

The Learning Curve



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www.cccbr.org.uk/education/

Quarters are good for you

A quarter peal (literally a quarter as long as a peal) sounds like a poor relation of, say, a half or whole peal, but quarter peals play a special role in the Exercise, with thirteen or fourteen thousand (far more than peals) rung every year, in over three thousand towers – an average of four to five each. The other couple of thousand towers have no quarter peals at all.

More quarter peals than peals are rung by local bands, so they more closely reflect ‘grass roots’ activity. Many (but by no means all) are rung for services. A quarter peal is a notable performance, publicly recorded in *The Ringing World* (providing you send it in) and possibly in your local association newsletter as well.

Being much shorter makes ringing a quarter peal more accessible than ringing a peal. It takes a smaller fraction of your day. It is easier to fit before a service or in an evening. It is less physically demanding. If you start with too many (or too few clothes) then you don’t have to sweat (or shiver) for so long.

Quarter peals are not subject to such strict rules as peals, so there is a bit more latitude for what you can ring, but in practice most people do broadly abide by the same rules as peals.

What have quarter peals to do with *The Learning Curve*? They can serve (at least) three different purposes. They can mark special occasions, they can help to ensure that enough ringers turn up for a specific service, and they can provide a very useful way to develop individual ringers or to develop the band as a whole. This third, training, role is perhaps less well understood than the first, and is what we consider this month.

The benefits

Ringing a quarter peal offers three things that are hard to get from normal stop-start ringing.

- You get time to settle down properly. An experienced band might do that in a ten minute touch, but most people need longer to relax, attune to their bells, adjust their correction for any odd-struckness, and really get into the rhythm of the ringing. A quarter peal gives that time, and also the time to enjoy it when everything does click into place. But it is not too long, so you are less likely to start getting fatigued (unless the bells are difficult).

- You really get to know the method. Few of us learn all the methods in our repertoire as thoroughly as we ought to. We know we should, but somehow, once we can get through a touch, the incentive to revise it more thoroughly wears off. Ringing the method for an extended period, helps you to see more of how it works.

- You actually do more ringing, especially if you are less experienced than most of the band. A 45 minute quarter peal gives as much rope time as you get ringing in an average practice that lasts twice as long, and more than you get during most service ringing. Also more of the time is ‘quality

time’, because you don’t spend half of it trying to settle down.



Quarters for training

You don’t need to be an expert ringer to ring a quarter peal. You don’t even need to ring methods. Ringing a cover bell helps to consolidate handling confidence, by giving an extended period of solid rhythmic practice, and more opportunity to learn to relax. Having an achievement publicised at an early stage can also be a great booster.

Covering doesn’t necessarily mean ringing the Tenor. For training purposes, you can have a second (or third) ‘Tenor’. For example, ringing Doubles on eight bells with 678 behind, lets a learner ring the 6th, which is lighter than the Tenor, and also removes the need to ring over different bells. Ringing Minimus with 56 behind on six bells also lets one of the covers ring over the same bell throughout.

True covering is then a further step, with the opportunity to focus on ringing evenly in last place, while rehearsing the ropesight needed to cope with different bells coming up behind.

Once a learner is ringing methods, quarter peals help to consolidate them in ways that short touches don’t.

Quarter peal ringing develops stamina. Once a ringer can comfortably manage one, the next step can be two in an afternoon, or three or four in a day, before attempting a peal. That is an easier transition than attempting it in one go, which is perhaps the barrier to more people attempting to ring a peal.

Don’t forget the training benefit for the conductor too. Conducting a quarter peal is more demanding than just calling the short touches (or plain courses) rung at practices. There is more incentive to prepare, and more satisfaction in succeeding. And if you don’t succeed (providing it was not for a special occasion) there is less stress than there would be worrying about losing a peal.

Finally, ringing quarter peals introduces ringers to personal record keeping, and with it a sense of pride in progress and achievement.

What to ring

What you ring depends on why you are ringing. For someone needing to consolidate a particular method the choice is obvious. For general development of the band there is more choice, and you should strike a balance between challenge and risk. You might not succeed this time, but you will learn from the attempt, and you can always try again later. Of course, if you are commemorating an event that won’t be repeated, then success is more important, especially if there

might not be time to restart if you fire out early on (say before a service).

If you ring Doubles, there are many variations that can be rung – some with names that might link to special occasions. You can ring sets of related methods, for example St Martin’s, St Simon’s, St Nicholas and Winchendon Place, which form a natural group. This teaches versatility, and the ability to think on the hoof. It starts to develop some of the building blocks for ringing Surprise. A similar approach can be used with Minor, eg St Clements, Double Oxford, but it’s more complicated because you have to splice the methods.

Conducting

Different methods give the conductor different problems. A quarter of Doubles needs multiple extents (at least ten and a half) so you need a way to keep track of how many you have rung. Most people find it helps to call each extent differently, using some sort of pattern.

You can call an extent of Plain Bob Doubles in four ways using bobs: one with each bell as observation, so if you call each in turn, and then repeat the same sequence, you know you have rung eight extents, leaving just two and a half. You can also use an ‘old’ single (places made in 123), which gives four more simple extents, and another four using bobs and singles, so you can call all ten extents differently.

Grandsire Doubles offers more extents to choose from. *The Learning Curve* in January and February 2006 described six 6-call extents and four 9-call extents – ten in all that you can work through systematically. If you prefer to conduct from the observation bell, it halves the choice of each, so work through them all twice.

With multiple Doubles methods, you can vary the method as well as, or instead of, the calling.

The counting problem is more severe with Minimus. You need 53 or more extents, but there are no ‘callings’ since the plain course is an extent, and there are only eleven methods (see *The Learning Curve*, last month).

A quarter of Minor needs less than two extents – a 720 and a 540. For Triples and above, the extent is much longer than a quarter peal, so you ring a single length. There are many compositions to choose from, in *The Ringing World Diary*, in books like *Quarter 500*, and on the web.

Getting started

If your band doesn’t ring quarter peals, then what is stopping you? Maybe you just got into the habit of not ringing them, so pick a date, agree a band and a method, and have a go.

Maybe you have problems getting people to turn out to ring. A quarter peal might actually help, because people will often make more effort to turn up for a quarter, and you can often get ringers from other towers to join you, even if they wouldn’t do so for normal practice or service ringing. Perhaps your tower has constraints on how much ringing is permitted. If this makes quarter peals at your tower impossible, try asking permission to ring one at a nearby tower.

In a future article, we will look at how to call some quarter peal compositions.

Tail End

Quarter 500 is available from Profile.

There are quarter peal compositions at:
<http://ringing.org/main/pages/quarters/>