

Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



October 2011, Autumn Issue



Wokingham All Saints

Ways of Learning

I recently attended the 'Learning Methods' course which covered all the techniques one can use to learn a new method thoroughly. It was run by John Harrison at All Saints, Wokingham, on the evening of Tuesday 14th June, with Graham Slade, Jon Tutchter and Richard Woodward as helpers. The students were: Tricia Amos (Finchampstead), Chris Markham (Finchampstead), Rob Needham (Sonning) and Mary Spence (All Saints, Wokingham).

John changed the way he had planned to run the course. His original plan was to discuss the ways of learning a new method on the night - then give the students a new method to learn and to practice ringing it. However, he decided that this approach would be too much in just two hours, so the students were asked to buy a small book titled *Learning Methods* by Michael Henshaw and study it in advance.

A few days before the course, John emailed the students with diagrams of a new method to learn. This gave us time to try to learn our method thoroughly by applying the principles we had read in the book, and we could then practice our new method on the night. It was agreed by the students that this was a good way to run the course and it was proved to work because we managed to ring our new methods without too much help, some even ringing a touch successfully. Each

Diary of Events

Saturday 15 October

Twyford

10am—12 noon

8 Bell striking competition

12-1pm Branch practice

Saturday 22 October

Branch Outing (Wallingford area—contact Pam & Andrew Elliston)

Saturday 12 November

7.30pm Branch Quiz

St Paul's Wokingham Hall

Saturday 19 November

Arborfield

6.00pm—7.30pm

Branch Practice

Saturday 17 December

Warfield

10am—12 noon

Branch Practice

Monthly Tuesday afternoon practices at All Saints, Wokingham on 11 October (note new date), 1 November & 6 December (provisionally).

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student had only one new method to learn, two were given St. Clements Bob Minor and the other two had Pinehurst Bob Minor. At the start of the evening's course John summarised the techniques described in the *Learning Methods* book and the students had a chance to discuss anything they were not clear about. The main techniques were: learn the blue line by breaking it into chunks of work, look for symmetries in the blue line, learn the work of each place bell thoroughly and the place bell order, see where one meets the treble and where one works with one's before and after bells, study the overall structure of the method, and use similarities with methods one already knows.

Of course, to make good use of a learning technique one usually needed another skill that hopefully one had already acquired; for example, it was no good learning where one passed the treble if one could not see while ringing where one passed the treble. The technique that seemed the most difficult for the students to make use of was studying the overall structure of the method; I suspect this is only helpful if one can see the order of ALL the bells while ringing – I know I can't.

Learning the work of each place bell 'in isolation' seemed quite difficult, and indeed I could only do it by knowing the whole of the blue line and remembering where each bell started on the line. However, knowing place bells really proved its worth when we came to ring a touch. It was a lot easier to remember what to do at the Bob and to remember what work came next. It would also be much easier to splice two methods together if one knew the place bell work of both methods. To reinforce the learning of the place bell work during the course, it was suggested that the conductor should always call out "lead end" at the end of each lead.

It proved to be a good course that covered a lot of ground, and our thanks are due to John and his helpers (who, in the case of Pinehurst, also had to learn a new method and ring it correctly!)

Rob Needham

Training update

In the last Newsletter I said I was hoping to run another Maintenance course. That has been overtaken by the Guild Towers & Belfries Committee (who run the course for us) offering priority to anyone on our waiting list for a course they are running on Saturday 12th November, probably in the Abingdon/Harwell area. I passed that invitation to people who I knew were interested, so there will not be a Branch maintenance course in the near future. If you are interested in bell maintenance, or if your tower needs someone to become more knowledgeable, then please consider this course. The contact is John Davidge (jdavidge@btinternet.com) or 01494 873325.

For information on Branch training courses see the website www.odg.org.uk/sdb/training or contact me on 0118 978 5520.

John Harrison

Us and Them (6) - abridged

In this article, I look at the relationship between recruiting and the creation of competent ringers, the recruit's aptitude and how we try to develop that aptitude into the performance skills.

Aptitude

However good or bad the training we provide, the outcome will be influenced by the raw material. An aptitude is the innate potential to learn a particular skill, and we each have them in different measures.

It is easy to see whether someone has developed a skill, but harder to determine whether they have the aptitude to do so before they start. It would be nice if there were an aptitude test for 'competent ringers' but in the absence of one, our traditional approach has been to set about training anyone willing to have a go, with little thought for aptitude.

The traditional approach

Our traditional approach produces very mixed results. Some trainees respond well, and quickly learn the required skills, but others don't. Some take longer to become competent, but some just struggle on indefinitely and never do. Many drop out, with estimates of retention ranging from 1 in 5 to 1 in 10. As a result, many bands spend most of their training effort on ringers who either give up (so the effort spent training them is lost) or struggle on without mastering the necessary performance skills (so they continue to absorb training resources, first for individual tuition and then collective practice time for interminable rehearsal that leads nowhere).

Why do trainees keep going despite failing to master the skills of bell control and good striking? It might be out of a sense of loyalty to the band, or gratitude for the effort put into their training. They might be driven by personal resolve – 'I've started so I'll finish'. They might feel that they should carry on unless told to stop, since the teacher or tower captain is in control of the process.

Why do we collude in the process? Do we feel guilty it must be our fault for poor teaching or are we so far committed we can't stop? Are we afraid to be honest about anyone's poor performance because poor performance is becoming normal?

Most bands have limited training resources, so effort spent on recruits who never become good performers is effort that could have been spent on the minority who are able to become competent performers.

Training

By focusing on aptitude, I don't want to play down the huge influence of training. The quality of training varies from excellent to abysmal, with the average probably somewhere near the lower end of the spectrum, but training is a very big subject, which I won't discuss here.

Instead I will look at ways to make better use of whatever training resources exist, by spending more time training people who go on to become competent ringers, and less time training people who don't.

A better way?

Most structured training programmes include check points to review progress and decide future action. If it becomes clear that success is unlikely, the training may be ended. The traditional un-structured training of ringers doesn't include any check points, but we could introduce some. Here is one way:

Rather than just asking people to sign up as recruits, we can offer taster sessions – to individuals or small groups - for people to see how the bells work and get a feel for what ringing is like. That way you could attract far more people than you would by direct recruiting, since there would be no commitment for them to carry on. You might invite them to visit a practice as well, so they get a feel for the routine of ringing life.

Whether it is a single session or a few sessions, you would start 'teaching' them using the full range of teaching exercises. The only difference would be that instead of carrying on indefinitely, you would stop and have a review after the initial session or sessions. Not just to ask 'do you want to carry on?', but a proper two-way discussion.

Some of them will just thank you for an interesting experience (which is a beneficial bit of outreach anyway). Some of them may now be having second thoughts about taking up ringing in which case you have both saved time and effort before the inevitable happened. Others will be interested to carry on, and they will want your view of their progress so far, to give them confidence that it is right for them. You will be in a much better position to advise them than you would have been before you started. Be honest about any problems you have detected, but be encouraging if you think they just need time to work through them.

If you have doubts about their aptitude, you should discuss them openly. You might agree to some further trial lessons, with an agreed point at which both you and the recruit will assess whether continuing is the right thing to do.

A decision to stop (by either party) is always difficult, but in some circumstances it is the right one. I have seen ringers who were never going to become competent, and it must have been painfully aware for all how they were struggling for month after month, because no one was prepared to face reality. I also remember being bitterly disappointed many years ago when I decided to give up trying to learn to fly a hang glider. I had hung on for months making no progress before finally admitting that I wasn't cut out for it. Had it not been for one event, I might have carried on even longer, not really competent – an accident waiting to happen.

What is competence?

I have talked about recruits 'becoming competent' and 'mastering the skills' as the intended outcome of recruiting.

Of course whether they achieve it depends on what you mean by 'competent'. Do you mean able to ring a bell without injuring anyone or do you mean able to strike it accurately? There is a huge difference between the two, and there is a lot of emotion about where to draw the line. Being safe on the end of a bell rope is an absolute minimum, but it does not constitute being a 'competent ringer'. Ringing is not a solo performance, it is a collective way of making music. Whatever we ring competent performance means striking in the right place. A choir would not consider someone who regularly sang the wrong notes at the wrong time to be a competent, and as ringers we should not set our sights any lower.

The fact that someone rings regularly does not confer competence if he or she regularly strikes in the wrong place. But should we aim to recruit more people who are incapable of performing any better than them? That seems a very low aspiration.

I have heard it said that bad ringing is better than no ringing. This may be true with a limited band on a Sunday morning but it is not true as a way of building a sustainable band. Poor ringing is a very good way to drive potentially competent ringers away.

You also hear people say that the public can't tell the difference between good and bad ringing. They might say they love the sound of the bells, even though they only hear poor ringing, but anyone exposed to good ringing and bad ringing can tell the difference. And just think which is more likely to inspire people to want to be part of it, and volunteer to learn to ring.

I hope these articles are informative, and possibly a little provocative. If there are any other aspects of our relationship with the public, including the way we turn some of them into ringers, then please let me know.

John Harrison

Peals

Saturday 23 July 2011 in 2 hrs 56 minutes

5056 Cambridge Surprise Major

Composed: Thomas B Worsley (reversed)

- 1 Catherine M A Lane
- 2 David Sullivan
- 3 Alan K Barsby
- 4 Michael K Hopkins Till
- 5 Richard H Johnston
- 6 Geoffrey K Cook
- 7 Christopher P Cole
- 8 Kenneth R Davenport (C)

Rung for the anniversary of the consecration of the Church.

Birthday compliment to 3. To mark the retirement of Vinnie Sullivan. 100th peal 5.

Quarter Peals

Friday 29 April 2011

All Saints, Wokingham

1250 Yorkshire Surprise Major

- 1 Mhairi C Miller
- 2 Jane A Mellor
- 3 Katie J Tutchter
- 4 Stephen R Smith
- 5 Graham E Slade
- 6 Nigel AL Mellor (C)
- 7 John A Harrison
- 8 Jon P Tutchter

A wedding compliment to Prince William and Kate Middleton.

Wednesday 29 June 2011

St. Paul's, Wokingham

1260 Plain Bob Minor

- 1 Susan E Davenport
- 2 Alison Clayton
- 3 Elizabeth J Davenport
- 4 Janet E Menhinick
- 5 Geoffrey K Cooke
- 6 Kenneth R Davenport (C)
- 7 Pam Elliston

Rung for Father Peter Day's First Mass Mass on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul.

31 July 2011

St. Andrew's, Sonning

1264 Plain Bob Major

- 1 Mary Webb
- 2 David Sullivan
- 3 Lavinia M Sullivan
- 4 Rob Needham
- 5 Pam Elliston
- 6 Andrew Elliston
- 7 David Willis
- 8 Charles M S Botting (C)

Rung to mark the birth yesterday of a grandson to Helen & Andrew Price, a Sonning ringer.

15 May 2011

All Saints, Wokingham

1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Nigel AL Mellor
- 2 Barbara G Smith
- 3 Mary Spence
- 4 Mhairi C Miller
- 5 Richard J Woodward
- 6 Jon P Tutchter
- 7 John A Harrison (C)
- 8 Stephen R Smith

17 July 2011

St Paul's, Wokingham

1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Mary Spence
- 2 Susan E Davenport
- 3 Alison Clayton
- 4 Elizabeth J Davenport
- 5 Stephen R Smith
- 6 Alan K Barsby
- 7 Kenneth R Davenport (C)
- 8 Geoffrey K Cook

For Service of Solemn Evensong in thanksgiving for the ministry of Fr. John Connell.

12 August 2011

Easthampstead

1260 Plain Bob Minor

- 1 John Hares
- 2 Ann Martin
- 3 Judith Bowler
- 4 Barbara Wells
- 5 Edward Martin
- 6 Stephen Wells (C)

Rung to celebrate the wedding of Nicholas Wells to Emma Curtis on July 30th.

12 June 2011

All Saints, Wokingham

1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Mary Spence
 - 2 Sian J Haseldine
 - 3 Julie B Goodchild
 - 4 Richard J Woodward
 - 5 Jonathan P Goodchild
 - 6 John A Harrison
 - 7 Jon P Tutchter (C)
 - 8 Jack W Stanford* (first quarter)
- 90th birthday compliment to HRH Duke of Edinburgh.

23 July 2011

Easthampstead

1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Tom Helyer
- 2 Ann Martin
- 3 Barbara Wells
- 4 Paul Fox
- 5 Steve Wells (C)
- 6 Ed Martin

Rung to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Rev Guy Cole becoming Rector of Easthampstead. First quarter 1.

18 September 2011 St Mary's Twyford

1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Richard Bennett
 - 2 Rachel Leitch-Devlin
 - 3 Andrew Elliston
 - 4 Graham Slade
 - 5 Simon Farrar (C)
 - 6 Richard Hamilton
- 1st quarter at first attempt: 6.
1st inside: 2.

A compliment to Revd Tim Dakin, a member of the local ministry team at Twyford and one time ringer of Meole Brace (Shrops), at being appointed as the new Bishop of Winchester.

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