

Ringling by Rope-sight versus Rhythm

Rope-sight is a useful part of learning to ring, without it we cannot see what is going on. It enables us to determine who to follow next and therefore ring more challenging methods. However, reliance on rope sight alone does not always lead to good ringing, unless you have the support of a band that can ring by rhythm.

Two errors that we all make, some more frequently than others depending on our bell control, are 'clips' and 'gaps'. A clip being the most easily identified and noticed error as two bells sound in too close a succession and ricochet off the local buildings outside. A 'gap' being less easily identified as most likely the person listening to their bell is too busy mentally to listen to the whole change.

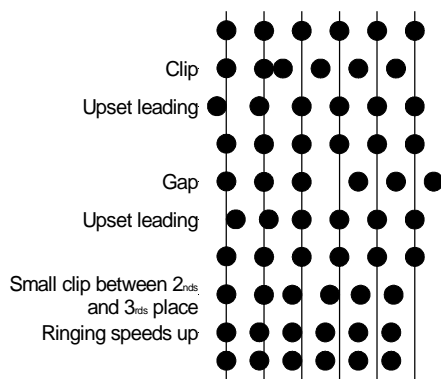


Figure 1 - Ringing by Rope-sight.

When ringing by rope-sight alone, the effects of a gap or clip can last a few changes or more until the ringing settles again. Illustrated in Figure 1, a clip can cause the next person to have to 'cut in' in order to catch up, making the change shorter which will then affect the leading and a few subsequent changes. Similarly a gap can cause the change to lengthen. The continuously altering length of time to complete a change will lead to additional irregularities and make the ringing feel difficult (more difficult than it ought). In particular, and quite noticeably when ringing on lower numbers (often in minor), a clip can speed the ringing up simply because people can hear the change in tempo near their bell. (The resulting speed then being blamed unfairly on an ambitious tenor ringer!)

Ringling by rhythm is often harder to achieve, especially on higher numbers of bells. A common reply to "please ring to the rhythm" being "what rhythm?", an issue to be addressed later. Notice in Figure 2 the effects when a clip or gap is inserted into the ringing. The bell following the poorly struck blow will ignore the out of place bell and continue to strike in what would otherwise have been the correct place. Therefore a ringer that is too quick will clip and following the clip will be a gap. **Less often considered is that a slow ringer will leave a gap, which may not be noticed, and then upon hearing the following bell clip, think it was the following bell's fault, clearly not so.** The following bell was just sticking to the rhythm which is then maintained.

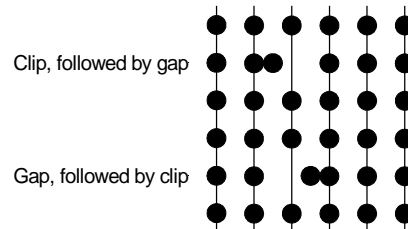


Figure 2 - Ringing by rhythm.

So, how do we get into a rhythm? This is not a simple achievement at first. Necessarily the gaps and clips need to be worked out of the ringing. As the adjustments are made, either as a process of correcting the error in one's own ringing individually or with the help (and instruction) of other members of the band, the bells begin to slot into place and the rhythm sets in from the more regular beat of the bells. So, **when establishing a rhythm, it is better to clip slow bells than to hold up for them.** The slow ringer will find it easier to fit in when the muddled sound starts to clear.

Often people cannot hear the striking errors that the experienced ringers are trying to reduce and feel their comments are unfair. This might happen where having been asked to hold off their bell to reduce clips and become sensitive to them, another ringer then clips them. What may not have occurred to them is that they were actually too slow for a particular blow and were the cause of that clip too, may be due to over compensating the required correction. Pre-occupation with a method can often mean a ringer is correctly counting their position, but mentally overworked and does not notice that they

have rung late. So late that another ringer thinks they have gone wrong and starts to correct them. The result is a fraught exchange of words – “*I know where I am!*”

In general, backstrokes tend to be too close. Perhaps this has something to do with the lack of sallies for visual cues, or perhaps because we generally stand bells at hand-stroke, so we have better control of the bell over the balance at hand-stroke. The effect is often referred to as a ‘dropped’ backstroke, where the bell does not reach the balance and comes off in its own time without control. In general, hand-strokes tend to be slow, especially on the back bells, where greater anticipation of the rope sight is required. This is due to the relatively larger wheel sizes of the back bells over the front bells coiling up more rope and hence necessitating the ropes of back bells to be pulled off sooner when ringing over small bells. The reverse is true of small bells ringing over large ones. The effects of this are horribly pronounced on higher numbers of bells where the bells need to ring much closer together to fit into the change and the back bells are so much larger relative to the front bells that they pull off in front of little bells and still manage to strike afterwards!

To counter these generalities, **push the hand-stroke in close and pull it to get the backstroke up to the balance** for careful placement in the next change. **The need for this becomes more noticeable on eight bells** and becomes increasingly important the more bells there are. Note this handling may be new to some people and require significant mental application until it is done consciously – so don’t be distracted by new and interesting methods at the same time! Hopefully, working through these points will lead to ringing by rhythm which is tolerant to the striking and methods mistakes we all make from time to time and ringing will recover quickly with little to mar the sound of the ringing.

Philip Abbey

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