

Review of The Guild of Devonshire Ringers

Interim Report of 'Support & Development of Ringing Skills' Working Party

Current Situation

- 1) At present each branch is running practices which from experience tend to be poorly attended and therefore struggle to be of use to those who do make the effort to go along.
- 2) There are 2 ringing centres within the Guild.

The Troyte Ringing Centre is geographically out on a limb and whilst wholly integrated into the North East Branch it is under used as a Guild resource. Whilst they are currently running courses we would like to have on offer, it is unable to serve the Guild as a whole owing to its location.

Wolborough currently holds a couple of Guild training events per year but is also under used as a resource for the Guild.

- 3) The Guild doesn't currently provide a programme of education events as is required to serve its members' needs.
- 4) Bell handling is mostly being taught at tower level which is fine in some cases but perhaps not in others.

Following discussions around these concerns, the encouragement of young ringers and the problems of the Guild's large geographical area, the meeting agreed the following recommendations:

1) Branch Structure

We recognised that the current branch structure, whilst not ideal, would prove difficult to change as we cover such a large geographical area. Some branches are very spread out; however moving boundaries could lead to branches either being too large in area, therefore members having to travel even further for events than they currently are, or too small to be viable without continual support from neighbouring branches.

We therefore agreed that, for the purposes for this report, the branch structure should remain as it currently is.

We would however recommend that neighbouring branches should work together to ensure viable outings and practices. This has worked well during 2008 with Exeter and Aylesbeare joining forces on several occasions and something that proved particularly successful was East Devon and Aylesbeare practicing together for the 8 bell striking competition. This meant they could both practice and enter teams in the competition which both would have struggled to do without this mutual support.

Branch practices should continue; however, the most successful ones tend to be those that are held on the usual practice night at any given tower. This means that the event will be attended

sufficiently to be viable, and those who do go along from other towers will benefit from having enough support.

Another successful branch activity that we would promote is the blitz approach, where a small party of helpers visit a practice for 4 to 6 weeks to help with a specific topic e.g. Plain Hunt.

We recognised that this would not work for N&NW branch and that their current practices are at present very well attended and working for the needs of their ringers. This branch recognises the need to travel in order to ring to the standard they want to achieve.

2) Education Committee & Branch Education Officers

We proposed that an Education Committee be formed by electing an Education Officer from within each branch. This post would be in addition to the Ringing Master and would provide a specific programme of events for both their own branches and for the Guild as a whole. The Guild events would make use of the current ringing centres and any others that were set up as a result of this Review.

The committee would meet prior to the end of each year to discuss the training needs of the branches and the Guild as a whole and put together a training programme. We would also expect them to review the events part way through the year to ensure that the needs remain the same and to encourage attendance of both helpers and students.

The type of courses that could be held at both branch and Guild level are:

- Bell handling
- Ringing rounds
- Raising & lowering
- Plain Hunt
- Stedman for beginners
- Moving on to Surprise
- Training the Trainer (bell handling)
- Bob calling & conducting
- General Theory sessions (how to learn a new method)

Young Ringers

In a county where the average age of the population is somewhat higher than the rest of the country it is important for our young ringers to realise they are not alone. Many towers probably find themselves with just one or two young ringers amongst a sea of older faces.

We would therefore recommend that special Young Ringer events be held during the year to enable them to get to know each other and to also help with their ringing skills. We felt that young ringer events should be well structured and include an element of social time and that whilst adult help is required this should not be dominant but the youngsters should be encouraged to take control. These young people are our future tower captains, ringing masters etc and need to be encouraged to find out what it is like to take charge in the belfry and not only be taught how to ring.

One problem for young ringers is transport and the need to rely on parents to take them to ringing wherever it may be. Many ringers have now been CRB checked and we need to make use of these people to ensure our young ringers are more mobile.

Database

Many towers are very often in need of just a small amount of extra help to enable their current ringers to take that next step in ringing, be it moving from rounds to plain hunt or having someone that can call simple touches of the basic methods. This may only require the input of a couple of more experienced ringers for a short period of time, but tower captains are not always aware of who to ask for such support.

We therefore suggest that a database is compiled of ringers of all standards who are willing and able to help in such cases which can be easily accessed by all, therefore providing that support and encouragement to help towers progress.

The database should not consist of just the most experienced ringers as everyone has something to offer. Indeed if someone has just mastered plain hunting they are in a very good position to help another ringer just getting to grips with this.

The database would be managed by the Education Committee and be available in both paper format if required and on the Guild Website. This website will only include information that each individual is happy to have shown on it.

Towers to Become Ringing Centres

We recognised the need for 2 to 3 more ringing centres within the Guild in strategic locations to serve as manageable an area as possible. Whilst we would need the current tower captain/local ringers to caretake such a facility, we would expect the activities to be largely driven by the Education Committee.

A ringing centre needs to be accessible to ringers in its area. For instance, one tower which is in an excellent location is Honiton. It is situated on a major trunk road, there is plenty of parking in the town, as well as places to get refreshments. The bells are relatively easy to handle and there are many 6 bell towers close by to make large courses a viable option. Such a location could successfully serve up to 4 branches in the East of the county, Exeter, Aylesbeare, East Devon and parts of the North East branch. By serving such a wide area, it should be easier to get sufficient helpers and learners at courses that were run there.

These are the kind of things that should be thought about before a tower is turned into a Guild Ringing Centre.

There may also be a need for some financial support from the Guild to help establish the Ringing Centres which is something that would require further discussion with the senior officers.

Conclusion

It is hoped that establishing an Education Committee, as well as setting up a database of ringers willing and able to support learning at all levels, will provide a core facility from which the Guild towers can draw to enable them to cope with the needs of their own ringers at any particular time.