Ringing Basics for Beginners

(or: How to Learn Methods – and then ring them properly)

A series of short articles written

for the Farnham District Newsletter

John Couperthwaite

Central Council Publications

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by

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Contents

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INTRODUCTION

In early 2002 the Editor of the Farnham District Newsletter asked me to write an article for beginners about how to learn methods. As a contribution to a newsletter it had to be fairly short, and when I tackled the job I found that I used the space available without getting very far into the subject. So I wrote another article for the next edition of the newsletter. Three years later I had written six articles under the general title of "How to Learn Methods (and then ring them properly)". At that point I decided that it was time to stop, at least for a while.

Several people were kind enough to tell me that they found the articles helpful, and to suggest that I publish them in a rather more permanent form. In response I produced a home-made book containing the articles, again entitled "How to Learn Methods (and then ring them properly)". Since 2005 this has been offered for sale locally, mainly by the Guildford Diocesan Guild bookstall, and, somewhat to my surprise, has sold well and has attracted many favourable comments. Recently my colleagues on the Central Council Publications Committee suggested that the book would be a useful addition to our list and so, with some trepidation on my part, here it is.

The articles were thought out, written, and published at six monthly intervals, and were not originally intended to form a book. However, after some thought I decided not to attempt any rewriting so that, apart from new titles for what are now chapters, the articles are reproduced here exactly as originally printed in the newsletter. Readers are asked to make allowances for this.

The title of the book has been changed, though. This has been done primarily to distinguish the book from other CC publications, but also because the new title is probably a rather more accurate reflection of the content of the articles as they turned out. I apologise in advance to those people who already possess the original book and have now bought the same thing with a different title. I hope they may be consoled by the fact that the original book cost very little and by the knowledge that all profits from its sale went to the Guildford Diocesan Guild Bell Restoration Fund.

John Couperthwaite

July 2008

THE THREE SKILLS

The Newsletter Editor asked me to write about "how to learn methods". However, having given the subject a little thought, I doubt that you want to know only how to learn methods. It is much more likely that you will want to know "how to learn methods and then ring them properly". If you can do that you will certainly be able to help your own band to produce good ringing. You will also be sure of a warm welcome when you visit other towers, however advanced their ringing may be. So I've modified the title.

When writing a piece on this sort of subject it is difficult to know who it should be aimed at, and who, if anybody, is likely to read it. I am going to assume that if you are an experienced ringer you won't need me to tell you how to learn and ring methods. You will have developed your own way of doing things, and if you are reading this at all it will probably be so that you can have an argument with me about some of the finer points. I will assume that if you are reading this because you really want advice, then you are in the fairly early stages of learning. I have no way of knowing whether you are 12 or whether you are 70, so I'll try to write in a way which might be helpful for all age groups.

You would probably find that if you asked twelve different people how to learn methods (and then ring them properly) you would get about a dozen different answers. However, I hope that most answers would have some strong common threads. I don't claim that my answer is better than anybody else's. All I can say is that the approach I will try to describe has worked for me, and for lots of other people. You must judge for yourself whether it suits you.

You may be surprised to find that most of this first article isn't going to be about methods at all. This is because I think that the "learning methods" is the easier part of the subject. It is mostly done at home, using books and paper and pencils. The "ringing them properly" part is much more difficult. The skills needed can be developed only through lots of careful practice in the tower. I suggest that until you have gone some way towards acquiring them there is not much point in concentrating hard on learning methods. It is essential to get the basics right before trying to move on very far. Most ringers are quite capable of learning methods in the sense of being able to write out a blue line. However, many of them cannot ring the methods properly when they get to the tower simply because they don't have the basic practical skills needed.

So, what are the “ringing them properly” skills and how might you go about acquiring and developing them? There are three, and their importance cannot be overstated.

- The first is the ability to handle a bell well so that, without thinking about it, you can always cause it to strike exactly when you want it to do so.
- The second is to be able to see in which position your bell is going to strike.
- And finally, the third is to be able to hear exactly where your bell is striking.

These three skills are bell handling, ropesight and listening. You will not be able to ring methods well until you have worked on all three of these basic skills. The first, bell handling, is the essential physical skill. When you have it the ropesight skill will enable you to strike your bell in roughly the right place just by looking. It will only be roughly the right place because almost all bells are “odd struck” to some extent. This means that merely relating the times at which your handstrokes or backstrokes begin with respect to those of the bells you wish to follow will usually produce only an approximate result. Using ropesight is the coarse adjustment mechanism. Only if you can, in addition, hear your bell, and make adjustments accordingly, will you be able to strike in exactly the right place. Listening is the fine adjustment mechanism.

Hardly anybody is left to teach themselves bell handling. However, it is not always taught well, and there are many keen ringers who, unfortunately, will not progress far until their bell handling is improved. Ropesight is probably the easiest of the three skills to acquire, but instructors often neglect to teach it properly. Learning to hear exactly where your bell is striking is difficult, and is often not taught at all. There are, again, many keen ringers whose bell handling is fine and whose ropesight is fine, but who are incapable of taking part in good ringing because they have not yet learnt to listen and to adjust accordingly.

Fortunately it is never too late to improve. It is not my intention in this short article to try to give you detailed instructions about how to acquire the three skills, but I will offer three general suggestions which should help. The first is simply to watch how people who are acknowledged to be good ringers go about it, and to learn from watching. If you do this carefully you will pick up a lot of useful tips. Amongst many other things, you will probably notice that good ringers:

- Pull both handstroke and backstroke with both hands. They don't use one hand just to grip the tail end of the rope tightly.
- Pull all the way through at both strokes.
- Don't ring with very bent arms.
- Don't move their heads excessively in order to try to look directly at the ropes they want to follow. They try to see all the ropes all the time, out of the corners of their eyes if necessary.
- Don't look up in an attempt to see the next rope to follow.
- Listen hard (more difficult to spot since you can't see people listening).

If you are listening to a whole band of such people you will probably be able to tell that the ringing is good.

If you are being actively instructed by your Tower Captain, or by a particular tutor, then you should, of course, be guided by them. But, if you are not in this position, my second suggestion is that you should make positive efforts to ask a few carefully chosen experienced ringers for their opinions on how you might improve. In this day and age experienced people are often reluctant to make suggestions or to offer criticisms in case they put other people off. However, if you pluck up courage to ask them to offer constructive advice about what you may be doing wrong, and about how you could improve, you will probably find that they are glad to be asked, and more than willing to help you.

The third suggestion is about learning to listen. You can best begin to do this when you are sitting out. Try listening for the treble or the tenor, which are fairly easy to distinguish, and try to determine what they are doing. Is the bell you have picked ringing in the same place all the time, is it plain hunting, or is it doing something more complicated? It takes a bit of perseverance to be able to do this, and you will have to concentrate very hard at first. However, you may well be pleasantly surprised by how soon you can make progress if you give it a serious try. A bit later you will, of course, need to be able to hear your own bell while you are ringing. A very few fortunate people have perfect pitch and can tell which is their bell simply by listening. But most of us can't do that. My own technique is essentially a combination of two things. Firstly I make sure that I always know which place my bell should be striking in, and then listen to pick out the bell which is in that position in the change. I also find it useful, especially when ringing on higher numbers of bells, to know where my bell should be in relation to the treble or the tenor, and then listen to pick out the bell in that relative position. The treble and tenor have the

highest and lowest notes and, with practice, are not too difficult to detect. I suggest that you shouldn't try to do the second until you are comfortable with doing the first.

You can probably best begin to concentrate on the three skills while ringing just rounds or call changes. There won't be a method to think about, so you will be able to give all your attention to handling, or to ropesight, or to listening, or perhaps to all three. Don't ever think that you are past the stage at which ringing rounds or call changes can be useful to you.

Before the next newsletter comes out I hope you will have a careful think about how good you really are at the three skills. If you decide that there is room for improvement I hope you will make positive efforts to do something about it. When I write the next article I will assume that you have done so.

I shouldn't close without writing something about methods so, at long last, here is the first step. I think that if you can ring the method called Original well then you really are a very long way towards being able to ring any method at all. By "well" I don't mean just stumbling through and getting to the end. I mean ringing with your bell in exactly the right place all the time, producing perfect striking by using all three of the three skills. You may need to arrange to ring in a band of experienced ringers to be able to do this. By the way, the plain course of Original on any number of bells is simply plain hunting.

SIMPLE METHODS

Before I go on to the next stage I would like you to read Part 1 again. Please remind yourself about the three essential skills. Remember that you must be reasonably proficient in them before you will be able to ring methods properly. I meet a lot of ringers as I travel around. It is a shame that so many of them are keen and dedicated but have no chance of making real progress simply because they have not developed the three skills adequately. Many ringers aspire only to attend their own churches regularly on Sundays and on practice nights. That's fine; those are our main duties. However, some of them seem to think that any old noise will do. That really isn't good enough. It is up to us to ring as well as possible for services, even if we want to stick to simple things. Complicated methods are not essential, but good striking is. Congregations and the general public can't usually tell the difference between complicated and simple methods. However, they can certainly tell the difference between good and bad striking. They appreciate the good. If you have mastered the basics you will be able to help produce good service ringing, which is the most important thing. You will also be ready to tackle increasingly complicated methods competently if you so wish.

So, how have you been getting on? I will assume that you are one of those who have made progress with the three essential skills, if you didn't have them already. Part 1 finished by recommending that you concentrate on ringing the method called Original well. I explained that the plain course of Original on any number of bells is simply plain hunting. It is perfectly possible to ring touches, quarters and peals of Original by the use of bobs and singles. However, in contrast to the plain course, touches are usually quite complicated because calls can be made at 2 change intervals, and lots of them are needed. So the next step is not to ring touches of Original.

There is a problem with ringing plain courses of Original for too long. Most people quickly learn the order in which they should strike over the other bells. It is then all too easy to ring plain hunt by remembering the order and then looking for particular ropes, rather than by using the ropesight skill. However, you must not rely on remembering the order. It is quite fundamental that when ringing methods you must at all times know which place your bell should be in, and then use ropesight and the other skills to put it there.

Suppose, for example, that you are ringing the treble to a method on six bells and that it should be in thirds place. There are 10 possible pairs of bells which could

occupy first and second places : 2&3 or 2&4 or 2&5 or 2&6 or 3&4 or 3&5 or 3&6 or 4&5 or 4&6 or 5&6. The members of these pairs could be in first and second places, or in second and first places (the pair 3&4, for example, could strike in the order 34 or in the order 43). So there are no fewer than 20 possible cases to deal with, even in this very simple example. Depending on the method, which you will have warning of, and on the touch chosen by the conductor, which you won't have warning of, any of the 20 possibilities could occur whenever you are in thirds place. And so on. It will be quite impossible to ring the method, even on the treble, if you try to remember the ropes to follow. You must remember the sequence of places (2nds place, 3rds place etc) in which your bell must strike. This sequence is commonly called the "Blue Line". Pick up any book containing methods and you will see the paths of bells through methods marked by lines, sometimes coloured blue. These lines highlight the sequence of places in which a bell must strike in order to ring the method.

So, back to Original. If you haven't done so already it is useful to practice plain hunting starting from a change other than rounds. Get the conductor to call the bells into a different order and then start plain hunting from there. This will help you to develop ropesight, and to avoid "remembering the order". Ironically, an advanced version of "remembering the order" is one of the extra skills needed when you learn to conduct. But that's for a different article.

Plain hunting well, which involves producing good striking, is not easy. You will be exercising the three skills while changing place continuously. But you will soon get back to where you started. After you think you have mastered Original try ringing the treble to any method in which it plain hunts. You will still get back to where you started just as often as in Original. However, the other bells will not, and the order in which you strike over them will change as the touch progresses, often in ways you don't expect. If you really have mastered plain hunting this won't give you any trouble after the initial shock. So the next step is to ring the treble. Until you can do so with confidence, producing good striking, you aren't likely to make much progress in ringing a particular method on a working bell.

We can now move on to ringing inside. Most people start with either Grandsire or Plain Bob, probably because these methods consist mostly of plain hunting. There has always been controversy about which of them is easier for a beginner. A lot of the controversy is, in my view, generated by the "I started with Plain Bob/Grandsire *(delete as appropriate)* so that must be the right thing to do" school of thought. I do not believe that it matters at all which you start with, and there are advantages in starting with both. You may possibly be told to start with another method. If you can

plain hunt properly you have all the basic groundwork needed for ringing any method.

I am not going to go straight on to the details of any particular method. I want to suggest a staged approach. Again this reflects my way of doing things. It has worked for me, and for others. However, some people will disagree with me on some points, and in the end you must do what works for you.

The first stage in ringing a method inside is simply to learn the “Blue Line”, and then to ring it. There are lots of pointers in any method. However, I suggest that you shouldn’t try to learn what they are to start with, or even try to spot them. Stick to remembering the line and ringing it. This will probably be quite difficult enough. Remember that while doing it you still need to be using the three skills and producing good striking. It is a great mistake to forget the striking and concentrate only on the line. Good ringing at all stages of learning provides a structure within which it is very much easier to progress. You won’t get good ringing unless you, and everybody else, concentrate on good striking as well as on the method.

So, make sure that you have thoroughly learnt the line for Plain Bob or Grandsire and then practice as hard as possible. Don’t worry about pointers. In the next article I will write about them.

POINTERS

The last article finished by suggesting that you learn the line for Plain Bob or Grandsire thoroughly, and then practice as hard as possible without worrying about pointers. I said that I would write about pointers in the next article – which is this one. I will assume, as before, that you have taken to heart the absolute importance of the three basic skills, and have continued to practice them, asking for advice when necessary. I will also assume that you are comfortable with plain hunting, no matter what the other bells are doing, and that you have made good progress with ringing Plain Bob, or Grandsire, or maybe both, reliably on an inside bell. You may even by now have learnt a little about bobs and singles, and progressed to ringing touches. So much the better if you have, but I will write about bobs and singles and touches in a later article. For now I want to concentrate on the somewhat difficult subject of pointers.

I have very definite views about pointers. These views are based on many years of learning methods myself, many years of trying to help other people learn methods, and many years of observation. As usual not everybody will agree with me, and in the end you must do whatever works best for you.

First and foremost, please don't fall into the trap of thinking that learning a few pointers will give you a magic short cut to ringing a method reliably when you haven't properly mastered the three skills and learnt the "Blue Line". I sometimes meet people at training events who think that there must be a "quick fix" of some sort. Almost without exception they are the ones who haven't yet developed the three skills properly, and are trying to run before they can walk. Quite simply, it doesn't work that way. They are deluding themselves. There is absolutely no substitute for the hard work of mastering the basics. Pointers of whatever sort are really no more than add-ons which can make life easier, or even much easier, when you have done this, but not before.

When I am in the early stages of learning some new skill I find that my brain seems to be constantly overloaded. The most basic things seem to need all my brainpower, and more. It takes a while to be able to do even the minimum necessary for some sort of success. If I try to do more than the minimum too soon, I find that I am very likely to forget something fundamental. After a while, sometimes a long while, and if I try hard enough, I find that the basics of whatever it is start to become more automatic. At this point, if I'm lucky, my brain has enough space left to begin thinking about other aspects of the job in hand. Your learning process is probably

not too far different from mine. The younger you are the quicker you will be able to learn, but whatever your age you have to take enough time to become competent at the basics before you can create some space to think about other aspects while still performing competently.

So far as ringing is concerned I think that pointers are definitely "other aspects". Doing the minimum to ring a bell well, even to rounds or plain hunting, by using the three skills is a very complex process. A high degree of physical coordination is needed, and you also have to be able to look and listen at the same time. You shouldn't be surprised, or discouraged, if it takes a while to create some spare brain space for other things.

The most useful and obvious pointers in any "treble dominated" method come, not surprisingly, from observation of the treble. A "treble dominated" method, in simple terms, is one in which the treble's path is the same in each lead. This path is almost always a plain hunt or a treble bob hunt. Plain Bob and Grandsire are both "treble dominated" methods. The only commonly rung method which isn't treble dominated is Stedman, and strictly speaking Stedman is a "principle", not a method. There are lots of pointers in Stedman, but they have nothing to do with the treble in particular. I may write about it later, but for now I want to restrict attention to "treble dominated" methods like Plain Bob and Grandsire. What follows applies to such methods only.

So, I suggest that you should concentrate on observing the treble when you feel that you have some spare brain space. By "observing" I don't mean just looking, I mean listening as well. Looking and listening are equally important. First try to develop the ability to both see and hear the treble leading; then try to observe where your bell passes the treble in whatever method you are ringing. Until you are confident of knowing when the treble is leading, and where you have passed it as you ring the method, don't worry too much about what you can then do with the knowledge.

The extent to which you can exploit your knowledge of when the treble leads, and where you pass it, depends on how much you learn and understand about the construction of the method you are ringing. Perhaps the most fundamental, and useful, characteristic of any method is that it is split into "leads". A "lead" is a block of changes rung between one occasion when the treble strikes twice in first place (called leading) and the next. The number of "leads" in a plain course depends on the "stage" of the method being rung; that is how many bells it is being rung on. It is perhaps worth pointing out that both Plain Bob and Grandsire can be rung on all numbers of bells, but that this isn't necessarily true of other methods. All "leads" of

a method on a given number of bells have exactly the same structure. However, "leads" will contain different changes if they start from different rows. By the way, I strongly advocate learning any method as a set of "leads", each with its part of the "Blue Line", rather than as a single continuous "Blue Line". Almost all of us start by thinking of a single continuous "Blue Line", and in the early stages that's fine. However, as soon as you start to ring touches, and to learn more complicated methods, it's well worth getting into the habit of thinking of a set of "leads". There are several good reasons for this, and I may write about some of them in future articles. But for now, back to how to use the treble.

I'll take Plain Bob Minor as an example. If you've learnt this you have probably done so by remembering that the "Blue Line" consists mostly of plain hunting, but with a dodge in 3-4 down, then a dodge in 5-6 down, then a dodge in 5-6 up, then a dodge in 3-4 up, then making 2nds, inserted in the line. You start somewhere in the sequence depending on which bell you ring. There is no substitute for knowing this thoroughly, and you should be able to ring the method without knowing what the treble, or any other bell, is doing. That's the only way to be sure that your bell will be in the right place, even if somebody else goes wrong. However, the treble, if it's being rung correctly, can give you some very useful prompts and reminders. If you look carefully at a fully written out course of Bob Minor, not just the "Blue Line", you will see that the dodges and the making 2nds happen only when the treble is leading – at its backstroke blow at lead to be precise. At all other times the bells are just plain hunting. So, you know that you must dodge or make 2nds only when the treble leads, and plain hunt for the rest of the time. It follows that if you were to plain hunt, watch and listen for the treble to lead, and dodge (or make 2nds) in whatever position you found yourself to be when it did so, you would automatically ring Bob Minor. But only if the treble was always being rung correctly. With luck the treble won't go wrong too often, so if you find from time to time, as we all do, that you have lost track of where you are on the "Blue Line" you don't need to panic, and you don't need to go wrong. Just plain hunt until the treble leads and then dodge (or make 2nds) wherever you find yourself. Since you know the "Blue Line" you will then know exactly what you have to do next, and the crisis will be over.

If you continue to study the written out course you will see that the position in which you pass the treble while plain hunting tells you immediately where your next dodge must be. This is another useful pointer which, if you think about it carefully, is just a variation of spotting when the treble leads, but with a bit of advance warning built in. Again though, it won't work if the treble has gone wrong, so you shouldn't rely on it.

Plain Bob Minor is a very simple example, but I hope you get the idea. In general the more you know about the structure of a method, even a very complicated one, the more the treble can be used to help you ring accurately and reliably.

I think that's about enough on pointers for now. Please remember that they should be regarded as useful aids, not as the primary means of ringing a method reliably. Don't concern yourself with them until you can ring the method properly, and then still have some spare time for thinking about other things. You don't necessarily need to learn about all the useful pointers in a method before you ring it. I find that as I become more comfortable with just ringing a complex method I automatically pick up pointers of all sorts, not necessarily anything to do with the treble, as I go along. But I think the secret is to let them grow on me gradually and not to try to learn too much all at once. If I do I'm almost sure to fall off the line.

CALLS AND PLACE BELLS

I hope you realise by now that these articles are not intended to describe particular methods in detail. There are plenty of books which do that, and you will find them on the Guild bookstall, or advertised in the Ringing World. I am trying to write about those important aspects of learning methods which may not be found in print quite so easily.

In this article I want to return to the recommendation I made last time about learning a method as a set of "leads", rather than as a single continuous "Blue Line". I will try to explain why this is a very helpful thing to do, even for inexperienced people. The subjects of calls, bobs and singles, and of ringing "spliced", will follow on naturally. I will describe a way of thinking about calls which removes many of the difficulties which learners experience when ringing unfamiliar methods, and which may be new to many of you. As in previous articles I want to concentrate on the fundamentals, which are really quite simple. It is often the case that ringers make learning methods much more difficult than necessary for themselves just because they haven't understood a few basics. Even when they have developed the three basic skills, and can ring Plain Bob and Grandsire properly, with good striking, some people find it much harder than it should be to go further. If you are one of them I hope that what follows will help you to progress.

So, what exactly do I mean when I suggest that you should learn a method as a set of "leads"? Think of it like this:

In order to ring the first lead of a method you should know where on the "Blue Line" your bell, whichever it is, starts in the plain course; you should know the part of the "Blue Line" which your bell follows until the first lead end in the course (the next time the treble strikes in first place at backstroke); and finally you should know which place your bell is in at this first lead end. Then, to ring the second lead, you should know where on the "Blue Line" the bell in that place starts in the plain course, the path it follows until the first lead end, and its place at the first lead end. And so on, until you have rung all the leads, and find yourself back where you started, in rounds. All you have done is to ring the "Blue Line" in a series of separate pieces, called "leads", knowing which place your bell is in at each lead end.

If you learn a method in this way there is initially a little, but only a little, extra work involved beyond just learning the continuous "Blue Line". In fact, once you get used to learning methods as sets of separate "leads" you may well find it easier than

learning continuous lines. I certainly do, and the reason is not hard to see. In all "regular" methods with even numbers of working bells the line for any "lead" is the exact reverse of the line for one of the other "leads". In all "regular" methods with odd numbers of working bells the line for one of the "leads" is symmetrical, with the second half of the "lead" being the mirror image of the first half of the "lead"; and the line for any of the other leads is the exact reverse of another line. The "regular" methods which you are likely to come across are methods in which the treble plain hunts or treble bob hunts, and in which all the "working bells" ring the "Blue Line". A "working bell" is a bell other than the treble. Plain Bob Doubles and Plain Bob Triples are examples of "regular" methods with even numbers of "working bells". They have 4 and 6 respectively. Plain Bob Minor and Plain Bob Major are examples of "regular" methods with odd numbers of "working bells". They have 5 and 7 respectively. Grandsire is a bit different because in it two bells are plain hunting at any given time – the treble and the bell presently in the hunt (2nds place bell). This bell stays in the hunt (becomes 2nds place bell at each lead end) until there is a call, at which point it does something else and a different bell goes into the hunt until the next call is made. So the bell in the hunt is really a "working bell". However, for the purposes of looking at mirror images and reverses we could say that Grandsire has two "non-working bells" in any particular lead. So, we could say that for most practical purposes Grandsire Doubles has 3 "working bells" at any particular time, Grandsire Triples has 5, and so on. If you look very carefully indeed at the lines for, say, Plain Bob Doubles and Grandsire Doubles you will see that the "reverses" which I have described start in slightly different places in each. In one "reverses" start at the treble's handstroke blow at lead, and in the other at the treble's backstroke blow at lead. This arises because Plain Bob is a "single hunt" method and Grandsire is a "twin hunt" method. But you really don't need to worry about this subtle difference at this stage of learning.

As an example of all this let's assume that the method is Plain Bob Minor, and that you are ringing the 4^{th}. The 4^{th} clearly starts the plain course in 4ths place, it plain hunts to first place, leads for two blows, and then plain hunts out and rings in 6ths place for two blows. It then goes down to 5ths place and steps back to 6ths place (dodges in 5-6 down) at the lead end. So it is in 6ths place at the lead end. The 6^{th} starts the plain course by plain hunting down to lead for two blows, plain hunts up to 6ths place, and then steps back to 5ths place (dodges in 5-6 up) at the lead end. So it is in 5ths place at the lead end. Similarly, when it starts the plain course the 5^{th} will be in 3rds place at the first lead end, having dodged in 3-4 up. And so on. If you study the "Blue Line" you will see that the line for 6ths place bell (the one that starts in 6ths place and is in 5ths place at the first lead end) is the one for which the second half is the mirror image of the first half. You will also see that the line for 2nds place

bell is the reverse of the line for 3rds place bell, and that the line for 4ths place bell is the reverse of the line for 5ths place bell. Knowing this may not seem to be particularly helpful, or necessary, when ringing Plain Bob. However, if you look at one of the much more complicated methods to which you could soon progress, say Yorkshire Surprise Major (yes, you really could), you should begin to appreciate the usefulness of learning the "Blue Line" in this way. In Yorkshire the line for 3rds place bell is the one for which the second half is the mirror image of the first half (this bell is often called the "pivot bell"); and the pairs 2 and 5, 4 and 7, 6 and 8 are the reverses. The work involved in learning a method like Yorkshire is much reduced once you are in the habit of learning it by "place bells" rather than as a continuous "Blue Line". Apart from the line for the "pivot bell", the lines for the "place bells" are always in pairs, the line for one member of a pair being the reverse of the line for the other member of the pair. You do, of course, need to learn the order in which the lines for the "place bells" are rung.

This is the right point at which to introduce two even more powerful reasons for learning methods by "place bells". The first relates to calls, bobs and singles, and the second to ringing several methods in the same touch. I will address them in turn.

Bobs and singles often cause quite unnecessary difficulty, particularly in the more advanced methods. Difficulty usually arises when people try to equate the action required by a call to the need to follow a particular piece of "Blue Line". As an example let's consider Plain Bob Minor again. The effect of calls is all too often described and taught as follows:

At a bob:

- If you were going to make seconds run out and make seconds at the next lead end.
- If you were going to dodge in 3-4 down run in and dodge 3-4 down at the next lead end.
- If you were going to dodge 3-4 up make fourths and dodge in 5-6 down at the next lead end.

At a single:

- If you were going to make seconds do so, unaffected.
- If you were going to dodge in 3-4 down make 3rds and then make seconds at the next lead end.
- If you were going to dodge in 3-4 up make 4ths and dodge in 5-6 down at the next lead end, just as for a bob.

While all this accurately describes what happens at, and after, calls in Plain Bob it is very unhelpful when it comes to properly understanding what to do at calls in other methods. It is unhelpful because it implies the need to follow Plain Bob patterns of "Blue Line" when responding to calls in all other methods in which 2nds place is made at lead ends (commonly referred to as methods with Plain Bob calls). Usually this is not the right thing to do. The essential point to understand is that bobs and singles alter the work at one row only, and that this one row is the lead end. Having got to a (changed) place at the lead end after a call all that's necessary is to ring the line for the "place bell" which starts at that place. There is nothing else involved. So, rather than learn the effect of calls in Plain Bob as described above, what I suggest you should learn is:

At a bob:

- If you were going to become 2nds place bell at the lead end, become 3rds place bell instead, and then ring the line for 3rds place bell.
- If you were going to become 4ths place bell at the lead end, become 2nds place bell instead, and then ring the line for 2nds place bell.
- If you were going to become 3rds place bell at the lead end, become 4ths place bell instead, and then ring the line for 4ths place bell.

At a single:

- If you were going to become 2nds place bell at the lead end do so, unaffected.
- If you were going to become 4ths place bell at the lead end, become 3rds place bell instead, and then ring the line for 3rds place bell.
- If you were going to become 3rds place bell at the lead end, become 4ths place bell instead, and then ring the line for 4ths place bell, just as at a bob.

These two ways of thinking about calls are exactly equivalent if you are ringing Plain Bob itself (take some time with pencil and paper to convince yourself). The second way is no more difficult than the first. However, the first way produces the right result only in Plain Bob. On the other hand the second, recommended, way is quite general and always produces the right result in any method in which 2nds place is made at lead ends, irrespective of the patterns traced by the various "place bells". Take a look at London Surprise Minor, which is a standard method, although

quite a difficult one. It illustrates the point well. London has 2nds place made at the lead end, and the bobs are exactly the same as those in Plain Bob; but the patterns traced by the various "place bells" near the lead ends are quite different from those in Plain Bob. However, if you use the recommended way of thinking about calls you will get exactly the right results with no trouble or confusion. For example, the bell which becomes 4ths place bell at the lead end when there is no call does so by moving up to 4ths place after striking two blows in 3rds. There is no 3-4 down dodge involved. At a bob this bell must become 2nds place bell at the lead end instead of 4ths place bell. It does so by moving down to 2nds place at the lead end after striking the two blows in 3rds. The pattern of work around the lead end is very different from that in Plain Bob, but the rule by which the lead end is reached is exactly the same as in Plain Bob. If you use this method of responding to calls you can simply start ringing the work of a new place bell as appropriate when a call is made. There is no need to be confused by the pattern of the "Blue Line" at a call, however complicated it may be. There are different, but equally simple, general rules, which always produce the right results however complicated the lines, for methods in which 2nds place is not made at lead ends.

The second powerful reason for learning methods by "place bells" relates to method splicing. You may be one of those people who see others ringing "spliced", with several different methods being rung in the same touch, and are baffled about how it's done. It's not at all uncommon for learners to think that such ringing is far beyond anybody who isn't in the "genius" class. They're wrong. Anybody who has properly developed the 3 basic skills – yes, we keep coming back to them as they're quite fundamental and essential – and who has learnt methods by "place bells" should have no trouble ringing "spliced". It doesn't have to be spliced surprise. There is a lot to be learnt, and a lot of enjoyment to be had, from ringing very simple methods together in touches of spliced.

So what exactly is a touch of "spliced"? It is no more than ringing a lead, or leads, of one method and then ringing a different method, starting from a lead end, as directed by the conductor. At this stage you can assume that changes of method will always happen at lead ends. I hope you can see that if you know the methods involved by the "place bells" method I've described, so that you know what the line is for any "place bell" and know which "place bell" it will become at the next lead end, then there should be no problem in starting the work of that "place bell" for a different method after the lead end. Approached in this way, ringing a touch of "spliced" using a set of methods which you know is no more difficult than ringing the methods separately. Of course, the conductor may find it more challenging because

he will have to remember which methods to change to at appropriate lead ends. I will write about conducting in a later article.

A very simple example should help you understand. First suppose that you are ringing the 4th of 6 bells and that the conductor says “go Plain Bob Minor” at the start of the touch. You will, as described earlier, end up in 6ths place at the first lead end. Then suppose that just before the lead end the conductor calls “St Clements”, indicating that he wants you to ring St Clements Bob Minor in the next lead. If you have learned St Clements by “place bells” you will know that “6ths place bell”, which is what your bell becomes at the lead end, hunts down to strike two blows in 3rds place, hunts up to strike two blows in 6ths place, and then hunts down again to dodge in 3-4 down, becoming 4ths place bell at the next lead end. When you end up in 4ths place at this second lead end you will be back where you started, and the bells will, in fact, end up in rounds after the two leads, and the touch will be complete. A very short and very simple touch, but a touch of “spliced” for all that. Another very simple touch, this time three leads long, would be to ring leads of Plain Bob, Little Bob, and Plain Bob in turn. I suggest that you find the methods in a book and work this one out for yourself. These touches could be extended by the use of calls, bobs and singles, so that while still ringing the same methods the bells would not come round so soon.

CONDUCTING – CALLING

This article will introduce the subject of conducting. You can certainly learn methods, and ring them properly, without knowing about conducting; and perhaps you don't wish to take on the extra responsibility of conducting. However, a band won't be able to ring touches if it doesn't have at least one conductor. In this sense I think that conducting can be seen as a part of learning methods and ringing them properly. Somebody must be able to conduct if the band is to progress very far, and that somebody could be you. Even if your band already has one or more conductors they may not be around all the time, and they may not want to do all the conducting if they are around. The more people who can conduct the better. Many bands fail to progress simply because they don't have enough people who can conduct.

If you have mastered the three basic skills, and have understood the content of the earlier articles, then you are quite capable of becoming a conductor. You don't have to be a better ringer, or cleverer, than the other members of the band, but you do need to do some extra work. However, there are advantages. I find that knowing about conducting helps me to ring more reliably, especially if I am doing the conducting, because I am more aware of what's going on. I think you will find the same once you have got over the initial shock of being in charge of the ringing.

There are four distinct activities involved in conducting. In increasing order of difficulty a conductor should ideally be able to:

- Ring the method accurately and reliably
- Call the bobs and singles in the right places
- Check that the ringing is correct
- Correct mistakes as they occur

As always I strongly recommend that you should take care to master the basics before trying to advance very far. You can be quite useful as a conductor with a fairly small amount of knowledge. Please don't imagine that you must be able to correct all mistakes as soon as they occur in order to be effective. That might be an eventual aim, but there are several stages to go through before you can hope to approach it; and most conductors aren't ever in such complete control all the time.

The first activity isn't peculiar to conducting - the whole band should be able to do this. However, it is vital if you wish to become a conductor. There is little point in concentrating on conducting if by doing so your striking deteriorates, or if you

forget what you're supposed to be doing in the method and go wrong. If either of these things happens the touch is likely to "fire out". You should be able to ring the method, whatever it is, accurately and reliably, using the three basic skills, and still have some space left in your brain to think about something else, before trying to add the second activity to your workload. This takes lots of practice, but I hope that by now you are beginning to feel that you can do it, at least when ringing simple methods. Of course, nobody is perfect and we all go wrong now and again. So don't be put off when you make the occasional inevitable mistake.

The second, third and fourth activities are peculiar to the conductor. Nobody else in the band needs to make the calls, check that the ringing is correct, or correct any mistakes. I will describe these tasks in turn, but before doing so I should say something about which method to try to conduct first. I said in the second article that I don't think it matters whether you start with Plain Bob or Grandsire when learning to ring methods. In contrast I do think it matters when you are learning to conduct. The first two stages of the four stage process should be equally easy, or difficult, whichever you start with. However, I think that it is rather easier to check that the ringing is correct, and to put things right if necessary, when you are ringing Plain Bob rather than Grandsire. In addition you will probably find that an ability to conduct Plain Bob leads you naturally to conducting many other methods. This isn't intended to decry Grandsire in any way – it is a fine method, and one which I enjoy ringing and conducting. However, so far as learning to conduct is concerned I think it is more difficult, and that it doesn't lead naturally to other things in the same way as Plain Bob. This is another topic on which there may be some disagreement or debate – I can only give my opinion.

There are two main aspects to putting the calls in the right places. The first is to know where in a lead to make a call, and the second is to have learnt a touch so that you know which leads should have calls in them. In the previous article I explained that in Plain Bob, as in almost all other methods you are likely to ring, a call alters the work at one row only, and that this row is the lead end – the row in which the treble strikes in first place at backstroke. In order to give the band sufficient warning that something different should happen at the lead end it is usual for the conductor to make a call one whole pull - two changes - before the lead end; that is when the treble strikes in seconds place at backstroke on its way down to lead. If you look carefully at one of the books which describes Grandsire you will see that in this method a bob again alters one row only, but that this row is the one before the lead end – the row in which the treble strikes in first place at handstroke. A single alters the next row as well. So in this method the conductor calls the bobs and singles when the treble strikes in thirds place at handstroke on its way down to lead. All this

arises because Grandsire is a “twin hunt” method, as I also explained. There are other “twin hunt” methods but they aren’t rung nearly as often as “single hunt” methods like Plain Bob. Having pointed this out I’m now going to concentrate on Plain Bob for the rest of this article.

It will take some practice for you to be able to make a call accurately when the treble is in seconds place on its way down to lead. There are three ways in which you can achieve this, and ideally you should aim to use them all. The first and most important way is to know where your own bell should be when the treble is in seconds place on the way down. It is the easiest way, and is also the way in which you should learn touches, at least to start with; so you should certainly concentrate on it. When you are comfortable with it you can begin to use the other two ways as useful aids, or double-checks. The second way is to watch what the treble is doing using the ropesight skill, and the third is to listen to what the treble is doing using the listening skill. In time you will find that the second and third ways, as well as being useful double-checks, are particularly helpful if you have got lost yourself. This is because they don’t rely on you knowing where your own bell is. I certainly have to use them when I am conducting and have got a bit lost – which I try hard to make a rare event.

We’ll use Plain Bob Minor as an example. We have seen that this is simply plain hunting, except that you must either dodge or make seconds place over the treble at the lead ends. So to put in a bob or a single two changes before a lead end you will need to make the call at the backstroke before a dodge, or at your backstroke blow in first place before you are due to make seconds place over the treble. Of course, if you are due to become seconds, thirds, or fourth place bell at the lead end and you make a call you will need to follow the rules for what to do at the call. Now a word of warning. Because Plain Bob is so simple you could probably manage to call touches without consciously knowing about lead ends; but please don’t be tempted to do so. I hope you can see that it will be essential to know where the lead ends occur when you move on to more complicated methods. This is another reason why it is so important to learn methods by “place bells”.

So now on to learning touches. You will need access to a source of touches and there are several books available, some written especially for newcomers to conducting. The Guild bookstall stocks most of them. However, you may find that you need some help at first in order to understand the notations used to write touches down. If you do get confused then ask an experienced conductor for help. He or she should be only too pleased to provide it. You can be forgiven for confusion because there are a number of notations in common use. There isn’t space here to go into great detail,

but I will introduce you to three of the most common ways of writing touches down, still using Plain Bob Minor as the example. Suppose that the touch is to call a single when the 6th is going to dodge 5-6 up, then a bob when it is going to dodge in 5-6 down, another bob when it is going to dodge in 5-6 up for the second time, and finally a single when it is going to dodge in 5-6 down again. This gives a touch of 120 changes, or two courses. Three ways in which you might see this touch written down are:

	23456
S	32564
	26345
	64253
	45632
-	45326
-	45263
	56432
	63524
	32645
S	23456

	23456		
S	32564	1	
-	45326	4	
-	45263	1	
S	23456	4	

23456	W	H
45326	S	-
23456	-	S

The first version shows all the lead ends in the touch, but without the treble. There is no need to include the treble since it will always be in first place at a lead end. So, for example, where 45632 is shown as the lead end, it really means 145632. The underlined 23456 at the beginning indicates the rounds before the touch begins. A dash, –, on the left indicates that a bob must be called to produce the lead end, and an S shows that a single must be called. If there is no – and no S then no call is needed to produce the lead end. There is a lot of information here. You can quickly see what any of the bells is going to do during the touch, and this means that you can easily call the touch from any of the bells. We already know what the 6th is going to do, but let's suppose you are ringing the 4th. You can see that a single must be called two changes before the first lead end, at which you are going to become 6ths place bell (by dodging 5-6 down in this method). Then there are three leads without calls (these are called plain leads, and they are occasionally denoted with a P instead of – or S). In the next lead a bob is needed which will cause you to become 2nds place bell at the lead end (instead of 4ths place bell, so that in this method you won't dodge in 3-4 down but will plain hunt to 2nds place). The same thing happens in the very next lead. Finally after three more plain leads a single is needed which will cause you to become 4ths place bell at the lead end (instead of 3rds place bell, so that in this method you won't dodge in 3-4 up but will strike two blows in 4ths place). I leave you to work out what the other bells do during the touch.

The second version takes less space. It shows only those lead ends which are produced by calls, and assumes you know that the other leads are plain leads. It also shows the numbers of leads which have to be rung between calls. These are the numbers printed to the right of the lead ends shown. So it shows that a single is needed in the first lead, a bob four leads later, another bob in the very next lead, and finally a single four leads later.

The notation used in the third version is very common. It is the most compact, and the most easily learnt, when dealing with longer touches. It is almost always used for quarter peals and peals, particularly on higher numbers of bells. It shows the calls which have to be made relative to a particular "observation bell" which is almost always the tenor – the 6th in our example – and shows the "course ends" which occur. A "course end" is simply the last "lead end" in a course. In Plain Bob Minor this is the fifth lead end, at which the 6th becomes 6th place bell. In simple touches it is usual for the work of the "observation bell" to be unaffected by any of the calls. In Plain Bob Minor there are two leads in which bobs can be called without affecting the work of the tenor – those at the ends of which it becomes 5ths place bell and 6ths place bell. There are three leads in which singles can be called without affecting its work – the two already mentioned for bobs and the one at the end of which it becomes 2nds place bell. Our example touch has calls only in leads at the ends of which the tenor becomes 5ths place bell and 6ths place bell. For historical reasons the lead end at which the tenor becomes 5ths place bell when ringing a minor method is called the "Wrong", denoted "W". The lead end at which it becomes 6ths place bell is called the "Home", denoted "H". (You might like to note that if you are ringing a major method the W and H are when the tenor becomes 7ths and 8ths place bells respectively, if you are ringing a royal method they are when the tenor becomes 9ths and 10ths place bells etc). So the example touch shows that the first course requires a single at Wrong and a bob at Home to produce the "course end" 45326, and that in the second course a bob at Wrong and a single at Home will then produce the "course end" 23456 – rounds.

Before closing I must deal with how the conductor should start and finish a touch. To start a touch the conductor should say "Go Plain Bob Minor" at the treble's handstroke lead in the opening rounds. The touch will start at the next handstroke – after the usual warning period of one whole pull. (Note that the start of the treble's handstroke lead occurs slightly before the handstrokes of the other bells). At the end of the touch the conductor must call "This is all" or "That's all" at the last lead end – rounds – just as the treble strikes at backstroke. This tells the other members of the band to ring rounds from then on because the touch has finished. Note that there is no whole pull's worth of warning. Finally, after a few rounds the conductor must say

“Stand” at the treble’s handstroke. Everybody should then stand their bells at the next handstroke.

In the next article I will write about checking the ringing and correcting mistakes.

CONDUCTING – CHECKING AND CORRECTING

If you can ring the method accurately and reliably, and put the bobs and singles in the right places, as discussed in the previous article, you are now ready to tackle the third and fourth conducting activities. These are checking that the ringing is correct and correcting any mistakes which occur. Checking and correcting need the same techniques, and experienced conductors tend not to separate the two. However, when learning it is probably best to tackle them one at a time since there is quite a lot to think about.

We'll deal with checking first. It may not be particularly important to check whether or not short touches are correct. It usually won't matter if you simply make the calls and wait to see whether rounds comes up at the end when expected. However, checking even short touches will obviously help you to develop your conducting skills. Checking will be necessary during longer touches, though - particularly during quarter peals and peals. You should be able to check that all is well, and stop the ringing if it isn't, reasonably frequently. There's no point in ploughing on for ages only to find that the touch doesn't come round when it should.

Checking that the ringing is correct can be done occasionally or continuously depending on your level of skill, and on the difficulty of the method being rung. At its simplest occasional checking consists of looking, and listening, for particular rows to be rung at the places in the touch where they should occur. The rows checked may be course ends, or lead ends, or ones which are particularly easy to recognise. For example, rows such as 13245678, or 12654378, or Queens, or Whittingtons, or Tittums should be fairly easy to spot. You will, of course, need to study the touch carefully before calling it so that you know what to expect, and where to expect it.

This form of occasional checking is useful, and may be all you feel able to do in some circumstances. But it has fairly obvious limitations. You must find, and remember, enough rows to check during a long touch and then observe them being rung. It usually takes about 2 seconds, a very short time, to ring a row. You will need to be concentrating hard on recognising a particular row at exactly the time when it is due to occur. Otherwise you will either miss it or be uncertain about whether it, or a row very like it, was rung. It is quite easy to be distracted by ringing the method, by thinking about the touch, or by a mistake, at any time. If this happens during the vital 2 seconds you will have to wait until your next occasional check point before you can tell whether or not the ringing is correct. If you don't get

distracted, and you see that the row expected occurs, you will know that the ringing is still correct. If the expected row doesn't occur you will know that something has gone wrong at some time during the touch. However, you won't know when it went wrong. The error could have happened at any time since the previous successful check.

It is clear that a way of checking continuously would have obvious advantages. With such an approach you could check for correctness when not distracted by other considerations, and you could check as often as you wished. Fortunately this can be done, although quite a lot of practice is needed to do it reliably.

Plain Bob is the simplest method to check continuously, and is therefore the easiest method to begin with. I will assume that you have the plain course of Plain Bob Minor written out in front of you – find it in a book or write it out yourself. Look at the order in which the 6 strikes over the other bells as it hunts down in the first lead. The order is 53124. As it hunts up again the order is again 53124, and it dodges in 5-6 up with the 4 at the lead end, causing it to strike over 2 and 4 for a second time. In the next lead the order in which the 6 strikes over the other bells as it hunts down to lead is 51324. As it hunts up again it strikes over 5, then 1, then 3, dodges in 3-4 up at the lead end so that it strikes over 5 and 3 for a second time, and then continues on up to 6ths place by striking over 2 and 4. And so on. The key things to notice are:

- The 6 strikes over the other working bells (those other than the treble) in exactly the same order – 5324 – on the way up, and on the way down throughout the plain course.
- When it dodges it strikes over two of the working bells, which will be adjacent in the order, twice. However, when this has been allowed for the order in which it strikes over the working bells is still the same - 5324.
- It strikes over the treble in a different place in the order in each lead.

I'll assume that you are ringing the 6, which you will remember from the previous article is usually the "observation bell" when ringing minor. In order to check continuously that the ringing is correct, assuming that the treble is always in the right place, all you have to do is check that you strike over the other working bells in the order 5324 on the way up, and on the way down, throughout the plain course. You will need to remember that when you dodge you will strike over an adjacent pair twice. If the order is not 5324 you will know immediately that something has gone wrong. Incidentally, you may remember that in the second of these articles I

said that you must avoid "remembering the order" when developing the three basic skills; but that, ironically, an advanced version of "remembering the order" is one of the extra skills needed when you learn to conduct. Well, that's where we are now – this is about the advanced version.

The order 5324 is called the "coursing order" for the plain course, which has the course end 123456 – rounds. In Plain Bob Minor it is the order in which the bells go down (course down) to lead, and go up (course up) to 6ths place. The coursing order remains the same until a bob or a single is called. When a call is made the bells move into another course, which is not the plain course. Which course is entered will depend on where the call is made, and on whether it's a bob or a single. The new course will have a new coursing order associated with it, and the new coursing order will not be 5324. However, the new coursing order will bear exactly the same relationship to the new course end - the lead end at which the 6 becomes 6ths place bell (by dodging 5-6 down in this method) – as 5324 bears to the course end 123456. The new coursing order will not change until another call is made.

A couple of examples should help you to understand:

- Suppose that you call a bob at the first lead end of the plain course. You will remember from the previous article that this is called the "Wrong", denoted "W", position. It is easy to see that 2, 3 and 5 are affected by the bob. If you ring to the end of the course without making any other calls the course end will be 152436 instead of rounds – work it out for yourself. The coursing order after the "W" will be 3254, and will be the same until another call is made. You should be able to see that 3254 bears exactly the same relationship to 152436 as 5324 bears to 123456. Notice that the bob has affected the work of three bells (2, 3 and 5) so that the positions of these three bells, and only these three bells, in the coursing order, and in the course end, are changed. The positions of the 4 and the 6 are unaffected.

- Now suppose that you ring the plain course until the last lead and call a single at the "Home" position, denoted "H". The work of two bells (3 and 4) will be affected by the single so that the course end will be 124356 instead of 123456. The new coursing order will be 5423 instead of 5324. Again I hope you can see that 5423 bears exactly the same relationship to 124356 as 5324 bears to 123456. The single has affected the work of two bells (3 and 4) so

that the positions of these two bells, and only these two bells, in the coursing order, and in the course end, are changed. The positions of the 2, 5 and 6 are unaffected.

At any calling position there are only three bells which might be affected by a call. All three are affected if the call is a bob, only two of the three if the call is a single. Now suppose that we label the bells in a group of three A, B and C. Then if the original coursing order of the three bells is ABC a bob affecting these three will produce a coursing order of BCA, and a single CBA. This is true not just for Plain Bob Minor but for any regular method with 2nds place made at a plain lead end. We have already seen that the first group of three bells in the coursing order (5, 3 and 2 in the plain course) are the three involved in a call at "W". You will find that the next group of three bells (3, 2 and 4 in the plain course), which are also the last three if we are ringing minor, are the three involved in a call at "H". This is also true for any regular method with 2nds place made at a plain lead end. You will need to work out the new coursing order produced by a call, using these simple rules, while ringing. The process is usually called "transposing" the coursing order. Incidentally, there are equally simple, but different, rules for transposing the coursing order in methods which do not have 2nds place made at the lead end – I'll leave you to work them out when needed.

We can use the touch of Plain Bob Minor discussed in the previous article as an example of how all this works. Remember that the touch was: *single W, bob H, bob W, single H*. I wrote out the touch using lead ends and course ends last time, but I could just as easily write it out using coursing orders. We start, as always, with the coursing order for the plain course 5324. The first call is a W, so the first three bells in the coursing order are the ones involved. The call is a single so that coursing order ABC becomes CBA, or 532<u>4</u> becomes 235<u>4</u>. The next call is a H, so the last three bells in the coursing order are the ones involved. Remember that the coursing order is now 2354, after the single at W. The call at H is a bob so that ABC becomes BCA, or 2<u>354</u> becomes 2<u>543</u>. (The course end is therefore 145326). The next call is a bob at W so that <u>254</u>3 becomes <u>542</u>3. The final call is a single at H so that 5<u>423</u> becomes 5<u>324</u>. We know that 5324 is the coursing order in the plain course, so we know that the touch must come round at the next course end, which in this case is immediately after the single at H. With practice (probably quite a lot of it) you will be able to work out the changes in the coursing order while you're ringing, so that you will always know what coursing order to expect, and so have a continuous check on correctness.

These are just the very first steps in using coursing orders. However, if you understand them you should find that by careful study you can work out how the coursing order changes for calls in other positions (including those at which the observation bell is affected), and for touches on higher numbers of bells. You will also find that with extra practice you can observe, and when necessary transpose, the coursing order when ringing one of the working bells or the treble. This is a bit more difficult because you will have to watch the observation bell, and because the position of your own bell in the coursing order will often change at a call.

When you tackle methods more complicated than Plain Bob you will find that in almost all of them the observation bell does not strike over the other bells in the precise order 5324 as it moves up and down in the plain course. The crucial points to understand, though, are that the coursing order in the plain course is still taken to be 5324 and that this bears exactly the same relationship to the course end (123456) as in Plain Bob for all regular methods. The relationship is the same for any coursing order/course end pair. You will need to study the particular method in order to learn where you expect to strike over the other working bells in each of the leads in the plain course, and sometimes this can be quite complicated. However, having done so you can check for correctness as the touch progresses in exactly the same way as for Plain Bob. This is because, for all regular methods with 2nds place made at the lead end, bobs and singles will have exactly the same effect on the coursing order as in Plain Bob. Try looking at another method, say Cambridge Surprise Minor, to see what I mean. Remember that different rules are needed for methods which do not have 2nds place made at the lead end.

You will often find that it is much easier to observe the coursing order in some leads of a method than in others. If so, ignore the difficult leads and concentrate on the easier ones, at least to start with. You'll still have frequent checks. There's no point in putting so much effort into observing the coursing order that you make a serious method mistake, or miss a call. When I'm calling a very difficult (for me) composition, such as a complex peal of Spliced Surprise, I sometimes learn what the coursing orders should be in places, not too far apart, where they will be reasonably easy to observe. I then look for them in just those places rather than work them out as I go along. This is far from ideal, and is only a form of occasional checking, but it is sometimes all I can cope with. The process is much the same as occasionally checking individual rows. However, it has the great advantage that it takes much longer than just 2 seconds to check a coursing order so that there is much less chance of missing a check point, or of being unsure about the result of a check.

Correcting mistakes is really just an extension of the checking process. If you always know the coursing order, and know where you expect to strike over the other working bells in each lead, or maybe just in some of the simpler leads, you will, with practice, be able to instruct the band on what to do if you find that a mistake has been made. For example, suppose you find yourself striking over the other working bells in the order 5234 at any stage in the plain course of Plain Bob Minor. You know that the coursing order should be 5324, not 5234, so you know that 2 and 3 have shifted. You will need to tell the ringers of these two bells when to lead, or where to dodge at the next lead end, so as to produce the correct coursing order. They may also find it useful to be told which of the other bells to follow down to lead, and which to dodge with at the lead end. If you know the coursing order you will be able to tell them all, or some, of this. But don't expect to get it right at first – lots of practice is needed, both while ringing and with a pencil and paper when not ringing.

Whether or not you know the coursing order it is often reasonably easy to correct mistakes that happen close to your position by understanding the structure of the method being rung. For example if the method requires you to dodge twice in 5-6 down at some point and the bell dodging with you does just one dodge you will know that a mistake has occurred. You will certainly be able to tell the other ringer that a dodge has been missed. If you know the method well enough you may also be able tell him or her what to do next, which is often vital information if they have forgotten where they are on the blue line.

Before I close I should point out that Grandsire, as always, is a bit different when it comes to conducting, again because it is a "twin hunt" method. I'll leave you to study it, and to ask for advice if needed.

For now "that's all". As always I have concentrated only on the simple basics, but I hope you now have enough information to begin developing your conducting skills.

CONCLUSION

In the six short articles which have made up this series over the past three years I have tried to write about some of the important ringing basics and to share some simple insights which may not always be easy to extract from books about ringing. Some topics have been directly concerned with learning methods. Others have been much more about how to achieve good quality ringing, which should always be the aim however simple or complicated the method. I make no apology for widening the scope since learning methods is really the easy bit. All the views expressed have been my own, drawn from my own experience. I don't expect everyone to share all of them, and other people will have different ways of looking at, and describing, things. Ask around.

In many ways, of course, the articles have barely scratched the surface. Lots of interesting and important subjects have been passed over with a few words, or not mentioned at all. However, rather than further widen the scope of this series I have decided to stop here. If there is any call for more articles about particular topics please let me know and I will try to write them – if I think I know enough about the topics.

In the meantime please remember always that the three basic skills are indispensable, and that practice makes perfect.

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