



More or Less?

OK, it is an obscure title, but it relates loosely to this month's topic. Most ringers have heard of 'the standard eight', even if they never ring them. (In case you are not sure, they are the eight Surprise Major methods: Cambridge, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Pudsey, Superlative, Rutland, London and Bristol.) They regularly appear among the methods in the *Ringling World Diary*, and they have become engrained into ringing culture as landmarks for progression.

From time to time, someone starts a debate about why they should be 'standard'. People extolling the virtues of other methods, but eventually conclude that most ringers learn methods that they are likely to find other people able to ring at local practices, and they are the standard eight because that is what other people learnt for the same reason. So the standard eight will never change. Some years ago, the CC Education Committee had a project to produce a booklet with 'Another standard eight', but the project was abandoned because it was impossible to obtain any widespread consensus about which eight should be chosen.

One method that is often learnt after the standard eight is Glasgow (which also features regularly in the *Ringling World Diary*), but in terms of difficulty it is a much bigger step, too big for many ringers.

It is interesting to look at methods that get rung a lot in peals (not the dozens with funny names that are only rung once, but the more regular ones). As you might expect, the standard eight feature high on the list, but in 2006, Lessness, Cornwall and Glasgow overtook Pudsey, and on current trends for 2007, Lessness will be up with London and Superlative, being rung twice as many times as the next method below it.

So to ring more than the standard eight, you might want to learn Lessness (which explains the rather tenuous link in this month's title). You could just sit down and learn it by rote, but there are two other ways, which we will look at, the first being the less conventional.

Lessness

Let's start with the basics. Lessness is a right place method, which means that there are no odd spikes or isolated places, all places are made right (hand-back), all dodges come the right way round (forward at handstroke and reverse step at backstroke) and there is no backward hunting. The place notation is:

X 38 X 14 X 56 X 16 X 12 X 58 X 14 X 58 (the 58 is the half lead) with a 12 lead end. *The Learning Curve* explained place notation in April 2004 (Volume 3, Chapter 4).

Figure 1 (b) shows the structure of Lessness (the grid), and Figure 2 shows the blue line. Let's look at the structure first. Much of it is the same as Yorkshire, which is shown alongside it for comparison in Figure 1(a). The parts of Figure 1(b), that are different from Yorkshire are highlighted in grey.

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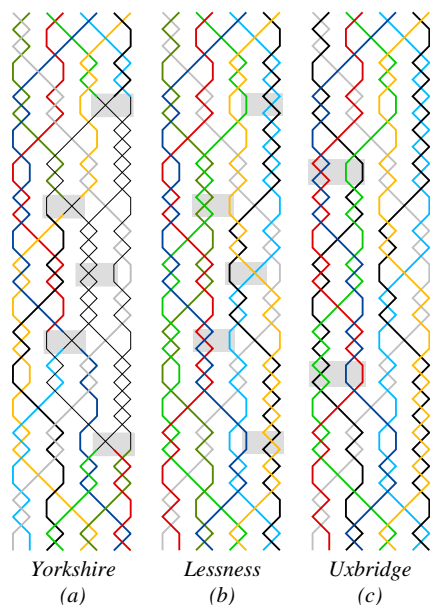


Figure 1: Structures compared

Having noted that similarity, let us now look at the blue line, shown in Figure 2. The first thing to notice is that the place bell order is one of the easier ones – you work your way up the odd numbers and then down the even numbers, like London, Rutland or Bristol.

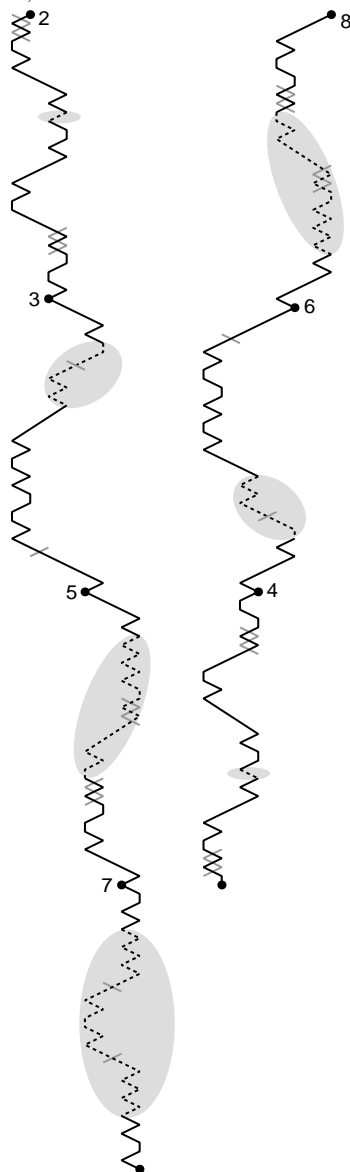


Figure 2: Lessness blue line annotated

Now to see how much Yorkshire we can find in the blue line. If you work your way forward or backward from each place bell start, the solid black lines, are all pieces taken from the blue line of Yorkshire. They come in a different order, of course, and there are gaps between them (dotted line, highlighted grey) in Figure 2. As you can see, there is quite a lot, so you could think of ringing Lessness by starting one Yorkshire place bell, doing a joining bit and then ringing the end of whichever Yorkshire place bell you need to fit in. In 2nd and 4th place bell, only a single change isn't borrowed from Yorkshire. Overall, the joining bits account for less than a third of the line, much of which is in the easy symmetrical pivot bell (7th place bell). The 'unused' bits of Yorkshire are shown as thin black lines, rather than colour, in Figure 1(a).

If you learned Lessness like this, you would need to know, for each place bell:

- How far to go ringing Yorkshire
- What the next place bell will be
- Which Yorkshire place bell precedes it
- How much of it to use
- What joins the two pieces together

Sensibly, you would learn a few more things to help you as well, for example:

- The four-pull dodges on the back fill the space between the lead end dodge and the dodges with the Treble on either side of the half lead.
- There are double dodges in 3-4, which don't appear in Yorkshire, and so must involve the joining bits.
- 5th place is made at the half-lead, in the middle of the pivot bell (7th place bell).

It's worth noting things that might catch you out too, for example 3rd place bell turns round in 5-6 and goes back to 3-4. The turn round in 2nd place bell is probably less troublesome, because it is a bit like turning round in Rutland.

Uxbridge

Uxbridge is another popular non-standard-eight method, and like Lessness, it dates from the 1930s. It was more popular for peals until the last couple of years, and has occasionally appeared in *The Ringling World Diary*. So perhaps you have already rung Uxbridge. In that case, you might find it easier to learn Lessness as a variant of it. The structure of Lessness is even closer to Uxbridge than it is to Yorkshire. The only one different change is while the Treble is dodging in 5-6, highlighted grey in Figure 1(c).

The overall pattern of the blue line is very similar too – the same place bell order and the same broad movements between places. The differences are in the detail, with some rearrangement of the work in 3-4 and 1-2 while away from the leads. There isn't room to reproduce the blue line for Uxbridge here, but Martin Bright's excellent method printer website lets you download any method in blue line, grid or 'diary' format, with your own choice of layout, line style, colour and so on.

Tail End

The Learning Curve – Volume 3: 2004-2005 is available from: CC Publications
Martin Bright's method printer is at:
<http://www.boojum.org.uk/cgi-bin/line.pl>