Call Changes

Every period of bell-ringing starts and finishes with the bells in Rounds.

In Rounds, the bells start with the smallest, lightest bell with the highest note first, and they ring down the musical scale, finishing with the biggest, heaviest bell with the lowest note last.

Numbering the bells from the lightest to the heaviest as numbers 1 to 8 (if there eight bells) then rounds would be:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

This would be monotonous to ring for a long time, but the music can be varied by the conductor, who calls bells to change position. Some musical changes are

Queens:
1 3 5 7 2 4 6 8

Tittums:
1 5 2 6 3 7 4 8

and Whittingtons:
7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

Whittingtons is said to be what Dick Whittington heard the bells of London ringing, calling him back to become Lord Mayor of London.

Method Change Ringing

'Scientific' changing ringing is called 'method ringing' by bell ringers. Instead of having a conductor to call out the changes, each ringer follows a mental pattern or 'method'.

This allows all the bells to mesh in together, but the order of the bells changes every time that they ring. Many of these methods have quaint names like

- Grandsire
- Plain Bob
- Reverse Canterbury Pleasure Bob Doubles
- Double Norwich Court Bob Major

There are strict rules for ringing and naming methods, maintained by the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

Doubles means that five bells are changing

Major means that eight bells are changing

Royal means that ten bells are changing

Maximus means twelve bells are changing

If you look on the peal boards in the tower, you will see names for changes on other numbers of bells.

Plain Hunt Minor

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

Can you see the pattern here? Each number represents a bell, and the position in the row gives the order in which the bells ring.

This pattern is called Plain Hunt. It is the simplest change-ringing principle, but it only gives 12 changes before repeating.

However, 720 different changes are possible on six bells.

The challenge is to ring all 720 possible changes in such a way that each change is rung once only, entirely by working out the numbers as you go along – no memory aids are allowed.