

Survival & Recovery

The Survival and Recovery Toolbox

We don't have a crystal ball to predict the future, but we are all hoping for a speedy and safe return to normal in our lives and in ringing. When and how are dependent on factors out of our control but return to ringing we will and we want to do it well.

ART and the CCCBR are doing their bit, including the compilation of the Survival and Recovery Toolbox:

<http://ringingteachers.org/survival-and-recovery-toolbox>

The toolbox combines existing resources with case studies and opinion pieces relevant to the pandemic. It is a work in progress and if you think we're missing something or have something that you think would be useful to others then please get in contact. The next stage of its development is to identify new tools that will help in ringing's survival and recovery. Developing such tools can be resource-intensive so let's make sure we choose the right things and ensure that they can be delivered in a Covid-secure way.

At the moment our emphasis is on survival, concentrating on retaining our existing ringers, by keeping people feeling wanted and finding ways of letting them enjoy ringing in whatever form ticks their boxes – handbells, online ringing, tolling a bell or joining virtual events such as webinars. It is hard finding new, stimulating things to do and maintain momentum so we've sourced ideas from around the country. Hopefully you'll find something you've not tried yet.

A number of people have questioned whether now is too early to start planning for recovery. If I catch myself asking that question, I imagine the response of the ringing community if vaguely normal

ringing was able to start in early Summer and we were not ready. I am sure it is that type of thinking that has prompted so many guilds and associations to start developing their recovery plans already, recognising that this takes time to do well.

To support this planning activity the toolbox contains ideas about "getting fit for ringing" and addresses such issues as "lockdown learners" – those whose use of online learning platforms means that their knowledge of methods far surpasses their ability to put their bell in the right place.

Hopefully, ringing will resume with few problems and we'll be back enjoying our wonderful hobby again soon. If that turns out to be the case and most of the tools in the toolbox don't have to be used, then that would be fantastic. I just don't think we can bet on that being the case.

Enjoy the toolbox and let us know what resonates, what we've missed and what you think needs to be further developed.

Lesley Belcher, ART Chair

Ringers are resourceful folk, and up and down the country and all over the world they are exploring ways to stay in touch, progress their learning and support each other.

The following are some inspirational stories of how some bands are holding it together. We really want to hear from you if you have a local story to tell about how you have kept your band of ringers together, with the aim of publishing positive stories to inspire others. Send your stories to Mary Jones at mary.jones@bellringing.org

Survival and Recovery Champions zoom meeting

The first zoom meeting of the Survival and Recovery Champions was held on Saturday 6 February. Over 50 people joined the call to meet the Steering Group and listen to presentations. The Survival and Recovery Toolbox had been released the day before and this was an opportunity to meet the team behind the materials and to explore some of the ideas.



Simon Linford opened the meeting by reflecting on the challenges we all face after this prolonged absence from towers and bells. During the first lockdown, there had been some hope we would all be back with a ringing fanfare but now it seems it will be a gradual return and some ringers may decide not to return to their old hobby. He reflected that pandemic fatigue might now be a problem with people struggling to come up with new ideas and lacking motivation. He hoped meetings like this and the toolbox would stimulate new ideas.

Hayley Young of the Truro Guild gave an excellent presentation about how they had identified issues and set up a working group to address the decline in ringing numbers. Their solution was an action plan which included creating a teaching team, raising public awareness and forging closer contacts with the Church.

The toolbox was introduced to us by Lesley Belcher, explaining its design philosophy and purpose by looking at pages on "Getting fit for ringing", "A Ringing Societies guide to life after the pandemic" and "Recruitment and Retention".

The toolbox includes an online survey for Recovery Champions to use to understand their local ringing situation which can be customised to suit individual needs.

If you think this is a progressive idea, which will help maintain your fellow ringers' interest in ringing, contact your Association or Guild secretary for more details. And if you wish to become a Champion you can contact Annie direct at annie.hall@sky.com

A recording of the meeting can be found on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/SRBxfa1cftc>

Annie Hall, Coventry Diocesan Guild

Virtual striking competitions

The annual inter-tower striking competition is one of the highlights of the ringing calendar. They are great social occasions and a chance for us to meet up and renew old friendly rivalries, whilst enjoying a sumptuous ringers' tea.

If you are looking for something slightly different to do in the current lockdown, then why not organise your own online striking competition (with virtual tea included). You can replicate your traditional competition or rip up the rule book and try a new format. We've seen that virtual ringing is a great leveller, with less experienced ringers holding their own with more illustrious colleagues. So why not give it a try, involve as many ringers as possible and don't take things too seriously – with the emphasis on having fun.

The toolbox contains some pretty interesting ideas about organising virtual striking competitions including some quite bizarre rules.

<http://ringingteachers.org/survival-and-recovery-toolbox/online-ringing-teaching>

Matt Lawrence

Ringbell

I run a website containing useful diagrams and a toolkit to progress learners through to the average service band ringer who may wish to call a touch.

The 'Change Ringing Toolkit' has never been advertised, but now seems a good opportunity. My website's log files show there has been no decrease and possibly an increase in activity during lockdown.

Visitors and their activities are completely anonymous, but things can be inferred from the pages visited. Someone recently spent all evening switching between the minimus methods library and the diagram drawing page. I can only assume that they were printing off loads of four-bell method diagrams. Maybe they are only ringing four bells to maintain social distancing rules? The 'Learn-the-Line' page receives many visits too, so it appears people are using their free time to learn new methods and improve their method ringing.

www.ringbell.co.uk/diagrams and
www.ringbell.co.uk/toolkit.

Steve Scanlon

Social survival

It feels like we have been marooned on a desert island and have to make our own fire doesn't it? Post-Covid, with some towers finding themselves perilously close to being empty and others struggling to ring all their bells, trying to survive is not too far from the truth. Thankfully, we are not short of food or water, but you might be short of ideas on just how to get your tower noticed and build up your band.

Be visible, be active, be bold!

Start now and use social media to tell your community that you're there and what you are doing. Make it easy for people to find and contact you. Build a basic Facebook page and add its address to any email or message you send.

Share whatever you're doing with your local village/town, community or church Facebook groups – photos and short videos always get noticed. Remember to make your posts fun, interesting, quirky or intriguing. Think before you post – will this make people want to join our gang? Support others by liking their posts and they will like you back. The more that happens the more people you'll reach.

You can find out more about PR and social media on the 'Engaging with your local community page' of the Toolbox

<http://ringingteachers.org/survival-and-recovery-toolbox/successful-pr>

Deborah Margason-Baker, Crondall

Strictly basic

When the first lockdown confined us to barracks, a small group of us had just celebrated our first anniversary as ringers having started ringing on 6 February 2019! It felt like the rug had been pulled out from beneath my feet.

After a few months, I was poking about on Facebook and found the Learning the Ropes Facebook group. Chris de Cordova was going to start an online 'Strictly Basic' ringing group for anyone, no matter how little ringing experience we had. The idea was to explain how the new technology worked and give us new ringers a place to feel safe. I had toyed with joining other online ringing, but had decided it was too scary, so this appeared a perfect introduction.

Now we are on lockdown number three. I have not seen the inside of a bell tower for 10 months, but Friday nights have become a regular Strictly Basic ringing night. You never know who will be there, but there is normally a good turnout. We ring anything from rounds and jump changes, Kaleidoscope ringing to Plain Hunt. On occasion we attempt a course of Plain Bob Doubles, depending on who is there.

No one complains if you can't get your camera working – I know you all prefer to look at the picture of my dog than to see me! And we have all been through trying to work out how to get two pages open on the screen at the same time. Like all ringing, the aim is for flawlessness in all we do, and this includes plenty of chatting and laughter, whatever happens. Chris is exceptionally good at suggesting we speed up or try to get closer to each other, or reminding us it's our turn to ring at just the right moment. All this gentle cajoling and laughing reminded me there is more to ringing than just a tower. I realised it's the people that make bell ringing fun.

We can all still learn and help others whatever our experience levels are and whatever journey we are taking, and we can still do it without a bricks-and-mortar tower!

So, despite not ringing a real bell for nearly a year, I now firmly believe I could ring Plain Hunt on any bell in a tower if given half a chance. And I know I can ring a variety of things in Ringing Room, given a line to follow and some good back up. My place counting has improved from not really understanding what it was, to plain hunting without having to count out loud or use my fingers. Fortunately, all the bells weigh the same, so there is no need to hide on the lighter bells. This allows a newbie to become a master at bonging behind even in a 12-bell tower. All from the warmth and safety of your own home.

I'm really grateful for the help and support of all the new friends I have made across the country, mainly because of Chris and her Strictly Basic ringing night. On the back of the confidence that this has afforded me, I have started a regular session in the Ringing Room for other members of my band. I have almost plucked up the courage to join some other towers ringing sessions as there is always something happening somewhere. Just pop into the Ringing Room Take -Hold Lounge on Facebook and see what tickles your fancy...

Clearly there are many advantages to using the Ringing Room and all the new amazing online technology during a global pandemic, but the main one is no one can hear you clash your bells outside of the virtual tower and like they say in the film "What happens in the Ringing Room stays in the Ringing Room!" So I, for one, hope the Ringing Room remains a go-to teaching and training aid even after we can go back and ring normally. If you have never tried it and want to give it a go, then head for "Strictly Basic" Friday Nights, I'll unlock the tower and put the heating on for you, but bring your own tea.

Claire Whiting

Carry on ringing

I am involved in several ringing groups and I guess you could say that I was an early adopter of online ringing. I recognised early on that we might be under restricted circumstances for some time. Little did I realise it would be this long.

I did two things in March 2020. Firstly, I signed up for a Zoom account, allowing those I connect with to be free of the 40 minute cap on free sessions. There are other conferencing apps, of course, but Zoom offers a comprehensive set of tools for screen sharing and even allows you to take control of a remote PC or laptop if someone is having difficulties.

Secondly, I immediately ordered a set of ActionXL controllers, thinking that we might be spending a long while without real ringing and that this was an opportunity to improve my handbell ringing as much as a threat to my tower bell ringing.

The first thoughts were to find a way of keeping our Mancroft ringers in touch. The simplest way was to just send a Zoom link out to our email group and then meet online. It quickly became clear that meeting each week on a Monday evening was beneficial, but went stale, as just asking what each person had been up to and how they were soon ran out of steam, every week being much the same as the previous. We therefore have two meets per week. On a Monday evening, when we would normally be practising, we hold a Ringing Room practice. This does limit numbers, as some don't have the right kit available and some are just not interested. It does, however, provide an opportunity to ring, albeit in a different way. One of the brilliant things about Ringing Room is that those who suffer physical limitations, either climbing the stairs or ringing a bell, are freed of these shackles and able to ring in a "pure and direct way".

A group of Mancroft regulars meet every day during the week to practise handbells and we have made considerable progress. The frequency of ringing and the motivation of those involved to do their homework means that we are ringing things that might previously have seemed beyond our reach. On Sundays a group of us would normally meet for coffee after ringing and so we hold a coffee meet on Sundays which allows us all to catch up on news, if any.

It occurred to me in the Spring that, in addition to tower bands meeting together, we were missing out on other

regular interactions. I am a very keen and gregarious ringer and am involved with a number of groups – June's Tuesday peals, Paul and Ruth's Lundy trips plus my own enthusiasm for meeting my friends. I therefore got in touch with people and have arranged a number of regular events, each of which is of great value to me.

The most successful of these is our Wednesday group which has been meeting for around 10 months - a group of old friends, again from across the country. We have kept the meets vibrant by setting a theme for each week. These have ranged from the ubiquitous quizzes, to cocktail evenings, to cookery challenges, to literary, musical and artistic themes.

We have learned so much about each other and our worlds outside of ringing and we have laughed loads. Several say this is their favourite meeting of the week. The level of thought and creativity that has gone into preparations for each week has been amazing, with people often willing to step outside of their comfort zones.

There are others, including a group of ringing friends who meet up once or twice a week to ring quarter peals on handbells. We have a project, into which we have all bought – to ring a quarter of each of the standard 41 Surprise Minor methods. Having a plan provides motivation, enthusiasm and sense of belonging to something, which drives us to practise and brings satisfaction when we succeed in overcoming hurdles. The sense of team-work that makes ringing so great is definitely there.

On an international level, I have rung with friends in Holland, France, Singapore, Germany and USA. In two hour's time we have one of our regular practices with ringers from Charleston, an impossibility until Bryn and Leland produced Ringing Room, or Graham John produced Handbell Stadium, or Giles Wood produced Ding.

In summary, I am spending more time seeing friends than I would have done, or could have afforded to do under normal circumstances. The most enjoyable sessions are those where there is a definable project, theme or plan to work to. In these strange days it is important to be engaged, motivated and happy and to not be inactive or isolated.

I, for one, am having loads of fun and at little or no cost!

Simon Rudd, NDA

Virtual training courses

Just because there is no ringing doesn't mean that there is no training. Once you've got to terms with the fact that a training event doesn't involve real bells and physically meeting, all sorts of new possibilities open up, such as running sessions multiple times on different days or drawing on expertise and helpers from around the world.

The recent Gloucester and Bristol Winter School attracted 1,000 delegates. What's not to like about that? To find out what people have done, including programmes and write-ups, have a look at the toolbox:

<http://ringingteachers.org/survival-and-recovery-toolbox/virtual-training-courses>

Lesley Belcher, ART Chair