

# Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



Learning <sup>TM</sup>  
the Ropes

Association of Ringing Teachers / Learning the Ropes - [www.learningtheropes.org](http://www.learningtheropes.org)

## Number 3 - April 2017

This time we head north to hear some inspiring stories of ringing achievements in Scotland. Covering a huge area, but with only 22 ringing towers, it's quite a challenge to learn to ring and develop one's skills in Scotland, but thanks to some innovative ideas, dedicated teachers and enthusiastic ringers, these challenges are being positively addressed. Read on ...

By Ruth Suggett,  
Editor

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## Recent Successes

In the first quarter of 2017, 173 certificates were awarded to ringers at the various stages of Learning the Ropes (LtR) as below (last year's numbers shown for comparison):

Level 1 - Bell Handling	92 (85)
Level 2 - Foundation Ringing skills	48 (39)
Level 3 - Introduction to Change Ringing	18 (20)
Level 4 - Novice Change Ringer	9 (6)
Level 5 - Change Ringer	6 (6)



# Scotland: The Challenge of Geography

In the British Isles there are more than 5400 rings of bells (with 5 or more bells) but only 22 of these are in Scotland. This means that towers are very sparse. From Dumfries in the Southwest to Nairn in the Northeast is 235 miles (a 4½ hour drive). From Haddington in the Southeast to Tulloch Ringing Centre in the Northwest is 151 miles (a 3½ hour drive). You can see on the map how far apart some of our towers are!

By Judith Frye, ART Tutor and  
Tower Captain at Dunblane

Despite this, there is a healthy number of people learning to ring in Scotland. We all belong to one association (the Scottish Association of Change Ringers) which is not split into districts. We have three ringing meetings a year, a training day and a weekend festival at Inveraray, as well as monthly 12-bell practices and advanced practices, all well attended. We have one ART tutor, seven fully accredited ART teachers and several more teachers working towards accreditation. Learning the Ropes certificates awarded so far are:

Level 1 - 29 ringers

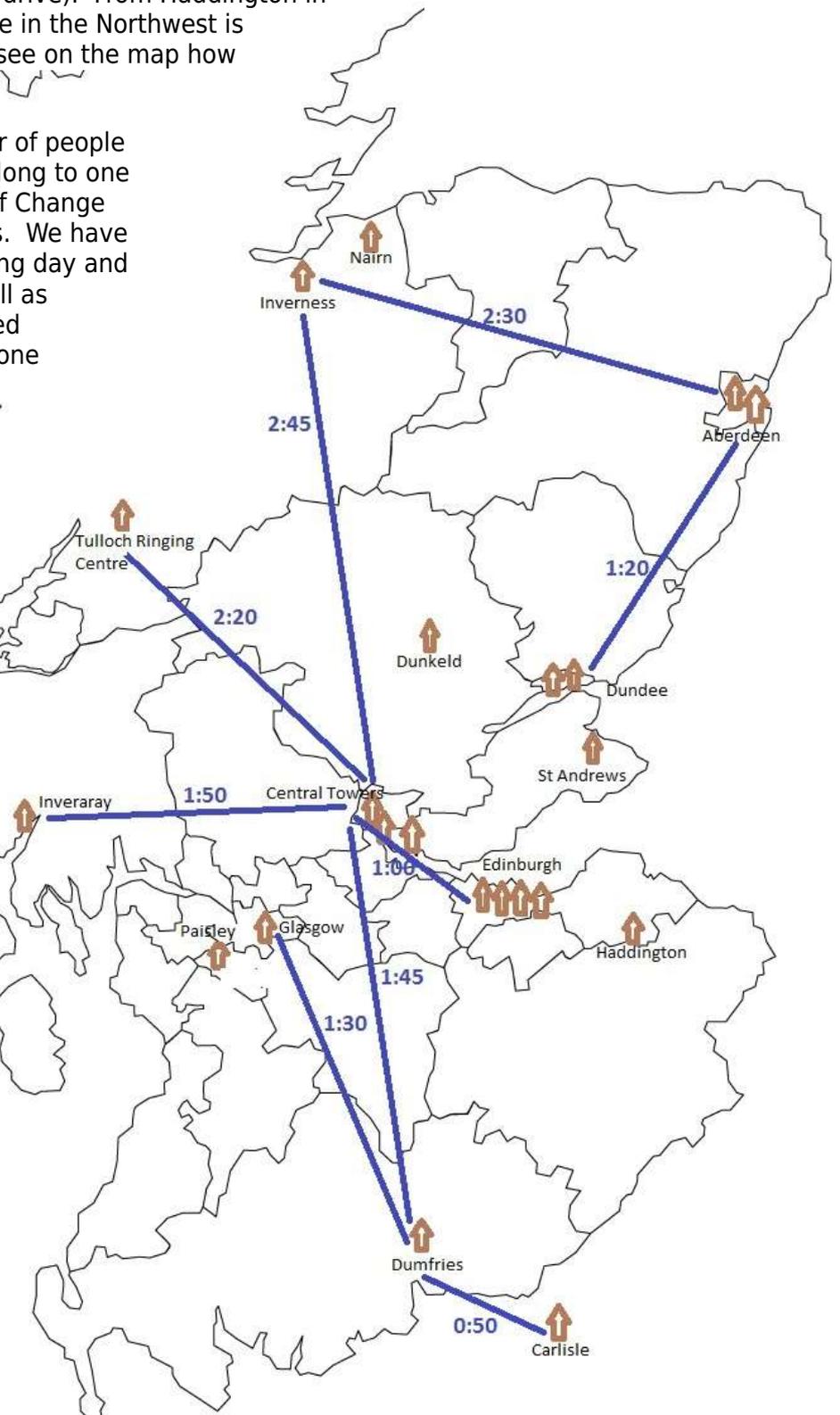
Level 2 - 15 ringers

Level 3 - 3 ringers

We all like the LTR scheme - it really helps ringers to measure their progress, and in this edition you can read some of their stories.

We recently rang for a wedding in Inveraray on the west coast where there is no band. **Ringers travelled about 70 miles each way to ring for 20 minutes for the wedding.**

Scottish Ringers are certainly dedicated and we do travel a lot!



# View from Dumfries

Situated in south west Scotland on the River Nith, Dumfries has seen a new band of ringers develop at St John's church under the leadership of Debbie Johnson. Some of the band, who are all at Level 2 / 3 of LtR, tell us why they got involved and how they are getting on:

## Douglas Solley

I first experienced the enjoyment of bell ringing as a young boy in the mid 1970s. However I was unable to pursue this interest fully until recently. So, when the bells were installed at St John's, Dumfries in 2013, I immediately signed up to learn. I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience and the team ethos which developed.

I have progressed from basic rope handling to plain hunt and covering. I very much appreciate the teaching from Debbie, Tony and Anthony to support my learning. Ringing at Christmas 2015 was a thrilling yet nerve-racking experience which I even managed to complete without making any noticeable mistakes.

I thoroughly enjoy being a member of the bell ringing team at St John's and look forward to our weekly practice sessions and ringing on a Sunday morning.

## Ann Roberts

Coming back to learning to ring after a 40 year gap as an older ringer was rather daunting and I appreciate the contrasts in the learning process. We have a large and supportive learners' group which I've been a part for the last 18 months and a very encouraging group of experienced ringers who are all happy to share their tips and experience. Each week we are all encouraged in our ringing practice despite some of the *faux pas* that occur. As our ringing is developing we are challenged by a variety of exercises to help in bell control and ropesight. Debbie makes the ringing practice enjoyable and has infinite patience. It is gratifying to feel on some occasions that my participation goes 'just right' and to look back on the distance I have come since joining the St John's band. I look forward to Thursday evenings and what progress can be steadily made.

## Jane Madden

It is hard to believe that my son, Andrew, and I have been ringing the bells at St John's Church, Dumfries, for three years now. Andrew was only ten years old when we started and we only went along because a friend of mine invited us to give it a try. I did not imagine then that we would still be ringing three years down the line. Andrew and I both enjoy going bell ringing and have improved a lot since we first started. However, Andrew is able to pick things up much more rapidly than I am and is able to do much more complex methods (I put this down to his youth). Hopefully, he will continue to go bell ringing even though he is now a teenager!



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[Practice night photos from Dumfries](#)

# Trail Blazing at Tulloch

Tulloch Farm is a secular ringing centre in the Highlands of Scotland, about 16 miles from Fort William. There is a ring of 12 bells, which are fairly light and very easy to ring. In another room there are 8 more bells which are much smaller; the largest is only 1cwt, but again they are very easy to ring. In a third room there is a dumbbell and simulator, where the computer makes the bells sounds and the other 'ringers' are computerised images seen on a very large TV screen. This can be used for individual training. There are holiday cottages on site and lots of groups go there to stay and ring as much, and as late, as they like!

There is a local band who are all working through the Learning the Ropes scheme with the owners, Helen McGregor and Peter Bevis, as well as visiting ringers and teachers. Helen explained "We understand the necessity for frequent handling practice to cement good style and the opportunity to ring with better ringers greatly helps one develop a wider repertoire. We created the ringing centre at Tulloch because - having a farm - we had plenty of space. We are delighted to be teaching a local band using Learning the Ropes and making as much use as we can of technology to give our trainees valuable time on the end of a rope. We are also thrilled that The Scottish Association make good use of the facilities here with training weekends, and visiting ringers come along quite frequently too. The mainstay of the current local band is Sue, who learnt to ring for the millennium, and is returning to the fold after 15 years in the wilderness! Her husband Ian is learning now as well, and they have recruited a number of friends. *[You can read Ian and Sue's story in this edition of Tower Talk.]* A recent Open Week at Tulloch attracted two other lapsed ringers whose spouses are also now learning. Earlier on in the year, we advertised for accredited teachers to come and stay, enjoy the Highlands and help teach the band! We have had a great response to this - and the Tulloch band is continuing to thrive! We now have four ringers on Level 2 and one at Level 1, and in March we successfully rang two quarter peals."

## One of the youngest trainees at Tulloch tells her story

My name is Mosella. I am nine years old and I've started bell ringing at Tulloch Farm.

The person that - accidentally - got me bell ringing was my next door neighbour, Sue. One day she asked me if I wanted to have a go at ringing. I didn't find out what she meant until I got to Tulloch Farm. It was amazing! They were the bells that you find in a church tower ... awesome!

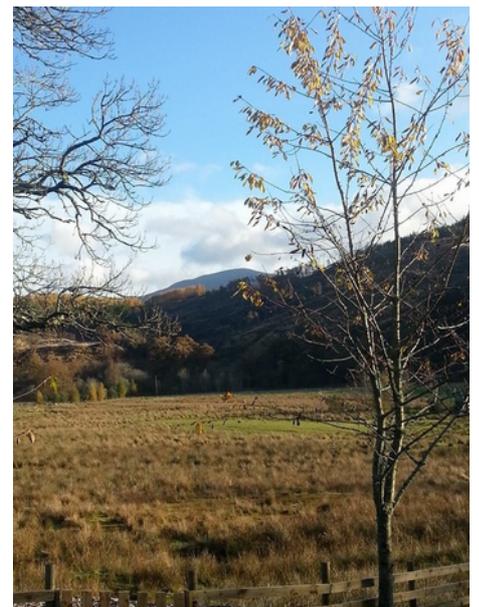
There I met a kind lady called Chris, who is one of the visiting teachers who has helped me and taught me a lot. When I first started ringing, which wasn't that long ago, I tried to ring one of the big bells but it was so-o-o heavy, yet once pulled it was super fast, and I thought it was going to shoot me through the roof! So Chris started me on the smaller bells. I've practised my handstroke, by

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By Chris de Cordova

Chris is an accredited Teacher from Whitehaven, Cumbria, who travelled to the Tulloch Ringing Centre as a visiting teacher.

**“** The opportunity to ring with better ringers greatly helps one develop”



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One of the many stunning views at Tulloch

pulling the sally, and backstroke, pulling the rope. I can now also set the bell, pull it off again, do very slow ringing and quite fast ringing too. I'm now ringing rounds on the bigger bells with the other members, and we change ringing positions. Now I just need to control my timing. If I can do that, I get to tell other people where and when to ring. I can't wait! But until then I just need to keep on practising.

The people who inspired me to keep going were my mum and my great grandfather who was also a bell ringer. Sadly I never met him, but I can imagine him ringing in the bell towers. Back to the story: I recommend anyone to give it a go and try bell ringing. It's life changing, especially if you work with a person as kind as Chris, and you never know, you might just love it! Chris has taught me so well in a short amount of time, she is the most amazing person to work with. THANK YOU!

**“** I recommend anyone to give it a go and try bell ringing. It's life changing”

**[Update.** In February, Mosella gained her Level 1. Well done, Mosella!]



Mosella ringing with the band at Tulloch

### Fascinating Fact

Of the twenty-two rings of bells in Scotland, five of them are privately owned - an unusually high percentage. One is in a school chapel, one in a University chapel and three are owned by individuals. Two of them (at the Tulloch Ringing Centre) are in the same building!

# The Three of Us

In every edition of Tower Talk we meet a teacher/learner duo and find out what their special chemistry is, but this time we pop down south to meet a threesome from Thornham Magna, Suffolk – Zoe Wright and her daughter Carmen, who have been taught to ring by accredited teacher Sylvie Fawcett. Carmen and Zoe have both recently achieved their Level 4, and just look at their special certificate!

## Zoe

Sylvie was certainly feeling very brave when she took on two new learners: two very different learning styles, and a mother and daughter to boot, but she has without a doubt demonstrated that the LtR pathway is a really strong method (no pun intended!) of teaching total beginners to become confident and knowledgeable ringers. Sylvie has been unflappable in her pursuit of our success, every next stage carefully planned and rolled out during practices, and it is probably only now, almost four years later, that I can see how all those little pieces have come together to build up a bigger picture. She has also been key in encouraging us to be confident in going to new towers and meeting other ringers, not missing out on any opportunity to ring, and above all, learning as much as you can from other ringers. I won't deny that at times it has been incredibly frustrating; my handling remains a constant sore point (whereas my daughter very irritatingly has near-perfect handling!) and there have been weeks where I have totally felt like throwing in the towel, but Sylvie has always been there to keep spirits up and remind me that PRACTICE!!! is the key.

## Carmen

Sylvie is an excellent teacher and she has helped me get to grips with the handling of the ropes. She has also given me the courage to do different methods without the fear of making mistakes. Without Sylvie, I don't think I would now be able to do Reverse Canterbury because I have learnt it with a variety of people when I go to different places to practise it.

## Sylvie

As there was no teacher at our tower and I am only tower captain by default, it was suggested that I should attend an ART Module 1 day course. I was at once attracted to the common sense of the teaching method and embarked on my teaching adventure with brave Zoe and her nine year old daughter, Carmen. They knew they were my first pupils, and that summer I went up and down the tower a lot, tying the clappers before every session with them. Teaching handling has been very beneficial for me, who hadn't really been taught much myself, so I have learnt a lot.

Then I did Module 2 and we had fun (well, I did!) introducing new exercises, surprisingly not always easily rung by the most experienced ringers, but this has also had a beneficial effect on the rest of the band and helping Zoe and Carmen has kept us all motivated.



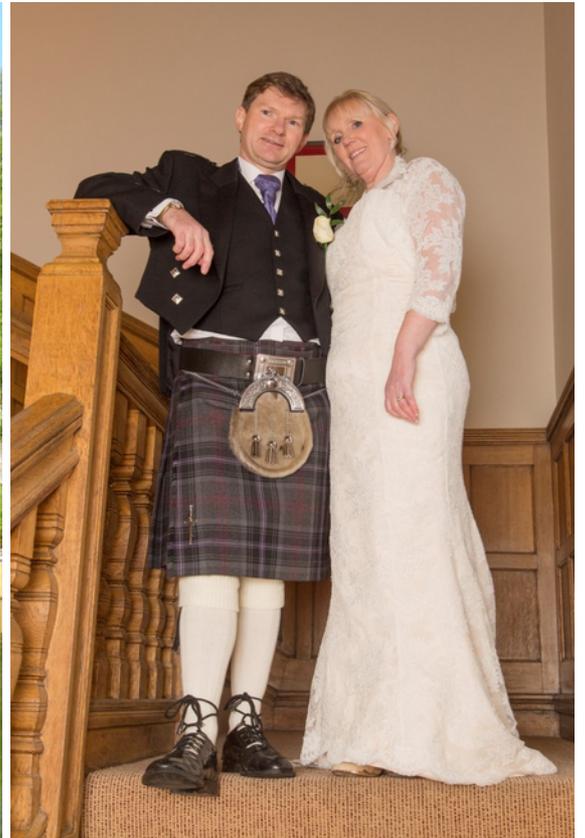
I am very lucky. Zoe and Carmen have been the perfect pupils: enthusiastic, trying everything suggested, ringing for all events and having a very good sense of humour which is really needed in a tower. They both passed Level 4 recently and Zoe has become tower captain of Yaxley, where she lives. They continue to work their way through the LtR booklet and we are planning their next quarter peal of Reverse Canterbury in February.

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Zoe (left) and Carmen with their specially made chocolate certificates. Teacher Sylvie is in the middle.

# More than a Highland Fling

This story is more than a love affair with bells! Sue and Ian Turner moved to the Highlands several years ago after getting married and setting up a B&B in idyllic surroundings. And here are the photos to prove it!



By happy chance, Sue had already tried ringing while living in England and, after moving to Lochaber, they discovered that their next door neighbours just happened to run a Teaching Centre! They each tell us how things developed.

## Sue

I first rang, with my son Nick, for the Millennium when we lived in Oxfordshire. Our village, Lower Heyford, had a lovely church where the bells hadn't been rung for many years and I wanted to organise the villagers to ring the bells once again for this one-in-a-lifetime event. We novices were helped by the bands at our local towers in Steeple Aston and Somerton and successfully achieved the original aim after some tuition. However, with no-one to lead the tower in the village, we all stopped ringing at that point.

15 years later, having remarried, I moved with my husband, Ian, up to Lochaber to run a small Bed and Breakfast. After a few months there I went to visit our neighbour at Tulloch Farm, five minutes up the road, to see their new baby goat. It was then I discovered from chatting to the farm manager that the farm also had a Ringing Centre.

After being encouraged by Helen McGregor (who is very persuasive as well as an excellent teacher) I re-started ringing in May 2016 at Tulloch. Facilities there are ideal for beginners (and returners) with the main tower having 12 larger bells (1 cwt to 7cwt), a ring of 8 smaller bells (1cwt and smaller) as well as a simulator. I have also started to learn handbell ringing which is a good complement to the tower bells, and most recently, in March, I rang my first quarter peal - on the treble to Plain Bob Doubles!

## Ian

Sue continued ringing over the summer while I stayed at home keeping an eye on the B&B. However, Sue and Helen's enthusiasm encouraged me to give it a try. Starting from scratch with a series of excellent teachers means I've avoided picking up any undesirable habits.

I am very competitive and, having given up running and orienteering following a hip replacement, I needed a new challenge. Like orienteering, bell ringing has both a mental and a physical element, which suited me well. The simulator, giving a score out of 10, brought out the competitor in me when ringing alongside Sue, each of us wanting to beat the other!

Because our local band is so limited in numbers, and most of us are quite inexperienced, we have benefited from visiting ringers coming to Tulloch. These have improved our ringing and we have gleaned helpful tips on how to improve. Just watching bands ring complex methods helps us to see what our goal is.

Helen and her husband Peter divide their time between Tulloch and Alderney, so they have kindly arranged for visiting teachers to come to Tulloch over the Winter and Spring when they are not around. The luxury of nearby towers with experienced ringers isn't available to us in a rural community where the next towers are about 2 hours' drive away. However, as part of our ongoing education we have had two tower visits to Inverness Cathedral, one just before Remembrance Sunday on the half-muffled bells.

The Abel simulator at Tulloch is excellent, using a laptop with visuals (i.e. moving bell ringers) projected onto a large flat screen TV, so we can practise our ropesight. This seems better than some other simulators elsewhere which rely on sound only. We have used the simulator from the outset, initially as an aid to learning, then later on when we were on our own, setting our own goals to improve our consistency. The simulator disturbs no-one, so unlimited time can be spent on it, morning, afternoon or evening. Even the best visiting ringers enjoy the competition of getting their own high score recorded on the adjacent white-board.

Meanwhile, with Helen's encouragement, Sue and I enrolled in the Learning the Ropes scheme and have achieved LtR Level 2, and we aim to achieve Level 3 soon! We have recently enjoyed a Quarter Peal day at Tulloch, where the local learners were supported by three other ringers. Sue rang the treble when I rang the 4<sup>th</sup> inside to a quarter of Bob Doubles. I separately managed a quarter of Bob Doubles on the tenor and the same day we had two other new Tulloch ringers, both returning to ringing after a gap of 40 years, completing quarters, one (like us) for the first time.

Our Bed & Breakfast (see [www.larchwoodlochaber.co.uk](http://www.larchwoodlochaber.co.uk)) has benefited from the proximity of the Tulloch Ringing Centre and we have enjoyed having a number of Scottish and English ringers stay with us whilst they visited Tulloch. Hopefully there will be many more in the years to come!



In conclusion, bell ringing in the Highlands of Scotland has been a most enjoyable experience for us both, having met so many nice and helpful people. One of the many highlights so far was ringing in the 2017 New Year with Peter, Helen and two others from the local band after a ceilidh at Tulloch Farm.

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The Quarter Peal band which rang Plain Bob Doubles on March 1 at Tulloch.  
Left to right: Sue Turner, David Ford, Helen McGregor, Peter Bevis, Stephen Rossiter and Ian Turner.

# Challenge Yourself

Ringing is full of challenges and most of us like to feel we have a goal to aim for or a challenge to conquer. This new publication from ART (Association of Ringing Teachers) presents a wide range of ringing related challenges which will widen your experience, and introduce you to the full diversity of ringing culture. It takes the form of a well designed logbook divided into three sections:

My Ringing - which is about personal ringing development;

In My Tower - about service to your local tower and band;

Out and About - concerns contributing to the wider ringing community.

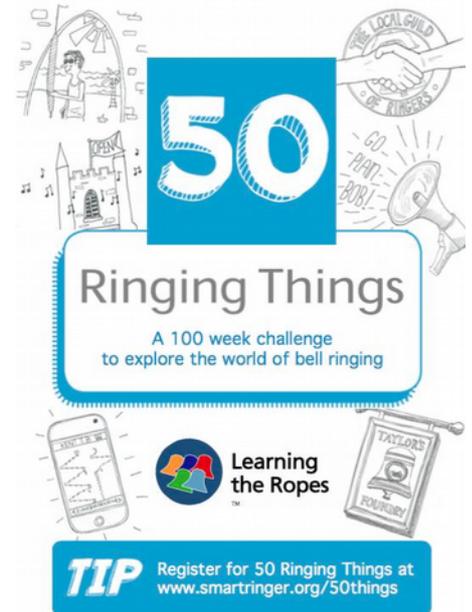
To get started with the challenges you will need to buy your logbook from the ART shop ([www.ringingteachers.org](http://www.ringingteachers.org)) and then register online at [smartringer.org/50things](http://smartringer.org/50things). Here you will find an area with tips and advice on how to achieve each 'Thing'. There is also a facebook group page to enable participants to share experiences and ideas: all you need to do is search for and join '50 Ringing Things' once you're on facebook.

Bronze, Silver and Gold certificates can be claimed for completing 15, 30 or 50 activities respectively and, if 50 Things are completed within 100 weeks of registration, a Gold Plus certificate can be claimed. You will have to complete a minimum number of 'Things' from each category to gain the Silver and Gold awards and, for the Gold and Gold Plus certificates, an ART Member, Tower Captain or a Guild official will need to sign off your logbook. Also note that you cannot use the same event/activity to claim more than one 'Thing', since one of the goals of the scheme is to help you to gain wide ranging experience.

There's no time like the present to start completing your challenges, and you may find that you have already done some of them and are more experienced than you think!

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By Graham Nabb,  
ART Chair



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## Don't forget ...

There's lots more to see in the ART Shop which is at [www.ringingteachers.org/resource-centre/shop](http://www.ringingteachers.org/resource-centre/shop) - from books and DVDs to clothing. Why not have a browse?

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# ART LtR 50/50 Club Draw News

The first 2017 draw of the LtR 50/50 club took place at the ART AGM and Conference at Basingstoke on March 10<sup>th</sup>. The first prize, of £62, went to Douglas Davis. Two equal second prizes of £31 went to Andrew Phillips and Bob Purnell.

There are currently 66 members of the club, which donated £645 towards ART's running costs last year and gave out the same amount in prizes. It's easy to join: information and forms can be found at [www.learningtheropes.org/5050club](http://www.learningtheropes.org/5050club).

Please do join, and encourage others, teachers and people being taught, to help give something back to ringing!

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By Chris de Cordova,  
50/50 Club Administrator



# Learning Tips No.3: Handbell Hunting

Are there any handbells in your tower? Don't be afraid to use them to learn all about hunting and the importance of knowing your place.

It doesn't matter if you have never picked up a handbell before! Holding the strap with your thumb uppermost, practise the upstroke (equivalent to a handstroke in the tower) and a downstroke (equivalent to the backstroke). It takes a little bit of time to get used to the wrist and hand movement required, but it's easy to practise!

To plain hunt on 4, ask the most experienced ringers to take the 2, 3 and 4, while you have the treble. If there are no experienced ringers, well, this need not hinder you and you will probably have a lot of fun getting started! Try some rounds on 4 first. Then take things slowly; try half a course of Plain Hunt on 4. From the treble you will sound first, then second, third and finally fourth, on successive strokes. Ring really slowly so that you have time to count your place. If possible, count out loud. Stop when you get to 4<sup>th</sup> place. Have a cup of tea and think about how you are going to hunt back down to the front. You will have to start in in reverse rounds and remember, hunting down is a bit harder than hunting up! Why is this? The answer is because there is one fewer bell striking between each of your blows.

1 2 3 4

2 1 4 3

Look at the path of the 4 in these two rows. Only two bells strike before it has to ring again.

Just like before, the counting out loud helps. Then you can put the two exercises together which gives you Plain Hunt on 4 for a whole course. You can extend this by doing the same again but on six bells. With a bit of practice, you will have mastered something which takes a lot longer to achieve on tower bells and you will also have gained an understanding of how to count your place and to know which place your bell is in a change. Well done!

If you are interested in pursuing handbell ringing, you can now follow the new Learning the Ropes programme for handbells as well as tower bells. Learning the Ropes Handbells (LtRH) is a progressive learning scheme for change ringing on handbells, based on the principles of music grades or karate belts. Just like the LtR we are all familiar with, it has five stages, known as levels. Each level develops key skills. When you have completed LtRH Level 5, your handbell ringing will be at a standard where you will be able to progress quickly forwards in the exciting and challenging world of handbell ringing.

To find out more, visit the [Learning the Ropes website](http://www.learningtheropes.org), where you can also buy a copy of the Personal Progress Logbook - maybe one for you and a couple more for your friends?

By Helen McGregor, accredited Teacher at Tulloch Ringing Centre



# A Traveller's Tale

Well, I took the low road and came back by the high road!

It may seem a bit extreme to travel to the Highlands to learn to ring a bell but, if you've got the time, it's a good way to do it, and it's also a great holiday as well. A lesson once a week up the spiral staircase of your local tower doesn't compare with daily individual tuition in three ringing chambers with handbells as an extra.

I may have left it rather late to begin, and wish I'd been 14 and combining the visit with an adventure holiday with other teen ringing enthusiasts, but Tulloch is certainly the place to go. Don't be put off by the distance; the weather and scenery make it all worthwhile, with extremely comfortable local accommodation. Teaching was first class: Helen worked hard at making a silk tartan purse out of an aged sow's ear, and has much more to offer more competent ringers.

There are two 5-day courses available at Tulloch in September: Learn to Ring on 18-22 September, and Improve your Ringing on 25-29 September. Designed to give a full introduction to bell handling in week one, you could book to do the following week too, which will work on rounds and call changes as well as the theory and practice of plain hunt. Full information is at [tullochbells.com](http://tullochbells.com).

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By Judy Stone, a participant on a Tulloch 'Learn to Ring' course

“ Don't be put off by the distance; the weather and scenery make it all worthwhile”

“ Teaching was first class”

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## Tartan Spartans Make their Mark

My name is Molly. I'm 18 years old and I was part of the only team that represented Scotland in the National Youth Striking Competition in London in 2016. Training and practising as part of the youth band is never easy as we live in different locations all over the country, and some of us are not close to any of the few towers Scotland has. (I'm from Aberdeen and I am studying at university in Orkney!) This means that every practice counts, as meet-ups aren't frequent, are usually at SACR events, and depend on how many of us can make it.

During the build up to the competition we worked on ringing consistently as a team, re-arranging and shuffling who took which bell to find the best combination. We needed to make it work as there were no spare ringers to step in. One of our early practices focused on pulling off correctly and listening to the bells so we could perfect our timing. We rang a quarter peal (my first one) which helped us focus for a long period and get used to ringing with each other. We then took part in the SACR Striking Competition (2016), winning the trophy for best inexperienced band and third overall.

The trip to London was a great experience in itself as the Tartan Spartans (as we call ourselves) got to hang out and spend some time together, which doesn't happen often. I am excited for the next meet-up so we can keep improving as a band and have some more fun doing it.

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By Molly Williams



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Four of the Tartan Spartans taking time out from ringing to ride on the London Eye

# Aiming for Level 5

In June 2014 during the 'Offenham Village Wake' (in Worcestershire) my husband and I wandered into the local church having seen signs that the bell tower was open (a ground floor ring of six). We met with the Tower Captain, Claire Penny, and before I knew it I was on the end of a bell rope! Under Claire's guidance I rang up the treble. My bell ringing journey under the Learning the Ropes scheme had begun.

One-to-one tuition from Claire, practice nights at Offenham, Pebworth, and Evesham Bell Tower working for Levels 1 and 2 followed and then, in October 2015, I received my Level 3 certificate.

Now to learn a method and ring inside! I attended the Hereford Ringing Course to learn Plain Bob Doubles. Opportunities to ring inside at my home tower were limited as we had lost several experienced ringers. However, with the help and advice of experienced ringers from local towers and the Four Shires Guild, and buckets of support from my husband, I rang a Plain Bob Doubles Quarter Peal on 28 October, the last piece of work I needed to achieve Level 4.

It took almost 12 months to rise from Level 3 to Level 4. At times it was very frustrating as I thought I should be progressing quicker, and at other times extremely rewarding with a huge sense of achievement and praise from my more experienced ringing fellows, which meant a lot. I am proud of my achievement.

I am now working towards Level 5. On 9 December I rang treble to a Quarter Peal of Plain Bob Minor, and can call a simple touch of Plain Bob Doubles. I am currently working on learning to ring Plain Bob Minor inside. I am also learning St Simons and St Martins Doubles with a view to ringing a Quarter Peal of Mixed Doubles. My aim is to achieve Level 5 by the end of this year.

*[And if she attains this goal, Claire, like any others who complete their level five before the end of the year, will be eligible to attend the annual Masterclass held in Birmingham. If you think you might be eligible for this, or want any further information, please email [artawards@ringingteachers.org](mailto:artawards@ringingteachers.org).]*



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By Claire Allen, a ringer at Offenham, Worcestershire

“ Now to learn a method and ring inside!”

“ extremely rewarding with a huge sense of achievement”

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A young ringer who succeeded in attaining LtR Level 5 last year, Sophie Keeble of the Birmingham School of Bellringing, is seen here receiving the Learning the Ropes Level 5 Achievement Award from Pip Penney during the ART Conference in March