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## PR advice for ringers

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### PR and ringing

Ringing is almost always a very public activity, but we are normally hidden from view. Most non-ringers know little about ringing and nothing about ringers. Some even think the bells are rung by machine. The sound of ringing has a special place in most people's minds, and there is a vast pool of potential goodwill for ringers to draw on, once we can get past the barrier of ignorance. We rely on public goodwill to continue to practice the art of ringing, we rely on recruiting from the non-ringing community, and we rely heavily on non-ringers for investment in the expensive equipment that we use.

Ringing PR is about communicating with non-ringers at all levels – individuals, groups, and the whole communities in which we ring. It is about explaining what we do, about sharing our rich heritage, and about engaging their interest. We should aim for ringing to be [as well understood as any other sport, music or hobby](#), and for the skills and expertise of ringers to be respected as much as those of any other performers.

PR is not just the preserve of ringing societies and the Central Council. We can all do any things, as individual ringers and as local tower bands. We can all help to bridge the gap between the public and ringers.

These pages contain many ideas and suggestions to help you. If there is something you would like to know but can't find, then please [let us know](#). If you have a good idea or a resource that you would like to share, then please [let us know](#) that too. *<The 'Let us know' link would point to a suitable generic PR Committee e-mail address>*

### Engaging with the community

**Your local church** – The congregation of the church where you ring is a microcosm of the wider community, but more accessible to you, and with a commitment to church related activities. Help the parishioners to understand about ringing. Help them to see the ringers as a familiar part of the church, not as a hidden mystery. You can:

- Invite them into the tower to see what happens (as individuals or more formally as groups).
- Write articles in your Parish Magazine (about things you do, and explaining about ringing) see [examples](#).
- Offer to give [talks](#) or organise [tower tours](#) for parish groups.
- Try to take part as an identifiable group in other parish events (quizzes, fetes, etc).

**Your neighbours** – Those who live around the church have to listen to your ringing, and most of them probably like it providing it doesn't interfere with what they are trying to do. Try to foster their goodwill. You can:

- Ring at predictable times (and possibly publish a policy on public ringing see [example](#)).
- Put notices outside during peals, etc. Say why you are ringing (with contact details to find out more).
- Inform your neighbours about ringing, eg with a leaflet ([see example](#))
- Invite your neighbours to an [open day](#).
- If you have a complaint, handle it sensitively (see [advice](#)).

**Your town or village** –

- Find out about major events in the town and offer to ring for them.
- Contribute to village or community newsletters.
- Contact community groups and offer them talks about ringing and/or tours of the tower.
- Make contact with your local council, so they know who to ask about ringing.
- Get your details included in community directories.

**The wider community** –

- Make contact with your [local press and/or radio station](#). Offer them interesting stories.

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## Talks & presentations

Giving talks to groups of people is a very good way to spread the word about ringing.

**Community groups** – Many invite speakers to their meetings, and most are keen to find new speakers with interesting topics. Talks on ringing are popular with many groups. You have a captive audience and you can cover a lot of ground. You can add local interest, show the human side of ringing, and dispel a few myths. Many groups will want a general talk, but some may prefer a slant towards their particular interest (history, music, maths, technology or whatever). Invariably your talk will be followed by questions, which enables you to interact with your audience and draw out what they find interesting.

Illustrate your talk with pictures and diagrams. Avoid lots of bullet points – your audience wants to listen to you, not read off the screen. Include some recordings of ringing – both methods and call changes (the ones with interesting names). If possible, use video to show what the ringers do and what the bells do. There are many sources of material on the web, including this [collection of slides](#). Try to build up your pictures of your own, especially those with local interest. Don't forget to include pictures of ringers as well as bells and towers.

Use props if you can. A model bell is ideal if you have one. You could make a [cardboard cutout](#) to show how big tower bells are, and how they swing. You can use a bellrope to demonstrate what the ringer does. It's easier to do that on an old rope without much top-end – ask your audience to imagine another 50 feet of rope up through the ceiling. Use it to demonstrate the size of the wheel – hold the middle of the sally in one hand and the tail end in the other, so the rope hangs in a semi-circle that is the same size as the bottom half of the wheel.

Many groups expect a talk of between 45 minutes and an hour (plus questions) but some will want longer and others shorter, so be prepared to adapt your material accordingly.

There are many groups. See [how to find them](#).

**Primary schools** – They will often accept an offer of a talk about ringing during school assembly (up to 20 minutes). Keep it simple, illustrated with pictures and sound, and include plenty of questions like: 'Who knows how many bells our church has?', 'Can you guess how heavy bells are?', 'Who knows how old they are?', and of course at the end 'Who wants to be a ringer when you are bigger?'. At the end, leave them with the address of a good website for non-ringers, to look up afterwards. If your tower or Branch website has lots of suitable material then use that. Otherwise look around to find one that does. Here is [one example](#), and there is [bellringing.org](#).

You can return to the same school every few years, when those who heard the last talk have moved on.

**Secondary schools** – They are mostly under time pressure, so they need a good reason to fit in anything extra. The best approach is to convince an enthusiastic teacher that ringing can be used to enrich his/her curriculum subject. Here is what [one tower offers](#). This approach may lead to an afternoon with a small group specialising in maths, music, or whatever the curriculum topic is, if you are successful in generating interest.

Alternatively, you may be able to arrange to hold a bigger event during the 'after exams' time at the end of the summer term, when pressures are slightly less. This might include several activities, with groups of pupils taking turns with each, for example talks, having a go with a mini-ring, working with handbells, and other exercises. Again, the best way to achieve this is to find a teacher who is keen to push it through and make it work.

<There must be an example we can put a link to?>

See [finding schools](#).

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## Finding suitable organisations

### Schools

Schools should be easy to find. There is probably a list on your local authority's website, or you can use [SchoolsSearch](#). In a small village you probably know all the schools, but in a bigger town there may well be more than you think.

### Church groups

There may be several groups that meet regularly in your church – Mothers Union, Church Fellowship, and so on. You don't have to limit yourselves to Anglican churches. Groups attached to other denominations may be just as interested in the story of ringing. They may not have bells, but they share the communal heritage of ringing. Your vicar can probably give you contacts, and your council website (unitary or county) should have lists of churches.

## Other groups

There are lots of groups out there – more than you think! Many rely on word of mouth to find speakers, so the more talks you give, the more likely that your name will be passed to someone else.

Some groups are purely local, and the best place to look for them is in local directories or libraries. But many are affiliated to a national or international organisation, which gives you another way to search for them. The table below gives details of some organisations, and how to find a local group near you.

Some organisations (for example the WI and some county history societies) have directories of speakers and their subjects, and the lists are provided to all their local groups. You might get on a list just by offering, or you might be invited to an audition. For example, the WI invites several speakers to selection meetings where each has a 20 minute potted version of their talk. It's not at all intimidating, and you might even get some ideas about presentation by listening to the other speakers.

Organisation	Description	Local groups
<a href="#">Rotary clubs</a>	Around 1000 clubs in the UK for people dedicated to volunteer service	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">Inner Wheel</a>	Nearly 800 clubs in 21 districts for wives and partners of Rotarians (over 20,000 in UK) that have separate meetings with speakers	
<a href="#">Round Table</a>	Around 80 branches in UK	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">Ladies Circles</a>		
<a href="#">41 Clubs</a>	Many clubs for former Round Tablers over 45	
<a href="#">Tangent Clubs</a>	Many clubs for wives and partners of 41 Club members who used to be in the Ladies' Circle	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">Probus</a>	Over 900 clubs in UK for retired professional and business people who meet for fellowship and to hear guest speakers	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">Soroptimists</a>	Over 100 clubs in UK for professional and business women working to improve the lives and status of women and girls	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">Federation of Women Graduates</a>	Around 20 local associations of women with degrees or equivalent who meet regularly	<a href="#">Listed here</a>
<a href="#">The Women's Institute (WI)</a>	Over 50 federations, with 7000 groups in UK.	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">Towns women's Guilds</a>	Nearly 800 branches for discerning women who care about their communities.	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">Trefoil Guilds</a>	Over 20,000 women and men with a connection to the Scouting and Guiding movement.	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">Civil Service Retirement Fellowship</a>	Over 250 groups in UK	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">U3A (University of the Third Age)</a>	Over 800 separate U3As across UK, with over ¼ million members. People no longer in full time work share experiences in a wide range of interest groups	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">Local history societies</a>	Over 1200 local history societies.	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
<a href="#">National Women's Register</a>	Over 350 groups in UK of women who meet regularly	<a href="#">Find one near you</a>
Ladies luncheon clubs	There are many	<a href="#">Search for one</a>
Gentlemen's luncheon clubs	Not as many as the ladies, but still quite a few	<a href="#">Search for one</a>

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## Tower visits and open days

Members of the public are fascinated to see inside a bell tower. There are two ways you can invite non-ringers into the tower (apart from personally showing round an individual).

- Group visit – You invite a small party, usually from a community of youth organisation. These are closed groups of a pre-arranged number of people who normally know each other.
- Open day – You advertise that you will be open between certain times, and accept visitors as they come. You don't know in advance how many people will visit, or when they will arrive.

You (on behalf of the church that owns the tower) have a duty of care to your visitors, so before inviting them you need a clear plan for how you will ensure the visit is both safe and rewarding for them. Each tower is different, so you need to work out what is and isn't practical in yours. These notes give general guidance, that may help you.

Bear in mind that non-ringers will be unfamiliar with many of the things that you take for granted, like spiral staircases, low doorways, bellropes, dusty walls or dim lighting. Visitors will also vary in size, agility and fitness. Always brief them before entry, and warn them what to do and what not to do.

### Access

Anywhere you take visitors must be safe and easy to access. Stairs are OK providing the steps are level and secure, and there is a handrail or a rope to hold. Ladders are undesirable, but a short one might be OK if it is easy to use. Some towers have a hybrid, with steps like stairs (as opposed to rungs like a ladder), but steep and open (like a ladder) – usually with a handrail. You need to be sure that the sort of people you expect would be able to use the access reasonably easily, and without risk to themselves or others.

### What to show

Each tower is different, but the more you can (safely) show, the more interesting the visit will be.

- Ringing room – The ringing room is probably the easiest space to access. It is a good place to explain about ringing, and show how a bell is rung. Use a model or pictures to explain what is upstairs – how the bell is hung, and the function of different fittings. A photograph of someone alongside a bell can help to give the scale. You can demonstrate the size of the wheel by holding the middle of the sally in one hand and the tail end in the other, so the rope hangs in a semi-circle that is like the bottom half of the wheel. If you can install a TV camera in the bell chamber, with a display in the ringing room, you can demonstrate how the bell movement relates to what the ringer does.
- Intermediate chamber – If you have an intermediate room below the bells, it may well contain things to interest visitors, for example a historic clock, interesting beam ends, spare stays, ropes, etc.
- Bell chamber – Bell chamber access varies a lot, from walking in alongside the frame to climbing up through it. It may not be practical to allow visitors into yours, but if it is then you need to decide how many people can safely be allowed in to the available space. If it's not practical for visitors to go in, could they safely look in from the doorway? Or would the logistics of getting them to and from the doorway one or two at a time be impractical?
- Roof – Some towers don't have an accessible roof, but if yours has one that can be safely accessed, then giving visitors a chance to see your town or village from above can be the crowning attraction of their visit. As well as easy access to the roof, you need a high enough parapet wall, and level, non-slippery surfaces that won't be damaged by being walked on.
- Ground level – the bottom of the tower might just be the porch or it might be used for storage, but there may be something interesting to show visitors before they go up – the rope for ringing the service bell perhaps, or a plaque on the tower door recording Millennium ringing.
- Outside – Your tower may have interesting features on the outside – an interesting design or unusual stone for example. In any case, it helps to give visitors a sense of scale if you show them from the outside where the ringing room window and the louvres are. There may be something else of interest in your churchyard, for example the grave of a famous ringer.
- In the church – If there are things in the church likely to be of special interest – a special statue or carving perhaps – then you could include them as well if you have some spare time. Your visitors may well be non-churchgoers, who have not been inside the church.

## Moving between spaces

There are two ways to organise visitors moving round a tower. You can take them as a single group to each space in turn (ringing room, clock room, bell chamber, roof or whatever). That is likely to limit the numbers severely unless every space is very large. You will need a minimum of two stewards (one leading and a back-marker).

Alternatively you can split them into several small groups, with each starting in a different space, and then move them round until they have all seen everything. That requires very good co-ordination to ensure that no groups meet on the stairs or in restricted passages. It also needs more stewards (at least one per space and one to supervise movement between spaces).

Whichever way you choose, think how it will work, even if something doesn't go to plan, for example if one of the visitors wants to leave before the end. You should also think about risks and how you will manage them – your church might want to see a risk analysis – don't be surprised if the most hazardous aspect turns out to be something like managing visitors on the stairs!

## Stewards

While groups of visitors are in the tower, you need several responsible people to look after them. These stewards need not all be practising ringers, but they must be familiar with the tower, and fully aware of what is and is not safe. How many stewards you need will depend on how many visitors you have, where you take them, and how you organise the visit. Work out how many you need, and make sure that you will have enough. If in doubt, have someone extra who is able to respond to anything unforeseen.

## Ringling during a visit

If any bells are to be rung while visitors are in the upper levels of the tower, you need strict precautions to ensure safety. The bell chamber, any space through which the ropes pass, and the ringing room must be either supervised by a steward or locked while any bells are up. Visitors must not be allowed near a bell to be rung or its rope. In the bell chamber the bell to be rung should be on the far side, away from where visitors are. In intermediate chambers, visitors should not be allowed near the active rope. Any ringing must be preceded by clear audible agreement between the stewards at all levels that it is safe, and visitors in the upper levels should be advised to cover their ears. Only ring a few whole pulls.

If visitors are not being taken to the upper levels, then providing there is adequate space in the ringing room, visitors can be given a demonstration of normal ringing,

## Approval

The PCC and Wardens are responsible for the safety of anyone within church buildings, so tower visits must be made with their knowledge and approval. If you regularly organise tower visits, they may be happy to delegate the detailed arrangements to you, but for a first or one-off visit you should discuss what you plan to do in advance. The church insurance should cover the activity, providing it is conducted in a safe and responsible way, but you should check.

Ecclesiastical Insurance (EIO, which insures many churches) includes a section on tower tours in its [Health & Safety Guidance](#). This is guidance, not regulation, so complying with the guidance doesn't absolve you from responsibility for the specific situation in your tower. In some cases you will need to impose more stringent constraints to operate safely, but equally in others you may be able to relax some constraints, providing you can demonstrate that your plans and precautions are well thought out and safe.

*<Note – This section will also be reviewed by Tower Stewardship Committee.>*

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## Ringing websites for non-ringers

There are many ringing websites (society, branch and tower) with useful information for ringers (details of bells, ringing times, contact details, etc). Some of this information might also be of interest to non ringers (information about the history of the bells, pictures of the bells, life of the ringers, etc). One way to help spread information about ringing is to provide a lot more information that is specifically intended to interest non-ringers, and to inform them about ringing.

### What to include

Include anything you think might interest non-ringers and raise their awareness. Here are some ideas:

- Ringing at your tower – when you ring, learning at your tower, your performances (peals, quarters, any historic ones, etc), ringing outings, competitions you have won, etc
- Your ringers – Contact details, pictures (friendly faces), details of any famous ringers at your tower, names of former ringers (which often get picked up by people researching family history), etc
- Your tower and bells – Details of the bells, other interesting things in the tower, views from the roof, etc
- Your history – If you know something about the history of your tower, bells or ringers, include it. Local historians may pick it up and show an interest.
- Your project – If you have had a big project (augmentation, restoration, recruitment drive, or whatever) write up the story with plenty of pictures.
- General information – It's useful to put something about how bells work and how ringing works. The level of detail on your own site is up to you – if you prefer, you can use links to other sites such as [bellringing.org](http://bellringing.org). Here is an example of [about ringing](#) on a tower site.
- Services you offer – If you offer tower tours or talks on ringing, then give a summary and contact details.
- Links – Provide links to other ringing websites (which provide more information) and other organisations within your community (which shows that you are part of it).

Use plenty of pictures on your website, as well as words. Make your site look interesting. Look at other websites for good ideas. See an example of [what is on one tower website](#).

### Promoting your website

There are four ways to get people to see your website:

- Tell people about your website. – Include the web address in any article you write or poster you produce. Put it on noticeboards, etc where people will see it. Give it to people whenever you talk to them about ringing. Carry some tower 'visiting cards' with it on, see [an example](#).
- Get other websites to link to your website. – Try to get links from as many other sites as possible: civic sites, church sites, council sites, community sites, personal sites, historical sites, and any others with which there is some sort of connection, however tenuous. Look at the other sites and suggest where you think the link might best fit. Providing a link to the other site makes a return link more likely.
- Help people to find your website. – People using search engines only look at the top few pages listed. Making your site attractive to search engines will get it higher up the list. Having a lot of links to and from it helps, and so does having plenty of diverse information on the site. For more advice, see: [Google's search engine optimisation guide](#).
- Help people to 'come across' your website. – Most of the time people don't search for bellringing, but if they come across your site while searching for something else and it looks interesting, they might stop and have a look. The more diverse your site is, the more likely it is to be picked up by a wider range of searches. This is a useful bonus for adding information about things other than bells (the tower architecture, the clock, local legends, former ringers, and so on) – your site is more likely to be found by people looking (or just browsing) for other things.

*<Does anyone know of other guidance for websites aimed at non-ringers that we could point to? The only website guidance I remember is an RW article years ago, but I'm pretty sure it was aimed at what ringers find useful.>*



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## Working with the media

Left to themselves, the press, radio and TV periodically help to propagate myths and stereotypes of ringers. They do that out of ignorance not malice, so we should work with them to help spread greater realism and awareness about ringing. Occasionally there are opportunities to do that nationally, but there are many more opportunities locally, so try to work with your local media. They have a much bigger audience than you will be able to address any other way.

The most important thing to remember is that journalists aren't interested in your peal, restoration project, or recruitment drive for its own sake. They are interested in stories that will help to sell the newspaper or enhance the station's ratings. So when dealing with them, try to think like a reporter and tell them things that will interest their readers or listeners. Does your peal commemorate a historical event? Does it feature a very young or very old ringer? Has your project uncovered some history? Is your recruitment drive doing something unusual?

There are several ways to work with local media:

- Respond to their requests for stories, comment or information when you are asked
- Offer them stories and news when you have something of interest
- Try to develop a longer term relationship with them

### Responding to requests

Journalists often pick up a story, and then want to know more. If it is a national story, they may look for a local angle. If it involves ringing, they will try to find a ringer. If you are a tower captain, or your name appears on a ringing website, or if you are known locally to be a ringer, then you could well be the person they contact.

Such out-of-the-blue requests are likely to be about general topics, and may well be slightly negative (noise complaints, shortage of ringers, accidents, and so on). The story may be exaggerated or inaccurate, so try to inject some factual balance.

Other misconceptions about ringing might be lurking in the back of the reporter's mind, so try to correct them. Remember that the reporter's job is to make the story exciting. If you don't correct misconceptions, you might find them in the story, associated with you. You might find the list of [ringing myths](#) helpful.

Such enquiries also come when they pick up on a national story, like ringing for the Queen's Jubilee, and want to know what is happening locally. If you don't know of any local plans, you might be able to pass them to someone who would know. If you haven't made any plans yet, be positive – explain how far ahead ringing is normally planned, and offer to get in touch with an update later.

### Offering stories and news

You can be more proactive. Make your own news, and raise the profile of ringing in your area. Many ringing events can make good stories if properly presented, but think like a reporter, and focus on what other people will find interesting, not just what you are doing.

Contact your local press, television or radio stations. They are often seeking general interest stories and if you can offer them something that's a special occasion, such as an older or younger ringer's birthday, a romance leading to a ringers' wedding or a major fundraising project, you might find the cameras at your event.

You can offer a story in two ways: you can issue a press release or you can contact a reporter to discuss what you have in mind. A [press release](#) allows you to put over a well defined set of information. It is appropriate when the story is more or less cut and dried, and when you are reasonably sure the press will be interested. You can send it to several media at the same time.

If you are not sure of the level of interest, it may be better to contact a particular organisation, say your local paper, to discuss the story and how best to present it. You can explore different ways the story might be covered, and you can answer questions immediately. If you want to make sure the facts are correct, you can still send a brief with the key facts by e-mail afterwards.

## Developing a relationship

If you can do it, it's worth trying to develop a relationship with a suitable individual who will be your main contact. It will help them to know where to come for any information about bells and ringing, and it will help you to have someone who you know as a first port of call. With a local paper, it might be the reporter who handles local news in your area, and with a radio station it might be someone who looks after church affairs. When talking to newspaper staff about anything non-urgent, always bear in mind that they are normally under least pressure just after the paper has been 'put to bed' (usually a day or so before publication).

Find out how your contact likes to work. Most local papers run general interest stories about the communities they serve, as well as the latest 'news', and they may plan these some time ahead. Find out how far ahead your contact would like to know about upcoming stories. Say if there is a list of forthcoming events on your website.

## Press releases

A press release is pseudo-news story, written in the third person, that seeks to demonstrate to an editor or reporter that the event, person or product you want to publicise, or the message you want to put over, is newsworthy. Write the main story clearly and objectively. Make it obvious where the main story ends (preferably by putting [ENDS] after it) and add any supplementary information after that. Include a link to your website if relevant, and include your name and contact details (phone and e-mail), together with those of anyone else who you may wish to answer questions (for example your tower captain).

Here is [an example press release](#). There is some advice on press releases [here](#) – filter out the commercial flavour and there is some good advice.

## Use your website

If you have a comprehensive website, it is really useful when talking to journalists or others over the phone, because you can refer to it while you talk. Explaining some things can be much easier when the person you are talking to can see what you are talking about, rather than having to try to imagine it. Even if you don't refer to it while talking, give them the address to look at later. If there is something they didn't quite understand, they are more likely to check on the web than to ring you and ask.

## Reporters

Reporters have a difficult job to do, so when talking to them, try to put yourself in their shoes. Time is short – they may have to get to another assignment. They almost certainly know nothing about ringing, though they may well have some misconceptions. They have been told to get a story, possibly with a particular angle. They ask what they think are reasonable questions, and scribble down notes of what they think your answer meant. When they get back to the office they have to make a story out of what they have got.

So try to make your answers clear. If a question seems a bit oblique, try to clarify it. Feel free to say more than just the bare answer, but make sure it is understood. Try not to throw in casual asides that may be only half understood. If you suspect that they have got the wrong end of the stick, ask them to confirm what they think you have said. Do it in a helpful way and it shouldn't be resented. After all, they don't want to get the story wrong.

Try to use lay language, and if you do use a technical term, explain what it means. For example if you needed to refer to a stay breaking, explain that the stay is a wooden rod used to rest the bell when it is upside down, but that it is designed to be the first thing that breaks if something goes wrong, like a fuse blowing. Ideally show them a model or a picture. Without that level of understanding you might find the story includes something bizarre like one of the supports holding the bells up in the tower collapsed, causing one of the bells to come crashing down.

## Photographers

Offer pictures if you have good ones, but don't be surprised if the local paper prefers to send its own photographer. Most of them do, so sooner or later you will have to deal with a press photographer.

He knows his job, but is unlikely to know anything about ringing, or the constraints of working in a tower. On arrival, he will be looking for what is possible – suitable positions, backgrounds and angles. If there are several places the picture could be taken, show him what is possible. If he wants to take action shots, explain how far the ropes move, and the need to keep clear of them.

Some photographers use lighting and/or a tripod, so you need to work with him to position things that will achieve the result he needs while not causing a hazard. TV cameras carried on the shoulder need particular care. They are



designed to allow the cameraman to move around, and while he is looking through the viewfinder, he might not be fully aware of how close the front of the camera is to the ropes (or the back if he is in the middle of the rope circle). In all cases make sure the cameraman understands the constraints, while trying to help him to get the pictures that he wants.

## Interviews

Being interviewed, either in person or over the phone, can be a bit daunting because of the fear that you will trip up and say the wrong thing or that you won't know the answer to a question. That is especially true when the interview is live on air. With a pre-recorded interview any fumbles might be edited out, but on the other hand so might things that you consider important, which could alter the story.

Normally you will be told in advance what the interview is about, and a researcher may talk you through the sort of questions you will be asked. This isn't just for your benefit – it helps them to plan the interview. You may be able to influence the eventual interview in this preliminary session. If you have been contacted to respond to something negative, make a point of emphasising related positive aspects that your interviewer might not be aware of. That way you are likely to get a more balanced mix of questions when it comes to the interview. Remember that the journalist's main interest is to produce something interesting to listeners. Whether you come over positive or negative is secondary. So try to make the positive aspects interesting.

If you do find yourself being asked questions about something negative try to keep your answers low key and factual. Don't get drawn into emotional arguments, and try to steer the discussion back onto positive things.

## Lifestyle publications

Your area may be served by one or more lifestyle publications – glossy magazines that feature people and local groups, usually with lots of pictures. They include various county life magazines (*Berkshire Life*, *Yorkshire Life*, etc) and the *Totally* magazines (eg *Totally Henley*). From time to time they include features about ringers. You may need to do a bit of research to find the ones in your area.

## The result

What finally gets published or broadcast is determined by the journalist, not by you. You can't control the result, though you can only influence it by providing good material, by being helpful, and if relevant by trying to win over the journalist to your point of view.

When you hear or read the final result, try not to be over-critical. It may well miss some bits out, and it is quite likely to contain some errors of detail or terminology (for example ringers 'playing' bells rather than 'ringing' them). Ringers sometimes get upset over such things, but what really matters is the message that comes over to the non-ringing members of the public. They are the target audience, not us. If the overall message is positive, try not to worry too much about minor details.

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## Personal PR

Raising awareness of ringing isn't just a job for tower officers, ringing societies and the Central Council. We can all play a part. You and your fellow ringers each know dozens of people, and between us we have far more contact with non-ringers in the course of our daily lives than ringing organisations can ever hope to do, however pro-active they are. There are over 40,000 of us. Just think what we could do for ringing if we all played our part in spreading the word – how it works, its history, and why we do it.

Anyone in PR will tell you that word of mouth is the best form of advertising. People believe their friends and acquaintances more than they believe 'PR'.

You don't need to be a high flying ringer, or a technical expert. All you need is enthusiasm, and the willingness to share your enthusiasm and knowledge. Tell people that you are a ringer and explain what ringing is all about. It isn't hard to increase the average person's understanding. Think how many of the people you know have even the basic understanding shown in this [comparison of different activities](#).

Just chatting to people about ringing can help to demystify it and make a positive contribution. Talk to people about your experiences. You might take your ringing for granted, but remember that to someone who has never rung, the skill needed to do it at all can seem amazing.

<Maybe this page could use a Kitchener-style 'Ringing PR needs you' poster?>

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## Some ringing myths exploded

There are many myths about ringing. Better information should help to dilute them, but powerful ideas have a habit of lingering long after they are known to be untrue. Always be prepared to confront misconceptions, and explain how things really are. Here are some common myths and potential responses to them:

- Just pulling a rope? – There's a lot more to ringing than 'pulling a rope'. To control a bell in full circle ringing requires considerable skill, and change ringing adds an extra layer of mental skill that can provide endless fascination. Ringers often get hooked on it
- Bells rung by machine? – Apart from a few tunes and clock chimes, English bells are hardly ever rung by machine. When you hear English style ringing, there is a band of skilled ringers in the tower, helping to carry on a 400 year old tradition and bring you that special, unique sound.
- Not the right type? – Ringers are male and female, old and young, and from all walks of life. The status of ringers reflects their ringing skill, not their age or their job.
- Nerdy ringers? – Ringers are keen, and some times passionate, about ringing. But so too are people about other forms of sport, music and hobbies. If you want to see how sociable ringers can be, join them in the pub after ringing.
- Going to church? – You don't have to be a Christian to ring. Many ringers are members of the church where they ring, but many others aren't. They ring for church services in return for the pleasure that they get from ringing, for services and at other times. The modern Church supports many activities that involve the community outside its own members.
- Too old or too young to learn? – You can learn at any age. Teenagers probably find it easiest to learn, but some very young children learn too, and many ringers these days learn in their 40s, 50s or 60s. Whatever age you learn, you can ring for the rest of your life.
- Is ringing hard work? – Not normally, unless the bells are very heavy or there is something wrong with them. Watch a skilful ringer, and you will see a smooth, almost effortless performance. Bell control is all about feeling and timing, not brute force.
- Do ringers need to be strong? – Not at all. When you have learnt how to do it, controlling a bell is easy. The more skilful you are, the easier it is, because of the way the bell works. Most normal weight bells (up to about a ton) are within the range of anyone of average build who learns the necessary technique.
- Being taken up by the rope? – It can happen, but it is so rare that most ringers have never seen it, let alone done it. When properly handled, a bell is perfectly safe – just like any other heavy equipment.
- Dangerous? – Compared with most activities, ringing is very safe. Ringing societies can get very good rates for accidental insurance cover for their members, because the risk is so low.
- Monks swinging on bell ropes? – If you ever see anyone swinging on a rope, they are not real ringers. Don't believe everything you see on TV! (If you should ever come across a real bellrope, don't be tempted to swing on it, or even pull it. If you don't know what you are doing, bells can be dangerous.)
- Campanologists? – Ringers rarely call themselves campanologists – it is a word mostly used by non-ringers. Normally we just call ourselves ringers. The literal meaning of campanology is the study of bells.
- A closed shop? – Not at all. It takes time to learn, as with any skilled activity, but ringers are very welcoming to those who want to learn, as well as to people who are just curious to know what it is all about. Try visiting your local ringers.
- An isolated activity? – Spending your time in a bell tower might seem isolated, but ringing is a team activity so you are always with others who share your interests. Ringers are also part of a much wider community that spans regional and national borders. A ringer walking into any tower in the world where English style ringing is performed is treated as a friend and invariably invited to join in the ringing.

## Measures of awareness

How high do we need to raise public awareness of ringing? We can't expect them to know as much as ringers know, but we could try to achieve a similar level of knowledge about ringing, to what many people have of other sports and musical activities.

The table below shows ringing and four other activities, with comparable descriptions of each for the equipment used, the activity itself, and the people who take part. These descriptions are not about participants or keen followers, but about people with no involvement. For example the cricket knowledge would apply to someone who never watches cricket, couldn't name any current cricketers, doesn't know there is a test match on and doesn't care who wins.

Our goal should be for most of the people we meet in everyday life to have at least the level of knowledge in the ringing column.

Ringing	Cricket	Ten pin bowling	Golf	Organ playing
Most bells weigh several cwt (but some can weigh tons). They are typically hung in sets of 6-8 (but can be more or fewer). They swing full circle, are fitted with wheels, and controlled from below by a rope. Rope has a fluffy bit (sally) because on alternate strokes the rope rises to a different height.	Smallish leather ball hit with a wooden bat. Larger grass pitch with a flat strip in the middle. Wickets at both ends of the strip are made of 3 sticks with bails on top. Batsmen wear leg protection.	Large, heavy ball with finger holes to grip it. Long lane with pins at the end. Pins are automatically cleared and set up by a machine. Scores are displayed automatically. Multiple lanes usually alongside each other.	Small hard, dimpled ball, long clubs of varying weight, some with wooden ends, some iron. Ball is hit a long way by swinging club through a large arc. Grassy course extends over several acres. 'Greens' (flat bits) are a good walk apart. Each has a hole in it that the ball must be got into.	Most are pipe organs, but some generate sound electronically. Sound is made by air blown through pipes of different shape and length. Lots of pipes. Playing console has more than one keyboard and (usually) a pedal board. 'Stops' can be used to produce different types of sound.
One performer per bell. Bells ring in sequence. Rhythm should be even. In change ringing sequence continually changes according to predetermined rules. 'Methods' (corresponding to musical tunes) have interesting names. Performances take from a few minutes to several hours (peals).	11 players in a team. Batsman at either end. Balls bowled alternately to one of them. Both run together to make scores. Extra score for hitting a ball to the boundary. Batsmen are got out by the ball being caught, or by knocking off stumps. Games last from a few hours to several days.	People play against each other, either individually or in teams. They have three balls for each go. The aim is to knock down as many pins as possible with each ball. Balls are set up again if they all go down before using the last ball.	18 holes in a course. Score based on total number of strokes to get ball into all holes. Players have a handicap (added to score) to compensate for differences in individual ability. Game takes a few hours	One person plays, using both hands and feet. Music varies widely. Can be used to accompany singing or to give solo performances. Organists normally play from music, but some can perform from memory.
Ringers are very varied: male and female, all ages (from teens until well past retirement) and from all walks of life. They don't need to be very strong but do need co-ordination and a sense of rhythm.	Mainly played by young men. Played at all levels: village, county, national. Amateur and professional players. Traditionally they wear white flannel.	Often played as a social activity by groups (eg work colleagues). Others play regularly in clubs and leagues.	Played by all classes, men and women, but some clubs have elite status, compared with 'pay as you play'. Amateurs and pros.	Organists can be any age or sex. They need to be musical and have considerable dexterity – harder than playing a piano.