

The Big Ring Pull - Recruiting bell ringers in the Milton Keynes area



Ringing Centres
Committee

The Big Ring Pull was successful in recruiting 38 new ringers and teaching them intensively to Learning the Ropes Level 1. Of these new ringers 55% are still ringing two years later. The project received a grant of £1,000 from the Ringing Foundation.

The North Bucks Branch of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers covers the Milton Keynes, Newport Pagnell and Buckingham areas. The branch is made up of 43 towers with 5 or more bells. Having carried out a review of what could be done to address current trends in ringing, the focus of the Branch in early 2012 was The Big Ring Pull, our large-scale recruitment and training project.

Prior to embarking on the recruitment and training, In October 2011 Graham Nabb from the Association of Ringing Teachers ran a day's Module 1 IITS course at Downs Barn in Milton Keynes for 21 experienced and new teachers. This gave us useful skills and bought us up to date with current thinking on teaching practices.

The main recruitment event was at the Milton Keynes shopping centre, on Saturday February 12, where the sight and sounds of the Charmborough ring captured the attention of hundreds of shoppers. The public were able to watch demonstration ringing, have a go themselves, read the display boards and take away information. We also set up a dedicated website and branded the project with our specially designed Big Ring Pull logo.

We established contact with nearly 90 people who were keen to come to Downs Barn to have a go on tower bells; learn more about ringing and our intensive training plans. Much effort was put into keeping in touch with these people in the intervening time as well as preparing professional quality video and presentations covering the many aspects of ringing; how we shall teach those who want to learn and then introduce them to their local towers.

The 'have a go day'

At 10 am on Saturday 25th February Downs Barn opened to its doors to a professional approach to recruitment and engagement. Tea and coffee was available to all comers; a dedicated presentation suite was set up in the hall, supported by display stands, rolling video and training booking desk. Ringing was demonstrated at an individual, rounds and method ringing level, and then the potential trainees were handed over to trainers who helped them with at least backstrokes - some managed more even in a short time.

At the Downs Barn day, there was a professional approach to recruitment and engagement, with a rolling video, display stands, information points not to mention tea and coffee and lots of enthusiastic volunteers. All the newcomers were able to watch demonstration ringing - individual bell, rounds and method ringing - and were then matched up with a trainer to have a go at backstrokes, some managed even more than this.

At the end of the day, 41 people had willingly signed onto the intensive 2-week training program and 2 lapsed ringers were brought out of hibernation.



Further information

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The 2-week training course

Following on from our recruitment drive in the Milton Keynes Shopping Centre and the Ringing Taster day at Downs Barn we commenced our 2 week intensive 'Learn to Ring' training course for our new ringers.

The course was held at Newport Pagnell in early March using the simulator which was kindly funded through the guild. Each learner attended 5 sessions of 2 hours duration: a meticulously planned mix of practical bell handling interspersed with non practical sessions ie. rope tying, terminology, the social side of ringing, history, handbells etc.

The practical aim of the course was to just teach the students to ring a bell on their own. Most achieved this stage, some with a little assistance. In the last module we introduced the students to rounds and the concept of ringing as part of a team. We also demonstrated change ringing as something for them to aspire to.

What we have achieved

During the course, a hand-over to local towers was coordinated, so that all the learners were introduced to their respective tower captains, or representative from the band.

38 new ringers have now been dispersed around the branch reinforcing 14 different towers. Two towers previously without a band, Downs Barn and Wavendon, have now established new bands and have commenced regular practices. Although the formal training has finished, the ongoing contact with the group is being maintained so that they can continue to meet and develop together.

Lessons learnt and how would we do things differently:

The learners have completed an online survey, from this we have some valuable feedback about the recruitment process which we will happily share with another branch or guild who may want to launch a similar recruitment campaign. 95% of them said it was 'very good' which is very pleasing.

Ongoing contact with the group of learners has been maintained, so that they can continue to meet and develop together at regular branch practices or special learner practices.

At the end of 2013:

12 have now stopped ringing – probably all at the rounds and call changes stage
8 are ringing Rounds and Call changes
11 are ringing the treble to methods
4 are ringing methods inside

Overall 57% of our new ringers are still ringing, after almost two years.



Further information

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