



Something for everyone

Ringling is a group activity and relies on give and take. We are all very different people, so how do we adapt our ringing needs to each other?

Must we all 'progress'?

We often assume that continuous progress is a good thing, but not everyone feels that, at least not always. In the early stages progress is essential to avoid slipping backwards, but there comes a point where many of us are pretty content with what we ring. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as we aren't complacent about striking or attendance. But to remain healthy a band needs some challenges. Most bands gain collective satisfaction from doing new things occasionally.

Inevitably some are keener than others, so try to avoid an 'us and them' feeling in the band. Try to include all your ringers when you want to learn something new, but if some do not want to, then be accommodating and cater for their needs as well. Can they ring the Treble, or cover, or perhaps stand behind someone with the book as a lifeline (though this is harder when you don't know the method). You will have to balance the wishes of all your ringers, keen and less keen.

What methods should we learn?

In the ringing world as a whole, there is a fair consensus over what the common methods are (Plain Bob, Grandsire, Stedman, etc) with a gradual fall off in the number of people who can ring any particular method depending partly on its difficulty (eg fewer people can ring surprise than plain methods) and partly on how far off the 'main stream' it is. For example, at a branch practice, more people would catch hold for Little Bob, than for Gainsborough, although they are members of the same family of methods. And far more people know Stedman than Erin or Shipway, despite the fact that Erin is a much simpler and Shipway is the even bell equivalent of Stedman. (We will say more about these methods another time).

So if you want to learn a new method, you either need to pick something 'mainstream' or make sure that enough other people learn it at the same time to ensure you will be able to ring it. Sometimes a branch practice will be advertised with a 'special method' that people attending can look up in advance knowing that other people will have done the same.

You can do something similar in your own tower, but it is better to take several weeks so it becomes the 'method of the month' (or two). Spreading it out allows for the fact that you might not succeed at first. It does not exclude anyone who misses the odd practice. Your more able ringers can get properly to grips with it, so that they can support those who are less sure. In any case, there is little point in learning something unless you ring it often enough to



ensure you don't immediately forget it. The ideal is to build up the band's repertoire. That way you avoid boredom and getting into a rut.

Are there any methods to avoid?

Generally no, though of course some are more difficult than others. There have always been bands, or individuals, who avoid some methods for various (often not very good) reasons. Some bands avoid Grandsire, calling it a 'dead end method' because decades ago some bands got stuck on it and couldn't ring anything else. Some bands never ring Kent, because they think it is boring. Some never ring Surprise, because they think it is too difficult. Some never ring Plan Bob Triples, because they think Plain Bob ought only to be rung as an even bell method. You might know of other examples.

Tail End

Dear Aunt Sally

The ringers at my tower aren't interested in ringing methods. I would like to learn to ring methods because I think it would be more interesting. Can I learn method ringing on my own?

Your situation is fairly unusual but don't despair. Many ringers see their main duty as ringing for services and don't aspire to ring lots of fancy things, although most ringers do in fact ring a few methods. Even simple methods can provide interest (and satisfaction if rung well) so it's a pity your band is missing out on this. Method ringing develops both mental and physical skills, and this is coupled with the pleasure of the continually changing sound pattern. Whatever level you are at, you can always learn a little more if you want to, or you can just take pride in doing what you do well.

Learning to ring methods without practice is virtually impossible, so you need to do something to improve your situation. You can learn 'what to do' from books, but you also need to learn 'how to do it'. The skill of changing the speed and position of your bell to fit in with the others is a very practical matter.

You could ask the band whether they would ring methods for your benefit. It might be they have just got into a rut, and do not realise you want to make progress. But if they won't (or can't) help you, the world does not stop at your tower door. One of the wonderful things about the ringing community is the way ringers as a whole are so willing to help each other. Ringing is probably the only activity with such an 'open door'. If you walk into almost any tower in the world, you will invariably be made welcome and asked to ring. So try visiting other towers on their practice night. There are active bands in most parts of the country.

Don't worry if you are inexperienced. Just explain what you can and can't do to the local tower captain and he will fit you into some suitable ringing. If you have not rung outside your own tower before, you might find some problems at first ringing on strange bells. Again, most tower captains are friendly and will be happy to stand with you while you get used to the bell.

In most towers, you will probably be welcomed with open arms, especially if you go early in the practice when their numbers are short. But there are a few towers bursting with ringers whose practices are very busy. If you pick one of them you will still be made welcome, but you will probably spend a lot of time sitting waiting, so when you are doing your homework to find out who practices when, try to find out how busy the practices are as well. And don't forget to look at the details of the bells. If you are used to ringing on an 8 cwt six, walking into a 35cwt twelve could be a bit of a shock.

When you find a tower where you feel comfortable and get on well with the local ringers, tell the tower captain that you would like to learn method ringing and ask whether (s)he would be prepared to give you suitable opportunities to practise. In most cases the answer will be yes, so start learning.

But remember you are a guest. The other ringers are sharing their (limited) practice time with you. In return you should be predictable in your attendance. Either attend regularly (arriving on time) or let the tower captain know when you can and can't arrive. If you ever become a tower captain, you will discover that planning a practice is hard enough, without the uncertainty of not knowing who will or will not be there. And always do your homework. Getting out your diary when offered a rope is discourteous and wastes time.

If you are not sure how to find out about towers in your area, try contacting the secretary of your local ringing association (whose address will be in *The Ringing World Diary*). The association might have a web site too. You should find a pointer to it on www.ringingworld.co.uk/

You can buy books about method ringing from several sources including CC Publications, see advertisements in *The Ringing World*.

Good luck, Aunt Sally