

Are We Trendy Enough?

How many ringers are there in the UK? Throughout the world? How old are they?

How many people learn to ring? Are they young or are they mature learners?

Many ringers think that they know the answers to these questions but I suspect that their views are based on where they ring and who they ring with. It is thought that there are 40,000+ ringers, and there is a general assumption that the majority are over the age of 40 and that there is an ageing ringing population. These statements may well be true, but there has never been a census of all ringers that would prove or disprove the truth or otherwise of these widely held beliefs. Various surveys have been carried out over the past 40 years but there has been little consistency between them, making comparisons difficult. The most comprehensive survey was carried out in 1988 when great care was taken to ensure statistical validity. The results of the survey were published in *The Ringing World* but it is conjectured that much of that information is now out of date. Since then there has been much discussion on whether an historical record of the state of ringing should be developed and maintained, including a report on Trends in Ringing that made a number of recommendations in 2002.

At the 2004 Central Council meeting in Colchester it was agreed to set up a new committee of the Council called the Ringing Trends Committee, and at the 2005 Council meeting in Harrogate five members were elected to the new committee. The main aim of the committee is "*To identify, evaluate and record trends in church bellringing for the purpose of guiding Council policy*". The plan is that, over the next few years, a census of all ringers will be carried out and the findings will be used to ascertain current trends in ringing to inform the Council and the wider ringing and lay community as necessary. It is also intended to set the information gained from this first census against sociological and demographic data from the 2011 general census.

Hopefully, by this stage we will know how many ringers there are, whether numbers are increasing or declining, and whether there is a definite trend towards an ageing ringing population. We also aim to gather accurate information about numbers of people learning to ring and wastage levels, together with a view of what is being rung throughout the country. By means of a regular and consistent survey we plan to provide a definitive picture of the general state of the ringing exercise, which should provide answers to all of the questions that people ask and nobody really knows the answer to. The information gained should help to support the promotion of ringing at all levels and highlight the areas where resources are most needed.

Clearly there is an enormous amount of work to be done, which is why we plan to spread it over a number of years. We are also very aware of the pitfalls that are inherent in what we plan to do. It is intended that information technology will play a major role in this exercise, and that data will be input on-line to a database, from which data for analysis can be recovered.

Initially, the data will be collected in pilot areas. This will be done as soon as possible, and it has been decided that the members of the committee will use the areas that they live in as their "guinea pigs". The areas involved are the Essex Association, Guildford Guild, North Staffs Association and the Salisbury Guild. Once we have established that our systems are working and the right questions are being asked, the data collection will be extended throughout the country and abroad over the following years, with data being collected on a rotational basis at regular intervals.

We intend to establish a network using Society representatives to collect data from designated areas, and to enable this we will be contacting all Societies asking them to nominate a co-ordinator(s) who will then be responsible for a specific area. Source data will come from individual towers and we hope that Societies will find the data that is collected useful for their own purposes and for their Annual Reports. We realise that there are some ringers who do not ring regularly at a specific tower or belong to any particular Society, and they will need to be identified.

As a starter for 10, everyone who attends the Roadshow at Newbury on 10th September will be asked to complete a questionnaire. This information will be compared with that collected at the Keele Roadshow which was used to inform data presented in the report on Trends in Ringing mentioned earlier. The information gained should then provide us with our first meaningful trends.

So, let's be trendy and plan for the future!

BERYL NORRIS
Chairman
Ringing Trends Committee