

# Survival & Recovery

## When can we start ringing again?

It was great to be able to publish positive guidance to the ringing community after the UK Government's announcement of phased release from lockdown in February. In fact, it was the first time Covid guidance has been published without any criticism whatsoever!

We have to be mindful of course that we are a worldwide ringing community, with different governments and different Churches controlling our activities, each with different attitudes to risk and of course different circumstances and priorities. In the British Isles, England and its Established Church are the most permissive – the authorities in Wales, Scotland and Ireland are likely to open up more slowly. Ringers in Australia and New Zealand have been able to ring much more than the home nations, while in North America a return to ringing may follow the progress in vaccination on a local basis.

So I will just focus on England and hope that towers in other countries are able to follow a similar pattern.

It does look as though we are going to be able to warm up to ringing 'normally' again by the end of June – Stage 4 as described in the Government's roadmap. The announcements say that there are not going to be any restrictions after that, however we cannot take that for granted, especially as there is a working party considering social distancing which is expected to report before Stage 4 starts. That could mean that facemasks and some degree of social distancing continue for some time.

Before that time, Stage 3 (no earlier than 17 May) promises the 'Rule of Six' indoors, subject to social distancing. That should put us back in the position we were in last

summer and so able to start getting back into the swing of things. It's not a very big window, but enough to restore confidence, find which muscles have gone to sleep, and how soft our hands are!

Young ringers may be able to ring a bit earlier. Just before Christmas we had agreed with the CofE Recovery Group that young ringers could benefit from some specific guidance for 'supervised children's activities in out-of-school settings'. This should be allowed in Stage 2, which starts on 12 April at the earliest.

It will have restrictions – expect facemasks and some social distancing, but at least we can get some ringing underway.

During any of these stages, ringers may still be cautious as not all ringers will be vaccinated, particularly young people. There is still the risk of transmission and infection for us to be aware of; vaccination is not a passport. Large well ventilated ringing chambers carry a significantly decreased risk of viral transmission than small airless ones, and this may drive where we focus our ringing to start with.

We will also need to give careful consideration to face to face teaching – that may still need to wait a while.

The main word of caution is that the Government is at pains to stress that the dates they have given are the earliest possible, so commitments made for shortly after those deadlines should be made with that in mind. However, it does now feel like the end of an incredibly difficult year for ringing is in sight.

<https://ccbr.org.uk/coronavirus/>

**Simon Linford, President, CCCBR**

## Recovery Planning

So far we've set up 18 surveys for Recovery Champions whilst others have sent out their own or started other types of consultation exercises. We've started to receive some feedback:

- Between 7 to 15% of ringers are expected not to return
- Impact is patchy with some towers expecting no problems and others expecting to lose 3 or more ringers which will have a serious impact on the viability of the band
- Ringers are concerned about their fitness to ring, both mental and physical
- There is widespread concern about the impact of changes by the Church to the long term future of ringing

Such information gathering exercises give an understanding of the scale of the problem in a local area and where intervention is most needed.

It's true that for some towers there will be no impact (what's all the fuss about?) but for others it will be devastating. Forewarned is forearmed, you can start talking and planning with those bands who are most affected and try to find

solutions that will keep the band viable or at least individual ringers ringing.

At this stage retention is key. There is little that we can do to influence the future of individual churches but there is lots of easy stuff that can be organised to help ringers return. Most ringers will get on the end of a bell rope and it will all come back (probably alongside some blisters) however the message is strong and clear that some will need nurturing. A great way of showing people that we appreciate and care for them is to put some thought into making every ringer's return a positive one. After all, while some of us can't wait to get back, others have found interests and ways of giving to the church or community that we will have to compete with.

For more information about surveys and other issues mentioned here have a look at the Survival and Recovery Toolbox at

<http://ringingteachers.org/survival-and-recovery-toolbox>

**Lesley Belcher, Chair of ART**

## Using Zoom to get fit for ringing

One of the most frequently visited pages in the new Survival and Recovery toolbox is "getting fit to ring". It is one of the pages Lesley focused on during the first zoom meeting we held for the Recovery Champions, and it highlights an issue about which many people are concerned. Those of us who have had a break from ringing before, can remember the sore shoulders and hands following the first tentative practice night after resuming ringing and we want to see if we can do anything to ease us back into things.

It will be over a year since most of us have done any ringing and some will have developed stiff shoulders, back problems and almost certainly soft hands. We are concerned that this might prevent us from ringing.

The ringing physiotherapists have been helpful in providing a list of exercises and warnings about how to exercise safely. They also stress an exercise class will be more successful if it is led by an instructor. Within our Guild, one of our previous District Secretaries is a personal trainer. Clare agreed to run a zoom session, based on the toolbox exercises, for all the District Secretaries. It was great fun and afterwards people commented that their shoulders seemed less stiff and it helped to loosen some muscles. We were unsure how an exercise class would work on zoom, but Pilates and Yoga classes are all virtual at the moment and Clare has been running a number of keep fit classes on line. It was not intimidating seeing others doing the exercises on the zoom

call and Clare was encouraging and able to make sure we did things correctly. She was also very professional and had a cool approach.

As this went so well, Clare has been asked to run a series of three sessions for our Guild members. There will be a short personal fitness questionnaire to complete before embarking on the programme and numbers will be limited so Clare can keep an eye on us while we are doing the exercises. There is no need to move furniture or have special clothes for the classes, just comfortable clothes and a chair, like a dining room chair, to use when needed. Classes last for 30 minutes and include warm up and cooling down exercises. After the class, there is the opportunity to chat and catch up with old friends. A nominal charge has been made for attending the course, which includes a donation to a ringing charity.

We recognise this is a different approach, but hope it will be a useful tool to get fit for ringing and also to keep in touch with friends.

For those interested in yoga, there was an article published in a 2019 edition of The Ringing World -Yoga for ringers, outlining helpful yoga poses specifically targeted at bell ringers, which some may find helpful.

**Annie Hall, Coventry DG**

# National Call Change Competition

Many bands may reset their expectations after a year without ringing. At least in the short term, the goal may just be to get all our ringers back to ringing well and with confidence. Thoughts of progression in method ringing may be a secondary consideration for many bands.

This could be a time for more focus on call changes, not as a means to an end but as an end in itself. I have gone on record many times now saying that call change ringing should play a greater part in ringing throughout the ringing world. Method ringing is not the only measure of success, and many more bands outside those in the South West's call change towers could find fulfilment by pursuing well struck call changes as their goal. During a discussion I had with a group of ringers in Suffolk during the first lockdown, one ringer said, "if I go back and tell my band they can ring call changes and not worry about Bob Doubles any more they will love me forever."

In the South West, and Devon in particular, there is a culture of using competition as a focal point for call change bands. Unlike the 'Annual 6-bell Contest' that is on many a Branch or Association calendar, there could be as many as a 30 call change competitions during the Devonshire Association's 'season'. Such competitions provide a focus for the improvement of striking as well as social events that mix bands and ringers. Their competitions have a fixed set of changes and include ringing up and down.

Competition call change ringing between local bands could have a place in ringing anywhere, and to that end a national

call change ringing competition would be an interesting addition to the ringing calendar.

There are many details to be worked out. I think it is important that this is for local bands so that it really gets us thinking about performance as a regular team, rather than just an association finding half a dozen people to form a band. This should be about local bands who ring regularly together trying to perform an excellent piece of ringing that provides focus for practice and service ringing. It would need regional heats and we need to see how that would fit in with existing local competitions.

I had it in mind that the final would be in the south west somewhere so that the best of the rest could compete against the Devon (and Cornwall) specialists. The YouTube competition showcased the genre to a wider audience and the standard that can be achieved. In the meantime, how many bands would be up for a bit of practice (at the callings at least) and would like to enter a call change competition on Ringing Room? I know it will lack almost all of the features of a proper Devon competition, but for the vast majority who have not even been to one of those it might help establish the principles and get some competitive juices flowing.

In order to give you plenty of time to practise, and also work out how we're going to do it, this will be on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April. Details will be announced shortly.

**Simon Linfoord, President, CCCBR**

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## A real life story of call changes in Ringing Room

I have come late to Ringing Room. Having retired, we moved, during lockdown, to be nearer to our grandchild and I found myself for the first time outside the network of ringers who knew me and who wanted to ring with me (for all sorts of inexplicable reasons). By a circuitous route I managed to get invited to a local Ringing Room practice.

At this first practice, I tried to find that corner in the tower where coats are hung so I could sit under them and not be noticed too much. But Ringing Room is a tower without these corners. And no one has to hang their coat up. I rang and probably didn't make too many mistakes and so was invited back the next week, and the next.

Then there was a discussion about call changes. In the ordinary course of things I really enjoy ringing and calling call changes. We used to ring the Devon 60 on Thirds most Sundays when we were allowed to climb the stairs to the tower. Before I knew it, I said that I had called the Devon changes, adding "probably hundreds of times". It was a statement of fact, but sounded like a boast.

I immediately wished I could swallow the words except a ripple of anticipation had passed around the band, along with

a relief expressed by our Ringing Mistress that she would not have to learn the callings. I was committed.

I've never got to grips with call changes on handbells, along with many other tower based change ringers. My expectation was that call changes in the virtual world would be a bit like that experience: tried once and never again. The seven day wait was a nervous one. The night arrived and I logged into the practice trying to hide in that corner hoping they'd forget that I had said I would call the changes but also part of me hoping to be asked.

Sure enough, towards the end, the Ringing Mistress called for the call changes and my moment had arrived. Ringing the treble, it's the bell that moves around the most, we set off. It is hard when you cannot read the body language of the other ringers but everyone behaved themselves, even when the conductor corrected a miscall, and we duly came round, much to my relief. Once we had got underway, it was much the same as calling in a tower minus the smiles and frowns.

They seemed to enjoy it. It wasn't as hard as I had anticipated. They want to have another go...

**Dickens**

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## Learning the Ropes Call Change Scheme



### Learning the Ropes

If you are faced with teaching a new band, or are adding new recruits to a small band without much method ringing experience, why not think about focusing on call changes? Not just your usual “Queens and back” called by Jim from the tenor. Focus on them in such a way as to get the whole band involved, including Martha, who only rings the third and Eric who can only ring the fifth. Getting everyone involved means just that. Create some targets and work towards them in small steps.

**Target 1.** Everyone should be happy to ring any bell in the circle. If you are practising in Ringing Room, there is absolutely no reason why people shouldn't move around and ring different bells to call changes. As you practise your call change sequences, make sure each of your band experiences them from every bell. People might need to do a little work on their handling technique in order to ring bells they are not used to when they get back into the tower, however, this should be part of your plan.

**Target 2.** Everyone should know how the call changes work. Ensure your ringers have a really good understanding of how the calls are made i.e. “2-3” moves 2 up the row and 3 down the row.

This really reduces the chances of striking errors – you should be confident about your move if you know your position in the row and which bell you will be following, should the call affect you. A very good way of teaching this is to ask each ringer to call themselves from the back position down to lead in one exercise and from lead to the back position in another.

**Target 3.** Every member of the band can call the call changes. Agree some call change sequences and ask everyone to learn them. Start simply with exercises like the two described above. Just like method ringing, you will have a much better chance of giving a great performance in a striking competition if everyone knows the method, or in this case the sequence. If your ringers have no experience of calling changes a good way to start them off is for them to call and observe from outside the circle. When they are ready to try calling and ringing at the same time, let the confident callers have a go first and once people are familiar with actually ringing the sequence, encourage the others to have a go.

Ultimately, your band could progress to ring some really quite complex sequences of call changes. Working towards this together with a goal of improving listening and striking skills should instil your band with a sense of purpose. Aim high and you never know, your band might be winning the next branch striking contest ringing “60 on thirds”!

**Clare McArdle, ART Tutor**

## Building good relationships with your church – a case study

One of the key things we need to consider is how we continue to maintain and build good relationships with the church. Are you keeping in touch with your church community? How is ringing included in your church's plans?

Here's a great example from Harrow Weald of what can be done to keep our connection with the church with virtual service ringing.

<http://ringingteachers.org/survival-and-recovery-toolbox/good-relations-church>

Many years ago, All Saints' in Harrow Weald (Middlesex) was home to a thriving band of ringers. By late 2019, with only a couple of members still ringing and no regular practices, their once-a-month service ringing could occur only if supplemented by other ringers.

At this time a training band for local foundation level ringers had just been established. But we were nomadic, with no home tower in which to hold practices. So I asked if we could

hold a monthly practice at All Saints: 'yes'. We managed three before lockdown! And 'in return' we augmented the monthly service ring so that all eight bells were in action.

Lockdown shunted our activities online; eKenton was created in ringing Room. Continuing a monthly (virtual) service ring seemed sensible for a number of reasons: it maintained our routine, provided a purpose for an online ring, and was an excuse to sustain contact with the church. I keep the vicar, churchwarden and tower captain informed to promote awareness of our activities. We ask that the congregation is told when we ring; and I send a follow-up email to the church contacts, with screenshots.

As soon as restrictions eased I arranged for a bell health check. The ensuing chimes produced a flood of enquiring calls to the church. Well...we'd been heard! When services resumed I asked if we could ring again for real: 'yes'. Covid-safety meant that we could only ring on three so I asked if we could maximise rope availability by returning the following week: 'yes'. I constructed a rota. Popping into the church to

sanitise our hands enabled us to introduce ourselves. We were seen...and invited to return. Father John wrote: *With deep and grateful thanks for the wonderful novelty of having bells every Sunday before worship!*

Next we were asked to ring for a wedding. Due to the unique circumstances, we waived our fees! Appreciation and thanks were received. We have asked that the TC represent us on the PCC when future wedding fees and other bell-related matters are discussed.

Further restrictions stopped play once more but we still tried to make a noise! We offered to ring hand bells at the carol service, though additional restrictions scuppered that too...but the church had noticed. Two of us (a family 'group') rang awesome Rounds and Call Changes on 2 (don't laugh – it's crazy times) on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Again, we were thanked.

Meanwhile, the Rector at All Saints', Westbury (Wiltshire) enquired what virtual service ringing entailed. I suggested that eKenton could ring for the White Horse Ministry once a

month, creating interest both for eKenton ringers and for the Westbury churches. Ringing was advertised to the congregation, paving the way for the return of the resident band. We have a lovely screenshot of the Rector and her daughter joining us on Zoom at the start of service ringing.

Currently, although there is no physical ringing, we continue the monthly virtual ring for All Saints', Harrow Weald. The previously almost silent tower is unlikely to stay silent when ringing resumes. I have a band of ringers champing at the bit, ready and waiting...and Father John has written to say: *You are welcome anytime!*

### Sonia Field, Harrow Weald

It's quite easy to make a recording of your Ringing Room session once you know how. To find out how visit:

<http://ringingteachers.org/survival-and-recovery-toolbox/ringing-room-recordings>.



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