

Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



Learning
the Ropes

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Tilda, who's shown sitting on a bell at St Peter Mancroft, Norwich, talks about ringing heavy bells on page 5.

In previous editions we have had an abundance of interesting articles about so many different topics of interest to new ringers but it has meant Tower Talk has just kept on expanding! As an online newsletter it is not always easy to dive into such a large document and 'saving it for later' might mean never... for this reason we have kept this edition a lot shorter and we would love to hear from you about what you want from Tower Talk. It's the only ringing publication dedicated to new ringers!

Good bell handling and technique is at the heart of every goal in the Learning the Ropes scheme, at every level. Spending time getting small movements right so that they become part of your muscle memory and won't let you down in challenging situations - such as ringing heavy bells as described on page 5 - is absolutely essential and is time well spent. For this reason we are focusing on handling tips and techniques in this edition, all of which you can investigate in more depth in ART's online resources at: <https://artonline.bellringing.org/>

Moving Round the Circle

Tilda Dowden, Norwich

I was first introduced to ringing by a friend who invited me to watch her ring at my home town of Bradford-on-Avon. I had been looking for an activity that would counteract my slouching posture from working at a computer all day, and was initially struck by how much the ringers had to fully stretch their bodies. My grandfather had also been a bellringer in Suffolk, so it seemed fitting to follow in his footsteps.

So in September 2023 I had an introductory lesson at St Giles in Norwich with Catherine Sturgess, who went on to teach me bell-handling skills and has continued to support me and many others through Learning the Ropes. I was immediately taken by ringing, particularly how it brought with it so many benefits: initially the physical challenge; then the intellectual strain of the number crunching; and not least the vibrant social side of the activity.



Tilda ringing the Tenor at Mancroft

"As I am still developing ropesight, I tend to ring by ear and so can fix my gaze at a spot on the carpet and drift off into a melodic trance, completely immersed in the sound of the bells and my place within them."

When I rang my first quarter peal covering to a doubles method, I was already hooked on ringing the tenor. Initially perhaps because I can be fundamentally lazy and couldn't really envisage myself ever having the concentration required to become a proficient method ringer. Over time however, I realised that there is something much more to ringing behind - it is incredibly meditative and soothing.

I have never found ringing lighter bells particularly easy. The only bell to ever make me cry was a treble, which I managed to ring down twice in quick succession one night at Colegate when I was overtired. I find smaller bells can be flighty and erratic compared to bigger bells. Big bells are consistent. Big bells are predictable. You know where you are with them and in my experience, they generally do what you ask them to do.

After my first quarter peal, I joined the monthly open ringing 12 bell session at Yarmouth Minster, as an opportunity to ring on heavier bells. I was encouraged to ring near the back, moving round a bell at a time until I rang the tenor (30cwt) in rounds.

"I got such a buzz from this session that from then on ringing big bells was all I really wanted to do, and I began to wonder how far I could progress."

The next heaviest bell in Norfolk (in fact in the whole of East Anglia) is the Mancroft tenor at 37cwt, but I was painfully aware that my chances of ringing there might be out of my reach. However, as my year's anniversary approached I wanted to do something to

mark the occasion, and I eventually plucked up the courage to ask! The manager of the Mancroft Ringing Centre, Nikki, made the arrangements for us to ring it one evening before the regular practice. Neither of my teachers had rung the bell before, either, as I found out that it is only in relatively recent times that women at Mancroft had rung round the back at all. They were both there on the night, which helped to boost my confidence and we all rang it, on our own and in rounds when the other ringers joined.

"That experience goes down as without doubt the most terrifying and exhilarating moment of my life."

Soon after this, I was invited by Catherine to an all-female 'ringing full circle' session at Mancroft. This was a brilliant opportunity to experience ringing all of the bells in rounds, with plenty of support and encouragement on hand. I met some incredibly inspiring women, who made ringing big bells seem easy and who created a relaxed and safe environment for everyone to feel able to push themselves out of their comfort zones.

Simply get on and have a go

In my experience, big bells are never as hard to ring as they might appear. If you are daunted by them, then my advice would be simply to get on and ring them, as many as you can and as often as you can. Ringing big bells isn't just about physical ability, you do also need to have the confidence to give it a go. I seem to have developed a certain degree of false bravado since ringing and have become quite unashamed at turning up at towers where I am clearly out of my depth and asking to ring bigger bells. The response I've found to be without exception welcoming and encouraging and I hear people remind me over and over that they have all been there too. I remember my friend who introduced me to bellringing saying that if I wanted to get anywhere as a ringer, then I would need to get used to feeling foolish and being shouted at - but fortunately I've experienced very little of that, although I have plenty of examples of overestimating my abilities and embarrassing myself by crashing around. To progress in ringing you have to master the art of being quick to let those moments go, and just brace yourself ready for the next time.



Progression will always be limited by staying in your comfort zone.

Don't be intimidated by bigger bells

I often remind myself that it is 'just a bell' and that as large as it is, there is also a proportionally large wheel to help to shift it. Making full use of this by allowing the rope to travel fully around the wheel in both directions does most of the hard work for you. Going up to see the bells has really helped me to understand the mechanics of what is going on and I often envisage what is happening above my head when I ring. Julia Cater's article on ringing bigger bells was pinned up on the noticeboard in my home tower, and watching her YouTube video on the subject also really helped with my technique, particularly watching the videos of people ringing in slow motion.



The majority of the effort that I put in is right at the top of the backstroke and always following through. The rest is fine tuning and getting a feel for when the bell is nearing the balance.

Look after your body

Although ringing bigger bells is down to technique rather than strength, it is safe to assume that it will result in improved upper body tone. A GP colleague of mine recently told me that research is currently being carried out into the correlation between women who develop dementia and having poor upper body strength, which has to be an incentive to get fit! Looking after your body is really important - it is the only tool you have. A massage will soon tell you which muscles you are overusing and taking care of your hands is a good idea too. Engaging your core will spare your joints. Ringing never fails to make me happy and is great for mental and physical health on so many levels. At the end of a long day at work, however tired I feel or cold it is outside, I know that if I go ringing I will come home buzzing and full of energy.



Looking after your body is really important - it is the only tool you have.

Tilda's support group

Catherine Sturgess, ART accredited teacher

For the first 35 years of my ringing career, I rarely ventured beyond the first four bells in a tower, no matter the weight. But since deciding to become a ringing teacher I have been much more open to giving new things a try and venturing outside of my comfort zone. This is both so that I can help the people that I'm teaching, but also because their bravery in giving things a go acts as an inspiration to me.

I usually start people off with handling lessons on one of the middle bells at the tower I teach at, which are in the 4 to 6 cwt range. Once they are reasonably confident at ringing these independently, I will give them the opportunity to contrast ringing the treble (3 cwt) with ringing the tenor (13cwt). At this stage, most people find the tenor easier to handle. The asymmetry of the handstroke and backstroke pulls for the treble can be tricky. The weight of the rope forms a much greater proportion of the whole on a lighter bell, so there is a tendency to either underpull the handstroke, with the bell not rising sufficiently at backstroke, or to overpull the backstroke, with the stay receiving a pounding at handstroke. The greater manoeuvrability of little bells tends to become more apparent once people start change ringing – and the advance planning required to strike bigger bells with any accuracy becomes more of an issue.

I started to teach Tilda to ring in 2023. I had attended a great session called 'Ringing Full Circle' at the Birmingham ART Conference run by Alison Edmonds and Julia Cater. This was a simple but very effective session which encouraged everyone to gradually work their way around the circle with rounds rung for just two minutes at a time, then moving on to the next bell until you found yourself standing on an enormous box waiting to pull off a very big bell. Inspired by this, I arranged a practice for a group of us (including Tilda, of course) to have a go at ringing all the bells at Mancroft (not just those in the front half of the circle) in a non-judgmental atmosphere. It was huge fun!



'Ringing Full Circle' comes to Norwich. Tilda is standing in the middle 4th from right, wearing the black top

Learning to ring in Norwich



I feel so fortunate to have started ringing in Norwich. There are so many opportunities on hand, with the MRDC offering supportive lessons on training bells, regular practices at the Norwich churches, opportunities stretching out in all directions at the many satellite churches in Norfolk, and not least all the people so willing to volunteer their time to teach. Far too many to name, but I am truly grateful to everyone who has supported me with patience and humour, and given up their time to contribute to the future of ringing.

Handling Heavy Bells

Jane Pridmore, Dorset

What constitutes a heavy bell?

In reality, it's any bell that has a heavier weight than that which you learnt on. I learnt in a tower with the tenor (of 10 bells) weighing 10 cwt, which means most bells for me are heavy! However, more specifically a heavy bell is anything over 16 cwt (812 kg). Ringing in Dorset, I feel well placed to provide some tips, because of our 123 towers 35 (28 %) of them come in the category of heavy. This is in contrast to eight light bells of 3 cwt (152 kg). This is not an unusual scenario; one of our local ringers learnt on a 25 cwt eight but on Sundays would go from those to another tower to ring an 8 cwt eight. Novice ringers benefit hugely from visiting towers and experiencing different weights.

Does bell weight have an influence on learning?

Teachers often start a learner on the lower end of weight, but the basic handling technique should be the same. Moving to heavier or lighter bells is no problem if you have a good underlying technique. So the main thing is to work on developing a good handling style, and avoid getting into 'sloppy' habits. Ringing skills require using arms, legs and core. Keep your back straight and tension in the rope, giving an even pull right through the stroke at backstroke. At handstroke stretch up high before pulling off and pull through with hands ending low. When catching the sally you may need to catch lower than you would on a lighter bell to take account of a larger wheel.

How do I pull a heavy bell off?

A 'lightweight' person, to get a heavy bell moving should stretch up high on the sally, then pull to get some purchase/movement so the bell is 'rocking/bouncing'.

The next step is to master controlling the swing and efficient handling by focusing on energy at the beginning of each stroke and acceleration when pulling through. Avoid over-pulling; as you need efficiency by putting in just enough energy to get backstroke right up so you are on tip-toes.

(Julia Cater gives some excellent advice and analysis in a YouTube video, referenced in Tilda's article)

Often you are standing on a box. For safety, make sure your toes do not hang over the edge. Ringing a 'heavy' bell is one of the targets in 50 Ringing Things. If doing this for the first time, ask an experienced ringer to stand by until you get used to it.

How do I ring methods?

When you get to ringing beyond rounds and call changes, turning in a heavy bell (even to plain hunting) means thinking ahead. Ringing down to lead is not a problem, but how do you change speed to get back up? As you are in seconds place (just before leading) at that backstroke pull hard, then on the lead handstroke do so again so that the backstroke goes up. Learning to move hands up and down the tail end is vital - [see Ker Chung!](#)

Lizzy ringing the tenor at Exeter (note the tip-toes!)



Learning the Ropes Achievements

Rose Nightingale

Between January and March 2025 the following certificates were awarded



Level 1
152



Level 2
89



Level 3
40



Level 4
24



Level 5
12

Congratulations to everyone!

Don't forget that when you achieve Level 5 you will be able to attend the **Learning the Ropes Masterclass** and can be nominated for a **Learning the Ropes Achievement Award**. Your invitation to take part in a future masterclass will pop into your inbox well before it takes place.

50/50 Club Draw News

Gill Hughes, Belper

The 50/50 Club supports the Association of Ringing Teachers in delivering training for teachers and ringers

It is a simple way of supporting the work of ART as well as having the chance to win a cash prize. All you have to do is join, pay the subscription of £12 per year (can also be £3 per quarter or £1 monthly) and your membership number will be entered into a quarterly draw. Over the year, half the money received goes to ART... and half is shared out in prizes by a draw of member numbers.

March prize winners

Rachel Milner

Roger Booth

Jan Tomlinson

Why not get your whole band to join?

Full details on how to join are at: <https://bellringing.org/donate-to-art/>

ART Goes West

Steve Vickars, Kirtlington



Skibereen, County Cork

As well as developing and maintaining the Learning the Ropes curriculum and logbooks for new ringers, the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) runs courses to enable ringers to acquire the skills they need to teach basic bell handling, foundation skills and change ringing.

These courses are delivered by a network of voluntary Tutors around the country. In January, ART Tutors Steve Vickars, Rebecca Odames and Claire Penny travelled to Cork, where they were going to run two courses in the area.

The story begins back in July 2024 when Diana Pitcher, the organiser of the West Cork Ringing Festival, contacted ART to see who would be interested in leading a teaching bell handling course in West Cork.

Diana explains that: “Mike Pomeroy, a Limerick ringer, originally from the UK, and a mainstay of Irish ringing for many years sadly died in 2003. He served as President and Ringing Master of the Irish Association and was a great friend and support to Irish ringing. He left a legacy to the West Cork Ringers to help train the teachers and we decided that running an ART Course would be a good start.”

New ART tutor Steve Vickars was interested in revisiting Ireland after 27 years and a dialogue got underway, with Rebecca and Claire joining in shortly afterwards. As plans developed, it was agreed to run two courses, one at Doneraile in North Cork, followed by another in West Cork the following day. As the three tutors were interested in staying for the West Cork Festival, to be held that weekend, they offered to run a number of ‘foundation sessions’ each lasting up to two hours, to give a taste of the exercises covered in the Foundation Skills course and also in Learning the Ropes Level 2. In the end, three foundation sessions were to be held, at Rosscarbery, Dunmanway and Skibereen, the most westerly change ringing tower in Europe.

On arriving in Rosscarbery, the tutors found the accommodation generously funded by the Irish Association, to be warm and comfortable, with homemade biscuits and granola provided by Rosemarie, one of the Doneraile delegates. We were certainly well looked after!

The first course at Doneraile involved a 2 hour drive by Rebecca and Steve up country to North Cork. Seven delegates attended, and spent the day practising the individual aspects of teaching handling.

Rebecca teaching the hand-ring exercise to Diana





Diana, who attended the course at Doneraile, gave this view: “It was a very long, very full-on day. I had no idea what to expect; whether I would enjoy the day or even be capable of being a useful participant. Steve and Rebecca were brilliant teachers, very knowledgeable, very clear and very helpful. My fears were allayed – it was a great day. As well as demonstrating the right or best way to go about things, they gave us many, many tricks and tips that will help us down the line. I’m very glad we were given booklets and leaflets detailing what we had been taught – there is no way I could have remembered it all.”

Next day, tutors Rebecca and Steve went to Dunmanway, nearer to Rosscarbery and the home of a recent 2017 installation of 8 light bells (but which feel rather more like ‘normal’ bells). The six delegates again responded well to the training.

Marja van Maanen, Tower Captain at Dunmanway said:

“Our tutors were Steve and Rebecca, and later Claire, were very kind, patient, inspiring but meticulous. It’s amazing how much is involved and how you can break down the skill of bell handling into component pieces. We learned every step in the process of teaching handling in the right order and were also given feedback on our own ringing styles and faults to bring it to perfection.

“We also learned that bad habits are hard to get rid of so it is better not pass them on...”

On Friday evening everyone attended the West Cork Festival kick-off event at Rosscarbery Cathedral, where the Dean of Rosscarbery welcomed the ringers and helpers. The West Cork Festival is a wonderful, supportive and relaxed event that is held annually at the beginning of February in the four towers around Rosscarbery to coincide with the recently established bank holiday. It is testament to its popularity that many ringers return each year from the UK and further afield to take part.

You can find out more about the West Cork Festival at:

<https://bellringingireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2025-West-Cork-Ringing-Weekend.pdf>

On Saturday Steve, Rebecca and Claire led two Foundation sessions, the first at Rosscarbery with help from experienced ringers including Matthew Higby, followed by the afternoon at Dunmanway. There was a brief period of doubt about whether the Dunmanway session would go ahead, as a clapper had sheared that morning. Thanks to swift action the clapper was repaired and refitted in time for the practice to go ahead on time. Very impressive work!

The practices introduced exercises to promote effective handling, listening, counting of places, striking and rope sight and were very well received by the local ringers.

At the end of the Dunmanway practice, the local band with a couple of helpers were able to ring a touch of Grandsire Doubles, which served as good preparation for their successful quarter peal of Grandsire the next day, with three first quarter peals for the Kingston family and first inside and conducted by Cliff (see <https://bellboard.uk/view.php?id=1818788>). Many congratulations to all in the band!

The weekend continued at pace, with an informal striking competition and dinner at Skibbereen on Saturday night, service ringing at the five towers and further afield on Sunday morning and an extended period of ringing before evensong at St Finn Barres Cathedral, Cork.

On the final day, Claire and Steve led the third Foundation practice at Skibbereen, where the students were interested in improving their listening and striking and enjoyed the Mexican Wave and jump change exercises.

Claire and Steve also managed to ring at Bandon tower for about 40 minutes, helping the local band and helpers practise plain hunt, Grandsire Doubles, Plain Bob Minor and Stedman Doubles, before catching their evening flight to Bristol.

A full-on, action-packed but fun weekend. We won't forget the very warm welcome offered, the very positive response by the local ringers and the many friends we made.

If you are ever in Cork, do get in touch with the local ringers as they would be very pleased to hear from you!



The sheared clapper of Dunmanway



The intrepid Tutors - Rebecca, Claire and Steve

What Makes a Good Teacher?

Debbie Chard, Learning the Ropes Ringer

What sort of teachers do adult learners respond to?

As adults, when we embark on our bell ringing journey, it soon becomes clear to us that we won't get anywhere without the support of a teacher. Echoes of school ring out! What if we don't have a good teacher? What if I can't learn from them? So, what sort of teachers do adult learners respond to? Of course, we know that all our teachers are brilliant, but we wanted to hear from our learners on the subject, so we asked around various different groups. This is what they said.

"My teacher is quite creative and makes every lesson interesting. We don't just chug on doing the same stuff. Sometimes, we turn up and the handbells are out; other times, we draw number cards for bells so I can end up ringing much heavier bells than usual. I remember one time when our teacher had composed a new method to reflect the different abilities of our learning group. I always leave the session feeling like I have tried something new and made progress."

"It is important to me to have a teacher who praises and encourages. I will always try my best, but sometimes, I have an off day and am not that good. My teacher has the knack of picking up on this, so will set the bar a bit lower, and still let me feel that I have consolidated my learning even if I haven't done anything new."

"I have a very cheerful and happy teacher who seems to have as good a time as me! After all, ringing is a hobby, so I want to enjoy myself. As learners, we obviously take the act of ringing seriously, but our teacher is great fun, and that really sets an amazing vibe for the sessions where we feel relaxed and not judged. We laugh as we learn – the best way!"

"I respond well to the fact that my teacher tries to ease us out of our comfort zones, and encourages new experience, whether it be attending a course, ringing on bigger rings, going on open days, even attending social events. It has had the effect of broadening my ringing experience and helped to establish me as part of the local 'ringing scene' so I now feel more confident to go out and about. This means that when I hit the inevitable plateaus in learning, at least I know that I can gain valuable experience away from 'home'".



Reviewing progress after a successful lesson

What makes a student rewarding to teach?

We always like two sides to a discussion, so we asked some of our Tower Captains and ART teachers what makes a student rewarding to teach. No surprise that the younger the learner, the easier it is, as youngsters tend to have sharper hand, eye and ear coordination, and of course they are used to being taught. But that aside, youngsters are typically more carefree and less self-conscious, eager to show their delight when making progress, and this makes teaching much easier, whatever the age of the student!

Patience and resilience are definitely appreciated by teachers, especially when students realise that they can't master bell ringing in a few weeks! One of the ART teachers summed it up rather well:

"We need our students to be patient with the learning process and open to feedback and guidance, willing to follow instructions and be receptive to new techniques. Overthinking and frustration tend to hinder the learning process. We love it when students stay keen and motivated, especially at times when progress may feel a bit slow."

It's not always plain sailing though, for either the student or the teacher. Not making much progress, or hitting a barrier to progress - 'just not getting something' can all make for difficult situations. The key here is trust on both sides. Keeping up regular communication, always making the student feel that the teacher is acting in their best interests, and sharing their plans for progress can all help with these more challenging situations.

Another teacher added: "A happy and relaxed learner is a real bonus, so no tense shoulders please!"



Celebrating success

Which students give the most joy to teach?

One of our ART teachers chose to answer a slightly different question, "Which students give the most joy to teach?", so we polled that question too. Universally, the answers were "the most enthusiastic", "the people who are attentive", "those who try hard", "those who care about listening skills as much as handling". So now we know! For those amongst us who aren't always the speediest to make progress, be reassured that "even the most difficult to teach can give the most satisfaction, as together we find different ways to explain and experiment, to meet their learning style and overcome problems and achieve together".

Well, that's a relief!

50 Ringing Things



Sometimes the learning process is not always a straightforward linear one and so to enable ringing experiences to expand sideways instead of just forward, ART has developed a great way of introducing different aspects of ringing through its Fifty Ringing Things Challenge. This is a great way to improve your ringing and find out about the many varied aspects of ringing and its culture. You will meet lots of new ringers, some still in the early stages of learning like you, and some very experienced who'll be delighted to help. You'll find out what ticks your ringing boxes, which will set you up for a lifetime of ringing enjoyment.

To start collecting, buy your 50 Ringing Things book from the ART Shop at:
<https://shop.bellringing.org/books/13-50-ringing-things.html>

Handling Tip - Taking in Rope, or **KER-CHUNG!**

The ART Team

To be able to control a bell accurately in changes you need to be able to adjust the position of your hands on the tail end. It may only be a very small adjustment to counter any slippage, or it may be a larger movement to allow for accurate changes in speed - particularly when going from slow ringing to faster in hunting, or when manoeuvring a larger bell.

This essential skill needs to be practised early on because it enables more accurate bell control and therefore more accurate striking. Good habits need to start early, which is why it is part of the Learning the Ropes Level 1 curriculum. It takes practice though, to build skills and confidence.

So how do you take in rope?

To describe these movements we will talk about 'top hand', which is the hand which is transferred from sally to tail end and 'bottom hand' which is the hand which holds the tail end.

The first important thing to understand is when the rope is taken up (or shortened). It starts at the end of the **handstroke** (not at backstroke as is often said) so that both hands are correctly holding the rope before it rises at backstroke.

As your hands are released from the sally and join the tail end, the top hand joins the tail end just a short distance above the bottom hand which then quickly moves up to lie directly below the top hand. This must be achieved before the rope rises for the backstroke and is a very quick and slick movement. Here's where Ker-Chung! comes in, in case you were wondering! As your hands leave the sally, give yourself a verbal prompt, like 'Ker-Chung'! Your top hand joins the tail end on the 'ker' and the bottom hand moves up on the 'chung'. This gives you an idea of how quickly you have to move. Give it a go!

The images show the two different stages of this movement:

First, the top hand joins the tail end after leaving the sally above the bottom hand.

Then the bottom hand moves up to join top hand before rope rises.

A variation of the **hand transfer exercise** can be adapted to carry out this manoeuvre. This is well worth practising early on to prevent the tail end being gripped too tightly, making it difficult for the bottom hand to move up the rope whilst ringing. As with many things in ringing, sometimes you have to learn to do something which seems counter-intuitive, and holding the tail end with a light touch rather than a tight grip is one of these things!

As you practise this movement, watch out for:

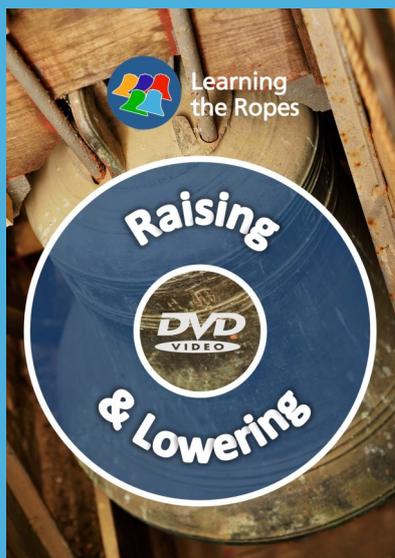
- Your top hand arriving on the tail end too late after the handstroke. It's too late if your rope is already going upwards.
- Your hands being too far apart on the tail end.
- Your tail end hand (or bottom hand) not working equally with the other hand on the handstroke, in other words, coming off the sally too soon.



KER-



CHUNG



Taking in rope forms part of the LtR Level 1 curriculum, but you will continue to work on this beyond Level 1. Focus on this technique at the first stage of lowering a bell when you still have two hands on the sally.

- Ask someone with good observation - it doesn't have to be your teacher - to spend ten or fifteen minutes watching what you are doing and ask them to make comments.
- Ask a fellow ringer to video you on your phone. If you have slow motion capability on your phone so much the better as everything happens quickly!
- Mirror someone else taking in rope. You might need to have silenced bells for this or only do it for very short periods of time!

The *Bell Handling and Raising & Lowering* DVDs contain several exercises to help you improve. The shop can be found at: <https://shop.bellringing.org/>

Norfolk Young Ringers

David Carter

Wednesday afternoons have become a fixture in the diaries of the young ringers receiving their Learning the Ropes certificates. Learning to handle at The Mancroft Ringing Discovery Centre, moving through to rounds then kaleidoscope exercises, Plain Hunt and Plain Bob Doubles, our young ringers have plenty of success to celebrate.

Sessions are focused on individual progression, working and progressing as a team and having a lot of fun. Two teams were entered into the RWNYS striking competition 2024, and we are looking forward to our trip to Birmingham in July. As well as regular practices, we have enjoyed outings during 'Summer School' in the school holidays.



“

Look out for a whole lot more LtR certificates heading towards Norfolk soon!

Brushford Surprise

David Martyn, West Somerset

I first learnt to ring in the early 1980's in West Somerset at Dulverton at the tender age of 13. The Tower Captain at the time (Ms Paddy Tuckett) used to sing in the church choir I belonged to. She was great fun and recruited both me and my older sister to join the ringing team. I also occasionally rang at Brushford where I grew up, and several decades later, Brushford is where I am undertaking the Learning the Ropes scheme.

Back in the 1980's, we rang mostly call changes and plain hunt on 5, and occasionally a plain course of Bob Minimus. This was my zenith at the time. We were all novices apart from our Captain Paddy who was very patient with us. Paddy's regular joke was that we were very good at ringing "Dulverton Surprise" when we went awry with our striking! Despite that, I do recall that we entered a Striking Competition, and I remember being very impressed with the Dunster Branch practices when they rang methods. I wanted to be able to do the same, some day.

University and a busy working life meant that I stopped ringing and I didn't touch a rope for years. But now, in my mid 50's, I am trying out retirement. I live in London, but spend every other week back in West Somerset at Brushford. With more time on my hands, I decided to reacquaint myself with bellringing.

In November 2024, I joined the practice at Greenwich in London. The team were very welcoming. I was re-initiated by raising a bell. Muscle-memory kicked in, with the Captain noting that I had: "picked it up very well" - after a few decades gap! At Greenwich I am getting the chance to cover to methods and have recently attempted trebling to Bob Doubles.

I have also returned to my West Somerset roots and have joined the ringing team at Brushford. There I was pleased to meet again my now LtR Tutor, Jude Atkins. Back in the 1980's, I had a Saturday job in Dulverton at the same place Jude worked. It was great to be able to ring again with a familiar face.

I am happy to be joining the formal LtR scheme to progress my ringing. The local Association Branch is also very helpful, with regular improver practices in West Somerset that I can join. I acquired some bad handling habits, back in the 80s when learning was more informal, that I am getting to work on now.



A few words on what I enjoy about ringing

The musicality of it. Good striking is a team effort that is a joy when it works.

The mathematical pattern and elegance of change ringing (even though I can't do much of it yet!)

The history of the bells. It's a head-spin to think that I am ringing bells that are hundreds of years old. The oldest I have rung is the 7th at Dulverton (c. 1499) which is a delight to ring. I was told that in the 1980's this bell was re-cycled from Barlynch Priory which is 1.2 miles from Dulverton and dissolved in 1537 (now in ruins). I can't vouch if this is correct or not, but I like to think it is.

The fact that generations before me have sounded these bells in the same way as I am (the previous generations at Dulverton and Brushford I knew personally, are no longer with us). The continuity is heartening. It's a challenge to note the achievements of previous ringers commemorated on the peal boards, and I like to think that these bells will continue to be rung for many more hundreds of years. I feel I am doing my bit to keep this continuity going and I look forward to learning new skills. Maybe with a bit of 'Brushford Surprise' thrown in on the way.

Returning Ringer, New Teacher

Anne Markwick, Dulverton

I learned to ring at St Bartholomew's Church, Horley, Surrey, back in the 1970's when I was 16. My friend said that if we went bell ringing it would be a good way to meet boys (turns out it wasn't). I remember having to stand on a box and being given some instruction but I never progressed to Sunday morning ringing and my ringing career at that time was a short one.

I didn't honestly give ringing any further thought until we moved to Dulverton, Somerset in August 2016. While chatting to my neighbour, Jim, we discovered we both had connections to Horley before announcing he was off to the tower where he was the Tower Captain. It was inevitable that after telling him I had learnt to ring as a teenager he would invite me to come and have a go. I went and tried a few backstrokes and it all came flooding back; the atmosphere in the tower, the ropes, the smells and the whole ringing experience.

I wasn't confident enough to begin ringing independently and I asked to be treated as a complete novice because that's what I was. I thoroughly enjoyed learning with Jude Atkins, herself a new teacher, and eventually became competent enough to join the Sunday band and I eventually took over as Tower Captain.

I still feel a bit of an imposter as Tower Captain, but the band are very supportive, and we have a lot of fun. I had vowed never to teach the physical side of ringing because it made me too nervous. I was keen, though, for our learners to use Learning the Ropes, so eventually I felt that my time had come.

I took a deep breath and signed up for a taster day, where I experienced the very thing that I had feared. I was in front of a learner, and they lost control of the rope. I was tempted to leave there and then. But with the gentle and encouraging support of the teacher, Jill Hansford and my supervisor for the day I gradually regained my confidence and learned some of the techniques of teaching bell handling that help us to keep everyone safe. I went on to successfully complete the teaching course. Throughout these experiences I have had fantastic support from our local teaching mentors Jan Swan and Susan Mew and my assessor Jill Hansford, as well as the course tutor Les Boyce.

I have been lucky enough to recruit a further two and a current cohort of three new learners. I love teaching new ringers and seeing them progress and gain confidence. Claire Partridge, Deputy Tower Captain, also one of Jude's first cohort, is also on her ART teaching journey and we support each other and our learners together.

Fancy giving teaching a go?



Have you enjoyed progressing through the LtR scheme, like the Dulverton ringers pictured left? Would you like to help teach people in your tower?

Even if you don't yet feel comfortable teaching bell handling you can help people move on from rounds towards plain hunting and method ringing. ART run courses aimed at you!

Module 2F is about teaching the foundation skills - rhythm, ropesight, listening - and using fun games and kaleidoscope exercises to keep everyone moving forward and engaged.

Find out more at: <https://bellringing.org/about-teaching/teaching-modules/foundation-skills/>

Call Change Puzzle

Rose Nightingale

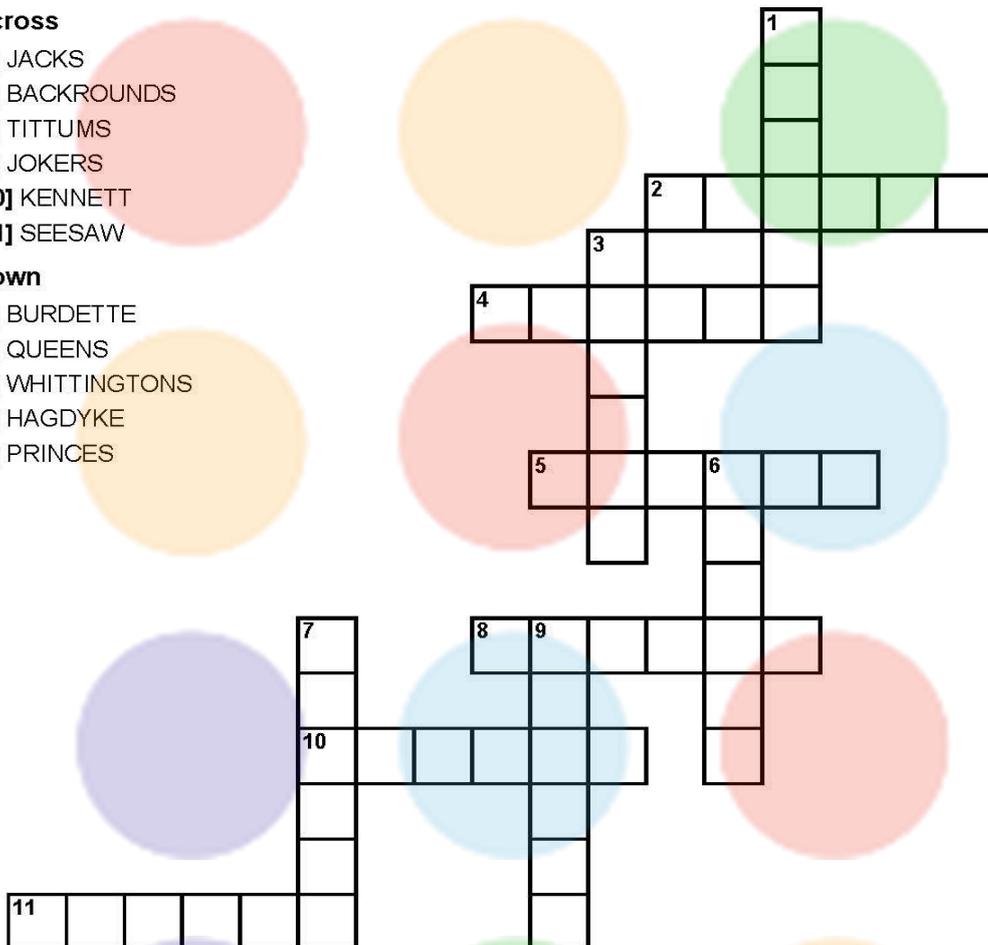
Complete the numbers for all the named changes

Across

- [2] JACKS
- [4] BACKGROUNDS
- [5] TITTUMS
- [8] JOKERS
- [10] KENNETT
- [11] SEESAW

Down

- [1] BURDETTE
- [3] QUEENS
- [6] WHITTINGTONS
- [7] HAGDYKE
- [9] PRINCES



Solution on page 19

Getting the Balance Right

ART Admin Team

Gaining confidence at the balance on both handstroke and backstroke takes time and practice, but it is an essential skill which underpins all ringing, as it is here that we are able to control our timing and therefore be able to achieve accurate striking.

First of all, what is happening at the balance?

It is when there is enough force exerted to swing the bell high enough so that it slows down almost completely at the top of its swing before changing direction and swinging the other way. To know if this is what is happening it's important to remember it's your rope which gives you this feedback and so you need to tune into how it feels.

If there is too much uncontrolled force the bell will go beyond the balance and hit the stay, not enough and you will experience the unnerving sensation of a floppy rope with nothing to pull on.

In Level 1 of Learning the Ropes you have to be able to set the bell ten times consecutively at handstroke and ten times at backstroke. It's great to start off a practice with this as a fun challenge for everyone. Not managing to do this is not wrong or a failure at all. Just think of it as essential practise. Your goal is to get to a stage where you can set your bell any time without thinking, 'that was lucky!'

The next stage is to be able to hold your bell on the balance for a period of - for example, five seconds. Again the goal is to be able to do this predictably without that 'will I or won't I? feeling'.



A poem by George Potter of Cranford St George

*"I say", said the stay, "That was an 'ouch' bounce!
They need to reduce the pull by an ounce.
But how are they, down below, to assess,
How hard to pull, (it's more a caress).
The sally shoots up, it is quite a scare,
But then it slows as the top becomes near.
Then, if they sense the speed is too slow,
The bell, perhaps, will say "Down I go!"
Too late then to delay its next descent,
The energy needed already is spent.
Worry, they do, what to do next,
(Not surprising they all get a bit vexed).
'Cos what they must do, is to help its downfall,
Then its return will be no trouble at all!"
Oh why is the 'balance' so hard to find?
Why does the bell have its own mind?
Why do I follow this bellringing chore?
Because life without challenge would be a bore!*

Exploring the balance

- Lift the bell off the stay when it is set and allowing to rest back on it again.
- Ring only one stroke, with your teacher ringing the other using subtly different amounts of force. This will help you to interpret what the rope is telling you.
- Try 'Whole Pull and Hover' instead of 'Whole Pull and Stand' - not allowing the bell to rest on the stay!

Wow! Peregrine!

Lynne Lambert, Buckinghamshire Owl and Raptor Group

... is the response most likely heard when this lightning-fast, powerful bird is spotted.

Some ringers will already be lucky enough to have nesting Peregrine Falcons on their towers and the presence of these impressive raptors can certainly help keep the local pigeons from nesting in our louvres... but with an increased interest in live streaming nest-cams during the nesting season and lots of churches joining in with the nationwide trend, churches may be able to help further by collaborating with local bird or raptor groups and installing nesting platforms on the sheltered side of a tower, we can help create an ideal area for Peregrines to start a brood.

Peregrines don't appear to mind the sound of bells ringing at all, but they can be sensitive to human voices, so going up to the roof or talking in the belfry during maintenance can spook them. They can also dislike flags or bunting moving erratically, church fire alarms being tested, illuminated towers, drones flying nearby or people walking around on the church roof. Birds new to an area may well abandon a nest if they become frightened by anything like this.



Peregrines are a type of falcon like a kestrel but much bigger and greyer. The female is bigger than the male and can weigh up to a kilo. They do not hover like a kestrel who is hunting for food on the ground but circle high up in the sky or sit on a vantage point and watch for potential prey from a cliff or a pylon or perhaps a church spire. They fly after their prey, then climb above to stoop with wings folded back and can reach a speed of 200 mph as they hit their prey from behind with talons outstretched.

Returning from the brink of extinction in the 70's from the effects of toxic pesticides, peregrines are recovering in numbers and are increasingly seen in towns and cities. They can live in a variety of habitats and tall buildings can provide ideal locations for a peregrine to nest. They will lay their eggs in a scrape in soil or gravel on a ledge high up on a cliff face or on the roof of a high building, safe from ground predators. Old church spires and towers provide suitable nesting sites for Peregrines. A pair will take up residence in the winter and in early spring will start spectacular flight displays to impress their mate. From late Spring the female lays their clutch of 3-5 eggs over a week and the pair will share the incubating for the

next 4 weeks until the tiny white downy chicks hatch. There are many places that now have installed cameras so we can watch their progress and until the chicks finally leave the nest in July it is a fascinating and addictive watch!

Peregrines are Schedule 1 birds which means their nest sites have the highest level of protection and it is illegal to disturb them. Despite this they suffer from persecution and egg theft and disturbance, and now new threats from drone disturbance can cause them to desert their nest. The nest cams are put in place well before the peregrines start to nest and offer protection as well as interest and entertainment for the thousands of watchers. Many of the chicks are colour-ringed to help track and learn more about the movements and life history of individuals which has led to some fascinating insights.

Northern European Peregrines migrate south during the winter but in the warmer UK only the young birds or birds that have been ousted from a territory move far, birds that have a territory stay on it all year round.

This website contains an up to date list of current cameras:

<https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/latest-news/updated-cathedral-peregrine-webcams/>



At the end of March this year Worcester, Norwich, St. Albans and Salisbury Cathedrals all had birds already on eggs and webcams were also operating at Wakefield, Chichester, Derby, Leicester and Winchester. Last year the 24 hour livestream at Worcester received nearly 500,000 views from across the globe! There are many other webcams run by wildlife trusts across the country, just google Peregrine Webcam and take your pick, but make sure you don't have anything else important to do - it's highly addictive!

Has your church got Peregrines, or a suitable roof to mount a platform? If you do notice you have Peregrines, please contact a local bird group who should have a licensed person who can go up and ring the chicks before they fledge. This is not a legal requirement, but can be useful for records, conservation and future protection of nesting sites.

Call Change Puzzle - Solution

Rose Nightingale

