

# Charmborough Ring in Schools



Ringing Centres  
Committee

*The Charmborough Ring in Schools project used 15 volunteer ringers to provide an activity day themed to give 96 Year 8 (12/13 year old) pupils a taste of bell ringing, including an explanation of the mathematics of bell ringing, some lapping on handbells, and an introductory session on a mobile ring of bells erected in the school hall. The project was supported with a grant of £500 from the Ringing Foundation.*

As ringers we seem to be perennially concerned with how few ringers we have/will have. There are many individuals and organisations hell bent on bucking the trend by providing bell handling tuition, from tower captains with their regular tied bell practices through to the Ringing Centres and everything in-between.

Recently a 'gap in the market' was identified and the Charmborough Ring in Schools Project (CRISP) was devised. The idea was to take the Charmborough Ring, probably the most authentic and manageable mini-ring (tenor  $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt), into a school and give the pupils a taste of bellringing. The general idea was to follow this up with opportunities for the pupils to visit local towers and learn to ring on larger bells. On a personal note, I was interested in attempting to tie lessons on bell ringing to the national curriculum, and, as a longer term goal, I hope events such as this, where there is an educational aspect, will be welcomed by schools and mapped to their curriculum. Not short of ambition, the planning began in earnest.

With any successful endeavour, personnel is often the key and the Trustees of the Charmborough Ring are overflowing with enthusiasm and skill. Add to this officers and members of the Surrey Association, students from the University of London and three ringers from the school community itself and you have a platform to provide a positive experience to all the participants. Overall we were helped by 15 ringer volunteers. The project was smoothed by having experienced ringers in the forms of a current staff member, a former staff member and a Sixth Former.

Anyone who has worked in a school, or attended one for that matter, knows how unwieldy they can be, but generally, once stirred, all support and enthusiasm flows, as was the case at Archbishop Tenison's Church of England High School, Croydon. We identified Year 8 (12/13 year olds) pupils as our target audience and positioned the bells in the school hall where they would be highly visible, during the assembly.

There isn't a 'best time' to run a project in a school, only a slot that will be least disruptive. You have to avoid: Sports Days, School Trips, Prize Giving, table tennis in the hall – the list goes on. Therefore arrangements had to be made with a senior member of staff, who has full access to the information required and the standing to sequester rooms, reassign staff etc.

We chose the end of the summer term, avoiding as much as possible the exam season. Of course the bells and a rota of helpers needed to be booked well in advance. Our initial plan of a two day session was reduced to one but, with hindsight, the intensity of the tuition would have needed a further set of helpers for a second day.



## Further information

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As luck would have it, the Year 8's have an assembly on a Tuesday morning which we were able to use to introduce the bells, helpers and activities. For a church school to have bells ringing for an assembly was a nice touch and meant the day could begin at lesson one. We were also fortunate to have the Year 8 annual Prize Giving the following evening where we were given pride of place, ringing beforehand and the best pupils from the previous day rang the backstroke to rounds prior to receiving their certificates and prizes.

There are 96 pupils in Year 8 and giving each of them a taste of bellringing was going to take some logistical juggling. We decided to split the pupils into groups of 8 and have each group do three separate activities in turn, with 25 minutes to complete each activity. The activities were ringing the Charmborough bells, handbell ringing and mathematical permutations. These three activities proved to be varied enough to appeal to all types of learners, from the kinaesthetic to the visual and auditory learners. Each activity was assigned a leader: Michael Uphill, Surrey Association training officer, for the Charmborough Ring; Roger Bailey for the handbells; and Jason Hughes with the maths. At the end of the day, three groups of 8 pupils were chosen for having been the most involved, and these pupils received small prizes at the prize giving ceremony the following evening.

The helpers gave a demonstration of ringing to each group of 8 pupils so they could see both the ringers and the bells turning full-circle, while being told what was happening. They were then each given handling lessons. Learning in the familiar surroundings of the school hall, with their class mates (and with no stays to worry about breaking) provided a very comfortable environment to try something so different and new, and even the most "cool" of characters quickly joined in with their full attention. All but 2 or 3 of the pupils mastered backstroke on their own and about a quarter managed to control both strokes on their own. Such is the ease that youngsters can pick up physical skills!

Even with an experienced handbell tutor it seemed a little ambitious to expect the pupils to ring double-handed in the time available. Consequently, they were divided into subgroups of 4, each with a tutor to teach them plain hunt on 4. This was probably more difficult intellectually than learning to handle one of the Charmborough bells – but then, we always knew handbell ringers were a minority sub-species of ringer!

The pupils were asked to come and stand at the front of the classroom and be a ding, a dong, a bing or a bong. They were asked to shout out their names in order (for some, hilariously, they had to be given a slip to remind them of their 'note'), changes were discussed leading to them physically swapping and ringing out plain hunt minimus, which every group was able to complete. The idea of numbering the bells was introduced followed by the question: Are there any other changes on 4 bells? Depending on the ability of the group, how long it took them to move between activities and whether they had already completed the handbell ringing session, some groups were taken through factorials and onto further permutations such as 'EMMA' (a popular maths coursework).



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This project was financially supported by the Ringing Foundation and would not have got off the ground without their generous contribution to supplement that of the school. The school also provided lunch and refreshment to the helpers and even some man-power helping to erect the Charmborough Ring.

The most encouraging feedback received was that the school and its sister school are interested in hosting another bells project next year. The pupils clearly enjoyed themselves and a number joined us at the end of the school day to have an extra go on the bells, and were joined by members of staff whose interest had been aroused during the day. The administrative staff had been rather concerned that the bells might disturb them during the day, the offices being nearby, but the bells were lightly muffled and were barely audible outside the hall.

A follow up assembly showing the photographs from the day and offering further tuition in local towers is to take place in the Autumn term with sessions taking place during half-term.

Once the model has been refined from this pilot project, the bells and materials can be offered to other schools. There are national providers of educational enrichment days and it is appropriate to compare the CRISP model with these. Those courses generally cover specific subject areas and can be costly to the pupil. When there is just the one ring of bells there is a limit to the amount of time each pupil can have on the end of a rope, of course this is why we branched out into the handbell ringing and permutations activities. Also if an event such as this is to be self financing then a lot of goodwill will be required from the helpers.

## Notes for organisers of similar projects

Get enough CRB checked helpers to avoid the school having to provide teachers to oversee the training. This may seem overkill but safeguarding is top of the list for schools. Give the school a list of everyone who will or might be attending.

Teachers are very busy people and also need to cover their obligations to the curriculum so make life easy for them! Spell out the areas that the sessions will cover e.g. Personal Learning and thinking Skills (PLTS), Mathematical processes and applications, Developing functional skills in music etc.

Speak to the right people: Deputy heads in charge of the Curriculum delivery, Duke of Edinburgh award scheme Co-ordinator, International Baccalaureate (IB) Co-ordinator, Head of Year/Head of Lower school etc. and offer to speak to the pupils, e.g. at a school assembly



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