**“When did you last do it”? Check your bell ropes!**

Why might one tower get ten times more life from its ropes than another? Tower A with service ringing and practice only once a week replaces its ropes about every five years. Tower B with regular service and practice ringing plus many peals, quarters and training days replaces them after about fifteen. Why is there such a difference? The reasons can be many and varied but you too may lengthen the life of your ropes; here are some suggestions:

* check the ropes every few months (depending on use) and do any repairs
* replace only the tail if the rest is OK
* replace only the tops if the sallies and tails are OK
* extend rope life with polyester top ends (and reduce stretch or the effect of wet and dry weather on rope length)
* reduce sally wear caused by low ceilings or low rope guides, use special ceiling bosses and tapered sallies, or even reposition rope guides (this requires appropriate design and may need a faculty)
* reduce excessive rope wear by replacing or repairing poor quality pulleys, flapping boards, ceiling bosses, rope guides, wheels, garter holes
* avoid stiff ropes with a rope tail-end drier (stiff ropes wear faster at any weak point)
* offer appropriate size boxes to save repeated tail-end adjustment (NB - boxes must be safe; strong, large enough, carpeted for non-slip, without protruding corners!)
* use clean mats or carpet where each rope lands on the floor, a must on rough stone
* tuck in tail ends properly
* protect garter holes with smooth “bobbins”, and/or hemp ropes protected with garter hole sleeves (soft leather)
* change rope position on wheel periodically to spread wear at the garter hole
* avoid use of chalks, powders, hand creams, glycerine, etc
* do not use sticky tape / string etc on the tail-ends (tuck the tail-end properly)
* stretch new ropes with weights (and use correct specification non-stretch polyester tops)
* store spare ropes in good order ready for use (keep them clean and dry, protected in paper sacks or covered cardboard boxes, not in plastic)
* washing ropes was discussed in the Ringing World (5th October 2018, page 952)

This may seem a long list or may be obvious! But how long do your ropes last and when did your tower check the ropes and remedy any issues? It is easy to assume that everything is OK as that is how it’s always been! Some key changes to the rope paths may significantly improve rope life.

Some changes may be rather daunting but help should be available from your local ringing society.  They may arrange rope splicing and maintenance workshops as well as general belfry workshops. If they don’t have a course coming up, perhaps ask them to arrange one or look for one in another society nearby.

If you have surplus rope, either repair it or pass lengths to another tower that may be able to use it. Is there a “rope bank” in your local Branch / District?

More information may be available on line – e.g. here:

* Bell Rope Wear and Repair by Chris Bassett <https://www.whitingsociety.org.uk/articles/stay-making/rope-maintenance.html>
* Splicing bell ropes by  Frank Beech <https://cccbr.org.uk/product/splicing-bell-ropes-illustrated/>
* <https://www.treblesgoing.org.uk/ropes.html>
* <http://www.barrowbells.org.uk/Training/RopeSplicing.pdf>

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