

South East District Ringing Master's Report 2017

Firstly, I'm sorry this is long, but I have a lot to report!

It was an honour to be elected as District Ringing Master a year ago and over the past twelve months I have tried to get around the various practice nights in our district to meet as many of you as possible. My apologies to those towers I have not yet managed to visit (particularly Tattlingstone, Barking, Otley & Pettistree where my regular commitments elsewhere have meant that free Monday and Wednesday evenings have been difficult to find).

Communication with various tower correspondents has enabled me to provide a number of updates to the practice night listings on the Guild website though, frustratingly, one or two emails sent to tower correspondents met with no response at all. May I urge all of you to check that the current Guild website listings for your own tower are correct? Visitors to Suffolk rely on the information on our website and it is essential that it is as accurate as possible. Please don't leave this to someone else.

Upon my election I inherited a list of pre-arranged district practices and was not able to attend all of them because of work or long-arranged domestic commitments. I would therefore like to register my thanks to Ralph Earey for running what turned out to be an extremely popular Stedman dominated practice at Hollesley in January and to Mark Ogden for standing in for me at Copdock in September, though that practice turned out to be less well attended. Indeed, I am particularly grateful to Mark not only for that but also for his valuable support at other practices and for enthusiastically picking up the baton for the Suffolk Young Ringers' events. If you have young ringers in your tower please do make sure that Mark knows about them; he is working hard to gather the momentum required to draw in as many young ringers as possible and deserves our full support.

In February we met at Sproughton and it was super to see such a large number of ringers of all abilities supporting that practice. March took us to Grundisburgh where attendance was also good. In April we held our District Training Day at St. Mary-le-Tower which, based on the popularity of the Hollesley practice in January, was on Stedman with a particular focus on Triples. The course was fully booked with a theory session taken by myself followed by ringing at SMLT with support from others. My thanks again to all who helped make this training session a success. I would welcome suggestions for our 2018 Training Day. I have some ideas, but I'd really rather the focus came from you.

May saw our annual District Striking Competition held at Bredfield with 10 teams entering. The Cecil Pipe Memorial Bell (method ringing competition) was won by St. Mary-le-Tower (with Pettistree following closely in second place) and the David Barnard Memorial Trophy (call change competition) was won by Debenham. David and Gill Sparling were the judges. I'm sure there are more bands out there who should consider entering the contest in 2018; with call-changes the minimum requirement it really is a contest that's open to all. Later in May district representation at the Guild competitions was lower than perhaps we would have liked because so many people (myself included) were unavailable. Congratulations to Hollesley who won the Lester Brett Call Change Competition. SMLT were joint winners of the Mitson Shield 6 bell competition with Pakenham but could not assemble a band for the Rose Trophy 8 bell competition which was won by the NE District. The SE District Team (thanks again to Mark for co-ordinating) finished 4th but with only 6 faults separating 1st and 4th this was a commendable effort from a band who don't ring together regularly - something to

build on certainly. Neal Dodge and I appeared on Radio Suffolk the Sunday before the Guild Competitions to talk about them live on air on the Jon Wright Breakfast Show - all useful PR.

As a district we visited Campsea Ashe and Wickham Market in June with a decent number of people attending. I started the year with the thought of having “featured methods” at district practices as a way of encouraging people to try something new. The idea here was to try and move those who ring Plain Bob Doubles and Plain Bob Minor one step forwards (or even sideways) by using the skills they already have to ring something different. Initially this seemed to work well; we rang lots of Double Court at Sproughton for example, and introduced the concept of rule based learning rather than sole reliance on the blue line. I tried other methods at subsequent practices but began to question this approach after our visit to Clopton & Otley in July where attendance was low and none of the relatively new band at the former came to ring. Were featured methods discouraging some from attending I wondered – perhaps mistakenly believing that the practice was only for those who could ring the featured method(s)? I would welcome your thoughts on this please. What do you want from our District Practices? Are you happy just to turn up and ring the usual selection of methods, or do you welcome the idea of trying something that may be generally rung less frequently to provide a bit of variety? This really comes down to how much homework people are prepared to do in advance I guess. They are District *Practices* after all; the opportunity to practice something you’ve already learnt beforehand!

In the summer I received two referrals from the Guild website (via Neal Dodge) of people wishing to learn to ring in the Ipswich area. Not being really sure where to direct them I have been teaching them on Wednesday evenings at Sproughton (with help from Sally & Ralph) before, and during, the main practice. One is currently on an extended visit to Australia where she has been able to continue with her ringing in Perth. Two others came forward following the SMLT Open Day in October but both of these expressions of interest highlighted that whilst we may have facilities in place to tempt people to think about learning to ring, we may need to think more about what we do with them when people do come forward to give them the rope time they need to make sufficient progress to keep them motivated.

On 12th July Sue and I were delighted to be able to join John Girt and Roger Coley at Kingsfleet Primary School in Felixstowe for a morning of ringing related activities organised and run by Jacky Savage for one of the classes there. This was a repeat of a similar session run in 2016 which resulted in some young recruits (and accompanying parents) coming forward to learn to ring at St. John’s, Felixstowe. The session in class involved an explanation of change ringing, identifying parts of a bell (John & Roger had brought along both a model bell and some ringing bits and pieces; rope, clapper, etc) and the pupils tapped out some rounds and call changes using chime bars. I understand that Jacky has another handful of volunteers who would like to learn to ring as a result of this session. This mirrors very much the excellent work that John, Shirley and Roger have been doing with the link they have established between St. Margaret’s Church and the neighbouring primary school in Ipswich, where they also been teaching some youngsters. This is clearly an approach that produces results so if you’re looking to recruit it’s possibly an idea worth exploring.

In August we held a quarter peal and meal afternoon, ringing 4 simultaneous quarter peals and meeting for a meal afterwards at the Westerfield Swan. Unfortunately I could not participate as this was the first day of our previously arranged summer holiday but I understand that all went well and it was pleasing that all of the QP attempts were successful. I received a very complimentary email from a resident of Henley who said how much he had enjoyed hearing those bells that afternoon. This was probably the most difficult event of the

year to organise though as it's virtually impossible to keep everyone happy and it relies on an exact number of ringers coming forward for the bells available. Do you want to do this again next year, or would you prefer something with a higher "social" element such as a mini outing in one of the other districts, say, two or three towers in the afternoon followed by the meal in the evening? Feedback please...

In October I decided to test the water at the district practice at Ashbocking by pitching it at "grass roots" level, advertising a session to concentrate on rounds and call changes particularly. I had intended to include an element on listening skills, expecting a handful of people to attend with only a few, more experienced, helpers. A quick head count on the day indicated that we had 30 ringers there and, since it was raining heavily (preventing any "listening" activities taking place outside) I had to exercise flexibility to make sure everyone was included as much as possible. Pleasingly, those who came to focus on rounds and call changes all had several rings with a band of more experienced ringers around them and spoke very positively about the opportunity provided. It was pleasing to see so many of our district's more advanced ringers not only turning up to support this, but also making the effort to chat to those with less experience to pass on tips and advice. It's exactly the sort of thing we should be doing. I will look to repeat this level of practice since it is evident that not only does it have a disproportionately positive impact on those attending but it also brings more ringers to our events who are perhaps not as involved with the district at the moment.

In theory District Quarter Peal Fortnight ran from 16th – 29th October. I say "in theory" since only 4 quarter peals were rung and at least 3 of them would have been attempted anyway since they were at towers whose habit is to attempt a quarter peal before their weekly practice. There's really only so much that one individual, such as the Ringing Master, can contribute towards an event like this and this really is where you, as members, need to make the effort to make the event worthwhile, given that you wish it to continue?

In November our District Outing went to south Essex where we visited Canewdon (10), Rayleigh (8), Basildon (8), Fobbing (8), Galleywood (8) and Writtle (10). Just over two dozen people took part and there was some nice ringing, a decent lunch and plenty of socialising. The absence of six bell towers was quite deliberate; the vast majority of district members do most of their ringing on 6 and this was the opportunity to try something new. My thanks to those who kindly agreed to share the running of the ringing with me (Tom Scase, Mark Ogden, Richard Munnings & Mike Whitby) and to Sue for wielding the clipboard, collecting money, dispensing donations, checking lunch orders and generally keeping everything on track. Finally, thanks also to everyone who came on the outing. As I announced at Writtle it's all very well organising events such as this, but no use whatsoever unless people support them. It was pleasing that so many did!

I have organised an Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) Module 1 Course to run at St. Matthew's, Ipswich on 27th January which I hope will not only bring ART accreditation to more members in our district but also provide valuable teaching skills and support to towers in our district that either have people already wanting to learn, or who will be recruiting soon (St. Margaret's, St. Matthew's, Creetingham & Felixstowe immediately spring to mind). My thanks go to Matthew Thomas at St. Matthew's, Ipswich who has arranged the venue for this course which is fully booked. It was pleasing that the Guild agreed to contribute towards the cost of this course; it's exactly the sort of thing where Guild support (financial or otherwise) makes a real difference. I am well aware of the commitment involved in following the ART scheme and I expect that we will only make a success of this with full and committed involvement and plenty of support from others. Nevertheless, we must continue to recruit and teach or ringing will not thrive and ART does seem to have an excellent record on

retaining learners, which is so often the biggest challenge. Personally, I am greatly looking forward to this course. The recently announced idea from Central Council to recruit and train 1,400 new ringers nationwide in 2018 (the number lost in WW1) as a way of marking "Armistice 100" is ambitious indeed. If it is to succeed we will all need to do our bit.

Finally, I have a couple of pleas to make... Much of our communication now takes place by email. However, I know from speaking to other Guild and District Officers that emails are also very easy to misread, or even ignore completely. I realise that some people do not have email, but for those of you that do, please read what is sent and, should a communication require a response, please respond as quickly as you can. Secondly, I would like also to make a plea for a greater sharing of resources than we currently manage in our district. A great proportion of the practices I have visited over the year have said something along the lines of "what a shame you can't come every week!" This was not because of who I am, but rather because Sue and I were the extra couple of ringers that they needed that week to make all the difference; it really didn't matter who those ringers were, they just needed a couple more people. If a few more of us were able to visit just one more practice occasionally I believe that it would make a massive difference to many of our towers.

Thank you for reading this and making it to the end. I hope that you can see that I've been busy! I am happy to stand for re-election at the ADM.

Jonathan Williamson
District Ringing Master