

RINGING WITH OTHERS

Once you can handle a bell fairly confidently, it is time to start ringing with others. The main difficulty is that you must now take your timing from the rest of the band.

You will start off ringing *rounds*. In rounds, the bells start with the Treble (the lightest bell with the highest note), and ring in order down to the Tenor, the heaviest bell with the lowest note.

Ringers refer to each bell by number. The Treble is *always* number 1, but the Tenor will be number 6, 8 or 10, depending on the number of bells in the tower and how many are ringing. This can be confusing, because the number given to each bell is not fixed. Instead, it depends on which 'set' of bells is chosen. Usually, when a band only wishes to ring some of the bells, they might ring the 'back' six, or 'back' eight if they have ten bells, because this gives a proper musical scale. If they ring the 'front' bells, the rounds would sound incomplete, because the ear expects to hear the complete scale.

To find the number of your bell, count round from the treble. It is good practice to work out the numbers of all the bells, so you know which is which.

The objective of ringing rounds is to obtain good striking. This means obtaining an even spacing between bells and a good beat or rhythm.

In rounds, the bells start with the treble, at handstroke, and ring in order down to the tenor. The bells then ring their backstroke, with no break in the rhythm. The treble is the first bell to ring at handstroke and then at backstroke, so it is said to be *leading*. This means that it follows the last bell (the

tenor in rounds) at the opposite stroke. A handstroke followed by a backstroke is called a *whole pull*, and can be illustrated as follows:

1234567812345678

The treble is now ready to ring its next handstroke, but before doing so, waits a fraction of a second (about the time it would take another bell to ring) and then another whole pull is rung:

-1234567812345678

Ringings always has this slight pause at the handstroke lead, called an *open handstroke lead*. This punctuates the ringing and gives a better beat than a closed or *cartwheel* lead. Open handstroke leads can be illustrated as follows:

1234567812345678-1234567812345678

The open lead is maintained by whichever bell is leading. In *change ringing* this isn't always the treble.

Starting off

The treble ringer gives the instruction to start ringing by calling 'Look to.' All the ringers take hold of their sallies ready to pull off. The treble ringer looks round to make sure everyone is ready, and then calls 'Treble's going' as he pulls his bell to the balance, followed by 'Treble's gone' as the bell comes over the balance. You should start pulling your bell to the balance when you hear '*Treble's going*,' so that you can pull off at the right time. You must give quite a firm pull on the first handstroke to ensure that the backstroke goes right up. This is to allow the ringers round the back enough time to get their bells moving. A good band should be able to strike perfect rounds from the pull-off. When the ringing

has finished, the conductor calls '*Stand*', as the treble pulls at handstroke. All the ringers set their bells at the next handstroke, which gives a whole-pull warning to the band.

Pull and stretch

When ringing in rounds, the bells seem to be ringing fast, but this is because many bells are ringing quite close together. Each bell is actually ringing fairly slowly, probably more slowly than when you have been practising on your own. Thus, you will probably find that you very soon get ahead of the bell you are trying to follow. You cannot control the *speed* at which the bell turns, so the only way to control how fast you ring is by holding the bell on the balance until it is your turn. To ring more slowly, you must give a long, steady pull, and then stretch to let the bell rise to the balance. It is particularly important to stretch up at backstroke — you will almost certainly need to let it rise further than when you were learning on your own.

How much space between bells?

You will need to learn to gauge the amount of space between yourself and the bell you are following. Watch the person in front of you and pull your bell as their hands pass their nose. Then listen to when your bell strikes. For most people, this is very hard to do at first, especially as there is so much else to think about. Your bell strikes as it comes to rest at the end of its cycle. This is at about the time you catch the sally, or as the tail end passes your face. Get into the habit of counting *all* the bells as they strike. If you are ringing in thirds place (i.e. the number 3 bell in rounds) then as you count three, you hear your bell strike. Try to hear whether it strikes with an even space each side. Some ringers only seem to listen to the

space *before* their bell, but it is just as important for the following space to be correct, otherwise the bells will never settle into a good beat. The counting exercise is something you can practise whilst awaiting your turn.

If you are ringing a *back-end* bell, it is sometimes easier to count from the back. For example, on the sixth it is quite easy to hear yourself, followed by the two tenors, because these bells are the loudest. [The back bells are often called the *tenors*. The word comes from the Latin meaning 'to hold together', and this is a perfect description of the function of the tenors in bell-ringing.]

What to do when you get out of place

If you are going too fast, pull slightly harder and stretch more. Catch the sally slightly lower, let a little rope out at backstroke, and stretch up more, onto tip-toe if necessary.

If you are bumping the stay, you are pulling too hard. Reduce the weight, but not length, of pull, and make sure you are catching the sally high enough.

If you are going too slowly, but you aren't bumping the stay, take a little rope in at backstroke, or catch the sally higher. Remember that all the adjustments should be slight.

Sooner or later you will get completely out of place. Forget about following the other bell for a moment. Pull and stretch to get your bell to the balance and then set it at handstroke. Now wait until the ringer in front of you is just about to catch the sally. Pull your bell up to the balance, and then pull off as their hands pass their face. Don't worry if you don't get back into place at first. Keep trying!

Roger Tompsett