

Visiting other towers

Are you new to ringing and feel that you need more practice but don't know how to go about visiting other towers? Then read on.

It's pretty obvious that the way to get more experience is to do more ringing on more bells. In fact, coupled with reading, learning and watching, it's the ONLY way to make progress. But how do you know where to go, and how to arrange it?

Ringling is almost unique in the sense of fraternity that it engenders in people. There are probably fewer than a dozen churches in the world where you cannot arrive with no prior notice on a practice night or on a Sunday and still expect to ring. Even most cathedrals will welcome you whatever your level of ringing. Despite all this, it can still be pretty daunting turning up at a strange tower when you know you are inexperienced. So what do you do?

Start near home. Ask your tower captain or instructor where they recommend. If they don't know, ring one of the district officers of the KCACR and ask their advice. You may also like to ring the tower captain or secretary of the tower you are thinking of visiting to check on the timing of the practice, and to check if you can come along, find out what they ring.

Maybe you will feel happier going with someone you know. Ask your instructor or someone you have confidence in if they can introduce you. If this does not work, consider going along with someone else from your tower who is at your stage. Be considerate, though, and don't take a busload, unless you have cleared it with the band in advance. Sometimes, of course, a busload might be just what they want - especially if it's holiday season, or you take some experienced ringers as well.

Turn up on time at the start of the practice. Not only is this good manners, but it will also give you the best chance of ringing most, and since many ringers arrive late you may actually be helping the tower by letting them start on time.

Be honest about what you can ring and let the ringing master know what you would like to try. He will try to help if his band is strong enough to do what you want. If you need someone to stand by you ask the ringing master to arrange this. If you are not sure how to describe your own abilities you could even get your instructor at home to ring the tower and discuss what you need with the ringing master. Strange as it may seem, everyone will want to help you, and many will be flattered to be asked.

Don't assume that this help is all one way traffic. From a very early stage you can help others less advanced than you. This helps other towers, especially if numbers are low, and the more ringing you can do the better.

When you are not ringing by all means sit out and chat to the locals. But remember you can also do this afterwards in the pub. Maximise the benefit of being there by watching others ring. Standing behind and watching is a fantastically effective and unstressful way to learn. Ask who to watch and what to look for if you are not sure. Take advantage of other peoples' experience. They were learners once and they were once in your shoes.

Finally, when you have developed some confidence locally, remember you can expect the same welcome all round the country. When you are away on holiday, or with work or studies, contact the local association, get the times of local ringing and turn up for practice nights or service ringing. You'll ring some wonderful bells, make more progress than you ever thought possible and meet some fantastic people. That's what ringing is all about.