

Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



Learning™
the Ropes

Association of Ringing Teachers / Learning the Ropes - www.learningtheropes.org

Number 15 - April 2020

Editor

Ruth Suggett towertalk@learningtheropes.org

In this issue:

50-50 Club Draw News	2
Puzzle from <i>The Ringing World</i>	2
3000th Milestone Achiever	3
Couch to QP	4
ART statistics and Hall of Fame	5
Progressing Together.	6
ART, Learning the Ropes and Coronavirus	7
Wordpair Puzzles.	7
Going for Gold.	8
A Surprise for Jamie	9
Bolton Bells Back in Action	10
Backstrokes In (and Up)!	12
Teacher Turned Learner.	13
Unexpected Pleasures.	14
The Ballad of the Bell Ringers.	15
Postscript from Isolation	15
Your Best Teacher is Your Last Mistake	16
The Central Council and You	17
Answers to Puzzles	18



*A lonely bell rope symbolises
our world without ringing*

This is possibly the most unusual Tower Talk ever – as usual, it’s full of inspiring and interesting stories from our amazing community of new ringers, *but there’s no ringing going on out there!* As most of these articles had been written before the full impact of the Coronavirus pandemic had hit every aspect of our lives, I felt we should go back to the authors and invite them to update what they had written in the light of recent events. There is a lot of sadness and frustration that people can’t get on with what they love to do, but there are also many people trying very hard to come up with ideas to keep ourselves interested and motivated, to keep learning and to support each other as friends and band members. There are many opportunities to stay in touch with each other and with the worldwide community of ringing, so make the most of what’s out there. This is the 15th edition of Tower Talk, so if you’re really stuck, there are 14 back copies you can catch up on!

50-50 Club Draw News

Gill Hughes, 50-50 Club Administrator

The first quarter draw for the 50-50 Club took place at the ART Conference on Saturday 14 March – who could have believed that all ringing would cease two days later?

The draw was made by Mike Penney, who had won the Christmas prize of £180. The lucky tickets this time were:

First prize of £71 - **Tony Croft** of Leicester

Other prizes of £35.50 each - **Gordon Gray** from Cumbria and **Alan Bentley** from Dorset.

This draw is open to anyone with a SmART Ringer username. That's anyone registered on Learning The Ropes, anyone who has attended a day course or is doing LtR Plus, LtR Handbells or 50 Ringing Things. An annual subscription of £12 is paid and half the money from subscriptions goes towards the prize money while the other half is fundraising income for ART. 25% of the total prize fund goes to one lucky member each Christmas along with three smaller prizes of 5%. Then in March, June and September we give out a 10% prize and two prizes of 5% each.

"You have got to be in it to win it", as Dale Winton used to say. More members would mean more money for ART as well as bigger prizes for members, so please consider joining the club. The 50-50 Club brings in a valuable regular income to ART of over £700 a year. Why not encourage your fellow band members to join?

To join or to find out more you can visit the Learning The Ropes website:
<http://www.learningtheropes.org/5050club>



The Ringing World Puzzle



Here's a puzzle copied with permission from The Ringing World. Answer on page 18.

You'll find lots more than puzzles in The Ringing World, and there's a special offer at the moment for new subscribers.

We started with six ringers at our six-bell practice. Ben is recovering from an injury so can't ring the 4, 5 or 6. Emma and Charles started recently and are fine on covering and call changes. Emma, unlike Charles, can also plain hunt well, but neither rings inside to methods. Ann, Donna and Frank all arrived together, and we decided to start with some call changes. Emma is learning to call, so she was asked to call them ('up', in our tower).

"1 to 2", "1 to 3" went ok, but at "4 to 5" there was a scrunch. Luckily Ann, perhaps because she was then following the bell that had gone wrong, quickly pointed out that the caller had failed to follow her own instruction to move up! Having got that sorted we had to stop because Frank was staring so intently at Charles, whom he was following, that Charles had a fit of giggles and totally failed to lead at the right time. Who was ringing which bell?

We then regrouped, all of us except Frank moving to a different bell, and we tried a touch of Plain Bob Doubles. Ann called a 120. Donna hasn't learnt bobs yet, so Ann kept Donna unaffected, calling a bob at the first lead-end. Who was ringing which bell?

Greg then arrived, so we decided to ring a plain course of Plain Bob Minor. Frank is a bit of a stick-in-the-mud and elected to stay where he was, but some of the rest of the us changed bells. It went pretty well though Greg had to tell Frank "lead after me" when Frank got a bit lost, and Donna made rather a mess of her dodge with Ben at the second lead-end. Who was ringing which bell?

3000th Milestone Achiever

Melissa Nash of the Cambridge University Guild

Greg Chu recently became the 3000th person to be awarded a Level One Learning the Ropes certificate. He began learning to ring in October 2018 with the Cambridge University Guild and their Teaching Officer, Melissa Nash tells the story.

The Guild carries out fairly large-scale teaching of beginners - recruitment takes place at the Freshers' Fair with the mobile Charmborough Ring, which is followed up by two 'Have a go' sessions.

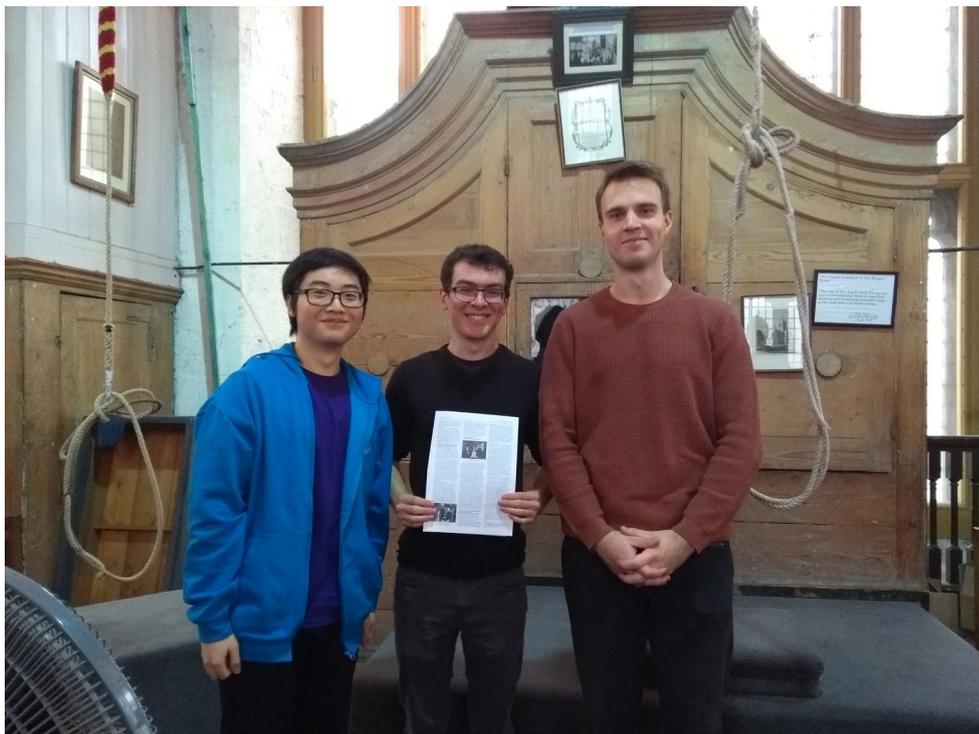
Then there are three teaching sessions per week throughout term. The group setting creates a fantastic environment for teachers and learners alike.

On the day of the Guild's Annual Dinner, Greg and two others from his cohort of learners rang their first quarters. Greg covered to Plain Bob Doubles at Great St Mary's in a time of 42 minutes. By this stage, Greg had started coming to regular practices as well as still attending some teaching sessions for some more focused simulator practice.

In the 2019/2020 academic year, Greg continued attending regular practices, where he'd begun working on Plain Hunt. As well as progressing his own ringing, he was also helping with the newest cohort of learners - at the 'Have a go' sessions he jointly ran the handbells activity, which introduces some of ringing theory with Plain Hunt; and he's also helped at some teaching sessions by forming a band for learners to practise following and rounds-based exercises on the simulator (once they've reached that stage). December saw Greg's second quarter, again on the tenor but this time on the far more challenging bells of Bene't's in Cambridge.

A new addition to the Guild's teaching efforts this year has been the introduction of the ART Learning the Ropes Personal Progress Logbooks. In February, Greg's bell handling was assessed and he passed both Level 1 and Level 2. A few weeks later, we discovered that he'd received the 3000th LtR Level 1 certificate to be awarded! Congratulations to Greg, the 2,999 before him and all the subsequent achievers! Greg's thoughts on his experience are, "The Guild has provided a lovely environment for learning, getting to interact with other learners always makes it more fun". More recently, Greg has been trebling to doubles and there was a dedicated plain-hunting practice for him, with another planned for the end of term. Unfortunately, this was cancelled due to social distancing measures but hopefully this can take place when ringing activities resume again and a quarter on the treble will closely follow.

As well as Greg receiving the 3000th Learning the Ropes Level 1 certificate, the CUG Teaching Hub has also had 9 other Level 1 certificates this year and passes at Levels 2, 3 and 4, so congratulations to those achievers also! We've also received the 'ART Award for a University Society that has made a Significant Contribution to Promoting Ringing to Younger People' for the second year in a row. Congratulations to both learners and teachers alike and thank you all for the hard work, dedication and most importantly, fun.



From left: Greg, Alistair and Dima on the CUG's London outing - Dima learnt to ring at the same time as Greg and Alistair was the CUG Teaching Officer at the time

Couch to QP

Emma Hughes, Puddletown, Dorset

Bell ringing was something I had wanted to try for a very long time. I have been ringing handbells since 2013 and the nearest I got to tower bells was chiming the treble on a Sunday morning.

There had been a ten year absence of weekly ringing practice in my village so when the Tower Captain approached me during the Spring of 2018, I jumped at the chance. At our first lesson in August 2018, there were three learners with a teacher each. We did the usual tour up the tower to see the bells, then over the weeks learnt to handle the bell and ring independently. Unfortunately a month after starting, I broke my foot and had to ring in a boot for the next three months, so this meant I couldn't ring up or down for safety reasons.

Our first "proper" ring was on 11 November 2018 as part of the "Ringing Remembers" scheme, where, after a quarter peal by the band, we rang a few rounds.

In December 2018 I had to arrange and lead a carol service for the local Diocesan Guild, as in the absence of the usual vicar, my Tower Captain remembered that I was a Lay Worship Leader and decided I could take the service instead! Before the service I rang a few rounds on the bells, and wondered why I was dizzy as I started the service - I realised that I'd been concentrating so hard on ringing, I'd been holding my breath. I've fortunately stopped doing that now!

So a year ago, we were working towards LtR Level 2, starting to learn Plain Hunt. Now I have rung two quarter peals on the tenor and need to ring a QP on the treble to complete Level 3. My jacket has several print outs in the pockets, including Plain Bob Minimus and Doubles, which have been handy to study at various places... hospital waiting rooms, sat on a coffin stool before verging a funeral - any quiet moments.

I have rung for Easter, Harvest, Remembrance Sunday, Christmas, New Year, baptisms, a wedding and our usual Sunday service ringing on the third Sunday each month.

I am also working my way through "50 Ringing Things", where I just realised a couple of weeks ago that I already qualified for the Bronze certificate.

My bell-ringing t-shirts started early on. As I was useless in remembering my own bell during call changes, let alone where I was moving to, I found a "Don't Follow Me, I'm Lost" t-shirt. Now I have about nine tops, four custom made, the others found on Amazon. Everyone at my tower is always wondering what I'll be wearing each week!

I ring with a great team and we are usually joined by learners from Hilton (which I refer to as our "Twin Tower"), and everyone is really friendly.

I've just got to hope the skin grows back on my finger, after shredding it ringing down our most awkward bell, before Thursday night's practice, or it'll be another night of one handed ringing like I had to do recently due to a cat bite!



One of Emma's many ringing t-shirts - front and rear view



Maybe my next t-shirt could have an L-plate on it whilst I prepare for trebling my next QP?

However now we have a different challenge. When we rang on Sunday 15 March, we had no idea at the time that it would be our last time together ringing or socialising for several weeks or possibly months.

I was upset and frustrated to start with at the thought of life without ringing, as I would have been attempting my first QP on the treble at the end of March, and I was feeling ready for it.

Now I'm worried I'll be starting from scratch in three months, six months - whenever that will be. I should really use this time to study methods, and make use of the bell-ringing app I have on my phone.

I've also been in my tower this week and took an old sally home as some sort of "comfort blanket"!

I miss ringing so much, but also miss the other ringers, and hope and pray we will ALL be ringing together very soon.

Here is the first verse of a poem by John Masefield that seems very poignant at the moment:

The Bell Ringers

*What do they do, when all the ropes are still,
When silence creeps again into her bower,
When the stunned air is quiet from its thrill,
And he, who bears the lantern, locks the tower?*



Emma hugging her sally as she contemplates life without ringing for a while

ART statistics and Hall of Fame

Here are the numbers of certificates awarded in the first quarter of 2020. These are impressive statistics given that the figures tailed off significantly in March thanks to coronavirus.

	First quarter 2020	Same period 2019
Level 1 — Bell Handling	134	274
Level 2 — Foundation Ringing Skills	80	125
Level 3 — Introduction to Change Ringing	32	29
Level 4 — Novice Change Ringer	21	17
Level 5 — Change Ringer	21	9



And here is the '50 Things' Hall of Fame.

Date	Name	Level
Feb 2020	Sharon Patton	Bronze
Feb 2020	Pat Bell	Bronze
Feb 2020	Roger Haynes	Bronze
Feb 2020	Roger Haynes	Silver
Feb 2020	Roger Haynes	Gold *

Feb 2020	Roger Haynes	Gold Plus +
Feb 2020	Emma Hughes	Bronze
Feb 2020	Claire Penny	Bronze
Feb 2020	Alison Lee	Bronze
Feb 2020	Alison Lee	Silver
Feb 2020	Michelle X	Gold *

Progressing Together

Dave Bailey, Barnard Castle

On 14 January 2019, history was made for Alix Robinson and her 12 year old son George when they took hold of a bell rope for the first time at St. Mary's Church in Barnard Castle. Within a few weeks of starting to ring, they were both handling a bell competently, and it soon became apparent these two were going to be good ringers.

Their progress over the next few months, having attended all practices at Barney and several other towers was amazing and on 9 March 2019, they both passed their LtR Level 1. George has acquired a copy of "Dove" and he seems to be learning it off by heart, as his knowledge of towers and bells is substantial! Progress continued admirably with several visits to local ringing practices in nearby towers with another landmark reached in August when they both passed LtR Level 2.

It was obvious that both Alix and George were keen, as they regularly accompanied Helen Scott on her visits to towers throughout the district. In December 2019, they both passed LtR Level 3, following successful quarter peals on treble and tenor.

Both Alix and George now ring regularly for church services and are valuable and reliable members of the Barney band. They are now ringing Plain Bob Doubles and are progressing well into the world of change ringing. George, despite being small, handles the Barney tenor with competence - and he thoroughly enjoys it!

The members of the Barney band really appreciate the efforts made by Alix and George and for Helen Scott and myself, it has been a real pleasure to teach these two talented people. Well done Alix and George and may your future bell ringing give you great pleasure.

Alix and George write;

We are both very grateful for the help and support we have had from our band, and from the bands at other towers we have visited, and particularly from Dave and Helen, our ringing teachers. We were both hooked on the day that Dave invited us to come up the tower and let us ring a bell for the first time, but we soon realised how easy it would be to give up without the kind of support and encouragement we have had, especially from Dave and Helen. They often manage to hold two practices a week just for learners, and Helen has given us countless chances to go with her to other towers. They encourage us to try new things, they are open-minded with our requests, however unorthodox, and they are patient and good-humoured when it all goes wrong. We are especially grateful for the chance they gave us to do our first quarter peals together, so that we could support each other. We feel very lucky to have Helen and Dave as teachers.



*George and Alix flanked by their teachers
Dave and Helen*

ART, Learning the Ropes and Coronavirus

Lesley Belcher, ART Chair

Lesley Belcher, Chair of the Association of Ringing Teachers (the organisation behind Learning the Ropes) has this important message for everyone on the Learning the Ropes scheme and 50 Ringing Things.

We are mindful that with no ringing, there will be no teaching or learning, at least on the end of a bell rope, so we have extended all our time-frames by six months. This means that:

- Teachers will have two and a half years to accredit after their day course
- Ringers on the 50 Ringing Things scheme will have 126 weeks to claim their 50 Ringing Things Gold Plus certificate
- ART Members can elect (by contacting the ART Membership Secretary) to extend this year's membership to 18 months

Although we have suspended all courses and workshops, ART is planning to be as busy as ever. Our biggest project is the building of an online learning platform, available to all ringers. The basic platform is in place. We have an Editor-in-Chief who is making sure we have all the necessary add-ons to build an appealing and useful product, and this week we are starting to look for volunteers to build curricula and start developing content. The courses will be mixed media and our aim is that they will be as professional and useful as possible in both content and delivery. We are working with both the Central Council and the Ringing World to make this happen. We know all our ringers have many different skills, so if you want to talk to us about how you could help or get involved, email me on

lesley.belcher@bellringing.org

We will also be taking this opportunity to review and revamp all our day courses and workshops, build our Learning the Ropes Listen and Strike resources (including practical tools) and complete the new SmART Ringer specification and move onto implementation.

Our aim is to use our time and resources profitably; building a stronger ART which is fit and able to help ringing emerge from this enforced period of inactivity stronger and better.

I know that the next months will affect all of us in unexpected ways – financially, personally and through our families. Look after yourselves, your families and your fellow ringers. We are all looking forward to Ringing Returns!



Wordpair Puzzles



What are the pairs of words which differ by only one letter which mean the following?
(Answers on page 18)

1. Another description for each pull of the bell AND the action of the clapper hitting the bell
2. A special hook from which bellropes are suspended when not in use AND the piece of wood under the bell on which the stay rests
3. Where you go to ring church bells AND what you normally do at the end of a practice
4. An extended piece of ringing lasting for about 45 minutes AND how you might describe a band which turns up to ring minimus



Going for Gold

Pat Bell, Ilmington



I started ringing at the tender age of 69 at Pebworth, Worcestershire when Martin Penny started up a new ringing group for beginners in 2015. After moving to Ilmington seven miles away, I started to ring regularly at Ilmington and Mickleton, and continued at Pebworth as well. I progressed slowly and completed my first quarter peal in December 2018, and I also organised a tour, maybe a small one but still a tour, last year.

It was suggested to me by a ringer from Pebworth that maybe I should consider doing "50 Ringing Things" - a 100 week challenge.

For those of you that don't know about this, it is a series of challenges which introduce you to the wider world of ringing, and is split into three areas: In my Tower, Out and About, and My Ringing.

Each challenge is described in a booklet you can buy from the Art Shop <https://www.shop.bellringing.org/books/13-50-ringing-things.html>

You can achieve Bronze, Silver and Gold awards, and if you are really addicted you can go for Gold Plus.

Typical of me, I went full steam ahead, bought the book and started to tick off all the things I had already done. I then found out that you can only count items that you complete after you have enrolled for the challenge - whoops, that's me told!



Pat with her Bronze certificate

So after messing up my book and starting again, I have to now try and sort it out. I have challenged myself to try and complete my Silver Award within six months (end of June), which until a few weeks ago was achievable with everyone's help!

These challenges have taken me way out of my comfort zone. For example

- Ringing a bell heavier than 16cwt - Blockley
- Changing a stay - Cherington. I posted a video of me doing this to the 50 Ringing Things facebook group.
- Ringing a bell less than 3 cwt - Lighthorne
- Writing an article - thank you for reading!

These and all the other things I have done have really shown me the breadth and variety of the world of ringing and have encouraged me to go out and experience many different towers, ringers and bells. It has stimulated a real interest in the history of the churches and bells I encounter and has given me a lot of confidence and I think - I hope - my bell handling is improving.



Model of a ringing aid which Pat made for her Bronze award

I have enjoyed doing these challenges although it would not have been possible without the help of other ringers, and I must record my thanks to the members of the Four Shires, G&B & Coventry branches and of course my tower captains. And the support of my husband who is not a ringer but who has kept me company as we trek around the countryside, has been invaluable especially as it is so time consuming!

In February when I originally wrote this, I was awarded my Bronze Certificate and was all set to start work on my Silver. Things have changed considerably since then. While on holiday in Australia, I did manage to tick two more things before everything closed - ringing St Peter's Cathedral in Perth and ringing on a simulator in St Peter's training room.



At the three-bell tower

A Surprise for Jamie

Jamie Watson, aged 12 from Norfolk

19 February was a very special day for me - I had a surprise visit to the belfry of Westminster Abbey. This all came about when my mother emailed the current conductor, Jeremy Pratt, and asked if I could visit the ringers at Westminster Abbey and watch them ring.

I only found out about this a couple of weeks before the trip and I was extremely amazed that I would be allowed! I have only been ringing for a few months and have had some time ringing at the Mancroft Ringing Discovery centre in Norwich and once on the big bells at St Peter Mancroft.

When we arrived at the Abbey, we had to sneak in and creep past the statues to the tower door because there was a service on. When you go through the door there is a little sign that you change. It says, bell ringers and then 'up' or 'down', so people know whether they are up there or not.

Once you've climbed the 120 steps to the belfry you are already puffed out! When we got there, we sat down and talked to Jeremy whilst the other ringers arrived. They rang Stedman and Yorkshire.

After the ring Jeremy said "Take off your coat" and I thought he was going to show us the belfry, which he did, but as well as that, I got a go! I rang the 2 to rounds for about five minutes and then went up to the belfry and came back down. They leave the bells up most of the time.

The ringing chamber is very bright, so that the many peal boards around the room can be seen! The bells have a lovely hum to them and I believe the tenor is 30cwt in D. I saw a familiar face there: David Brown, who rings at St Peter Mancroft.

The only problem when I was ringing the rounds was that I stood on the tenor box, which is obviously bigger than normal boxes because a bigger bell equals a bigger wheel and more rope needed. So because I was on a small bell, not much rope was needed, so I had to have loads of tail end in my hand which makes it hard to handle, because you have to stop it going over the balance too much. They are a lovely set of bells! Overall my trip to Westminster Abbey was...



Jamie at Westminster Abbey

AMAZING!

Bolton Bells Back in Action

From Silence to Active Teaching Hub - The Story of All Souls, Bolton

Andy Cope and Laura Robinson

Built in 1881, All Souls in Bolton is a beautiful historic church that has recently been converted for use as a conference, office, learning and community space. As part of this work, the original building was carefully restored, funded mainly through the Heritage Lottery Fund and is now managed by the Churches Conservation Trust.

As part of this ambitious regeneration project, the eight bells (23cwt tenor) were fitted with new ropes and some repairs were made in order to make them ringable again. In June 2017, three years after the reopening of the Community Centre and after a 'ringing room make-over', the bells of All Souls rang out once more to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Private Thomas Knowles, a bell ringer at the church who gave his life in WW1.



Aerial view of All Souls church

As a consequence of this occasion, there were many enquiries from local people who were keen to learn the art of bell ringing and by the end of the year we had eight beginners. Through an ongoing recruitment programme and the Ringing Remembers campaign, we had 18 enthusiastic bell ringers all actively completing the Association of Ringing Teachers 'Learning the Ropes' programme and most have now achieved their Level 1.

This is what Gill Knowles, one of our first learners to take up bell ringing here, has to say:

All Souls Church played a major part in my early life. We worshipped there as a family and it was where both my sister and I were confirmed and married. Obviously, it was with no little sadness that we saw it become a redundant church in the 80's. I therefore jumped at the opportunity to go back and ring bells in a place that was so familiar to me – even allowing for the changes required to turn it into a community asset.

My first visit to the bell tower showed my family name appearing a couple of times on the plaque which commemorates the very first ringing of the bells, and a little research showed that these were, indeed, my ancestors. This provided yet another reason to continue this wonderful old tradition of bell ringing. To ring a bell – that is, to make it sound – is relatively easy; but to have total control of the bell, to be able to alter the timing of it and take your place in an ever-changing sequence of ringing is a wholly different matter!

Our first aim was to ring rounds in time for the 11 November 2018 to remember those bell ringers who fell in The Great War. As a team we managed this with a modicum of success, not least owing to the very patient teaching of our tower captains. This quiet tuition continues, and as a group we are becoming more proficient (some more than others, it has to be said). Visits by experienced ringers from other towers is always fun, and a great revelation as to what can be achieved. We all look forward to continuing to improve and trying our hands at more changes in the future.

We have developed links with Bolton School and for the past two years have been teaching Lower Sixth pupils as part of their skills section for the Duke of Edinburgh's award. This continues during term time and it is hoped that after one year, each student will be capable of ringing rounds in their home towers.

Our latest news, and much to our delight, is that since last Christmas we have been recognised as an ART Teaching Hub and we thought it would be great to give you an idea of what it means for us and what we are trying to do.

We wanted to do more to support and promote bell ringing and over the last two years we have been offering to help any individual learner and towers in any way that we can, for example improving handling skills, developing listening skills, learning how to ring up and down and most recently, after hosting the ART conducting workshop at All Souls, holding some follow-up sessions in order to put into practice their conducting skills.

This year we have planned 15 progressive practices on a Saturday and these are open to any individual and also to towers who would benefit from specific training or support and advice. Most recently some of the Rossendale Branch ringers have taken two of the Saturday sessions and this is what Graham Lord, their organiser has to say:

The Rossendale Branch of the Lancashire Association includes some very enthusiastic ringers, many of whom have limited experience and lack the opportunity to progress.

This was highlighted following the very successful 'Ringing Remembers' initiative, where the new recruits mastered ringing in rounds and simple call changes. It was therefore recognised that in order to give these learners the chance to continue to develop their skills, further input was needed.

Andy Cope and Laura Robinson offered to provide training over several weekends to meet the various needs of these new ringers and also to stretch and challenge others in the Branch. They welcomed us at All Souls with open arms, giving constant encouragement, excellent tuition, endless patience and wonderful refreshments, all delivered in a fantastic training facility!

We look forward to further sessions in future.

We are also hosting specialist practices on a monthly basis concentrating on one method only and this has been a great success so far, with our next session being Double Grandsire, which is not rung so often nowadays. A session is also planned with U3A this year where we hope to gain some interest in what we do.

All Souls is also available to other towers and Branches and this month the Blackburn Branch had a specific practice for Stedman Triples for those who haven't had the opportunity to ring touches or even conduct a touch.

Through fundraising, we have been able to soundproof the tower and install a simulator which allows us to use the facility at any time and we certainly have been teaching at some unusual times of the day and night! We have also made a video to promote bell ringing at All Souls, so do take a look:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gas3WYnsjP8>

We are excited to be featured in a joint collaboration with The Churches' Conservation Trust, CCCBR and ART in a new "Learning the Ropes" campaign which we hope will attract plenty of interest in bell ringing and possibly many more potential bell ringers.

We are very thankful for the support we get from experienced local ringers and we are looking forward to an exciting future where more ringers and learners will use the All Souls Hub.

But it's amazing how things can change so quickly. Like everywhere else, the bells have fallen silent (even the simulator) and we realise that it is now very important for us to quickly adapt and to continue to challenge our learners. We have found that our established WhatsApp group has become our lifeline and we are constantly keeping in touch about everything bell ringing and much more.

We have suggested that it would be a great idea to purchase either Abel or Virtual Belfry ringing simulator and over the course of the next few weeks, we will be helping them get the most out of the features, using a phone to video the screen and adding a running commentary. Once familiar with the software, we are going to deliver rope-sight and listening exercises that will help them improve their ringing skills for when we are able to ring our bells again.



The All Souls Team ready to ring for Remembrance Sunday

Backstrokes In (and Up)!

Jennie Town, Northallerton

Once, as a visitor, I was asked to stand behind somebody who was learning to ring inside to Plain Bob Minor. This lady knew what she was supposed to do and did her 'down' dodges perfectly, but she couldn't do the 'up' dodges accurately, even though she knew which place she was supposed to be ringing. I immediately recognised the problem – she didn't know how to get her backstrokes in. If you have this problem too, you may be interested in the following tips.



Photo by Neil Thomas

When you first learn to ring backstrokes, you should be instructed in the following:

- Comfortable stretch at the top
- Low at the end of the stroke with thumbs pointing down
- Keep tension on the rope
- Don't shoot the arms up too fast

Here's a tip to understand the swing of the bell. Stand up and stretch one arm out to the side at shoulder height. Now, swing it down across the body, with the arm still straight, until it is pointing out at shoulder height on the opposite side of the body. You will find that your arm naturally accelerates towards the lowest point of the swing and slows as it climbs to the other side (provided you keep your arm relaxed and don't try to affect the speed). Bells do exactly the same as this – slowing towards the highest point and accelerating at the lowest. To keep tension on the rope, your arms need to mirror this, so that the rope doesn't go slack.

Don't Hold Tight!

At first, your teacher will find a comfortable place for your hands on the tail end which you will stick to. However, as you gain experience you learn that the tail end hold needs to be much freer than this. Once you have control and can ring in rounds, you need to learn to move your hand position on the tail end to enable you to alter speed. You can only do this if you don't have a tense grip on the tail end.

When moving down a place, the bell strikes sooner so you need to stop the bell swinging so high. This translates into shortening the rope. Many ringers achieve this on lighter bells simply by ringing the backstroke with slightly bent arms, which is a very good reason for ringing with a comfortable stretch to start with.

However, the best technique is to shorten the rope by moving up the tail end. To do this, you move from the sally at the handstroke pull and transfer your top hand to the tail end higher up, then quickly move the bottom hand up to meet it. This is just the same move as when you start to take a bell down, but you may be doing this just for one stroke and then moving back to the original position on the tail end. To move back, hold the rope more loosely and let the bell pull the rope through your hands until you reach the correct position on the tail end for the next stroke.

Think One Stroke Ahead

A lot of control at backstroke is driven by the previous handstroke – if you want the backstroke to rise, then you need an adequate amount of effort at handstroke for the bell to reach the balance at backstroke with a comfortable stretch.

Kaleidoscope exercises are excellent preparation for the skills you need in plain hunting and dodging – emphasising the need for accuracy in changing places and just how much you will need to hold up or check in. Both hunting and dodging need changes of speed and an ability to know what to do to achieve this.

If you watch experienced ringers ringing a heavy bell to changes, you will see that their hands rarely stay in the same place on the tail end from one pull to another. Any change of direction will entail moving up or down the tail end and on heavy bells the difference in position can be considerable.

To conclude:

- Find a comfortable place on the tail end for the 'neutral' pace when ringing rounds.
- To hold up at backstroke, apply enough effort into the handstroke and stretch up, letting out rope if necessary.
- To check in at backstroke, shorten the rope by moving up the tail end.
- Maintain a relaxed, not rigid, hold on the tail end. Learn to adjust according to where you want the bell to strike, in the same way as you might catch the sally in different places.
- You can practise moving up and down the rope whilst ringing on your own – ask your teacher for time to do this at an appropriate time.

I hope that these tips are helpful – good luck!

Teacher Turned Learner

Starting out on Handbells

Dee Smith, Burwell, Cambridgeshire



When Alan said, “*That’s all*” my first thought was “*What – already?!!!*”

I had just rung my first handbell quarter. As a tower bell ringer for many years I am used to ringing quarters, but for my first quarter peal on handbells the time had flown by.

My first experience of handbells was in the 70’s when I was at University and there were several times after that, but I just did not seem to be making any progress.

As an Art Assessor, I am familiar with the LtR teaching ways for Tower Bells. So, when a *Learning the Ropes for Handbells* programme was launched I was very interested in rekindling my interest in handbell ringing, so I signed up.

The LtR Handbell levels (just like the tower bell version) have small goals for both practical and theory targets. SmART ringer also provides helpful explanations as well as videos. At the same time, I was recommended to buy motion sensors to use with Abel, which cost about £12 each. This was another great help as I could practise on my own and review my striking. Getting a long column of ‘green’ is so encouraging! As well as SmART ringer, there are some useful websites you can visit for tips and help.

I had the book and the ‘bells’, but of course another key influence was my fellow handbell ringers who have been very patient and encouraged me all the way. I was fortunate that there were opportunities locally for me to practise with handbell groups and for them to explain to me the key terms given in my LtR book. While I find Abel a great help, I do find ringing with humans is so much easier.

I am the Diocesan Training Officer for the Ely Diocesan Association and often when I ask ringers what they would like help in learning to ring the reply is often ‘handbells’!

So, sign yourself up for the LtR Handbells programme and have a look at the resources. Find some fellow ringers who would like to ring handbells and organise regular practices and very soon you will be achieving your Level 1 certificate!

Unexpected Pleasures

M. R. Mayo (Em) of Highgate, London

The moment the idea popped into my head, I knew I was on to something significant. Recently retired (again) and looking for a pleasant occupation that would keep me fit through my declining years, from out of nowhere came - 'Why don't you try ringing bells?'

A mere six hours after my initial email to the ART Administrator, there I was in the alien environment of a church-bell tower with my hands on the end of a rope, and as soon as I felt the glorious, weighty tug of the bell I was smitten - for life. (I had been under the impression that I was only there to 'observe', then to go away and 'have a think' - ha!)

And now, 67 towers, numerous outings, several excellent bell courses - one as far as Tulloch, Scotland (it's a must), a number of inspirational teachers and two very scary QPs, here I am, exactly one year later, the 500th bell-ringer to receive their LtR Level 3 certificate. It feels like such an honour, such a privilege and such an astonishing achievement, only made possible by the generosity, support, kindness, skill and enthusiasm of every teacher, helper, assistant and band-member that I have encountered along the way.

Special thanks must go to Stephen Jakeman, who so ably guided me just a nose ahead of my comfort zone, ignored my resistance and hesitation, had faith in me when mine faltered, and arranged for me to achieve my QP on the treble on the very anniversary of that first tug on a rope. I am also indebted to the lovely people at my home tower of St. Anne's Highgate, and to all those I meet elsewhere at other tower practices and on outings and courses, whom I now consider to be among my friends - an unexpected bonus of this new life in the bell-ringing community.

And it does not stop here. After a short period of consolidation, and assimilation of my new, rather surreal sense of identity, I look forward to pursuing the next goals; getting to grips with methods and passing the milestones for LtR Levels 4 and 5, and beyond. What lies beyond? More gut-wrenching terror, more ego-bashing humiliation, more incomprehensible shoutiness, more irresistible challenges and more joyous accomplishments - what's not to love?

I can honestly and gratefully say that life begins at 70 - with a bong!



Em in action, ringing a bell at Navestock in Essex which was cast in 1430



The quarter peal band, from left: Celia Workman, Janet Betham, Em, Guy Wells, Debbie Malin and Stephen Jakeman

The Ballad of the Bell Ringers

M. R. Mayo (Em)

Inspired by her first visit to Shoreditch in January 2019, Em created this poem and she writes: 'I was still not able to ring both strokes but there I was among 12-bell rounds at Shakespeare's local church. I was so ecstatic I went straight home and wrote The Ballad of the Bell Ringers. I have since turned it into a Christmas carol with handbell descant — that's the sort of thing the lovely bells can do to a person'.

THE BALLAD OF THE BELL RINGERS

Ding-dong merrily on high
Sound the changes, touch the sky
On wings of joyful noise we fly
Together
We ring the bells

Ding-dong pulling them off
Feet apart, arms aloft
Look to, treble going, she's gone; we're off
Exultant
We ring the bells

Ding-dong rotating unseen
Cascading Rounds, rippling Queens
Grandsires and Bobs fulfilling our dreams
Triumphant
We ring the bells

Ding-dong sallies up, sallies down
In celebration the peal resounds
Proclaiming its message across the town
United
We ring the bells.

Post Script from Isolation

M. R. Mayo (Em)

As if self-isolating wasn't bad enough I'm also in mourning. I am a bereavement counsellor so I recognise the signs; a complex mixture of anger, sadness, loss, defeat, disbelief and, surprisingly, betrayal – I feel as if I am letting the bells down. Their voices have rung out to and on behalf of the collective community for centuries and if ever this was a time for them to be bringing us all together, it is now – they should not be silent – it's just wrong, and I'm not sure what I should be feeling or who to blame, or what I can do about it. Yes, that about sums up grief. And I also fear that everything will have changed when we emerge from this and nothing will be quite the same. For example, those calluses that I am so proud of will have softened again, will my arthritic hands still hold a rope, and will I be able to remember any of the new methods I was just on the point of mastering (mistringing?), and even if I do my blue-line homework and keep those ringing muscles exercised, will I still be able to ring in place reliably or last the distance for a quarter peal, or even just a Sunday service?

The bells are not all I am missing because, right from that very first bong, I have felt so at home in the bell-community, have delighted in the history and enjoyed the enthusiasm, the inclusion, the kindness, the successes and failures, the challenges and the fun we all enjoy together. Waiting weeks (or months?) for our life in the towers to resume seems surreal. I know Shakespeare knocked off a few of his best plays (all tragedies) while the theatres were closed during the threat of plague (yes, this has happened before) and I have considered trying that myself (I might call it Blood on the Sally, that's the mood I'm in) but meanwhile I can't face the charts and the books and the diagrams and bits of rope that usually litter my own home because, without a bell to ring, what's the point?

So I'm self-intoxicating.

All best wishes and fond thoughts to everyone out there who would rather be on the end of a rope. Keep the faith – I miss you all.

Your Best Teacher is Your Last Mistake

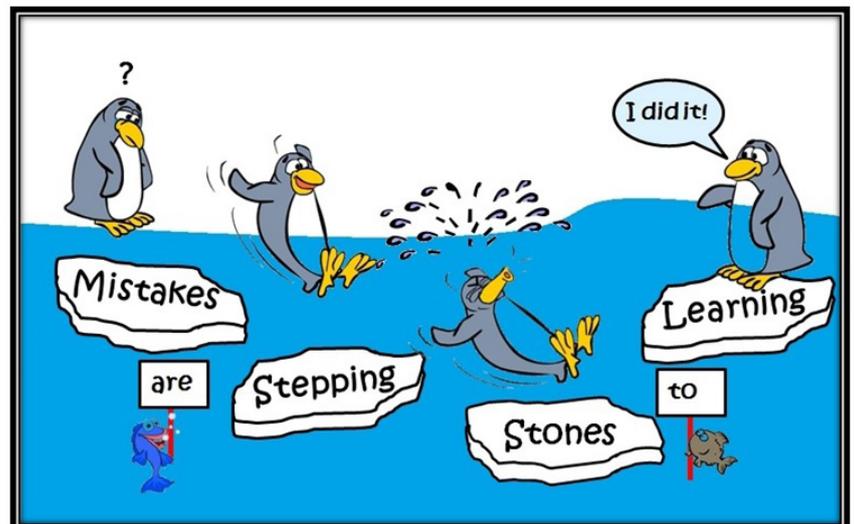
Tim Farnham of Scarning, Norfolk

Have you ever thought about the process of learning and how we master things that we initially are unable to do? Any parent will remember the amusing things their children said when learning to talk. Our son, for example, went through a period of saying 'firstabor' when he wanted to say 'first of all'. He heard people saying it, grasped the context it was used in and had a shot at saying it himself. No doubt after he had said it a few times one of us taught him to say the words properly and he never went back. Imagine if in his childish way he had said to himself '*I'm not going to try saying that funny long word any more because I'll get it wrong and they'll think I'm stupid*'. That way he would never have learnt to talk fluently.

So apply that to yourself at a ringing practice. Have you ever avoided trying something new because you didn't want to embarrass yourself? Or been reluctant to ask someone to go over something once more just for your benefit? Or felt apprehensive ringing in a strange tower with people you don't normally ring with? I certainly have, and I'll bet that if you are honest you have too. These comments are aimed principally at those of us who are still very much in the learning process, but when I spoke to someone who had recently started ringing at St. Peter Mancroft in Norwich, where ringing methods on ten and twelve bells is normal, and I realised that for her that experience must have been just as intimidating as the things less accomplished ringers attempt.

Think about how you learn to do something new. You might read about it in a book or have someone explain it to you and then just do it perfectly. If so, then well done you. But what about bell ringing? The process of learning invariably involves getting it wrong, possibly repeatedly, and gradually working out how to do it right. Once you tick that little problem off, another one comes along, and so on. The vital point is that we are learning through our mistakes, learning through failing. So if we allow ourselves to become afraid of failure to the extent that we avoid anything that might make us look (in our eyes) foolish or incompetent, how is that helping us to learn? The simple answer is that it isn't, in fact it's probably the single biggest thing holding us back.

I have struggled with this at times. I try, as time permits, to go to practices where there are ringers who are well above my standard, as I feel that this is my best chance of making progress. But I am nervous of doing so, even to the extent of chickening out on occasions, which is clearly not helping me. Recently I have tried to think about this differently; something along the lines of 'I'm going to go to the practice at 'x', I hope to try new and difficult things, I'm going to muck it up, and eventually I'll learn how to do it right'. In other words I'm going to the practice accepting that I may struggle, but intending to use that experience to learn.



So my moral is that on practice nights we need to be game for (almost!) anything, happy to fail, but thoughtful about how to learn from our mistakes. Being anxious about failure just makes it harder to learn. But if you can stay positive and confident in the knowledge that getting it wrong is the inevitable precursor to getting it right you will find it much easier to master the thing you are working on. We also need to remind ourselves that when we do mess things up, our fellow ringers will invariably respect us for trying and encourage us to have another go, which is precisely what we must do.

The Central Council and You

Simon Linford, newly elected President of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers

When I learned to ring in the 1980s, I remember my first encounters with the organisational hierarchy above me. I became a proud member of the Stafford Archdeaconry Society when I rang my first quarter, and that is where I found that there were experienced ringers outside my own tower. Indeed, when the Society came for a Saturday evening practice at Cannock I listened in awe to a course of London Major – “one day that might be me” I thought. We took part in the Society’s striking competition, and I went to practices to gain more experience.



Simon helping with Brumdingers

ART pretty much from the start and I am involved in ringing teaching every week at all levels.

I am sure you are finding that very experienced ringers are prepared to help those less experienced than them – it is part of what ringing is all about. I think that helping the ringers coming up after you is part of ringing’s ‘social contract.’

The Central Council, which has representatives from over 50 ringing societies, has had a perception of being irrelevant to the ordinary ringer for a long time. That is a shame because it has actually done quite a lot. Of course it does technical things that are probably of no interest to you yet, but it provides expert advice on a wide range of subjects from safeguarding to insurance, organising fundraising and PR. The *Ringing Remembers* recruitment campaign, which may have been your route into ringing, wouldn’t have happened without the Council, working with Alan Regin and The Big Ideas Co.

To find there was a level above that was quite a surprise, and my first experience of it was not great. The “Central Council” came to Cannock one day as part of a ringing tour prior to its AGM, and although still a young whipper-snapper I went along. Sitting behind the 5 and knowing it to be oddstruck, I helpfully told one of these great ringers who had caught hold of it that it was quick at handstroke. He turned to me with a condescending smirk and said “I think I should be able to work that out.” To which I replied “but you won’t get the first handstroke right.”

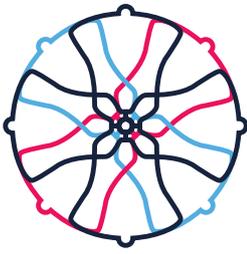
I don’t think he was impressed with that reply, and indeed he was quick with both his first and second handstrokes. It was not really the right thing for an experienced ringer to say to a 13 year old learner. It set the tone for me for a long time.

Forty years on, that young ringer from Cannock became President of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, and I have been given the opportunity to tell you what that means, and how this representative body for bell ringers is looking to help you.

First of all, I hope my attitude to ringers who are less experienced than me is better than what I experienced from that visitor at Cannock. I have been involved with

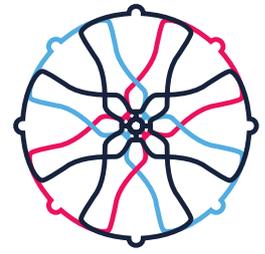


...and in action in Miami



THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

In recent times the Council has tried to slim itself down and support others instead of doing things itself. *The Ringing World* now thrives as a separate entity whereas it was once part of the Council (I hope you at least see a copy each week). The Council used to publish a lot of ringing books but now there are other ringing organisations publishing good material, including ART (although the *New Ringer's Book* is still a top choice!).



THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

Learning the Ropes was first envisaged by Pip Penney when she and I were both on the Central Council Education Committee. Learning the Ropes and then ART could be said to have spun out of the Council – at least the Central Council did support it early on with funds from the Ringing Foundation before it became self-sufficient.

The Council is very supportive of ART, whilst also recognising that great teaching and support also comes from ringers who do not follow the ART path. We are now working on some joint initiatives such as the promotion of ringing centres at churches under the care of the Churches Conservation Trust, and I meet regularly with Lesley Belcher of ART to see how we can all work together. It helps that we have been friends a long time! It is a shame that these initiatives have been delayed by the current suspension of ringing, but nothing is getting forgotten about. In fact new initiatives are springing up quickly, such as the introduction of webinars so we can still help with the theoretical side of ringing.

If you use social media I encourage you to follow the Central Council on Facebook or Twitter. Every two weeks I am publishing a blog which will not just give you insight into what is happening in the wider ringing world (not as much at the moment as there usually is!) but hopefully inspire you and make you realise that you are part of something really quite special. Whether you notice it directly or not, there are a lot of people out there who want to help you, whether it is neighbouring towers, your branch or district, guild or association, local ringing centre, ART Hub, or Central Council.

Nothing is more important to the Council now than retaining the enthusiasm of those who have recently been bitten by the bell-ringing bug. We will therefore all be working hard to keep you interested, and maintain opportunities for you when ringing returns.



Answers to Puzzles



Answers to Wordpairs Puzzles (in this issue)

1. Stroke and strike
2. Spider and slider
3. Tower and lower
4. Quarter and quartet

Answers to 'Missing Vowels' (January edition of Tower Talk)

1. Keep your backstrokes in!
2. Who can ring on Sunday?
3. Stretch up high at handstroke
4. Band to lower
5. Go Plain Bob Doubles

Answers to *The Ringing World* puzzle (in this issue)

1. BCFEDA
2. EBFDAC
3. EBFDGA