

Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



April 2013, Spring Issue

Easthampstead Handbell Day

During the February half term, we were wondering what to do with our young learners (and the more mature ones too!).



Rather than go on a chilly outing, we decided to have a handbell day in the comfort and warmth of the Tower Captain's house.

None of the youngsters had rung handbells to changes before, so the aim of the day was to get them all competent in ringing plain hunt minor on all the pairs.

They all seemed to take to it really well and with the help of Ann's expert crib sheets and written exercises to do, everyone was thoroughly engrossed in learning a new skill.

Fuelled by pizzas and cake at lunchtime, we carried on into the afternoon, with some having a go at Bob Minor.

It was such a success that we had another session during Holy Week.

So well done to Claudia, Connor, Tom H, Tom W, Alex, Anna and Ali. And thank you to Steve, Ann, Eddie and Janet for their expertise and patience.

Barbara Wells, Easthampstead



Diary of Events

Saturday 20 April

Sandhurst, St Michael
4pm—6pm
6 bell striking competition
Followed by Branch Practice

Saturday 18 May

Hurst
10.30 -12 noon Branch Practice

Saturday 15 June

Shottesbrooke
4-6pm Branch Practice

Saturday 20 July

Wokingham All Saints
4-6pm Branch Practice

Monthly Tuesday afternoon practices (2-4pm) at Binfield on 7 May, 4 June and 2 July (provisionally).

Thanks to Andrew Dugdale from Aborfield who has kindly offered to print the newsletter for us free of charge.

Simulators in training

Over the years several Branch towers have installed a simulator of one sort or another but I don't know how many are still operational (or in regular use). To recap in case you aren't familiar with the idea, a simulator lets someone practice ringing with a perfect band, but without needing any other ringers (perfect or otherwise). You ring a bell as normal, but it is silenced and connected to the simulator, which makes the sound at the instant when the bell would strike. The simulator also makes the sounds of all the other bells (you can choose how many) striking perfectly.

Peter Cummins invented the simulator 35 years ago. The early ones were expensive hand built machines, but in the 1980s David Bagley's conversion kit for a BBC computer brought the price right down. Nowadays most simulators use a cast off PC for the processing, but you still need a sensor to detect the bell movement.

Despite the obvious breakthrough, for years very few were installed. Ringers can be a conservative bunch, biased towards how things have always been done. Most of us were taught to ring visually, and many still see ringing as an inherently visual activity even if they have developed reasonable rhythm and listening skills. So ringing without ropes to watch may seem alien to many, and the thought that novices could learn to do it might even undermine their perception of their own skills.

More simulators have been installed in recent years, after the introduction of the multi-bell interface (connecting to all bells rather than just one) and with the use of real bell sounds instead of beeps. But many of them have only been used as a form of sound control – ringing all the bells as normal, but with the sound generated electronically inside the tower. There are probably simulators in around 1 in 20 towers, but far fewer are used as training aids, and many people who 'attend a simulator practice' are unaware that such use is possible.

Ringing with a simulator helps to bridge the gap between solo bell handling practice (where there is no attempt to synchronise the bell to an external rhythm) and ringing with other ringers (where the synchronisation task is complicated by the variability of other ringers, and where listening to the confused result is much more difficult). The simulator allows the trainee to start ringing to a set rhythm much earlier in the training cycle, and it makes it possible to do so for far more of the available time than when taking part in a typical practice. Above all the trainee's task is much simpler. There is no question of 'which sound is mine?' or 'is that me out of place or someone else?'. As well as providing an ideal stable environment, perfect striking from the other bells means 'if I can hear an error it is me'.

Anyone who has not used a simulator in training may think that 'ringing without ropesight is too difficult for a learner' or 'learning to listen is too difficult to do until you can ring well enough to have some brain power left over', but neither is true. Novices who have never rung with other ringers generally find ringing with a simulator easier than established ringers who have become dependent on seeing ropes. And learning to listen as an integral part of ringing from the start is easier than trying to graft it on as an extra skill later, after developing a visual ringing style.

There is one important caveat. The simulator is an excellent teaching tool, but it doesn't teach everything. Trainees need to develop ropesight in order to make sense of what is happening around them, so as well as teaching them to ring rhythmically and to correct by ear, you also need to teach them ropesight. It is far better to do that as an explicit 'navigation' skill than just assuming that it will somehow emerge from the habit of looking at the rope being followed.

There is one other drawback to using 'a simulator', where only one person at a time can ring. Most towers with a simulator are at the stage that schools were when they had 'a computer'. When simulators were very costly the idea of having several would have been unthinkable, but they aren't any more. If you have a sensor on every bell (which most installations do these days) you don't need to add any more, you just connect another (free) old laptop to them. At a stroke you can solve the problem of trainees having to sit around and take turns.

Wanted - items to sell at Bric-a-Brac sale

St. Andrew's, Sonning bell ringers are organising a Bric-a-Brac sale under the pagoda in Woodley shopping centre on Wednesday 8th May. The event is to raise money to make a Branch donation to the ODG Bell Fund, so we hope members of the branch will support us and donate unwanted items for sale. We raised over £350 last time so it was a good fundraiser.

The items can be brought to the sale on the day, starting at 8.30a.m., or give them to any Sonning ringer in advance. Clothing, ornaments, utensils, glassware, crockery, CDs, books, paintings – all are welcome.

Rob Needham

There are some practicalities. The extra laptops need more sockets to plug into. Ideally you should specify that as part of the initial kit, but if you already have a simulator with only one socket, you can buy an expander to provide more sockets. You also need to use headphones so the trainees don't hear each other's ringing (one might be ringing Rounds on 6, another on 8 and another hunting). If you can locate the laptops behind the bells being rung, you can use ordinary headphones with the cable run down the trainee's back. Otherwise you need wireless headphones (on multiple channels). It also helps if the instructor can 'listen in' on another pair of headphones. There is more practical advice on the Guild website.

Is it worth it? For 20 years I used a single (BBC based) simulator. Four years ago we invested in sensors on all bells and installed two (Abel) simulators, but almost immediately it was clear that two was not enough. We now have three, which are regularly all in use at our pre-practice sessions. I expect that we will add a fourth in due course, but I don't see us ever catching up with the eight that they have at the Worcester teaching centre.

I would hate to go back to teaching without a simulator, with nothing to fill the gap between solo bell handling and collective ringing, and without the ability to continue to develop rhythmic ringing skills alongside trainees learning to cope with the realities of 'real ringing'.

For advice on installing and using simulators see: <http://odg.org.uk/education/Simulators.php>

For more on the background to simulators, on my website, see: <http://jaharrison.me.uk/Ringing/Simulators/>

John Harrison, Branch Training Co-ordinator

Sonning Tower open to the public

On the Saturday of the Easter weekend, Sonning church organised a parish walk, Easter egg hunt, tower tour and free BBQ. The vicar asked us if some of the St. Andrew's ringers would organise the tower tour.

The difficulty with tower tours at Sonning is the narrowness of the spiral staircase and the impossibility of squeezing past each other on the stairs. We had a member at the bottom of the stairs, one at the ringing room, and one on the tower roof. With much shouting we managed to get batches of about 12 people going up or down without meeting each other half-way! Two fathers even carried quite heavy-looking infants the whole way to the top and down again.

In the ringing room we had several ringers to explain things and answer any questions, including our youngest ringer who talked to some of the visiting children who were near her age. Our tower treasurer, Pauline Needham, organised a quiz based on one that Richard Hamilton had done at Twyford



The answers were all in the ringing room, and to make things easier for the young children the rough location of an answer was marked with a numbered, small picture of an Easter egg. In case you are wondering, the rope in the picture is on a bell that has been rung down!

By the end of our session we had talked to several adults about ringing, children had had fun doing the quiz, and we had names of four youngsters who expressed an interest in trying ringing.

Rob Needham

Another unusual bell, but closer to home!

This bell is the regimental bell for the Royal Berkshire Regiment, based in Reading. It reflects the dragons on the regiment's badge. The officer commissioning it in 1933 described it rather accurately as being 'more Burmese than Birmingham'! Designed and cast in Burma—it is housed on a decorative stand.

Bob Townsend, Sonning



Peals & Quarter Peals

Saturday 26 January 2013 in
2 hours 48 minutes
All Saints Wokingham
5088 Yorkshire Surprise Major
 Composed by Nathan J Pitstow

- 1 Stephen R Smith 1
- 2 Nigel AL Mellor (C)
- 3 Mhairi C Miller
- 4 Timothy R Forster
- 5 James M Champion
- 6 John A Harrison
- 7 Jon P Tutcher
- 8 Stephen R Smith 2

Rung on Tower Dinner Day.
 1st Surprise inside 3.

Tuesday 1 January 2013
All Saints Wokingham in
1 hr 9 mins
2013 Plain Bob & Gainsborough
Little Bob Major

- 1 Stephen R Smith
- 2 Mhairi C Miller
- 3 Rebecca A Woodgate
- 4 Alan K Barsby
- 5 Andrew C Elliston
- 6 Stephen R Smith
- 7 Graham E Slade
- 8 John A Harrison (C)

To mark the New Year.

Wednesday 16 January 2013
St Laurence Reading
1259 Grandsire Caters

- 1 Graham Slade
- 2 Geoffrey K Cook
- 3 Susan E Davenport
- 4 Barbara Wells
- 5 Elizabeth J Davenport
- 6 Steve C Wells
- 7 Alan K Barsby
- 8 Kenneth R Davenport (C)
- 9 Jon P Tutcher
- 10 Stephen R Smith

Rung by a Sonning Deanery band.

Saturday 19 January 2013
Easthampstead
1260 Oxford Bob Triples

- 1 Paul Fox
- 2 Barbara Wells
- 3 Judith Bowler
- 4 Stephen Wells
- 5 John Tchighianoff
- 6 Edward Martin
- 7 Rachel Moss (C)
- 8 Andrew Moss

Rung in Thanksgiving for the life of D. Roy Fuller, Grandfather of the conductor, who passed away on 2/01/13.

Sunday 3 March 2013
Sonning
1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Jenny Page
- 2 Rob Needham
- 3 Joyce Vernon
- 4 Jack Page (C)
- 5 Peter Kemm
- 6 Derek J Barrett
- 7 Andrew Elliston
- 8 Keith Vernon

Rung to celebrate the 70th birthday of Rob Needham on 23 Feb

Saturday 17 February 2013
All Saints Wokingham,
1260 Plain Bob Triples

- 1 Oliver James*
- 2 Mary Spence
- 3 Sian J Haseldine
- 4 Jane A Mellor
- 5 Stephen R Smith
- 6 Nigel AL Mellor (C)
- 7 John A Harrison
- 8 Jon P Tutcher

* 1st quarter on 8

Wednesday 20 February 2013
St Laurence Reading
1260 Little Bob Royal

- 1 Graham E Slade
- 2 Geoffrey K Cook
- 3 Jane A Mellor
- 4 Susan E Davenport
- 5 Elizabeth J Davenport
- 6 Alan K Barsby
- 7 Kenneth R Davenport
- 8 Nigel AL Mellor
- 9 Jon P Tutcher
- 10 John A Harrison (C)

Rung by a Sonning Deanery band

Sunday 31 March 2013
Sonning
1260 Plain Bob Minor with cover

- 1 Andrew Dugdale
- 2 Joyce Vernon
- 3 Rob Needham
- 4 Andrew Elliston
- 5 Richard Bennett
- 6 Robert Partridge (C)
- 7 Keith Vernon

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