

Birmingham School of Bell Ringing - An Introduction from Simon Linford

14/7/13 Birmingham School of Bell Ringing #1

This is the first of a series of emails I will send to this list over the next week to introduce and explain what we hope will revolutionise ringing training in Birmingham and the St Martin's Guild. The reason I am splitting this over a number of emails is because there is so much to say, there is a danger that no one will read to the end!

The idea is the principal product of the "Carlsberg" brainstorming day held a couple of months ago when about 20 members of the Guild and a few invited others thought about what the ideal ringing organisation would be. As might be expected, high quality and reliable training was a central theme.

Clare introduced the idea which is to adopt centralised teaching, where new recruits will be taken from handling through to change ringing, with teaching taking place concurrently, at four different towers covering four defined stages, and always on a Saturday morning. All the teaching will be in accordance with the "Learn the Ropes" programme and carried out by tutors who have followed the Integrated Teacher Training Scheme (ITTS). In order to make the training valued by participants, to professionalise the programme, and cover the costs associated with the School, there will be a £5 charge for every two-hour session (with concessions).

The Birmingham School of Bell Ringing is not meant to replace any training that is currently being done at towers, or to imply that that is inadequate. What it will do is provide an additional resource in support of more recruitment, training of ringers for bands which do not have anyone confident enough to teach, additional opportunities for existing ringers to acquire skills they cannot get in their own bands, and help to remove barriers to ringing progression which exist on the route from handling to change ringing.

The next email will explain more about how the programme will be run.

16/7/13 Birmingham School of Bell Ringing #2

Sunday's email introduced the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing, which is an initiative being launched by the St Martin's Guild which we hope will represent a step change in the training of bellringers.

The BSoBR will progress new ringers through the first four stages of the "Learn the Ropes" scheme, designed and promoted by the Association of Ringing Teachers.

<http://www.ringingteachers.co.uk/learningtheropes/>. There will be four towers all teaching concurrently on a Saturday morning between 10 and 12, with one tower allocated to each stage. The four levels of the curriculum are as follows, with more details available on the website linked above.

- Tower A - Level 1 - "Bell Handling and Control"
- Tower B - Level 2 - "Foundation Ringing Skills" (this introduces activities to build skills cover ropesight development, bell control and listening)
- Tower C - Level 3 - "Plain Hunt" (ending with ringing the treble to a QP of Doubles)
- Tower D - Level 4 - "Novice Change Ringer" (ending with ringing a QP inside)

New ringers will progress through the School at their own speed, or at the speed of a group if they want to learn in a group together. It will not be necessary to start at the beginning - we think that current ringers should be able to use the School to overcome any barrier to progress they have reached, or just to get more practice. For instance we think there is a particular need for those

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learning to ring Plain Hunt to be able to do so with a strong band of helpers, as there are a number of towers in the Guild where there are insufficient inside ringers to give those learning to treble a decent chance.

Of course this programme is going to need a lot of support and helpers to work. Recruitment, staffing, and the roll-out programme (this will start in September) will be the subject of a later email.

If you were wondering how frequent these emails were going to be, then now you know - every two days!

20/7/13 Birmingham School of Bell Ringing #3

The last email explained how the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing, which the St Martin's Guild is planning to launch in September, will take new recruits through the four stages of the "Learn the Ropes" programme, with each stage being taught concurrently at one of four different towers. Someone 'graduating' from the School would have rung a quarter peal of Plain Bob or Grandsire Doubles on an inside bell, and would we hope therefore be an asset to their home band.

Before going on to discuss which towers are going to be used for the School I want to explain the relationship between the School and individual towers, as 'ownership' of learners is a key potential stumbling block to overcome.

It is not the intention that the School will teach itinerant or mercenary ringers with no local band or Sunday service ringing ambitions. The School is intended to provide St Martin's Guild towers with competent ringers without the teaching having to be done by that tower. It is hoped that with the new ringers will be more likely to continue ringing because they have learned quickly, got competent quickly, got to know quite a few more people than they otherwise might, and generally have seen the bigger picture beyond the local tower. We think towers will benefit from not having to do as much entry-level ringing for learners.

We envisage four ways in which learners will come to the School.

Firstly, and most ambitiously, we hope to have more centralised recruitment so that someone wanting to learn to ring does not have to chance upon their local tower, but can be directed straight into being taught and find their most appropriate local tower later. At the moment the process by which someone wanting to learn to ring finds somewhere to learn and gets taught properly with a clear progression path is too hit and miss.

Secondly, we hope that towers will see the School as a way in which new recruits can be accelerated through the learning process. It is not a compulsory replacement of teaching in local bands. This is an additional programme with the greater benefit of the Guild in mind. A lot of people from a lot of different towers are going to give up a lot of time to make this work, and it is not with the intention of pinching promising learners for their own bands!

Thirdly, we want to target towers which currently do not have enough ringers with wholesale recruitment from the congregation or local schools, youth groups, etc in order to build bands quickly. This has been done in other places, particularly when new rings of bells are installed. Such recruitment needs the support and help of the clergy, and improving our relationship with the clergy at the highest level was another outcome of the Carlsberg Day.

Lastly we will invite anyone who is in between the handling stage and the quarter peal of Doubles inside stage to come to the School on a Saturday morning and accelerate their progress. We would

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hope that all towers will make their ringers aware of the School and what it can do. I was delighted to receive an email yesterday from someone wanting exactly that.

The next email in this series will deal with some of the practicalities of this ambitious venture!

25/7/13 Birmingham School of Bell Ringing #4

The last three emails (at sporadic intervals) introduced what may have sounded like an extremely ambitious venture. The St Martin's Guild is probably unusually able to carry off something like this, given the Guild is not too big, and has a lot of very active and committed ringers willing to support new initiatives. Lots of people are talking about how ringing recruitment and training has to change to address the drop in numbers - the St Martin's Guild has the opportunity to show the ringing community at large how it can actually be done. We expect to have a close alliance with like-minded mould-breaking centres of ringing training, including Worcester Cathedral and Adelaide.

Wise counsel has recommended that we "think big, start small", which is what we are going to do. When we start the School in September, we are only planning to start with one tower - Tower A doing the handling teaching. Tower A only needs a few tutors - it doesn't need the supporting ringers that the later towers need. We will add the other towers as the momentum builds or subject to demand, although I have already had enquiries for Towers C and D.

Tower A is going to be St Paul's Jewellery Quarter. St Paul's is ideally set up for training, having been designed to be a teaching tower. The bells are easy to ring, there is the school room below the ringing chamber, the two dumb bells, free parking in the churchyard, and a central location. We anticipate the first teaching then to be on Saturday 14th September with the previous Saturday being a meeting of the tutors to finalise arrangements.

The part you can now play is recruitment! As I said in the last email we are going to be trying centralised recruitment (the hiring of the Charmborough Ring was for this) and targeted recruitment for towers with not enough ringers. If you know people who want to learn, or have people enquire about learning to ring at your tower and you are happy for them to come to the School (it will help us get established) then please introduce them.

Attached is a flyer which you can use - please put it on the church notice board not just the ringing chamber.! Note we are now saying 10.15 rather than 10 so we can be consistent across all towers (one cannot start at 10 because of a service), and so anyone planning to go Parkrunning can have a shower before teaching!

Simon Linford

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