

# St Martin's Guild Summer Camp – August 2012

It was an idea which had been floating around the St Martin's Guild (SMG) for many years: an intensive ringing course designed to teach young people how to ring in one week. On 31 December 2011, Simon Linford sent out the challenge: "We didn't do this last year [2011] because we had left it too late to organise, but I remember us saying we would do it next year so we could do it justice. Well next year is tomorrow, and if we are going to do it we need to start planning it now... should we take the plunge?"

It would be fair to say we all thought it was a good idea and enthusiastically decided to "take the plunge". We eventually worked out what "it" was going to be and the final week of August saw the first SMG Summer Camp held in Birmingham.

## Recruitment

Those involved in teaching ringing will appreciate how challenging it is to get new ringers, especially young people whose social diaries often put my own to shame. We set ourselves the challenge of teaching 11-15 year olds who were completely new to ringing, with the option of allowing other young existing ringers within the Guild to join us towards the end of the week.

We were very fortunate to be able to take full advantage of our connections with St Philip's Cathedral choir. Several of their members had recently reached, or were close to, choir "retirement" and we made quick contact to see whether any might be interested in learning to ring. A taster session one Sunday afternoon secured six of the places whilst two from Perry Barr completed our cohort of "new ringers". A couple of existing young ringers from Solihull and Harborne expressed interest and joined us part-way through the week. The rationale behind this was two-fold: they could benefit from intensive tutoring over a period of a few days and they could help support the new ringers as they developed their skills and were ready to begin ringing with others.

## ITTS

We were all clear from the outset that we should follow a consistent teaching pattern, especially as the recruits would be taught by different people throughout the week. In fact, the flexibility offered by this "team teaching" turned out to be one of the main advantages of the camp.

Pip Penney had hosted ITTS Module One in Birmingham in April 2011 and all involved in the camp were mentors or new teachers of the ITTS scheme. This scheme is a consistent, coherent and straightforward programme of teaching and during the week of the camp it certainly proved to me that we were right to follow the scheme. We were also very grateful

that Pip Penney came along on our last day to see what we had achieved and she provided us with some additional ideas for future use.

We issued each recruit with a Level One progress record, which they enjoyed using, and provided each tutor with an easy and quick reference to see how far the student had progressed.

### **The schedule**

The brightly coloured spreadsheet probably looked more complicated than it actually was, but we felt it was crucial that the students enjoyed a diverse programme of events. Clearly we needed to set aside enough practical time for handling, but short and intense bursts were felt to be more effective. These were interspersed with breaks and other activities. The camp ran from 9am-5pm, so maintaining interest during such long days was always going to be a challenge. To combat this, Chris Mills organised handbell tune ringing; James Forster led a session on “methods” and call-changes using handbells; and Clare McArdle talked everyone through the on-line resources they could access with their new “ITTS/Learning the Ropes” passwords.

One of the successes of the programme was that different aspects of ringing appealed to different students, something which is true for ringers at all stages. Some enjoyed handbells whilst others preferred the mathematical theory elements. To hear some of the young ringers talk about place notation and course bells after only a few days was a particular highlight of the week, further proving that you can teach concepts and theories alongside handling. Unsurprisingly, all enjoyed the chocolate and frisbee games, but the less said about the latter the better: I, for one, will advocate softball in the future!

We split the students into two groups, one based at St Paul’s in the Jewellery Quarter and the other at Harborne. This allowed us space for focused teaching, the benefit of using additional IT resources and, later in the week, the flexibility to differentiate the groups a little to help each progress at their own level. For most of the camp we were fortunate to have enough tutors to provide 1:1 supervision. However, we also mixed in peer assessment at times and Clare videoed each student throughout the week so they could watch and learn from one another.

We also varied the schedule with outings: to the belfry at St Philip’s Cathedral, to Worcester Teaching Centre, a fun afternoon ten-pin bowling as well as a ringing outing to Hanbury and Dodderhill. We invited existing young ringers within the Guild along and this helped develop social links between the new and current ringers. This worked very well and we hope that future trips will encourage more young ringers within the Guild to keep ringing.

### **Funding**

Here, a balance had to be struck between covering our costs and providing an affordable yet diverse schedule. We were very grateful that the Ringing Foundation generously donated towards our cause. We were also grateful that Tony Daw offered to cover the cost of providing each student with an SMG Summer Camp t-shirt. On top of this we charged each recruit £50 for the full week. This covered all costs including the very generous and delicious buffet put on each day by Chris Mills.

### **Success?**

One of the recruits from the Cathedral choir wrote that “on the Sunday night before the Saint Martin’s Guild bell ringing course I wasn’t quite sure what to expect”. He might be surprised to read that in all honesty we didn’t either! The schedules had all been devised, the whole week organised, towers booked and food bought. But when you run something like this for the first time you never quite know how it will pan out.

In my mind, there were three success criteria. The first was to provide a positive introduction to bell ringing; to give an impression (even if not the full picture) of the variety of reasons people ring and why. We made clear from the beginning of the week that people enjoyed ringing for different reasons. From emails and a questionnaire all recruits answered, I think we can confidently say that our schedule did provide enough variety to sustain interest and enjoyment. All found something to enjoy. The second objective, perhaps obviously, was to get all students handling a bell competently. It is difficult to judge how much progress we could expect, though Simon had set the bar high the weekend before by saying that if each student could not confidently ring by themselves then the week should be considered a failure. Thanks Simon! Again, I think we can confidently say all students delivered and were very close to completing Level One of the “Learning the Ropes” scheme. All could handle a bell and were beginning to ring in rounds by the Saturday outing. Some were even ringing call changes at Worcester Ringing Centre, something I would not have believed had you told me at the start of the week.

The final criterion is hardest to assess, that of retention. Unsurprisingly, the camp was a huge commitment by those involved - some even took annual leave from work for the whole week. The camp would only truly be successful if we retained a large proportion of ringers. Only time will tell, but things are looking positive. Out of the original eight “new” ringers, six completed the week. One decided ringing was not for him early on and the other could not make the last three days due to illness. However, the remaining six have expressed an interest in taking up ringing and we are working with local towers within the Guild to ensure that they are incorporated into local practices. Clare even managed to get one of the parents out of ringing retirement!

In time, we hope to include the former choir boys into ringing for the 11am service at St Philip’s Cathedral and we will continue to organise regular “young ringers” practices and outings. I think it is fair to say that we are optimistic about the future of ringing in the SMG

and would certainly advise other guilds to consider running an intensive training week. The camp encouraged young people to socialise with one another, showed they could make progress quickly and introduced them to the various things which ringing can offer: all ingredients to keeping young people interested and engaged.

### **Final comments**

Talk is already starting about Summer Camp 2013, and we will be thinking about the feedback from this year and Pip's suggestions for how to make the week as effective as possible. Before I leave it to one of the students to conclude, I would like to publicly thank the following people: to all involved as tutors and supporters of the Summer Camp (Clare McArdle, Tony Daw, Andy Carr, Simon Linford, James Forster, Chris Mills and Tracy Stevens); to Pip Penney for visiting, supporting and advising us in general on the ITTS; to the Ringing Foundation for their financial support; to St Paul's, Harborne, St Philip's Cathedral, Worcester Cathedral and Old St Martin's, Hanbury and Dodderhill for the use of your bells and facilities; to the Birmingham University Ringers for coming out and supporting the taster session; and finally, to the students themselves and their parents – the former were a true credit to the latter, and the camp could not have happened without the firm support of the parents.

On a final note, if any of you are considering running anything of this nature please feel free to email [smgsummercamp@gmail.com](mailto:smgsummercamp@gmail.com) – one of us would be very happy to talk to you about our experiences.

Over to one of our students: "Overall I really enjoyed the course and I learned a lot and I'd like to thank all the instructors for making it such a great and memorable week. I now hope to attend some practices at Northfield church"

Arthur Reeves