



## Good striking & rhythmic ringing

*We would like to improve our striking, but it doesn't seem to happen. We've been told we should ring by rhythm, but how do we do that?*

If you all try to ring rhythmically, it should help your striking. Some ringers find that rhythm comes naturally, but many find they have to work hard at it. You need to aim for the right balance between being relaxed and alert. You also have to develop the right sort of habits. Here are some things to keep at the back of your mind, especially when things seem to go wrong and you are not sure why.

### Learn to trust your rhythm.

You probably have more of a sense of rhythm than you are aware of. Try to build on it, and don't let it get submerged under a continual flood of short term corrections. Your own rhythm, and the natural swing of the bell, can help you ring predictably. Of course you will still need to make corrections, to keep in line with the other bells, but too much correction destroys the rhythm. Striking can get worse if you try too hard. When you first learn to ring, your rhythm and co-ordination take a while to develop, so in the early stages you will be continually correcting. This is normal, but try to move on to a more confident and smoother style.

### Feel what the bell is doing.

Even with steady rhythm, good listening and ropesight, you will always be 'behind the game' if you do not also 'feel' what your bell is doing. As it rises to each stroke, feel whether it is moving at the time and speed you expect. This will give you valuable early warning, and more time to respond by making small, gentle corrections. Just let the bell rise a fraction more or less to compensate.

### Beware of over working.

Ringing most bells should not be hard work, but the harder you pull on one stroke, the harder you will need to check on the next. It is easy to get 'wound up' so you are pulling and checking hard on every stroke. You might not realise this, you might just think it is a difficult bell. It is hard to break out of this vicious circle. If you just relaxed at one stroke, you would be out of place and might bang the stay. The secret is to reduce the effort gradually, by deliberately pulling less than you have just checked. Try to keep down your effort all the time you are ringing (even if you are well within your strength limit). Then you will find over pulling is less of a problem. Of course you can't ring with zero effort. You need a little in hand at each stroke so you have freedom to check a bit more or less than normal, so you can keep in time. But many people habitually use a lot more force than they need.

### Don't fight it - correct it.

If you are continually struggling to stop your bell ringing too wide (or too close) then



something is wrong. Don't just fight the symptoms, try to correct the cause. The commonest problems are:

- Rope too long (or too short),
- Arms not rising high enough,
- Sally being snatched too soon (or caught too late),
- Starting to pull down before the bell has risen to the top of the stroke,
- Not pulling all the way down at backstroke.

Some of these need a physical change, like moving your hands on the rope. All of them require you to change the way you move your arms and hands, ie your handling style. Unless you get these right, so you and the bell are in harmony, you will continue to struggle. It is not worth the effort. Getting it right requires less effort and the result sounds better. If you are not sure, ask someone to watch you and suggest improvements.

### Beware of over correction.

It is easy to over correct. When you are ringing steadily, most corrections you need are quite small. If you over correct you will then have another error to correct, but in the other direction.

### Big corrections need a counter correction.

If you have to correct hard, you change the speed at which the bell swings, as well as its position. To stay in the right place when you get there, you need a small reverse correction to put the speed back to normal, otherwise you will overshoot. A big correction will need a big reverse correction.

### Try to ring near the 'zero effort speed'.

Always aim to use as little of your available effort as possible for staying in the right place at the right speed. By adjusting the length of your rope, and or your overall stance, you will find you can change the speed at which the bell most naturally rings.

*Adapted from The Tower Handbook, (available CC Publications).*

## Leading

Many beginners seem to find leading difficult. Here is one person's recollections from forty years ago

"We were first taught to ring rounds on an inside bell. We were told we should pull our rope a short while after the one in front. I managed this without too much trouble, and although I was not conscious of it, I must have developed some feel for the rhythm and the ability to hear my bell.

"When it came to leading, we were told it would be a bit different. We should follow the tenor, but wide and on the opposite stroke. The reason for the opposite stroke was obvious, and we were told the reason for ringing wider was to allow for the different way heavy and light bells swing.

"This all seemed too difficult for me. I think I tried, but soon concluded that I would never be able to do it properly. Of course as a young lad, I dare not say that to my teacher, so I had to find a way to 'cheat'.

"I decided that if I rang at a steady pace, and listened carefully, I should be able to keep the bell in the right place, and nobody would know that I couldn't lead properly. It was a bit unnerving at first, but it worked, and as I got better at doing it, nobody knew I couldn't lead by ropesight like I had been told.

"Older and wiser now, I teach my pupils that the ability to ring steadily by rhythm, and listen to correct any errors is fundamental to good striking. But nobody told me that. I discovered it by accident. I sometimes wonder how things might have been different if I had just done what I was told when leading, and not tried to find a better way. What sort of ringer would I be now?"

## Overheard

Seasoned Ringer (SR) to Up-coming Youngster (UY) - (after a rather choppy piece of ringing)

SR (helpfully): "If the bells in front of you are in the wrong place, just ring in front of the bells behind you".

UY (puzzled): "How can I ring in front of the bell behind me?"

SR (Smiling): "Well you'd find it hard to ring after the bell behind you!"

UY was probably puzzled because he assumed that the bell behind him would be following his rope, just like he was trying to follow the one in front. UY was finding this hard to do because the bells in front of him were all over the place, heaving and pulling.

Had he glanced to his left (or had he listened more carefully) he would have observed 678 steadily ringing away despite all the chaos in front of them (SR was on the 6). They knew they could not hope to join in the gymnastic antics of the middle bells, so they stuck together, ringing by rhythm in time with the Treble. The tune went something like '12 crunch crunch 678'.

So, if UY on the 5th taken his cue from the back three and joined in their steady beat, he could have had a much easier time. And the tune would have been '12 crunch 5678'

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