



Intermediate methods

It is a practice night and a keen novice wants to have a go at Treble Bob hunting, having only very recently learnt plain hunting. There are five surprise ringers present, but it would be unwise to pitch him straight in as the Treble to Cambridge, especially since he is a hefty lad who does not often ring the Treble. As a compromise, the Tower Captain (TC) calls for Kent. The stable coursing order will help the Treble, and Kent should be more interesting for the rest. One Surprise Ringer (SR) does not like this idea.

SR - "I can't ring Kent".

TC - (used to excuse from people too lazy to remember things) "Come on, you must know Kent. You've rung lots of Surprise Methods".

SR - "I never learnt it. James said I should not waste my time on Kent but go straight to Cambridge". (James was one of of SR's former mentors).

TC switched the touch to pure Treble Bob hunting, put the youth on a bell where he was more comfortable, and the touch was a success. But what about James' advice?

The middle ground

James is probably not alone in his opinion. There seems to be an increasing polarisation in the Exercise. Many years ago, in *Tail End's* youth, ringing abilities seemed to be spread fairly evenly from basic to extremely high. There were many good ringers (ie excellent strikers) at all stages of the method ladder, with many long established good ringers ringing up to but not beyond methods like Kent and Oxford, Double Norwich, Oxford Bob and Stedman.

In our time, good ringers in this middle ground seem to be very thinly spread and rapidly vanishing. The march of progress seems to have given us a few more Surprise ringers at the top end (which is good) but a lot more ringers stuck at the bottom end. The idea that a good ringer need not be a Surprise ringer seems to be out of fashion.

Does it matter?

Ringing should be about giving our best in the service of the Church. Some will aspire to ring complex methods but others, with limited time, energy and latent ability available to develop method ringing, must aim for something less complex. If the choice is between 'Surprise' or 'basics' many ringers with mid way potential will be consigned to a permanent diet of basics, alongside 'the learners'. That is likely to provide them with less interest and inspiration than a more varied diet of slightly more demanding methods.

Developing skills

Intermediate methods can offer challenges and fun to all ringers, including those with their sights set on ringing Surprise. They also offer good training for aspiring conductors. In September 2000, *The Learning Curve* discussed the complementary ways of learning a method. To

develop this richer approach to method learning, you need something more complex than Plain Bob to get your teeth into, but if you make the huge leap to learn Cambridge in a hurry, you are likely to miss a lot and be left with 'blue line syndrome', ie total dependence on fault free memory and execution of the line, with no other means of self correction. Learning methods more comprehensively, and learning sets of related methods should make it easier to build up a repertoire of methods that you can ring, without the need to re-learn them, even after a period without practice.

Useful stepping stones

It is always sensible to build on what you already know. There are many methods that you can learn by finding similarities with other methods you know and then seeing how the differences affect things. The table below is adapted from *The Tower Handbook* and describes the gist of eight methods beyond Plain Bob. To ring them, you should study them in more detail, ideally using the approach in *Learning Methods*.

There are many other methods, but we cannot list them here. The traditions in your tower and the others that you visit will affect what you are able to ring, but many of these methods are within the grasp of a competent ringer, so you ought to be able to find people willing to learn some so you can ring them. Whatever method you ring, try to find out what its distinguishing features are, and try to learn it well enough that you do not 'lose it' as soon as you hit a crack in the Blue Line.

Tail End

The Tower Handbook and *Learning Methods* are available from CC Publications.

Method	Relation to Plain Bob or simpler method	Interesting features
Little Bob (any number)	Leads as Plain Bob. Extra dodges when Treble makes 4ths. Coursing order throughout as Plain Bob.	Can be learnt as a variant of Treble Bob hunting, but important to learn the difference between the lead end and half lead dodges.
Saint Clements (any number)	Structure under the Treble split to give long dodges on the front and lots of hunting down to 3rds. Coursing order is like Plain Bob but with the pair dodging on the front each lead missed out.	Lead end order is reversed. Dodging on the front requires stable rhythm or the pair can become detached from the rest. Need to count how many dodges on the front and/or reliably see the Treble coming down.
Single Oxford (Minor and Triples)	Structure over the Treble is split to give long dodges on the back and what looks like Plain Bob (or Grandsire for Triples) on two fewer bells below. Coursing order is mixed up except at the back.	Need to remember to make the place before the dodge 3-4 (or 4-5) down. Need to count how many dodges on the back and/or reliably see the Treble coming up.
Single Oxford (Major and higher)	Extra pairs of places give even longer sets of dodging, with the work below as it would be on two fewer bells. Coursing order is more mixed up.	As above. Need to remember to make the place before each additional long dodge away from the back.
Reverse Bob	Plain Bob with everything upside down.	Progression of work like Plain Bob - thinking upside down!
Double Bob	Plain Bob above the Treble and Reverse Bob below. (See <i>The Learning Curve</i> May 2000)	Progression of work like Plain Bob, if you include the work under the Treble in terms of its mirror image. Work comes twice as fast.
Kent Treble Bob (any number)	Mostly dodging. Each lead, one bell is 'in the slow' (repeated 2nds) and others omit dodges on the front to fit in with it. 'Lead end' work replaces 3-4 dodges with Kent places (or Reverse Canterbury places) and a bell enters or leaves the slow. Coursing order is as Plain Bob but with the slow bell each lead omitted.	Need to remember to make 3-4 places when the Treble is below you. Need to go in and out of the slow when you dodge with the Treble. Need better bell control for almost continual dodging.
Oxford Treble Bob (any number)	Structure is as Kent, but the Kent places are replaced by 3rds (from the back) and 4ths (from the front) which changes the lead end order and mixes up the coursing order.	Need to remember to turn round and go the other way when making the places, rather than following the familiar pattern of moving from front to back to front. Need to be alert because you don't always meet course and after bells on the back.