

Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



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*A seasonal wreath made by ringer
Emma Hughes of Puddletown, Dorset*

This time, it's all about handbells! So many people of widely varying experiences have been drawn to handbells, despite pre-pandemic claims they would never be interested, or beliefs that mastering the art was simply a mystery beyond them. New ringers too find that learning to ring handbells allows them to concentrate more on rhythm and place, instead of worrying about controlling their bell. It's also a great way of meeting up with your ringing friends on a regular basis, and with Ringing Room, they don't even have to live nearby. As the restrictions wear on, it's clear that they are a brilliant way of keeping us ringing – either for real where restrictions allow or in Ringing Room. And in fact, there's a whole section on handbells in the new *50 Virtual Ringing Things* just launched (see the articles on page 12). Inside this edition, you will discover the many facets of handbell ringing with lots of tips on ways to get started, the versatility of handbell ringing – tunes as well as methods – and tips on how to care for handbells.

As we enter the new year, we all have to think about keeping ringing going in the short term, and how we will all help ringing to recover in the longer term. We all have a part to play in this, so keep ringing, keep supporting and think ahead! There are some useful ideas on pages 6 and 7.

Happy Christmas to ringers everywhere!

Ringling Handbells - Tunes or Methods?

Phil Tremain, St Columb Major, Cornwall

Change ringing on handbells, with a bell in each hand, is clearly an extension of tower bell change ringing. That said, there are undoubtedly some people who have practised method ringing on handbells before learning to handle a tower bell, but they must be a very small minority. Tune ringing, on the other hand, attracts many people who have never rung tower bells and never will. A set of bells are seen, together, as a musical instrument on which the ringers perform. Large bell orchestras with 40 or more participants and over 100 gleaming bells can produce an amazing performance, utilising different techniques (ringing in-hand, off the table, with mallets) to produce different sounds, ringing from the same staff notation as any other instrument. At the other end of the tune ringing spectrum is the tower-bell band who dust off the old box of ten or maybe a dozen handbells from the cupboard in the ringing chamber and go out at Christmas, around the pubs or care-homes. This would probably involve ringing by numbers, with some basic but clunky harmonies.



The St Columb tune-ringing band after performing in church about thirty years ago!

So what of the audience, if any? Change-ringing on handbells is mainly for the benefit of the participants, unless perhaps at a ringers' event where the complexity of what is being achieved would be appreciated. Non-ringers may enjoy the sound of the bells, but might have little appreciation of what is going on. Tune ringing, on the other hand, can be appreciated by a much wider audience as they recognise the tunes.



Can the two co-exist or are views polarised? A method ringer can be transfixed by complicated change-ringing, marvelling at the brain processes which are taking place and wishing they could emulate the performance; for some of them tune ringing is a poor relation. Tune ringing, though, can engage a much wider audience who can more readily appreciate the skill involved. Tune ringers may well consider method ringers as pursuing an art with few external benefits.

The bells themselves may be set up differently. Method ringers ring the bell up (for handstroke) and down (for backstroke) but tune ringers may prefer to ring in one direction only, and to avoid the risk of a doublestrike the springs may be set one-sided, making the bells unsuitable for double-sided change ringing; the handles too may be stiffened. Whether this problem is real or imagined, most sets of handbells are probably used for one purpose or the other, with little overlap.

To end with, a couple of quotes from some of the friends with whom I practise change ringing:

"I've done both tune ringing and methods on handbells and enjoyed them both. Christmas carol handbell ringing in a rowdy Saturday night pub, collecting for charity, was great, but I wouldn't be able to keep right in a method in the same location!"

"It depends on the situation, but the greatest pleasure I have had with ringing handbells was helping perform Christmas carols in hospital wards on Christmas Eve. The appreciation was overwhelming. I don't think method change ringing would have elicited the same response."

Maybe there's a place for 'God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen' at the College Youths' dinner in the future!

How to Impress your Friends

Lesley Boyle, Cambridgeshire

It all came about through Covid. A friend's 60th birthday. Her daughter's appeal for a special message that she could compile into a video montage for her mum in the absence of real people at her birthday celebrations.

Many years ago when I learnt to ring, I was fortunate to have a tower captain who not only was a good ringer but he rang handbells to changes (and taught us). He was extremely musical and led the Spalding Parish Church Handbell Ringers, so we joined that too. He arranged the music himself and we performed in competitions and concerts. He also played the carillon in the recently restored town hall. (Ron Noon - if you're looking down on me now, I want you to know how much I owe you, and thank you.)

We rang tunes with handbells 'four-in-hand'. You hold two bells in each hand but at different angles, so that the clappers swing at right angles to each other. When you move the hand downwards the lower (dominant) bell rings, when you swing your hand inwards the other bell rings. The clappers swinging along different axes means that only one bell will sound at a time. You interlock the handbells with one strap inserted through the other so that you can grip them both firmly.



Two bells in each hand

Back to my friend's 60th birthday - the obvious thing was to ring her a tribute. I should explain - I ring handbells to changes regularly and so does my partner, so we do have a set of 12 handbells in the house. I know how tune ringing on handbells works, so we could ring 8 bells between us. I was sure I could teach Gareth to ring 4 in hand. Does 'Happy Birthday' fit within the range of 8 bells? A bit of humming and plonking on the piano told me that it did. I then did a google search for *Happy Birthday* on handbells. What amazing diversity - handbell choirs of 30 people ringing wonderful arrangements off the table. But one ray of hope for our modest venture - 'Larry and Carla' on YouTube ringing a handbell duet. What they managed to do with 8 bells! You can listen to them and download their music at these sites - (*Happy Birthday* is free, other music is payable):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ_xpIC9j3Q

<https://www.choraegus.com/freebies/happy-birthday>

Larry and Carla's music had way too many notes in it (though they look like they're having fun, don't they?) I took their music and wrote it out again missing out some of the twiddly bits. Then I worked out what the bell numbers were that matched each note, with the lowest note/bell assigned to bell number 8. I wrote the music out again using numbers, which is a common way of displaying music for handbells: the numbers below the horizontal line were for me to play, and those above were for Gareth. And as we went on, I crossed out a few more notes that I decided were superfluous to requirements (i.e. too difficult to ring).



Happy Birthday -an 8-bell duet performed by Larry and Carla

The results were quite splendid. We were thrilled with ourselves and my smile was almost as wide as Carla's (see above). Sharyn (the birthday girl) was amazed and astonished. We had never had a reception like that to our Sunday morning ringing!



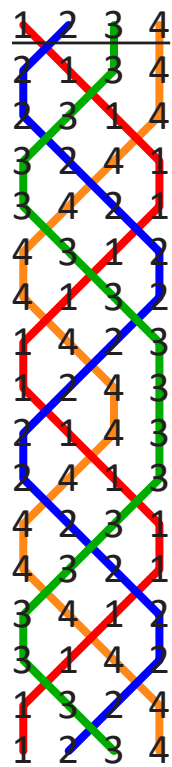
Silent Night for handbells

So do give ringing handbell tunes a go. It was ages since I'd done it and I'd forgotten what fun it was. It was enlightening to teach my rather stubborn partner to ring the top four bells - and the feedback was that I wasn't very good at that! If you can get hold of a set of bells, try some tunes with each person in your family ringing one in each hand. At the left is one which will need bells 2 to 12 of a set of 12 bells. If you haven't got proper handbells you can buy little coloured handbells quite cheaply (search 'coloured handbells') or try boomwhackers!

Maxing out on Minimus

Rose Nightingale, Marsworth, Buckinghamshire

With tower ringing being restricted, those of us who can ring have found ourselves in bands of only three or four and it looks like this will continue to be the norm. Even before the restrictions most of us could relate to the experience of arriving at a practice session to discover that only four people have turned up. After waiting for a while, the decision is then usually made to decamp to the pub.



*Grandsire
Minimus*

The idea of ringing minimus methods doesn't usually seem very appealing. After all, what can you really do with four bells? The answer is: quite a lot actually! Not only are minimus methods excellent for practising your striking skills, there are also plenty of methods to explore. In these days of socially distanced ringing taking place on fewer bells it's a good chance to have a closer look at what can be done on four bells to keep our brains – and muscles – in good working order.

Ringers who are quite new to ringing will find plenty to join in with and, because the larger gaps between blows require more forward planning to strike well, minimus methods are an excellent challenge for bell handling and thinking ahead. And even experienced ringers may be quite unfamiliar with them so it's a learning experience for everyone.

A new Minimus Ringing Toolbox which is available free online has been produced by the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART). Click here

<http://www.ringingteachers.org/resources/Method-Toolboxes/minimus-toolbox>

to access this wealth of information and make the most of what we can do. There are eleven standard minimus methods which are most commonly rung, and if your band are up for trying something new, there are plenty more to explore. Some of them are a lot harder than they might at first appear.

Choose from entry level methods through to a couple labelled 'really tricky' which might challenge the more experienced band members.

There are also minimus methods suitable for bands of mixed experience, such as Llanarthne Little Bob Minimus, where the ringer of the 3rd bell simply makes places in 3-4, the treble plain hunts and the 2nd and 4th ring a line with the treble bobbing in 1-2.

Or how about trying Grandsire Minimus? Treble and 2nd bell plain hunt, while the 3rd and 4th make alternate seconds and long fourths – a good opportunity to practise Grandsire singles, and it can also be rung by a band who can plain hunt but who are quite new to method ringing.

If you do want to delve into the 'really tricky' side of minimus, Ypsen Harben Minimus is something that even experienced ringers might find challenging. The treble hunts and makes points while the working bells wrong hunt and do snap leads on the front. Anyone attempting this might wish they'd decided to go to the pub after all!

Whatever your level of experience, ringing minimus methods can be great fun. They're short, easy to learn and have no calls to worry about. Give it a try. As well as providing a bit of a challenge, you might be surprised how much fun can be had with just four bells.

And don't forget, you can do it on Ringing Room too. But here's a word of warning for when we are in the tower: because the gaps between bells are large, ringing minimus can be quite physically demanding. The good news is that it saves money on your gym membership!



*Llanarthne
Little Bob
Minimus*

Ten Good Reasons to Ring Handbells

Mary Jones, Reedham, Norfolk

1 They are there, so why not use them? Many churches will have a box squirrelled away somewhere that contains some handbells. Our own were a gift from an anonymous donor on the occasion of the Queen's coronation in 1953. Co-incidentally, someone pointed out the grave of the generous benefactor to me the other day. During the conversation I convinced her that learning to ring handbells would be an excellent idea so she and her husband, both members of the congregation, will be joining our new handbell group. Thus are potential ringers drawn into the net. Unfortunately, our handbells melted into a handbell blob during a catastrophic fire at the church in 1982, but we have sourced others - from the vicar's spare room, I believe. If your band does not appear to own any, check under the vicar's bed. You might get lucky!

2 There is nothing much else to do with bells that you can enjoy at the moment. Handbells may not offer the shock and awe of their larger brethren, but they do share many essential characteristics. You need to know the method, watch the treble, count your place and keep the rhythm going.

3 Ringing handbells stretches the brain. If using the brain stimulates the production of brain cells and keeps your brain young then I estimate that I will soon have the brain of a seven year old. That is how much thinking I have had to do recently.

4 Handbells can be rung outside and socially distanced. This means that real-life ringing is possible, as long as you don't plan to ring more than maximus. I do not have such ambitions, so should remain an upstanding member of the community, safe from arrest. However, should I be jailed for ringing in a group of more than six, would that mean that any individual prison population is a social bubble? And if so, might we be allowed some bells for recreational purposes?

5 Handbells can be rung for services and for other occasions such as funerals and weddings. I would far prefer eight handbells to be rung over my coffin than an atonal clanging of two or three tower bells because social distancing does not allow a proper peal.

6 One can learn a lot about method ringing by indulging in handbells.

7 I have it on good authority that handbell ringing is a competitive sport. You learn to ring handbells because someone else is doing it and you think you can do it better.

8 A handbell ringer is always welcome in Ringing Room because they can nonchalantly take on two bells if the numbers attending are low. Our American cousins, many of whom rarely see an actual tower, are particularly skilled in this respect.

9 Handbells are tremendous fun. Three or four friends perched on wobbly folding garden chairs battling against the wind, wasps or neighbouring DIY enthusiasts as they strive to make sense of something new, cannot fail to enjoy themselves.

10 You do **not** need to handle a large lump of metal on a piece of string in order to be successful. For some of us, that is a good thing. What more need I say?



Mary with two bells from a set from St Peter Mancroft in Norwich

Top Tips for Survival and Recovery

Matthew Lawrence, Lilleshall, Shropshire

Key messages

Stay positive

We will return to ringing at some point. The exercise has survived much longer periods of inactivity without all the fantastic resources that have been developed during this pandemic.

Stay safe

Always follow social distancing requirements and the coronavirus restrictions in your local area.

Keep ringing

The sound of bells has been missed in our cities, towns and villages. Use every opportunity to promote ringing to your local community.

Be bold

If nothing is happening in your tower, then why not organise something yourself.

Keep in touch

Try as many different ways as possible. Not everyone enjoys virtual ringing; that doesn't mean that they aren't as keen to return.

Plan ahead

Think about what you can do differently when we return to ringing to help sustain ringing for the future.

Keeping in touch

Ringers

Run virtual pub sessions or coffee mornings using on line video conferencing platforms.

Keep in touch with ringers with regular phone calls.

Meet up as small group where restrictions allow. Go for a walk or have a catch up over a hot drink following social distancing requirements.

Run social events. How about a virtual Carol Service or a Bake Off challenge?

Keep in touch with other towers, encourage ringers to take part in Association / Branch events.

A tower approach

Use the skills of all your ringers, this is not just down to one person. Involve the whole of the band and use the skills and strengths of everyone. Do you have a social media expert, someone to check on the bells, or someone who likes to arrange social events?

Church

Have regular meetings with clergy and church wardens. Agree how and when bells can be rung for services and community events.

Community

Keep in touch with your local community via newsletters, websites and social media. Let the community know why bells are silent or why ringing might sound different.

Keeping ringing

Church bells

Ring for every possible occasion - not just services. Let the community know what you are ringing for.

Draw up a rota and give everyone an opportunity to take a turn even if this means ringing fewer bells. Allow less experienced ringers to chime a bell.

Other ringing

Organise a virtual practice or form a hub practice with other towers.

Organise a handbell practice.

Recovery

Return to ringing

How are you going to support less experienced ringers when we return to 'normal' ringing? Find ways of helping people return to ringing - e.g. offer one on one silent practice for less experienced ringers.

Reach out to others to share ideas for returning to ringing - what else is happening in your area? Get in contact with your Guild / Branch / Association to find out what's happening. If nothing is happening then set something up.

Develop your brand

Look out for and take advantage of training opportunities for new steeple keepers, tower captains etc.

What new ways are there to keep your band motivated?
How about organising joint practices with neighbouring towers.

Plan ahead

What are the aspirations and values of your band? Do you know how many of your band may not return to the exercise?

Are you planning to recruit? Do you have the capacity, skills and experience to teach new ringers? How about working with other neighbouring towers, or targeting lapsed ringers.

A Light for our Times

M. R. Mayo (Em)

Em is a ringer in North London and sent us this poem. She says:

'I was asked by the hospice I work for to write a poem for their annual Light Up a Life ceremony and I came up with this. I realise it is not specific to bell ringers but it is about our current non-ringing situation, so I hope it will help us to feel connected to each other.'

A LIGHT FOR OUR TIMES

I have a light that shines from within
You have the same light that nothing can dim.
Magnificent strings of bright shining pearls
Like fireflies flickering all round the world.
A galaxy of starlight, reflecting us all
Every one precious, no one too small.
Shadows may threaten but cannot destroy
Our radiance, our courage, our love and our joy.

I don't know you, you don't know me
But nothing divides us, not mountains nor sea.
The life that unites us has just one embrace
For gender and colour, age, culture and race.
The dreams that inspire us, the fears in the dawn
The children we cherish, the losses we mourn
We all have in common. For each other let's strive
The better to prosper, the better to thrive.

So twinkle, twinkle, brave little light
If we twinkle together we'll conquer this night.
No one need struggle alone in the dark
Our lustre a magnet to each other's spark.
No matter who or wherever you are
How great or how lowly, how near or how far
Come brothers and sisters, come sparkle with grace
Light beacons of hope for the whole human race.

From Ringing to Restoration

Sue McClaughry, Calstock, Cornwall

Sue is the winner of the 2020 Westley award for Church Bell Maintenance

Having left the West Country as a teenager it had always been my intention to return to Cornwall when I retired which is why in 2016 my husband and I settled in the Tamar Valley. My daughter, who was ringing with the Calstock band at the time, informed me that I needed a hobby and suggested I give bell ringing a try.

I can't say I was instantly enthused with the experience but after a few experimental weeks I decided I simply had to overcome the terror and put my trust in my new-found teacher, Kevan Borlase, a man of quiet, unwavering confidence. Before long I'd managed to gain control of the rope and had caught the bug. I was invited to join the regular practices at Calstock and St Dominic where Kevan was tower captain and where his son, Owen Borlase, also started to work with me. Within a few months I was ringing for services and going to other district practices where I could try many more bells.



Sue and her team



Sue with the Westley award

Kevan and Owen have always been keen to share their knowledge and enthusiasm for ringing, so it wasn't long before one or the other of them had taken me up the local towers to explain how the bells work and what the differences were between the various arrangements. It was fascinating and I was eager to learn, not just about ringing but also about maintenance, fitting muffles and tying ropes. Why were some bells odd struck, what happened if the clapper and the bell didn't swing in a compatible fashion? It was a real adventure.

Early in 2018, I accidentally became tower captain at Calstock, brought about by the sudden, unexpected departure of my predecessor from a band where no-one else was willing to do the job. There wasn't really any other option so it meant that the bells were now my responsibility.

Calstock bells were difficult to ring, and that wasn't just my opinion – they had a poor reputation throughout the area. Owen and I went up the tower and looked at the numerous problems. I decided to call in the bell hangers and the result was a decision to rehang.

We were going to need a minimum of £46,000 and we had no idea how long it would take to raise the funds so we made some interim changes to help improve the bells in the short term. We replaced several of the pulleys and repositioned pulley boxes but the biggest improvement came from fitting a new wood-shafted clapper to the tenor. While we waited for the rehang we had probably the smallest bell in the world (just over 9 cwt) fitted with a wood-shafted clapper. Pretty neat!

In the end we accumulated the funds fairly quickly and within eighteen months our bells had been rehung. More details and photos of the rehang work can be found on the bell ringers' website:

<https://www.calstockbellringers.com/bell-restoration-project>

Those early weeks gave me a fabulous introduction to working in the bell chamber and with my own venture finished it seemed reasonable to offer to help other towers and parochial church councils in a similar position. So towards the end of 2019 I took on the role of Bell Restoration Officer for the Truro Diocesan Guild of Ringers (TDGR).

Of course, as things have turned out I haven't been able to do much except deal with applications for grants from the TDGR Bell Restoration Fund but I do hope to visit more towers and take on more projects in the coming months.

Book Review: Change Ringing on Handbells

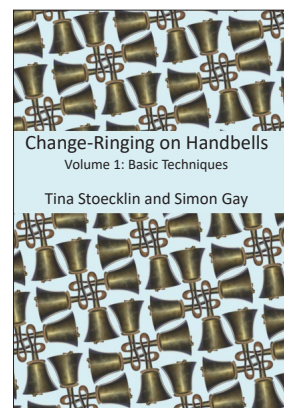
Authors: Tina Stoecklin and Simon Gay

Review by Janet Bond, Buckinghamshire

Volume 1: Basic Techniques. *The paperback edition (206 pages) can be ordered from Amazon for £20, and the Kindle edition is available from Amazon and the Kindle store for £8.99.*

The authors (a real-life handbell-ringing couple) begin by introducing themselves, their respective backgrounds and ringing histories, and how they have developed their skills and techniques over their years together. There is a good overview of English change ringing for the uninitiated, and actually, this book does not assume that the reader is already familiar with change ringing, so a non-ringer can certainly begin handbell ringing right here. The next section gives all sorts of advice about finding yourself some actual bells, as well as looking for other ringers who might let you join in, along with lots of lovely photos of the shiny hardware.

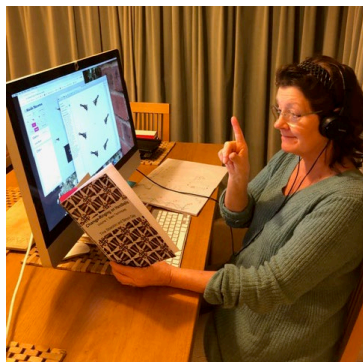
The sections of the book are well laid out and you can navigate your way through, skipping bits if you feel like it, or indeed missing whole chunks out. For example, there's no particular need to have Plain Hunt explained if you're already a tower bell ringer. However, the style is very easy and interesting, with regular margin notes throughout, which are jolly helpful.



The front cover

The Plain Hunt section is the 'getting started' stage and they suggest beginning on four bells. Personally I dived straight into the six bell hunting as I am already used to a minor rhythm. There are quite lengthy explanations for all of the steps, which is perfectly logical given that non-ringers do need to have the foundations fully explained.

Personally, I found the Plain Hunt section to be the most important. It's where the patterns for each pair of bells are explained and, crucially, demonstrated in diagram form, and it's at this stage when to practise is the most important thing. So, with no actual bells and certainly no opportunity to ring with actual human beings, I resorted to my trusty phone and iPad and good old Mabel. (Mabel, Abel, other online platforms are available. Oh, and Ringing Room, of course, once I got a little more confident.) The advantage of practising online is that you can select any pair of bells in order to thoroughly practise each position. For example, the 2-3 position is a tricky one to master but obviously we don't ring with those two bells in real life, so you need to find ways around it. This is explained nicely in the book, in terms of real bells and ringers and how to achieve each position, and it's even easier using online bells.



Janet at work

After the Plain Hunt section, the book moves on to Plain Bob. Again, they take you through minimus, which I skipped, and then minor. It is well explained, with diagrams too of course, and the revelation that you now need to master dodging, with explanations of the different types of dodges arising from the patterns made when ringing them with a pair. As I'm a mature learner, I find it slow going to learn anything new, so I've found learning handbells a little more straightforward on the 1-2 pair. This way I actually have hold of the treble itself, so it gives me a bit of a clue when the lead-end is. Plus, I have no idea what to do if a helpful person says, "Dodge now" or even worse, "Dodge with me". That just doesn't make sense to me! So these patterns are the way forward.

The final chapter in the book, by the way, is entitled, 'Double Norwich Court Bob Major' and by the time I get to that stage I shall be receiving a telegram from whoever the monarch is then. But that's a reflection on me and not this book! I have found it invaluable so far and one day – who knows when – I might venture into Chapter 6 where I shall learn all about bobs and singles.

I heartily recommend *Change Ringing on Handbells*, it's a great book for all scenarios. It is clear and helpful without being at all patronising. Whatever your circumstances, it will provide you with the basics as well as the stepping stones toward definitive advancement in the world of handbell ringing.

Listen While You Work

Cathy Booth

I started the *Fun with Bells* podcast in February 2019 and it has now surpassed over 13,000 downloads! Since then I have really enjoyed interviewing a wide range of people and am amazed at how much goes on, and is still going on, during Covid-19 in the bell-ringing world.

Our most popular episode has been, *'Seventy-Five Years, Twenty Voices, One Story'*, which was published to celebrate the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Through readings of contemporary records of the day it featured a story about the lifting of the World War II ban on ringing. It also included interviews with two veterans who told us about their extraordinary stories of VE day; one a prisoner of war, and the other ringing his first peal on that memorable day.

In another episode, *'15 Tips to Improve Your Striking'*, recorded at the ART conference in March this year, three top strikers made the case for a focus on good striking and discussed how best to achieve it.

Complete with spooky sound effects, *'Spooky Stories from the Ringers' Arms'* – a more recent episode – contains many entertaining bell ringing tales and is the most professional sounding docu-drama to date.



Lifting the WWII
ban on ringing

The *Fun With Bells*
podcast
7 May 2020

We have lots more episodes planned so, go to:

<https://funwithbells.com/>

then download an episode and it will be ready to listen to when you are doing the washing up or wrapping Christmas presents. Or even in a quiet moment when working from home! Here's what some of our listeners have said:

"I like the mix of topics – different aspects of ringing. I also like the diversity of the interviewees in terms of ringing background and age."

"Fantastic insight into learning to ring. I'd recommend this podcast to new ringers and anyone interested in learning to ring."

"A brilliant snapshot of our cultural heritage."

An Invitation to Ringing Room

Chris de Cordova, Moresby, Cumbria

Brian and Barbara are Moresby ringers I have taught from scratch. Barbara started with dumbbells before tower bells were installed, and she became a neat ringer with good striking. Brian started a long time after the main band but quickly showed good understanding. When we had to stop ringing in the tower I started Ringing Room practices and then with the help of Ian Mills, invited Barbara, and later Brian as well, to try handbell ringing. Ian was willing to teach her, with me filling the gaps.

We now have two sessions a week. Ian is the main teacher, and I lead the other session, with a friend helping. Brian and Barbara are both doing well, though differently, on different pairs and touches. I can't wait to see how it impacts on tower bell ringing when the time comes!

Barbara writes: Being a Ringing Remembers recruit, I still feel new to the world of bell ringing. Then, when everything stopped in March, we were all new to the weekly Ringing Room sessions set up by Chris de Cordova.

A few weeks into the lockdown, Chris asked if I would like to have a go at learning hand bells using Ringing Room. As I had lots of extra time on my hands I thought I would give it a go. So along with Ian, a ringing friend of Chris', we agreed to meet one Sunday evening via Zoom. I was not very good at working out where I needed to be with one bell so having to master the position of two was a challenge. I found it quite difficult at first. At my age it takes time for things to sink in, but Chris and Ian were very patient. Brian, another of our band of ringers, has also started to learn handbells as well and this has helped me because I get the chance of watching while Brian has a go and I can then watch the patterns.

Ringing Room is a wonderful way of learning as it allows me to focus on the position of the bells and the patterns they are making without having the added pressure of controlling your bell, which has a tendency to do its own thing when you don't pay attention. Something I realised early on is that ringing has a language all of its own, so I was particularly pleased with myself on one of our sessions recently when I understood the instruction 'make seconds and ring long fifths'. Small triumphs matter.

Learning via Zoom does have its unique problems. My cat thinks she can do it better and often feels the need to join in, walking over the keyboard and getting in the way of the screen. You can get very immersed in what you are doing and I have been in trouble with my husband on several occasions because I was late for tea!

Brian writes: I don't know how good I will be when it comes to actual handbells, as all my experience so far has been using virtual bells!

I started learning to ring at St Bridget's church, Moresby in Cumbria, in 2019 but my progress was very 'stop start' as I was spending a lot of time looking after my parents. I could ring rounds and some call changes but not much more. When tower bell ringing ceased in March I soon realised that virtual ringing was a lot easier than the real thing and hoped that our group would take up the challenge.

When I was first asked if I wanted to do handbell ringing, I thought – why not? Our ringing friends Ian, Jane and Chris have given up their time to help us learn which I much appreciate. We used Tadhil ringing software to practise and I have now learned all about Bob Minor and the three different patterns needed to complete a course. I thought I was making good progress until the single and the bob were introduced. I searched on the internet for explanations but discovered that bell ringing jargon was not my type of vocabulary! My teacher, Chris, did send me an explanation which helped. I now need to put this into my memory bank so that the ringing part becomes fun again and less stressful – that is the joy of learning. I am also learning to ring Plain Hunt on eight, ringing bells 3 and 4. I am now beginning to get the hang of the vocabulary.

As always when you ring with people that know what they are doing they make it look easy. I just hope that one day I can be that person that helps the next beginner. I also hope that when we go back to real ringing that the virtual world is not abandoned. It is a good learning tool and I have increased my understanding over the last few months. I am a much better ringer in the virtual world than the real world but time will tell if those skills are easily transferable.

50 Virtual Ringing Things

Judith Frye and Sarah Pike

Judith Frye is an ART Tutor. She writes: If, before the pandemic, you had tried *50 Ringing Things* you can now find a whole new set of challenges to explore in the world of *50 Virtual Ringing Things*.

A great many of our normal activities are currently restricted but it is helpful to stay positive and focus on what we are still able to do. Ringing has benefited enormously from software innovations that allow us to continue to practise our art, albeit in a rather different manner.

50 Virtual Ringing Things has been designed to enthuse and inspire us, keeping us motivated in our ringing development. It encourages the use of simulator software for practising alone as well as using ringing websites where we can ring as a band.

Everything can be achieved on your own at home. There is a huge variety of challenges for ringers at all levels to develop your virtual ringing whilst still having fun. There will be activities that appeal to you and some that will challenge you but there are plenty to choose from. Have you ever rung online with someone from another country or tried handbell hopscotch? You could learn a minimus method or would you prefer to write a limerick?

You will find these and many more exciting challenges when you enrol on the scheme. Choose from 'Things' in four categories:

- **Simulator Software:** Developing your ringing on your own
- **Ringing Online:** Progressing with others using ringing websites
- **Handbells:** Learning with simulator software, online or handbells
- **Tail Ends:** Exploring the wider world of bells and bell ringing



Bronze, silver and gold certificates will be awarded for completing 15, 30 and 50 Things respectively. There is a wealth of bell ringing information available online and you will find information and links to resources that you can explore to assist with each challenge. Go to ART's Online Learning website:

<https://onlinelearning.bellringing.org/>

To view the *50 Virtual Ringing Things*, you must initially register and click 'enrol' before checking out this fascinating scheme which is open to everyone and completely free of charge.

Sarah Pike of Lincolnshire (aka 'Spike') writes: I've just had a sneaky peek at the forthcoming *50 Virtual Ringing Things*. It's definitely going to be a challenge like its older sibling, *50 Ringing Things*! This is a fantastic opportunity for ringers to ring with friends from all over the world as well as making new friends in different countries. Perhaps virtual ringing and the *50 Virtual Ringing Things* can be the new Christmas day activity that families can enjoy together even if they cannot be together or have family members who do not ring.

I had almost completed my own fifty ringing things. I was trying to complete them in a hundred weeks from registration, but Covid-19 halted that one for me. So, being an avid tick-box-er, I am really quite excited about continuing my ringing journey virtually. And with up to eighty different activities to tackle in the new program there's not a moment to lose.

What I really like is the electronic recording of your completed activities. You select a tick box at the end of the activity description and it then shows up in the relevant titled summary box to show your progress at a quick glance. (Something I'd love to see on *50 Ringing Things* too.)

Clearly, a lot of thought has been put into the range of activities that will challenge seasoned ringers – along with us novices and new virtual ringers – by either having to learn methods that will be hugely useful once actual ringing starts again or by having to learn, and embrace, the technology!

Finally, I am particularly excited to have a go at virtual handbell ringing and I have just written to Santa asking him for a pair of electronic handbells. You can find them at: <https://ebells.co.uk/>

They are designed to look and feel like medium-sized handbells and have motion-detecting electronics which respond to a simulator app. Perfect for someone like me who is not really a fan of tapping the button – my finger seems to have a life of its own and is occasionally impatient for its turn at an inappropriate time! Anyhow, Merry Christmas to you all and I hope to visit as many of you as I can in your real towers as well as the virtual ones. From Spike & Rusty the Spaniel.

TLC for Handbells

Steve McEwan

Steve McEwan was Foreman at Whitechapel Bell Foundry for 23 years and is now running Whitechapel Handbells. Here he gives a few hints and tips on how to make the best of your handbells.

Have you got an old dusty box sitting in the corner of your ringing room, looking a bit sad? Maybe some handbells with wobbly clappers and cracked straps have been uncovered by the Church Warden and handed over to the ringers. Or maybe you've just been meaning to do something about the handbells for a while, and with tower bell ringing severely restricted, it's a perfect opportunity to give them a bit of TLC. This will bring them back to life and maybe will bring ringing back to life for you! Taking pride in your handbells though is not just about ringing - it's about appreciating the history and the legacy of ringers who have gone before you who may have rung many peals on them or just used them week in, week out to practise methods and teach the art of change ringing. So there are many good reasons to uncover that box!



Before TLC

The first step is to take a good, careful look at them and it's possible that with a little bit of love you can start ringing on them. Here are a few pointers:



After TLC

- Handle them with care. The metal, being a mixture of copper and tin, is brittle and can easily be cracked.
- Don't touch the metal surface unnecessarily. The smallest amount of moisture, even from your hands, can cause local tarnishing.
- Don't attempt to clean the bells with abrasives.
- Use metal polish or impregnated cloths. I recommend the non-abrasive Autosol to remove any tarnish. Once polished, the occasional rub with a clean, dry and soft chamois leather will maintain the surface.
- Store the bells in a clean, dry place and protect them from pressing against each other. If you have a proper box or bags for the bells do use them and make sure these are also in a good state of repair.
- Lubricate the bearing pin of the clapper with a drop of 2-in-1 oil.

If you have got this far then you can try ringing them, using a gentle up and down technique as shown in this short video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAo8OU5dL2A>

You will then be ready to have a go with other people (social distancing permitting!)

If your bells are in a very poor condition, or you're just not sure, it is probably best to consult your Guild or Association's Technical Adviser, rather than trying to ring them which may worsen any problems.

You can contact me for any advice regarding your handbells on: 07506740202. Always happy to help.

The Diary of a Novice Handbell Ringer

Gerard Chadwick, Swaffham Bulbeck, Cambridgeshire

What's yours like? (Your Tower Captain, that is). Mine's irresistible, or to be more accurate, she's not to be resisted. I suppose that to be a successful TC you have to be. After all, ringing's a bit like joining a monastery. It's all about obedience. One would more likely ring a peal blindfold than say "No" on being asked to ring the tenor to Bob Doubles.

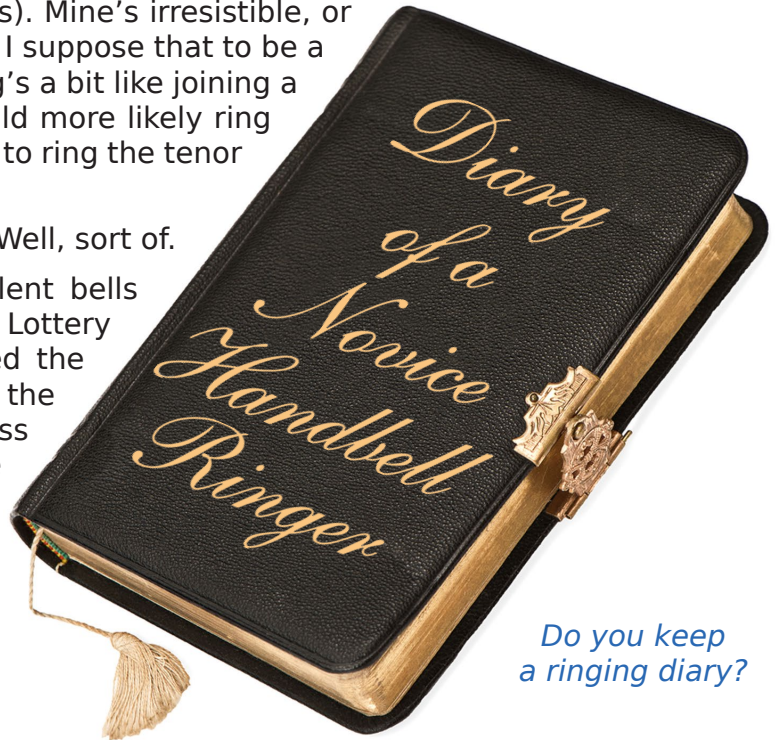
All this to explain why I'm ringing handbells? Well, sort of.

I came to ringing late. In 2000, our long-silent bells were restored with the help of the Millennium Lottery Fund, but there were no ringers and I joined the pressed volunteers. Twenty years later, before the first lockdown, I'd made reasonable progress but, like most people, nothing dramatic. Life offers more than bell ringing. But I had been steadfast in one regard - no handbells. Reasons were various: a bit naff, not even exercise, what would the neighbours think, let alone one's children.

Then the lockdown arrived and with it our banishment from the tower. Our practices moved rapidly to Zoom and Ringing Room, and at first it was all tower bells. Then the TC suggested that I should give handbells a try on Ringing Room. I note from my lockdown diary that my first attempt was May 31st, with the comment that I thought it would be a long, slow business.

And so it has proved. It's partly my fault. I'm retired so there's no time to spare. I do a bit on Abel and we have an hour of Ringing Room handbells a week (compared with five hours or so on tower bells). Midway through June, I noted a target to ring 1 and 2 to Plain Bob Minor by the end of the month. No doubt I thought that reasonable. Yet on July 1st I recorded, 'PBM still nowhere. Perhaps I'm just too old - it seems to be the coordination. Still, can't be beaten.'

And so it went on, like all bell ringing, two steps forward and, if you're lucky, only one step back. The TC was boundlessly enthusiastic and encouraging. I'd have given up on me a long time ago. Finally in mid-August, on my own on Abel, I managed a good plain course of PBM. I didn't record what I drank in celebration.



Do you keep a ringing diary?



Gerard at work

It would be nice to say that with one bound Jack was now free. But this is bell ringing. Nothing is ever easy. I'm now able to lurch through a simple touch. It's taken six months.

So has it all been worthwhile? Undoubtedly yes.

Principally, I have acquired another untransferable skill - I can use two fingers at different times. (I am in awe of pianists!) Quite what it will be like on real handbells I have no idea. The TC, of course, says it's easier. So there has been a quiet satisfaction in scrambling to the top of a foothill. I can now ring two bells at a time.

It's made tower bell ringing on Abel a doddle. I've practised this way for years and after a hopeless twenty minutes on handbells it is balm to the soul to relax into a bit of spliced Surprise Major.

I listen even harder to the bells. At the moment on Abel, I ring entirely by ear. Ropesight in real life tends to make things easier. People can wave at you.

It's increased my admiration for the staggering ability of the leading handbell ringers. How do you ring two bells for 72,000 changes in 24 hours? It's taken me 6 months to ring a touch of 180 changes.

But will it improve my tower bell ringing? I can't answer that yet. The TC tells me that there are all sorts of transcendental delights awaiting those who through handbell ringing leave behind anything as mundane as the blue line and ring solely by place notation. Where, by coursing the seamlessly correct bells of others, and knowing what you do by what they do, your brain is freed up to plan tomorrow's supper. No doubt there are countless other benefits.

So is it worth taking up, even if we hope to be back in the tower soon? The answer is clearly "yes". I really think it's fun, and where else can you ring in February without getting frozen?

Go on - you know it makes sense!

Note from TC: *Gerard learnt to ring the trebles to touches of Plain Bob Minor with the equivalent of only 4 months of weekly practices at which he got about 10 minutes 'rope time' due to sharing the practice with three other learners. He made up for this with some use of Abel. If you want to make the most rapid progress you should try to organise meeting up with just 3 people two or three times a week.*

Level 5 Masterclass - What Happened Next

Jimmy Yeoman

Jimmy Yeoman is a first-year student at Birmingham University. He attended ART's Level 5 Masterclass in Birmingham in 2018, and here he describes the experience and the aftermath.

One Saturday in September 2018 I woke up early to get to Lesley Boyle's house. From there she gave me and another ringer a lift to Birmingham's city centre for the Level 5 Masterclass. I didn't really know what to expect but I remember feeling very nervous as I'd heard about these "big and scary" Birmingham ringers. I soon discovered that these "big and scary" ringers were in fact incredibly kind, welcoming and keen to help learners improve their ringing, with a strong emphasis on striking well. It was here that I first got the chance to focus on getting into twelve bell ringing which up to this point had seemed like a daunting step up. With the encouragement of our tutors for the day, I even surprised myself by ringing a method on the sixteen at St Martin in the Bullring, which before that would have been unimaginable.

It was the masterclass that gave me the confidence to start going to the twelve bell practice close to home at Great St Mary's, Cambridge. Here, with a lot of help from the local band, I progressed through Grandsire Cinques to Surprise Maximus and then spliced.



Jimmy receiving his Level 5 certificate from Dee Smith

Now, two years later, I realise that I must have liked the city and the ringing very much because I've ended up studying at the University of Birmingham and I am at the end of my first term (which for obvious reasons has been unlike anything I could have expected!) The ringing scene is rather different to what I'd anticipated, yet despite there being no peals or practices, I've still managed to get involved with the local ringing. I have taken part in some handbell ringing with the locals and I am part of the Sunday morning ringing at St Martin's and St Paul's. Here they have established multi-floor ringing, which enables more ringers to take part in a safe way. That certainly makes for a unique challenge.

I look forward to the point when we can start getting back to normal, although I fear my grades may begin to drop!

Christmas Tunes

David Warwick, Wimborne Minster, and the editorial team

With Christmas rapidly approaching it's time to spruce up practice nights in Ringing Room and what better way than to try out a few seasonal tunes instead of Plain Hunt, Bob Doubles, or whatever your current project happens to be.

To get started, you need to make sure everyone has a copy of the 'music' in front of them in advance of the session. Let's start with *Jingle Bells*. This is for an eight-bell tower, so you need to set up Ringing Room with eight bells. To do this, click '8' in the bar at the top of the left hand panel of the screen.

Assign bells in the usual way, either one bell for each ringer, or two each if you're low on numbers or feeling ambitious. For your first attempt it is probably a good idea to give the role of conductor to someone who isn't ringing. Everyone except the conductor should mute their Zoom, then the conductor can count everyone in with a preliminary "1, 2, 3, 4", and then keep the time count going throughout the tune.

As you can see in the *Jingle Bells* diagram below, the top row is the beat of the music and the bottom row is the number of the bell to ring. So for example, the person assigned to bell number 6 starts off *Jingle Bells* with a cheery dong on each 1-2-3 of the beat until the other bells join in to complete this old family favourite. Don't forget to give that double dong when necessary and remember to keep the beat moving. It is lots of fun but probably easier to just give it a go than to read these instructions!

When you want to move on to some of the longer and harder tunes, be sure to set the tower to have the correct number of bells - eight bells for *Jingle Bells* and *The First Noël*, ten bells for *Unto Us a Son is Born* or twelve bells for *Silent Night*.

Notice that you can, if you prefer, ring the entire tune by yourself. To do this, use the number keys 1 to 8 for *Jingle Bells*. To try one of the ten-bell tunes you will also need the number keys 9 (for bell number nine) and 'zero' (for bell number ten). If you venture on up to twelve bells, then you will also need the 'minus' and 'equals' keys for bells eleven and twelve respectively. In the music, the symbols 0 (zero), - (minus) and = (equals) are used for bells ten, eleven and twelve, as these are the keys used in Ringing Room for these bells.

The timings in some of the diagrams are slightly simplified, so once you have got the idea you might want introduce your own improvements to the rhythm.

You might even want to work out some other tunes for yourself. *Joy to the World* works for an eight-bell tower - the first eight notes are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 in that order, though with an interesting rhythm. For a harder challenge, try using a twelve-bell tower and working out how to ring *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*. For both tunes it's probably best to work out the notes with just one person experimenting. As before, for a twelve-bell tower, use the keys 1 to 9, then 'zero', 'minus' and 'equals' for bells ten, eleven and twelve, respectively. *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* starts with bells 12, 10, 8, 5, ... so you'd start off with these keys: = 0 8 5 ...

Jingle Bells (for an eight-bell tower)

1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
6	6	6		6	6	6		6	4	8	7	6		5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	6	7		4		

1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
6	6	6		6	6	6		6	4	8	7	6		5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	4	4	5	7	8				

