



## Ringling methods in hand

So far *The Learning Curve* has only talked about ringing tower bells. To many ringers handbells are a mystery, yet learning how to ring them can add an extra dimension to your ringing and be very satisfying. Helen McGregor has taught many people to ring handbells and has agreed to write a series of articles for *The Learning Curve* that will appear over the coming months.

### Similarities & differences

Before starting, it is worth saying a few words about how we actually ring the bells. Ringing changes 'in hand' requires a rather different technique from ringing tunes, but it is much easier to learn the handling than a tower bell. There are though, several similarities. We still swing the bells in opposite directions at handstroke and backstroke, and the clapper strikes on opposite sides of the bell at hand and back. By convention, the bells are up at backstroke and down at handstroke (like sallies in the tower). Also as in the tower, the handstroke blow sounds just before the bell comes to rest at backstroke, and vice versa. It is the slight jerk as you stop the bell that makes it strike. This is quite different from a tower bell, and something some people find hard when they first try ringing handbells. It is possible to swing your arms vigorously up and down with very little sound, while the experts can get crisp striking from modest movement ending in a neat little flick. It's a bit like swinging a drum stick - the sound comes when it stops!

### Method ringing - Lesson 1

When you can ring rounds rhythmically, you will move onto methods. You can ring methods on any number of bells, but it is easiest to start with minor (six working bells).

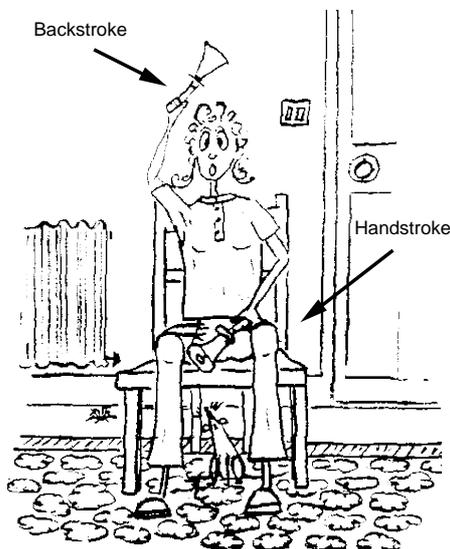
Obtain a sheet of graph paper and write out the path of the Treble (in blue perhaps) to plain hunt on 6, draw a solid blue line along its path. In a different colour (red?) overlay the path of the two, and again draw a solid line along its path (see figure 1). Now look at the relationship between the two lines and note:

- In every row of the first half of the course the 2nd strikes before the Treble, and in the second half the Treble strikes before the 2nd.
- For most of the time once you have struck one bell just leave a gap for someone else's bell to sound and then ring your other bell.
- Your bells meet and cross at the front in 1-2 (first and second's place), and at the back in 5-6 (fifth and sixth's place).

This relationship between the bells, running parallel with only 1 bell separating them, and always meeting and crossing at the front and back, is called '**coursing**'.

With this pattern in mind, you can ring by:

- knowing which of your hands rings first
- knowing what place it rings in
- leaving a gap and then ringing the other one



What you should not do is try to remember the place of both bells while you are ringing - therein lies chaos.

### Now to practice.....

Handbell ringers don't have to cope with short or long tail ends, wobbly sallies and/or long draughts so you don't need lots of rounds to settle down before going into changes. The normal custom is simply to ring a 'whole pull and go', also known as 'up, down and away'. You ring a round at handstroke, a round at backstroke, and then the first change of the method. The table shows what happens for our plain hunt on 6. The right hand column is an explanation, but you should not really be thinking much more than what is in the left hand column.

Rounds.	at hand
Rounds	at back
Cross over	The 2nd is now the first of your pair to ring and the Treble rings immediately after it
Separate	2nd leads again but hunt with the Treble to leave a gap of 1 bell
Hunt up	2nd in second's place, leave a gap for someone else then the Treble
Hunt up	2nd in third's place, leave a gap for someone else then the Treble
Hunt up	2nd in fourth's place, leave a gap for someone else then the Treble
Close together	2nd in fifth's place, no room for a gap, as there are only 6 bells so ring Treble straight after it.
	<i>Phew made it to half way!</i>
Cross over	Treble is now the first of your pair to ring and your bells are still in fifth and sixth place.
Separate	Treble hunts down to fourth place, leave a gap then ring 2nd.
Hunt down	Treble in third's place, leave a gap and ring the 2nd.
Hunt down	Treble in second's place, leave a gap and ring the 2nd.
Hunt down	The Treble leads, leave a gap then ring the 2nd.
Close together	Treble completes its lead, and the 2nd meets it so they sound in consecutive places at the front.

This sounds quite long winded, so be careful not to think too much. After a while you will find you do not consciously need to think so much. Remember, all you need to know is which of your bells strikes nearer the front, what place is it in, and of course that you are 'coursing' (one between you except when meeting at front and back). Imagine the bells joined by a piece of elastic that holds them together at the front and back but stretches to allow one, but only one, bell in between them the rest of the time.

I cannot emphasise enough: know which one is ahead of the other, what place is it in, leave a gap, then ring the "shadow". Whatever you do, **don't try to count the places of both bells !!!!!**

Try to get the feel of this strike-gap-strike rhythm as you ring. That will make it easier, since then you really won't need to think about the second hand.

This all has to become automatic, so repeat lesson 1 until you can do it almost without thinking. Do not pass on to the next pattern until you just 'know' which of your bells comes first, what place it is in, and you can ring the other one (the shadow) 'automatically' after the gap.

One final thought on coursing. The Tenors (the 5th and Tenor) are also coursing - they ring the same pattern as the Trebles (Treble and 2nd) but they start at the back, cross over, come down to the front with the Tenor ringing nearer the front than the 5th, cross over at the front and then ring up to the back with the 5th nearer the front than the tenor. Draw this out as well (see figure 2).

For those of you who have not yet drawn your own diagrams, here they are:

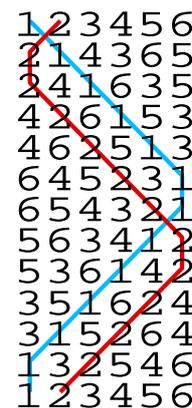


Figure 1 - Coursing pattern of the Trebles

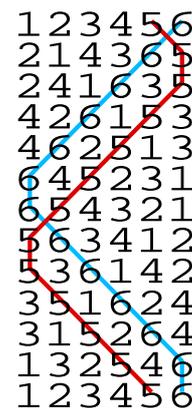


Figure 2 - Coursing pattern of the Tenors

What is everyone else doing in the meantime? You can work it out for yourself if you like. Otherwise wait for Helen's next article.

In the mean time, practice makes perfect, so keep practicing. You can even practice on your own, without bells! Imagine that your thumbs are handbells, and move them up and down as if you were ringing them. Keep saying 123456123456123... to yourself moving your thumbs up and down at the correct time, as you do when ringing. There is no one else to see whether you are doing it properly, so you will have to be honest. It's not a good idea to do it in public either - most people won't know you are practising handbells and might get the wrong impression.

*Tail End*