questionnaire together with other questions particular to university societies. The specific questions include issues of student union affiliation and support and participation by non-students. At the end of February 36% of university societies had returned the questionnaire.

Initial results show that some university societies have sole practices, others share practices with local bands and some less active societies just act as contacts. The average percentage of student ringers attending university society practices is 58%. A high number (74%) of students involved in university ringing are studying sciences or engineering. The longer established societies have former students as officers to assist the student officers and also provide a source of assistance and continuity. Universities are teaching people to ring at all of the active societies who have responded so far and play an important part in the training of young people providing opportunities to progress in ringing terms and take on positions of responsibility. The ringing societies also ring for Sunday services.

Alongside the questionnaire an analysis of trends in university society peal ringing,

using data from **peals.co.uk** has taken place . This shows that between 2004 and 2008, 519 peals were rung attributed to eighteen different university societies. There has been a decline in the number of peals rung by university societies from 2004 to 2008. However, the number of university societies ringing at least one peal in the year has risen from 13 to 15. Trends in quarter peal ringing has also been researched,

Other Voluntary Organisations

The Ringing Trends Committee has contacted other voluntary organisations to enquire about the state of their membership, recruitment, training and other issues similar to those being considered by our ringing surveys. We are particularly grateful to the Croquet Association and The Scout Association for their comprehensive responses. Other responses were from Bridge and Real Tennis players. The information obtained, together with other reference material, data from the Cabinet Office National Survey on volunteering, and EU reports, has been used towards an article for the Ringing World.

In addition, there have been recent separate reports in the media that other activities such as golf, morris dancing, other traditional dancing, folk singing, and cathedral choirs are all suffering a decline in interest especially amongst younger people, while a variety of university student clubs and societies are also seeing dramatic reductions in participation. Conversely, we have heard that ballroom dancing is undergoing a revival, perhaps as a direct result of high profile and extensive time on TV.

From all of the information gathered it is very clear that it is not only ringing that is reporting a decline in membership and participation, particularly amongst younger people. However, other organisations noted that focussed publicity and marketing campaigns can improve the situation. These other organisations suggest that the focus for the future must come from identifying the lifestyle and interests that attract individuals to participate and what the activity offers them. Word of mouth still seems to be a key way in which people are introduced to activities. However, the image of the activity can remain a problem and activities have to adapt as society changes.

Conclusion

During the year information from the survey has been provided to the Ringing Foundation and to individuals who have requested information. In addition, following our earlier reported findings, one Society is considering a change in their rules regarding older members.

The Ringing Trends Committee have decided that, because of the consistency of the information obtained so far, that it is not necessary to proceed with Phases 3 & 4 of the planned programme at present and intend to start preparing a final report once all of the information from Phase 2 of the survey has been analysed. In order to do this we need to test the statistical significance of the database and the Ringing Trends Committee would welcome the assistance of a statistician with this work.

For the future, the committee plan to undertake some sample surveys of individual ringers and possibly undertake wider surveys to get a view of what encourages ringers to 'stick' with ringing. In addition, a fuller picture of city centre ringing is considered essential.

The Ringing Trends Committee feel that the significance of the information obtained from this survey so far is of interest to the Ringing Foundation, CC committees and ringing societies in general and will be reflecting on these issues in the next phases of their work.

Beryl Norris (*Chairman*)
Alison Hodge
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