

The Birmingham School of Bell Ringing

By Central Council of Church Bell Ringers: Ringing Centres Committee

The Birmingham School of Bell Ringing, established in September 2013, is probably the most comprehensive dedicated bell ringing training programme ever devised.

The School was established to provide high quality ringing training and provide an environment where students can guarantee that they are taught well, at their own pace, and get to a position where they are a valued member of a local band of ringers.

Many individual towers can teach people to ring, and there are very good teachers at many of those towers. However for the person wanting to learn to ring there is no effective way of finding one of those people or finding a band that is guaranteed to nurture your ambition.

With the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing, the pathway to learning to ring, and combining service to the church with a lifelong hobby, starts at St Paul's Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham, from 10.15 to 12.15 every Saturday morning.



Learning the Ropes

The Birmingham School of Bell Ringing follows a programme devised by the Association of Ringing Teachers called "Learning the Ropes". This programme follows five key stages of learning to ring, from the initial technique of ringing a bell, and then developing that technique to ring with other people and progress into 'change ringing' which is the foundation of much of the interest of ringing.

Level 1: Bell handling

Level 2: Foundation skills (rounds, call changes and kaleidoscope)

Level 3: Introduction to change ringing (plain hunting)

Level 4: Novice change ringer (ringing a method inside)

Level 5: Change ringer (ringing two doubles methods and PB minor inside)

The school started with two towers (St. Paul's, Jewellery Quarter and St. Edburgha, Yardley). From January 2014 we added another tower (St Mary, Handsworth).

Before too long we will also open the final tower to complete the framework and this will require more helpers and tutors. The more that get involved, the less onerous it will be on each individual.

Whilst new recruits are learning to ring, we will introduce them to a tower near where they live, where they can become a member of the band. The



only commitment required of new bell ringers is to ring bells for service on a Sunday. Indeed the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing will not teach anyone not able to make that commitment.

The Birmingham School of Ringing

All the tutors are CRB checked and have completed an Integrated Teacher Training Scheme (ITTS) course. Once enrolled at the School, students are automatically made associate members of the St Martin's Guild, so that all parties are covered by public liability insurance.

Recruitment

To start the school we held a recruitment campaign, and we also invited existing ringers from towers within the guild who wanted to learn to ring rounds and call changes or plain hunting to join the course at the appropriate level. Not all of our students have therefore started at level I.

Some of the students were perhaps a little too ambitious in their expectations and we have needed to move them to a different group to help them improve their basic technique.

Group size

We have deliberately kept the number of students in each course down to a maximum of six. We operate a waiting list system, so that new people can join as existing students move up a level. Not all of the students are able to attend each week.

The helpers and tutors are organised through a web based system "Doodle polls". The students are all organised by email.

To help towards our expenses, each student currently pays a course fee of £5.00 per week, although there are some concessions.

We record how many sessions each student attends and over time we will be able to understand more about retention and progression rates. However, as each student is an individual, each will progress at different rates.

Tutors and helpers

We have a pool of ITTS qualified instructors and each of the sessions, each week has a dedicated leader. This may not be the same person each week, but as all the instructors have been trained under the ITTS system, there is a common approach. The qualified instructors are supplemented by a group of helpers, who are experienced ringers but not necessarily ITTS qualified teachers.

Benefits

Although it is still early days, the school has attracted a healthy group of students and helpers. We suspect that the ringing school will bring a



number of unexpected benefits. We already finding that the students are making new friendships, and as a result, ringers are helping each other out at neighbouring towers. In particular, the school has already helped rejuvenate ringing in the north-east part of the Guild.