



The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee

Network for Ringing Training (NRT) summary Feb 2002

Welcome to the 7th Summary for the NRT. There were some very long postings this month, some of which had been copied over from the Ringing Education Network. I haven't reproduced the whole posting but will gladly send out a copy upon request.

Scouts and Guides

Heather Peachey kicked off this month with a request for any scouts/guides who are ringers, to contact her with their views on the badges. Photos of scouts/guides ringing, (with parental permission) and views from 'trainers' on the appropriateness of the level of difficulty of the awards. She still would like a picture of a current scout ringing! The Learning Curve (Straight Arms) *Rodney Stevenson* started quite a long thread about the learning curve from January's RW with regard to pointing out to learners that one arm will always be more straight. He says he had always disregarded the whole issue, leaving it as something learners would discover for themselves. He always teaches right-handed and concentrates on getting them to ring with almost straight arms, but not rigidly stretched which appears uncomfortable when their whole body is stretched out just to get to the balance. He asks whether there is any follow up advice for tutors?

Peter Wenham writes, standards in handling can be a moot point especially with the more mature learners and, whilst he likes all his learners to ring 'copy-book' style, it doesn't always work out that way despite many explanations and exhortations. If the style is not perfect but the ringer is safe to his/herself and others, he has at least produced another 'Sunday Service' ringer! Assuming right handed to mean holding the tail in the left hand he recounts a comment by a left handed ringer that while he had been taught 'conventionally', he later found it easier and more comfortable to swap to the opposite hands. Perhaps the dominant arm is usually slightly longer and this would support the Learning Curve explanation?

Peter Humphrey replies, he firmly believes that the conventional exhortation to maximal stretching ("Keep Your Arms Straight") misses the point, and in many cases does more harm than good. It's A Bad Thing. The point that's being missed is simply that the longer the pull is, the lighter the effort must be to achieve the same effect. We all know that a heavier bell will, in general, need a greater total effort, and it follows that the most comfortable style will include a long pull. However, the converse is also true: a lighter bell will need a lesser total effort, and the most comfortable style will *exclude* a long pull. The latter is for two reasons: firstly, for many people the instantaneous effort resulting from a long pull would become unfeasibly light, and secondly, also for many people, the resulting wind milling effect would waste too much energy in accelerating the arms up and down. (Just try ringing, say, the trebles at the Foundry with fully stretched arms.) A third factor is that a ringer with his or her upper arms vertical on each side of his or her face probably cannot see to each side - it's like wearing blinkers. Our ringing style has to be adaptable if we're to cope with different bells - even those in our own tower. Teaching an insistence on a single style does a gross disservice to our pupils.

John Harrison writes, most good advice, if over simplified and taken to extreme causes problems. The trouble with just saying 'straight arms is not good advice' is that it encourages people to ring sloppily unless you put better advice in its place. Do adjust the rope so your hands go up to a comfortable full reach. What is 'comfortable' will depend on how supple you are. ... Reaching up becomes even more important with bigger bells that have bigger wheels and hence a long rope movement. The most important use of the rope is to allow you to feel what the bell is doing. The main thing is to observe carefully, spot any imbalances and awkwardness, try to work out why it is happening and help your pupil to ring smoothly and effectively. This sounds very general, but observation is important. We all need to remember that we are helping our pupils to solve their particular problems, not just following the book.

Peter Humphrey replied, agreed, though if the pull isn't sufficient, it won't matter what you can feel. And that's related to the fallen-bell problem that learners often encounter.

John Harrison continued, you need to feel what the bell is doing, and you obviously do that through the rope. But if you snatch the rope, the main thing you feel is the transient force generated on your hand by the snatch. Only after your hand is moving smoothly with the rope can you hope to feel with any accuracy what is going on at the other end of it. Moving smoothly requires a reasonable stroke length to establish. Feeling the bell is also more difficult the harder you pull, which you tend to do with shorter strokes.

Rebecca George replied, she used to over pull tremendously but could feel the bell well enough not to bump the stay and has never broken one. Pulling harder does prevent you from feeling as much though.

John Harrison wrote, Not hitting the stay merely requires that in the last few inches of the rise (if it rises that far) you are prepared to put on whatever force it takes to stop it. Doing that says nothing about how soon or how late the bell comes back down again. To strike accurately you need to feel whether the bell is rising more quickly or more slowly than you expected, early enough to be able to make small accurate adjustments to the force, so it rises a little more or a little less in compensation. To strike passably, you need to get this right to within well under a tenth of a second, considerably less than the time it takes to tighten or relax the muscles in your arms if they are not already prepared to do so, hence the need for a delicate touch, and an even rhythmic movement.

Merits of different forms of training.

John Harrison wrote, Sorting through old messages, I just came across a request for information about the respective benefits or otherwise of weekly teaching sessions/practices compared with weekend courses (e.g. Grantley Hall). You are no doubt aware that most of the big ringing courses are heavily oversubscribed. Many people are concerned about this. Given the numbers, it is probably not practical to increase the number of places on big courses enough to meet the demand. There are many other ways that training can be provided - by local associations and districts - where increasing the supply could be more practical, but would people perceive this as an alternative way to meet their needs. The CC Education Committee is currently exploring this with a questionnaire sent to the applicants to one of the big courses. There are lots of different aspects of how training is provided, but it might be helpful to consider two main aspects: Scale: Weekend v day/half-day v evening (perhaps repeated) Location: Outside local area v in local area v in home tower.

John Preston replied, he feels it depends on the learners! Most of his learners are, shall we say, mature people, but even they vary as to what is suitable. He has one very diligent couple (husband and wife) who view ringing as a service specifically to their local church, and have no interest in ringing elsewhere for any reason. For them a concentrated couple of hours in our tower

concentrated on what they happen to be learning is the ideal. Two other rather more outgoing ladies took themselves off to a weekend course, but were disappointed and came back not much better than they went. He's fairly sure the reason is that at their age they absorb new ideas relatively slowly. Each step needs considerable practice to consolidate. Consequently they found that there was not enough time to consolidate one new idea before they moved on to the next new concept. For them a branch special, targeted practise seems to be the best training. On the other hand he's fairly sure that for a bright younger person who can absorb new ideas rapidly, a weekend course will be ideal especially if it stretches them. One concept that we are just about to launch is a "pilot night". Half a dozen experienced ringers are invited to a particular tower that is having difficulty in making progress. The plan is that the local learners all have someone standing behind them to pilot them, and the band is filled up with experienced ringers.

Call Change Trouble
John Harrison posted a copy of an email to the REN that was in the middle of a discussion about standards of ringing. The question was why call changes were struck worse than Triples? The posting from *Liz Rayner* was, the problem with Call Changes unfortunately are not unique. One of the main reasons for this tends to be many people's view that Call Changes are easier than method ringing. However if you start breaking down the skills that the ringer needs for both types of ringing it soon becomes apparent that they are not. Call Changes require the ability to listen, comprehend and react to an instruction in a very short space of time and skill in handling a bell, which means you know exactly what adjustments to make to implement that instruction and can carry it out. The ringing doesn't need to follow any set pattern - like plain hunt for methods - so the ringer doesn't learn these skills by repetition of the same exercise each time unless the conductor or TC makes a conscious effort for this to occur (this also means ropesight doesn't follow any predictable pattern). Call Changes also require a ringer to have done some homework if they are to have enough understanding of them to make real progress - unfortunately it is common to say to method ringers do your homework and give them things to aim for but how often do we do it for inexperienced call change ringers? By comparison simple methods require a limited ability to react until the band get to ringing touches and even then many know they will be unaffected for a lot of the time on 7 or above and may choose ropes accordingly, it has advance warning of the handling the ringer needs to implement and this follows a repetitive pattern as does the ropesight until complex touches are encountered. Suggestions for improvement are: Do give ringers homework for call changes and cover some of the theory. Check you are all working on the same type of change i.e. up or down - ask practice night and Sunday visitors which version they know before putting them in to ring. Practice the handling skills that learners need before getting them to ring Call Changes - try getting them to "make places" with a neighbour keeping the remainder of the band in rounds. Teach people to lead before getting them to lead when ringing call changes - the common "don't like ringing light bells so I don't want to lead on the Treble" means their handling still needs work. Ensure ringers' rounds are of a very good standard before Call Changes are introduced and have sessions of rounds which reflect the length of a session of Call Changes - for many learners once Call Changes are being learned the time they are expected to ring and handle consistently without hitches can treble, which is similar to the concentration and consistency improvement that an experienced method ringer has to undergo when moving from ringing quarter-peals to peals. Finally given that from your e-mail you obviously have adequate experienced ringers if you would consider the band placed has too many learners in it to ring a method successfully it also has too many learner ringers in it to succeed with Call Changes.

Rebecca George replied, she has found that a lot of towers don't consider call changes to be important enough to strike well. Used as a stepping stone between ringing rounds and learning methods and dropped as soon as the learner can move the bell from one place to another, regardless of striking. As with all ringing, it is practise that improves the striking as long as the ringers are making an effort to listen. This includes experienced ringers along with learners! Call changes do have a different set of problems to change ringing, but perhaps they can be taught in a similar way. An idea is to have one learner in at a time if possible and someone standing behind to talk to the learner. Have the learner ring near the front if calling up should help. Start by asking how many bells are in front of the learner then call them up a place, and ask again, try to get the learner into the habit of seeing how many bells are in front of them. This should encourage ringing by places and ropesight and also listening to see how many bells are in front, three things that make ringing call changes a lot easier letting the learner concentrate more on striking the bell. It should also, eventually, allow the learner to see that another ringer may be wrong so they shouldn't follow them, again helping the striking.

Pam Copson sent in 3 ideas to add to the call change saga! 1. Learners have a huge mental leap to cope with - first bells being named by their numbers (2 to 3..... 3 to Treble etc) which later has to be overlaid by place numbers. One way of avoiding this is to use people's names instead of the bells' numbers - (Ben to Celia, so Celia you are after Adam now) for called changes. 2. Tell the affected learner whether they have to hold up or cut down to effect the change. Celia go up a place, Celia go down a place. The rest of the band can find this quite entertaining especially if you also change them around too but by silent signals. If the learner finds this a bit daunting, tell them what you are going to call and ask them who they will then be following, and only after receiving the correct answer call 'change'. 3. An exercise for a learner band. Starting in rounds let each of the band in turn, call him/herself up from lead to the back (or down). Treble first, then say 'over to you 2' etc. Again this can be made more exciting when the band has absorbed the idea, by starting from some order other than rounds. Give it a fancy name like Up the Steeple!?

Tim Ford felt that the reverse is true about the mental leap from numbers to places. The change to ringing by places comes (usually) after proficiency at call changes, so shouldn't be a problem related to change ringing. Surely we should be aiming to strike whatever we are ringing well? Also, if a ringer can't strike call changes well, this doesn't bode too well for progressing to method ringing. There can be a problem when ringers from, say, a ten bell tower attempt call changes on six bells. This is due to the much bigger change in pace necessary to make a clean change on six than on ten. On the subject of having someone standing behind a novice call change ringer, he thinks it's an excellent idea, and a good way to point out the basics of practical rope sight. A good question to ask is not only which bell are you following, but which bell is in front of that one? Hope this is of use to someone!

Two long postings about different teaching methods for call changes from the REN followed. If you would like a copy of these, please contact me.

Teaching (Non Sighted People)

John Proudfoot asked, has anyone any experience with teaching persons who are unable to see? He would be grateful for any help as he has a young man wanting to learn at his tower.

Brian Telford replied, treat them as a normal sighted ringer, but with a little more vigilance and you will be surprised at how easily they cope. He taught a 60 year old blind person to ring in just a few weeks. Verbal guidance is needed at first to help them catch the sally.

Gail Cater added, ringing is a great activity for people who cannot see. She has never taught anyone who is totally blind, but has taught someone who has little sight. He of course needs to learn everything that any other learner would learn. Needless to say you need to teach him to handle a bell very well with a very straight rope. It will be well worth spending a lot of time on this. All the teaching of striking needs to be done by rhythm and counting. This can be quite difficult at first but gets easier with practice. Anyone standing with this ringer when he is learning, needs to think carefully what s/he is going to say to help him. This will be about what position he is in and whether he needs to be quicker or slower (and how to achieve this). Clearly, pointing at bells or saying which bell to follow will probably be less than useless. He will in time need to learn to listen for the treble, especially when it is coming down to lead. My pupil clearly has a good sense of rhythm and can cope with 6 and 8 bell

ringing quite well now. Ten and 12 bell ringing are coming on steadily. What can make it difficult for my pupil is if the rest of the band is not ringing rhythmically, because he then has little to help him except counting. Of course he can ring beautifully with a simulator. Hope this is a useful starting point and gets you thinking.

John Harrison posted a string of archived messages on the subject of teaching a blind ringer. If anyone would like a copy, please contact me.

Richard Pargeter added, he has never taught a completely blind person to ring, but did teach a 75 year old, who was completely blind in one eye, and only partially sighted in the other. One thing he did was to feel for things with his finger ends, and this did not help when trying to catch the sally. He would feel for the sally, thereby knocking it away, and then grasp at thin air. Once he had been taught to feel for the sally with the palm of his hand, the problem was solved. There was no trouble teaching him to catch beyond this, and on reflection he wondered if this is because he teaches people to catch by rhythm. The "down, slight hesitation, and up" movement imposed on you as your hand stroke is taken up to the backstroke, is almost exactly the same as you need to use to match the movement of the sally after pulling down a backstroke. It might even be an advantage to be blind - it's the ones who look up to try and see the sally coming who ruin their timing and catch too early or late!

Hearing Aid Systems

Paul Loxston has two ringers with hearing problems that makes their progress slower than others. He is contemplating putting a loop system into the ringing chamber, plus a mike for the conductor, and maybe a mike amongst the bells. He would be interested if any other tower has had this problem and how they tackled it.

John Preston suggested he get in touch with Peter Rivet as he has installed a loop system at Lancaster Priory – a loud, heavy eight – for the benefit of one of their ringers who is very deaf (has to wear two super charged hearing aids!) Without the loop system, this ringer has extreme difficulty in hearing the conductor's commands over the noise of the bells. It isn't perfect but it certainly helps this ringer.

Niel Donovan replied, in one of last years editions of the Lancashire Association newsletter, there was an article about a tower that got advice and a grant from the local authority to install a loop system in their ringing chamber. Perhaps someone can help with a copy?? In his tower they are also teaching a young man with hearing difficulties. They did consider a loop system but were told that this type of system was unsuitable for his particular problem.

Paul Loxston was a surprised that the responses to his query all seemed to point to Lancaster Priory as though no other tower had tackled this problem. His tower will definitely be fitting a loop system and he will write a short piece when it is done in the hope that it may help someone else.

This is a brief summary of February's postings. If you would like any greater details on any of the points raised, please contact me.

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