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Go ... again

In November, *The Learning Curve* looked at very elementary aspects of calling. This month we will look at calling methods.

Start simple

After calling 'go and stop' to a plain course, most people move on to calling an extent (120) of Plain Bob Doubles, ringing the 'observation bell'. You are unaffected and merely observe other bells doing something different at the bobs. You can ring any bell, calling a bob every time you make long 5ths. Before you start, work out exactly where you will be when you call, remembering that the call must be a whole pull before the first row that it changes. You might find it useful to work out at which lead the first call will be, and how many leads before Rounds after the last call. That means one less thing to be surprised by while you are ringing.

Look wider

Call yourself observation from several different bells, then move to non-observation bells. Always prepare yourself before trying something new, with some pencil and paper work. Write out any of the touches you have already called (see tip below) and look at what each of the non-observation bells does at successive bobs. You will find that in all cases, they follow the sequence in Figure 1, which you can abbreviate to something like 'In - Out - Make', 'Make - In - Out' or 'Out - Make - In'. Some people remember the order with the mnemonic 'Isle Of Man'.

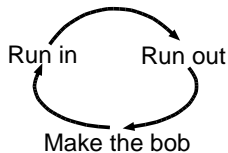


Figure 1: Work sequence at bobs

To call a touch from any bell, put a call somewhere in the first course, notice what it makes you do and then call the next two bobs so that you do the other two items in sequence. Before starting though, work out and remember exactly where you will be when you call for each position. This gives twelve different things to do (4 touches x 3 starts for non observation bells).

Calling indirectly

Someone is always ringing the observation bell, even if it is not you, which provides another way to call the touch. Keep an eye on what the observation bell is doing, and put in calls whenever it is in the right position. That sounds difficult, but it is easier than it seems, provides good practice seeing what is happening around you, and is a valuable step in developing conducting skills. To give yourself advance warning, watch for the observation bell dodging 3-4 down and you know the call is at the following lead.

Look deeper

Putting the calls in correctly is the start of

conducting. Once you can do this, try to see what is happening around you. When you understand how things fit together, you are more likely to be able to help people to get right again. You are also less likely to make mistakes yourself that you cannot correct.

Get into the habit of watching what the other bells do at the lead ends, and how they fit in with what you do. Look at a plain course and you will see that in Plain Bob Doubles bells work in pairs 2&5, 3&4. The pairs dodge with each other and when one makes 2nds, the other is in long 5ths. So you know what your 'opposite number' will be doing every lead, and you also know what the other pair are doing, even if you don't know which way round they are. With a little observation prior to the lead, you can know what everyone will be doing.

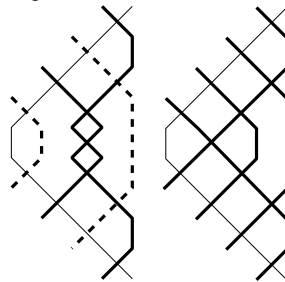


Figure 2: Fitting together (a) plain lead (b) bob

Quality and responsibility

The conductor's responsibilities listed in November's *Learning Curve* included 'Decide if it should be called round'. That is the bottom line, but in fact you have a broader responsibility for quality. Ringing is a collective activity of course, so everyone has some responsibility for quality, but as the conductor you should take the lead. In a peal or quarter peal, you are in charge of the whole performance and in a touch during practice or service ringing the tower captain or ringing master delegates authority temporarily to you. Try to ensure that the touch achieves its objectives, which includes achieving an acceptable standard. What standard is acceptable will depend on the circumstances of course, and on the other objectives.

Calling round when things get too bad will limit the damage, but try to avoid getting to that point if possible. Timely correction of mistakes can help. So can reminding anyone of repeated mis-striking. Perhaps the most difficult problem to handle is general sloppiness, with imprecision and trips across the band. You can remind people to be more careful, but you can't hope to comment on everything, and anyway too much general comment sometimes demoralises people rather than sharpening them up.

What if you get lost?

No one is perfect. Even experienced conductors make mistakes, and so will you. If you get completely lost, you might have to call 'Go Rounds'. That is better than going on aimlessly with no hope of completing the touch.

If you keep your wits about you though, you might well be able to end the touch in a tidy rather than untidy manner, which sounds better outside. When you call 'Go Rounds', everyone has to get from wherever they are to their 'home' position as quickly as possible. Tower bells can't do that instantly because of the inertia of the bells. The longer it takes for everyone to get back into the right place, the more crunching there will be as they pass each other in the scramble. In the delay,

less confident ringers often start holding up to wait for others who are not yet in place, and that destroys the rhythm even more.

The secret is to time the call when as many bells as possible are not too far from their rounds position, especially the back bells. Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the effect of calling Rounds from two different rows. In Figure 3 all the bells have a big jump to get from where they are into Rounds - between them the six bells have to move a total of 18 places. In Figure 4 things are much easier. Half of the bells don't need to move at all, and the others only have to move a total of 6 places between them.

What you might not realise by looking at the figures, is that if you were ringing Plain Bob, you could turn the first situation into the second simply by waiting three blows before calling for Rounds. As a general rule, try to get the Tenor, and at least one or two other big bells somewhere near the back - you will make their life easier. The smaller bells are more agile, and better able to move rapidly from the 'wrong place' back to Rounds.

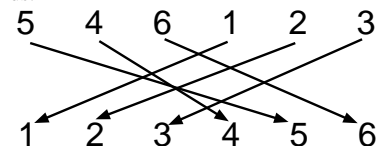


Figure 3: A struggle to Rounds

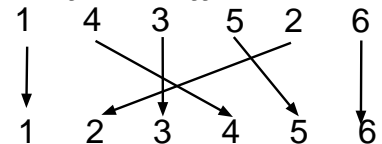


Figure 4: More easily to Rounds

Tip for writing out

When writing out a touch to see what happens at the lead ends, you can save the need to write out all the rows of plain hunting between the leads if you know the transformation to get between one lead head (the backstroke row of the Treble's second blow at lead) and the following lead end (the handstroke row of the Treble's first blow at lead). Write out the first lead of Plain Bob Doubles, then write the lead head and lead end together and draw lines between them. Repeat the process for Plain Bob Minor and you should get Figure 5. Try it for Plain Bob Major and see if you can work out the general pattern on any number of bells.

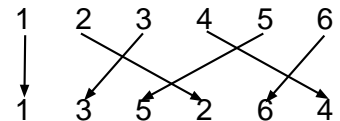


Figure 5: Lead head to lead end transform

Moving on

We have only scratched the surface. There are other touches of Bob Doubles, other Doubles methods, touches of Plain Bob on higher numbers, and so on. *The Learning Curve* will return to the subject in a future article. In the mean time, practise the basics and support your experience with plenty of pencil and paper work so that you understand what is happening. Don't be afraid to ask for advice, and for opportunities to practise. If possible, find someone who will act as a mentor for you. Learning conducting is often a solitary affair you are expected to do on your own, but there are plenty of people who will help if you ask.

Tail end