

SURVEY OF RINGING IN KENT 2017

Summary findings

BACKGROUND

The General Committee agreed at its meeting in August 2017 to undertake a snapshot survey of ringing within the county. The decision arose in part from discussions that followed a motion to amend the Association's aims to place a greater emphasis on ringing. One concern raised about the proposed change was that it appeared to reduce the emphasis on Sunday service ringing and the close relation of ringers and the Church.

One of the principal existing aims of the Association is *"the establishment, maintenance and encouragement of service ringing in the churches in its area"*. A survey of service ringing is thus an appropriate and important means of assessing the Association's effectiveness.

The committee delegated the task to Doug Davis and David Grimwood and they were assisted in the design, the data entry and analysis by Daniel Brady and Phillip Barnes.

METHODS

It was decided to undertake a survey of all ringing in the month of November at every tower in the Association's area. November was chosen because (a) it was considered less likely to be affected by large numbers of ringers being absent on holiday; (b) it included an iconic ringing Sunday in the form of Remembrance Sunday; (c) there no other major church festivals (such as Lent, Easter, Advent, Christmas etc; and (d) it contained four Sundays so that variations from normal service or ringing patterns due to a "fifth Sunday" would be avoided.

To make it as accessible as possible a pragmatic, paper-based survey was used. This consisted of the following elements:

1. A Sunday sheet to include data about services held in the church in question, the number of services rung for, numbers of ringers attending etc
2. A number of "touch" sheets to collect some high-level detail about what was rung at each ringing session (Service, Practice or Wedding). This was designed as a tick list for ease of completion.
3. A sheet to record details of any quarter-peals or peals rung at the tower during the survey month and the involvement of local ringers in these.

The survey packs were posted to the tower contact for all of the towers with three or more bells (241) with a stamped and addressed envelope for return.

The data from the returned forms were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Where statistics were required these were performed using QI Macros for Excel.

RESULTS

Response rates - is the sample representative?

A total of 156 surveys were returned giving an overall response rate of 65%. While response rates by District varied a little, between 57 and 76%, this was not statistically significant. These data are shown in the table below

District	Returned	Not returned	Total	% response
Ashford	28	17	45	62%
Canterbury	32	24	56	57%
Lewisham	21	12	33	64%
Maidstone	28	11	39	72%
Rochester	25	14	39	64%
Tonbridge	22	7	29	76%
KCACR Total	156	85	241	65%

There was a far lower response rate from towers with 3,4 and 5 bells that was statistically significant. This does not affect the strong messages within the overall data but any inferences made later *may* not be applicable to the small number of towers with smaller numbers of bells.

Obviously we cannot tell if the towers that did not respond may have been more active and with more ringing than those that did not. With a good response rate of 65%, however, this seems unlikely. Indeed the reverse seems more likely with the data presented herein presenting a best-case view of the current state of ringing in Kent.

There were a total of only six weddings reported and these data were not further analysed. Also there were three towers (two secular and one redundant church) that held no service or practice during November. They are excluded from analysis, leaving a total of 153 "Sunday Service Towers" in the analysis that follows.

Sunday service ringing

How many services are rung for?

In total 465 sessions of service ringing were undertaken in the 153 towers over the four Sundays of November 2017.

Although the survey asked for the total number of Sunday services held in the church that day the respondents have clearly interpreted this in a number of different ways. Thus we cannot make an accurate assessment of the *proportion of* services that were rung for but even in the heyday of ringing very few if any towers would normally have rung for each and every Sunday service including early communion.

There are however other important questions that we can answer from these results.

- How many towers were silent on a Sunday and thus not reminding the community of the church in their midst?
- How many towers were silent **every** Sunday in November?
- Of those that rang, were there enough ringers for every bell?

The information on how many towers were silent on Sundays (below) makes sobering reading. There were 19 towers where there was no Sunday ringing at all in November. This is one in eight of all towers responding. In addition to the 10 towers where the survey responses said there were no services to ring for during November, a further 54 towers had at least one Silent Sunday (of which nine didn't ring at all) – over a third of the total.

Sunday Tower returns	153	
Towers with no rung services in November	19	12.4%
Sundays where a church <i>had at least one service</i> but no ringing occurred	99	
Total Silent Sundays (max possible 612)	139	23%
Towers with services but at least one Silent Sunday	54	36%

Of the 134 towers that were able to ring at least once on at least one Sunday in November the number of ringers available *on average* was:

Enough to ring all the bells at	53	towers
Too few to ring all the bells at	77	towers
No data on ringer numbers from	4	towers

Overall there were an average of 0.91 ringers per bell at the services which were rung for with a maximum of 2.0 ringers per bell and minimum of 0.13 ringers per bell.

The problem with averages is that they can mask services with too few ringers when there are other services with more than enough. So, it is noteworthy that that out of the total of 462 services for which there were data on numbers of ringers, in 225 cases (48.7%) there were not enough ringers to ring each bell.

This situation is despite the efforts of the sizable number of ringers reported to ring at more than one tower on a Sunday.

There are a total of 1661 bells in KCA towers of which 42 are in secular or redundant church towers. This means that there are 1619 ropes to be manned if we want to ring every bell on a Sunday. Clearly even with our existing membership of around 1450, however, these results show that we are falling well short of having enough ringers.

What is rung on a Sunday?

Not all returns recorded ringing in the same way. Thus we cannot count touches or say accurately what proportion of the ringing done was rounds and call changes as opposed to Plain Bob, Stedman or Surprise. We can however get a broad picture of what the most complex ringing that was undertaken for Sunday services at each tower. The data that follow reflect what was the most complex touch rung at each tower for Sunday service during the month, even if it was only achieved once.

Most complex touch	Towers
Rounds / call changes	42
Plain Hunt	12
Plain Bob / Grandsire	33
St Simon's / St Clements etc	4
Stedman	15
Surprise Minor	6
Surprise Major or above	1
No ringing / no detail	40
Grand Total	153

Practice Nights

The numbers of practices held in November was as below. At least one pair of towers hold a combined practice (Wrotham and Ightham) and they appear as a single entry in the tables. Several of the practices noted were held on silenced bells using a simulator – particularly those towers with the highest number of practices.

Given that there were five Wednesdays and Thursdays in November 2017 the large numbers of towers having either four or five practices is to be expected. In general there was also a clear association between the number of practices at a tower and how active they are in Sunday ringing.

Practices	Towers
0	19
1	15
2	18
3	12
4	53
5	30
6	3
7	1
9	1

In terms of what is rung at practices the range is more adventurous than for Sunday ringing with over 40% of practices where detail was given ringing Stedman or Surprise. However, for 47% the most complex touch rung was Plain Bob or Grandsire.

Most complex touch	Practices	
Nil	19	
Rounds	8	7%*
Plain Hunt	18	16%
Plain Bob / Grandsire	28	24%
St Simon's / St Clement's	11	10%
DNCB	0 [§]	
Stedman	20	17%
S Minor	19	17%
S Major or above	10	9%
No detail	19	
Grand Total	152	

*of those practising and where detail is available

[§]Note DNCB was rung at six towers but other more complex methods were rung in each case.

CONCLUSIONS

A significant proportion (12.4%) of the churches within the Association's area of activity were entirely silent throughout November 2017.

A further 29% of towers were silent on at least one Sunday in November and across the county bells were silent on Sundays 23% of the time.

In those towers in the county meeting to ring for Sunday service in November about half (48.7%) had insufficient ringers to ring all their bells.

The Association is not currently achieving its aim of *establishing, maintaining and encouraging service ringing in the churches in its area.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in this survey should be circulated widely within the Association and discussed at the 2018 Annual General Meeting.

Association Officers at County and District level should gather together without delay to consider what strategies and actions are required to improve the situation and to develop and implement a plan to deliver these.

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