

Ringling Survey Results
from the Computer Ringling Questionnaire at the Roadshow 2003 and mentioned in the
Ringling World.

We have found the results of the Ringling Survey fascinating. There were a few surprises and a few potentially useful insights as well as much that seems familiar. Most of all, it was encouraging. Read on to see why.

Over 500 people filled in the questionnaire at Roadshow 2003 and from details published in the RW afterwards. You can still go to the web site, register your details and see your profile. The address is www.talentinnovations.co.uk/ringing/

There were 84 questions, but it doesn't take long to fill in. The factual questions were about things like the age you learned to ring, whether you started to ring through a family connection, whether you had opportunities to ring with more advanced ringers, age now, years of ringing, number of peals, number of times you ring per week, and the methods you ring. Other questions looked mainly outside ringing and were combined to assess characteristic factors:

1 Attitude of individual

- 1 Interest and Dedication (reliable, punctual, committed)
- 2 Time prepared to be given to ringing
- 3 Fits the Image (happy to see oneself as a lifetime ringer)
- 4 Team Orientation
- 5 Being Ambitious
- 6 Being tough-minded (being resilient, not upset by being shouted at)
- 7 Sociability
- 8 Ringing mainly out of a sense of duty

2 Mental characteristics

- 1 Conceptual Preferences (enjoy logic problems; enjoy concepts and theory; quick at mental arithmetic; intuitive grasp of numbers)
- 2 Attention and Stamina (ability to enjoy / to stand / to concentrate for long periods at a task; liking for detail)
- 3 Memory and Adaptability (good at / enjoy, memorizing; quick at new situations and picking up new skills)

3 Efficiency of senses

- 1 Good Rhythm
- 2 Good hearing Skills (picking out notes)
- 3 Good visual skills (good eyesight, good at scanning)
- 4 Coordination and Vitality

What did the Questionnaire attempt to do?

As well as provide an interesting tool for ringers and potential recruits, we were hoping to use the data to establish what factors are characteristic of bellringers and which factors are involved in making progress in method ringing. We were also keen to know whether progress

in method ringing is steady or whether there are critical jumps in difficulty at different stages.

This is not to imply that progress in methods is the be all and end all of ringing. This questionnaire makes no attempt to assess such invaluable aspects of ringing as teaching, conducting, composing, handbellringing, organizing, travelling or friendship. However, if anyone wants to progress in method ringing then knowing some of the elements involved should be useful.

How was progress in methods assessed?

We asked several questions about method ringing, and used people's answers to classify each person into one of 6 levels, as follows:

- 1) Rounds
- 2) Plain methods
- 3) Surprise methods
- 4) Surprise maximus (Cambridge)
- 5) Advanced maximus (Bristol Max without mistakes)
- 6) Orion (without mistakes)

This is clearly a simplistic view of how people step up the 'ladder' of method ringing progress, but seemed reasonable. In hindsight we missed out some questions that would have allowed us to differentiate within step (3). However, this scheme did give us a reasonable number of ringers in each category.

RESULTS 1: Strong associations with method progress

Years of ringing

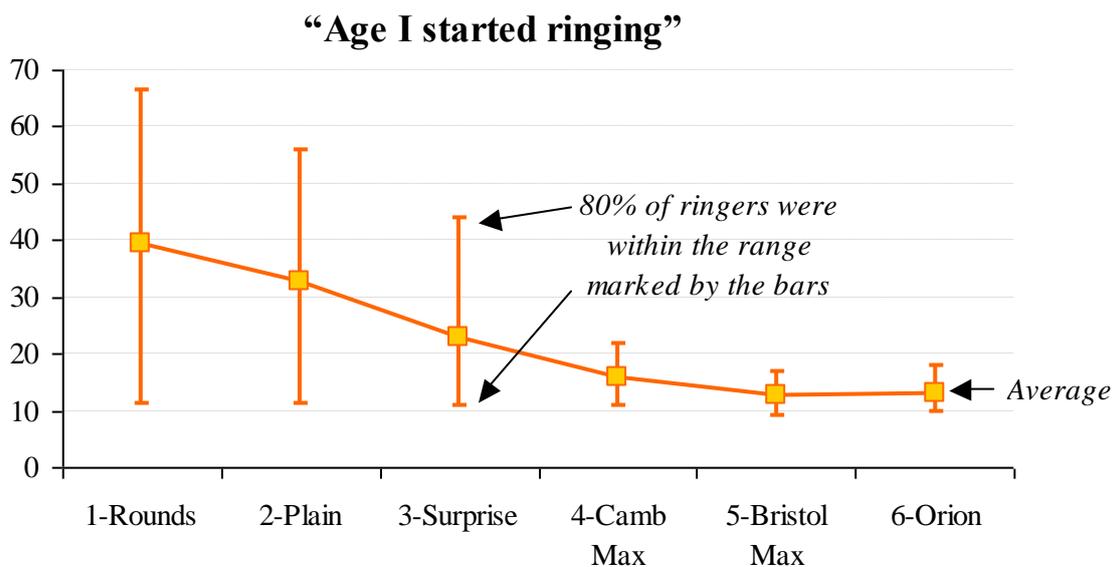
We found on average those ringers at the Rounds stage had been ringing for 4 years, on Plain methods 7 years, Surprise 15 years, and in all three stages of Maximus 25 years. These averages conceal large differences: Bristol Maximus ringers include some who have been ringing for less than 10 years and some for more than 50 years. So people undoubtedly progress over time, although some progress more quickly than others.

Number of peals rung

This progress over time might imply that the more ringing you do the better for progress. Certainly the ringing of peals is associated with method progress, although whether the peals cause the progress or whether progress causes the invitations/ /involvement/success in peals is not clear. Most of those on Rounds and Plain methods have rung no peals; Surprise ringers on average had rung 4; Cambridge Maximus ringers average 50; Bristol Max ringers 230; Orion ringers 370. However the questions on the amount of time spent on ringing per week show little difference between those in different stages, except that those not yet ringing methods spent least time per week on ringing and Maximus ringers most time.

Age of starting to ring

It has been suggested several times in the RW recently that those who start young make most progress. Like it or not, the survey confirms this, and it is not due simply to the extra years of ringing this might give. In their first five years of ringing those who started youngest made considerably faster progress in methods than older starters. The same is true up to 25 years, after which point almost everyone is ringing Surprise, and age of starting is less significant.



The data suggest that starting between the ages of 12 and 17 is associated with the furthest and fastest progress over the whole range of methods. However those who have reached proficiency in Bristol or Orion Maximus generally start at any time between ages 9 and 17. There seems to be no advantage to starting any younger. Perhaps the most impressive finding is that nobody who started older than 23 rated themselves proficient in Bristol or Orion Maximus. Here is a record waiting to be broken.

In spite of these findings, there are signs of encouraging progress in those who were older at starting. In the first five years of ringing most learners reach at least Plain methods, including some who started in their sixties, while some who started in their fifties were among those ringing Surprise. Of course the influx of older learners at the time of the Millennium has not yet shown up in the long-term data and they may surprise us all.

Being an ambitious ringer.

It is a very encouraging finding that those ringers who see themselves as ambitious progress further in ringing. It implies that effort is rewarded. All those extra practices, and branch meetings you attend, the work on learning and revising of methods, the quarter peals you organize, even the ringing discussions in pubs must be useful for progress in methods.

Opportunity

This also is strongly associated with method progress. Of course if you lack opportunity, progress must be impossible and there is a lot of luck involved. However lack of opportunity can be overcome by ambition, since an ambitious learner will seek out the opportunity to ring with better ringers. This may involve travelling to many practices and meetings or taking the initiative in organisation and it will certainly involve effort. Those who ring advanced methods on twelves in our cathedral cities often travel great distances using considerable time and money to do so.

RESULTS 2. What are the characteristics of ringers?

One of the original aims of this endeavour was to see if it might be possible to ask questions of a new recruit which would predict a successful ringing career. Thus many of the questions

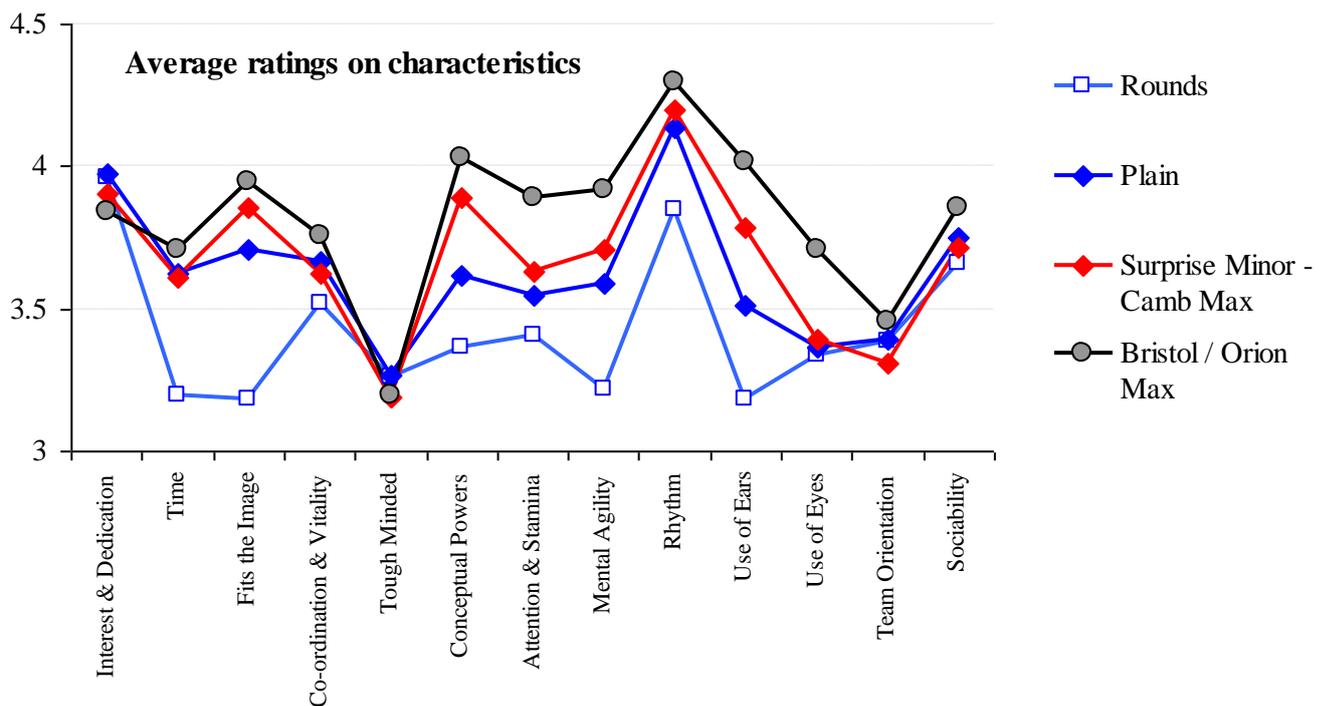
were based on activities outside ringing, for example ‘Can you tell the lowest note in a musical chord?’ ‘Are you quick at mental arithmetic?’

The following factors were high in all ringers:

- 1 Interest and dedication
- 2 Team orientation
- 3 Good coordination and vitality

The average values of the following factors was high for all ringers, and was higher for those in the more advanced method stages:

- 4 Time prepared to be given regularly to ringing
- 5 Fit the image
- 6 Conceptual preferences
- 7 Attention and stamina
- 8 Memory and Adaptability
- 9 Good sense of rhythm
- 10 Visual skills
- 11 Hearing skills



At present we have no sample of non-ringers with whom to make comparisons, but many of these characteristics of ringers seem likely to be higher than in the general population and tie in with a general impression that ringers are often good at maths and music. They suggest that certain natural, probably inherited, abilities are an advantage in ringing progress.

RESULTS 3. What characteristics are *not* associated with method progress?

- 1 Tough-minded

We defined tough-minded as being the sort of person who will always grab a rope

regardless of knowing the bell or the method, and is unfazed when everyone shouts at him, as opposed to the sort of person who tries always to stick to the familiar bell and method and is upset and flustered if spoken to.

The lack of a clear connection between tough-mindedness and method progress suggests that there might be progress advantages and disadvantages to both extremes, and advantages to taking the middle ground. Perhaps the pushy would progress quicker except that they tend to irritate so get slapped down by other ringers, while the timid are encouraged.

- 2 Sociability. Ringers were not particularly unsociable either. Obviously some are more sociable than others.
- 3 Ringing mainly out of a sense of duty. Ringers show themselves in other questions as being committed and dutiful people, so the fact that this is not the main motivation must show that ringing is an inherently pleasant and absorbing activity for most ringers.
- 4 Age now. This is also an encouraging finding, since in so many activities increased age is a drawback – swimmers, tennis players, footballers, sprinters etc all peak before the age of forty.
- 5 Starting through a family connection. Comparing the whole group of such ringers with the rest does just show a significant association with method progress. Nevertheless no significant advantage from family connection was seen in the first five years of ringing, nor any subsequent five years, nor at any method stage, so the association seems slight.

Knowing that learners vary so much from the beginning, and that there are ringing dynasties in the Exercise, we have found the mildness of this effect surprising. Moreover the earlier questions on characteristic factors of ringers suggest that certain natural abilities are associated with progress and could surely be inherited from a family connection who is a proven ringer. In addition a family member would be likely to provide tips, advice, literature, encouragement, transport, and opportunities.

This is an interesting result. Perhaps, again, the over-riding influence in method progress is ambition. The push to succeed, to make an effort, to pursue opportunity may be all important.

RESULTS 4: Is progress steady or are there jumps between method stages?

There are indeed significant differences in various of the measured factors in those ringing at successive method stages.

From Stage 1 (Rounds) to Stage 2 (Plain methods), the Plain method ringers put in significantly more time to ringing, and see themselves more as fitting the image as ringers. They also have significantly higher ratings at memory and adaptability.

From Stage 2 to Stage 3 (Surprise Minor) is a bigger jump. Starting young is a significant

advantage here, and also all three mental factors are higher in surprise ringers (conceptual preferences, memory and adaptability, attention and stamina).

From Stage 3 to 4 (Cambridge Surprise Maximus) starting young is again significant, more time is given to ringing and more commitment to ringing as a lifetime activity. A good sense of rhythm is significantly higher in Maximus ringers.

From Stage 4 to 5 (Bristol Maximus) starting young is yet again significant, also two of the mental factors (memory and adaptability, attention and stamina) and good visual skills.

From Stage 5 to 6 (Orion Maximus) the only significant increase is in ambition.

It's clear from this that commitment of time to ringing and to the concept of oneself as a ringer is important in order to progress through the method stages. Also such attributes as attention, stamina, memory and adaptability are important, but where is cause and where effect? Is it the experience of having to learn new methods that improves memory? The experience of ringing peals that increases attention span and stamina? It may well be, since the newer research findings suggest that mental exertion can enhance mental ability in the same way as physical training increases muscle. It may be that natural problems of attention, lack of memory or poor eyesight make progress more difficult for you, but that continuing to ring may itself cause improvement.

CONCLUSION

There is nothing you can do about the age at which you started to ring, but the other findings from this survey must surely be encouraging to all ringers.

If you are happy to be seen as a ringer and are ambitious as a ringer, what do you do? You attend regularly, learn the methods and keep them revised, go to the pub, you ask questions, borrow or buy the ringing manuals, seek out any local practises where you may encounter more experienced ringers, attend association events, make contacts. If someone invites you in a quarter or peal, you cancel everything else and have a go. If nobody invites you, you organise one yourself. It's up to you.

However if your ringing is only a small part of a life full of other activities and hobbies, that's OK too. Just keep on attending your local tower and you will improve over time, although slowly. Ringing is not like most sports and athletics where you peak in your twenties, if not in your teens. It is a rewarding lifetime activity, mentally and physically stimulating. Also, yes, it is necessarily sociable because you always ring with other people. The physical and mental exercise may even be good for you.

But please don't give up on teaching youngsters.