

Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



Learning
the Ropes™

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Editor

Ruth Suggett towertalk@learningtheropes.org

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Wedding ringers enjoying simple pleasures at Puddletown, Dorset during the pre-Covid era in 2019

Lesley Belcher, the chair of ART, writes:

The government has published its roadmap out of lockdown and a third of the UK population have now been vaccinated. That means that we could well be starting to ring again in the UK. Soon. I have a spring in my step again and I'm not the only one. This learn-to-ring enquiry landed in my inbox over the weekend:

"With the lockdown hopefully ending soon I feel a new lease of life, and what better way to celebrate than with the sound of bells! I would like to find somewhere in London I can go to ring bells and express my joy to be alive. Is there any way you could arrange this?"

So, it's not only us who've missed the bells. The absence of ringing has made churches and communities realise how much the sound of bells is part of the local and national landscape. Absence truly has made the heart grow fonder.

Continued on page 2...

ART Awards - the Winners

Lesley Belcher and the editorial team

Lesley Belcher, the Chair of ART, writes:

This edition of Tower Talk is packed with stories and tips about carrying on ringing when we can't physically ring together - handbells, Ringing Room, Ding, 50 Ringing Things - and a desire not to stop doing them when ringing resumes.

The ringing world has opened up. You can ring anything, with anyone, anywhere in the world now.

The people who made this happen were recognised in last week's ART Awards. And what an outpouring of thanks went out on social media after the event. I add my own. Thank you Bryn and Leland (Ringing Room), Laura Goodin, Graham John (Handbell Stadium), David Norman (Ding), and the eBell Team. I know online ringing isn't for everyone, but these people have kept so many ringers sane and happy, in such difficult times. Amazing people, ringers.

Ruth Suggett, the Editor, writes:

The presentation of the ART Awards at a virtual ceremony on Saturday 6 March gave the whole world of ringing a much-needed boost and a great chance to celebrate all the many good things which have happened in a year of no ringing. Many of the articles in this edition of Tower Talk were written by award winners or nominees, and every one of them has done something amazing.

Tower Talk will be highlighting their work in future editions.

For more details of the awards, see <https://ringingteachers.org/recognition/awards>



ART AWARDS 2021

The Sarah Beacham Youth Award

Winners: Elizabeth College and the Kildwick Mini-ringers

The ART Award in the Development of Technology in Teaching

Winner: Bryn Marie Reinstadler and Leland Paul Kusmer (Ringing Room)

Runners Up: Simon Gay, Tim Hart, Graham John and Ben Johnson (The eBells Group) and Graham John (Handbell Stadium)

Highly Commended: David Norman and Giles Wood (Ding)

The ART Award for Excellence in Recruitment or Retention

Winner: Laura Goodin

Highly Commended: Sonia Field, Tom Hinks and Catherine Sturgess

The ART Award for Inspiring Leadership in Ringing

Winners: Ruth Marshall and St Martin's Guild

Highly Commended: David Thomas

Learning the Ropes Achievement Award

Winner: Donny Brock

Learning the Ropes Contribution Award

Winners: Jayden Newton, Joseph Blake and Mary Jones



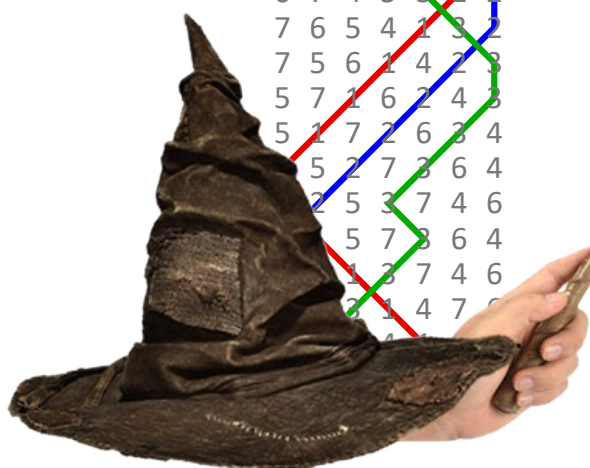
Can Online Practices Improve our Ringing?

Micki Nadal, Stockbridge and Kings Somborne, Hampshire

As I write, the Winchester & Portsmouth Guild has now offered three fortnightly online practices via Zoom and Ringing Room and, after a couple of teething problems, have now settled down to a good rhythm. The 50 or so attendees are split into four groups:

- Beginners unfamiliar with Ringing Room learn the basics and then concentrate on rounds and plain hunting,
- Group 2 concentrate on plain courses of doubles and minor methods,
- Group 3 ring touches of doubles, minor and triples methods and can choose to call a touch themselves – whilst the Big Beasts of...
- Group 4 generally tackle surprise methods.

The Winchester & Portsmouth's secret sorting device?



You're not stuck in one group and can move into another as you progress, or if you'd like to push yourself a bit further. Of course, none of this happens without our fixer-in-chief Roger Booth, who is the ringing equivalent of the Hogwarts School Sorting Hat and magically divides us according to our wishes and abilities. We also rely completely on the generosity of those leading the groups, who give up their time to help us improve our skills and make sure everyone gets equal ringing time.

Attendee Trisha tells me: *"The sessions I attended have been excellent. Participants are organised into groups at appropriate levels, so there are not too many in any one group and there is something for everyone. It is important to be on time to get the details for your group, and that goes best if people have signed up in advance. All good fun."*

Trisha is right; this is a fun way to learn and has also given us the chance to meet fellow Guild ringers from outside our own Districts. We're not annoying the neighbours and we can immediately stop, pause, reflect and try again. Even counting places is enjoyable!

I know prophets of doom will argue that it's nothing like 'real ringing' (we know that, we're not stupid!) and that these skills are not transferable. Well, I'm somewhat more optimistic – I'm learning to be a better method ringer, counting places all the time and (I hope) producing even, rhythmic ringing. If it takes a little more work to use ropesight too, in the tower, well I think that will be balanced by my increased knowledge of methods and how they are linked to each other, especially work at bobs and singles, and an increased confidence in calling touches, as I can see and understand more of what the other working bells are doing at a call.

Another attendee Sue said: *"I've really enjoyed being pushed to the limit in surprise methods that I rarely get the chance to practise, and feel I'm improving all the time."* This is so true; at many rural towers the opportunities to find sufficient people to ring more challenging methods are small; we rely on carefully planned District practices. Guild online practices have brought more of us together to ring, not only at our comfort levels, but at our aspirational levels.

A final quote from attendee Jane, who wrote: *'Many thanks for the practice this Saturday. Can I just say how impressed I was with all the breakout rooms and enthusiasm of all? The session really helped William with his Reverse Canterbury and confidence, so please convey our thanks to the Team Leaders running the session.'*

So my answer to this article's headline is a resounding 'Yes' and to ask you to encourage your guilds and districts to set up something for you. Online ringing is a great resource now and still will be when we're back in our towers!

Ringling Room One Year On

Leland Kusmer and Bryn Reinstadler, Massachusetts

A year ago, on 29 March 2020, we were sitting in our living room with our laptops, looking at the very yellow background of the very first version of Ringing Room which we had come up with.

The interface was buggy, the sallies were backwards, and the user names had to be re-typed every time you entered a room. There was only one server and it was located in New York. That night, we rang a quarter peal of Kent Treble Bob Major with some fellow Massachusetts ringers and sent it up to BellBoard as the first quarter peal rung on the platform.

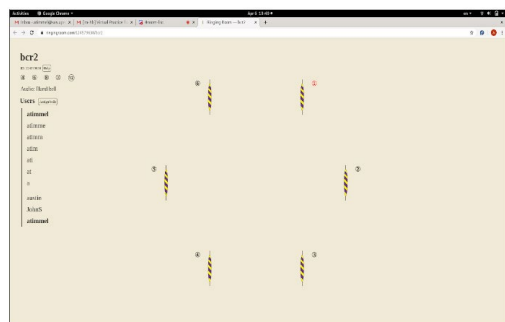
Ringling room timeline 2020

- March 19: Work on Ringing Room begins
- March 29: First QP
<https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1345187>
- April 10: Ringing World article announcing Ringing Room
- May 24: First transatlantic quarter peal
<https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1364936>
- May 30: BBC interview airs
- July 2: First peal
<https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1401409>
- November 6: Half-muffled feature added, for Remembrance Day
- December 11: Tower Augmentation! (5, 14, 16)
- December 17: Carol tune sheets added to Ringing Room

Just weeks before, the world had been plunged into lockdown due to the coronavirus crisis. Bryn's last day at the office was on 11 March; by the time of the 3 April 2020 issue of *The Ringing World*, Will Bosworth's column, *What's Hot on BellBoard?*, featured only performances by single-surname bands. Those first few weeks were vaguely surreal, punctuated by sadness at the rapidly diminishing number of commitments in our diaries as it became clear that much-anticipated peal weekends and quarter peal afternoons would be impossible. Ringing Room was born from our desire to keep ringing with our local band, and many of our early discussions about the platform assumed that it would be essentially a platform for ringing longer performances with our friends.

We could not have been more surprised (and delighted!) when bands of all stripes began using Ringing Room for everything from practice night touches to Christmas carols.

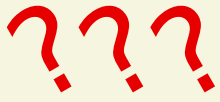
One year on, we've come a long way. The interface is not (very) buggy, the sallies have been put the right way round, and the usernames persist across sessions. There are now a total of four public servers: the main one was relocated from New York to London, and is supplemented by an additional server there to help keep the bells 'moving' during peak hours; there are separate servers in New York and in Singapore. Around 5,000 ringers have used the platform in the last month, and there have been well over 1,000 quarter peals rung since we posted that first one nearly a year ago!



A screen from an early version of Ringing Room

Many bands are using Ringing Room in conjunction with other software to keep the much-valued social side of ringing alive. But even more amazing and unexpected to us is how many inspiring stories we've heard about new learners — some who had started just before lockdown and others who have never touched a bell rope before — who have progressed greatly on the platform we built.

The community's enthusiasm for online ringing has been a bright spot for both of us in this difficult year, and we're excited to see how ringers continue to use the platform in creative and exciting ways even well after we can all return to our physical towers again.

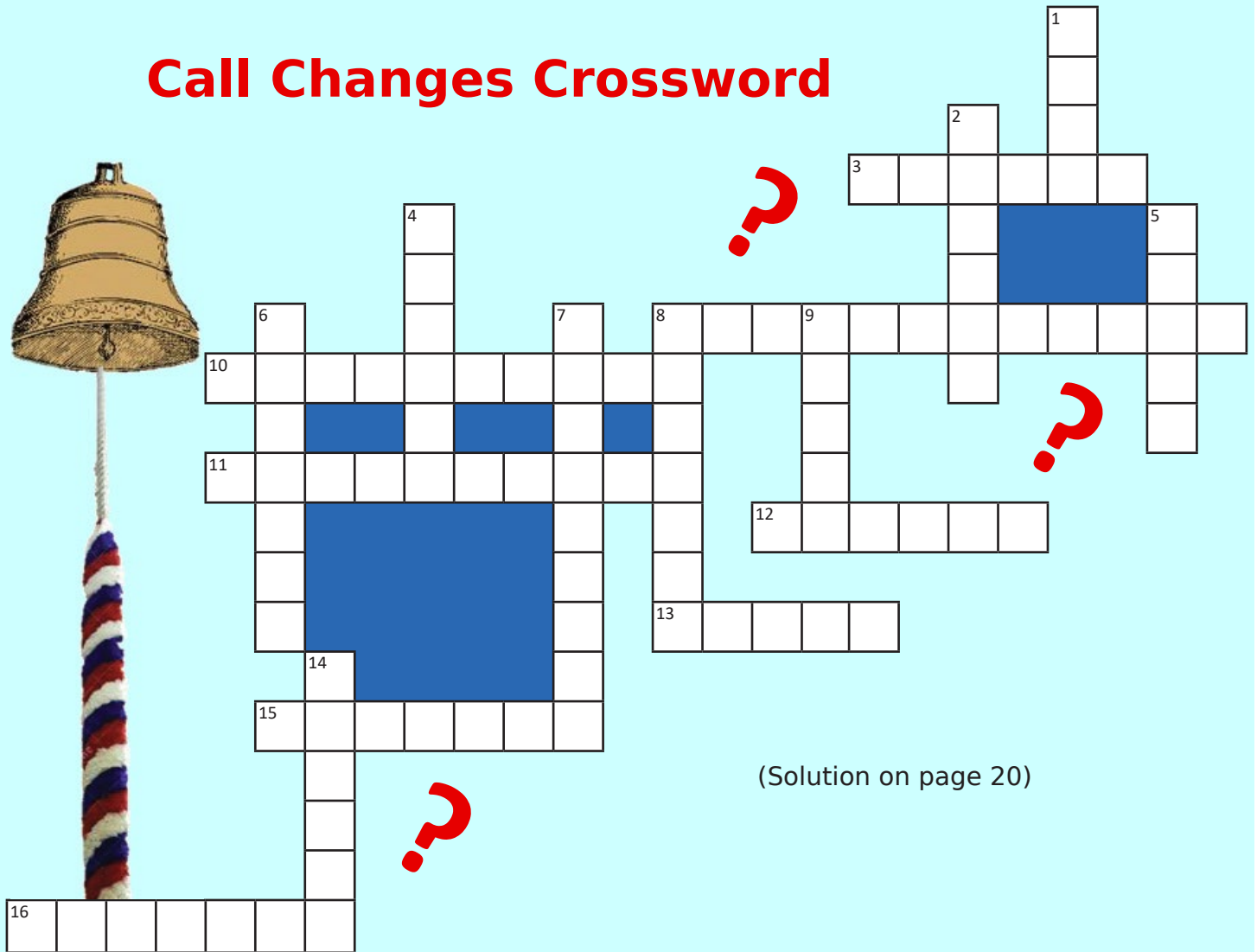


Puzzle Corner

Rose Nightingale and Denise Tremain, ART administrators



Call Changes Crossword



(Solution on page 20)

Clues

Across

- 3. 123456
- 8. 125346
- 10. calls are made at.....
- 11. 654321
- 12. the lightest bell in the tower
- 13. set your bell
- 15. 142536
- 16. ringing first in the sequence

Down

- 1. a team of ringers
- 2. 135246
- 4. ring nearer to the bell in front
- 5. 531246
- 6. the bell is at the top of its swing
- 7. instructions to lower the bells in peal
- 8. 14235
- 9. the heaviest bell in the tower
- 14. bells striking at the same time



Hats off to Sonia!

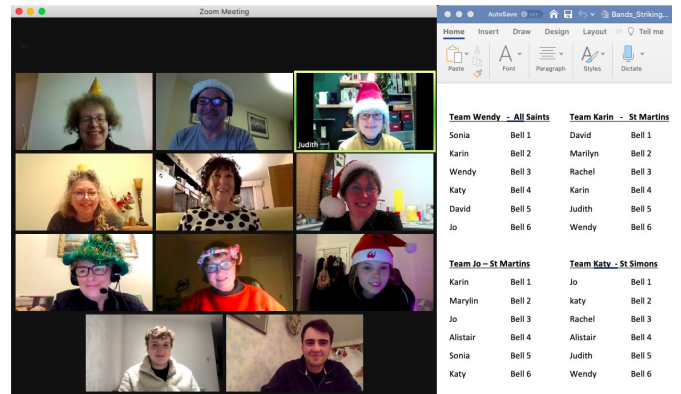
Karin Farnworth, Middlesex



At the start of lockdown, the Ruislip band were struggling with call changes; by Christmas 2020 we were participating in a virtual striking competition. Karin Farnworth describes the experience.

It was a first for everyone. The excitement and tension were palpable, even across the internet, as the Ruislip Ladies assembled for their striking competition. Screenshots of cheerful faces under Christmas headgear (competition rule No 1: all attendees must wear a festive hat) belied jitters calmed by sotto voce mumbling of the competition methods and off-screen tots of gin. Nine months earlier, none of the competitors had achieved a course of Plain Hunt; now they were ringing plain courses of All Saints, St Simon's and St Martin's doubles.

Towers closed across the country in the March 2020 lockdown, and learners risked regressing or lapsing as the lockdown lengthened. The Ruislip band might have been among the casualties, had it not been for the intervention of Sonia Field. She offered training with a virtual teach-in on the theory behind Plain Hunt. This led to weekly practices using Ringing Room. Several 'lightbulb moments' later, the band was Plain Hunting confidently on six and moving on to Plain Bob.



The striking competition - with hats

As restrictions eased in June, the band joined forces with learners from eKenton, a virtual band set up by Sonia for ringers from several North Middlesex towers. Some new tutors entered the scene: Middlesex Association Ringing Master, Dave Bassford, and St Paul's Cathedral ringer, Christopher Rimmer, came to assist and enjoyed themselves so much that they stayed, bringing in another St Paul's ringer, Alistair Smith.

During the autumn, the band worked through Plain Bob and various doubles methods, with a variety of training exercises thrown in for fun. As confidence increased, so did the numbers attending.

Nonetheless, the proposal of a striking competition was daunting to all - except perhaps to Chris who relished the opportunity to judge a striking competition! Nerves notwithstanding, the band assembled in Ringing Room, hats on, at 5pm on 30 December, to watch Simon Linford, President of the Central Council, draw the order in which the bands would compete.

Nine bands took part and everyone rang in at least four of them. The results were close, with just five points separating the first and last placed bands. The idea that winning is not down to individual excellence but to a collective team effort was strongly reinforced. Steady tenoring that provided structure was praised. The relatively low number of faults may have been partly due to the gentle pace of some ringing - our judge pointed out that a couple of the bands might have been there all night had they been ringing a peal!

The satisfaction of simply getting through the competition has produced a further boost in confidence and increased enthusiasm. Several band members now meet weekday lunchtimes for an extra practice and to talk about how we will - one day - figure out how to transfer all that we've learned back into a real tower. Here's hoping we don't have to wait too long for that story.

Fellow Ruislip band member Jo Harris adds: *"An online striking competition was one of the best ideas Sonia had last year as far as I am concerned. I say that not because I was a part of the winning band, but because the competition gave those of us involved the incentive to hold extra practices to prepare for the big day. These have now developed into regular weekly lunchtime gatherings on Zoom and Ringing Room; we meet two, three, four and sometimes even five times each week! This affords us the opportunity not only to strive to perfect the methods we have been practising but, perhaps more importantly, to build a strong bond with our fellow band members. For that period of the day we now have an interest in, and connection with, the world beyond the four walls that many of us currently have to spend so much time in."*

Meet Wheatley - the Ringing Room Bot

Iain Scott, Grappenhall, Cheshire

Wheatley the bot can provide extra Ringing Room helpers on demand. When this article was first written, using Wheatley required what Iain describes as 'a modicum of technical skill', which is what his Beginners' Guide explains. At the time of publication, a new version of Wheatley has just become available as a built-in part of Ringing Room, and the section at the end describes how to use this new version. But the original version is still of used by some ringers so Iain's guide may still be useful to some, even though the typical user won't need it now that Wheatley is incorporated into Ringing Room.

Have you ever met short for practice in Ringing Room? Needed just an extra couple of confident ringers before your band can ring that next step on the RW Blue Pathway? Do you want an entire band to ring around you to help you learn a method at 2 o'clock in the morning? Wheatley may be the answer!

Wheatley is a computer program or 'bot' which fills in for missing ringers in Ringing Room. It is intended to be human friendly, pausing for slower ringers or those who have made a mistake. It is designed to be a 'ninja helper with no ego'.

Many a practice on Ringing Room has already benefited, and Wheatley is now integrated to the Ringing Room website. The earlier version did require a modicum of technical skill to get it up and running, and I have put together a 'Beginner's Guide' which remains useful for anyone using this earlier version rather than the newer version, which is much more intuitive to use:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WtMhWPiaq43_OlnjqP0dhJeCbf4XqAyKgliopxov-o

Thanks go to Ben White-Horne, Matthew Johnson (and others) who devised, programmed and continue to develop Wheatley, which is yet another amazing and ingenious response from ringers to make online ringing as rewarding and accessible as possible.



Has the tower webcam caught Wheatley in the act?

!! Wheatley is now in Ringing Room !!

Wheatley is now available as a built-in part of Ringing Room on all the major servers. By default it is turned off for a given tower. To enable it, go into 'Tower Settings' (by clicking on the 'Settings' box in the list of 'My Towers'; only the creator of the tower can do this). Look for the 'Enable Wheatley' option and switch it to 'Yes'. Wheatley will then appear as a ringer when you next enter the tower.

*You can then assign Wheatley to ring one or more bells, just like any other ringer. Remember that a human needs to hit **L** (for 'Look To' - so Wheatley knows when to start ringing rounds), and likewise other keys such as **B** or **N** for Bobs or Singles so that Wheatley knows what to do.*

As with any new software there may be some initial bugs. If Wheatley gets stuck, try clicking the 'Reset Wheatley' button, or leaving the tower then rejoining. If that doesn't work, use the settings to turn Wheatley off then turn it on again.

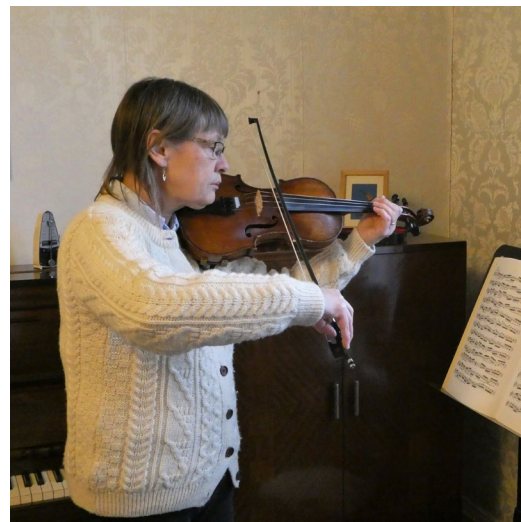
A Little and Often Does You Good

Judith Frye, Dunblane

When I'm not bell ringing you will often find me playing my violin. I have played since I was a child and am co-leader of our local amateur orchestra. We perform three concerts per year and the programmes are often quite challenging. Under normal circumstances we rehearse weekly, but my individual practice takes up several hours a week too. There are many similarities between music and ringing but traditionally, although ringers learn methods at home, they don't practise in the way that musicians do.

Life has been very different in the past year and the advent of online software that allows us to ring together as a band (such as Ringing Room, Ding and Handbell Stadium) has been enormously beneficial. Simulator software such as Abel (and its variants) and BelTower are also excellent for self-improvement using a keyboard (as is Ding) but how many of us use them to practise at home? Perhaps we should adopt the musician's approach of some dedicated time for ringing practice most days?

Yes, I hear you ... the dog's pleading eyes ask you go for a walk, home schooling is taxing all your brainpower, your boss is under the impression that you are working from home, and I know that the washing breeds if you leave it for too long! But you deserve a tiny space for yourself in your frenetic day – really you do. *It doesn't need to be long and that's the secret – a little and often is the maxim.* Find a short slot that fits your routine and each day treat yourself to one course of what's-its-name. That's it. It's not much time to dedicate to your hobby but it will make a difference. Whether your penchant is for tower bells or handbells, by the next practice night, you will notice the improvement and that will give you the incentive to take another small step. You may be inspired to do a little more some days because you can see your progress. The secret is to keep it up. Doing it every day will soon become a habit and it will not seem like an effort. Practising frequently for short amounts of time is more beneficial than an occasional longer practice.



Judith at her violin practice

If your practice regime goes well, you may want some targets. Be realistic. Get comfortable at one thing before embarking on the next. Try to progress a small step at a time. I didn't master Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star then move on to Beethoven's Violin Concerto so don't try to go from Grandsire Doubles to Bristol Max! If you need some ideas, ask your Tower Captain/Ringing Master or have a look at ART's Minor Stepping Stones which has lots of suggestions for intermediate steps with advice about how to learn them: <https://onlinelearning.bellringing.org/>

When I find a particularly tricky passage in a piece of music, I do two things: first, I analyse the technical reason that makes it tricky and work on that technique, then I play it very, very slowly and gradually speed up. The same process can help with ringing. Whatever you find difficult, the ART website may be useful for information: <http://ringingteachers.org/> or try using the Tadhil Learn facility: <http://tadhil.com/ringing/> Both of these techniques mean you can think things through more slowly than when ringing. When you are ready to try the simulator software again, slow the peal speed down, so you have more time to think. Then gradually speed up.

Using simulator software to progress at home is a great resource. It will speed up your progress because you can tailor it to your needs and practise at your convenience. If you learned a musical instrument as a child, you may have used the Tune a Day series; a new tune each day, carefully graded to ensure slow and steady progress. It worked for budding young musicians. Apply the same 'little and often' maxim to ringing and it will reap rewards. Whenever you have a difficulty, try to work out why, work on the issue then practise slowly. Life will not be the same when we return to the tower. We may use the online websites and simulator software less than we do now, but I hope that we will continue to use them as tools to help ourselves to continue to progress.

Patmore Towers - a Tale of Three Sisters

Vicki, Jenny and Tracey (née Patmore)

Vicki, Jenny and Tracey grew up in a family of ringers, and when ringing stopped in 2020, like everyone else, all their ringing activity came to a crashing halt, but thanks to Ringing Room they responded by setting up their own family practice: Patmore Towers. Here is their story.

Vicki

I grew up in a family of ringers. Dad learnt when he was young and as each of my older siblings and I reached the age of 11 we were given the opportunity. My brother didn't pursue it and although Mum wasn't interested she supported us all in our endeavours. Both are resigned to the inevitable topic of conversation on the family virtual catch ups! So it was down to us three girls to carry the torch. I have the added benefit of having married a ringer who supports all my ringing activities.

Fast forward many years to 2020. Some clever sparks in the USA develop something called Ringing Room, a virtual world where 'ringing' could still take place, and even better you can ring with anyone, anywhere, any time and not upset the neighbours. To be honest, I was quite sceptical about it all to begin with. What's the point if you can't ring properly? Of what benefit is pressing a key to make a pseudo bell sound?

But by May I thought it was about time to investigate what all the fuss was about, but I wanted to do it in a safe environment with family and friends. Between us we call our parent's home Patmore HQ (Patmore being the family name) so it obviously had to be called Patmore Towers!

After the first few weeks, we settled into quite a good routine of practising methods that we all knew, but it soon became clear that we could use Ringing Room to learn methods that we wouldn't ordinarily get to ring in our local towers.

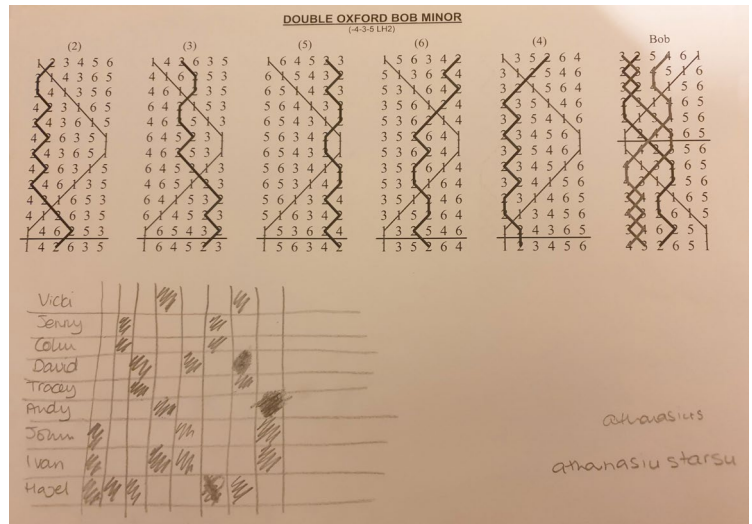
My goal was to make progress in six bell methods as I don't ring them very often and I was also one of those who jumped straight from Plain Bob to Cambridge Surprise and missed out on all those useful stepping stones en route. We meandered through Pinehurst Bob, Buxton Bob, Oxford Treble Bob, Double Oxford Bob and St Clement's College Bob Minors, gradually building the blocks to tackle Cambridge. Don't tell anyone that we're loosely following the Ringing World Pathways. And Lo! My sister Jenny is ringing Cambridge, her nemesis! In November, we scored a quarter peal of it. And we've rung a few other quarters since and explored more methods. Who'd have thought?

It was a no-brainer for me to organise the ringing with a grid system to keep track of the ringing. This has earned me the honour of being sent a special T-shirt by one of our participants with the phrase 'Data Nerd' on it. I wear it with pride!

From being very sceptical about the benefits of Ringing Room, I now run Patmore Towers and have surprised myself with my progress. I support other sessions too and I've met some lovely, supportive ringers from across the world at the same time.

Jenny

I am the middle sister of the three who were all taught by our Dad in Essex in the 80's. I carried on ringing wherever I lived and I met my husband through ringing in Harwich. We moved to North Lincolnshire in 2007 and I am now the Ringing Master of our local tower.



Vicki keeps everything under control

We have plenty of ringers and are able to ring plain methods quite well for Sunday Service and even a course of Stedman Triples on a good day. But not many of the locals are surprise ringers plus I have always had a mental block with surprise ever since trying to ring it when I was younger. I tried Abel but never really felt I got on with it and actually used to get in quite a paddy with it.

But along came lockdown and although I can't exactly remember how or when I heard about Ringing Room, I was quite excited about its possibilities from early on. None of the others in the local band particularly wanted to explore it but my husband and I joined some ringers from a neighbouring Branch in Lincolnshire who also ring plain eight-bell methods very well. Then Patmore Towers came into being and after loads of messages back and forth we joined in. And so my obsession began.

I've overcome my antipathy to Abel, and Vicki runs the practice so everyone gets a fair turn. She plans the practice to ensure we ring some stepping stones to get us to ringing surprise minor within a matter of weeks. We've not only achieved that goal but rung other methods too, something I could never imagine I'd have a chance to do in the tower. I was very excited when we rang a quarter peal of Cambridge Minor in November for my husband's birthday.

For me the marvellous thing about Ringing Room is that I now participate in five different sessions a week, some with the same people and some with others. I've met all sorts of lovely people that I may not have met in the real world. There are those that have all spared time to help me gain confidence with my abilities and those that I try to help. Some of the sessions are more about the social aspect and some are more about the ringing, but all of it is good.

Tracey

Like lots of people I watched the emergence of Ringing Room via social media channels and wondered whether it was something that the towers I regularly ring at could get involved with.

I watched and read the posts with interest, as no-one could possibly have predicted the effect that one lockdown after another would have. Our ability to go to practice nights, ring for Sunday services or take part in celebratory quarter peals and peals for our own pleasure was about to be more disrupted than at any time in my living memory.

When it became clear that we were in it for the long haul, my thoughts turned to how I could get involved. I could see all the positive coverage Ringing Room was attracting and I thought, well it's got to be better than nothing. So, in the first instance I established a practice for my own local band, and then for another tower that I regularly help and teach at.

It didn't take long for my sisters' ringing antennae to gravitate towards Ringing Room too. We often joke that we have our own band, which is actually true as there is my Dad, my sisters, brothers-in-law and other extended family members who all ring.

So, Patmore Towers was created by Vicki and she acts as host. The group also welcomes some of our ringing friends and family from all over the country. It's been a great opportunity to work on some of those methods that we don't normally get time to try.

Unfortunately, I began to find I simply didn't have time for off-line method studying or a third weekly practice. I'm involved in a lot of teaching and felt I had to commit to those practices to keep the emerging bands bonded during the pandemic, and to help ensure their survival post-pandemic. And with my other commitments – work, health and domestic goings on – I have had to withdraw from Patmore Towers for now. But it's been great to virtually catch up with each other's lives, to generally make sure each other is OK and to see what great things can be achieved in a friendly and supportive environment.



The Patmore sisters – or could it be Charlie's Angels?

The Virtual Steeplekeeper

Simon Head, Bletchley

In pre-pandemic days, an invaluable member of the band was the steeplekeeper: always ready to nip upstairs and mend a stay, or fix and tweak any niggling problems, and reliably making sure the bells were in good order and ready to be rung, putting on muffles and checking ropes as well as countless other jobs. Now ringing has moved online but we still need that useful person who helps us keep ringing as much as ever – the Virtual Steeplekeeper.

How many times have you met online and used up half an hour with questions like 'How do I use Ringing Room?', 'Does it work on a Mac?', 'I can't hear anything!?' All these seem to be regular questions and any online practice that involves people who are new to this will probably have these and countless others asked multiple times. There is also the need to have a bit of an understanding about how software works and interacts with other programs, and indeed about how the internet actually works, so there is definitely a virtual steeplekeeper (or 'technical guru') role that usually involves trying to troubleshoot blindly without being able to see the other person's screen.

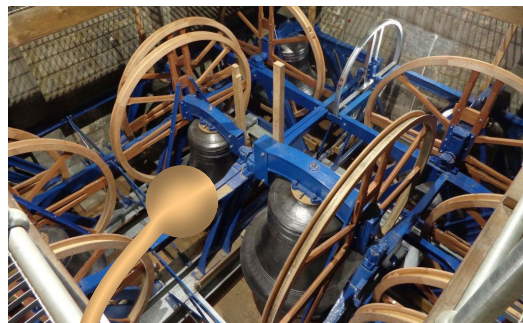
Ringing Room is simply a website, and I'm sure almost everyone in this day and age is familiar with computers, web browsers and navigating websites. We all use online banking and shop on Amazon and Ebay, so how hard can it be? Well as it turns out, far more difficult than you'd expect. Like many people, ringers don't always feel comfortable with the technology even if they are using it, so if you have someone in your online band who is interested, has a bit of technical know-how, maybe works in IT or is prepared to acquire the knowledge necessary to get online ringing running smoothly, then they could be your virtual steeplekeeper. You are running two programs together – the ringing one and the communication one, so there are bound to be problems along the way, but having someone able to sort them out could make the difference between a successful practice where people go away feeling they have achieved something, or a dismal waste of time where nobody understands what is going on.

There are other online ringing platforms available – Ding is described in the article on page 12 and there is also Muster (Multi-SITE Ringing) which is a program that can allow you to connect copies of Abel and Beltower together in order to ring collaboratively. For more information on what's available take a look at the Survival and Recovery Toolbox on the ART website:

<https://ringingteachers.org/survival-and-recovery-toolbox/online-ringing>

Finally, here are my Top Tips for using Ringing Room successfully:

- Run it on a device that you can plug an ethernet cable into and make sure you are connected to your home router with a cable, not WiFi.
- Get some headphones or a headset and plug them into the device that is running Ringing Room.
- Enable Host Mode if you have a busy practice.
- If you have people new to Ringing Room, set up a conference call an hour beforehand to make sure that they can do the following things: log in, assign themselves to a bell, know which keys do what, understand how to mute and unmute themselves and most importantly, make sure other members of their household are not using the WiFi to watch Netflix, stream stuff on Spotify or watch cat videos on YouTube.





Discovering Ding

Louise Gay, Sarum St Martin, Wiltshire



Ding is an inventive on-line ringing simulator developed by David Norman and Giles Wood (Trowbridge). Early results were so promising that David and Giles started running Open Practices. I've benefited hugely by going to these and I'm now excited to be running Ding practices with my own band.



The standard Ding buttons for 8 bells

Ding has two ringing screens (Buttons and Ropes), real bell sounds, and an automated ringer called 'Bob'. Ding can be rung with the keyboard, mouse, handbell manager/ebells or dumbbell. With Bob, you can practise by yourself, or as a group ringing on up to 12 bells (Standard Ding) or 16 bells (Unity Ding). Bob can also display the correct order of

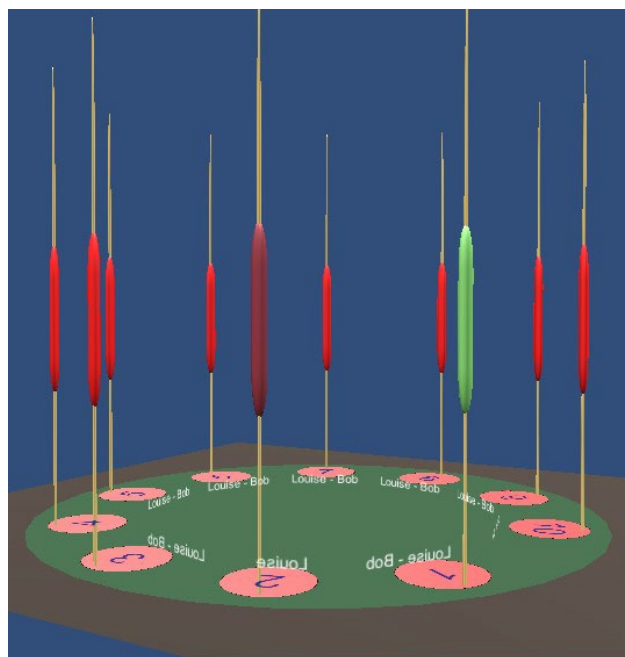
bells (great, as I can't put people right), call bobs/singles and, on Unity, wait for you or force the pace. Through some computer wizardry I can't begin to understand, ringers on buttons and ropes can ring together. Moreover, using the latest 'RingAlong' feature on Unity, ringers sitting out can grab any bell and ring with the band as if in another dimension of time and space!

Like Ringing Room, the Ding Buttons screen (Standard and Unity Ding) doubles for tower and handbells. The design couldn't be simpler. Your bell jumps up to the top row (handstroke) and back down again (backstroke), striking immediately. Learners make rapid progress because they can focus on all the bells. Concepts such as 'place' and 'course and after bells' are easy to see.

Carolyn from Trowbridge, who is yet to ring rounds in the tower, said:

"Suddenly I was flying through methods - I rang Plain Bob Doubles, Minor and Major, Little Bob Minor and Major, attempted Stedman Doubles and treble bobbed to a quarter peal of Cambridge Surprise Minor (I'm sure they said Court Appeal!)" - all in three months. With such clear signposts and swept along by everyone else's success, I took the plunge and called my first quarter peal (Bob Minor). I'm now much more likely to try all these in the tower."

The 3D Rope Screen (Unity Ding) is designed to develop the habit of looking at all the ropes. It also replicates the delay between pulling a rope and the bell ringing. I found the ropes confusing at first, but a few weeks and two quarter peals later, they are a joy to ring and strike well. Good striking is hard with eight or more humans, but strengthening the band with Bob works wonders. Amazingly, at nearly 70 my ropesight has started improving again and I can now see the place I'm in instead of relying on counting. On a technical note, to ring quickly you need to ring by rhythm, anticipating that the rope you are following will start to move. Practising rounds with Bob on the first three bells helps with this.



The Ding screen with ropes

Standard Ding (Windows PC) and Unity Ding (Windows PC, Mac, Linux, Android) are available at www.dinging.co.uk

See also the Ding Facebook Page for lots of news and updates. Your virus checker may warn you when you download Ding - it's ok to continue. Giles and David still run all-ability open practices on Saturdays 7 - 9.30 pm. Look for the 'Open Practice' Tower and Zoom details when you start Ding between those times. Need help? Please contact Giles at gilesrwood@gmail.com

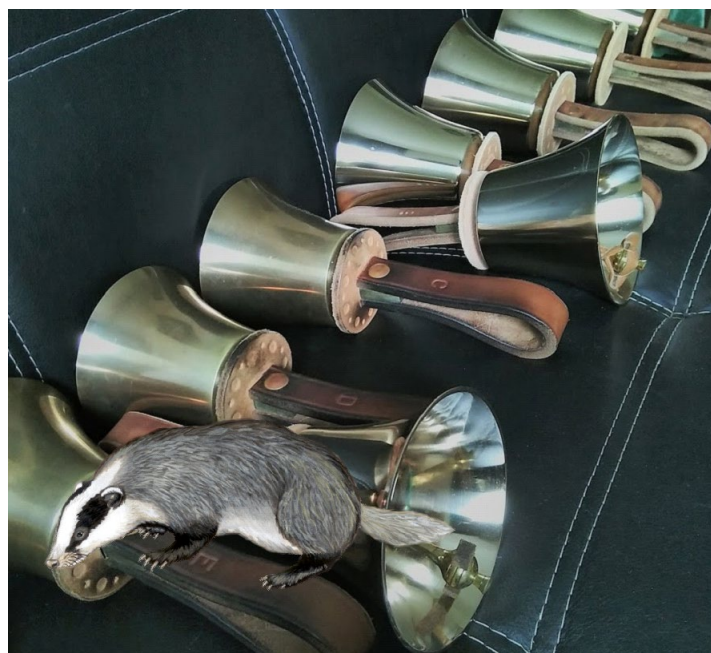
The Badgers Handbell Ringers

Lindsay Powell

I learned to ring handbells about four years ago at Stanford in the Vale, which slowly expanded to form two groups in the Oxfordshire area so by the time we were in lockdown it seemed sensible to combine our resources and meet together online. One of the groups had become known as the Badgers group (due to founding member Joe's obsession with badgers) and the name stuck.

We kept to the same practice times, with some people coming to one practice and some both. A few didn't enjoy online ringing but we hope they will re-join us when normal activities are resumed one day. As confidence using Ringing Room grew and we acquired better technology, we began to attempt virtual quarter peals. After a patchy start, these became quite manageable, and Monday evenings and some Saturdays became quarter peal times.

Running a practice for up to 15 people with differing experience levels is no mean feat but David Thomas has managed it very well. In the summer when we were allowed to meet in person the Monday evening and Saturday quarter peals moved to the real world. It was gratifying to find that the methods we had learned virtually translated to actual handbells very smoothly. We achieved several peals as well – including first peals and firsts in methods. Our main venue was Grandpont Nature Park – close to Oxford city centre and with just about the only free parking left in Oxford. It is relatively underused, so we did not disturb others and we became very skilled at stringing tarpaulins across the trees to make shelter on rainy days! The downside was contending with the odd train speeding past but we got used to that quite quickly.



The Badgers Handbells always travel with an escort

It was quite natural that sub-groups would form. These have been really beneficial. There are two groups working on six-bell methods and a group who have pushed themselves to quarters of surprise major and royal with very little experience of this before lockdown. A third group is working on major methods – strengthening their ability to ring all pairs. A monthly 12-bell practice has so far helped us achieve three quarters of maximus and has led to ringing on higher numbers at the ordinary practice nights. With some of our members being students who are not in the area at present, the regular online practices hold the group together.

We have made some amazing progress and have scored many quarter peals with numerous 'firsts'. We have grouped them on Bellboard so we can easily track our progress:

Badgers Handbell Ringers 2020: <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/event.php?id=13373>

Badgers Handbell Ringers 2021: <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/event.php?id=13413>

What became apparent early on in the first lockdown was that there were a lot of people teaching themselves handbells with no band to ring with. Luckily I work part time so I put a feeler out on the facebook 'Ringing Room Take Hold Lounge' inviting anyone new to handbells to join together for a regular practice. I got a very positive response and so the Friday afternoon handbell group was started. I was expecting a group wanting plain hunt and Plain Bob Minor but they are progressing far more rapidly than that.

We have tried to make the best use of this time away from tower bell ringing. Progress with handbells was slow and steady before March as tower bell ringing was the priority. When we return to tower bells we will have far less time to devote to handbells but hope we will have built some very solid foundations for the future.

The Peripatetic Student

Laura Kang Ward, Livermore, California

I first heard of the ART Learning the Ropes scheme from Candace Higginbotham at a ringing festival in Shreveport, LA, in May 2019. She kindly signed me up. I didn't even know exactly what it was, but I was an eager learner of both tower bells and handbells – but with no towers within 800 miles of my home, I soon found that the structure and organization of the ART program not only gave me a road map for tracking my progress, but it also became a sort of portable syllabus for a peripatetic student.

Although my opportunities to ring handbells (before Ringing Room!) occurred months apart, and with different bands and mentors, I realized I could just hand the ART LtRH booklet to the band's leader and say something like "could you please quiz me on these ringing terms, and by the way, I need to practise treble bob hunting".

Leafing through my LtRH booklet, I count at least eight different teachers, from California and Texas to Chicago to Cambridge (both of them!) and Oxfordshire, who have checked off my theory and practical targets, and generously shared their time and talents with me. Being a methodical person, it's very satisfying to see my progress unfolding in a concrete fashion. The certificates one receives upon completing each level aren't strictly necessary but are a nice touch, and I've seen several people share them proudly. I'll also admit that the motivation to call my first quarter peal last autumn came mostly from my desire to complete Level 4 of the ART scheme; I'm not sure I would have gotten around to calling a QP anytime soon on my own, but it was the next step in the booklet!



Tracking progress!

Good News from Australia

Tom Perrins, Sydney

The past year unfortunately brought most ringing activities across the UK to a great halt, so it is encouraging that in Australia and New Zealand, restrictions have been limited, and in some ways the art of ringing is growing. The rate at which new towers are installed across Australia is one or two per year, and 2020 was no exception, with the latest installation being rung for the first time on Christmas Eve at St Patrick's (Catholic) Cathedral in Parramatta, within suburban Sydney, NSW.

This peal is based around six bells from St Paul's in Widnes, Liverpool. Originally hung in 1907 by John Warner & Sons, the 10cwt eight were not in use for more than a few decades due to deterioration of the frame. Factories in the vicinity of the tower had created a corrosive atmosphere. The original 7th bell became dislodged from its frame and was recast by Gillett & Johnston in 1935. The bells were ultimately removed in the 1980s and placed into storage.

The tower at St Patrick's, Parramatta was intended to hold a peal of bells but the installation of bells was indefinitely placed on hold. Attempts to acquire a peal in the 20th century were unsuccessful, and a devastating fire which destroyed most of the original building in 1996 understandably shifted focus to more pressing rebuilding work. Following the erection of the new Cathedral in 2003, it was finally decided in early 2018 to complete the Cathedral by installing a peal of bells. It was ultimately decided to use bells 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 & 7 from the ex-Widnes ring, retuned to form a diatonic ring of six. Two new Taylor trebles were then cast to complete the octave, with the tuning work undertaken by Matthew Higby & Co.



Blessing the new bells at Parramatta, NSW

Although I am somewhat biased, I think the final outcome is a very fine 8cwt ring of eight in a commensurate tower. Teaching is soon to start – already there is a lot of interest. We look forward to welcoming you to Parramatta and the Sydney area as soon as it is safe to do so!

50 Ringing Things - Success for Max

Tamsin Lane, Birmingham (mum of Max, aged 8)

Max had her first trip up a tower aged about two weeks, and from then on she spent many hours hanging around the tower while Mummy rang. She first asked to learn to ring when she was three. Despite being told she had to be eight before she could learn, she was persistent.

She came along with Mummy to help with the National Youth competition in Birmingham in 2017 and found out that one of the girls with the Bedfordshire ringers had started to learn aged six. That clinched it, so next day, aged 4, she had her first lesson with our amazing tower captain Clare. Clare and Max had total faith that this would work and so it did. However, progress is slow when you are knee high to a grasshopper and have the attention span of a goldfish. So to help keep Max keen she was given the *50 Ringing Things* booklet to have a look at.

Max has never looked back; she was determined to get all 50 Things done. It has been an amazing way for her to learn so much and develop so many skills while growing taller and stronger. This scheme is such a great thing to be doing as you progress with ringing. Before lockdown she was ringing short bursts of rounds and call changes and starting some place-making. In lockdown on Ringing Room she has learnt to plain hunt on one bell, but she found online ringing hard work.

However, through *50 Ringing Things*, she can write out methods using place notation, and can splice a rope. Obviously lockdown has created some challenges. Her main disappointment is that it has prevented her ticking the Thing 'Ring at 50 Towers' - but she says it will be her 51st Thing once we can ring again.

She has had so much help and support from within ringing and has found if you ask for help people rarely say no. Our steeple keeper Mike helped her complete bell maintenance tasks (pre Covid). They did a full inspection of the bells and found a cracked stay which Max replaced (she keeps it in her bedroom as a treasure). Mike has actively encouraged her to do much more than was needed for her 50 Things and she has loved every second.

When asked what her favourite Thing was, Max replied, 'There are so many things that I loved doing, how can you ask me to pick one?'

Some memorable events - pre-pandemic of course - include giving Clare one of her scariest ringing experiences when she asked to ring backstrokes at Hereford cathedral aged four (and ticking off 'Ring at a cathedral' and 'Go on a ringing outing') and ringing at York Minster and seeing bells ring from the level of the bells for the first time. Max talks about this all the time and she loves "how the tenor bell made my body feel" when it struck each time. This did not give her a tick in 50 Things but was her 34th tower.



Max ringing at Hereford Cathedral

Max came up with some ingenious ideas for completing the Things. Her ringing video was hilarious and her highlight was calling call changes using her number flash cards as a demonstration in a teaching session.

Max has loved *50 Ringing Things* and has been determined to get to 50. Her 50th Thing was to visit Loughborough bell foundry to help test their Covid procedures on 27th October 2020 (aged 8). Three years of constant entertainment and enjoyment.

The scheme has been fantastic at increasing Max's knowledge of ringing and has developed her confidence. It is a great way to keep achieving even when you are struggling with your ringing and it is for everyone. So why not explore what it has to offer? There are plenty of non-ringing Things you can get started on and Max has shown you don't need to be an advanced ringer at all.

See <http://www.learningtheropes.org/50-things> There's also the companion scheme 50 Virtual Ringing Things <https://onlinelearning.bellringing.org/> This was featured in the previous issue of Tower Talk <http://www.learningtheropes.org/news/tower-talk-issue-18>

Debbie's Online Experience

Debbie Phipps, Lytchett Matravers, Dorset

As a Tower Captain, I was concerned that with a long absence from ringing, some of our ringers might lose interest and not return, especially because none of us are well-established ringers. As time went by and the possibility of ringing in a tower became even more distant, I spent more time considering Ringing Room.

I joined the **Ringing Room Take Hold Lounge** on facebook which is a lovely group from around the world, both experienced ringers and less experienced who were all embracing the virtual world. I found a group on a Saturday morning organised by Vicki Chapman where there was ringing at my level and realised what a great group of people ringers are, as many come along just to help us less experienced ringers. They are all greatly appreciated.

So I started to become enthused about my ringing again and decided I must pass this on to our band of 15, of whom only 3 are facebook users. It took a while to get our band interested, mainly because of technology issues. After several one-to-one sessions to iron out any problems, we did eventually get 7 ringers together. We muddled around for a few weeks, but became demoralised as none of us could set people right if they'd gone wrong. Luckily, I spied a friend from further afield on another Ringing Room practice, and he said he would join our band. From then on everything improved, and I have even recruited friends and relations who have never rung before. From these new recruits, I have two ringers who will be taking up ringing when we get back into the tower.



*The Lytchett Matravers band
in festive mode*

The thought of keeping our band together and not losing anyone was enough to keep me busy, but then **50 Virtual Ringing Things** came out. I am a great fan of this scheme – being one of the first to achieve Gold in the original *50 Ringing Things*, I was delighted to have the challenge of the Virtual Things. I signed up as soon as I could and just like the original one, some of the things I had already done so it wasn't difficult to do those again especially with all the groups I was ringing with. From 3 December 2020 when I achieved my Bronze certificate, I succeeded with my Gold on 20 January 2021 and one of my band members Cathy Neyland has also achieved her Bronze certificate.

You can sign up to it here: <http://ringingteachers.org/news/articles/50-virtual-ringing-things>

The **handbell** section might have been tricky but we had already located the branch handbells before Christmas and, with a little help from Alan Bentley, I was able to teach four of our other ringers to ring some patterns and Christmas tunes for our Christmas services.

There is also a section for using a **simulator** which we are fortunate to have installed in our tower, though with ringing stopping in March, we did not have time get to grips with it completely. Having bought Abel, I tried out some of the 'Things' on my computer at home and it is fascinating how much you can do on it.

Here's useful presentation 'An Introduction to using Abel' by Nikki Thomas and Simon Rudd of the Mancroft Ringing Discovery Centre in Norwich: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYlcsMwFcq4>

The section for **Ringing Online** was the easiest, as I am doing so much of it already, but there were all sorts of things to try out which I hadn't thought of. As for the final section called **Tail Ends**, that really stretches the mind and makes you think outside the box.

My online experience started because I wanted to keep our band ringing, but the *50 Virtual Ringing Things* rekindled my interest in ringing beyond just the weekly village tower practice. It has benefited not only my own personal ringing development but also that of the Lytchett Matravers band and has given me the confidence to do more for ringing locally – albeit within a virtual environment.

If you haven't already joined, I highly recommend it – it doesn't cost you anything other than time and enjoyment, and the same goes for Ringing Room.

Ringling Room Takeaways

Janet Horton, Birmingham School of Bell Ringing

Lockdown took us all by surprise and ringing stopped overnight. One day we were having practice nights, ringing peals and quarter peals. The next day ... nothing.

In the summer, I started a handbell session in the garden with a group from the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing. But as autumn approached, we were increasingly having to cancel because of the weather. At first, I thought I would find us an indoor space where we could socially distance, but entering the Tier system made that out of the question.

Thankfully, our bell-ringing computer whizzes had come to the rescue and introduced us to Ringing Room, Handbell Stadium and other platforms to allow ringing of some kind to continue. Some of the group were already using Ringing Room so we took the plunge and went online.

Two of our group had just completed LtR Level 2 on tower bells before lockdown and were starting to work on plain hunt on five. They had made great progress using handbells in the summer and are now working towards touches of Plain Bob Minor. They would probably not even have progressed to plain courses of Plain Bob Minor in the tower. As it is, they understand the structure of the method including the place notation. They know how a bob works, and when to call them. They have learnt about coursing orders and watching the treble. All this as well as counting their places, and learning the different positions involved when ringing two-in-hand. These are things which will help them when we go back to real bells. On top of all that, they have also subconsciously learnt the music of the plain course. I reckon that they would be able to recognise it from outside the tower now.

But back in the tower, it would be a miracle if they rang Plain Bob Minor. There are the issues of handling to be readdressed after a year without touching a rope, not to mention confidence. We will be going back to rounds and call changes, and Kaleidoscope ringing in the first instance. Those muscles are going to find it a shock! We certainly felt it when we went back up the tower last July after just four months off.

I asked the group what they thought that they would be able to take away from the online sessions when we get back to real handbells and real tower bells. Here are a couple of their comments:

Mike (BSoBR graduate): Ringing Room has been really great fun to use. Though different techniques are needed to ring with RR, the methods are the same and hopefully some of the skills I have been practising will be beneficial to tower ringing.

All the bells on RR are on the screen in front of you, so it is easier to see when the treble leads and I am starting to see the coursing order. When we return to tower ringing, I will try to stop looking directly at one bell at a time but see all the bells together. Seeing when the treble leads and seeing the coursing order has been so helpful with my ringing during lockdown. I have been told that wearing glasses doesn't help with peripheral vision, but I will try.

RR has helped keep up my interest in ringing and it might be fun to use RR occasionally even when we can go back into towers.



When ringing stopped...

Roger (helper): Ringing Room tower bell sessions have allowed me to ring with old and new friends from all over the country and, indeed, the world, without leaving the comfort of my armchair. Wheatley has also allowed us to progress to ringing on higher numbers even when not everyone has been able to join every practice. This has kept the methods I should know fresh in my mind.

Handbell Ringing Adventures

Monica Hollows, St Anne's, Lancashire

Late summer in 2020, I happened to post in the Learning the Ropes facebook group about my attempts to teach myself handbells during lockdown, lamenting the fact I wasn't getting very far. Next thing I know, I receive a message from Lesley Belcher of ART: *"So, you've started to ring handbells and would like some help in progressing. How exciting is that? I have some teachers who can help (online)."*

An offer too good to refuse! I asked my teenage son Ellis if he'd like to learn too and he jumped at the chance. I also remembered a prior conversation with my Tower Captain and our Branch Ringing Master Stuart, and he too was keen to join us. Lesley matched us up with the wonderful Jennie Town from North Allerton who is an extremely accomplished handbell ringer but also a wonderful teacher. And so our adventures in handbell ringing began via weekly sessions using Zoom and Ringing Room.

Our first step was to tackle plain hunt on six, mastering each of the three pairs in turn. Under Jennie's expert guidance we realised that you don't need to run two lines in your head at once. You think about one bell and the relative position of the other bell, depending upon which 'pattern' you are in. With patient coaching from Jennie and help from Joyce, we mastered the three patterns: coursing pairs, opposites and 2-3 position. Another ringer from our Branch, Ken, joined our Wednesday lesson and soon caught us up with some dedicated practice.

The next step was Plain Bob Minor, practising plain courses of each pair in turn, and now we are starting to look at touches. More ringers are gradually joining us and our regular Monday evening Fylde Branch Ringing Room slot has become a handbell practice session too.



From the left, Stuart, Ellis and Monica with the soon-to-be-refurbished handbells

Before I started this, I felt that change ringing on handbells was too daunting and something best left to those clever folk who can split their brain in half. However, although it's far from easy, I now realise that you can learn by practising small easy stages. Just like learning to ring tower bells, you learn each step and build it up. I have also learnt that homework and practice, as well as patience, are the keys to progress.

Counting places is even more vital on handbells than on tower bells. The trickiest bit is thinking ahead far and fast enough to work out where you go next! This is where my son Ellis' young brain definitely has the advantage! Ellis has this to say: *"I have really enjoyed the experience of learning handbells on Ringing Room. At first, I think we all found it tricky but once we began to learn the basics it became a lot easier. We are currently fortifying the basics of Bob Minor and we have begun to look at touches and even ring a few. This experience has been great so far and I can't wait to learn even more."*

As a 'graduate' of the Learning the Ropes scheme for tower bells, I have also been keeping a personal log of my progress on the Learning the Ropes scheme for handbells. There is a LtR logbook for handbells with five different levels just like the tower bell scheme. My next goal (which is a way off yet!) is to complete a quarter of Plain Bob Minor so I can complete Level 2.

So now we have a nucleus of five handbell ringers developing in our Branch, with a few others interested. We want to continue and develop this further in our Branch. I've also acquired a set of real handbells, which I'm hoping to get refurbished shortly - the bug has definitely bitten! I look forward to better weather and being sufficiently out of lockdown to meet outside and ring real handbells together. We might even get the chance (and be allowed) to cross the Pennines to meet Jennie in person and ring with her too.

So thank you Lesley, Joyce and most of all Jennie for all your help with our handbell ringing adventures!

A Celebration of Handbells

Alan Winter, Cambridge

The Ely Diocesan Association instituted an annual Handbell Day about ten years ago. Aimed as a celebration of handbell ringing, this brought accomplished ringers together to ring at their own level, and also provided an opportunity for the rest of us to ring a little beyond our regular experience.

We also offered inexperienced handbell ringers, including complete beginners, a chance to ring with experienced and friendly people. Attendance has typically been from thirty to forty, mostly members of the EDA but always including a few highly valued visitors, and we have been able to use the facilities of Christ's College in a very narrow time gap between the end of term and the start of admissions interviews, for which we are very grateful. One of my favourite experiences has been walking along the corridor hearing the mingled sounds from three or four different sessions.

It's a full day, with many people involved in many different ways – so we wondered how could we offer the same in the current Covid crisis. Obviously, everything was done on Zoom and we maintained the ringing sessions but drastically reduced the breaks other than a lunch-time presentation. We checked in advance with the creators of Ringing Room that their platform was easily able to sustain parallel sessions for a group of our size. As organiser I worried whether assigning three dozen ringers to half a dozen sessions (Ringing Room Towers and Zoom Breakout Rooms) might lead to a monumental dither, but it turned out well on the day.

First-time participant Sandra Webb writes:

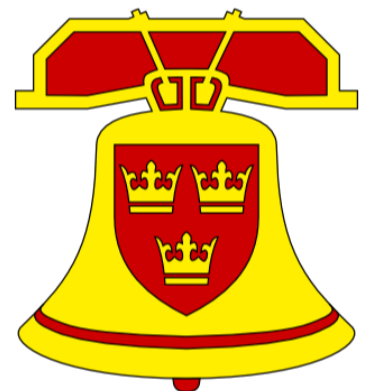
The fact that I am usually on holiday in December meant that I had never attended the real-life version of the Ely DA Handbell Day. However, I was able to join the 2020 virtual version. The upside of this was that I could do so from the comfort of my own home. There was no travelling time, and I did not have to compete with hordes of Christmas shoppers for a parking space in Cambridge.

What could possibly go wrong? Well, I had not anticipated the increasing dread of attending via the computer-based platforms of Zoom and Ringing Room. This was despite, or maybe because, I had been using both on a regular basis. Would the technology/internet let me down? What is a breakout room? What would it be like to interact with that many people at a Zoom meeting? By the time the day arrived, I felt I could have happily abandoned the idea of attending altogether, and probably would have done so, except I felt that I would then be letting down those who had encouraged me to try handbells in the first place.

I need not have worried. The tech side of things worked flawlessly and my only problem was getting stuck in a breakout room, because I was unfamiliar with how they functioned, thus missing part of the lunchtime talk. The ringing sessions worked well. I joined the meeting only having tried plain hunt on six bells, so had the comfort of covering that familiar territory in my first session – luckily with a tutor I knew.

During the second session, led by David Pipe, I rang some plain hunt on eight for the first time, including a dodge at the end. Two firsts in one session – what more could I ask for? I am immensely grateful to Alan and his team for organising the event, particularly given all the extra work that running it online entailed.

If you get the chance to participate in a similar event, please don't hesitate – I promise that you won't regret it! As for me, I've now signed up for LtR Handbells and am ready to start working my way through the levels!



The Ely Diocesan Association



*New handbell ringer
Sandra Webb*

Duncan Curry, a ringer at the Stretham Ringing Education Centre writes:

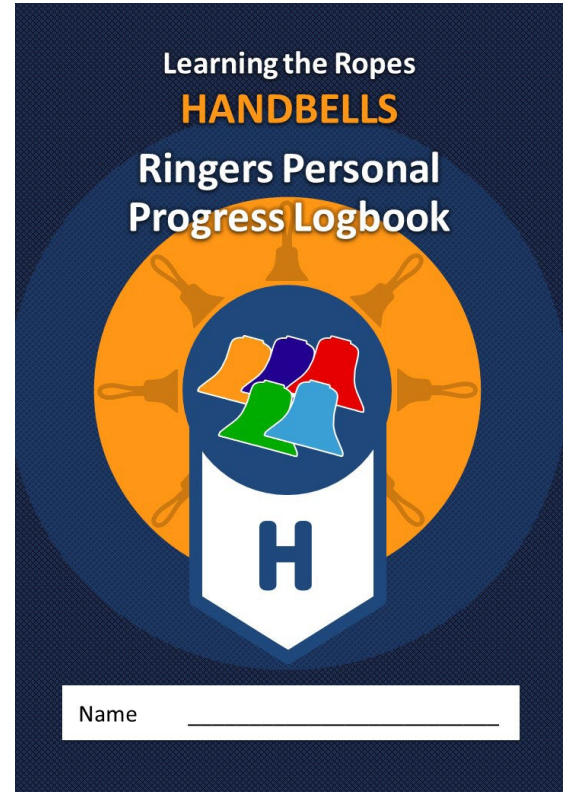
Despite being much shorter than last year's event, the virtual format made good use of the time. Last year, groups formed spontaneously and went in search of a place to practise. This year we flitted effortlessly between the virtual breakout rooms and 'towers' and one ringer logged in unexpectedly from Germany - that wasn't possible last year!

Introductory sessions were followed by two practice sessions with groups of four or five, led by experienced ringers with two or three students. Pre-registration permitted Alan and his team to group ringers with methods and offered the opportunity to choose an alternative. As in 2019, the experience encouraged me to progress and to practise further, something possible even now with the increasing number of virtual ringing groups.

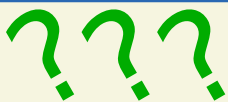
Becca Glazier also from the Stretham Ringing Education Centre said:

Being fairly new to handbells I was pretty nervous but it was such a fun and supportive day! I'll definitely be back next year.

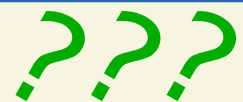
She won't have to wait a whole year, though - the Ely Diocesan Association has followed up this successful day with a series of regular online handbell sessions, using the LtR Handbell Scheme. These aim to support new handbell ringers, and consolidate the progress of those who have already started.



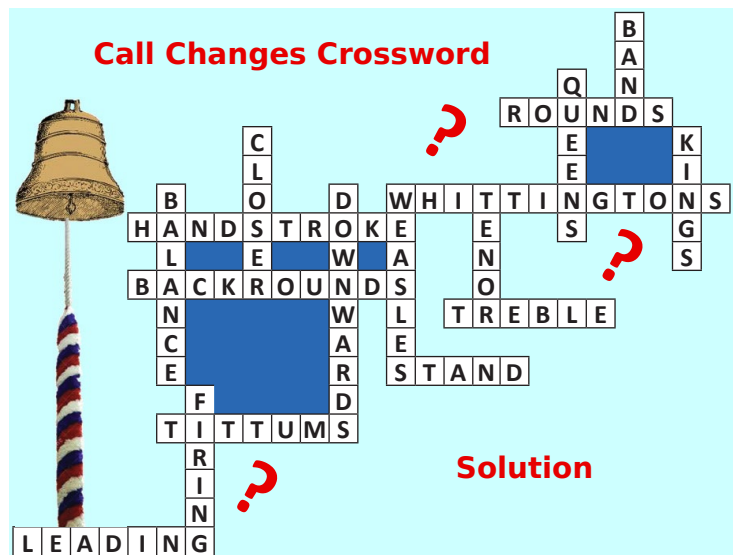
LtR Handbell Logbook



Answers to Puzzles



Here's the solution to the puzzle on page 5.



Follow Aberavon's Example

Kevin Musty, Aberavon, South Wales

Kevin Musty describes how easily he managed to set up a Ringing Room virtual tower, and how this has kept the Aberavon Band going.

In March 2020, we in Aberavon actually welcomed a little break from ringing!

We thought this would be for a short period of time, but over Easter, I read about a new online program called 'Ringing Room' in *The Ringing World* and thought this was worth a look.

I liked what I saw and the potential that could be unlocked. So I registered a user account and created an online tower. And so the St Mary's Aberavon virtual tower was born.

I enlisted the help of my non-ringing wife, Wendy, to see if she could ring one of the bells. I assigned her to a bell, told her to press key '3' and the bell rang! Simple. I added her to a second bell and myself to two more bells and we were away, able to ring rounds on the four bells with no issues at all.



The local band pre-Covid



The 'real' Aberavon tower

Next was to introduce the idea to the Aberavon band. We had already set up a Messenger group which met every Thursday evening for chat about this and that, including a couple of quiz sessions, which were good fun! So I suggested a video call to talk to the other ringers about the opportunity and to see how much interest there would be.

We are a go-ahead sort of group, so we grasped the opportunity with both hands. What a great way to keep us together as a band! However, after helping me get started, my wife Wendy did not continue as a band member.

We are not all tech heads, so we had to get everyone sorted out with usernames and how to log on, but with individual help from me we eventually got up and running.

On our first session we hit another problem – amazingly so many towers with the same name were created during the first few weeks, which caused all sorts of confusion. However once this was ironed out, things have gone from strength to strength.

Although I attend other online practices, none of the other band members do, but we all appreciate the social interaction.

We enjoy our regular weekly practice, ringing everything you can do in a tower and more!