

Successful Planning for Recruitment and Retention 2 – Raising Awareness



In the first article we discussed the excellent opportunity that the current ringing hiatus offers for planning your next recruitment drive. Although many ringers are eager to resume real ringing, sadly a few may not return ... recruitment of new ringers will be even more important than before.

Raising Awareness

Recruitment activities have a greater chance of success if there is awareness about ringing and ringers among the church congregation and wider community. *“Oh, but I thought the bells were rung by a machine”* may sound familiar to you! Sometimes it seems like an uphill battle ...

So, how to raise the profile of bell ringing, especially with current limitations? You may think that if ringing and tower open days are off limits, there’s nothing you can do. Not true! The following suggestions can either be actioned *now*, or actively planned in readiness to initiate them once restrictions are eased. Good preparation is more likely to achieve the required influx of new recruits.

Write articles for community and church magazines, and local papers.

Approach your local radio for a promotional mention or interview. With many planned events and activities cancelled, local media will be more appreciative of interesting content and stories.

Publicise everything you do via Social Media. Set up a Facebook Page, Twitter feed, or Instagram to present short updates of your ringing activity to the public. Include pictures. Encourage the younger members of your band to contribute. Link your tower’s social media presence to other community publicity, including both local newspapers and radio. A series of regular features may have more impact than a one-off article or post.

Update websites – when was your association/branch website last updated – is the most recent content *last year’s* news? Offer to help update it, write a news story or provide newer photos. Does your church website have an information page about the bells and the ringers? Are contact details up-to-date? Are photos recent?

Offer talks to local groups, perhaps a history group or WI. Events could be held now via Zoom, which has excellent functionality for public presentations, and advertised online using Eventbrite, together with the social and traditional media channels mentioned above.

- Despite no current ringing activity to showcase, you could describe how ringers are practising without tower bells. Take the opportunity to explain *why* the bells have been silent – even during the Thursday 8 pm ‘clap for key workers’.
- Reflect on your ringing activities last year, or discuss what you’re looking forward to when ringing resumes. How do you plan to mark the return to ringing? Will you ring ‘open’ to celebrate, or half-muffled?
- Some people will be interested in the historical or technical aspects of bells and ringing, but personal stories are more likely to have broader appeal; perhaps interview your band’s oldest, youngest or longest-serving members?
- Incorporate photographs of a diverse group of smiling people all having a good time. Actual ringing is extremely difficult to photograph well, so include photos of people enjoying tea and cake, or sitting in a pretty churchyard.

Present a ‘virtual tower open day’ using photos and videos of good sound quality (clips of ringing at your tower may be lurking on YouTube!)

Integrate ringing into the church service. Ringers are often heard but not seen; out-of-sight is out-of-mind ... so when church services are back up and running, why not set-up a taster session

after a service, or offer ringing as one of the activities for Messy Church. Start planning this with your incumbent now! In the meantime if your church is now streaming services on YouTube then offer a ringing clip (if you have a good one) to start them off.

Participate in local events as a ringing group - enter a team in pub quizzes, sponsored walks or bike rides, or the town pancake race. Are there online events that you could join? Remember to advertise your involvement!

Advertise and showcase ringing to its full in everything you do.

Promote a fun and fantastic hobby suitable for a diverse range of people. The most important thing is to come across as enthusiastic and friendly – that’s what people will remember.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that non-ringers are missing the sound of bells ... use as many of the above suggestions as you can manage to turn the effects of lock-down to your advantage. As restrictions are eased and people return to a ‘new normal’, they may have less time to consider taking up a new hobby and tower bell ringing is likely to be one of the last activities that will be allowed to restart (see the Central Council’s document on ‘Ringing and COVID-19’: <https://cccbr.org.uk/coronavirus/>).



Sussex ringers – from teenagers to retirees – enjoying refreshments at a District practice

So, what are you waiting for?! Grab a mug or glass of your most effective brainwave-inducing tipple, download ART’s Recruitment Toolbox available here: <http://ringingteachers.org/resource-centre/recruitment-and-retention> ... and start filling in Section 1.

Your Vision for the Future

Hopefully, after raising awareness of ringing and ringers, you will generate plenty of interest and have an army of potential new recruits beating a path to your tower door! So how can envisioning the future of your band help with planning an effective recruitment strategy?

To maximise your chances of converting new recruits into committed and dedicated learners who become integrated into your band, recruitment must work for everyone. So it’s worth taking some time to talk to existing band members about *what* you want to achieve and *who* you could aim to recruit. Band members who are involved in planning recruitment are more likely to welcome new ringers and participate willingly in their training.



Ringers of all ages ring in the New Year at Horsham

What do you want to achieve?

To optimise successful recruitment, first decide *what* you want to achieve rather than what you will do. Have an honest look at your band's needs and aspirations, and the people and skill sets you have available to realise these. As a rough guide, aim for a band with 2.5 ringers per bell. Remember that a band which is strong now may not still be strong in a year's time. If a couple of people move away, the capabilities of the band can completely change.

- Are you predominantly concerned about maintaining Sunday service ringing?
- Do you need additional ringers who can extend your method ringing repertoire?
- Are you conscious that your band is 'getting on a bit'?
- How many new recruits do you require?
- Do you want an injection of new recruits, a low-level steady flow of newcomers or are you starting a band from scratch?

To augment your resources to transform new recruits into fully developed ringers you could:

- Organise some training - perhaps an ART Module 1 - to support teaching Bell Handling (there's information here: <http://ringingteachers.org/get-involved/courses>).
- Request assistance from nearby towers or your local branch or territorial association.
- Share recruitment and training with a cluster of local towers?

Who to recruit

Once you've decided what you want to achieve, discuss who you aim to recruit and how you might engage them. You could appeal to:

- Anyone
- Local villagers
- Specific age groups – maybe teenagers
- Other organisations – schools, youth groups, Scouts/Guides, university ringing societies, music groups, history groups, WI, U3A
- Families
- University students
- Amateur musicians ... they should understand the concepts and skills involved!
- Lapsed ringers

Including demographics such as those who can't or won't ring on Sundays might spark lively debate. But once new recruits have the ringing bug their priorities on Sunday mornings may change! Or perhaps you feel that having an extra pair of hands on practice night is more important than insisting that everyone rings on Sundays.

Although children tend to learn quickly, they usually have a lot of other commitments (e.g. homework, exams, sports, music) and often move away after a few years. However, while they are in the ringing room they help to attract other youngsters, add an extra dimension of diversity and vitality to the band, and may return after time away. After all, young ringers are the future of ringing; if you don't teach them, who will?

So why *would* your ideal recruit be interested in learning to ring with your band? And how is it best to target them? Would a 'bell ringing experience' gift voucher tempt them?

Take a further look at the resources on the ART website for additional ideas ... and fill in sections 2-3 of the Recruitment Toolbox.

In the next article, we'll consider ideas to entice potential recruits through the tower door, publicity, and holding successful recruitment events.

This R&R workshop, with resources and supporting articles, has been produced by: Matt Lawrence, Steph Pendlebury, Sonia Field, Deb M-B, Lesley Belcher, Paul Lewis, Tim Hine; V&L and ART working in partnership.