

The Taunton Branch shows the way forward

By Central Council of Church Bell Ringers: Ringing Centres Committee

Following a recruitment campaign in 2011, the Taunton Branch was successful in recruiting 75 new recruits and teaching 51 of them to reach the stage where they could ring rounds and ring up and down, so that they could join the Association. Most of these are still ringing two years later, and there is a steady stream of further recruits coming forward.

Towards the end of 2010 the Bath and Wells Association ran a recruitment campaign in each of its 11 branches. The Taunton Branch has always helped its towers recruit and train ringers, and within the Branch 30 of the 44 towers took part in the campaign, and they ended up with a total of 75 recruits.

The campaign took a number of forms. The branch has a 'Womble' (a Saxilby simulator dumb-bell, mounted on a metal frame) and this was exhibited in a number of the villages. Towers also publicised open mornings, afternoons or evenings to entice potential recruits to come and see what bellringing was all about. Refreshments were provided, with some of these events taking place on weekday evenings, some on Saturdays and some after church on Sundays.

Although the Branch has always run approximately fifteen ringing courses a year including beginning to train new teachers, some of the towers did not have more than one person available to teach their new ringers. The Branch recognised that in order to teach the new recruits and to retain them it needed to provide many more ringing courses. During 2011 forty nine courses were held and this was increased to 73 by 2013. These usually took the form of three hours intensive tuition and were generally held on Saturday mornings or afternoons. They were organised centrally by the Branch, co-ordinated by the Education Officer. In order to facilitate these courses the Branch developed its first Ringing Centre and is now working to establish a second.

These courses were focussed on the needs of the new ringers, providing tuition in basic handling, rounds, call changes and raising and lowering. About 50% of the recruits took part in these courses, coming mainly from the towers where there was less teaching help available or where there were a large number of new recruits. Other recruits already had intensive tuition available in their own towers.

To supplement the courses, the Branch organised teachers to help those towers which did not have any teachers to train their recruits. The teachers attended the weekly practice at these towers and also encouraged the new ringers to take advantage of other nearby learning opportunities.

It is a requirement of the Bath and Wells Association that each new ringer can ring rounds and raise and lower a bell, before they are proposed for membership. 36 of the initial batch of 75 recruits were elected to membership of the Association during 2011/2012. In addition, as some



people took a little longer to learn, a further 16 people were elected in 2012/2013. This was over 68% of the people that had been recruited as part of the recruitment campaign. Most of these ringers are still ringing now, at the beginning of 2014.

Future recruitment

It seems that success breeds success. During 2012 a further 60 people started learning to handle and 46 of them attended branch courses. Most of these came through personal recommendation both of the people who had taken up ringing in 2011 and the present ringers. In addition, during 2013 a further 40 new people have started learning to ring with 28 attending courses. Therefore it has not been necessary to repeat the Branch wide recruitment exercise.

Future recruitment needs to concentrate on specific towers only. One tower which was unringable at the time of the initial recruitment exercise didn't manage to recruit and train any ringers at the time and the Branch recognises that it needs now do something to help this tower, as well as others where there are only a small number of ringers or none at all.



Use of the Integrated Teacher Training Scheme (ITTS)

Although the initial recruitment and training exercise was not carried out using ITTS accredited teachers, eight members of the Branch have subsequently gone on to attend Module 1 and Module 2 ITTS courses and are at various stages of achieving their accreditation. As a result a steady stream of Learning the Ropes passes are now being produced, with 40 Level 1 passes, 33 Level 2, 2 Level 3 and 1 Level 4 achieved so far.



Similar things are happening in other Branches across the Bath and Wells Association as a whole, with 63 people having now attended a Module 1 ITTS course, and 27 the Module 2 Course.

In addition the Branch has now built up a pool of 44 assistant tutors, who have not gone through the ITTS process, but help with training, and another 65 members of the branch who help on courses. A number of these are people who have learnt themselves in the past few years and are now competent to help others learn, by filling in for rounds, call changes, kaleidoscope ringing, etc.

Young ringers

The Branch has also concentrated efforts on supporting young ringers. During 2011 it started a young ringers group which met on mornings during half terms and school holidays. The group started with 11 young ringers from the Taunton Branch plus another five ringers from neighbouring Branches.

During 2013 this group has grown to 25 young ringers and it is now necessary to split the group into two groups, because towers where the sessions are held simply cannot accommodate the

numbers of young ringers attending. In 2013 eight young ringers mornings were held, plus a young ringers outing.

Ringling Centres Committee

The Branch also took part in the Association's first Inter-Branch Young Ringers Striking Competition in 2013, and one of the regular attendees at the groups sessions rang for the Bath and Wells team in the Ringing World National Youth Striking Competition.

Promise for the future

The success of the Taunton Branch shows what can be done to safeguard the future of ringing in an area. Now there are over 228 ringers in the Branch, about a third of whom who have started ringing within the past three years. Over half of the ringers in the Branch can only ring rounds, call changes and perhaps one method inside. Nevertheless, by concentrating on catering for the needs of the new ringers and teaching them well, the foundations have been laid to enable much progress to be made in the future, both in terms of the numbers participating and those who will be able to progress on to become accomplished ringers.

Extract from training programme 2012-3

Friday 28th Dec	9.30am	Grandsire
Friday 28th Dec	9.30am	Moving on to Plain Bob
Saturday 29th Dec	9.30am	Plain Hunt 1 and 2
Tuesday 1st Jan	9.30am	Plain Hunt 1 and 2
Tuesday 1st Jan	9.30am	Raising and Lowering in Peal
Thursday 3rd Jan	9.30am	Young Ringer's Morning
Saturday 5th Jan	9.30am	Call Changes
Saturday 19th Jan	2.00pm	Plain Hunt Stage 3
Saturday 26th Jan	9.30pm	Master class - Bell-handling
Saturday 2nd Feb	9.30am	Plain Hunt 3 – Hunting to methods
Thursday 14th Feb	9.30am	Young Ringer's Morning
Saturday 16th Feb	9.30am	Raising & Lowering
Saturday 23rd Feb	2.00pm	Plain Hunt 3
Saturday 2nd March	2.00pm	Plain Hunt 1 and 2
Saturday 9th March	9.30am	Plain Hunt 3
Saturday 16th March	9.30am	Moving on to Plain Bob
Saturday 6th April	9.30am	Rounds to Call changes
Saturday 6th April	2.00pm	Master Class Handling
Thursday 11th April	9.30am	Young Ringer's Morning
Saturday 13th April	9.30am	Rising and Lowering in Peal