

Mobile belfries – some tips for engaging with young people



The new Touring Tower

Mobile Belfries are an excellent way of taking ringing out of the tower, where ringers are often hidden away upstairs, and out to engage face to face with members of the public. To maximise success, it is important to plan for each event in advance and to have good follow up in place for afterwards.

In launching our new third mobile belfry 'The Touring Tower' the Trustees wanted to encourage their use with young people and have set reduced hire rates for this.

They are proud that the Touring Tower's first event was on 23rd and 24th May at St Edward's Schol in Romford. This was part of a trial of lesson plans, devised by Jason Hughes, for school-teachers to deliver to their pupils, incorporating different aspects of bell ringing into the national curriculum.

In the Autumn, all three mobile belfries are likely to be in use at freshers' fairs throughout the country to help encourage non ringing freshers to take up ringing. ART is supporting this and providing teacher training modules to help existing students learn to teach, helping generate the leaders of the future. This has proved very successful over the past couple of years, and our third belfry will enable us to expand on this work.



Between 27th July and 2nd August the Touring Tower is also at the Essex International Jamboree, attended by around 5,000 young people along with their 1,200 leaders.

For safeguarding and GDPR reasons we cannot collect the contact information for each young person, but we will be making a note of their Scout/Guide group and encouraging leaders to arrange visits for

their whole group to a local tower after the event. ART's admin team will be helping to put the leaders in touch.

We will also be publicising the fact that the young people can use bellringing as one of the activities needed to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme.

The Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) is an ideal way of introducing young people to bellringing and motivating them to become good ringers.

Planning an open evening

Before you hold an open evening, you need to consider what you are trying to achieve. Then plan for it, and any follow up afterwards.

There is some excellent advice in the Ten Point Plan developed by ART and the CCCBR, which can be downloaded from the recruitment and retention resources on the ART Website www.bellringing.org.

Just raising awareness of bellringing amongst a whole Scout or Girlguide group is a worthwhile aim itself. Scouts or Guides who become bellringers later, will have the benefit that their peers know that bellringing is something interesting and different, not something that is stupid or funny, or that only old people and churchy people do.

Scouts and Girlguides

The Scout movement caters for boys and girls from age 4 to 24:

- Squirrels (4-6)
- Beavers (6-8)
- Cubs (8-10½)
- Scouts (10½ - 14)
- Explorers (14 - 18)
- Network (18 - 24)

The Girlguide movement caters for girls from age 4 to 30:

- Rainbows (4-7)
- Brownies (7-10)
- Guides (10-14)
- Rangers (14-18)
- Inspire (18-30)

Nowadays Scout and Guide badges are designed to give young people a taste of a wide range of activities. Badges are designed to be easy to earn. The Scouts hobbies badge requires Scouts to pursue a hobby for at least four months and then showcase their hobby to the rest of their group.

The Blue Bells challenge is open to Scouts and Guides and consists of raising money for a cancer charity and a choice of at least three other bell related activities chosen from a long list. The syllabus is published on the CCCBR website

Many churches are eager to attract young people and families. Do talk to your clergy and PCC about what you plan to do. They will usually support you. Your church may

also have a youth group, and you could consider holding an open evening for them too. You will also need to talk to your parish/benefice safeguarding officer.

However, please remember that Scouting & Girlguiding is open to people of all faiths and of no faith, so in welcoming a Scout or Guide group into your tower please remember that raising awareness of what we do as ringers is very important, even if it does not directly result in any recruits.

For those aged under 10, most tower bells will not be suitable to learn on, however they may be interested in handbell tune ringing. Quite a few schools also use Belleplates, Chimes or Rainbow bells to teach young people music. Therefore, they may already be familiar with them, so you can build on this. Sets are inexpensive to buy compared with real handbells.

The Handbell Ringers of Great Britain (HRGB) can provide advice on restoring handbells and can sometimes loan sets, of bells, belleplates and chimes, if needed.

The open evening itself

Some towers have access right up to the bells. Depending on the age of the young people you will be able to take them up to see them. However, do be very careful about health and safety and undertake a risk assessment. There is an excellent guidance note about this on the Ecclesiastical Insurance website.

If there is no safe access to view the bells themselves, you may be able to rig up a CCTV camera or play one of the excellent split screen videos on YouTube.

Typically, you will have a group of 12-15 young people, so it will take a significant part of the evening to give each one of them a go. What works best is to have some handbells, chimes, belleplates, rainbow bells or boomwhackers, and for some of the band to explain downstairs about ringing rounds and give the young people a go. Then you can try ringing queens and then going back and forth between the two.

On tower bells, most young people will get the hang of ringing the backstroke in a couple of minutes. Explain to the whole group what they are going to do, rather than repeat it to each young person.

Make sure that the tail end is long enough first. Resist the temptation to hold the backstroke above them, so that they cannot feel the bell. After a couple of minutes, they should be ready to have a go at ringing the backstroke in rounds, with the instructor ringing the handstroke, and following another experienced ringer.

Be prepared to answer questions that the young people may have, such as how old the bells are, and how are they made.



Belleplates



Chimes



Rainbow bells



Boomwhackers

After the event

Do follow up any interest quickly, before it goes cold. Nowadays young people will not sit patiently on practice night watching the adults ring, waiting for a few minutes of handling lessons between touches. You need dedicated handling lessons, with one instructor per pupil, and preferably close together and about an hour long. The young ringer will then be ready to ring rounds in a couple of weeks.

Also make sure that your practice times work for the young people. So many activities for young people these days are in the form of after-school clubs. Putting on a course of 6-8 handling lessons each day in the school holidays may be an attractive option.

Do involve the parents, they will be reassured that you have safeguarding in place, and they will help encourage the young people.

Inclusion is also an important buzzword these days. It's not just about physical disability, but young people can have issues such as ADHD. You may need help from people experienced in dealing with such issues. Therefore, if there are any people in your band, or District or Branch who are familiar with working with young people, do talk to them.

Many Guilds and Associations, even Districts and Branches also have young ringers groups, so work with them too. Young people will be impressed seeing their peers ringing and enjoying it.

How DofE works

14-24 year-olds can follow a DofE programme at one of three progressive levels:

- Bronze (14+)
- Silver (15+)
- Gold (16+)

There are four sections to complete at Bronze and Silver level and five at Gold.

- Volunteering section
- Physical section
- Skills section
- Expedition section
- Residential section (Gold only)

Church Bell Ringing is specifically listed as an activity by DofE in the Skills section, under music. Participants in the Skills section need not be absolute beginners. It is about developing a skill and showing progress in it. Therefore, if you already have young ringers, please do encourage them to choose bellringing as a 'Skill' when they enrol on the Bronze (or Silver or Gold) programmes through their school or Scout/Girlguide group.

At Bronze level participants need to spend at least three months in each of the Volunteering, Physical and Skills sections, with one of the three for at least six months. The minimum time commitment is expected to be an average of at least one hour per week for the duration selected. It can help for the activity to be longer (in terms of hours per session) but less often.

Thereafter they can continue with this as a skill as they progress on to the subsequent awards. If you do not encourage them to do this, there is a danger that they will need to take up other activities instead.

Learning the Ropes can help



Learning the Ropes

ART's **Learning the Ropes** scheme is an ideal tool to use and demonstrate progress, whether for absolute beginners or young people who already have some ringing experience.

Bellringing is a skill which takes a significant amount of time and practice to develop, and that needs to be made clear from the outset. Therefore, please do encourage participants to sign up to bellringing a skill for a minimum of six months.

Three months would only allow you to teach new ringers to handle. If they progress on to rounds and call-changes and beyond for Silver and Gold, you will then have them for a significant period of time.

The extent and rate of progress does depend on the ability of the local band that the young ringer rings with. Some village bands may have difficulty taking young ringers through to the higher levels, but most Guilds and Associations have young ringers' groups. Also, there are a number of residential ringing courses available, as well as Guild/Association/Branch/District training days.

Each participant needs to develop a programme which is specific and relevant to them at that stage. This should be drawn up and agreed with their Assessor (tower captain or teacher). There is a downloadable Programme Planner sheet on the DofE website.

In setting goals, these should be challenging, but realistic. Achieving Level 2 of Learning the Ropes within six months, and Level 3 (first quarter) within 12 months of starting is quite realistic and provides sufficient challenge to meet the objectives of the DofE scheme.

The Central Council's Schools and Youth Workgroup also publish a more extensive and advanced list with objectives well beyond the five levels of Learning the Ropes.

In addition to the programme planner the participants need to keep a record of the time spent on the activities for each section in an Activity Log. Participants will ask their Assessor or another instructor to initial each entry. Participants will add to this information with progress certificates, photographs etc. as evidence and load it into the electronic portal (eDofE).

Book early

The Mobile Belfry Trustees main function is to operate and promote the use of three mobile belfries. We rely on ringers booking them for events, and we will support hirers with advice whenever we can.

We already have six confirmed bookings or enquires for dates next year, which is far more than at this stage in the past. So, if you have a fete or show in mind, do get in touch with us sooner rather than later. We often find that event organisers will pay our hire charges and your Guild, Association, District or Branch may contribute too. Schools will often reimburse reasonable costs for activities weeks, especially in the last half of the summer term, after SATS, so it may not cost you anything!

You can also help us if you have a vehicle available and would like to volunteer to take one of our mobile belfries to events, or by donating towards our work. Further details including a gift aid form are on our website under 'Can you help?'

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