

Tower Talk

The newsletter for ringers using



**Learning
the Ropes™**

Association of Ringing Teachers / Learning the Ropes - www.learningtheropes.org

Number 22 - February 2022

Editor

Ruth Suggett

towertalk@learningtheropes.org

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The Tower Talk Team are all volunteers and sometimes life gets in the way, so apologies for the short delay on getting this New Year edition out! Yet again the positive news stories flood in, from all around the world. New bands are being formed and ringers gradually returning, some with new skills learned online, some feeling a bit rusty or tentative, others raring to go. The Association of Ringing Teachers supports everyone returning to ringing with programmes and challenges at different levels, and an array of useful and practical learning resources. And on page 8, we describe some of the ways you can take your ringing forward even after the dizzy heights of LtR Level Five have been achieved. There's lots more information available on the Learning the Ropes website:

<http://www.learningtheropes.org>

There are several events coming up this year which the sound of bells will help commemorate and celebrate - most notably the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. There is a really useful page on the Central Council's website:

<https://cccbr.org.uk/bellringing/things-to-ring-for/>

So let's start planning and practising.



Ring Out for ART's Tenth Birthday

Lesley Belcher, ART Chair

For many of you, the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) has always been part of your ringing life, with the Learning the Ropes scheme, the ART Awards and the Learning the Ropes Masterclass, and of course your newsletter, Tower Talk. But in fact, on Friday 4 March, ART will be ten years old and this is a milestone we really want to celebrate.

We would like to invite you to **Ring Out For ART** on or around this anniversary. Ring out with something that you and your band have enjoyed learning through ART, whether that's rounds on six, 40 changes of Switch-a-roo, Mexican Wave, a touch of Original, someone's first quarter peal, handbells, eBells, a teacher's quarter peal, a LTR Achiever's touch - because everyone's learning, there are so many ways you can be part of the celebration.

We have created an event on BellBoard called 'ART's tenth birthday', so you can link your performance, and we can all join together to celebrate as the Learning the Ropes community. It's a great reason to ring something special, and to say thank you to ART's volunteers, who produce logbooks, develop web content, run workshops, support new teachers and develop software. Volunteers like Ruth, the Tower Talk Editor, and of course your ringing teacher.

This link takes you to BellBoard and shows how to link your performance to the 'ART's tenth birthday' event: <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/event.php?id=14287>



The 50-50 Club Draw News

The winners of the bumper December Christmas draw are

First Prize of £176.01

Number 54 Robert Nicols

Three equal Prizes of £36.93

Number 6 Clare McArdle

Number 90 Susan Read

Number 35 Jacky Savage



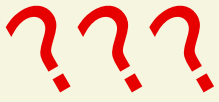
For your chance to win a cash prize and support the valuable work of ART in the process, go to <http://www.learningtheropes.org/5050club>

Why not get the rest of your band to sign up as well?!

Learning the Ropes Certificates

Congratulations to all those who were awarded Learning the Ropes certificates during November, December and January:

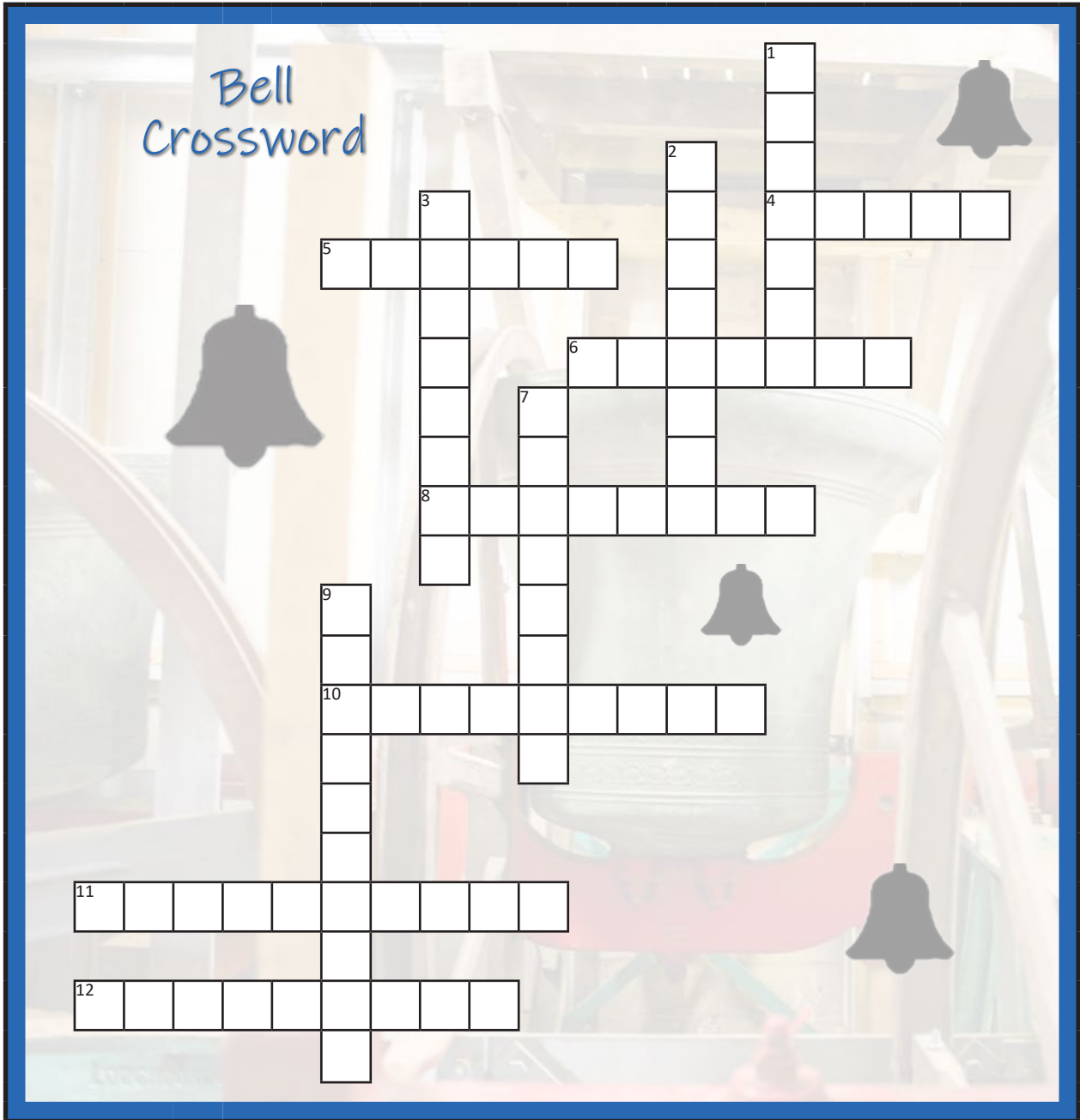
Level One	91	Level Four	8
Level Two	14	Level Five	4
Level Three	13		



Puzzle Corner



Rose Nightingale and Denise Tremain, ART Administrators



All the answers to the clues contain the word 'bell'.
Solution on page 19.

ACROSS

4. a woman with beauty
5. emit a deep roar
6. infectious 'deutsch' rash
8. classified
10. uprising
11. eel crumble (anag.)
12. to add extra detail

DOWN

1. lift this one
2. a silent metal instrument
3. flora feels down
7. an essential song for wet days
9. a type of mushroom

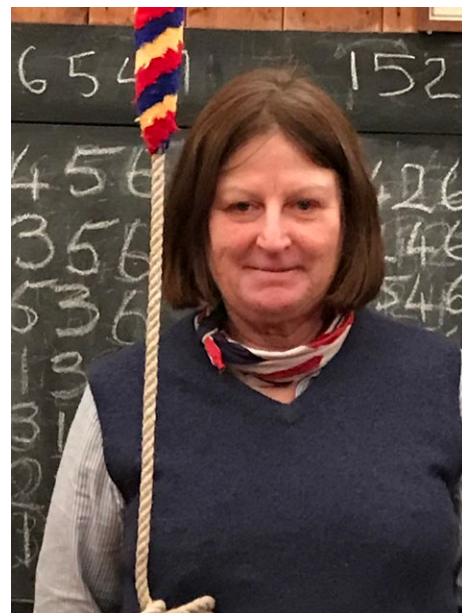
50 Ringing Things and the Wider World

Penelope Bellis, Bedfordshire

In July 2021, coming out of lockdown, I was a new beginner at bellringing. I really enjoyed attending the Festival of Bells in London that month; and as a learner, I took my tutor's advice to get lots of rope time on different bells. In September 2021, my local Association President noted this, and suggested that I might enjoy the *50 Ringing Things* Challenge.

I got off to a really good start, so on September 18th, I was part of a team which entered a fun striking competition held by my Association – my first tick! It was a great competition where bands could elect to ring rounds, call changes or methods; and this effectively levelled the playing field and made prizes available to all levels. The next weekend I could achieve another goal and was elected to the National Guild of Police Bell Ringers at their AGM. We rang at Tewkesbury Abbey and several other churches, and by the end of the day I had logged my ninth tower. What fun!

I have not worked so hard specifically on 'Ringing Things' – I have more or less done what I would have enthusiastically done anyway, but the list of challenges has helped me to be alert to opportunities to help my tower. For our recent open day, a leaflet had been prepared previously which just needed updating. I didn't interfere with that, but business cards and expression of interest forms were required, so I volunteered – would have done so anyway – but even so it was good to know that this was a valuable contribution.



Penelope Bellis

At the beginning of lockdown my tower captain gave us a worksheet for place notation. As this is one of the challenges of *50 Ringing Things*, it was an ideal opportunity to review it. Mostly though I have just been living my best ringing life, ticking the assignments off as I go, and enjoying the variety along the way.

Whilst I feel I am not suited to calling call changes, I learned the changes required for 'Queens and back' by rote. When I was asked to call, these went well and I felt very proud. It's a useful thing to be able to do and now I will try to extend it to a larger repertoire.

It has not all been successful. I have not done well in the belfry tasks. My balance and coordination are notoriously poor and my courage has been lacking, despite several approaches. I went on a steeple keepers course in the hope of finding a way forward but I have only been able to do bits of things so far. But I haven't given up!

So I have submitted my silver award at this time, and for the future there are some 'things' that I am excited to have a go at, steered by 50 RT. I'm planning to research local historical bell foundries for the history assignment. When I apply myself in the next couple of months, a number of other assignments can be completed. I continue to ring different bells and am currently on my 21st tower.

I hope by the time I am able to submit my gold award, that my bell handling will have improved a great deal and I will have learned Plain Hunt and be on my way to learning some methods.

If you want to sign up for the 50 Ringing Things Challenge, go to

<http://www.learningtheropes.org/50-things>

and get started! You can do it on your own or make it a group endeavour and there is always something new to learn.



Work in the tower

Not So Likely Partners

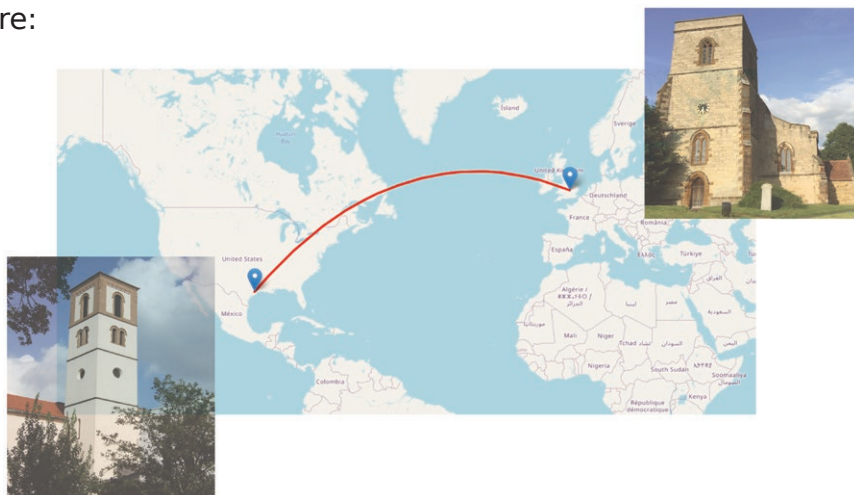
Allen Nunley, Houston, Texas

Lesley Belcher, the Chairman of the Association of Ringing Teachers, contacted me last fall and asked if I would help a tower bell ringer in Northamptonshire move from ringing one bell in Ringing Room to two. The person asking for help had had a go by himself and was not happy with his progress and Lesley thought I might be able to help. Asking someone for help from another continent is not something which would have happened pre-pandemic.

The Players in this transatlantic group are:

Alan Faiers

rings at Pattishall, Northamptonshire, had never rung handbells before and had learned to ring a while ago. With a career in electronics hardware design, software and with mechanical skills, he likes to tinker and create, and has built and uses a dumb bell online, and also builds switch controllers using his 3D printer.



Allen Nunley

trained in electronics and software testing, learned to ring in 1974, is the Ringing Master at Palmer in Houston, Texas, and has been a handbell ringer since the 70's.

Laura Ward

first had handling lessons two years back at St. Giles' Oxford AGM, and is the proud owner of a 2021 dumb bell. She started on Ringing Room when it was first launched, and has been burning up Bellboard with 29 quarter peals (eight conducted by herself) and eight shorter performances on handbells and in Ringing Room.

Laura and Allen had met at the Shreveport 7-Towers Festival, May 2019. For the 2022 event, see <https://www.nagcr.org/event/7-towers-bell-festival>

In October 2020, Lesley Belcher introduced Laura Ward and me to Alan Faiers online. I joined a session with him that day and Laura and I met with Alan the following Thursday (and quite a number of subsequent Thursdays). We began with Plain Bob Minor. We stayed on this track for a number of sessions, progressing from one complete plain course to two to three and then to short touches and then on to longer touches.

From there we progressed to other minor methods (St Clement's, Little Bob and Kent). We are working on touches (including spliced amongst these methods) and are working on Plain Bob Major (with the help of Wheatley).

It turns out that Alan was not the only student. Laura and Allen learned a lot too, and got to practise skills. The lessons which strengthened us included tracking and calculating coursing order, keeping the touches straight (under a variety of conditions including transatlantic network latency), coming up with different exercises for Alan, conducting and ringing from unfamiliar pairs, re-familiarizing ourselves with some methods that had gone a bit stale, and keeping ourselves straight in lumpy ringing.

We have all enjoyed the sessions and look forward to them; we normally meet up even when there are only two, with Wheatley filling in the gap. We have additionally become friends and often chat away part of our practice time. A serendipitous meeting has borne fruit and we plan to continue for the foreseeable future.



The Lizard Awakes!

Miranda Penhaligon, St Buryan, Cornwall



The Lizard Recovery Project was born out of frustration. Frustration over the apparent doom of Cornish ringing. How to help? Where to turn? But from despair came forth sweetness! (Apologies to Tate & Lyle).

Firstly, the facts. During 2020, the Helston Tower Captain Bob Woods was horrified to discover that the number of ringers in his area had decreased to 40 (including 12 at Helston and six at Constantine) leaving a sorry 22 between nine remaining towers. In addition, many tower captains and ringers were over 70, with some over 80. The Lizard area was in severe decline and only a handful of ringers seemed engaged with ringing at all.



An important part of the Lizard Recovery Project

Secondly, action! Ordinary ringing folk decided something must be done and willingly joined their Truro Diocesan Guild district committees to take action, focusing on recruitment and retention. Bob became Chairman of the Western District and Hayley Young became Guild Secretary.

Thirdly, the awesome team! (All cake lovers)

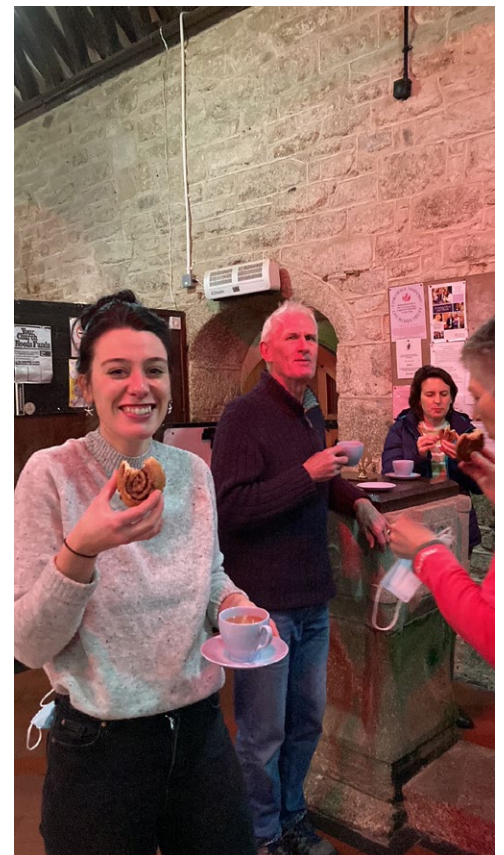
- Bob, an ex-copper, passionate about getting that mojo back into Lizard towers.
- Hayley, ace facilitator (and brewer), capable of persuading stones into action.
- Andy, a forward-thinking ex-bean counter, pragmatic and a great leader of group teaching.
- Miranda, former project manager and lover of spreadsheets.

The Team gathered more (depressing) facts and set out a recovery plan by talking to ringers, brainstorming on recruiting, and setting up a training hub at Wendron, which is within easy reach of Lizard towers and potential trainers. Wendron had one ringer (the tower captain Ray Spencer), but a ground floor ring of six easy going bells. Bob's way with Facebook ensured he had a steady stream of keen recruits as soon as restrictions were lifted. Some were lost during the long wait for training to start, initially planned for spring 2021, but finally starting in October 2021.

Fourthly, Train the Trainer. The group setting allowed Andy to bring on some 'fledgling trainers', who are very grateful for this on-the-job experience under his leadership. Hayley and Andy have started organising 'Train the Trainer' sessions across Cornwall, to refresh and give confidence to the many ringers who haven't taught bell handling for a while. Teaching starts from the 'bell down' approach. It's always more fun to teach in a group and gets around any safeguarding issues as there were always more than three students present.

It's not all work. There's the coffee-and-cake-fuelled camaraderie – this week, two students were spotted swapping contact details over the cinnamon whirls!

Meanwhile down on the most southerly point of the Lizard at St. Keverne, Helen McCabe was thinking the same, and thanks to several chance meetings had assembled a small group of learners. We all met up at an ART training course in Zennor in October, and hope to work with St K in the future to share the mojo!



Some of the team busy ~~ringing bells~~ eating cakes!

Helen says:

A really nice thing which brought us all together just a bit more, was the 'Clang for Climate' event.

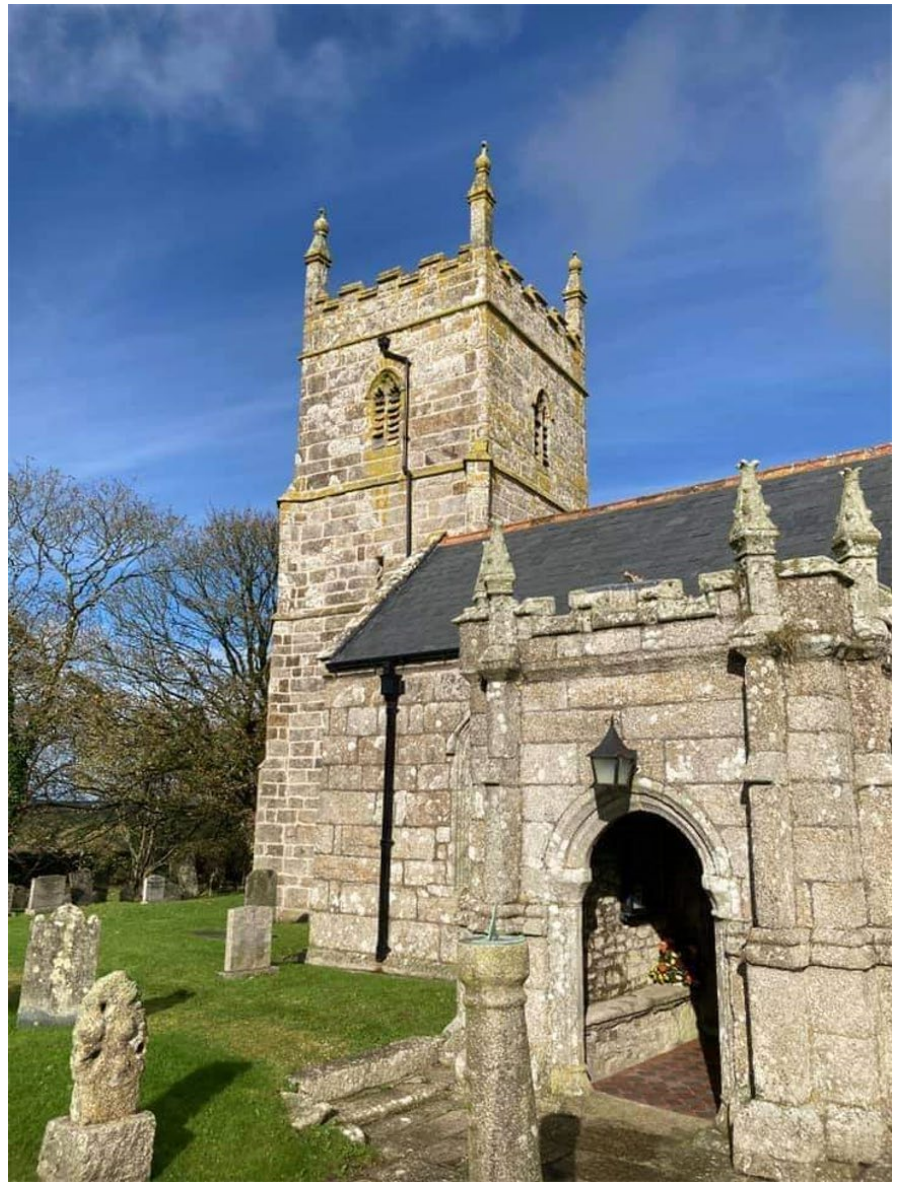
<https://clangforclimate.org/about-clang-for-climate/>

We knew that we couldn't ring anything properly, but decided as it was a 'Clang' we would do just that.

So all our recruits, a ringer from St Anthony who is a regular at our practice and some of their partners came along to chime the bells.

I advertised it around the village, and a local couple who came along to watch were 'roped' in as well, along with the Church Warden, who had popped in to watch.

Everyone really enjoyed themselves and many of us repaired to the pub for a pint and a meal. We must make sure to keep this social side going!



Wendron - a training hub

Louise Allen is one of the new recruits who started to learn at the Wendron Teaching Hub and is based in St Gluvias. Here are some of her impressions:

I think it's fair to say that many people express a wish at some time or another to have a go at ringing a church bell (well, that has been the reaction to me telling my friends). Few of us actually get past the stage of actively seeking out a place to learn and even fewer hit the jackpot and get to learn with the Wendron Bells Hub.

Having actually had my hands on a sally before our first lesson, I did have some idea of what to expect and an inkling of how hard it is, but there were many complete beginners on our first Saturday morning in Wendron, as well as a few who were there to learn specific skills.

Needless to say we were made very welcome, and I have thoroughly enjoyed my subsequent lessons. I really appreciated learning from having the bells down. It really built up confidence and the 'feel' of the bells. It was also great to learn all available bells as they are all so different at first.

But the best thing has been the teachers. So many have turned up to help us and as we rotate around teachers and bells, each has shared their particular style and skills, so that we have had a real breadth of tuition and support. Everyone has progressed really well.

So many thanks to Bob for organising, Andy for making sure that everyone was learning at their own pace, Ray for the use of his bell tower and coffee cups, Miranda for cake and all the other teachers from surrounding churches who have helped us. Thanks also to all the other learners who have made it such a friendly course and I look forward to us continuing in the New Year.

What Happens After LtR Level 5?

David Smith, Brisbane, Australia

The 'Learning the Ropes' scheme is perhaps the single most important ART product. It provides a detailed plan that guides teachers and students from the very first moment when the student enters a ringing room and bell chamber, through the early stages of learning to handle a bell safely, then on to ringing with others and right up to the stage when they ring quarter peals of methods.

The student who has passed LtR Level 5 is a competent change ringer who will have rung at least six quarter peals, including ringing inside and involving a variety of methods.

This poses the question 'What happens next?' There are quite a few answers!

The Master Class

ART offers a Master Class to ringers in UK when they pass LtR Level 5. These were suspended during the Covid incursion but are now resuming. Those who have been on one of these courses speak very highly of the huge amount of progress they can make in a comparatively short time.

Further Learning the Ropes schemes

There's an extension of the LtR scheme called 'Learning the Ropes Plus'. This starts where 'Learning the Ropes' ends, and guides the student through the next stages of their ringing development. There's also a 'Learning the Ropes Handells' scheme.

Both of these have logbooks for the student, available from the ART shop at:

<https://shop.bellringing.org/>

Fifty Ringing Things

The '50 Ringing Things' challenge offered by ART is very popular, and includes all sorts of suggestions that go way beyond just bell-ringing achievements - for example it includes steeple keeping, social media publicity, visiting a foundry, using a ringing app...

The article by Penelope Bellis on page 4 describes one person's experiences of the '50 Things' challenge.

Ringling in other towers

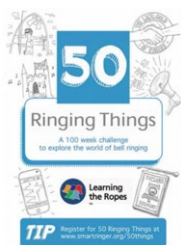
It's a good idea to start ringing in other towers as early in your ringing career as you can - so this is something you can do well before you reach the LtR Level 5 stage.

As you progress, you may find that you want to move on beyond what your home tower normally rings. If so, ask around and see what courses or special practices your association or branch offers. If for example you want to learn surprise ringing and this is not something that your home tower can help you with, or if you want to try ringing on ten bells but your home tower is an eight-bell ring, then special branch practices may be what you need.

Residential ringing courses

There are also a number of residential ringing courses held each year, including a new one being launched this year - the North West Ringing Course. You may have seen this advertised in *The Ringing World* recently - the article about this course is reproduced on the next page.

If you have reached LtR Level 5 and are now interested in ringing on eight bells, the "From six to eight" topic may be the one for you. Or perhaps you may prefer "Moving on in Minor". If you are interested, watch out for when applications open later in the year, and meanwhile have a look at the website mentioned on the next page: <https://nwringingcourse.uk>



The North West Ringing Course



The North West Ringing Course

A new residential ringing course!

We are proud to announce a new residential ringing course, to be held for the first time in August 2022 and annually thereafter. The residential centre is located in the North West of England, but the course is open to all ringers, wherever they are based.

We are aiming at ringers in the middle ground – those who are no longer at the early stages of learning, but are not yet experts. So students will typically be comfortable ringing touches of a few methods, and now want to extend their skills to the next level.

As well as being educational, the course will, we hope, be informal, relaxed, friendly, fun and entertaining.

What are the dates?

The course will run from Thursday 11th to Sunday 14th August 2022. We will meet at lunchtime on the Thursday for some introductory sessions, followed by ringing in the evening. Then there's a full programme on the Friday and Saturday, with the course ending at lunchtime on Sunday – though there will be optional ringing on Sunday afternoon at Liverpool Cathedral for those who don't have to rush home.

SAVE THE DATES!
Thursday 11th to
Sunday 14th August 2022

Where is it based?



The residential base is Myerscough College, which is near Preston. Ringing will be in nearby towers.

The college has extensive facilities, including classrooms that we will use for theory sessions. It has an on-site pub that will be available for our exclusive use during the course – and yes it does serve real ale!

What will it cost?

Exact prices aren't known yet, but we are aiming to keep the cost to about £350 for students and about £200 for helpers. This includes three nights accommodation, meals (except for lunches on Friday and Saturday, when we will be away from the college), and tower fees. But you'll have to pay your own bar expenses!

We'll give full details of pricing on the website when all the costings are finalised.

What topics will be covered?

For theory and practical sessions, attendees will be split into groups, each studying one of these topics:

Moving on in Minor

This is aimed at ringers confident at Plain Bob Minor and maybe a few other minor methods, but who wish to expand their minor repertoire.

From Six to Eight

Designed for those who ring in six-bell towers or have little opportunity to ring on eight, and so want experience with triples and major.

Stedman

This is for those who ring Stedman Doubles, and are looking to move on to touches of Stedman on higher numbers.

Basic Conducting

This explains the calling positions and how to call touches and quarter peals of the more popular doubles and minor methods.

Advanced Conducting

This is for those who can already call touches, but want to learn more about transposition of coursing order and keeping people right.

Each group will have a tutor, six to eight students, and (except for the conducting groups) some helpers. Having helpers enables students to ring one at a time with a good band when necessary, but we also want helpers to provide one-on-one assistance via a 'buddy' system – standing behind when their buddy is ringing, and providing individual advice and mentoring.

Helpers aren't just there to help! We hope that they too will enjoy and benefit from the practical and the theory sessions, and from the less formal evening activities.

Please see the website for more information about each of the course topics, and for the minimum standards for students and helpers in each group.

Any extra-curricular activities?

Yes! There will be a variety of talks, demonstrations, and activities in the evenings, mostly not directly related to the various course topics. The extra-curricular program will include opportunities to learn about tower maintenance and rope splicing, and to practise ringing on handbells and mini-rings.

The Charmborough Ring will be on-site for the duration – and of course the bar will be open in the evenings.



Where is the website?

The website is at <https://nwringingcourse.uk>

At present it contains basic information about the course, but more details will be added soon so please keep an eye on it. In due course the website will allow you to register your interest in attending, whether as a student or helper, and to say which topic you are interested in.

So save the dates, and bookmark the website!



THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

The North West Course is an initiative of the Central Council, being managed by the Volunteer and Leadership workgroup.

DAVID SMITH



My Sort of People, My Sort of Scene

Claire Curtis Thomas, Liverpool

I was busy rigging a very small dinghy when a fellow sailor asked whether or not I was interested in joining the local bell ringing group. He had only been ringing for a few months himself, and he was loving every moment, so I didn't hesitate to say yes. One week later, late in November 2019, I was ascending the spiral staircase of our local church, to be met by a load of smiling faces and many pounds of chocolate and biscuits – my sort of people, my sort of scene.



The group of 'improvers' on the course at Tulloch

fellow trainees and trainers were the best. If I have inadvertently joined a cult, I love it and wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to anyone.

The training was incredibly well organised and we were split into many different groups depending on our ability at the task in hand. The course was run by Helen and her husband Peter, but they were ably assisted by a significant number of additional tutors who had come from all over the country to help out. Ringing and handbell ringing classes started at nine thirty and went on until five, but the time flew by.

The facilities were excellent, with two rooms rigged with bells and a third set up for a dumb bell connected to a computer and screen which allowed novices like me to practise simple methods repeatedly.

I arrived at Tulloch not really understanding the mechanics of ringing a bell. Five days later, even though I struggled, I at least understood what needs to be done to ring a bell efficiently. In my view, during the course of the week, I had made great progress, I had gained a significant degree of confidence, I'd participated in rounds, and I was beginning to think I might be of some use. The people I met there were just great, kind, generous and willing to share their time and knowledge.

Since getting back home, I've been out three nights a week, trying to gain as much time on a bell as possible, and there's not a session when I don't hear Helen's calm voice guiding me through bell control. Every week I'm improving a tiny bit.

Tulloch offered a great residential experience, I was surrounded by bell ringing experts and crucially, an endless supply of chocolates. As training sessions go, it was the very best.

Within minutes, it became obvious that the people who assembled into place and proceeded to make a wonderful sound were nothing short of geniuses. I had no idea how they managed to navigate their way through complex changes! "Fear not" was the general positive advice, "there's a brilliant course for baby bell ringers taking place at Tulloch, so book yourself in ASAP".

Nearly two years later I finally arrived at Tulloch in the Scottish highlands all the way from Liverpool, to participate in a five day training course for intermediate ringers. My son was convinced I had joined a cult, on the basis that once I arrived there I didn't want to leave, I only talked about bellringing, and I thought all my



Helen McGregor, who runs the course at Tulloch, with her faithful friend Blaize

Jamie and Ollie Go Ringing!

Jamie Watson and Ollie Watson

We are two young ringers from Norfolk and in December we had a wonderful day in King's Lynn, and we hope you will enjoy reading all about it. The day started at 10am in the Minster with handbell workshops, which we both really benefited from. We used pocket handbells to work on Plain Bob Minor, Treble Bob Hunting and Plain Hunting. Jamie hadn't ever rung handbells before and Ollie only a few times before lockdown. Each of us tried different pairs of bells to get a feel of them and after trying Plain Hunt, we moved to Plain Bob Minor a few changes at a time. Within an hour we felt comfortable enough to attempt a whole course! Considering both of us had little or no experience on real handbells before, we both felt very pleased with the morning's ringing. The icing on the cake was the chance to ring Plain Hunt on ten when another ringer was spotted and persuaded to join us!

Some ringers went off for lunch and a historical walk around the town before meeting back at the Minster to ring on the ten tower bells. The Norwich Diocesan website describes the bells as follows:



These impressive deep toned bells ring out across the ancient town and port from the North West Tower. The twin towers are unusually very different from each other in style and dimensions, the South West tower of Norman origin being the older of the two. The church, founded more than 800 years ago by the first Bishop of Norwich, was once much larger and attached to a priory.

The present bells are based on a ring of eight cast at Whitechapel in 1766. The treble and second were added in 1887, presented by the Mayor and his wife on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The bells were re-dedicated on Sunday 20th November 2005, having been re-tuned and re-hung in a new frame by Taylor's of Loughborough. The ninth has been re-cast. The ringing room was also reordered at this time.



Jamie at full stretch ringing the tenor at St Peter Mancroft, and with his LtR Level 3 certificate

More ringers joined us to ring and we went over our allotted time by half an hour. We all rang plenty of times and had the opportunity to try bells of different weights with Jamie having to have a stack of boxes to ring the back bells. The Minster bells were very enjoyable to ring. We started with rounds to get used to the bells, which are quite large with the tenor weighing 28cwt! We both rang the tenor in rounds and call changes on all ten, which went really well and really brought out the splendour of the bells.

Now that we were all comfortable on the bells we attempted plain hunting on nine and ten, where we took it in turns to ring inside and on the tenor. It was quite a new experience for everyone, but in the end we rang it to a very respectable standard. Filled with confidence we dared to ring Grandsire Caters, which came round successfully. *'Jamie had rung the treble to Grandsire before but inside only to Doubles - no problem with Caters though!'* says Nikki, Jamie's teacher.

After this we had the chance to see the bells in the belfry. Once there, the old wooden frame can be clearly seen still in position with the ten bells hung in a new cast iron frame below it. Then to finish the day, we rang two courses of treble bob hunting which really exercised the brain and this was followed by lowering all ten bells in peal.

We both had an amazing day and can't wait until the next one! Thank you to Nikki for inviting us. Nikki adds *'The same afternoon the Northern Branch of the Norwich Diocesan Association of Ringers held its annual branch meeting on zoom. Ollie and Jamie were both elected as members and on the following Monday evening they visited Mancroft, (12 bell tower in the middle of Norwich) which was their first tower as members of the NDA, and spent the evening ringing Grandsire Caters, Grandsire Cinques and yes you've guessed it.. Mancroft tenor.'*

Ringling Room is my Home Tower

Vicky Chapman

Laura finished her latest rave about Change Ringing with

“...and it's really geeky! You'll love it.”

Laura has been my friend since what seems like forever, several lifetimes at least, and therefore by definition we have a lot of interests in common, although she is infinitely cooler than me. I lie somewhere between admiration and jealousy for her enthusiasm for archery, fencing, writing, her love of the English language, her passion for history, geography, and indeed life itself. But the change ringing thing? Well, that was rather new, and she'd only been obsessing about it since she got back from a trip to the UK. And when I say Laura was (and still is) obsessed, I mean, she was carrying on like the universe itself was brought into existence just so that 13.8 billion years later, she, Laura E. Goodin, could lay palm to rope and fulfil the purpose of creation.

Did I say “yes” to doing her Four Virtual Bell Ringing Lessons just to placate her? No, but it was the start of Lockdown 2020, I was bored by my now Work-From-Home job, and the odds were good that I would enjoy it to some degree at least. And it was, as she said, really geeky and that suited me just fine.

And before long, a bunch of us, Laura's victims really, were slowly pecking away at the keyboard: **Ding, Ding, Dong, Ding, Dong, Dong Dong** “Sorry! The spacebar got stuck!” **Ding, Dong, ... CRASH!** “Damn internet!”

There was a dizzying amount of language to learn, which was far harder than understanding what I thought were fairly simple concepts about permutations (it's just like plaiting, weaving and tatting, really). The words **sounded** like English, but clearly had a different meaning, and besides who were Sally and Bob? And why were they single? If there's a back stroke, why isn't there a front stroke, or indeed a Freestyle rather than a handstroke (OO-err!) What is a touch (again, OO-err!), and why do people seem to revere Oprah's boyfriend, Stedman? Why is the blue line blue and not green or red? Why is it third's place bell but not bell 3? What is this up the front and out the back? All the jargon was quite overwhelming. But I am stubborn, Laura is a most patient enabler, I mean teacher, and by the time I had got through the four lessons, I could just about manage Plain Hunt on six.

It would have stopped there as an interesting distraction, but Laura knows me well. Far too well.

“Vicky,” she asked ever so sweetly, “I've got five ringers here, but we need a sixth”. You know how to treble, don't you? Could you treble for us?”

“I'm still pretty new to this,” I warned.

“That's fine, you'll be able to keep up, just keep counting.”

I swear she set me up, and I fell for it hook, line, and sinker. Trebling for a more experienced band was like seeing the dance of the solar system for the first time and my long forgotten English ancestry, far too sunburnt to otherwise say much under this Australian clime, sat up and paid attention. As the touch progressed, although I had no understanding of the method they were ringing and all my conscious effort went into counting my place on the treble, my soul was soaring on the sound of the bells. I threw myself into learning about change ringing, reading up about the various mathematical theories, of why bells are made of bronze and not steel, of the history behind bellringing, and the glorious patterns that a bell ringing method makes. I'll bore anyone even half willing to listen about the intricate beauty of a Janogram (polar plot, circle of work) and put together a neat Excel program that will convert any CompLib method into one.



*Victoria ringing
a real bell*

The universe was clearly waiting for me to put palm to sally as well. But there was a problem. There are no towers near me.

The closest belfry, as the bat flies, is in the Uniting Church at Bowral, just 33km away, but driving that 33km can easily exceed 90 minutes negotiating towering rainforest and hairpin bends along the way. The next closest is St James at Menangle, on a no less treacherous road, and still over an hour away. Compounding the problem of geographical distance is the fact that most towers have early evening practices, and it's just not feasible to leave work early.



*The long train trip has good views!
Bald Hill, Stanwell Park*

In the meantime, though, I joined the 'General Ringing Practice' online, and kept up with the other early career ringers as we slowly made our way through to Plain Bob Doubles. How on earth anyone can know where all the bells should be at any point in time is still like a dark art to me, but I hold great admiration for those who can.

Daylight Savings starts in October here in Australia, and Daylight Savings ceases in the UK, which unfortunately meant that I could no longer attend the UK-based General Ringing Practice, so at Laura's encouragement, I started my own virtual band through the Take Hold Lounge, Plain Bob's Friends. Most of us are early career ringers, still considered learners before lockdown prevented us from continuing with our lessons. But even though we started pretty much at Plain Hunt, through the six months of practice before Daylight Savings stopped here in Australia, and to the cry of "Let's break some stays!!", we had mastered a full touch of Plain Bob Minor, and I am very proud of us for that.



The start/end of Daylight Savings in March 2021 meant that Plain Bob's Friends were, unfortunately, put on hold for six months, but I didn't, and indeed, I couldn't stop ringing by now, I was addicted. The addition Wheatley helped immensely as I could now practise solo. I have also helped Laura indoctrinate other people, the latest being a young lad from Vancouver, Canada. He has joined us in a band called 'Miracles', which consists of Australians ringing early Sunday afternoon, and folks from the Americas, for whom it is the evening, but the UK-ers miss out because, alas, this world of ours is round (although if anyone in the UK wants to ring from 2am-3am early Sunday morning, they'd be welcome). It has been truly wondrous to watch the development of this young ringer as he grows, completely overtaking what I've learnt in the past two years within just a couple of weeks. I am so proud of him.

Maureen from Christ Church St Laurence in Sydney rings with our 'Miracles' band and invited me there. Although 2.5 hours away, Christ Church St Laurence is within walking distance of Sydney's Central train station, and they were willing to give me lessons on a mid-Sunday morning, rather than a week-night evening.

I haven't been more excited about a trip to Sydney since I was a kid going to Luna park. I couldn't sleep the night before and woke up ridiculously early to catch a very early train into the city. I was far, far too early, but I was there. I was in the tower and there were sallies! James and Priscilla are wonderfully helpful, and I was exactly where I needed to be. Of course, it wasn't that easy. I wore the minor carpet burn and slightly wrenched wrist with pride, and called Laura the moment I had finished "OMG OMG OMG" I kept repeating down the phone.

"Uh-huh, told you!" she said, with just a hint of smugness.

I'm going back to practise some more. It must be quite weird to them that I know how to ring touches of Plain Bob Minor, and a plain course of Stedman Doubles but still can't handle a bell properly. Unfortunately, I can't commit as a regular ringer, because that 2.5-hour commute completely kills the day, but I will be there as often as I possibly can.

And although Ringing Room will always be my home tower, the moment I felt my shoulder muscles stretch as I pulled that first backstroke at Christ Church St Laurence, I knew for sure I was a Ringer, and therefore the universe itself was fulfilled.

It's All a Game!

Steve Farmer

Gone are the days where students would pore over an encyclopaedia – nowadays they'll reach for their phone. Technology has taken a major place in everyone's lives and ringing is no exception.

With a background in engineering and electronics, and as a new learner myself, I quickly saw the potential for ringing simulators in a tower or on a dumbbell, initially as a way of getting more rope time when learning. But the reassuring 'bong' at the appropriate time, the perfect band which never got tired or complained and the sheer fun of it were additional benefits. Since starting to teach, especially younger ringers, I see that the use of technology increases their learning and interest, and adds a competitive edge.



Steve Farmer

Consider for a moment three learners – teenagers, friends, but very different in character and with abilities. The '**studious**' one, quick to process information but not so good on the physical bits like rhythm and hand/eye co-ordination; the '**sporty**' one, always out playing ball games but not confident outside their comfort zone and has to be coaxed to move forward; and finally the '**social**' one, who likes to be involved, lives on social media and really wants to be part of the team.

In the early stages of bell handling, these three were very different. The first picked up the process of ringing very quickly and understood the mechanics but struggled with rhythm and intuition. The second concentrated on the handling without necessarily understanding the process, and the third just followed instructions and made very quick progress, and was extremely easy to teach.

Then they reached the point where I could introduce more features of the simulator, which has just been going 'Bong!' in the background, and get them to start ringing rounds on four bells, nice and steady. This soon turned into a video game for them. They have a go, ringing for a few minutes each, and then they ask "How did I do?" , which turns into "Who was the best?".

In society and certainly in education, there has been a move towards creating a non-competitive atmosphere, but contrast this to their activities in their spare time when young people are playing more and more online and video games that have a significant 'Win' and 'Lose' element. I was surprised how all three of these learners really wanted to have a league table of how they were doing in comparison to each other, and this got me thinking about how what is now technically called 'Gamification' can be applied to ringing.

I started to look at the best option for creating a 'score' for ringing. With a simulator available, lots of data is produced which can be used to create scores. As all three wanted to have this score, we decided on a set of scores rather than a single one.

I use Virtual Belfry (<https://www.belfryware.com/>) as my software of preference when teaching and practising, and within the software there is a large amount of data that you can access, but there are three basic pieces that I suggest are the most relevant to an improver.

Standard Deviation: consider this as the 'Spread' of the striking, early to late.

Mean: This is whether the ringer tends to be early or late .

Average Error: A simple average of the striking error whether early or late, so 'overall'.

Getting each ringer to ring for four minutes (including the pull off) gives a series of scores that can be used to motivate them to improve against themselves and others. I also provide them with a score for 'style' over the four minutes which is an additional metric that can be used. Although subjective, it is useful to point out the benefits of a good style from day one!

The results were astonishing. Almost immediately, they went from concentrating on the act of ringing alone to the full listening, responding and adapting style which we could call unconscious competence!

This simple and easily accessible option for producing a definitive score can also be used to develop teamwork. Using Virtual Belfry, you can analyse real ringing very simply, and then use the results to move ringers into different positions to see if they can improve the overall performance. For a teacher, this information is valuable as it can be used to determine where you should concentrate your efforts.

I can see lots of options for software that could use the bell as a 'controller' for single striking. Imagine a pendulum on a screen with the rhythm of the handstroke and backstroke. On the end of the pendulum is a target and your bell is a paint gun that fires as the bell strikes. Can you hit the target? Or what about a team of two, a bell each, the first bell's striking determines left and right, the second up and down, and ringers have to keep a cross-hair within a target area or move it around by making micro adjustments to their ringing...

The options are endless, and maybe it is time that we look at supplementing the excellent training programs we have with some innovative technology and a splash of fun?

Finally, a word of warning for those who may wish to try this approach. Not everyone is as competitive as everyone else, and you must be careful to ensure that you are not alienating anyone within the tower - but then again, you just may be surprised who are the competitive ones!

If you would like to talk about any of these ideas, please email me at steve.farmer@elginhill.com

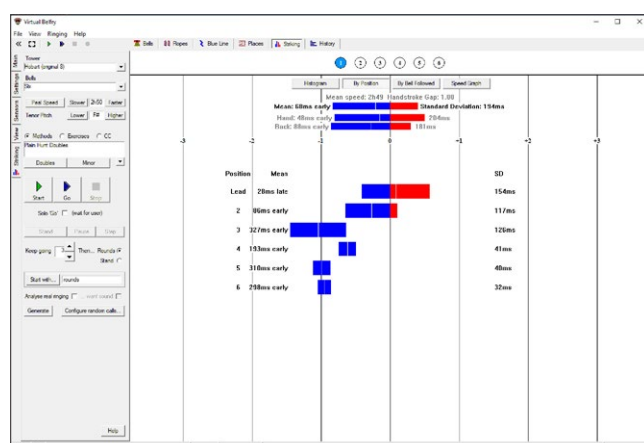
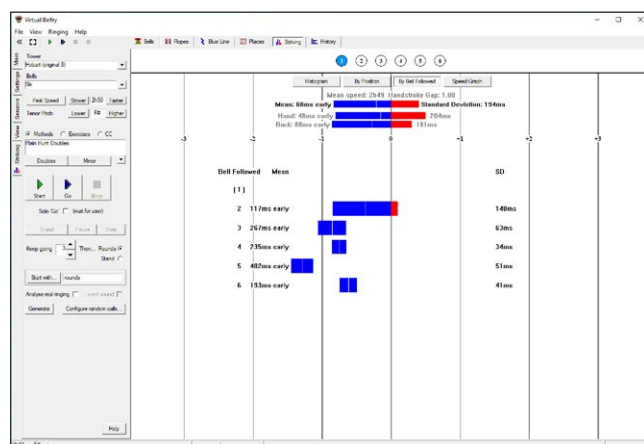
The illustrations

The top two illustrations show screenshots of the data taken from Virtual Belfry to create a 'score' targeted at improving a learner's ringing.

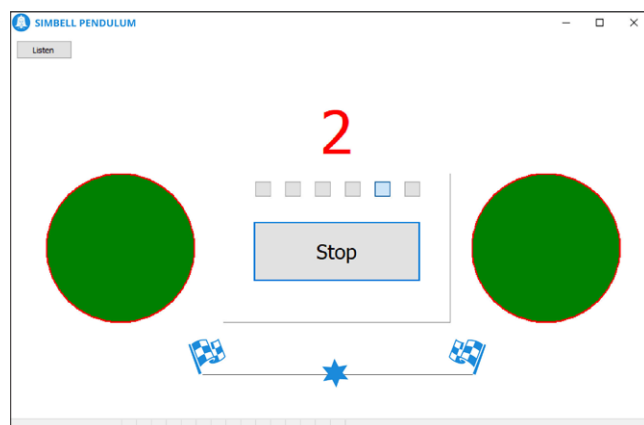
The Pendulum is a striking game that I am currently developing, where the green circles flash alternately. The amount of time that the green circle is visible can be changed. Two ringers compete against each other and they have to strike their bell when their green circle can be seen. A point is scored every time they hit their target. The first one to cross their finish line wins.

You can imagine this as a sort of tug of war. The star at the bottom moves towards your flag each time you strike accurately, but moves back the other way each time your opponent scores.

As the flash time is constant, this game teaches rhythm. It should be released in a couple of months as long as I get time.



Screenshots of data from Virtual Belfry showing striking accuracy



A screenshot of 'Pendulum'

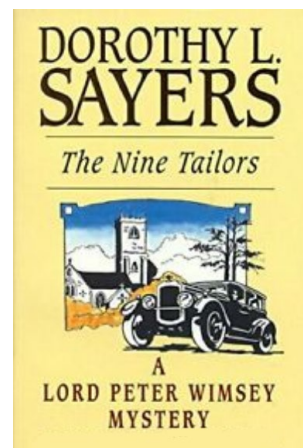
Nine Attempts

Lydia H Trossory

This could be the title of my bell ringing inspired murder mystery – but I think something like it has already been done? Nine attempts at what? On my life – on all my nine lives? On gaining that elusive quarter peal? Well, so far, Covid has had two attempts on the former – and I am still here to tell the tale. Or should that be “still here to grab a tail”?

Thanks to the virus I have had two of my attempts at a quarter peal of a doubles method inside interrupted. This has allowed plenty of time to practise the method in ‘Ringing Room’ – in fact I have managed to achieve two quarter peals of said method in Ringing Room. One on the treble, one inside. Both achieved earlier this year. A full year after my planned real life attempt was interrupted by you-know-what. The concentration was much harder than I had imagined. As was the need to keep my ‘trigger finger’ poised over its key for such a long time. So it was with a huge sense of achievement and relief that I managed to complete both attempts with my two bands of friends. And gratitude at having the chance to do a couple of virtual quarter peals. Definitely a cause for celebration. I’ve still got to wait to achieve it in the tower, but hopefully it won’t be too much longer. And then my quarter peal of Plain Bob Minor. And then my LtR Level 5 will be finally done and dusted. Long overdue but it will feel all the sweeter once it eventually happens. And in the meantime I have become a much more rounded and capable ringer.

Since getting back to ‘real ringing’ the virtual stuff has taken a back seat. It’s been great, and I have thoroughly enjoyed being able to ring far more complicated methods than ever I thought I could do in the tower, including methods on eight bells, as well as lots of different doubles and minor methods. This has been thanks to the ‘Blue Pathway’ (and then starting the ‘Red Pathway’).



A bell-ringing inspired murder mystery!

Pathways

‘Pathways’ are an initiative of *The Ringing World*. They are described in the *2020 Ringing World Diary*, and you can also find details on *BellBoard* at

<https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/pathways>

The blue pathway is for ringers looking to develop their ringing beyond Plain Bob Minor by learning some simple new doubles and minor methods.

The red pathway is aimed at ringers who can ring a surprise minor method and who wish to learn more methods on five, six, and optionally seven bells.

The yellow pathway takes ringers who can already ring some surprise major methods and expands their repertoire on eight bells with both plain and surprise methods.



I worked through the Blue Pathway virtually, using Ringing Room. Both good fun and good challenges, and supported by wonderful targeted practices. I am so grateful to the leaders of those practices. The pathways made me ‘do my homework’, learning the method and place bell starts thoroughly, and thinking ‘blue line’ – which I never had the mental capacity to do in the tower. I was always a ‘circle of work’ and ‘where do I pass the treble?’ sort of tower bell ringer. Still am. But gradually, creeping into the mix, is the elusive blue line, and the ‘what place bell have I become?’ – all thanks to the Pathways, and thanks to the Ringing Room. I am sure I am not the only novice ringer who struggles to think in that linear, blue line way? Or to clearly follow the path of my course and after bells? But, gradually, the ability to use both those helpful tools in the tower is coming.

Yes, it's being back in various towers (as many as I can manage) since the return to real ringing that has been the most fun. Nothing beats the feel of a real rope or the sound of a real bell – or being with real live people. And no amount of virtual ringing can help with bell handling, or ropesight, or the nuance of precisely when to pull, or where to catch, or how hard or light that pull should be, or how high up those hands should go at backstroke. These are the things that have taken me the time to re-learn. The 'feel' of ringing. It's such a nuanced thing for me. And with so many facets to it. Listening to your bell to hear (and adjust) its place in the row, at the same time as seeing the ropes, at the same time as feeling your rope, at the same time as pre-empting your pull on the rope to get the right place at the next stroke. You don't really get to do any of that in Ringing Room. Nor do you get any sense of a change of rhythm or speed of your bell, between hunting up and hunting down. That 'feel' thing again.

But what you do get in Ringing Room is a really good chance to see your course and after bells, a clear and easy way of seeing as well as hearing the position of the treble, and a way of using your brain quite differently – well, in my case anyway – so that you really can just ring 'by the blue line'. There's so much less physical stuff or mental processing to get in the way of doing that.



So for me, the two ways of ringing and practising, virtually and on real bells, definitely do complement each other.



I have found myself attempting methods in the tower recently that I never thought possible, including Stedman, because they have become so familiar to me from Ringing Room and because I know the blue line.

I am a fair way off attempting Cambridge Surprise Minor in the tower, but what I do know is that it is definitely within my grasp. Hurrah!

Seeds of Hope

David Cooper, Lincolnshire

It's early days still at Ruskington in Lincolnshire, but following a recent recruitment drive on social media, we have attracted eleven people all from outside the church or the ringing community. Not all of these will continue for a variety of reasons, but we have a good age range and even have three people on the waiting list.

With just myself as the sole active ringer in the village I have found it much more difficult to recruit teaching help. So many ringers are busy keeping things going in their own towers, but I do have help from a local lady as well as some help from the local Association officers. One unexpected benefit of having no 'proper' ringers is that our beginners benefit from intensive two-hour teaching sessions, with no interruptions for method ringing.

What is so encouraging is to read the many positive and appreciative comments on our village Facebook page like this one following ringing for the Carol Service:



Our Churchwarden, Diana, full of smiles as she chimes a bell.

'What a lovely sound round the village tonight. Christmas is coming. Many thanks to the campanologists of St Andrew's church.'

Bell Founder for a Day

Sophia Dady, Leicestershire Guild

Sophia Dady is a former Ringing Master of the Four Shires Guild.

Have you ever heard of 'Kids in Museum Takeover Day'? The children of Cobden Primary School in Loughborough hadn't either, but by the end of a fantastic and fun packed day at Taylor's Bell Foundry in November they certainly had! The year 4 group, comprising 60 youngsters, were thrust into one day in the life of one of the oldest firms here in England that relates to the age-old art of bell ringing!

What is Kids in Museum Takeover Day?

Kids in Museum Takeover Day is a UK national event, giving heritage sites the chance to connect with different groups of children and young people. The premise of the day allows young people to be invited to museums or heritage sites to take part in the different roles at these locations. As a result, the children can learn outside the classroom, while getting an insight into how these sites are run. Furthermore, they are taught new skills and given a sense of ownership over their local heritage site. This year, the theme chosen by the Takeover organisers was aptly 'Climate Change' and I was asked to come in to teach the pupils 'Solutions', my new climate song, and we used handbells as our chosen instruments.



The Taylor's bell foundry at Loughborough

So this is how the day mapped out

The children were split into two groups: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Within these groups they were further split into three groups, ten in each. The morning group started the day in the Bellfoundry Education Room, where they were given safety instructions and guided through the events. They were taught what a tour guide is and their role in the museum, with the importance of educating the public about life in a working foundry. The group then took on the role of a 'tour guide' and showed their classmates around! This was great fun as they announced "Hello everybody, and welcome to the Bell Foundry. We will be your tour guides today" and "The Bell foundry is very old and was made by the Taylor family. Here at the Bell foundry we make bells"!



Ready to go with handbells, from left, Sophia Dady, Ian Stonehouse and Sally Brown

The second group were taught the importance of looking after artefacts at the museum. They were each given an object, asked to describe it and think about how best to look after it. Working in their groups, they made a display for their teachers to show at the end.

The third group were taught how to keep the Bell Foundry safe and one of the Bell Makers came in to talk about how the bells were made. The group then made their own bells using kinetic sand and placing it into a bell mould. This followed a presentation by the group of their work to the teachers and staff at the foundry.

The session then concluded with 'Solutions' – a song I had written to carry forward the message of hope in helping to look after our world. The group were shown a video of Boris Johnson announcing that he would learn my song, followed by a performance by Fairfield Prep School in Loughborough (the first school to take part). The Year 4 group then set about learning the song, along with the actions, and gave a fantastic performance to their teacher Mr. Wright and the staff at the Bell Foundry. The session ended with a questions and answer session with Sally Brown, Leicester Guild President, and myself regarding handbells, the environment and the inspiration behind the song.

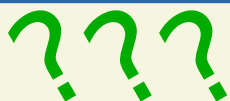


From left, Hayley Simons, Chrissie van Mierlo, Kira Mills, Sophia Dady and Sally Brown

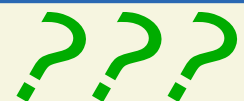
We all had a fantastic day and the children had a real insight into the workings of this historic foundry (not to mention, a goodie bag to take home as a reminder of their day!). To find out more about the foundry, head to <http://taylorbells.co.uk/>

To find out more about 'Solutions' and how you can get involved, then head to <https://sophiadady.com>

While it's not easy to play a tune on Tower Bells, I've transposed the song to be played on 12 handbells in the key of G major, so hopefully that should suit many handbell ringers but if you only have six bells, then do not fear (I've covered that eventuality too) as I have written a chorus part, just for you! All welcome: schools, choirs, eco groups, handbell groups or even individuals and in whatever way you wish. All videos recorded of your performance will be promoted on my website and social media as a way of saying thank you. I can't wait to 'hear' from you!



Answers to Puzzles



Here's the solution to the puzzle on page 3.

Across	Down
4 Belle	1 Barbell
5 Bellow	2 Dumbbell
6 Rubella	3 Bluebell
8 Labelled	7 Umbrella
10 Rebellion	9 Portobello
11 Cerebellum	
12 Embellish	

