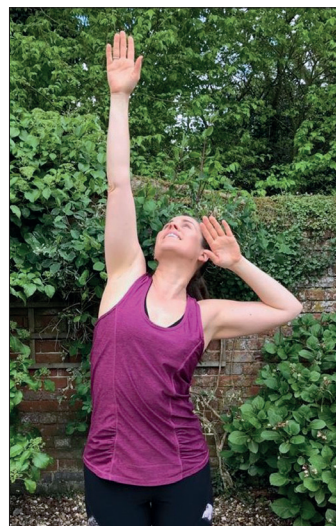
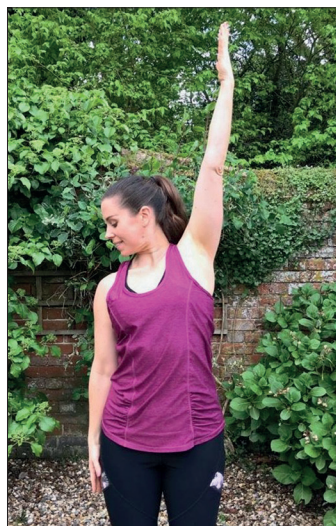


Yoga for ringers

Mary Jones with Hannah Burrows (yoga teacher)

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There I was, hands interlaced behind back, in a forward-fold with arms rising towards the front of the room and over my head, when the yoga teacher said “a very good pose, this, for any bellringers amongst you”. Not a completely random comment as she, her mother and niece had recently been to a bellringing taster session at our church. Perhaps it was the rush of blood to my head, given the contorted position that I was in, but I had a “moment” – one of those ideas that take hold and snuggle in your brain like a persistent worm. The idea was, **yoga for bellringers**. Athletes warm up and stretch before and after their exertions, but ringers saunter in carelessly, grab a rope and repeat a sequence of actions for maybe hours at a time. This cannot be good for our bodies. If we had a manual of yoga positions that were designed to open up shoulders, relax hands, and relieve tension in calf muscles, perhaps we could all go on for longer and avoid strains. Has anyone tried it before?

So I spoke to my yoga teacher, who was happy to collaborate, and she has produced a few suggestions for yoga positions that might be beneficial to try before ringing. Obviously, most towers are not suitable for a mass yoga session prior to bells up, and some ringers might never get up off the floor once they got down there, but we could practise at home and then be match fit, particularly when attempting anything requiring stamina and poise. As an added benefit, the liquid chalk so useful to avoid hands slipping on ropes is also handy when rock climbing, when pole dancing and when doing yoga. Four activities for the price of one bottle. Take your pick which one you would like to try.

Here are Hannah’s recommendations. I bet you can’t wait to get started.

As a yoga teacher, I often look at how we can incorporate more yoga into our everyday lives. This may take the form of gentle stretching, learning to breathe more fully, or simply practicing kindness towards ourselves and others. Consequently, when I got asked to write a short article on “Yoga for Bellringers”, my response took its usual form... “Great! A chance to invite more willing (read: hesitant) participants (read: unsuspecting members of the public) into the mystical world of yoga!” When we think about practising yoga, it might conjure up images of strange contortions accompanied by indecipherable chanting, however the practical reality can be very different.

What if we could use a few simple physical yoga techniques to warm up and prepare both our bodies and minds for bellringing? Having liaised with some regular ringers, it seems there are common areas that take the most strain during this activity and it would seem a sensible idea to warm up these parts of the body, much as we would mobilise muscles and joints before any other sport or physical activity. All of these exercises can be practised seated or standing.

1) Breath

Although we can all breathe well enough to keep us in oxygen, it’s always a great idea to start any physical activity by taking a few deep breaths into the chest, the ribcage area and down into the belly. The act of deepening and lengthening a few breaths can have a calming effect on the body and mind and allows us to focus on the activity in hand. Try 3–5 full breaths, breathing in and out through the nose if that feels comfortable for you.

2) Arms & neck

Taking both hands above the head, elbows lightly bent, fingertips pointing up, reach alternate hands up towards the sky, opening up through the shoulders and the sides of the body. Repeat 10 times, then pause with the right hand raised above the head. Let the left arm relax down by the left side of the body – both hands reaching away from each other. Turn the head to gaze down towards the left hand to add a gentle neck stretch. We are looking to feel a stretch in the lifted shoulder and down the side of the body. Repeat the arm reaches for another 10 repetitions and then pause with the left hand raised above the head. Let the right arm relax down by the right side of the body this time. Turn the head to gaze down towards the right hand to add a gentle neck stretch.

3) Chest and shoulders

Sitting or standing tall with an extended spine, relax both arms by the sides of the body. Lift the chest and allow the shoulder blades to slide down the back, letting the shoulders relax back and down. Begin by rolling the shoulders in a backwards direction, creating small circles. Gradually, start to increase the range of movement, making the



circles bigger, starting to take the arms out to the sides and incorporating them into the circles. You can keep the elbows bent and only make the circles as big as feels comfortable for your own range of movement. Try 10–20 circles.

Bring both hands behind the back and interlace the fingers together. Taking a deep breath in, lift the chest. As you exhale, press the hands down and away from the body. Draw the shoulder blades together to feel a stretch across the chest and the front of the shoulder area. Hold for 10–20 seconds.

4) Hands and wrists

Smaller muscles and joints, but still important for ringing.

Taking both hands out in front of the body palms facing down to the floor, keeping the elbows soft, make both hands into fists. Circle both hands around the wrists in either direction. Change direction if that feels comfortable for you. Try 10 circles in each direction, then bring both hands into a prayer position in front of the chest, fingertips pointing up to the sky. Gently begin to turn the fingertips forwards, drawing the heels of the hands towards the chest, and keeping the elbows bent out to the sides. You may be able to point the fingertips down to the floor, or they might only extend to pointing forwards. The aim is to feel a stretch in the underside of the wrists. Hold this stretch for 10–20 seconds.

5) Spine and feet

Having a solid foundation during standing activities such as bellringing is vital for balance and endurance, hence making sure our feet and spine can support us effectively can be very beneficial.

Standing or sitting with feet hip width apart, toes facing forwards, spread the toes as wide as possible imagining you are spreading the weight evenly through all four corners of your feet. This will give you a solid foundation. From here, bring the tops to the front of the thighs. Making sure the spine is lengthened and chest lifted, start to fold forward from the hips. Slide the hands down the legs towards the feet and bend the knees as much as required to prevent the backs of the legs and the lower back from feeling uncomfortable if practising this from a standing position. Only fold forward as far as feels comfortable for you, using the hands on the legs (avoiding putting pressure on the knee joints) for support. Let the top of the head move down towards the floor – this will maintain the length through the back of the neck. Let the back relax into this forward fold for a few breaths (5–10) or count 10–20 seconds. To exit the posture, roll the spine up slowly one vertebra at a time all the way back to an upright position. Take a moment before moving on to ensure you feel no dizziness. The forward fold will give a gentle stretch to the backs of the legs and through the length of the back and is great for improving spinal mobility as well as having a calming influence on our central nervous system.



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Ringing for Notre-Dame

SIR, – I agree totally with Chris Kipling (p.482, 17th May). However, I was more than 'uncomfortable' (Chris's word) with the request to ring for Notre Dame. When I received the emails from the Central Council, I was astonished, angry and exasperated. Do our Prime Minister and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York really feel that buildings are more important than people? What about the many other disasters in recent months that have had a real and lasting effect on people's lives, such as the devastating floods in Southern Africa and the bombings in Sri Lanka? These lives can't be replaced or easily rebuilt. And if they want us to ring for buildings, what about the many buildings of historical, cultural and architectural importance that have been destroyed in the wars in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere?

It seems to me that our political and religious leaders have been swept up in the sentimentality whipped up by our media, who were no doubt relieved to have something other than Brexit to report on. By all means ask us to remember and pray for the workers and worshippers of Notre Dame, to thank God that no lives were lost and praise the brave and professional Parisian fire service. But to ring the bells? And to take up 18 pages of *The Ringing World*? The Editorial even made a link with the last mass ringing event on 11th November 2018. That, of course, was on a totally different level – it was linked to national/worldwide events, it was well planned and publicised, and all our communities knew why the bells were ringing. I wonder how many non-ringers understood why the bells were tolling on 18th April, and if they did, agree with the sentiment?

It's ironic that at the same time, protests were taking place around the world about the biggest crisis facing the human race – that of climate change. Now, if I was asked to join

in mass ringing for a cause like that, with its threat of famine, flooding, wars about scarce resources and mass migration, I would immediately rally to the call – providing of course I had explained ahead to the local community what the special ringing was all about.

SUSAN MEW

Carhampton, Somerset

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SIR, – The Archbishops asked for church bells to be rung for Notre-Dame and their request was rapidly made very public in the ringing community; church bell ringers responded handsomely.

Is Chris Kipling (p.482) suggesting that ringers should be wary of responding to such requests? Perhaps he is forgetting that the bells belong to the Church of England and the Church of England is led by the Archbishops.

Chevening, Kent

TONY CRESSWELL

Bell News

SIR, – I recently spent an afternoon looking at the PDF facsimiles of *Bell News*, which are free to download from the Central Council's website. *Bell News* was an earlier equivalent to *The Ringing World*. I chiefly looked at issues from the late 1800s, and used the 'Find' function to scan through to find towers and areas where I currently ring.

Nothing much has changed. There were reports of local ringing meetings where a master discussed poor attendance, mention of a tower contact vowing that work would be carried out on bells, and anecdotes alluding to hearty retirements to local public houses. These were surprisingly detailed reports – in a national publication – of local meetings which were a joy to read in their detail and charisma.

I found an instance where a ringer had been struck on the head, and instantly killed, by a falling clock-weight, and extents of doubles were regularly celebrated and reported as we would now a quarter. There were differences, too. Many mentions were made of "a six-score", rather than a 120, being rung. Unfamiliar methods were frequently mentioned – Dream Doubles and Lincolnshire Singles seemed to be a standard diet in my area, Lincolnshire.

I encourage anyone who enjoys the continuum of activity, and handing-down of skills, that makes ringing quite special to have a look at this resource – it is easiest found by searching online for "ccbr online publications".

SAM W NAPPER

Boston, Lincolnshire

Hymn of praise

SIR, – I was fascinated by the article and hymn by Jonathan Williamson printed on p.422.

Jonathan writes hymns well and I would encourage him to write more, and even consider becoming a member of The Hymn