

Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



Learning
the Ropes

Association of Ringing Teachers / Learning the Ropes — www.bellringing.org

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In this issue:

The ART Awards 2024	2
Brave New World in Sheffield	3
Yorkshire Tykes Take Prizes!	5
Band of the Year	6
What a Winner says ...	8
Ringling Revival at Mansfield Woodhouse	9
Puzzle Corner	10
A Hobby for Life	11
Ashton's First Quarter Peal	12
Together We Can Achieve so Much!	14
The Click Parade	16
To Ding or Not to Ding, That is the Question!	18
Slapton Bells Restored	19
Sharing the Tower at All Saints' Landbeach	21
Perfecting Technique	22
Masterclass Inspiration	23
Ringling on Heavy Bells Comes Full Circle	24
United by Bellringing	26
The ART Shop Looks for Support	26
Ten Top Tips for Belfry Maintenance	27
Puzzle Corner Solution	29

Just about everyone who does anything in the world of ringing is a volunteer – as a new ringer you probably already are a part of a team which rings on Sundays and for other occasions, but your teachers, the ringers who run your Guild or Association, those who take on national roles such as representing ringers on the Central Council, steeple-keepers and your Tower Captain, to name but a few, are all dedicated volunteers who willingly give their time and expertise.



It's not just ringing expertise, either – there are numerous people who produce newsletters (like this one), liaise with church and other organisations, organise trips and outings, run bell restoration projects, take care of finances and apply for grants. The possibilities are endless and it's always so much better when everyone does a bit and contributes their own particular skill to something, whatever it may be. Even as new ringers there is always something you can contribute – in the picture (*left*) is a young ringer from Yorkshire helping out with steeple keeping tasks.

This year volunteers are celebrated in Volunteers Week which runs from the 3rd to the 9th June. It is a special time of year to take a moment to recognise and thank everyone who gives their time to help out in their communities and organisations.

We would love to hear your inspiring volunteering stories, so do get in touch!



Ashton Jackson volunteering in the belfry – see p11

The ART Awards 2024

Lesley Belcher, ART Trustee



The ART Awards were the brainchild of Stephanie Warboys, who's been the ART Awards' Leader since the launch of the awards in 2015.

In this edition of Tower Talk we hear from some of this year's winners. It's reading about the great things that people are doing in ringing that makes all the hard work that Stephanie and the judges do worthwhile. Inspiring for them, and hopefully inspiring for you too.



The 2024 ART Award winners were announced at the ART Conference, held in Harbury on Saturday 2 March 2024.

The awards recognise achievement, innovation, and impact in the following areas:

Youth and university groups

Inspiring leadership

Excellence in recruitment and retention

Promotion of ringing

There was also a new award this year for Band or Cluster of the Year, which focused on those who are improving ringing standards and developing the sustainability of ringing. This award attracted a fair few nominations which made the judges' job quite difficult. Well done to the eventual winners, the Chirk Cluster in North Wales.

The next generation of ringers (I'm talking about the likes of you) are also recognised with the two Learning the Ropes Awards – one for achievement, the other for contribution. Two great winners, but lots of others who were highly commended too.

There are lots of inspirational people in ringing and it is really important that the great work they do is recognised. Anyone can make a nomination, so why not give some thought to making one yourself?

To find out more, visit

<https://bellringing.org/art-awards/>

and start planning for when nominations open in October.

Say thank you to someone special.

Brave New World in Sheffield

The Tower Talk Team

Student ringing in Sheffield had been declining over the years to the point where there was no regular student band or a student tower. At the start of the 2023/24 academic year, there were only four student ringers in the Sheffield Universities Guild of Change Ringers (SUGCR). But then Carys Hughes Blagden and Hana Booth arrived!

They had started at Sheffield University the previous year, having already learnt a few years ago, and took part in the Society's events in their first year. This was the motivation they needed to start planning how things were going to change when they returned after the summer break...

They hit the ground running with an effective campaign over the summer to attract students and other young ringers to the SUGCR, using Facebook, Instagram, and a lively stand at the Freshers' Fair.



SUGCR students at the recent Dinner, with mascot

The Sarah Beacham Youth Award this year was jointly won by Carys Hughes Blagden and Hana Booth of the Sheffield Universities Guild of Change Ringers, and the Yorkshire Tykes.

The award is given for youth, school and university groups and societies who are successfully recruiting, retaining, and developing young ringers.

The judges wanted to understand any barriers that had been overcome and how the group linked into the wider ringing community. Consideration was given to the ethos of the youth group, how the young ringers were developed, and the transition from the group to ringing elsewhere.

Student ringers in Sheffield can now enjoy an active and varied calendar of events which includes teaching sessions, beginners' practices, outings, quarter peal opportunities, practice nights around the city and service ringing at various towers, as well as other social events including the Annual Dinner.

Hana and Carys had never taught anyone to ring before, but needed to be able to instil confidence in their learners. It just shows how 'where there's a will, there's a way'. They both went on an ART teaching bell handling course and with the support of other experienced ringers are leading Friday night teaching sessions.

They also recognise that it is important to work on their own ringing capabilities as well, so have worked hard to push themselves to conduct and ring on higher numbers of bells.

The Society is now really well integrated into the wider Sheffield ringing scene, and also with other University Societies. All this builds really firm foundations for the future of ringing, so well done Carys and Hana! Leading the student ringing is a completely new experience for both Hana and Carys and they are mindful of the need to make sure that the SUGCR is set up for the future.

Here's what they both have to say about their experiences...

Hana... 🛎

Neither of us are particularly experienced ringers but we did dedicate a lot of time to ringing which I think helped to develop some of the skills we've been teaching this year. Being young and a newer ringer is very helpful as it's slightly more relatable to a student learner and you can pass on advice that you found useful. It also helps create the right kind of atmosphere for a practice – there's no real hierarchy and we're all learning together. I also think that when there's no one else to do something, it gives you a bit more confidence to have a go as you know that if you don't, nothing will happen.

In terms of social media, we use it sporadically to post a few pictures of what we've been up to and also for more light-hearted memes! However, most of the bonding occurs in the pub afterwards which is an important part! As a lot of our membership grew through word-of-mouth and friends bringing their friends, who brought their friends, pretty much everyone got along from the beginning, as everyone kind of knew someone else! Our outing to the Hope Valley in October, and the Northern Universities' event in York were also really helpful in bringing the group together quite early on in the academic year.

Thinking back, although I thought I'd do a little ringing when I went to uni, I definitely did not think it would be as much as we do now! My tower captain at home encouraged me to join SUGCR but there was very little activity at the time I joined. The incredible sociability of our ringing group, both within the universities and with everyone in the city has been fantastic and has helped us not only become a great group of friends but has given us so many new opportunities for progression as ringers.

Carys... 🛎

I definitely think having only learnt to ring two years ago gave me a great advantage in teaching handling, despite my lack of experience. It gave me a lot of compassion and patience in the role as I remembered clearly how difficult and demoralising my early days were. I came back to a lot of the techniques my own teacher at Belper, Gill Hughes, used when teaching me as they were still fresh in my memory, and I felt I knew what worked and what wasn't so helpful.

In some ways I also think my inexperience helped improve my relationship with the students I was teaching, as it created a sense of camaraderie, as if we were both learning from one another through the process. I think a lot of teaching in ringing, especially with teaching handling, is pattern recognition, being able to spot common handling habits that lead to poor style. In fact, through this I was able to spot poor habits of my own and am currently trying to correct some of my own style. I really do believe teaching handling and method ringing are a massive aid to your own personal growth as a ringer. It's made me be a lot more thoughtful about why we do the certain things we do in ringing, and what is their purpose.

Here at SUGCR, we have great social secretaries who help run our Instagram, with posts which are funny and relatable. Our social media presence has really put our Society on the map as other uni ringing societies are able to connect with the shared experience and humour.



Sheffield Universities' ringers

Personally, I think ringing can appear quite inaccessible to some – partly because of the way in which ringing is promoted, and partly because, for some towers, the only advert about ringing would be in the church itself. Prospective ringers that are not involved in the church have no way of knowing that ringing even exists, which is a shame. Social media, when used in the right way, can be a great way to spread awareness about ringing.

So my advice is, if you are lucky enough to have young ringers in your tower and you want to recruit more, why not have a chat with them to find out which social media they use and ask them to get involved? You might have a Facebook page, but this isn't necessarily where younger people are looking.

Yorkshire Tykes Take Prizes!

Jane Lynch, Organiser of the Yorkshire Tykes Youth Group

It was a real honour to attend the ART Awards on 2 March 2024 on behalf of the Yorkshire Tykes. Now in our tenth year, we were previously runners up for the Sarah Beacham Youth Group Award in 2019. Things have moved on considerably since then. Throughout the pandemic we kept the group together with Ringing Room sessions and have gone from strength to strength since then.

We now have 30-plus young ringers attached to the group and were able to take 28 youngsters to the 2023 National Youth Contest, entering an 8-bell method team and an 8-bell call change team for the first time. Hosting the 2023 contest on home turf in York did mean that lots of our parents became involved as stewards, caterers, bus chaperones and general helpers, which gave them a much better understanding of what ringing is all about and it really helped bond the whole group together.



Yorkshire Tykes Call Change team

I'm often asked what we put the success of the Tykes down to? In a county the size of Yorkshire, logistical problems and the huge amount of travelling required are our biggest issues. However, after 10 years we have become pretty well organised and have established ourselves as a "Branch" of the Yorkshire Association of Change Ringers. Other tips to success include:

- 🔔 Maintain a regular meeting date and stick to it. Don't miss any months.
- 🔔 Maintain good contact with all the parents, as they are the ones who get their children to the towers. Keep them informed all the time.
- 🔔 Move the meetings around the area. We travel widely across all of Yorkshire with regular trips to other areas.
- 🔔 Don't be scared to visit the big, prestigious towers! Kids are not scared of big bells like adults can be. It actually inspires them to keep coming along.
- 🔔 Create a sense of identity – those Tykes shirts are seen everywhere!
- 🔔 Highlight your achievements on social media – subject to relevant parental permissions of course.
- 🔔 Allow the young ringers to run as much of the ringing as possible, calling changes, conducting touches, quarter peals and running ringing sessions.
- 🔔 Engage with other local ringing events.
- 🔔 Our age range is 8 to 18 years, so we require several DBS checked adult ringers to run the group. Follow the CofE adult to child ratios.

Last year was a great year for The Tykes. They scored their first ever peals as a group, did well at the RWNYC and also entered the White Rose 12-bell contest for the first time.

It was very pleasing to be joint winners of the Sarah Beacham Youth Award this year, especially as we shared the prize with fellow Yorkshire winners from Sheffield University. It is also great to be nominated by our parents without whose support and commitment the group could not function. As an added boost, two of our young ringers also did well at the ART Awards.

Dylan Smith was joint winner of the Learning the Ropes Achievement Award and George Rees was Highly Commended. Both of them have reached LtR Level 5 in a relatively short space of time and will now attend the Learning the Ropes Masterclass in Birmingham.



Dylan, member of the Yorkshire Tykes receiving his LtR Level 5 certificate from Helen Nichols

Band of the Year

Clare Morris, Overton on Dee



Taking on Liverpool Cathedral

and the winner is ...

Overton on Dee, Bangor on Dee, Chirk Cluster

The Chirk Cluster is a grouping of three towers in North-East Wales, which are part of the North Wales Association of Church Bell Ringers. This cluster is a wonderful example of towers and ringers working together and helping each other. It shows great commitment to pursuing the art of bellringing, and a drive to improve standards. It also demonstrates delivery of community-based activities, recruitment for the future and investment in training.

The Band of the Year award is open to any tower or cluster of towers that is focused on improving ringing standards and developing the sustainability of ringing. Ringing level is unimportant – this award is equally open to those who ring call changes to those who ring Surprise Maximus. What is important is the band’s commitment, drive, and delivery. Ringing sustainability might be demonstrated in different ways, for example, the development of the next generation of leaders; training ringing teachers; developing young and early-stage ringers; and/or supporting neighbouring ringers and teachers.



Steeple-keeping tasks at Bangor on Dee

The next edition of Tower Talk will include some stories from ringers who make up this successful cluster, but here are a few of the things that have been accomplished:

- 🔔 Delivered new learners and good retention rates in all three towers with ideas and plans for future recruitment. Young ringers were actively recruited by strengthening school links. Overton on Dee recently involved Year 6 at the local junior school in a competition to design their new polo shirt ringing logo, including a talk about bell ringing. In Chirk, groups of children from the local school have visited the ringing room and bells, and handbells have been taken into school and used as part of their Christmas performance in church.
- 🔔 Popular outings have been organised to give people experience of ringing on different bells and different numbers of bells. Particular highlights were to Liverpool and Chester Cathedrals.
- 🔔 Supporting Sunday Service ringing within the cluster.
- 🔔 Bell restoration within the cluster – members of the cluster towers have actively helped in projects in Bangor on Dee, a local tower in Hanmer and are preparing to help in a new project in Chirk to rehang the bells, and add two bells to complete the octave, for which the Chirk Church Committee are fully involved and supportive of the project.
- 🔔 All of the cluster towers have embraced social media, predominantly Facebook and Instagram, which has been instrumental in linking with the local community and wider community of ringing.
- 🔔 Training has been actively sought both inside and out of the association to develop the next generation of leaders and teachers and to develop ringing standards. Technology has been added, with a simulator at Chirk tower which has enabled many of these sessions to take place.



A joint practice makes everyone happy! 😊

What a Winner says ...

Lesley Boyle, Swaffham Bulbeck, Cambridgeshire

A few years ago, I was lucky enough to win an ART Award. I couldn't believe it when I realised they were talking about me! After some spluttering and a struggle with imposter syndrome ("It's a terrible mistake, you must mean someone else,") I then got to grips with what this meant – £400 to spend on a small project.

At the time our tower had already been contemplating the purchase of a training bell. I'd tried one out at the ART Conference at Royston and thought the Matthew Higby version of a dumbbell was the nearest thing I'd rung to a 'real' bell. The purchase was agreed at our Tower AGM. The ART award meant that we were able to afford the extras – a second hand computer plus standalone simulator software, plus a wireless simulator hardware set up for one bell (Simbel).

The training bell is the best thing since sliced bread! Yes, we can teach bell handling on it, and it is perfect for nervous learners or teachers.

We have had other towers come and use it, too. We've had kids summer holiday sessions centred around using it as it's fun and stress free. Kids can ring the whole bell much sooner than they would on a real bell. We can also use it during the practice for gaining ropesight, mirroring a real bell. Every tower should have one!

Writing this reminds me what I intended to do more of, and what the ART money in particular enabled. This was to plug the computer in and use it for striking practice, and also to do more outreach. I intentionally bought all three main simulator programs so that we could compare, and I could demonstrate these to other bands by taking the computer/simulator software/wireless sensor out to other towers ('Belfry in a Box'). So now's the time to focus on getting more of this organised.



Thanks to ART for the whole concept of Awards and what they enable and think about putting in a nomination this year – it might make all the difference!



The training bell located unobtrusively in a corner of the clock room



Everyone loves the training bell!

Ringing Revival at Mansfield Woodhouse

Annette Harvie, Mansfield Woodhouse

The bells at St Edmund's Church in Mansfield Woodhouse, Nottinghamshire had gone silent for many years, but in May 2023 Richard Wolfgang made a call to the church to ask why? The old tower captain had retired, and the tower no longer had ringers. After an inspection by Richard and some helpers, it was established that they were good for ringing so a recruitment drive was then launched.

Richard Wolfgang and Thomas Doughty started to train new ringers in September and the tower started to come to life again. A new band of eight has been learning the ropes and over the past almost eight months has seen great progress. Over half of its members have achieved Level 1 of the Learning the Ropes scheme. Out of the eight members, two had rung before in their younger years and wished to get back into ringing and the others had never pulled a rope before. The youngest member, Elliott has just turned ten years old and is becoming a bit of a local ringing star. Definitely one to look out for in the months and years to come.



Smiles galore from the band at Mansfield Woodhouse

They have worked hard and in a very short time are becoming a great band, having already mastered rounds, call changes and the oldest and youngest members have moved onto plain hunt.

Many members have visited other local towers for more rope time and practice, been to the extra learning sessions run by Mansfield District Guild and even rung at the open practice night at Southwell Minster.

With the ultimate goal of ringing for Sunday services always in sight, St Edmund's church bells rang for the Easter Sunday Service celebrations with its own band of ringers after seven months of training. It was certainly a proud moment for Richard, Tom and all the other guest helpers. What an achievement!

Puzzle Corner

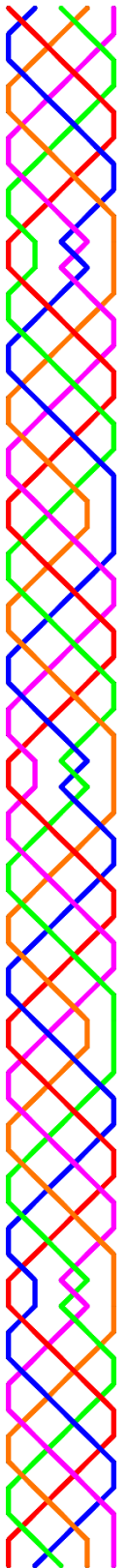
Rose Nightingale and De Tremain, ART Administrators

Method ringing jargon

I S E C A L P E K A M A M M H
R N K R O W T N O R F I R V T
T N U H T B A B O R N G H A W
E I T S G R D O T O D H E R S
U R D C N B A B R I D D O I O
I L G I I U G N G I O N N A N
E R G E R U B N G O G G O T O
T T U A E L I R A R L E N I S
R S E N V R B P W E G E O O U
B R E M O H G T N D R V A N I
E L V N C U L T O E M L S D O
I T E A A T T D E E A G N D V
O T S E L B U O D O R L N R N
R N O V T I B N R A N R E U E
T O E N L L E B E C A L P R O

DODGE	MAKEPLACES	HUNT	LEAD
TENORING	COVERING	DOUBLES	MINOR
PLACEBELL	RUNOUT	FRONTWORK	BOB
SINGLE	VARIATION	WRONG	HOME

(Wordsearch solution can be found on page 29)



A Hobby for Life

Jake Harkett, Knighton, Leicestershire

I started ringing 2 years ago, but I wanted to be involved much earlier as I vaguely recall seeing something on Blue Peter years, or maybe decades ago, even? It was a church open day at Hitchin which included a tour of the tower which hooked me in. Unfortunately I then went off to university in Exeter, which was not ideal for learning something like this! I vowed that once I had settled down a little I would get in contact with the local tower, which I did as soon as I was settled into my PhD in Leicester.

I contacted the tower captain at Knighton, Jane Salt and was soon introduced to Becki. I started learning at pretty much the same time as another newcomer, David, which was actually quite nice because both of us realised quickly that bell ringing was quite a lot harder than we thought it was going to be! It took several weeks for me to be able to coordinate myself enough to do both hand and back strokes. It was an amazing feeling though when I finally managed this, a bit like cycling without stabilisers for the first time – forgetting that I nearly crashed when I did that!



Jake with his LTR Level 4 certificate

The first method I managed to ring was Bistow Doubles on the treble. Becki challenged me then to ring plain hunt on 5 bells. I remember up to that point that I had spent so much time thinking about how to do this method, I've lost count of the number of videos I watched about it. Certainly my colleagues at work got very used to hearing bell ringing videos playing! Of course the first time I tried to ring plain hunt it was a complete mess, but we just kept trying again and again. I made a conscious decision not to learn the bells I was following after each change and instead tried to ring this by places from the very start.



I went to Saturday sessions at St Mary de Castro, which were especially helpful in giving me the time to practise. They also got me trebling to Plain Bob and Grandsire as well to try to help develop my ropesight, and I then rang other bells. It was at about that point that the coronation happened and we had the Ring for the King celebration in Knighton, complete with bottles of my homemade cider and royal mead of course! I started to have very long conversations with Paul and Becki about bobs and singles, which was another massive learning curve. But by then I was ringing at Knighton, Aylestone and St Mary de Castro most Saturdays (thank you Becki for introducing me to all these tower captains), so there was plenty of time to practise and really think about what I was doing. On Remembrance Sunday 2023, I rang my first quarter peal, Plain Bob Doubles on the treble, made all the more special by the bells being half muffled. I rang a second quarter peal of Plain Bob in December, this time on an inside bell. I almost went wrong 30 seconds before the end. Lewis told me, 'Don't go wrong now, we're nearly there' and I managed to hold it together until the end! I am having great fun ringing at the Cathedral. 12 bell ringing is magnificently cathartic! Back at Knighton Becki and I are working on touches of Grandsire (very cursed!), Plain Bob Minor and Stedman, with

the intention of finally ringing a quarter peal that is not Plain Bob Doubles. She is also introducing me to more 8 bell methods. I may be moving to California next year, but I would love to ring a full peal in Leicester just before I go.



"It took a while to get started with bellringing, but I am so glad I did it. It has been a wonderful hobby to do alongside my PhD and will hopefully be something I keep up for my whole life. I am so grateful to Becki for her patience and all the hard work she has put in. I definitely couldn't have done it without her."

Ashton's First Quarter Peal

Harry Helyer, St Cuthbert's Ormesby

On 9 March, Ashton Jackson rang his first quarter peal, covering to 1260 changes of Grandsire Doubles. He smashed it! Being only 16 myself, it has been an honour to teach Ashton over the past year, and it has been great to see him flourish into a brave and enthusiastic ringer.

When Ashton first came to our tower at St Cuthbert's Ormesby, I was in the middle of learning to teach, so I didn't have much experience. I made this clear to Ashton and his mum, and they were not put off! Ashton was very quick to pick up handling skills, and I could instantly see his potential. Ormesby's bells are not the most convenient for teaching – low ceiling, ropes close to the wall and the other ropes, bells on two tiers, and not forgetting the worn pulleys, which make ringing any bell difficult. However, Ashton coped admirably with all this as together we embarked on the Learning the Ropes scheme.



Ashton (centre) with the successful QP band

This was very helpful, giving Ashton goals to aspire to, and allowing him to see what he had and hadn't ticked off to complete the levels. It was not long before Ashton was ringing rounds, gradually building up to ringing all eight of Ormesby's bells. He achieved this before the King's Coronation, which he took part in! Ever since, his talents have developed and more people from the local area have had the opportunity to see how competent he is. My own teachers and mentors, Jennie and David Town, along with other ringers from Northallerton, came to help ring all eight at Ormesby, in order to progress Ashton's foundation skills and good striking together with call changes, kaleidoscope exercises and Mexican Wave.

He was then invited over to Northallerton on a Thursday night to further develop his skills – covering, plain hunting and getting used to different bells (in this case, much easier bells!) After plenty of practice at covering, I decided it was the right time for Ashton to ring his first quarter peal. He put in a great effort, striking his bell rhythmically, and at a speed which was appropriate for the number of bells and their weight. It was a great achievement, well done Ashton! Recently, Ashton joined me and the Northallerton ringers to celebrate my 16th birthday – touring around Wensleydale on an old Routemaster bus ringing at five different towers! Ashton says...

"The things I enjoy about bell ringing: Firstly, I liked the sound of the bells after hearing them in my back garden. I was immediately intrigued by how they worked and sounded, and once I started going to the church and ringing the bells I got more and more enjoyment out of it. I enjoyed learning the basics first and going into the bell tower to study the bells. I also enjoy meeting other bell ringers and visiting other bell towers. I recently took part in my first quarter peal which went very well and helped my confidence grow.

I aim to be able to ring my first peal in the future, that would be a great achievement for me. In the future, I would love to be able to learn more methods, one in particular called Yorkshire Surprise Major. I really like this method as I think it sounds really nice and I would love to be able to ring it one day with confidence. I enjoy my practice evenings and have also attended others in different churches, which has helped me gain confidence and I feel like I improve every week. I have also rung for weddings and the King's Coronation. Recently, I took part in my first bellringing tour, where I went to several churches, and travelled via an old Routemaster bus! I really loved doing this and hope to participate in many more tours."



Ashton helping out with steeple-keeping

I could not have asked for a better learner than Ashton. He has become a fixture in the Ormesby band, helping out on Sundays and with weddings. He is certainly giving me an easy time when teaching him, and he is great to be around.

In a way, I would say that bellringing has boosted his social skills, and going to different towers, and joining in social events has certainly helped. I look forward to seeing Ashton grow into a top ringer, and the way he is heading, that is certain!

Beginning to teach at the age of 15 was no easy feat! However, I was excited for the experiences and challenges coming up! I have learned many things from becoming a teacher, and it has been nice to learn ways to adapt for each individual learning to ring. In Ashton's case, doing extra things was important to keep him interested. For example, I used to let Ashton have a go at chiming the tenor, with help of course, or going up into the belfry and to help with small steeple-keeping tasks. He is now able to help me with some of the steeple-keeping jobs such as fitting new stays, adjusting ropes on the wheels and even cleaning and painting in the belfry, which has been a big project over the past year.

I am also helping to teach a couple of adults now. Having the opportunity to teach both a child and adults has helped me to be versatile in my teaching, as everyone is different when it comes to learning to ring, and everyone finds different things difficult, which is all part of the fun! Since starting teaching, I have become ringing master at Ormesby, with hopes of reforming and rebuilding the band so that we can ring all eight on a Sunday morning, as we mainly have five at the moment.



Ashton Jackson volunteering in the belfry



Any advice I would give to a young person who is teaching, or wanting to learn to teach is to be patient, and to try and build a personal relationship with the learner – it makes life much easier, and allows them to enjoy it more, because there is someone there who they can have a laugh with.

Together We Can Achieve so Much!

Lesley Boyle, ART Teaching Hub Coordinator

All around the country ringers and teachers alike are experiencing the benefits of teaching and learning together – often when several towers come together to share resources in a teaching hub. Here are some news snippets from them.

All Souls, Bolton

It has been a while since we last contributed to Tower Talk from the All Souls ART hub in Bolton. We are pleased to say that our teaching hub is still busy within the tower and reaching out to our sister towers for any support they require. We have now taught over 30 pupils from Bolton School who have completed the Learning the Ropes Level 1 during their Lower Sixth year as part of their community service. We are happy to say that some of them took part in the Churches Conservation Trust bellringing video and we are hoping that they will continue ringing during their university years and beyond.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX1ZHwxyKQ>



A number of towers have visited All Souls' for sessions on ringing up and down and in peal, improving leading and also practising plain hunt. We have been requested to run a session on improving listening skills which is planned for next month. We continue to give talks to various groups who visit the church and it is a pleasure to receive so much positive feedback from these sessions and the occasional new recruit. There is a steady stream of learners coming through the door and our latest recruit, Edith, who has just completed her first few sessions and is making excellent progress, says...

"I am really enjoying learning to ring, and I never realised how much is involved. I so enjoy the company of like-minded people and I am looking forward to being able to join in with the team ringing together"

The Mike Rigby Teaching Centre, Warwickshire

We heard from the new Mike Rigby Teaching Centre in the last edition of Tower Talk and as a postscript, bell ringers from around the locality gathered at St Laurence Church in Lighthorne to celebrate its formal opening on 7 March. Jane Rigby, unveiled a plaque dedicated to the memory of her husband, Mike, who was tower captain of the Mid Fosse Ringers from 2010 until his unexpected death in 2020 and after whom the teaching centre is named. The unveiling was followed by champagne and cake which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

The Mike Rigby Teaching Centre was started in April last year and became an ART Teaching Hub at the beginning of this year. Training is offered to those wishing to learn how to ring a bell, to existing ringers wishing to improve their ringing style and to those wanting to become more advanced ringers. The centre has become very popular and has trained over 50 different students to date.

The Sole Bay Ringing Hub

Serving north-east Suffolk, this teaching hub has just celebrated its first birthday. During this year, 44 different people have visited the hub in some capacity, with 29 learners benefiting from expert tuition and guidance.

While the prime focus is on teaching bell handling, we also provide individualised guidance to support ringers to hone their skills. A ringer may come to learn from scratch, correct a mishandling habit, or to top up skills such as ringing up or down. The aim is to ensure that our ringers strike their bell with accuracy and precision.

We want everyone to feel supported and welcome. The hub is based at St Margaret's church in Reydon near Southwold and offers an hour and a half of tuition every Saturday morning. There is no need to book a place and there are always home-made cake and drinks. A growing library of books and resources are available for loan or purchase.



'A beautifully made cake celebrating one year of the Sole Bay Teaching Hub'

Beccles, Suffolk

The Bell Tower

Monday, 22 April 2024 in 48m (11)

1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Kate Bungay
- 2 Phillip Gorrod (C)
- 3 Chrissie Pickup
- 4 Kate Gill
- 5 Sarah Plummer
- 6 Marie Owen

1st quarter: 6. 1st on a working bell:1.

Rung for the induction of Rev Dimitri Theulings as rector of Beccles with Worlingham, North Cove and Barnby. Also for the 1st anniversary of the Sole Bay Ringing Hub.

Birthday compliments to 3 (26th) and 6 (23rd)

This performance included a first quarter-peal ringer on bell 6

Everyone can learn from each other, and new ringers enjoy being taught by different teachers. There is an emphasis on overlearning skills so that learning is successful.



A learner introduced to ringing at the hub a year ago said, "Happy Birthday to the hub – a brilliant idea with oodles of amazing people who lend their time to teach and keep alive a beautiful tradition."

We have fun. There have been friendships made and strengthened through the love of ringing. We want to make sure that there is a strong network and plenty of competent ringers to sustain bellringing for years to come.



The Click Parade

Rose Nightingale, ART Administrator

ART recently reached a significant landmark... over 1000 subscribers to its YouTube channel, which covers a wide range of interesting topics for everyone whatever level of learning they are at: <https://www.youtube.com/@ringingteachers>

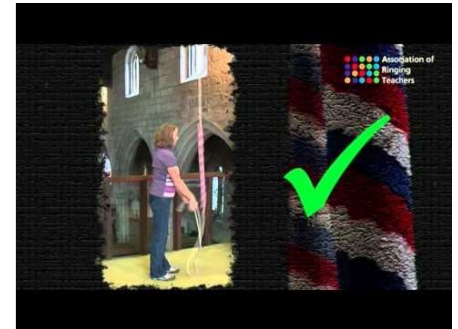


So if readers of Tower Talk want to check out some of our great content, here we go with a list of the top 10 videos available right now.

This article includes video animation when viewed online.

1. Handstroke Grip and Pull

With an incredible 36,000 views, this is ART's most popular video by miles. If you are learning to handle a bell right now, or simply want to improve your ringing style, there are plenty of tips here on how to identify and fix common handling problems.



2. Call Changes



A top band from the St Martin's Guild demonstrates raising in peal, a call change sequence, then lowering in peal.

Produced for the LtR Advanced Call Change scheme, it's a great example of call change ringing and as one person commented, "Let's hope we don't have to come up against this team in a striking competition."

3. Jump Changes

Now, you might be thinking, what on earth are Jump Changes? Well, they're like call changes but the conductor calls the bells to move (or jump) more than one place. This can seriously challenge your bell control, so lots of skills can be developed if you give these a go on a practice night. The St Martin's Guild sets the standard high in this video, so have a look, have a go see what you think – but perhaps not on 12 bells!



4. LtR 2 - Ropesight Explained



Ropesight explained

Ropesight is a word that new ringers often hear in the tower, annoyingly in sentences such as: 'This will all be easier when you get ropesight'. Not very helpful, really. If you're not sure exactly what ropesight is, this is the video for you.

At the end there's some great slo-mo footage of the St Peter Mancroft Guild of Ringers ringing Plain Hunt Doubles for you to 'get ropesight'.

5. LtR 2 – Call Changes



Call Changes

Learning call changes? A bit confused? Then this video is for you.

It not only explains how the calls affect the order of the bells, but it also includes practical advice on how to change position by adjusting the handling of your bell.

Watch the Mancroft ringers ring call changes before you go to your practice.

6. Burnout – Putting out the fire

Ringers can often be inward looking, but sometimes it pays to look at other hobbies and sports to learn something new.

Here, a sports science academic talks about burnout – recognising the signs, understanding why it happens, and what to do if you or someone you know is suffering from burnout.



7. LtR 2 – Listening and Leading



Listening and Leading

You might have been told to 'listen to it'. But what are you listening for? What does good ringing sound like and how do you produce good ringing when there is such a time delay between action (pull) and sound (ding)?

The Mancroft ringers supply some great footage, particularly illustrating the time delay. Have a look and it will all make much more sense.

8. LtR 1 – Ringing a bell up

Raising a bell is something that gets more controlled and precise with practice, and this 15-minute video goes through the technique of raising a bell.

It breaks down all the movements into small stages which you can pause and study at your leisure – unlike in the tower when it all happens so fast!



Ringing a bell up



How to learn a method

9. How to Learn a Method

Tom Hinks is a very accomplished ringer who has prepared this 30-minute video full of advice on how to learn a method using the blue line, treble signposts, and other handy tips. It's aimed at ringers who know nothing about any of this jargon. So if you've finished your LtR Level 3 and are about to start learning a method, there's plenty here to help you out.

10.LtR 2 – From rounds to changes

So what exactly do you need to know about moving on from rounds? This video explains what skills and support you need to prepare for the next steps.

As always, we love to hear from ringers, so if you've found a great ringing video online, whether it's on the ART channel or somewhere else, do let us know about how it helped you. Maybe readers would even like to make their own ringing video sometime?



**Rounds to
Changes**

To Ding or Not to Ding, That is the Question!

Debbie Chard, Moseley

Nothing puts the frighteners up a relatively new bellringer more than hearing that a bell is lively, awkward, or not for the faint-hearted!

So, if as a learner, you are facing ringing a new bell, whether out tower grabbing or indeed just returning after a break, should you ask for a ding on your own, just turning the bell over a few times before getting into anything more?

This question 'To ding or not to ding' always promotes a healthy debate! So I set about asking some fellow ringers in Birmingham for their point of view and got some great responses:

- 🔔 *'Absolutely'*
- 🔔 *'No way, just get on with it'*
- 🔔 *'If I'm invited to'*
- 🔔 *'Depends on how I'm feeling'*
- 🔔 *'You shouldn't really need to, because no one will mind if you go wrong'*
- 🔔 *'Definitely helps to get a feel for the rope'*
- 🔔 *'Take the plunge!'*

Overall, about 65% of the learner ringers I asked liked the idea of having a ding on an unfamiliar bell before settling into rounds, call changes or anything else.





The crux of the issue is confidence.

So, if it helps a learner build confidence, then it's the right thing. Tower captains and teachers tend to agree if it helps to give confidence, although they do try to wean ringers off this practice in their home towers.



Vicky and Pete are wondering – should I, or shouldn't I?

It's not a habit that they want to establish. When pressed to explain further on this, those teaching gave the following reasons:

-  We aim for ringers to gain confidence in their own skills, not to rely on this 'ding' beyond the point when they really need it.
-  Learners will be introduced to public ringing when they are considered ready to join in. So if your teacher has confidence in you then trust them! If you're not ready, tied practice gives a new ringer the space to learn to handle a bell and work with moving around the bells, or indeed ringing a specific bell for the first time, without the need to do it 'in public'!
-  We are only too aware of how single dings sound outside and want to avoid imposing too many on the locals!
-  'Tower grabbing' – the art of visiting new towers to ring at, needs this confidence and self-belief to catch hold on unfamiliar bells, so learners will be much happier getting out and about once they have let go of the single-ding crutch.



So, in summary...

Arguments for the ding

It can provide reassurance, give confidence, help a learner to feel the bell and understand the rope length (especially where a knot may be required!).

Additionally, it's helpful in cases of introducing a learner to a heavy tenor bell and the slightly different technique which may be required.



And against the ding

It's only really a temporary measure when learners are finding their way. It can stifle natural growth in confidence that we aim to develop, and lots of single dings can sound pretty scrappy!

So, maybe the message to all new ringers is to stay with the 'ding' while you need it, but when your teachers feel that you have gone past that point, then it's time to move on. After all, there are over 6,000 towers with ringable bells in the UK, so that's well over 30,000 bells. So, what are you waiting for?

Slapton Bells Restored

Margaret Winfield, Slapton, Buckinghamshire

The bells of Holy Cross Church, Slapton, can finally be rung full circle again for the first time since 1997. Safety and stability issues forced them out of action in 1998.

Now at last, thanks to various donations, grants, fundraising and the sale of a small plot of land belonging to the church an extensive restoration of the bells, frame and tower has been completed. It's not just restoration that we can celebrate but also augmentation to a ring of 6.

The Keltex Trust have been very generous and have given us two bells in addition to some financial help.

Blyth and Co of Newark began the work of removing the five bells from the tower in October 2021, and by November 2023 the bells were finally returned and work on the tower commenced.

Bell	Weight	Note	Date	Founder
Treble	4-3-26	C#	1846	Charles George Mears
2	5-1-8	B	1852	Charles George Mears
3	6-2-4	A	1846	Charles George Mears
4	7-0-11	G#	1889	Mears and Stainbank
5	7-3-13	F#	1715	George Chandler
Tenor	10-0-8	E	1889	Mears and Stainbank

The long-awaited inaugural practice took place on Monday, February 19 2024, attracting considerable interest from local ringers and from Slapton residents, who were very complimentary.



The newly restored bells lined up ready for rehangng

The only trouble was that inside the church we were deafened by approximately 84 decibels and couldn't hear the calls!

Several rolls of 200mm loft insulation were purchased and laid out on the wooden floor above the ringing chamber but below the bells.

Full of enthusiasm we started the next practice only to find that we were being showered by a light fall of snow – bits of fluffy insulating material were floating down through the holes for the ropes! This was not pleasant and although we managed our first service ringing the following Sunday, the problem clearly needed solving before there was any more ringing.

Richard Booth, the Tower Captain of neighbouring Marsworth, fortunately discovered some spare wood in his garden shed and was able to come up with a practical solution to prevent anything further dropping through.

Since then we have continued to run weekly practices and to ring for a service on alternate Sundays. A relatively new ringer myself, I have taken on the role of Tower Captain. With only two local ringers, our numbers are boosted by ringers from nearby towers.

Interest in the bells has now prompted two Slapton residents to start learning, and two others who have returned to ringing after learning as children have already both been able to join in rounds.

Our next venture is an Open Day in early May to invite local people to see what has been done and entice some to have a go and maybe even start learning. Philip Dobson and Richard Booth are both experienced teachers, so individual instruction is integrated into practice night and Richard supplements this with some individual lessons, and I have signed up to attend a teaching bell handling course.

Sharing the Tower at All Saints' Landbeach

The Tower Talk Team

The swift is now an endangered bird in the UK, and we have lost over 50% in the last 20 years. The main reason is loss of nest sites, but fewer insects may have also contribute to this decline. Nest boxes in church belfries have proved to be very successful, resulting in some substantial new colonies.

There are about 16,000 churches and chapels in England, many with a suitable belfry. So there is an opportunity to make a significant contribution to halt the decline of swifts. The advantages of church belfries are that they are high, out of the way, and swifts seem to like nesting there.

At All Saints' church in Landbeach, Cambridgeshire there have been nest boxes for swifts in the belfry since 2006, and swifts have nested there since 2013.



All Saints' church in Landbeach

By 2023, 22 of the nest boxes were occupied and four of the boxes contain cameras which have provided some very useful insights – most interestingly, any concerns that the swifts would be disturbed by sudden changes in light levels were unjustified – they appear to take no notice, and similarly, they take no notice of some very loud bell ringing!

Barbara Le Gallez, the Tower Captain at Landbeach told us...

'On the one hand, having the nest boxes in the windows slightly reduces the light and space available, and when we had sound control installed the panels had to be cut around the nest boxes, increasing the amount of work and therefore cost. But apart from that, they are no trouble, and really it is only a problem because our tower is so cramped anyway.

On the other hand, having the nest boxes does attract more interest in the church. We know the nest box installers, and we have worked together on items such as a TV camera in the belfry. Our church has realised it won't survive unless it is seen as a community resource, not just a religious building. So the plus point for ringers is that it keeps the church going as a place that people are interested in'.

There is some very useful and practical information about installing swift nest boxes in belfries to be found here:

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/guidelines-for-installing-swift-nest-boxes-in-church-belfries/>

The Action For Swifts website also provides practical tips and pictures from the nest box cameras.

<https://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/>



Perfecting Technique

Jeze Bowman, Barrow upon Soar

In the summer of 2023, our tower captain and his family who are all ringers left our village of Barrow upon Soar in Leicestershire for pastures new, leaving a significant dent in our Sunday morning band. I'm a churchwarden and had worked closely with this tower captain on the upkeep of the tower and had always done all I could to support the bell ringing activities.

So, as this became at risk, I reasoned that it would be a good time to learn a new skill and give it a try. The ringing master at Barrow, Andy Boston, decided to start a new learners' night and he had enlisted the help of Sally Brown, of the Leicester Diocesan Guild and a very experienced bell ringing teacher, to help.

So it was that we found ourselves on the Monday after Remembrance Sunday, having just removed the muffles from the previous day's ringing, starting our learning journey with backstrokes. There were five of us in total starting the journey and we have lost some and gained some along the way but here in April 2024 we have four ringers from that cohort, myself included, now moving on to plain hunting and ringing on Sunday mornings for service.

From the beginning, our teachers instilled in us that once the most basic capability to handle a bell was achieved, working on the correct style of ringing would be key to successfully ringing with others.

Experienced ringers perhaps don't feel that the motions of ringing a bell happen particularly quickly, but anyone new to the experience will find things seem to happen at lightning speed; no sooner is a backstroke pulled than a sally is immediately in front of your face needing to be caught, with pressure to not miss for concern about breaking a stay. This leads to a tendency to not pull through on backstrokes as you want your hands in the sally-catching zone! It lures you to abandon the backstroke pull early but that results in lost potential energy and a dropping, speeding bell.

When it all happens so quickly, as a new learner, it's hard to unpack where you are going wrong. Video becomes an interesting tool in learning as it enables two things:

- 🔔 the ability to watch the same thing over and over
- 🔔 the ability to slow the sequence right down and see what you are doing moment by moment

I was keen to collect these short videos at practice nights and, since I knew what I should be doing, even though I wasn't doing it, I could analyse my videos off-line and see what I needed to work on at the next practice. Eventually, you capture some video and think "that looks alright, I can't see what's wrong with what I'm doing" and at that point, you might feel tempted to post it on Facebook and declare yourself a bellringer!

There's always a way to improve and Facebook is full of very experienced ringers who will find something you can improve on.



Jeze and the eagle eye of the video lens

Psychologically, if you post a video with the intention of gathering feedback for self-improvement rather than one which is posted to say, "Look how well I'm doing", then the critical feedback doesn't hurt as it's what you were seeking. How would you get better at anything if someone didn't tell you what you were doing wrong and how to improve it?

In the most recent video I posted, I thought I was demonstrating good ringing style, but I opened it up for critique, nevertheless. Very quickly an experienced ringer noted that I was looking at the sally as I caught it (which I was for the first few blows, then didn't thereafter, so I clearly didn't need to) and that my hand-transfer could be quicker. Interestingly, that was the beginning of my development of a wandering right hand which I'm now working on correcting again, but it was great that it was spotted early so I could fix this before it became too embedded in my style. To get the best results, it's important to think about where you are posting videos of yourself ringing on social media.

Groups for bellringing learners such as "Learning the Ropes" are ideal, as they are followed by teachers and other learners, both of whom have valuable input. Posting in groups more dedicated to experienced ringers, or those that exist for the 'thicker-skinned' bell ringer might not achieve the results hoped for. In any case, the 'risk versus reward' is for each and every one of us to consider, but for me personally, sharing such videos has helped me and I hope others who also get to see how a new learner can improve their style and build on the advice of others.

My recommendation? Be brave; video, post and listen to the feedback!

Masterclass Inspiration

Rebecca Glazier, Cambridge

Having steadily achieved each level since beginning to ring in 2018, I was so proud to have attained my LtR Level five in 2022, soon after we came out of the many lockdowns, all of which is now a bit of a blur!

As a reward and in celebration of this, Stephanie Warboys invites ringers who have achieved LtR Level 5 each year to a Masterclass in Birmingham. I have just got back from an incredible weekend where 20 of us were supported by many excellent ringers who helped and guided us all day when we were ringing at different towers and particularly, ringing on higher numbers. We were generously hosted at the Premier Inn, mere walking distance from Birmingham's top towers – St Martin's, St Paul's, and St Phillip's.

Split into several groups, we spent the day stretching ourselves to practise the method that each individual was working on. We were evenly matched within our group, but overall the methods and abilities ranged

from Plain Bob Major to Surprise methods. Lunch was provided and eaten on the hoof, followed by another tower in the afternoon. Late afternoon found us back at St Martin's, where each of us had the opportunity to ring on 16 bells – rounds, call changes and jump changes. Then to the pub for dinner and well-deserved beers, and a debrief of the day. After a good night's sleep we had the opportunity to ring for service, then back to St Martin's to listen to the impressive ringing of 16 bells. Handbells were offered, as was a quarter peal in the afternoon, and I took the opportunity for both!

Phew! Jam-packed, inspiring, supportive, and great fun. I feel very fortunate to have participated in this.

One of the great things about the Learning the Ropes scheme is feeling supported throughout the whole learning process.



Ring on Heavy Bells Comes Full Circle

Deb Margason Baker, All Saints, Crondall, Hampshire

I started teaching using Learning the Ropes when eight learners, consisting of six children from the same family arrived at my tower. I had no clue what to do or what to say. I wanted to sound credible and not babble like an idiot! Thanks to the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) and the Learning the Ropes scheme (LrR) I have found my joy, and I love it!

I have two young ladies from that initial group who were 8 and 15 at the time. I spent two years away from the UK and when I returned two summers ago, I became the tower's first training officer, which I relish. My dedication was seriously tested last year as all our 'Ring for The King' recruits needed teaching!

Many of us might shy away from ringing the heavier bells 'round the back', myself included. However, I attended a fantastic workshop last year entitled 'Technique versus Strength' which aimed to show how a good underlying technique could help anyone ring heavier bells confidently. I took home the knowledge on how to develop my own heavy bell technique, and the confidence to inspire the same in my smaller framed fellow ringers, including the two young ladies Rebekah and Leona, I mentioned above.

In the workshop, run by Lesley Boyle, an ART Tutor based in Cambridgeshire, we were shown that it was OK to add body weight by dipping and bending the knees, thereby adding more downward force for pulling off or holding up and waiting. Lesley used a sports ergonomic phone app*, which turns you into a moving stick person and shows where you can improve movements, for example, extending your reach, bending your legs, or straightening backs. I loved it all. It gave me the confidence not only to ring more heavy bells myself, but also the commitment to teach my smaller framed ringers how to:

- 🔔 Ring on our back bells
- 🔔 Jump on any heavy bells before the others get there!
- 🔔 Ignore any unconscious bias like:

'Will you *really* be ok?'

'Are you *sure* you can do this?'

'Wouldn't you prefer a lighter bell?'

I must point out that this doesn't happen in my very supportive home tower of Crondall, where we all jump around the bells and allow anyone to safely give the heavy bells a go.

Soon our youngest ladies were regularly ringing at the back. I also encouraged our newer ringers to embrace it, and when we attended the District's annual visit to Guildford Cathedral, where the tenor weighs in at 30-1-6. Rebekah, Leona and I looked at each other and ran for the 10, 11 and 12. We then swapped around twice more before giving others a chance. It did the job. People noticed the biggest bells being rung by some of the smallest people.



Deb in action on Guildford's tenor

Fast forward to this year's ART Conference weekend in March 2024, when there was an option to ring on 10 or 12 at Coventry Cathedral, so I boldly signed up. Oh my goodness what an amazing opportunity it was to ring in such esteemed company! I watched Linda Garton ring the tenor and took notes. And yes, she dipped down bending her knees. I was given the 10 to ring, then towards the end I was offered the tenor to Grandsire Cinques. With knocking knees, I focused on everything I had learned...

- 🔔 Bend knees
- 🔔 Ring top to bottom
- 🔔 Follow through
- 🔔 Push the sally down into the ground
- 🔔 Straight arms
- 🔔 Flick the tail end down hard
- 🔔 Take the tail end in as you head to the front
- 🔔 Dip and bend to add energy into the rope as you go up to the back... AND REPEAT...



Dipping and bending round the back at Guildford Cathedral

I'll not lie, hearing 'that is all' was a relief to this old bird, but holy moly I did it! The lesson had turned full circle. So the annual trip to Guildford Cathedral came around. With a glance at each other, we three took hold again for the back bells and yes, we had to politely fend off the fellas kindly asking, 'If we needed help pulling off or maybe going to a lighter bell'. We showed the other smaller framed people that it could be done.

We must continue to show everyone how to ring heavier bells, that no matter what size you are, you should feel confident to give bigger bells a go. The message is that there should be no barriers to ringing anywhere in the circle, least of all because of a lack of self-belief! As teachers we have the ability to instil courage to try, impart the knowledge to apply, then smile in their efforts and joy. What a delight this teaching thing is. To close, my latest proud teacher moment is that Rebekah wants to become a teacher and has asked me to mentor her, and I know anyone she teaches will be given the confidence to ring anywhere.

The app Lesley used was called OnForm - check if there's a free trial on offer! <https://www.onform.com/>

United by Bellingring

Tom Doughty, Mansfield Woodhouse, Nottinghamshire

Among the diverse professional guilds dedicated to the art of bell ringing, the Guild of Police Ringers stands as a noteworthy institution. Established in 1931 in Leicester, it emerged from a gathering of police officers united by their passion for ringing.

The guild is driven by a dual purpose: fostering camaraderie within the police community while advancing the art of bell ringing. For me the great thing about being part of the Police Guild is the welcoming attitude of all the members regardless of experience, where everyone is happy to let you join in where possible. Following our ringing sessions, it's customary to gather for a pub lunch, where stories and experiences are shared, enriching both our friendships and our skills. Membership is extended to serving and retired police officers and staff, as well as their families.

If you have a police connection, why not get in touch?

Throughout the year, the Guild hosts three main events:

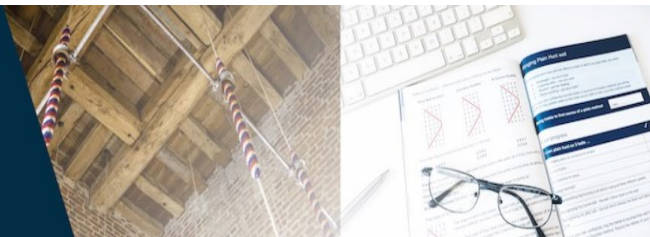
- A quarter peal day in March. The most recent day was held in London, and featured the ringing of four quarter peals.
- A spring weekend in May, offering members an enriching experience in the picturesque Cotswolds and Cheltenham area. It is an ideal occasion to explore new surroundings while enjoying the art of bell ringing.
- An Annual General Meeting which this year will be held in the scenic locale of North Bedfordshire. With a wealth of experience in both policing and bell ringing among our members, we are committed to supporting each other to progress. Following our ringing sessions, it's customary to gather for a convivial pub lunch, where stories and experiences are shared, enriching both our friendships and our skills.



The ART Shop Looks for Support

Andrew Slade, ART Chair

Can you help to support the ART Shop?



Since the ART shop was established, the team has striven to automate as much as possible of the financial 'back office' work involved. However, some straightforward financial work still needs to be done manually.

Anne Sladen has done this for a long time, and we are looking for a volunteer to work with her to both get an additional person involved and to provide cover for Anne.

Further information is available on our website: <https://bellringing.org/art-news/>

Ten Top Tips for Belfry Maintenance

Jonathan Frye, Dunblane

There is a whole world up there above our heads and keeping our bells fit for ringing is an essential task. Willing volunteers to help steeple keepers are always welcome and it is also something you can do to earn an award in the 50 Ringing Things Challenge. Jonathan Frye of the Scottish Association shares his top tips for some elementary bell maintenance.

If things seem more complicated there are always people to ask for advice – someone from a neighbouring tower, your local Guild or Association, the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers or any of the professional bell hangers.

1. Be Safe

Before entering the belfry make sure that all of the bells are down and that nobody can ring while you are in the bells. Always have two people present when doing maintenance. A head torch is an invaluable aid as it provides light while leaving your hands free to work.

2. Check the clappers swing freely

Pull the clapper towards the lip of the bell and then let go, the clapper should swing backwards and forwards. A perfect clapper would swing at least 10 times before stopping, if it swings less than three times before stopping then it needs attention.

3. Check Stays and Sliders

Inspect the stay for cracks, these are most likely to form where the stay meets the headstock. If the stay is cracked, then it should be replaced. Push the slider from one stop to the other to make sure that it slides freely without requiring too much force.

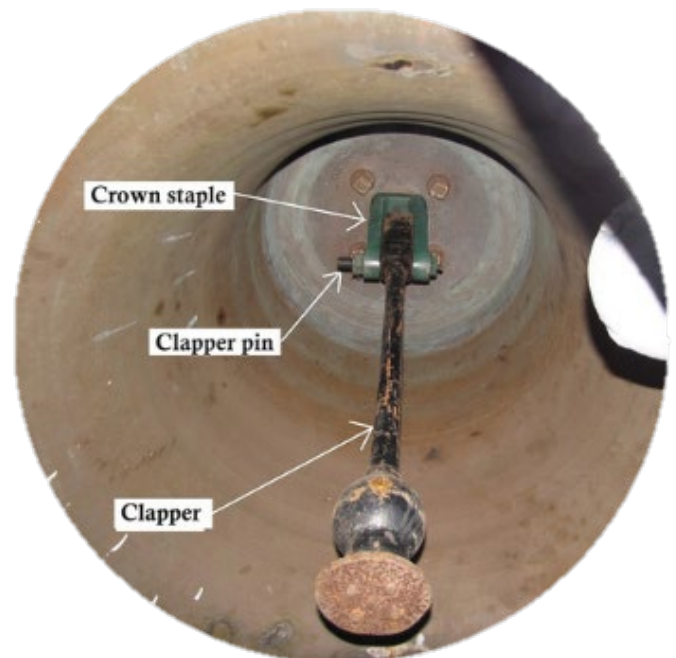
4. Check the pulley blocks

Hold the rope off the pulley wheel and give it a good spin. The wheel should spin freely for a while before stopping. While spinning it should look round, if it appears to be wobbling then it has worn unevenly.

5. Check clapper grease

The bearing on which the clapper swings needs to be greased once or twice a year. Normally there is a grease cap at the end of the pin which holds the clapper into the crown staple. Give this cap 2-3 turns clockwise and it will squeeze enough grease into the bearing. If the cap has turned as far as it can then it is empty. Unscrew it completely, fill it up with grease, then screw it back on with 2-3 turns.

Note that some clappers have got a nylon bush. These must not be greased. If there's no way to add grease, then it probably doesn't need doing.

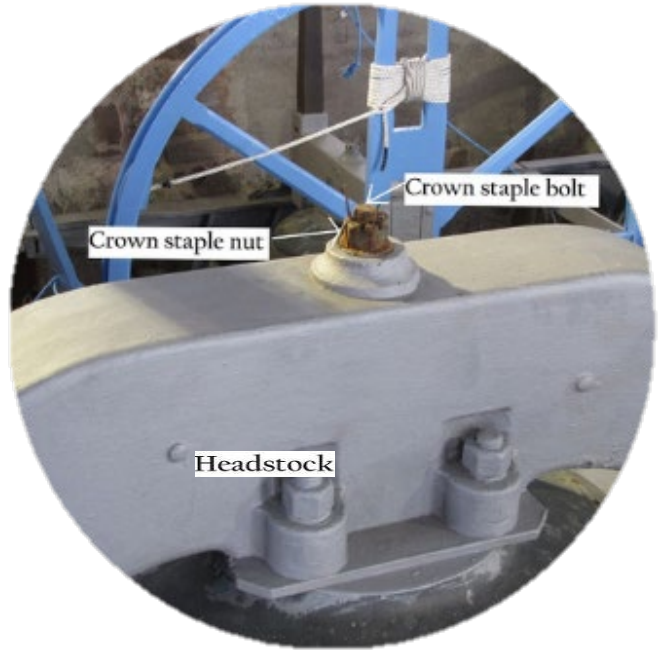


6. Check the crown staple is tight

Try and move the clapper by pushing it up towards the top of the bell and rotating it around. Have your helper watch the threaded crown staple bolt that comes up through the middle of the headstock – it shouldn't move at all. If there is any movement of it or the nut on top of the headstock then the nut needs to be tightened.

7. Check the clapper bush for wear

Position yourself in front of the clapper so that when swinging normally it would swing towards you and away from you. Try and move the clapper from side-to-side, it should move a little bit but not much. If it moves a lot, then the clapper bush (the bearing) is worn and that's what is allowing the side-to-side movement. It's hard to know how much movement is normal so get a more experienced steeple keeper to show you what normal clapper movement feels like and what a worn clapper feels like.



8. Check the ropes for wear

Check each of the ropes for any signs of wear. You're looking for any sections which are thinner, which look worn or have started to fray. The three key places for wear are where the tail-end hits the floor, where the rope goes through the pulley block and where the rope goes through the garter hole on the wheel.

9. Check the bearings

Look at the two main bearings where the headstock is attached to the frame. If you see a greasy or oily patch this could indicate a leak. Most modern bearings don't need any maintenance, so this is just an inspection.



10. Tidy Up

At the end of your session make sure to remove all tools from the bell chamber, check that there is nothing in the way of the bells swinging before switching off the lights and locking the door, and keep a record of what you did and when.

If you are interested in learning more about the maintenance of your bells do check with your local Guild/Association to see what courses they may be able to offer.

Puzzle Corner Solution

Rose Nightingale and De Tremain, ART Administrators

