**The Scottish Experience**

**Judith**

We are hoping to show the power of the ART Training Scheme describing some of what has been happening in Scotland. We are using a new tower, Dumfries, as the main example but I will put that in the wider context of other towers in the Scottish Association.

The story of the new ring of bells at St. John’s, Dumfries began like many others. In 2006 two chimes of Gillett and Johnston bells from Greenock and Quarriers village near Glasgow became available when the churches became redundant. My husband was ringing master of the Scottish Association of Change Ringers at that time and he took on the task of finding good homes for these excellent bells. It was a project that at times seemed to consume our family over the next few years but the net result was:

*Slide 1*

* St. Andrews University - 3 bells installed with 2 existing bells and a newly cast bell forming a light 6
* Tulloch Ringing Centre, near Fort William - 6 bells formed the back 6 of an 8 cwt 12
* St. John’s, Dumfries - 5 became the back 5 of an 11 cwt ring of 6, then 8 bells

The remainder of the story though is far from predictable. The congregation at St. John’s, Dumfries was keen to have bells but when they were first approached they were in the middle of an organ restoration project. Most churches would have rested on their laurels after tackling such a restoration but not this congregation. Once the organ was finished they threw themselves into an new world of structural work, bell casting, hanging, sound control, fund raising, simulators and much more besides. The project was exceptionally well managed with the whole church behind the plan.

Scotland, as you probably know, does not have a huge number of rings of bells and there is a large geographic spread. *Slides 2/3/4.* We then added St Andrews, Tulloch to the North West and were now proposing to install another in Dumfries in the borders some 85 miles south of Paisley - its closest Scottish neighbour!

Yes, of course the challenges of teaching a band in such an isolated location crossed our minds but where there’s a will, there’s a way and with such enthusiasm from a wonderful congregation it had to be regarded as an opportunity rather than a daunting task.

Rolling the clock forward to 2013 our eldest son, Jonathan, had succeeded his father as ringing master. Although the bells were not yet installed work was progressing well and he was discussing training with the church. Three lapsed ringers had come forward and ambitious plans were already under consideration. For Scottish ringers to assist with the training so far away, it had to be undertaken intensively. This is, as you know, the approach recommended by ART but with the amount of travel involved it was the only way. However there needed to be some local teachers too.

At that time I had become an accredited ART teacher and Pip had asked if I would consider becoming a tutor. So in September 2013 I ran my first Module 1 course at the Tulloch Ringing Centre for teachers from various towers across Scotland but timed especially for two brave souls from Dumfries. *Slide 5.* Debbie and Noel had not rung for many years but they had nobly volunteered to start a new band. *Slide 6.* There is a lot packed into a day in M1; new ideas to think about and new methods to try. *Slide 7.* It is very stimulating but quite exhausting. Imagine how Debbie and Noel felt; starting the day with a 4 hour drive, handling a bell for the first time in many years and then trying to absorb teaching skills for a whole day. I guess they were overwhelmed at that stage and yet, it was exactly what they needed to help them tackle the challenge ahead.

A month later the back 6 bells were in and the fun began.

**Debbie**

When the rector of St John’s Dumfries first mentioned back in 2008 that there was a possibility of some bells being installed in the tower, I thought he must be mad. While it is true that we had been offered 5 bells from a redundant church near Glasgow, my immediate thoughts were that to introduce tower bells into a church in the middle of a residential area in Dumfries was not the way to go about making friends and influencing people. As bell ringers, we are only too aware of the scenario where people move into a picturesque village to ‘get away from it all’, only to discover that there are all too many noises in the countryside – whether it is a cockerel crowing at stupid o’clock, cattle who may recently have been separated from their offspring, farm machinery working late into the night to get the crop in before the weather breaks, and of course the bells in the beautiful old church which ring for a couple of hours on practice night, another hour on a Sunday morning, not to mention quarter-peals, full peals and weddings! While you may have an argument pointing out to incomers that the bells have actually been doing that for at least the last 100 years, this would obviously not be an argument that would hold water in Dumfries.

However, fast forward a couple of years, and we reached the stage where the bell project was definitely going ahead, and all we had to do was to acquire some ringers to ring them. As I was a member of the congregation AND a lapsed ringer – I was volunteered to collate a list of names and numbers of people who either were already ringers (mostly lapsed, for reasons of Geography) or across the border – 35 miles in Carlisle. The whole project was advertised locally in magazines and by word of mouth, and one by one, I had various people approach me, either who were already ringers, or who liked the idea of learning to ring.

The first six were installed in November 2013. I had already attended Module 1 in September. Now we were ready to go, and with help from Jonathan Frye, we were ready for our first training day. We thought it would be best to start with an all day event on a Saturday at the beginning of December. Twenty five turned up at that first training day, most of whom are still with us. With just six bells there, we split the beginners into groups of about four, and used all six of the bells for one-to-one training. While one lot were being given tuition on rope handling, another lot were being given some theory, including being shown from a small two dimensional model exactly what happens when a bell is rung. As our ringing room is fairly small, any more than 16 people means that it all gets a bit too much of a squash. Lunch was provided, and the day was considered a success in that everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, and the vast majority immediately signed up for the next session which was to be a month later at the beginning of January.

*Slide 8.* In January a Module 1 follow up session was held in Dumfries with many of the teachers from the course. This had the dual purpose of providing plenty of trainers to assist the learners whilst providing an opportunity for the teachers to employ their new found skills.

To provide variety and ease congestion in the tower, other topics were introduced in the warmth of a meeting room to small groups at a time. Listening skills were explored with the use of clapping exercises. The skill of listening doesn’t come naturally to everyone and benefits from coaching. This generated a great deal of hilarity but the skills required to achieve good striking were absorbed by the students. Later handbells were introduced to develop these skills. These activities also generated the opportunity to ask interesting questions regarding ringing.

We had two more training sessions after this involving Jonathan and some helpers from Glasgow area. Most of those who helped in all these sessions were teachers working towards their ART accreditation plus a few spouses.

*Slide 9.* The brand new treble and second had been cast in December, and were ready for installation on Monday 24 February 2014. On this occasion, our rector decided to make a bit more of an event of it, and he arranged for a special ‘baptism of the two new bells’ by the bishop. The new shiny bells were left at the front of the church – the plan was for one of them to be filled with beer, although in the long run, we decided the beer might react with the metal from the bell, so the beer was kept separate, and they were ‘baptised’ by not one, but two bishops – the current Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway, and his predecessor, who by chance is also a bell ringer. *Slide 10/11.* The beer was made especially for this occasion by a local brewery, and a buffet was also enjoyed by the sixty or so people who turned out on a cold Monday evening in February. *Slide 12.* The two bells were installed in the tower the next day. All eight were then rung for the first time (apart from testing them) on Saturday 29 March at an Association meeting.

In March, we started a regular practice evening on a Thursday from 6.30 until 9 pm initially, dividing the time into three sessions for the different levels. The reason that there were three levels is that after 4 full training days, we had the situation where some people were picking up the mechanics of ringing rather quicker than others, plus there were some who had not come along to the initial training days, so they had divided themselves into two groups which we referred to as beginners and the inbetweenies group – ie those who were reasonably confident handling a rope, and whom we were reasonably confident wouldn’t just let go of it, even though they were still learning full bell control. Right from the start, in addition to Jonathan and the ringers he brought with him to the training sessions, there were two other ‘lapsed’ ringers who helped me with the training. One of them and I went up to Tulloch in September 2013 to do part one of the ART Training Scheme, which I must say, I found very helpful. As it was some 30 years since I had learnt to ring, and been ringing regularly, although the actual mechanics of ringing was much like ‘riding a bike’ – and came back to me very easily, it was good to go through some of the exercises that we put beginners through, and to learn new ways of putting things across. When you have been doing something, such as bell ringing for quite a long time, there is a tendency not to question it, and now we were required to do so. *Slide 13.* From March when we started regular practice evenings, we have been trying to teach good practice both in the practical handling of a bell and in the theory. During the course of 2014, we acquired a few more experienced ringers who had also not been ringing for a while. Considering the publicity we felt we had done, it seemed incredible to us that there could be bell ringers in or around the Dumfries area who did not know of our existence. One of our ringers, a GP, found out about the bells because one of his patients who was learning to ring, went along to him complaining that he had hurt his shoulder due to practising his new hobby. Shortly afterwards, the GP joined our band. Another lapsed ringer happened to be walking past the church one day and heard the bells ringing, and came in to find out more. Another one went to a local wildlife spot to look at the ospreys, and there discovered an old friend of his, who is also a ringer, and who then told him about the bells. We are now in the lucky position of having ten ringers who are so-called lapsed ringers, and several of these come along to the early session to help out with the ‘beginners’. Our practice is now divided into two one-hour sessions. At present, we have no one who is still learning bell handling, and the ones who started with the initial training day have now been ringing for just over two years. Most of these, being ‘mature’ adults are still at the stage where they are improving their bell control skills, but are perfectly confident handling a bell after all this time.

I attended Module 2 (also at Tulloch) exactly a year after module 1. Again, I found it very useful as an introduction to teaching method ringing. (Also I was very happy to be offered the chance to have a go at ringing a quarter peal of Bob Minor the day after the course – my first quarter peal in over 30 years!) The resources on the website are extremely useful, and we have used a lot of them in our weekly practices. Judith has come along to do the assessments for me, and there have been no shortage of people to teach. There is a youngster who is now doing plain hunting fairly easily, and we have recently run a course for the beginners where all of them managed to plain hunt after a one hour theory session, but with 10 beginners, and only one ringing at a time, it takes a while for them all to have a go. we practised plain hunt on 5 using the back six bells (including a cover bell) using the simulator, and just one learner at a time, but we also used the treble and second (totally silenced) for other learners to practise on by themselves (as if ringing the treble) which gave them a chance to consolidate what they had just practised on ‘live’ bells.

The main problem with starting a band from scratch is the sheer amount of input needed by just a couple of teachers with so many beginners which can feel overwhelming at times. The average tower probably has no more than a couple of beginners at a time, with maybe 8 – 10 more experienced ringers, and they are definitely at an advantage here. I know myself that I ring much better and learn fastest when I am put to ring with ringers who are much better than me (of whom there are 1000s)! It is very much easier to ‘up your game’ when you are the ‘weakest link’ so to speak, surrounded by people who almost carry you along with them, and this is certainly my experience. I think this would also be the case for the new ringers at Dumfries, but the fact is that there are lots of them, and not so many of the better ringers, and in order that they can have as many turns as possible, we try to have as many of them ring each time, (eg 4 or 5 beginners and 3 or 4 more experienced). I think this means they do not have the same benefits as if there were just one or even two ringing in a team of more experienced ringers. One possible way of helping them to progress faster, for those who want to and are able, is with the use of the simulator. We did already have a simulator, which initially, we used mainly for the beginners’ practice, but have more recently, through some generous donation, been given funds which have allowed the purchase of a Bagley Interface box which means that more than one person can be using the simulator at any one time. We are planning to run additional simulator-only sessions on a different evening each week, so that some of the beginners can come in and try learning at least the theory of things such as plain hunt and covering. I know it is said that ringing with a simulator is very different from ringing with other ‘proper’ ringers, just as I know, from my own experience that running on a running machine is very different from running outside where the ground does not come towards you! However, it gives some of the beginners a chance to have a go by themselves with a ‘perfect’ team around them who will not make any errors. And that in itself can be very helpful.

As regards our more experienced team of ringers, they come from various different parts of the UK, and their ringing experiences have been quite different. We have someone who learnt in a tower of quite heavy awkward bells, where Grandsire is the only method that was ever rung. We also have two of our retired members who, were keen peal ringers and conductors in the fairly dim and distant past, but in one case, finds that having such a long break from ringing means that he feels he has forgotten much of what he once knew. All of us who have had an enforced break (sometimes of several decades) from bell ringing feel that we have lost a bit of confidence in the intervening years. In my own case, I find that when I was learning back in my early teens, call changes were a piece of cake for me, I now actually find the mental gymnastics I have to do to work out what to call next really quite taxing. While I also recall that in my teens, although I was starting to learn all sorts of methods, I really found ropesight incredibly tricky, and did it mainly by counting, and yet now, not only do I find ropesight much easier, I also have some idea of ringing by the treble.

However, having said that, I do feel that we are progressing as a team in that we are able to ring more complicated methods than we did – we now quite often manage the odd plain course or short touch of Stedman (more often doubles than triples) and generally look forward to having visiting ringers, as quite often just a couple of more experienced ringers enable us to extend our repertoire. *Slide 14.* We have also now rung our first quarter peal on the bells (although conducted by someone from outside our tower), and this included one of our beginners covering on the tenor. *Slide 15.*

We are only the 21st tower in Scotland to have bells, and so unlike in England, where there are I believe some 6000 towers, and where you can usually find several towers within say a 10 mile radius of where you live, we are a long way from our nearest neighbour with bells in Scotland. This is another reason why progress for our new ringers may be a little slower than it would be in a similar tower in England, where they could perhaps go along to other practice nights at nearby towers to get extra practice. However, in spite of all this, we seem to have a solid team who show dedication by turning up week after week, and really seem to be enjoying learning the art of campanology.

I have been very pleased and honoured to have been an integral part of the first band of ringers at St John’s Dumfries, and we as a team are very grateful to Jonathan Frye and the Scottish Association for all the help that they have given us in getting things going at Dumfries.

**Judith**

At a Scottish Association meeting last year we were delighted to elect 25 new members from Dumfries. This is an incredible number of ringers, especially considering their isolated location. Our membership was about 250 so they have increased the association numbers by 10%.

The success at Dumfries is due to many factors, not least the people involved in every aspect of what has been achieved so far. However ART has played a significant part in providing the skills to teach ringing to a high standard. Debbie has embraced these wholeheartedly and is now a fully accredited teacher.

It has been an absolute pleasure to be part of the establishment of change ringing at St. John’s, Dumfries. The support from the Rector and the congregation has been excellent. The hard work and enthusiasm from all the ringers, especially Debbie, has been amazing. They have achieved so much in the past two and a half years and, I assure you, they are raring for more.

Scotland now has 6 fully accredited ART teachers and 1 who has just done Module 2. Most of those who have undertaken courses were already teaching ringing. On the whole the skills learned have been of benefit but not all have pursued accreditation. Our first courses were held back in the early days of ITTS and, with hindsight, we were not fully prepared for what was involved! There were more mentors than teachers and few mentors truly assisted their teachers. Few teachers had new learners to teach and in general there was insufficient follow up.

We were novices and we have learned from this and the subsequent courses have been more targeted with only Jonathan and me as mentors for consistency. Some Glasgow ringers who already had teaching experience are still working towards their accreditation and one has just completed hers this week. Theirs is not an easy tower for teaching but they are actively using ART techniques and this is apparent at their practices.

One teacher from Dunkeld who attended the first course was a model teacher taking on board all that the ART Training Scheme offers. She had been ringing for many years but when she found herself tower captain she had to start teaching. The ART Training Scheme was exactly what she needed and she is doing a great job with a relatively inexperienced band.

Our other new tower, the new Ringing Centre at Tulloch near Fort William, also employs ART techniques. Despite its isolated location (it really is in the middle of nowhere) they are teaching a band. It is also being well used for training courses (both ART and others) as well as peals and quarters. The sheep don’t seem to mind at all.

From a personal perspective the ART Training Scheme has done a huge amount to improve my teaching although there is still very much more that I would like to achieve. In Dunblane we are lucky to have a very loyal and competent band. Three of us are accredited teachers but most ringers have not yet attended either module. With many ringers offering learners advice there can sometimes be differences of approach. One of my aims is to run a course for us so that we are all “on the same page” in our teaching. However since employing ART techniques our retention rate has been good with 5 of out 6 teenagers making good progress.

An idea generated from one of the courses was the thought that we could use our new skills to help other towers (in addition to Dumfries). If a tower had a specific need we could try to provide a band, a conductor and/or a teacher to help them for a limited period. So Demand-a-Band was born. You can make a request via email or the ringing master. We have helped by teaching the theory of bob doubles and providing ringers to help practice it. We have also provided ringers for a band learning Cambridge Major.

Last year we managed to enter a band for the National Youth Striking Contest. With young ringers from Inverness, Aberdeen and Dunblane and, this year, adding Glasgow, Dumfries and Edinburgh this year, you may imagine the logistical challenges! However when we do manage to practice together we certainly make use of ART principles.

The ART Training Scheme has benefitted many towers in Scotland. For those already teaching there seems to be less incentive to work towards accreditation. We are actively pursuing this with those who wish to but some do not. However this does not mean that they have not benefitted; it doesn’t of course improve the ART statistics! To me the greatest benefit is for those who had not previously had much teaching experience such as the captain in Dunkeld and Debbie in Dumfries. Their towers would not have achieved nearly as much without the kick start provided by ART.