

NRT Conference - 8th May 2004

Over 40 NRT members took part in the conference, and its main outputs are the ideas and inspirations they took away with them. These notes have been prepared for the benefit of those members who were not present, but it is impossible in them to capture either all the things that were discussed or the sense of involvement of the participants. The notes are based on contributions supplied by those who led the topic groups, combined where appropriate.

Summary

Most of the day was spent working in small groups on 11 different topics. They were spread over three sessions, so each person could take part in groups on three different topics, plus the final plenary session. There was one group per topic except where marked (2). Missing letters in the sequence represent topics for which demand was too low to make them viable. Most of the sessions were organised as discussion groups, with two as tutorials and one as a “workshop”. The type of each session is shown in brackets.

A	Developing basic method ringing skills (2) (Discussion)
B	Developing method ringing repertoire (Discussion)
C	Kaleidoscope ringing (Tutorial)
D	The “tower captain’s resource” (Workshop)
E	Attracting and teaching children (Discussion)
F	Teaching older people (Discussion)
G	The use of ringing centres (Discussion)
H	Accreditation of training (Discussion)
I	Tips and techniques for teaching bellhandling (Practical)
K	Using a simulator as a training aid (Tutorial)
M	Practical ways to achieve good striking in a band (Discussion)
Plenary	Future development of NRT (Discussion)

The annexes present brief summaries of each topic. Many of the detailed points made by the groups are not new. That does not invalidate them, but it does highlight the fact that many people travel the same paths, and try to make the same discoveries that other people have made before them. Helping to pass on such ideas, and especially giving insights into what is or is not likely to work, is one function of a gathering like this.

Follow up ideas

Several ideas need to be followed up. Some are continuation of actions already in progress.

- A resource for tower captains - This concept is being developed as part of the CC Education Committee programme of work. Members of NRT should be able to contribute material to it.
- A code of practice for training - It might be a workable alternative to “accreditation”.
- A directory of topics discussed by NRT - Discussion summaries are now available for download, with a basic search facility. An index should be in place in the near future.
- More publicity for NRT - Membership has increased, but does not yet include the whole training community. Members should also spread the word locally.
- Feedback on the success or otherwise of training initiatives - This is up to members to let the rest of us know when they do something significant.
- A future NRT conference - There was a consensus that the conference is useful, but a wider survey of members’ needs should be done before planning the next one.

Feedback from participants

80% of the participants completed the feedback form. Of those who came for the first time, almost all found the event what they expected, and of those who had attended the previous conference, a third thought this one was better while the rest thought it similar. An individual's choice of topics clearly has a strong bearing on overall satisfaction. Some people commented that they chose more wisely this time, while some first timers had not made the best choices.

Some of those who attended both conferences said that they valued the opportunity to meet people again, and quite a few commented favourably on the choice of venue. Two thirds of those responding said that they would attend another conference, with the remainder saying "possibly" and none saying "no".

Organisers' reflections

The first conference in 2002 was an entirely new venture. We had experience of the Education Officers' Conferences that the CC Education Committee ran in the mid '90s, but NRT presented a much broader audience in terms of both experience and role. We did not know in advance what would be the best mix between "tutorial" and "group discussion" sessions, and we offered a mix of both. The 2002 conference was very successful, and so we used a similar format for this second one.

To cater for those coming to the conference for a second time (over half of the participants) we included quite a few new topics in 2004, chosen after asking for members' suggestions. We also included a selection of the topics from the 2002 conference. Overall, we offered slightly more topics than could practically be run, and we ran those selected by most people. The choice of topics biased things towards discussions. One session (use of simulators) was offered as an opportunity to share experiences, but was switched to a more tutorial style, when we discovered that only one of the participants had significant experience of using a simulator as a teaching tool.

NRT is a "club for improvers" as much as it is a "club for experts" in training ringers, and the aim is to cater for all their needs. Both ends of the spectrum were represented among the participants, with some people relatively new to teaching, whose own ringing is not very advanced, as well as more experienced teachers. With hindsight, a greater tutorial content in some other sessions would have benefited some of the participants.

The number of members who attended the second conference was reduced by about a third compared with the first (roughly 10% of the current membership of 400, compared with roughly 20% of a membership of 300 in 2002). Several factors could have caused this, for example the date (May rather than November). We have some useful feedback from those members who attended, and we plan to seek the views of all NRT members over the next few months.

The information gathered, together with any other input about members' needs or suggestions for improvement, will help to shape future NRT conferences.

If you have any suggestions or comments to make, about the conferences or any other service that NRT provides (or could provide), please contact: John Harrison edchair@cccbr.org.uk 0118 978 5520.

Acknowledgements

Those who helped to make the day successful included:

Leaders and supporters of the group sessions:

Alan Bentley, Christine Baldock, Mark Banner, Rebecca Banner, Jenny Beech, Fred Bone, Stuart Flockton, Phil Gay, Phillip George, Sheila George, John Harrison, Nigel Harrison, Michael Hatchett, Geoff Horritt, Paul Johnson, Catherine Lewis, Frank Lewis, Gordon Lucas, Francis Mitchell, Harry Nichols, Richard Pargeter, Barry Peachey, Heather Peachey, Ernie Runciman, Nick Smith, Mike Winterbourne.

Venue and host:

Chris Mew of the Coventry Diocesan Guild.

Food and refreshments:

Ruth Border and team.

Organisation and planning:

Ernie Runciman, Heather Peachey and John Harrison

Participants:

Jonathan Beale, Christine Baldock, Mark Banner, Rebecca Banner, Frank Beech, Jenny Beech, Alan Bentley, Fred Bone, Jason Carter, Freda Cleaver, Lynda Coles, Victor Coles, Cyril Crouch, Stuart Flockton, Phil Gay, Sheila George, Phillip George, Nigel Harrison, Michael Hatchett, Geoff Horritt, Paul Johnson, Kathleen Johnson, Raymond Kefferd, Catherine Lewis, Frank Lewis, Gordon Lucas, Brian Marginson, Christopher Mew, Francis Mitchell, Harry Nicholls, Heather Peachey, Barry Peachey, Margaret Perrott, Richard Pargeter, Bob Robertson, Ernie Runciman, Nick Smith, John Thorp, Peter Wenham, Mike Winterbourne, Carolyn Wright.

Topic group summaries

Summaries of the key aspects of each of the topic groups are attached as an appendix to this report. The summaries can only give a brief indication of what occurred. The major “results” of the sessions are the personal insights and ideas that participants took away with them.

This report was prepared by John Harrison, from contributions by topic group leaders and supporters.

Appendix - Summaries of topic groups

Topic A1 - Developing basic method ringing skills

This was one of two groups to discuss this topic.

The group

Our range of situations and experience was quite wide. One striking difference was between those who had time to offer extras, such as training quarters and simulator sessions outside practice time, and those who could only manage a basic weekly practice.

Theory

In the latter case above, in particular, there was a concern that ringers were unhappy to spend "good ringing time" on theory. Nevertheless, it was agreed that it is valuable to teach as much as possible about any given method (accepting that this cannot be done all at once). Coursing order, for example, can be a very valuable concept at an early stage. Little bits of theory can be dropped in without taking over the practice. It is also a useful pub activity!

Bell control

Inadequate bell control was identified as a common hindrance to progress with method ringing, and revision of handling and bell control as required should not be neglected. The difficulties of identifying problems, both practical and mental, were discussed. One tool here is to draw feedback from the learner by judicious questioning. This can help identification of the aims of the learner and formulation of a planned progression, and can enable realistic and relevant homework to be set. Look out for any disabilities which might be proving a hindrance - for example those slightly hard of hearing may not hear quiet instructions. Be assertive in teaching - always aim for high standards, within the capabilities of the ringers.

Use of call changes

The benefits and otherwise of using call changes were aired - benefits being to encourage listening and ropesight, and (if asked to call) to learn to think more widely while ringing. Call changes without going further than following the bell you're told to were not considered to be of any help, and always moving places at handstroke is a habit which may have to be broken for method ringing. Significant differences between method ringing and rounds and call changes were identified as changes in speed, dodging and ropesight. Various "short blue lines", such as observation bell to Grandsire, were suggested as ways of moving on from plain hunt without taking too large a step, and various aids, such as using Bastow for dodging practice, "follow the bell that's followed you" for hunting up, were included in the discussion.

Homework

We ran out of time to have a proper discussion on homework. Maybe a session in its own right might be suitable for next time.

Topic A2 - Developing basic method ringing skills

This was the other group to discuss this topic. The group discussed specific points of interest rather than exploring the topic generally. The over-all conclusion was:

- There are many tools in the toolbox.
- Select the appropriate one to suit the learner's need of the moment.
- Check through the toolbox occasionally to refresh techniques and exercises that are only used infrequently.

Plain hunting by numbers, places or ropesight

Ringing by numbers could be beneficial if it helped the learner initially, but should not be allowed to continue for so long as to inhibit the development of ropesight and awareness of places. Learning to use rhythm and listening skills are just as important. Bell numbers will eventually be re-introduced for coursing order, etc.

Follow the bell that follows you?

Several members of the group had learned this way, trebling to a method. Although not generally advocated today, it should not be ignored for starting a very able learner who had already gained the skills of ropesight and changing speed.

Exercises and techniques

Kaleidoscope ringing was summarised by members who had attended that session.

Similar exercises to help call change ringers with changing on both strokes were (on 5 bells plus cover) to ring the 3rd out for just 2 changes of plain hunt (PH) finishing with steady ringing in 5th's place. Next ring the 4th in for 4 changes of PH and lead steady. Finally ring the 2nd for 4 changes, to lead and out to 3rd's place then steady.

Other suggestions included the teaching of rhythm by having several learners ring (silently) simultaneously with one experienced ringer ringing plain hunt, preferably following a simulator or CD.

For ropesight (in PH on 5), the learner could most easily discriminate between two bells at a time by starting on the 3rd and being pointed repeatedly towards 4 & 5 then towards 1 & 2. Next, to pick out three bells, on the 2nd passing the treble and being pointed towards 3, 4 & 5. Finally, on the treble, having to discriminate between 2, 3, 4 & 5 all together. Vary the starting order to avoid learning the numbers.

Have the learners watch other ringers constructively, explaining first and questioning afterwards, or even better have a tutor quietly direct their attention during the ringing. They should observe both handling techniques and bell movements.

Considering the learner's perspective

Teach one skill at a time, much as exemplified above.

Do not present learners with a (confusing) sheet of numbers. Rather, allow them to discover the method for themselves. Illustrate the PH of the treble alone then get the learners to use separate columns alongside, not interleaved with each other, for the other bells. The hunting becomes obvious. They then "discover" Plain Bob, seeing the lead-end change as a break before the PH is resumed in another bell's place.

To help a newly acquired skill become automatic, try gently distracting the learner by simple conversation not related to bell ringing. The idea is for the learner to stop concentrating totally on the learned action and, unwittingly, continue it whilst thinking of something else.

Topic B Developing method ringing repertoire

This group discussed the suggestion that the Exercise is dividing into an elite that can ring many methods, mostly advanced, and an underclass that can hardly ring any, whereas several decades ago when there was more of a continuum. The group discussed this, and looked at ways of developing ringers and bands to become more rounded ringers, able to ring a wider range of methods.

The group started with a general discussion on how we should develop learners to be better method ringers by expanding their repertoire early on by moving them into similar plain methods on Doubles and Minor. Everyone agreed that it is not a good idea to set the goal of going straight from Plain Bob to Cambridge, a jump that many will be unlikely to make. A lot of fun can be had out of ringing a wider range of Doubles and Minor methods. There were thoughts on using Reverse Canterbury and then the St Simon groups to develop the idea of different types of work, and then methods with different work above and below the treble, to learn how methods fitted together.

We considered why many bands do not have a wide breadth of methods in their repertoire.

- Learners are frequently fast-tracked without a good understanding of basic methods and how they fit together. This is sometimes because the one extra ringer brought on can enable the band to ring Surprise.
- Towers that cannot manage much more than Plain Bob tend to be held up by a lack of conductor, or not enough experienced help to allow the band to move on.
- District, society and tower practices tend to reflect each other; they frequently focus on learner methods (eg call changes, Plain Bob and Grandsire) and Surprise methods, with nothing in between. This is self-perpetuating.

The group then came up with the following suggestions on how to encourage ringing a broader range of methods in towers:

- Try to encourage different methods through district and society practices (which ought to have more resources than individual tower practices) possibly by having a "special method" and encouraging struggling bands to attend the practices.
- Suggest holding quarterly tower meetings to review progress and deciding where the band wishes to go in terms of methods; then produce method sheets to make it easier for people to learn them.
- Encourage small steps in bands where the majority may not wish to make any major change.
- Try to keep people moving, so that they do not stagnate and get out of the habit of method learning.

Some of the ideas would need to be considered more widely than individual towers:

- *The Ringing World* once did a set of articles on "Social Surprise Minor". It would be possible to do one on Plain Minor methods (or similar).
- *The Learning Curve* can include articles on appropriate methods, and how to learn them.
- *The Diary* could be used to influence recommended learning routes. Simply including different methods in *The Diary* has a major effect on what is rung. (Some different methods were introduced a few years back and the numbers of quarters and peals in them increased.)

Topic C Kaleidoscope ringing

This group began with a tutorial by Gordon Lucas, originator of the Kaleidoscope approach, and author of the CC publication on the subject, published shortly after the conference.

Presentation

Gordon listed the extra skills that a learner needs to develop between the ability to ring rounds confidently and being properly prepared to start change ringing. This is the stage in a learner's development with which Kaleidoscope ringing (KR) is concerned. These skills include:

- The ability to change speed while ringing
- The ability to look away from a bell being followed in order to find another one
- The ability to do this for several consecutive blows
- The ability to lead for maybe just one whole pull
- ... and so on.

Gordon outlined how the KR system operates, showing how it attempts to develop these skills. (See the book for more details.)

Each set of changes is called a "work", and examples are "places" and "dodging". Thus a typical KR instruction might be something like "2 and 3 make places in 2 - 3", which would involve the 2 and the 3 swapping for a whole pull at handstroke and then back again. Another might be "3 and 4 dodge". These phrases are termed "instructions", and simply explain to the students what is expected of them. The actual work is started by a "command", typically in the form "next handstroke".

One of the differences between KR and, say, call changes, is that instructors are encouraged to start works from backstroke too, a point which is often overlooked in standard call changes. The presentation concluded with a look at the way KR may be extended to include experienced ringers and more complicated works.

Discussion

In the general discussion after the presentation it was acknowledged that many teachers used some of the KR "works" already to supplement call changes (eg place making and "dodging on the spot") though normally after rather than before call changes. Several participants said they would try parts of the system, although no one felt ready to change over completely.

There was also some discussion of bell control skills and more specific concentration on the development of good striking by moving the listening focus to match the place. The group also explored the way that KR could be used to begin the development of ropesight and how hunting might develop naturally from it.

To sum up, we felt that KR presents a lot of valid concepts, and should alert instructors to think more carefully about how people develop method ringing skills. Many of the concepts ought to be known to instructors already. Whether the techniques of KR catch on is an open question. Less "aware" instructors might not be prepared to try anything new like KR, and more "aware" instructors might convince themselves that what they already do includes some aspects of it. However, all teachers of ringing skills would do well to get and study the book because there are many good ideas spelled out in it.

For a fuller description of the approach and the thinking behind it, see *Kaleidoscope Ringing*, available from CC Publications.

Topic D The “tower captain’s resource”

Background

The first NRT conference concluded that there was a need for some sort of “tower captain’s resource” containing a collection of useful information that could help practices held in many different contexts to be varied, stimulating and effective. Some work has already been done to gather ideas and produce a working structure. This group was invited to make their inputs. The draft structure is grouped under the following main headings, reflecting the different questions. They are not exclusive, and considerable cross referencing is anticipated.

- Particular situations (What do I do if ...?)
- Objectives (How can I achieve ...?)
- Types of activity (How can I do ...?)
- Practical aids (Things I need to help me do ...?)

Discussion

Questions included: What the tower captain needs, what is available, where it can be found, and what form any new resource should take. The latter question provoked most interest, with a consensus that information should be presented in the form of single sheets per topic, which could be collected and placed into a loose leaf folder. With a single sheet format, updates can be accommodated more easily than with a book.

- We should not be too ambitious initially, gradually build up the number of topics
- Text should be no smaller than 12 point.
- The NRT network could be used to gather information under the various headings and topics and could be used to review draft sheets before issue.
- Some of the information could be in summary form with references to where other more detailed information could be found.
- Duplication of information under different headings is not a problem.
- The structure should be able to adapt as the amount of published information grows.

Ideas

The group brainstormed a number of ideas. Some of these would be out of scope for a resource whose primary role is to be immediately on hand and usable during a practice, rather than for more detailed study “off line”. The aim is not for example to re-invent *The Tower Handbook*. In the spirit of brainstorming, no ideas were suppressed, even those that would not fit in this way. The lists below should be read in that light.

- Situations - brief advice
- Exercises and method sheets - (a number of sheets from various authors?)
- Mechanical diagram(s)
- Development structures / advice / involve everybody / needs of novice
- Practical techniques could include:
Methods including Minimus methods exercises
quarter peals (including ringing behind to Minimus or Doubles)
- Pointers to other resources could include:
Information resources - books, videos, CDs, websites, *The Ringing World*
Physical resources - simulators, computer software, handbells
Training courses including central council course
Organisational resources - NRT, ringing centres, local experts, local bands, district meetings, joint practices, the Bell Club
- Tower management information could include: security, child protection, clergy relations, repairs, money, risk assessments, ringing for weddings and funerals, ...

Topic E Attracting and teaching children

The aim of this session was to share ideas on what has been done and what could be tried to increase the number of children learning to ring. We assumed that recruiting children is a good thing. Indeed, as one member of the group reminded us the vast majority, if not all, of the “black zone” ringers who are extending our art started ringing as children. We also avoided discussing child protection in its own right.

We covered the topic under four broad questions:

- How can ringing be made attractive to children?
- What are the most effective strategies for recruiting children?
- What are the most effective methods of initial training for children?
- What are the best ways to enable children to develop their ringing?

Making ringing attractive

A number of factors have conspired to reduce the numbers of children taking up ringing along with many other activities. One of these is the connection with the Church and the group felt that it is important to make it clear to children that you do not have to be a churchgoer to learn to ring.

On the positive side there are lessons to be learnt from the Scouting movement with regard to getting children to hold offices within the tower. The “Bell Club” approach works well with younger children. Older people may sometimes form good contacts with the young – “children and grandparents united in disdain of parents”. Also the group was of the view that the physical environment in the tower was important.

If you want to attract ringers then make the place look attractive.

Recruitment strategies

The PR side is very important for creating the conditions for successful recruitment.

- Bands should strive to ensure that they have an appropriate profile in the Church and community and in local publications. Hence, if you succeed in getting a good contact with the media, re-use it as much as possible. Holding tower open days and arranging visits for groups of children, such as the senior year of the local primary school, all help.
- The group wondered whether the Central Council could do something towards correcting the false impressions of bellringing that are rife amongst the general public.
- The use of a questionnaire for the general public about ringing can raise awareness and provide useful information - for example at an agricultural show.
- After school clubs can be successful but remember that children are often tired, and, therefore not in a terribly receptive frame of mind at the end of school. A possible solution to this is to organise a club during school hours as part of the Year 6 activities after SATs have been completed. Ringing could also be taken into the school in the manner proposed by Phil Gay.
- The direct approach to individuals was, in the group’s experience, the most successful. Michael Henshaw informed us that some recent research had found that 80% of ringers start through a family or friend connection and less than 5% as a result of an advertisement or public appeal for ringers. Targeting those already known to you would seem to be the most likely route to success.

The key message is that recruitment must be proactive and is the responsibility of all members of the band.

Training children

The group was in broad agreement that:

- It is important that the training of children should be intensive and aim to get them handling on their own as soon as they can manage it.
- Although some of the initial handling training should take place outside the normal practice night it is important that children attend some of a normal practice on a regular basis so that they come to feel that they are part of the band.
- Beyond basic handling, training can be enhanced by the use of simulators.
- Children could also be encouraged to get a ringing program for use at home. Also, it may be possible to get the local school to install one on their machines.
- Using other children as instructors and helpers will also help as will the provision of worksheets and exercises.
- Handbells can be used to help with method ringing, perhaps as part of a lunchtime club in school.
- Bands or districts could organise summer schools. An example was given of one such that used 3 towers all with simulators providing external silencing, and groups of 4 children going to a different tower each day for a separate self-contained module.

Supporting ongoing development

The group was running out of time as we reached this item so the discussion was brief. However, we did agree that the importance of parental support should not be underestimated and that bands or districts should try to arrange regular youth events such as special outings for youngsters only.

Also, if there is a tower fee then make *everyone* pay at an appropriate rate. This will help to make them part of the band.

Topic F Teaching older people

This was one of the larger groups. The following points were offered during the discussion.

What could older ringers bring to the exercise?

- They can have other useful skills
- They can be more perceptive
- They tend to be punctual
- They can be easier to relate to than youngsters

Older ringers can present some challenges

- They can be slower to learn - making it important to rehearse everything carefully
- They can get frustrated if they take a long time to progress
- They have probably not learnt a new skill for a very long time
- They can stick to a habit, even though they are conscious they are not doing it right
- They are not used to taking orders or instructions (whereas as younger people are)
- They can be very busy (as can younger ringers)
- They are more likely to wear spectacles, which can impair good field of view

Some participants challenged these generalisations - not all older people are the same!

Members of the group offered some tips

- Discuss an overview of what will be done and why, at the start of instruction
- Accept that developing skills may take a while (youngsters might overtake them)
- Have a development plan for each ringer
- Recognise that some will only want to ring rounds on a Sunday, but also recognise that some may want to progress and attend branch activities etc to help them, even if others in the band are less ambitious
- Consider holding practices during the day, which might suit people not in work
- Instruct good handling right from the start
- Have a cut off point for all ringers when you know they will not progress to be able to handle a bell properly
- Appoint experienced ringers in the band as mentors to look after learners
- Don't impose your expectations onto your learner. Try to see theirs
- Don't see lack of progress as lack of fulfilment
- Work out how the learner learns
- Make good use of simulators
- Make it fun

Many of these apply to ringers of any age, but participants felt that they might be more important for older ringers.

Conclusion

There was consensus that it was necessary to tailor the teaching to each individual learner regardless of age. Our teaching methods have largely evolved with teaching young people, and we need to be prepared to adapt them where necessary to suit the needs of older people, especially if learning is going to take longer. As with a new ringer of any age, an older ringer becomes a valuable member of the band once he or she can ring rounds reliably.

Topic G The use of ringing centres

Background

There are now many ringing centres and more are being set up. The various ringing centres will adopt ways of working that best suit them and the context in which they find themselves. The group tried to look at ringing centres “from the outside” and focus on how the wider ringing community could relate to, and exploit the presence of, ringing centres in their area.

Initial comments

- Our ringing centres are not being fully used.
- It takes a long time to build up the use of a ringing centre.
- What are ringing centres really about?
- Structured training is needed to develop ringing skills.
- They should concentrate on improving the trainers.

To achieve their aims ringing centres should ...

- Assess the needs of their catchment - some have used questionnaires.
- Develop the best teaching methods for a range of skills.
- Define their aspirations.
- Maximise their availability.
- Provide a variety of opportunities to different people.

To do their job ringing centres need ...

- Equipment: - good sound control, a simulator, video equipment (camera, recorder, TV) audio recording and playback, flip chart or OHP, (laptop) computer.
- Skilled personnel.
- Dedicated meeting spaces.
- Good publicity and marketing (e.g. use of branch/guild newsletters).

Selling points of a ringing centre

- Extended ringing times (using sound control or a simulator) for more intensive learning experiences (particularly suited to mature learners)
- Dedicated use of a simulator for individual training
- More sophisticated learning experiences (which younger learners expect these days)
- Facilities and expertise not normally found in most other towers
- Availability for branch and guild initiatives

Ringing centre courses that have been successful

The group listed some examples

- Conducting
- A 6 bell tower acquiring 8 bell experience during augmentation
- Open days for ringers and non-ringers including hands-on experience
- Presentations to non-ringing groups (WI, Guides, etc)
- Covering skills on light bells using simulators.

Topic H Accreditation of training

Background

Ringling is one of the few leisure activities for which there are no accredited courses and no qualified trainers. Society increasingly expects such things, and there have been periodic suggestions for more formal structures to regulate ringling training. Each such suggestion has been met in more or less equal measure with some support and strong opposition, on the grounds that it would be disruptive and might kill off training altogether in some areas.

The problem does not go away, for example some ringling centres are meeting pressure to be able to show that their courses and teaching have some sort of approval.

This group tried to answer the questions:

- Is accreditation in principle desirable in ringling, and if so, what ought to be accredited?
- How could the transition be managed to avoid adverse side effects?

The debate

To a large extent, the session reflected the turbulent history of this topic, with participants bringing strong opinions to the debate.

There was some consensus that restriction on any aspect of ringling would be unwelcome in many areas, but there was no consensus on how best to respond to that. Some felt it was sufficient reason to reject the notion of accreditation in any form, even without considering what might be accredited (for example courses, course tutors or anyone doing any training). Others felt that the Exercise needed to be prepared for the possibility of an external body imposing restrictions on it. The recent history of child protection was cited. It demonstrated that restrictions could be imposed on ringers, and could cause problems. It also demonstrated that the problems could be reduced where guilds (and the CC) had faced the problem in advance and already put in place their own policies.

The group recognised that many ringers would resent being “inspected” or examined, especially those who had been training ringers for a long time, but did not discuss whether this could be overcome in any way.

There was some support for a “code of good practice” if a suitable one could be drawn up by a national body (such as the CCCBR Education Committee). This might offer a way forward, possibly with the Ringling Centres Committee taking the lead in adopting it and ensuring that it was workable.

Conclusion

The group did not manage to answer either part of the first question, and did not therefore seriously tackle the second.

The most hopeful idea to emerge was that a voluntary code of practice might be able to achieve some of the desired results with less risk of the feared side effects. For example it could be used to demonstrate to interested stakeholders such as parents or PCCs that training was conducted in a competent and responsible way, but being voluntary, and using less prescriptive language, it need not be adopted by those who did not want to do so. There would still be a possibility that a PCC might insist on the code being followed. On the other hand, doing nothing would not prevent a PCC (or Church as a whole) from imposing its own, probably unreasonable, constraints in the wake of a high profile accident.

The group did not solve the problem one way or the other.

Topic I Tips and techniques for teaching bellhandling

This practical session looked at common problems, and demonstrated how to tackle them.

Getting the right hand to the tailend quickly enough

- Do a dry run of the action from sally to tailend on a stationary rope, before attempting to do it with a moving rope.
- Tell the learner to take hands to “where Scotsman keeps his sporran”
- When the learner first pulls off a sally:
 - use a spare tailend in the left hand, which is immediately joined by the right hand after the pull
 - never allow the learner to take hands wide apart after leaving sally - they should always go directly to the “sporran” position
- Use an elastic band to encourage hands to stay together (some had doubts)
- Explain that, although the right hand normally goes above the left, at the point the right hand joins the rope, it is actually below the left hand as the rope is hanging down below the hands, rather than being above them at that point

Getting all left hand fingers round the sally

The group agreed that the position of the tailend was the problem.

- Dry run the action (on a static rope) from tailend to sally, with correct opening up of left hand so that the rope comes in the correct place.
- Discourage holding tailend tightly with thumb.

Banging stay

- Give a lot of initial practice at feeling the set position by pulling the bell up to the balance and letting it gently back.
- Practise in pairs with one person doing backstroke and the other handstroke so that the strength of pull can be monitored.
- Catching the sally in the right place is particularly important. Telling learners to “pull all the way down and move straight back with the same movement to meet the sally”. This helps when people are trying to stand.

Teaching to catch the sally with bell half down initially was demonstrated.

Putting the whole pull together

The group agreed that safety was important when giving the learner control of both strokes. It helps if the separate actions are really safe first. Pulling off the sally and ringing backstroke as one action, before trying to include catching the sally, is generally safe.

Pulling right down (especially for portly people)

It helps to rehearse the action with a bellrope held vertically (bell down). Learner makes a ring round the rope with both hands and practises moving the arms up and down in the correct action without disturbing the rope with the hands. This should help find a suitable standing position.

“Tell, push, bribe” - Tell them to push the rope down at the bottom, turning thumbs down at the end. Put a fiver on the floor and tell them they can have it if they can hit it with the rope (but beware of bells with large wheels!).

Adjusting hands to the right place on tailend

Correct method of shortening tail end, before hands begin to go up, was demonstrated.

Getting people to do as they are told

Video helps people believe they are doing as we tell them. A different tutor might help.

Topic K Using a simulator as a training aid

Background

Simulators are now readily available, well proven tools, but they are still not as widely used as they could be, and even when installed, they are often under exploited as training aids.

The group

Participants had little experience of simulators either for their own use or for teaching. The group looked at the practicalities of choosing and installing a simulator, and using it as a training aid. The group used both a Bagley RingLeader simulator connected to a single silenced tower bell and a laptop computer running Abel connected to a dummy handbell. Each person rang the tower bell with the simulator.

Simulator use

Ringling with a simulator:

- Provides a strong (ie perfect) band around a learner
- Enables a learner to start learning to ring to the rhythm of rounds as part of initial tuition, ie before needing a full set of ringers.
- Enables the practice of methods for which there is not a full band available

Benefits

Using a simulator has several benefits as part of a training system:

- Using a simulator for early training (between pure bellhandling and ringing rounds with other ringers) introduces the learner to the discipline of ringing to a set rhythm much earlier than otherwise, and enables far more time to be spent ringing rounds than would be practical within an ordinary practice.
- Using a simulator at any stage of training enables ringers to practise ringing the rhythm of more bells than there are in the tower
- Using a simulator can provide extra method practice, when a band is not available to ring it.
- If the simulator has sensors fitted to all bells, then it can also be used to provide sound control for normal ringing practice (because the bells are tied and the sound is made electronically).
- If the simulator uses the single reflector system, it can also be used to help teach ringing up and down in peal, although it does not simulate a bell being chimed.
- The fact that simulators use computers can appeal to the young.

Some of the group were concerned that over reliance on using a simulator might leave a learner unable to cope with the unevenness of (some) normal ringing, and hence put off him or her. [In the very rare case of learning entirely with a simulator, it was the other ringers who were “put off” because the learner rang with too steady a rhythm. In practice, using a mix of techniques, this need not cause any problems. Obviously new ringers have to be taught about the imperfections they will meet in “real life” and how to cope with them. Some simulators can demonstrate the difference between good and poor striking.]

Exercises

The group discussed different ways of using a simulator to achieve various objectives, at various stages of development.

- Ringing rounds on a single bell with the rest simulated - the basic exercise
- Ringing tenor behind to a method on a bell whose weight is more suited to the learner than the real tenor
- Leading practice - learning to hear and respond to the open handstroke gaps

- Ringing rounds at different speeds to develop better bell control
- Ringing rounds very slowly indeed, showing that it is much harder to ring with an even rhythm, because the long pauses reduce the effect of the bell's natural rhythm and momentum.
- Ringing rounds following a second tied bell (with a real ringer) as well as the simulated bells
- Ringers on the middle bells, with the simulator ringing treble and tenor to force a rhythm
- Plain hunting, to develop the ability to co-ordinate speed changes
- Ringing a method, to practise it without needing other ringers (and without their mistakes).
- The tutor ringing various exercises to develop his or her own skills

Some practicalities

The group discussed alternative ways to silence a bell [different types of clapper stay, and different methods using a rope].

We agreed that the teacher should acquire a good understanding of the simulator and experience of ringing with it, in order to be of most help to a learner.

Getting the learner to pull off at the right time with no visual clue can be a problem. Some simulators will start automatically to fit in with the learner, or the tutor can learn when to press the button to do the same thing. [People often find it easier to come in at the right time when ringing the tenor.] Having the learner initially follow a second tied bell was suggested as another possible aid to coming in on time.

Learners can sometimes get onto the wrong stroke (ie at handstroke when the simulator is ringing the backstroke row, and vice versa). This imposes on the learner an unnatural rhythm of closed handstrokes and open backstrokes. The tutor must be able to spot if that happens and either get the learner to hold up for one blow, or pause the simulator for one blow. If the learner gets completely lost, it is easy to stop and start again.

The group recognised the need for the teacher to be comfortable ringing with the simulator, in order to demonstrate how to ring, and to do so confidently enough to inspire the learner. [A little private practice will help an instructor using a simulator for the first time.]

Choice of simulator

The group commented that simulator software on a PC or laptop seems to be more flexible and has a wider range of functions than a stand alone simulator. Some modern laptop computers do not have the correct ports to link it to the sensor equipment though, so this would need to be checked. (David Bagley, who supplies sensor kits, has been asked to look at using USB ports instead of COM ports to get over this.) Different types of sensor, and different reflector arrangements with optical sensors affect how easy they are to set up, and how trouble free in use.

A more detailed comparison of different simulator options was published in *The Ringing World*, 9th April 2004.

Topic M Practical ways to achieve good striking in a band

Background

The standard of striking accepted varies considerably in different bands, based on what they are used to. This situation is self-perpetuating, because individuals have neither the incentive nor the opportunity to improve in a band where striking is poor. They lose interest in striking as an objective, and their experience of ringing is impoverished. No other area of musical endeavour would tolerate this situation.

The group discussed how bands could work together to improve all of their striking.

How can individuals improve their striking, even in non-ideal surroundings?

This seemed a good starting point before moving on to group improvement.

- Using a simulator in the tower helps by providing a good striking environment, where the individual can focus on his or her own striking without distraction.
- Using various computer listening aids, along with the Listening CDs (or tapes) can help develop the ability to recognise striking errors.
- “Making an effort” - An individual, even in a slightly erratic band, should aim to strike the bell in the correct place (relative to a reasonably consistent tenor) which should help others to find a consistent place.

An individual wishing to improve his or her striking might consider contacting the local ringing centre, ringing master or education officer for support.

How bands can best help improve all of their members' striking

The group consensus was that bands that struck well had a culture of good striking. This culture was maintained both by encouragement and by expectation. Such bands are either led by, or have within them, ringers prepared to question the striking during and after any piece of ringing.

Nurturing this culture is progressive and needs the will of the whole band, although a couple of individuals prepared to find good ringing and bring the acquired rhythm back home would help to improve the overall striking.

The starting point is for everyone to have the opportunity to listen to some good ringing. Then as the individual and band learn each step, it requires a reasonable emphasis being placed on the striking. It should be accepted that striking will probably be slightly sub-standard when learning new techniques or methods, but in all other situations, the emphasis needs to be maintained.

New ringers

New ringers need to be fed this culture as a part of an ongoing programme, giving them the opportunity to listen to good ringing, and emphasising striking at each stage, as above.

Until a new ringer can hold position between two other bells on low numbers, it could be counter-productive to take the next step to ringing rounds on higher numbers of bells. Such a focus on striking early in the ringer's career should help to develop the skill of listening early too.

Resources available to help improve striking

Simulators, both in the tower and at home

Listening CDs and tapes

Local ringing centre / ringing master / education officer or friendly competent ringers who can strengthen the band in the short term, and allow discovery of the satisfaction of well struck ringing.

Plenary topic Future development of NRT

The plenary session discussed how NRT was developing against its original objectives, and considered whether any changes were needed.

The background

NRT membership has grown to around 400 after only 3 years. NRT was set up to provide a conduit for the exchange of information and experience relating to ringing training. It is managed by the CC Education Committee as a “benevolent dictatorship”.

Nominated individuals perform specific tasks to keep it running (manage the membership database, manage the discussion list, compile monthly discussion summaries, provide bulk postal mailing, manage discussion archives, provide bulk e-mailing).

NRT services include:

- A discussion list (this is active, with 40% of members signed up to it, most of whom participate; other members get summaries)
- Conference (nearly 20% of 300 members attended the first, just over 10% of 400 members attended the second)
- Newsletter (there have been two so far, with fairly limited content)
- Contact details for “who is near me” (this is used very infrequently)
- Ability to request help (this has very rarely been used)
- Ability to run local trainer focused activities (this is only an aspiration so far)

Discussion

The following points emerged in discussion:

- The discussion list is well used and seems to be self sustaining.
- **Local activity** - Some societies and some ringing centres already “teach the teachers”, without drawing on NRT contacts. There have been 6 requests for contact names of other NRT members. No one mentioned examples of trainers banding together to help each other, but there has been informal contact between NRT members, though it is difficult to know how much. **Suggestion:** If members organise local activities of interest to other trainers, they should tell NRT members whether or not they have been successful.
- **Visibility** - The discussion list is much more visible than the other services, which might in part explain their lesser use.
- **Dissemination** - Not everyone wishes to see everything on the discussion list, some of which might not concern them. (Over half of members don’t see it at all, and rely on the monthly summaries.) Some people might prefer information targeted at them (eg tower captains).
- **Newsletter** - The newsletters produced so far have been fairly lightweight. Could they be expanded to include articles about training? Obviously they could - if someone wrote the articles - or they could be circulated as above.
- **Attachments to e-mails** - The ability to share documents with other members would be useful. Attachments are not allowed on the discussion list, mainly to protect members, but documents sent in can be made available for other members to download. **Suggestion:** Publicise this fact more widely.
- **Making a difference** - The aim of NRT is to enable things to happen that would not otherwise happen. It is complementary to the activities of local societies (who should use it as a resource) as well as other sources of information, eg books. NRT allows ideas to be shared with a wider group.
- **Scope** - Should NRT just be for exchange of information, or a formal Central Council clearing point for good practice and advice for training? This question generated

some strong views. The original vision of NRT was of an embryo “training community”, but one that was grass roots led, rather than centrally directed. There was a consensus that this focus should be maintained.

- **Penetration** - The number of people training ringers is large (one in every other tower would be 2500) compared with NRT membership (400). More people involved in training ought to join (especially education officers). At the launch, all territorial societies were offered free leaflets to distribute to towers in their areas. Only about a dozen took up the offer. There was consensus that more publicity is needed, and that local ringing societies should be involved in this. **Suggestion:** Write again to local societies offering promotional leaflets.
- **Conference** - Later in the year was suggested (the first one was held in November). It is intended to send a questionnaire to all members, inviting their views about the conference, before the next one.

Overall, the consensus was that NRT is heading in the right direction. About 50% of participants were interested in local communication.