

A Word from the Master

I've been here before you know. Twice before, in fact. The first time was about 1978.

Not a lot seems to have changed very much, just a little faded in places.

So, I sat down, and set the world to rights, as one does. The blank sheet of paper. The list of all the things that I could think of that might improve the quantity and quality of the ringing in the Branch. The list of things that go wrong for ringers in the Branch. All the things that obstruct progress and prevent the Branch from functioning in a way which helps us develop, improve and enjoy our ringing.

My wife looked at the list. "You can't say things like that", she said. "You'll get everybody's back up", she said. I read the list again, she was right. Of course.

In the 'constructive discussion' which followed, it came to light that a lot of things that I wanted to say have already been said, and said very well, and said in a way that won't get people's backs up. So, rather than cause any offence, I am advised, gently and very politely, to point anyone who wants to progress in bellringing in the direction of the little blue book. It's called '*The Follow on Book for Bellringers*' – *Sherbourne Teaching Aid No4*, by Pam Copson. It's all there. Please get hold of a copy. My jolly useful Ringers' Diary gives an address for the Copsons on Page 21. I believe the phone number is: 01789 841573. There's a website: www.btinternet.com/~copson.

Start with page 3. NO, not *that* page 3! Page 3 in the little blue book.

Then try page 16, about striking, and note what it says about Ropesight. We are all encouraged to learn Ropesight because it is better than learning the numbers. But Ropesight does have severe limitations that we might not be aware of – have a look at the diagram at the bottom of page 16 and you will get the idea.

The trouble with relying entirely on Ropesight is that, to get good striking, the rest of the band need to be ringing accurately by rhythm and ear. Furthermore, Ropesight makes no allowance for the many 'oddstruck' bells we have hanging in the Central Bucks Branch.

What might appear visually to be the right gap between your bell and the bell you are following might mean you clip them if your bell is quick and / or their bell is slow. Or it might mean a big uncomfortable gap between the striking of the bells if the 'oddstruckness' is the other way round. You just have to listen and ring with your ears.

Start listening when you pull off in rounds and check whether the gap you are leaving after the bell you are following sounds right. If it doesn't, adjust your striking until it does. When you go into changes, listen carefully to see if your gap is still working – making allowances for the weights of the bells as needed. If the adjustment doesn't seem to work, it may have been the other bell that was 'oddstruck', not yours. Keep listening!

And remember, bell 'oddstruckness' is likely to be different from the handstroke to the backstroke.

Having got your bell roughly sorted out for 'oddstruckness', the next thing you need to concentrate on is the rhythm. This is not so easy to explain. As some famous jazz

musician once said, "If you gotta ask what it is, you ain't got it". Obviously not from Central Bucks, and if he only said it the once, he probably wasn't the Ringing Master!

Again, start by listening during the Rounds. Concentrate on getting the bells evenly spaced by ear. The actual speed of the ringing is less important at first, but, sooner or later the band will settle to a consensual speed. Listen to your bell within the framework being set, *work as a team member*. Get a feel for the speed, and spacing, being established by the band and work to reinforce them.

When you go into changes, try to get your bell to strike, within the speed framework, exactly where the bell you have changed places with struck in the preceding change. Forget Ropesight – that just helps you check where you are. If ringing like this means you clip another bell that's in the way, don't worry, clip 'em and let them know you won't go round them if they are slow. Conversely, try to avoid falling into the Ropesight hole which gets left if the bell you are following strikes early (tenors behind often fall into this trap). Stick to your rhythm and put your bell where it should be. So long as you are striking according to rhythm you will be helping the band towards a well struck touch. *Relax, listen, and enjoy*. If you ring by Ropesight you'll find yourself holding up for bells that are late and diving into holes, chasing after bells that are struck early, leaving the bell behind you stranded. Of course, if you prefer all this concertina stuff, you could always take up Morris Dancing!

We will be returning to this, and other 'bees' that I have in my bonnet in due course. In the mean time, Happy Ringing!

For general information look out for some regular monthly practices I am hoping to establish in addition to the monthly Branch meetings. The first, subject to confirmation, will be a six bell change ringing practice at North Marston on Tuesdays starting with 1st July. I am planning on one a month but the week of the month may vary. Details to follow. We will be progressive but will start with Plain Hunt, Plain Bob Doubles, and Grandsire, or whatever the needs of the band on the night. The practice is open to anyone who wants to make progress. Having your own practice night on a Tuesday is no excuse, these will be only once a month and you can bring your whole practice night band to join the fun! Helpers welcome. I'll keep the Branch informed of what is being rung.

But be prepared to be pushed and encouraged...we intend to make progress!

- Ed Houghton, Branch Ringing Master.