

APPENDIX 4 – Extract from a Report of The CCCBR Administrative Committee's Report on Trends in Ringing

Young Ringers

The decline in young ringers is noted with concern. The group spent much time considering the reasons for this with a view to advising schemes to reverse the trend.

It is firstly important to consider why the trend is deplored. With the apparent healthy state of ringers, based on overall numbers, it might be questioned why there should be concern at the reduction in recruitment of younger ringers (teenagers). It is clear from data collected that a considerably higher proportion of ringers who achieve the highest technical standards learned to ring as teenagers. Furthermore, the best teachers of ringing are more generally those who themselves learn young. Broadly, it appears that younger ringing masters lead the most prospering bands - and clearly ringing masters can only be elected young, if they learned young.

There are many reasons why ringing is less attractive to younger people than formerly, and competition with other 'leisure' activities must surely figure high among them. Many activities offer the participants instant, or at least fast, reward, whereas ringing is characterised by requiring patience to learn the skills and in many ways the most exciting aspects come quite late in the ringer's development.

Lack of a peer group may also have a significant bearing on the ability of towers to retain young recruits. If 75% of ringers are over 40, then the opportunities for teenagers to ring with and enjoy the company of their peers at any one tower is limited.

There is some evidence to suggest that recruiting young people of 11-13 is reasonably successful, but retaining them between 14-18 is difficult. Unfortunately, this may be due to the association of ringing with the Church. The impact of bullying and teasing of children who attend Church (in whatever capacity) may be underestimated by adults, but it is likely that a proportion of young recruits are lost for this reason.

Finally, there is the image of ringers, as so often projected by the media, as a rather strange and quaint old group of people. Not many young people want to belong to such a group.

The Oxford Diocesan Guild and others have had some success with week-long intensive training courses for new, young recruits (organised during half-term holidays). By training a group of youngsters, from different towers, together on a fast-track scheme a number of difficulties can be overcome.

Firstly, they are with a peer group that can offer encouragement and support (and competition, upon which young people often thrive), secondly, faster results may be achieved, thus relieving the boredom they may otherwise experience if learning the basics takes several weeks.

Furthermore, the training can be carried out with people used to working with young people, which can have a motivating influence. The use of young adults (e.g. students in higher education) as part of the training team is also considered beneficial. This concept has much to commend it, and should be promoted.

There is much work to be done in promoting a more positive and conducive image of ringing to young people. This must be achieved both at a national and local level. The Council should develop promotional materials that specifically target young people in appropriate ways. It is very important that the image projected is not undermined on the first real experience of ringing and so suitable introductory events should also be developed.