

Notes taken from the TDGR Workshop on Recruitment and Retention

(R&R) hosted by Matthew Laurence of the CCCBR (Central Council of Church Bell Ringers) Volunteer and Leadership (V & L) Workgroup and assisted by the ART (Association of Ringing Teachers) 10 point plan. This workshop was held virtually using Zoom on Sunday 2nd August 2020 at 20:00 (During the Covid-19 Pandemic in the UK).



Workshop

Truro Diocesan Guild of Ringers

Get involved!
Lets talk about Recruitment and Retention

Matthew Laurence from
CCCBR Volunteer & Leadership

Association of Ringing Teachers

BELL RINGERS URGENTLY NEEDED

"Ready when you are, George..."

These notes should be viewed alongside the PowerPoint slide pack titled: Virtual Recruitment & Retention Workshop PDF (1346) PDF.

The whole workshop pack should be available on the CCCBR website very soon.

Sonia Field: Volunteer & Leadership CCCBR R&R Workshop training rep for Middlesex Association written recent columns in ringing world helping David smith. She has run sessions on Ringing Room (a virtual bell tower) during lockdown.

Jo Harris: A recent new recruit, taught by Sonia Field.

Matthew: an ordinary ringer from Shropshire, Passionate about recruitment & retention, V & L and this workshop. Before lockdown he was on the verge of publishing R& R workshop pack nationally for the CCCBR.

There were approximately 23 other participants present (members of the TDGR) on the Zoom session.

Introduction to thinking about the subject of Recruitment and Retention across the TDGR:

What the situation like in your tower / area? Mixture of successes at retention of ringers – some have lots of ringers and we need to understand why.

Really learn from those who are doing it well and see if we can replicate it

Over the past 2 years, we've recruited 10 new ringers at Lilleshall (Matthew's local tower).

Sometimes we forget what a fantastic hobby it is. Sometimes were too shy. It is important to highlight what we enjoy about our hobby.

Jo Harris's experience at starting to ring: Lucky to have Sonia as a teacher, been ringing almost 2 years for the *Ringling Remembers* recruitment drive. A friend heard Christopher O'Mahony on the radio, "I always thought you had to be a member of the church to ring the tower bells".

"I've always loved the sound and it was a shame that I didn't take the hobby up sooner in life. I fell in love with it from the first moment. Sonia has been very encouraging and signed me up for everything that was applicable. Always pushed me to go to other practices. As an adult coming into learning, I'm not a natural at handling, but I stuck at it. I might have fallen by the way if I had only been given 10 mins per week, but I went to a few other practices with people at my own level, which focussed on learners."

Negatives: a few along the way

It's extremely easy as an adult to be discouraged when you get that little eye-roll when they say, "I suppose we better do some rounds and call changes for the learners".

Banding ability to practice nights might be a solution. Targeted practice at people at certain stages would be better.

Be sensitive about hammering on about getting young ringers, when you have ringers learning and other folk in the band who are a bit older and cannot help their age. Older folk can commit more time and they are steady members of the band.

I like to ring for a purpose and appreciate Sunday morning ringing. The *Ringling Remembers* campaign was a great push, which had personal significance.

Sonia has been very aware that there are a lot of people at my level which might give up.

At a theoretical level, we are further ahead by using Ringing Room and Zoom. Try to keep in touch, it has been a lifeline. Maintain the connection, we have even been able to do service ringing on-line.

Wellbeing is a massive benefit of bellringing.

Bellringing is being used by a local at Matt's tower as a bit of 'me-time' – selling the physical & mental benefits of ringing.

Attracting volunteers – how to attract busy people, we need to do lots of different things. Don't view R&R as an activity that just happens once a year, it needs to be constant.

Tower open days can be a bit hit & miss.

Keep trying different things & figure out what works in your area.

Try to get the message that it's not paid professionals, you don't have to be a member of the church, bells aren't rung by robots or mechanical systems.

The days of attracting new ringers through the church, family or friends are gone and not to be taken for granted anymore.

Recruitment toolbox ten-point plan - go away, ponder and think about having an in-depth workshop session in smaller groups within the whole TDGR or your local area (cluster or hub).

You can get an ART affiliated person to run these workshops, but equally you can do it with any enthusiastic person!

Points of discussion around the 10 Point Plan

1. Raising awareness of bellringing in the local community.

Think positive about your ringing – make it known why your ringing, weddings, special occasions as well as services. Phil Tremain at St. Columb Major already does this on Facebook Group – Bellringing in Cornwall and they have more people following the bellringing page than the church page!

Get the basics right – make sure your tower contacts are up to date, any info in the public domain is accurate, e.g. correct practice night of the week listed in Dove.

Join-in with any local events as a group of bell ringers, make sure your seen as a group of people enjoying each other's company & having fun.

If there is an activity going on in the church, why not offer bellringing taster sessions at the same time?

Why not try local radio or paper – they are always grateful for any material.

Scouts or Guides – we have a TDGR badge for this purpose Robert Pearce designed this – details can be found here: <https://tdgr.org.uk/guild/guild-personnel/education/>

2. What do you want to achieve?

Aim for about 2.5 ringers per rope in your tower, so for a 6 bell tower, ideally, you need 15 ringers to be fully 'staffed' throughout summer and other busy holiday periods, ringing for weddings, services and other special occasions.

Tailor your recruitment drive according to how many ringers you need. Also have a good look at the teaching resources that you have available in your existing band.

Consider getting trained up, enrol on ART module 1 course, maybe for extra confidence or just a 'refresher' or maybe join forces with other local towers to enhance your teaching resources.

We know that we can't physically teach bell handling at the moment (due to social distancing), but we can plan, so we can hit the ground running when we are permitted to teach bell handling once more.

3. Who to recruit?

Go for anyone! Don't have any pre-conceived ideas. Anyone who is interested.

School children – got to make it appealing to the parents also, as it will be them who will be adjusting their lives to accommodate this extra hobby.

Taylor the message – don't be too 'anoraky', keep it simple, only go into details if they ask. Don't be concerned about DofE schemes dropping out, if they don't stick at it in the short-term, you never know when they might resume, as long as it was a positive learning experience, they'll always be positive about it.

Keep a look out for lapsed ringers, welcome them into the band & make sure the reason that they gave up before does not occur again.

New folk who have recently moved into the area, for example a new housing estate may have a 'Come and Meet' event that local bell ringers could help with.

Sam Nankervis – TDGR President said, "If you do have a lot of learners at the same time, don't be afraid to ask the guild and district officers for help".

Some towers have a waiting list as they recognise that they do not have the resources within their band to teach a lot of ringers all at the same time.

When bell ringers move between areas in the country – use the bellringing network, contact a key ringer in the recipient area to issue an invite to the ringer who is moving area.

Don't be negative about teaching children, many towers are sometimes afraid of investing the time to teach them because "they'll just move away" or "go to university", but you really have to bear in mind that we're recruiting and teaching the ringers of the future.

Mainstay of Matt's band tend to be aged 40-60, they have more free time.

4. What are you going to do? Planning your event...

What can you do now, whilst we cannot physically teach?

Arrange Zoom sessions & Ringing Room 'towers' – set up your own, Sonia has designed a **Virtual Tower Tour** (I will try to get hold of this and make it available to the TDGR alongside these notes and the PDF Slides) which could be adjusted to serve for any tower with a little modification. This will introduce new folk to the ringing environment.

Small groups of socially distanced handbells. Take care to manage expectations of new recruits, we all know that real ringing is hugely different from ringing in Ringing Room or on a simulator.

Bell Ringing Recruitment & Retention Facebook group – please join.

5. Publicity

Posters around the village, press releases – can be being prepared now.

Be clear about intended purpose; recruitment or raising awareness.

Use appropriate media – posters & leaflets vs social media Facebook/Instagram.

Face to face contact, get to know people, use the personal touch – word of mouth

Please don't use the words "recruitment crisis", or "dying art". Stick to the positives.

CCCBR help can be found here: <https://cccb.org.uk/resources/publicity-material/>

6. Holding a successful event

Plan your event. Check your message with non-ringing friends. Learn from other peoples or past experiences.

Make sure you have got all the resources you need. Guild resources (banners etc...) are available from the Guild Librarian, a contact form can be found here:

<https://tdgr.org.uk/guild/guild-personnel/librarian/>

Think about how you record interested people's contact details for follow up (bear in mind GDPR) & how you give out yours.

Leaflets: think about utilising a QR code to save paper & reduce shared contact points with smart device users.

Prepare your tower open day or recruitment afternoon risk assessment, make sure the incumbent is on-board.

All this can be done in advance for smooth operation & stress-free event. Plan the next event or your first taster sessions, so you can tell people what the next meet-up opportunity is.

7. Follow-up

Use the email addresses & phone numbers that you collected, do not rely on email alone, use the phone to follow up in a timely manner. Be personable and quick. Don't be a double-glazing salesman about it, but get it done.

8. Intensive / Structured Training

First steps of bell handling training should be done as quickly as possible really – helps with building muscle memory & confidence quickly.

Studies have shown that 15 hours of bellringing as quick as possible will result in 80% retention rate if you are able to do intensive training when teaching bell handling.

People expect to be taught intensively these days; homework & theory sessions can also be part of it. Be careful to work on integrating the new member of the band firmly into the band and make them feel welcome & valued.

There are towers out there where it can be too full-on if you do too much recruitment all at once. The Ledbury branch of the Herefordshire Diocesan Guild, there's only 8 towers, they cluster together for recruitment purposes. They have one big recruitment drive once a year and then after that, they remain joined to facilitate a mass intensive training that is completed at one tower, 2 hours per evening and Saturday morning over the course of one week, they then re-distribute the learners who can now handle a bell. There is no point trying to do this kind of thing if you have no means of teaching bell handling to a high standard, as you will struggle to retain your new recruits. ART courses are highly recommended (even as a refresher or just to gain confidence).

High quality teaching is really important. Matt went onto explain that in his area, lots of ringers have been held back by having a poor, inefficient bell handling style, this really has inhibited the amount of progress they can make within ringing and it's not the students fault, it's the fault of the teacher(s). There are lots of tools available within the ART framework, which can really help. Nobody learns in the same way, so as many different ways of teaching, explaining and demonstrating the same thing can be very useful to have in your back-pocket.

ART is not the only way of successfully teaching new ringers, but experienced ringers should know that if you're already an experienced bell handling teacher, it is also possible to become an ART Mentor and be able to share your experiences and knowledge more widely if that's something that you would like to do.

9. Keeping your new ringers interested

Recognising that the early stages of learning about bellringing and how to handle a bell can be fun, fast and exciting, but there does reach a stage where the excitement and the attention wanes a bit, which is natural progression. The trick is to find ways of motivating and interesting your new recruits (and that can be a challenge in the virtual world).

Some ideas (using Zoom) might include:

- Plain hunting with eyes closed
- Theory based sessions using ringing room
- Social chats or quizzes
- 50 ringing things can be a source of inspiration
<http://www.learningtheropes.org/50-things>
- Organising virtual tower practices, maybe with a specific aim
- Make sure learners are invited to other virtual opportunities, across districts and guilds if possible.

The most important thing to do is don't do the eye roll – whilst saying, "we better have some rounds for..."

Try to think about it's not just the next generation of ringers that we have to train, it's also the next generations of leaders, tower captains, guild officers, steeple keepers, teachers, helpers, tower secretaries etc... etc.. all the other positions of responsibility within the ringing world.

10. Making recruitment work for everyone in the band

Sometimes it can feel like a big-ask to squeeze everyone's training requirements into just the one practice night. How to manage the transition from having no learners to having ringers of all abilities in your band. How do you keep everybody happy within the limited time?

Think about the progression of your existing ringers. Think about separate sessions for learners or more advanced practice nights or time zoning practice nights. If new recruits are successfully integrated into the existing band, the whole band should see benefits of having those new recruits present, if they don't something has gone wrong. Always listen to what your band is telling you.

TCs might find benefit in planning their practice nights in advance and taking an active approach to asking each person in advance of the practice night "what would you like to learn"?

Tower captain/teacher burn-out can be fatal and even disastrous to a local bellringing area. Sometimes its demoralising when new recruits leave. Don't neglect your own ringing needs and health. Delegate responsibilities; assign a tower social secretary and teachers within the band. Sometimes a separate pair of eyes and a different teacher can get over a hurdle with a learner.

Key messages

Always evolve the plan, things can change, respond to change positively, find the opportunities.

Ringing Teachers must focus on quality teaching and follow on with equally good foundation skills.

Teach in small groups if possible, camaraderie always helps. Usually learners support each other and make it fun! Use your newest recruits to advertise the positives about ringing!

***Do something – Take action! ***

Don't just put it to the back of your mind and think that someone else will take the initiative, become an ambassador for bellringing and help our bells continue to ring for many generations into the future!

A note on Safeguarding

Safeguarding wasn't mentioned as part of this workshop, but I feel it should be considered alongside the information provided, especially when planning any recruitment. You should already be covered by a Safeguarding Risk Assessment and Policy within your normal bellringing activities within your tower. If you embark on recruitment, you may find that your safeguarding position changes, and you should check this and make every effort to ensure you and the rest of your band are covered adequately. If you need help, we have access to Diocesan Safeguarding Officers:

<https://trurodiocese.org.uk/resources/safeguarding/> and our very own TDGR Guild Safeguarding Officer who can be contacted using this link: <https://tdgr.org.uk/guild/guild-personnel/safeguarding/>

Hayley Young 10/08/2020