

Branch Secretaries Meeting 6th February 2021

Summary of our Discussions concerning Post-Covid Ringing Recovery

Introduction

This meeting was called to determine how Branches are managing with the continuing Covid pandemic and the issues that are likely to ensue when the restrictions start to be relaxed. There are many of us who are concerned that after a long period of little or no ringing, some ringers might not return. Also we have not been able to teach new ringers and many existing ringers will be nervous about their physical and mental preparedness.

This will be the first of several meetings – the next series will be based around Stewards' areas which will include Ringing Masters and other Branch officers.

Ringing could well recover gradually.

Current Situation

Summarising the comments coming from the Branches about the situation over the past 6 months:

A mixed picture on whether towers recommenced ringing when permitted in the summer/autumn. The main limiting factor was those towers with small ringing chambers. Some Branches had the majority of their towers ringing, others had few.

Ringing Room has worked well in maintaining interest amongst some ringers and some have invited others to join them. However this has limited appeal. Most want to get back to real bells.

Many tower bands are keeping socially connected through Zoom or meeting up in passing, the latter particularly in small communities.

Some branches reported a large proportion of 2021 subs had already come in.

Previously strong bands are staying strong. Keenness to ring again particularly on those bells that have been restored during the pandemic.

During summer & autumn, Vale of White Horse hosted supervised one-to-one bell handling refresher sessions.

For the Future

Impact will be:

- on churches which could be facing an uncertain future with diminished congregations,
- on tower bands which could find that some of their ringers are reluctant to return,
- on individual ringers, some of whom will need to familiarise themselves again after perhaps over a year with no ringing.

There are several newsletters being produced on Survival & Recovery, particularly by the Central Council and ART. Particularly useful is their Toolbox. The link is at the end of these notes.

Before ringing restarts, check the state of bells and tower, consulting T&B members if necessary.

Recovery Champions: Katie is Guild's main Recovery Champion. All Branches should be appointing at least one each. Stewards should communicate with their Branches about this.

Webinars: being produced by Education Sub-Committee in coming weeks.

The main points made by the Branches were:

It is important to get the timing right. Firing up resources too early will lead to frustration and disillusion, but we do need to get on with planning and knowing about the support resources available. Some opinion that Covid will still be an issue until autumn.

Several Branches are confident that they can provide the support to towers, but not all mentioned it. Many Branches have their AGM or an officers' meeting in coming weeks at which this subject will be discussed.

Ringling champions are a good idea.

The stronger bands before the pandemic will be resilient but some towers will find that some ringers will not return leaving them short.

All towers must liaise regularly with their church. There could be a change in pattern of church services, so ringers should be more flexible as to where they ring.

Many ringers, particularly the more elderly, will need to ease themselves back into ringing. The least experienced should be offered one-to-one supervision on handling before ringing with the band. Even the more experienced might have lost upper-body strength, so should not assume that they can immediately go back to the heavier bells. Use physio exercises, etc. (see the Toolbox).

Help from the Guild on recruitment would be good. It might be a good time to recruit, but consider how early we will be permitted to teach one-to-one.

Ringling for memorial services (when permitted) will be good public relations. Most of the public will be pleased to hear bells again, but some towers particularly in town centres might find some kickback from residents who have had a year without the bells.

Some commented that we need to ensure that not too many emails are sent, and keep them short otherwise some will not be read.

Useful Links

I am putting newsletters, etc. that I receive on this subject in the lower part of <https://odg.org.uk/category/covid-19/>. THIS WILL BE KEPT UPDATED.

The Toolbox is at <http://ringingteachers.org/survival-and-recovery-toolbox>.

Ken Darvill

12th February 2021