

Plain Hunt

How to Learn it

Plain hunting is usually the first step in learning change ringing.

“Change ringing” means that bells are changing places at each pull according to a set pattern called the “Method”. In change ringing you need to learn the method being rung, that is, the path you take through the other bells. You also need to develop a skill called “Ropesight”, the ability to see your place among the other ropes.

A basic rule of change ringing is that a bell may only move one “place” at a time; you may only change places with the bell ringing before you or the bell ringing after you. To do this you need to change the swing of your bell slightly, “holding up” to ring slower when you move “up” over another bell, or to “check” your bell to ring faster when you move “down” in front of another bell.

Good bell control is essential; it is worthwhile repeating the bell-handling lessons to be sure that you can hold the bell up, every time, handstroke and backstroke. Failing to hold up at backstroke is perhaps the most common fault when learning change ringing.

An important part of learning to ring - at all levels - is to **thoroughly** study what you are going to do beforehand, otherwise you are not being fair to yourself or to your tutor. The next step is to study what is involved in plain hunting, then to discuss how it is rung.

Watch the treble when it is plain hunting, that is, when “Plain Hunt”, “Plain Bob” or “Grandsire” are being rung. See if you can follow what is being discussed here. If you can “see” what you have to do first it makes the “doing” that much easier.

First of all, think about two bells, numbered 1 and 2. We can ring them in the order 1 - 2, or 2 - 1. Not very exciting, so now look at three bells, 1, 2 and 3. Study the figures below and write them out yourself - several times!

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| From rounds: | 1 2 3 |
| Change 1 and 2 (the front pair) | 2 1 3 |
| Change the back pair | 2 3 1 |
| Change the front pair | 3 2 1 |
| Change the back pair | 3 1 2 |
| Change the front pair | 1 3 2 |
| Change the back pair | 1 2 3 |

(which has brought us back to rounds or 1 2 3).

You can see that as you changed the numbers (representing bells) in a regular order they have formed a regular pattern. Look at 2; it becomes the front (“leading”) bell for two rows, then moves one place “up” at a time until it is the last bell (“at the back”) for two rows. It then moves down one place at a time towards the front. If we kept on writing the figures it would do the same thing over and over. All the bells follow this same pattern, each bell starting in a different place. This pattern is called PLAIN HUNTING and it is the basis of all change ringing. Keep writing it out until you can do it without mistakes.

Get some 5 mm (1/4”) squared paper for this - it will help to keep your figures tidy.

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Now try the same idea on four bells:

| | |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Rounds | 1 2 3 4 |
| Now you can change two pairs | 2 1 4 3 |
| Now change the middle pair | 2 4 1 3 |
| Change the outside pairs | 4 2 3 1 |
| Change the middle pair | 4 3 2 1 |
| And so on - - - | 3 4 1 2 |
| | 3 1 4 2 |
| | 1 3 2 4 |
| | 1 2 3 4 |

You can see that this makes a similar pattern, all the numbers (bells) following a plain hunting path. Keep busy with the paper and pencil until you can write “Plain hunt on four bells”, then try it for five bells and six bells. The figures are shown below if you can’t get it right.

Plain hunt on five bells

1 2 3 4 5
2 1 4 3 5
2 4 1 5 3
4 2 5 1 3
4 5 2 3 1
5 4 3 2 1
5 3 4 1 2
3 5 1 4 2
3 1 5 2 4
1 3 2 5 4
1 2 3 4 5

Plain hunt on six bells

1 2 3 4 5 6
2 1 4 3 6 5
2 4 1 6 3 5
4 2 6 1 5 3
4 6 2 5 1 3
6 4 5 2 3 1
6 5 4 3 2 1
5 6 3 4 1 2
5 3 6 1 4 2
3 5 1 6 2 4
3 1 5 2 6 4
1 3 2 5 4 6
1 2 3 4 5 6

How to ring it

There are many ways of learning to ring Plain Hunt, and you will learn by what is done in your tower. But, whatever method you learn by, a basic fact to appreciate is that when you are hunting “up” from the front to the back you must ring slower than in rounds, “holding up” every stroke, and when you are hunting “down” from the back to the front you must ring quicker than in rounds by “checking” your bell before it reaches the balance.

Another thing that you should know is that most learners find Plain Hunt difficult at first, so don’t be put off if you don’t “get it” first time - or even the twenty-first time! There’s a lot to do when you are controlling the bell at different speeds and watching where you are going; most people need a lot of practice. But this is the gateway to all change ringing, so keep practising. Also, watch others while they are Plain Hunting.

Plain hunt is usually taught on five bells, plus a covering tenor if you are in a six bell tower, so look at the figures for plain hunting on five bells and think of yourself ringing the treble. When “Go” is called you start by hunting “up” from the front to the back so you must hold up at each stroke to move into “seconds place”, then “thirds place”, “fourths place” and “fifths place”. When you move into seconds place one other bell pulls before you do, then as you move into thirds place two bells pull before you do, then three bells and finally four bells pull in front of you. It won’t take you long to realise that when ringing the treble in Plain Hunt you follow the other ropes in the order 2-4-5-3 as you do this, but don’t rely on memorising numbers - you will see why later! You need a way of seeing which rope to follow next.

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Looking at the figures and still thinking of ringing the treble, in rounds 2 is following you and in the first change you pull after 2. Now 4 follows you - and next time you pull after 4. This gives us the basic rule of hunting up:

FOLLOW THE BELL THAT FOLLOWED YOU.

Knowing that (for the moment) you will meet the other ropes in the order 2-4-5-3, as you pull after 2 look at 4, as you pull after 4 look at 5 - and so on. Watch **all** the other ropes and find the one that has followed you. Later on, when you are plain hunting the treble to a method and the other bells are doing something different, you will still be able to find the bell that followed you, each time you pull, and to follow that bell next pull as you hunt up. This, basically, is what is meant by “Ropesight”.

Hunting back down to lead in Plain Hunt you will pass the bells in the same order as when you hunted up, but now you will be ringing faster than in rounds, moving one place nearer the front at every pull. And, of course, there will be one rope less in front of you at each pull. Try to see this - Four ropes in front of you - three ropes - two ropes - one rope - lead!

Leading after hunting down might seem a problem but, by now, you should have a picture in your mind of how the tenor ringer is catching the sally as you pull the handstroke lead. (See Instalment No. 1, page 12.) If the tenor is covering, after your backstroke pull in seconds place look at the tenor and time your leading pull from him/her; it's just the same as leading in rounds.

When you can hunt up and down make a habit of “counting your places” all the time you are ringing. Starting from lead this will be “Seconds - thirds - fourths - fifths - fifths - fourths - thirds - seconds - lead - lead - seconds - and so on. Knowing which place you are in becomes very important in ringing, so get into the habit of counting places now. Try to count your place as your bell strikes; this will also help you to hear your own bell and to listen to your striking.

Keep working on your bell control and learn to ring with the minimum effort. Some points to watch:

- On the backstroke lead always pull sufficiently to be sure of holding up - and you must be able to hold up on **every** pull until you are at the back.
- On the last pull at the back (on five bells this is a handstroke) pull less, because you are going to check on the next pull to start hunting down.
- On the backstroke before you lead pull a little harder; this steadies your bell for the lead, otherwise you might clash with the tenor at handstroke instead of making an open lead.

After some practice with the treble try plain hunting on other bells, having looked to see where each other bell starts. For instance 2 starts with two blows at lead.

Usually the next step is to ring the treble to a method where the treble plain hunts, such as Plain Bob or Grandsire. Hunting up and down, and counting your places is just the same as in Plain Hunt, but you will pass the other bells in a different order each time you hunt up. (This is why “learning the numbers” doesn't help in the long run.) Keep working at ropesight and your sense of rhythm, a slow rhythm to hunt up and a faster rhythm to hunt down. Keeping this sense of rhythm helps you to see the other ropes. When you can hunt the treble to method the next step is usually to learn Plain Bob Doubles.