

## **Part Branch Master's Report 2004, Philip Abbey**

The aims of the G&B are presently stated on the revised Branch website and are as follows.

- To promote the ringing of bells for Divine Service.
- To practise ringing to obtain a higher standard of ringing.
- To educate the public in the art and science of change ringing.

There is a fourth aim listed in the Association report which is perhaps more relevant to the Association as a whole. Instead of this, the Branch's fourth aim has been taken from a previous Branch Master's report, "*Make Cheltenham Branch the envy of others in the Association*".

### ***Ringing of bells for Divine service***

Why do we ring bells at all? Those amongst us that attend church will say to announce the commencement of a service or some other important church event. I personally feel when ringing for a service, especially when we are ringing in return for money such as at a wedding, that touches rung are a 'performance'. When an orchestra performs publicly, it rarely performs something it has not practised in order to provide a competent rendition. I feel the same applies to ringing, even if the ringers are often hidden from view of the audience. I hope this explains in part my attitude towards Gloucester Cathedral Service ringing this year, which was well attended with ringing of a suitable standard.

### ***Practise ringing to obtain a higher standard of ringing***

This year the practices have been well attended and productive. Following the Winchcombe practice just after the last AGM, it was commented that there were too many 'learners' in any one touch. I agree that the touches were weaker than I had expected. I felt that there were several concerns that required addressing throughout this year that, if I were right, would alleviate the effects of the problems. You might remember a previous Branch Master making similar comments!

- Knowledge of the method about to be rung was inadequate.
- The physical aspects of ringing have often not been honed sufficiently to support the level of method ambition. These physical aspects are bell control and listening in order to increase accuracy of ringing.
- It was not going to be possible to simply announce a touch and let people grab hold, as this resulted in a band that was not strong enough overall as a team to ring the touch successfully. Note that I judge 'success' to be 'without bells crashing'.

In order to provide *appropriate opportunities for all*, I have tried to line up specific bands at practices that will be strong enough for one to two people to try a new method. This does mean asking people to ring in specific touches, often on specific bells. This limits the number of unsteady people in any one touch and ensures the trebles and tenors will be accurately placed too so that the touch has a chance of achieving some rhythm to make

the ringing easier. I am aware that other people do not like bands being placed. I hope those of you who have made a request to me at practices have found me receptive!

In order to line up bands with sufficient strength to be useful for teaching, those learning are heavily reliant on the so-called 'experienced ringers'. I would like people to distinguish between 'competence' and 'experience', as the two do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. If we are to continue to encourage the much needed competent ringers to aid us in our practices, then we will need to ensure those ringers feel their time has been well spent helping us. Since competent ringers have little desire to listen to bells crashing around, there is a distinct pressure on 'learners' to attend to their striking if they wish to retain the competent ringers' help in future.

### ***Education in the art and science of change ringing***

This leads on to the third aim, where the 'public' has become 'branch members' for my own purposes. I hope that members will see that we have tried to start to address these issues listed above. Through a special class on 'back bell ringing' kindly lead by David Bagley, and through the newsletter, I hope that branch members at least now have had the opportunity to discover what the Branch Masters think we should be aiming for, and what they might expect from us when we are running practices. I believe that we should be encouraging people to improve to attain a standard of ringing through better teaching rather than lowering the standard to be more inclusive.

### ***Make Cheltenham Branch the envy of others in the Association***

I am pleased to see that people have so much ambition to make progress with their ringing. I also hope that people will not have been put off by my repeated requests to learn methods properly in advance of the practice. Learning a new method is very much a memory exercise. Cementing a method in memory, well enough to ring correctly, takes more effort than a couple of minutes before grabbing a rope! Particularly when the method is of a greater difficulty than you regularly ring. In addition, the same amount of effort also needs to be paid to the physical aspects of ringing.

Our ambitions will only be realised when they are backed up with personal effort to help ourselves, by accurately placing our bells in the same place we are thinking of, and making sure we each know the method well enough before taking a rope. This will enable best use to be made of the precious time available at practices and ensure that the opportunities provided are maximised for the benefit of our membership. In this way, I believe we *can* make Cheltenham Branch the envy of others.

Philip Abbey  
10 October 2004