



# R & T Notes

## How to Double Your Progress

by Peter Devenish

How much practice do you get each week? How long do you spend on the end of a bellrope each practice night? If your answer to these two questions are both the same, you are getting only a fraction of the practice that you could and the remedy is in your own hands.

Remember you can get really useful practice without being at the end of a bellrope at all: sometimes even more useful because there is less to think about. This is true no matter whether you are struggling with bell handling or trying to break into Surprise Major.

What do you do when you are sitting out? Talk? Go into a coma? Read the peal boards? If so, you are throwing away a valuable opportunity. Try these ideas:

### 1. Handling

A lot of people, even quite advanced ringers, have handling faults. Whilst sitting out, study each ringer very carefully for a minute or so and decide for yourself which are the good handlers and which are the bad ones. This is really worthwhile practice because observing other people's faults will make it very much easier to recognise and correct your own.

Here are a few points to look for:

- Do they stretch up well at handstroke, or are their arms bent?
- Do they pull equally with both hands, or lopsidedly?
- Are all their fingers round the sally, or are they cheating by keeping some round the tail end?
- Do they keep a firm grip after catching the sally, or do they let the rope go loose by releasing it again?
- Do they let their hands swing smoothly up to meet the sally, or do they try to swat it in mid-air?
- After pulling off at handstroke, does their upper hand go straight down to the tail end, or does it hover at chest or waist level?
- Finally, have they got a smooth, confident style or an awkward, sloppy or show-off one?

You see there is a lot to think about, a lot to study. It is only by working at it, off your own bat, that you will feel the benefit. Do not assume that the established ringers will necessarily be perfect handlers, or that the more elementary ones will be worse handlers. You will get some interesting surprises.

### 2. Rounds

Sit and listen carefully. Is the treble giving proper open handstroke leads and a closed backstroke one? Count the rhythm to yourself – shutting your eyes will help. If there is any unevenness, try to

decide which bells are out of place and whether they are striking early or late. This is an effective way of developing that essential ability to listen critically all the time, when it is your turn to ring.

### **3. `Call Changes**

After each call, see if you can work out what order the bells are in. If you find it a bit difficult, try, at least, to work out which bell is leading – then judge which bells are leading correctly and which are not. Perhaps they are closing up the open handstroke lead, or giving a slightly open lead instead of a closed one at backstroke. Maybe, on the other hand, they are just not striking consistently at all. Nothing spoils a piece of ringing more than bad leading, so, if this exercise improves yours, it will have been worthwhile indeed.

### **4. Method**

Most beginners who are learning plain hunt or taking their first steps into method ringing are encouraged, from time to time, to stand behind the ringer on the treble or some other bell and to try to follow the work of that bell. How many learners do this every time, as a matter of course? In my experience, absolutely none! We have all been heard to say, at some stage, ‘But there’s so much to think about!’ Well, this is a super way of practising without having to think about actually handling the bell. Whether or not you are yet into method ringing, you can still close your eyes and count the rhythm (‘123456123456-123456123456’). This is a valuable exercise because you can never hope to be a really good striker until you automatically do it all the time you are ringing. Maybe you spend about a third of your weekly practice ringing. OK, now you can be learning throughout a whole practice; a 200% improvement. Did I say ‘Double your practice’? I should have said ‘Treble it!’.

### **5. Sunday Ringing**

Do not forget that Sunday service ringing can be a good opportunity for learning, but not practice as well. You should not be asked to attempt anything you cannot do quite well, so concentrate on polishing your rhythm. At every stroke, try to judge whether you have pulled a fraction early, a fraction late, or exactly on time, then listen and see whether you were right. Remember, on eight bells, an error of 1/20th second is noticeable, 1/10th second is a definite clip and ¼ second a full blown clash! This critical self-testing will certainly make you a better ringer, whatever stage you have reached.

### **6. At Home**

Anybody who is not doing some homework between practices need hardly be surprised if their progress is very slow indeed. It is easy to convince ourselves that we do not have the time, but remember, there are 168 hours in the week! In the early stages, the tower captain will be able to advise on what to do in the way of study, but you will very soon be able to work on your own initiative, especially if he has recommended one or two relevant books to study. Remember, if you have looked something up (which you should have), make sure that your tower captain knows. That way, you might get to ring it.

Of course, home study cannot replace experience in the tower, but it is amazing how far you can go if you are sufficiently dedicated. Years ago, when learning Grandsire Caters, I arranged nine pieces of furniture around the room to represent the other ringers and stood in the corner raising and lowering my arms like a loony and mentally counting off each chair and wardrobe as I passed it. It was the nearest you could get to the real thing! Where did it get me? Well, after ringing a near perfect course, first try, I got told off by the tower captain for telling him I had never rung it before.

With 40 minutes study during the week, in the bus, car or train, you can double your progress again.