

Part Branch Master's Report 2005, Philip Abbey

On taking up office, we were issued with a challenge to encourage better striking within the branch. It occurs to me this cannot be achieved by the branch ringing masters alone. If the branch is serious about addressing the issue, perhaps all of us with a teaching role within the branch need to challenge our teaching methods?

Ringing more complicated methods is not the only way to measure progress; striking competitions remind us of that. As the standard of method being rung increases, this necessitates an increase in accuracy of ringing. I am pleased that members want the opportunities to ring more complicated methods, but we must also equip ourselves for a desired opportunity.

Last year I pushed for better preparation of methods prior to taking hold of a rope. I am delighted to see such an improvement. This was evident at both the Bristol and Advanced Surprise Major practices, which were made possible by strong support from the local experts – Thank you! Now I would like to claim that *quality of striking must be proportional to difficulty of method*. I see this as a pre-requisite success criterion without which 'success' is barely possible or credible.

A good starting point therefore is the quality of opportunity being arranged. Do those leading the ringing take 'charge' or 'responsibility'? 'Charge' is only given in order to fulfil our responsibility. I think responsibility is first to those *outside* who can hear the bells, and second to those in the belfry. Also, responsibility within the belfry is to good quality service ringing on Sundays and good learning opportunities on practice nights. We ought not just take charge, but fulfil that responsibility.

Continually weak or underpowered touches, relative to the standard of method, lead to consistently poor ringing. This can only teach that a low standard is both usual and acceptable, contrary to the aims of this Association. Ideally, to provide a good learning opportunity a strong supporting band is required. Each person has a standard at which they are accomplished. Something harder and they are 'on the edge'. A little further out they need supporting (*i.e.* a minder to stand behind them). Finally there's 'beyond hope'. Then there's the effect of combining people into a team to ring. Happily, we are blessed by many and diverse talents within this branch. But, how often do we ask ourselves if we are setting up our team for success or failure, is it *hopeful* or *hopeless*?

Conductors asked to call a touch are not without responsibility. I think they need to take responsibility for that touch when it is below the standard required to achieve any form of learning. There is no expectation that they should put the touch right. The other options are simple; either start afresh with hope for a better attempt, or stop and let the ringing organiser decide what to do. If a touch goes wrong in the first half lead, its costs little to restart immediately and will encourage concentration. Even if you can 'resurrect' a touch, should you?

Present day expectations of what we should be able to achieve have increased. More people are ringing Surprise Major than ever before. But as a branch, do we put as much effort into improving striking beyond that required for Bob Doubles as we do our methods? I was impressed by what we achieved at the 12-bell practice this year, a really good joint effort. Also, much hard work went into achieving a respectable course of Little Bob Royal on this year's branch outing. I hope further opportunities can be made available by asking Steve Coleman to run a training session for us this coming year.

Finally, the use of a minder is a sure indicator that the ringer is not yet competent in the chosen method. You may have noticed from the Gloucester Cathedral opportunities, it's my desire to see service ringing organised where there is no need for a ringer to have a minder. By this I do not mean they ring a touch they find difficult anyway but without the support. Instead, that they are allowed to ring something easier that they are already accomplished at, relax and enjoy it. I believe Sundays are a performance not a rehearsal. So my plea to members is to *keep Sundays special*, in what you organise and what you ask for.

Philip Abbey, 23 October 2005