



*The Weekly Journal for
Church Bell Ringers since 1911*

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Marsworth replies!

by Richard Booth Tower Captain, Marsworth, Buckinghamshire



All Saints Church, Marsworth

I was somewhat amazed to read the News Review in *Ringing World* No. 5390 (p.833) regarding the publicity in the *Hemel Hempstead Gazette* group of newspapers for our Tower Open Evening on 1st August – and especially that someone at the *RW* actually spotted it! We do try to make bell ringing sound interesting and attractive, and we certainly don't want to give the impression that we are dying out.

The evening went very well, with six people attending, one of whom came as a direct result of the newspaper item. We followed our now well-established format, starting with an introductory talk, during which the *Learning the Ropes* scheme is explained. Some demonstration bell ringing then preceded a tour of the tower, where the various parts of the bell installation were explained and the method of ringing demonstrated with a silenced bell. Most then proceeded to the top of the tower to admire the view.

The evening concluded with everyone "having a go", by following the first exercises of the *LTR* route, quickly proceeding to ringing backstrokes and in some cases to start the handstroke exercises, under instruction from an ITTS-trained teacher. Four of those attending are continuing to learn here, of which two will ultimately join other towers. At the time of writing, three have already attained their Level 1 Certificate, and the fourth, who prefers short (one and a half hour) lessons twice a week rather than an intensive course, is expected to do so in the next week or two.

I thought perhaps readers may be interested to learn of our experiences so far with ITTS and *Learning the Ropes*. Our involvement in the scheme arose from a realisation during 2012/13 that we needed

to recruit more ringers. Despite combining the Cheddington and Marsworth teams, overall numbers of active ringers continued to decline, although this was to a degree masked by problems at Cheddington which resulted in all ringing taking place at Marsworth and participation of two ringers from Eaton Bray where there was no team. So, having sorted out the problems with a disintegrating ringing room ceiling and imminent completion of the rehang project at Cheddington, we determined on a recruitment campaign. After some deliberation, we decided to organise an ITTS Module 1 course at Marsworth, with participation from prospective teachers and a group of mentors from nearby towers, which was held on 28th June 2013.

This was followed by a publicity campaign, advertising Tower Open Days when anyone interested could come along and discover more about bell ringing. We continued with a group of 7 new ringers being taught by our three teachers at a couple of evenings a week. This seems very similar to the approach adopted by the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing, but in retrospect we found that the drop-out rate was quite high, with only three actually completing their *LTR* Level 1. We subsequently adopted a more intensive one-to-one approach, so there is no time during which the learner is idle and progress is correspondingly quicker. Although we do try to have two or three people learning together if possible, this is not essential, and we find that this method works well.



30th August 2013: explaining call change theory using handbells



Individual teaching within a group

We tried a “learn to ring in a weekend” course but found this very tiring for both teacher and pupil! We now favour starting with two whole-day sessions, by which I mean typically 10am to 4pm broken into two lessons in each half day with a tea break between and a longish lunch break, with the two days separated by not more than a week. However, it is necessary to be flexible; one of the people we are teaching, as already mentioned, prefers short sessions twice a week. Including the new learners from the recent open evening, we have now taught 16 people using this intensive 1:1 method, of which we have lost only three. Everyone who has achieved Level 1 has

continued to ring, all are enjoying it and are making good progress. Several have rung quarter peals on treble, tenor and inside, and some help out with service ringing at other local towers when we aren’t ringing at Marsworth.

Along the way, we have refined our publicity process! You never know what is going to work, so we use a combination of Village Newsletter, leaflet drop, word of mouth, posters, local newspaper, social media and even radio. However, we found the “contact me if you’re interested” or “come along to a practice” approach just doesn’t generally work.



Building skills for the handstroke



Thomas Monks and Bob Deeley receiving their Learning the Ropes certificates for Level 2 (foundation skills) back in December 2013. Both ringers have since progressed through the scheme to level 4 (QP of a doubles method on an inside bell)

Our biggest success has been the formation of an entire new team at nearby Eaton Bray, previously a silent tower with only two resident ringers. They now ring every Sunday morning and are really enjoying it and progressing together, but still come to our practices at Marsworth. A short while ago one of our teachers received a very excited text from a new Eaton Bray ringer proudly telling us that they rang plain hunt as part of the



Teacher Ruth Monks helping a new learner to get a feel for straight downward movements with 'the hand ring exercise'

service ringing for the first time without any outside help!

Our 17 new ringers are encouraged to feel rightly proud of their achievements, and “ticking boxes”, certificates and badges have been a pleasure to all who have taken part, including those of school age. One of them, who is just 60, proudly wears her badges to work on her nurse’s uniform, which has proved to be an interesting talking point causing others to express an interest in learning to ring. The fact that badges are only available for levels 1 & 2 is a problem, so we have to supplement these with other badges sourced elsewhere to meet demand.

I will admit to being extremely fortunate in my Tower with 3 ITTS-accredited teachers, two of whom are much younger than me (i.e. in their early 40s), which has enabled us to run two practices a week for the new group of ringers, and to run separate workshops for developing specific skills. We are also able to call on similarly accredited teachers from nearby towers to help when needed, as well as non-accredited helpers, who all play a valuable part. The Church has also been very supportive, including purchasing a simulator when we were



Our outing on 23rd August

noticeable that those who participated last year were now ringing Plain Bob Doubles and Minor, and the striking was much improved!

Quarter peals are a regular feature of our ringing. Four of the new ringers we have taught have now rung quarter peals on treble and tenor to doubles, three have now progressed to treble to minor and two have completed quarter peals inside to doubles. We encourage them to ring several quarters to really help them consolidate each stage – one new ringer has now rung 17 quarters and two more have rung 15.

As we are now offering two dedicated ‘learners evenings’ each week in addition to our general practice which also involves a lot of basic ringing, we have found it necessary to arrange a monthly treble bob / surprise minor practice and some challenging quarter peal attempts for the more advanced ringers so that we have something to stretch ourselves.

Without this, although the constant teaching is an excellent investment in our future team, it can become quite repetitive. A happy balance needed to be reached so that all ringers who come to Marsworth are progressing, whatever stage they are at – whether learning to handle a bell or learning more challenging methods.

The first recorded quarter peal by an all Marsworth team was successfully rung on 31st August, following which Level 3 Certificate was presented to Sally Tulley and Level 4 Certificates to Thomas Monks and Bob Deeley by Revd David Holloway, at the start of the United Benefice Service.

RICHARD BOOTH
Tower Captain, Marsworth

Marsworth, Bucks. (All Saints) 31st August, 1260 Plain Bob Doubles: Sally Tulley 1, Ruth Monks 2, Thomas Monks 3, Richard Booth (C) 4, Rose Nightingale 5, Robert J Deeley 6. Rung prior to the United Benefice service. The team included 3 ringers who started ‘Learning the Ropes’ 13 months ago and the 3 ringing teachers who taught them. First QP by a band of Marsworth ringers.

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in urgent need of one and did not have anything in the tower fund at the time; we have, however, since repaid this, largely from donations which we request of learners participating in our intensive 1:1 courses and with grateful thanks to the Ringing Foundation and Oxford Diocesan Guild for grants received. We do not make any other charges, although we have recently started a donations box for loose change which we hope will cover the cost of electricity used.

From the outset we have encouraged learners to participate in service ringing, even if this is only rounds, and we also organise outings when the learners can experience different bells, which is an enormous help in developing bell control. The first outing was held in November 2013 (*RW* 5353), which was notable for ringing lots of rounds and call changes, much of it rather badly struck! We have recently held our second outing to local towers, on 23rd August. It was particularly



Certificate presentation after first quarter peal (l-r): Thomas Monks, Ruth Monks, Sally Tulley, Bob Deeley, Rev David Holloway (behind), Rose Nightingale (in front) and Richard Booth