



Hands and arms

Tail End hopes you had a festive Christmas, ding-donged merrily, feasted moderately, rang in the New Year joyfully and recovered from the merriment enough to complete any date touches you attempted. As an antidote to the festive season, this month we take a look at some aspects of ringing that one might not normally give a second thought.

Ringling with both hands

The Learning Curve in July 2000 described 'double handed ringing', ie ringing one tower bell with each hand. This term is well established, but if you think about it, it is a bit misleading since (most of us) ring double handed anyway, but we use both hands to ring one bell. Have you ever thought about the fact that you use two hands when ringing? Probably not, so here are some thoughts.

All the text books, and good tutors, tell you to keep your hands together on the rope, but even if you do that, one hand is still above the other. When you reach up to backstroke (or handstroke) with both arms, the hand that grips uppermost (for most of us the right hand) has to reach a little higher than the other. If your arms are the same length - and I am sure most of us believe that they are - then either:

- One of them is bent a little or
- Your body is tipped over, with one shoulder higher than the other.

In terms of pulling and bell control, the upper hand must have a slight advantage (as in the phrase 'getting the upper hand'). It is straighter, it has further to pull down, and if the shoulder really is higher, then it probably has more weight on it. So perhaps when we think we are ringing with two hands, we are really only ringing with about 1.9 hands, since one of them is not doing quite as much work as the other?

Ringling wrong handed

Having rung with one hand higher than the other for all these years, our bodies adapt to the slightly one sided ringing position. You might not be aware of it, but it soon becomes apparent if you ring 'wrong handed' - with the tail end in the opposite hand to normal, and therefore the other hand uppermost when you grip the rope.

This can be quite instructive as an exercise. If you have tried it, you will know it feels odd. If you haven't tried it, don't rush out and do so unless you are confident with your bell handling. If in any doubt, have someone stand next to you, just in case.

If you ring wrong handed, you are likely to notice two things (apart from the odd feeling).

The surprising thing is that your hands occasionally collide with each other as they close around the sally. Every now and then your left hand (if you normally ring right hand uppermost) will try to close around the other hand instead of above it on the rope. This hand is used to going

lower than the other, and when you want it to be the upper hand it does not always comply. Your body has adapted to one sided ringing - it has 'learnt' that when ringing, one hand goes higher than the other. It doesn't really matter whether arms or shoulders have adapted, the effect is the same. This is most likely to happen if you ring something that needs concentration or makes more demands on your bell handling, like ringing a method or calling changes, since it stops you thinking carefully about your hands.

The other effect you might notice is that if you ring a moderately heavy bell wrong handed, you don't seem to be able to pull it as effectively as you normally can. It might just be the unfamiliarity that distracts you, or it could be another sign that your body has adapted to working the other way. Your best pulling hand is no longer in the best position to pull, because it is lower on the rope, and the best position is occupied by your less practised hand, so it is perhaps not surprising that you pull less well.



Look - one hand!

Ringling one handed

Ringling one handed is a bit like riding a bicycle one handed - it would be frowned on as a sloppy habit, and so is rarely seen in respectable circles. But ringling one handed as an exercise can be instructive - another way you can occasionally stretch your skills a little bit in directions you would not normally explore.

Being able to ring well one handed could have practical benefits too if one arm was out of action for any reason and it allowed you to continue ringing. In a small band that depends on you, that might make a big difference.

I once rang one handed for several weeks because I had a problem with my right elbow but wanted to continue ringing. I had occasionally tried double handed ringing (two bells) so I thought ringing a bell with one hand would be easy. Although I was successful, it turned out to be less easy than I expected.

I restricted myself to the lighter bells, for example the 3rd in our tower, which weighs 6 cwt. I normally turn in bells well over a ton without batting an eyelid, so I was surprised that I felt rather near the limit when ringing such light bells one handed. It seemed as if my ability to exert adequate control over the bell was reduced by much more than a factor of two, though I don't

know how I could put an exact figure on it.

I don't have a scientific answer, but perhaps it is because with a balanced pull from both arms, the lateral position of your hands is more or less fixed (by triangulation) whereas with only one arm, part of your effort has to go into keeping the hand moving vertically, and you exert twisting forces with your back, chest and spine that you would not normally. Perhaps all this means that you are less able to take the force without feeling uncomfortable. Are there any sports physiotherapists out there who could provide a proper explanation?

Not firing on all cylinders

This motoring term has entered common speech. In a car it means loss of power because some of the engine's cylinders are not working properly, but to the layman it just means performing below par. I use this analogy because there are times when I see people ringing with only about one and a half arms. (At this point, I can hear you muttering that *Tail End* has been imbibing too much to be in charge of a word processor, but bear with me.)

You often see people ringing with two hands on the rope, but it is obvious from watching their arms, and from observing their poor control of the bell, that they are not really using both arms effectively. One arm is effectively a 'passenger', doing little of the work - in extreme cases, none of the work. One hand is often a lot lower than the other on the rope. So even if the upper hand goes high enough for a reasonably good downward pull, the lower one does not. You will have been told when you were taught (and if not, you should have been) that ringing with bent arms is not a good idea. Well that applies to each arm, not just the top one! (The need for a long stroke was discussed in *The Learning Curve* in January 2001).

If one arm is significantly more bent than the other, then they will have different actions, the commonest symptom of which is taking the lower hand off the rope too soon. The lower arm will feel the tension on the rope a little later and have less time to pull. Co-ordinating two different actions is harder than doing the same thing with both arms, and the easier option is for the lower one to follow passively, ie leaving the lead arm to do most of the work.

This fault can be elusive. People who ring like this often have the upper hand in the correct position, or even slightly high. They manage the rope quite well with the upper hand, giving the impression of good control. It is deceptive, like driving a car or riding a bicycle one handed, it's OK while the road is smooth and straight, but lets you down in tight bends or over rough ground since, one hand is neither strong enough, nor steady enough for proper control.

You can often get away ringing with one arm as a passenger. After all with most bells a good ringer need not exert great force very often. Where it really lets you down is when you need that little extra pull - quickly and accurately. The upper arm is out of balance, like it is with one armed ringing, and the lower one is unable to do very much, so your striking suffers.

Having read this article, you are likely to look at other ringers differently - more critically perhaps. More to the point, they might be looking more critically at you, so do make sure you really are ringing with both hands.

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