



Handbell Ringing

Handbell ringing is easier than you may think. On handbells there obviously isn't 70ft of rope to worry about and the bells weigh considerably less than the 'small car' we regularly seek to control swinging above our heads. The downside is you do have to ring 2 at a time.

Happily, ringing 2 handbells is easier than it sounds. All you need is a group of 3 interested people and a set of handbells. On 6 bells (minor) there are only 3 patterns to master. These are coursing, opposites and 2/3.

Reach for your squared paper and 2 different coloured pens 😊 😊

COURSING: This is the pattern created by the 1&2, also by the 5&6. First write out rounds (1,2,3,4,5,6 at hand stroke) and then immediately underneath, rounds (1,2,3,4,5,6 at backstroke). Pick out the line for plain hunt on six from the treble in one colour. On the same chart draw the line for the 2 with the other colour. You will see that, after the bells have crossed over in 1/2 to start, that in the first half of the course the 2 is the first of your pair to sound. In the second half of the course, after the cross over at the back, the 1 is the first of your bells to sound. For 90% of the time there is a gap of a single bell between your bells. Therefore to ring this pair all you need to remember is a) which one is first out of the pair, b) what place is it in & c) leave a gap for one bell and then ring the other one of your pair.

Handbell ringers do not ring rounds until the conductor says 'go', they ring a handstroke & backstroke only then launch into the method.

Look at your chart & recite the following:

Rounds (at handstroke)

Rounds (at backstroke)

Cross

1st, gap, sound the other hand

2nd, gap, sound the other hand

3rd, gap, sound the other hand

4th, gap, sound the other hand

5th, can't be a gap, sound the other hand

Cross

4th, gap, sound the other hand

3rd, gap, sound the other hand

2nd, gap, sound the other hand

1st, gap, sound the other hand

1st, no gap.

You will recognise that the pattern of a gap of a single bell only alters when one of your pair is called upon to lead or lie. When both bells are hunting the gap of one is maintained.

At the risk of repeating myself I say again, in the first half of the course you must be concentrating on the 2, after the reverse rounds at the halfway point you must then concentrate on the treble. **ALWAYS CONCENTRATE ON THE FIRST OF YOUR BELL TO STRIKE, COUNT ITS PLACE, LEAVE A GAP AND SOUND THE OTHER HAND.**

OPPOSITES: This is the relationship between the 3 & the 4. On a clean piece of graph paper write out plain hunt on 6 from the 3 and (in a different colour) from the 4. You will see that they are akin to an object and its reflection with a mirror running down the centre. When one hand sounds in 3rds place the other is in 4ths (either side of the mirror). When one hand sounds in 2nds place (one away from the front) the other sounds in 5th (one away from the back), when one hand sounds first the other is last. All you need to keep track of is which hand is closest to the front of your pair, what place it is in and then ring the other hand in the appropriate place. If you have counted the first of your bells to be in 2nd place then the other hand must be in 5ths, if however your first hand is in 3rds then the other hand is in 4ths. DO NOT TRY TO KEEP TRACK OF THE POSITION OF BOTH BELLS AND TO HUNT THEM BOTH – RATHER KEEP TRACK OF THE PLACE OF THE FIRST OF YOUR PAIR TO STRIKE AND THEN SIMPLY RING THE OTHER HAND AS A ‘REFLECTION’ OF THE FIRST HAND. Don’t forget to remember which hand is closest to the front of your pair, ie which one are you counting and which one is just the reflection. Loudly count 3rds (quietly think 4ths for the other hand). Loudly count 2nds (quietly think 5ths for the other hand). Loudly count 1st (quietly think last for the other hand) etc

The 2/3 POSITION:

Take a piece of squared paper and 2 coloured pens. Write out the path of the 2 for plain hunt on 6. In a different colour on the same piece of paper write out the 3 for plain hunt on 6.

Be aware that if both bells are hunting in the same direction then the gap between them remains constant. The gap decreases by one if one bell is hunting and the other is making a place. The gap between them shrinks by 2 if they are hunting towards each other, and increases by 2 every time they hunt in opposite directions.

Starting in rounds then the 2 moves to the front to lead and the 3 hunts out towards the back. Since the bells hunted in opposite directions they have opened up a gap of 2 places between them. **Two between you.**

In the next change the 2 completes its lead (making a place in 1st place) and the 3 continues to hunt so in this change the gap between the bells grows to 3 spaces. **Three between you.**

Both bells hunt and the 2 sounds in 2nd place and the 3 arrives on the back. Since both bells hunted then the gap of 3 has been maintained. **Three between you.**

Next the 2 hunts to 3rds place but the 3 lies behind (makes a place in 6th) so the gap between them decreases to only 2 spaces. **Two between you.**

Both bells hunt (in opposite directions) so they come together in 4th & 5th place respectively. **Meet.**

Both bells hunt so they swap over in 4th & 5th place. **Cross.**

Now the 3 is closer to the front than the 2 and so that is the bell you must concentrate on as it moves down to 3rds place opening a gap of 2 between your bells because the 2 hunts to 6th place. **Two between you.**

The 3 hunts to 2nds place and the 2 lies (makes a place). **Three between you.**

The 3 hunts into 1st place and the 2 hunts down to 5ths. **Three between you.**

The 3 remains at lead (making a place in 1st) and the 2 hunts to 4ths. **Two between you.**

Both hunt towards each other so they touch in 2nds and 3rds place. **Meet.**

Both continue to hunt and pass each other in 2nds and 3rds. **Cross.**

There is a rhythm to: **Two between you. Three between you. Three between you. Two between you. Meet. Cross. Two between you. Three between you. Three between you. Two between you. Meet. Cross.** It just takes practice ☺

There is no easy way to learn this pattern, you must practice it and practice it. In order to arrange the bells so that someone rings the 2 & the 3 then if you sit in a circle with one person holding the 1 & 2, then next person holds the 3 & 4 and the last person has the 5 & 6, ask every person to put their left hand bell on the floor by their side. Everyone now moves the bell they retained in their right hand into their left hand. Everyone now leans over to their right and picks up the bell 'discarded' by their neighbour. You will now be ringing the 2 and 3, the 4 & 5, and the 6 & 1. You will realise that the 4/5 pair is the same pattern as the 2/3 just starting at a different point. The 1/6 is opposites (the same pattern as the 3/4 just starting at a different point)

Once your group can ring plain hunt as configured 2/3, 4/5 & 6/1 then again ask everyone to put their left bell on the floor, change hands and get a 'new' bell in their right. You will now be holding pairs 1/2, 3/4, 5/6 so can ring plain hunt with the trebles coursing, the 3/4 in opposites and the 5/6 coursing. Change the bells around again and you will be 6/1 (opposites), 2/3 & 4/5. Perfect your plain hunt. Change bells again etc etc

Plain bob minor

Understand that plain bob is plain hunt with a piece of work every time the treble strikes its backstroke blow at lead. (Novice tower-bell ringers would be well advised to write out the treble to plain bob minor then write in the blue line for any of the working bells. Please then study your blue line and come to accept as an absolute truth that plain bob is just plain hunt with a piece of work every time the treble strikes its backstroke blow at lead). Take a pair of bells and ring plain hunt but keep an eye on the treble and dodge with both hands every time the treble leads.

If you have chosen to ring the 1 & 2 then you will not have to learn to 'see' the treble lead - you will be ringing it - so will know with absolute certainty when it leads. The first lead you are coursing, then, when the treble strikes at handstroke lead the 2 is 'lagging' by 1, when the treble strikes at backstroke the 2 must dodge so the gap becomes 2 between you. You are now in the 2/3 position. Plain hunt until the treble is again at lead. At the handstroke treble lead the 2 will be in 5th place, when the treble leads at back then the 2 will dodge to 6th place. Striking first and last means you are now in opposites. Plain hunt until the treble is again at lead. You will arrive at lead end with treble in first place and 2 in 6th but at the trebles backstroke lead then the 2 dodges into 5th place so you are again in the 2/3 position. Plain hunt until the treble is again at lead. When the treble is at handstroke lead the 2 will be a gap of 2 away, at trebles backstroke lead the 2 will dodge and strike only a gap of 1 away (coursing). Plain hunt until the treble is again at lead. Make seconds and start again 😊

If you ring the 3/4 or the 5/6 then you have the advantage of applying the same rule to both hands (both hands must dodge when treble leads) but you will have to 'see' the treble lead as you are not ringing it.

Write out the path of the treble faintly in pencil, write out the 3 in red and the 4 in blue. Concentrate on making the 3 & 4 simply plain hunt and dodge/make 2nds when treble leads. Do not 'cheat' and ring the circle of work as if you

were in the tower. You will see that the 3/4 start in opposites so having struck in 2nds place and 5ths at the trebles handstroke they strike in 2nds and 6ths at back (2/3 position). Because one of your bells made a place and one dodged you will change position. Plain hunt until the treble is again at lead. Strike in 3rds and 6th at treble handstroke and 4th & 5th at back. Both bells dodged so stay in the same position ie the 2/3. Plain hunt until the treble is again at lead. Arrive at handstroke lead in 4th & 5th, dodge into 3rd & 6th, remain in 2/3 position and plain hunt until the treble is again at lead. Next time treble leads you will be in 2nd place and 6th, make seconds with one hand and dodge with the other into 5ths place and you change position & are now in opposites. At the final lead end you dodge with yourself in 3/4.

Write out the path of the treble faintly in pencil, write out the 5 in red and the 6 in blue. Concentrate on making the 5 & 6 simply plain hunt and dodge/make 2nds when treble leads. You will see that the 5/6 similarly stay in their allotted position if both bells dodge at the lead end and change position only if one makes a place (2nds) and the other dodges. Their pattern you will see is coursing, coursing, 2/3, coursing, coursing, but how you ring it is PLAIN HUNT AND DODGE/2NDS WHEN TREBLE LEADS.

The shape of the bells across the lead end (ie when the **treble** rings twice in 1st place) can be shown:

I I X X handstroke
 backstroke

le when the **treble** strikes in first place at the handstroke if you are in 2nds place at the handsroke then make a place and sound in 2nds at the backstroke. However if you sounded in 3rds place at the treble's Handstroke lead then sound in 4th at the backstroke & vice versa – if you were 4ths at hand then sound 3rd at back & likewise 5th/6ths cross at the lead end. All you do next is plain hunt from the starting position you find yourself in, make the shape-

I I X X handstroke
 backstroke

every time the treble leads and heh presto! you are ringing plain bob minor😊

For touches of bob minor: if a Bob is called:

I X I X handstroke
 backstroke

If a single is called then make this shape:

I I I I X
handstroke
backstroke

Key, I is the treble leading

Other methods

Look in diagrams, analyse a method, put into words HOW the method holds together. Then apply that rule to your plain hunt & ring it 😊

Little Bob Minor

This has a treble hunting only to 4ths. When the treble turns round in 4ths if you are higher you dodge if you are lower you plain hunt. Everyone also dodges/makes 2nds when treble strikes 2nd blow at lead.

St Clements Bob Minor

Treble plain hunts. Everyone else dodges/makes 2nds when treble leads but if they take treble from lead they stay on the front and dodge 1/2 up until the treble returns. When hunting down from the back and arrive in 3rds place if the treble is NOT in front of them turn round in 3rds and go back to the back. If you arrive in 3rds and the treble is leading dodge 3/4 and go onto the front with 1/2 down dodges until treble arrives.

Kent TB Minor

If you can't formulate the 'rule' come to Alderney any Thursday and we will tell you

A final piece of theory: Every time you add a pair of bells there is a new pattern to learn so major on handbells needs you to recognise that not only does coursing last a bit longer, opposites has the mid-way cross over spot in 4/5 (still the middle just the numbers have changed) and the 2/3 positions back cross over spot is 6/7 (one away from the back ie the same words as minor – just new back numbers), but now you have a new pattern called the 3/4 which has 5 between you, where you meet & cross in 3/4 & 5/6, fiendishly difficult to ring on 8 but when you ring 3/4 for Royal it is much more manageable as the 5 between you gets a chance to settle down – sadly on Royal there is a new position called 7 between you which is tricky to ring but more manageable on 12 bells – of course when you ring 12 bells there is a new position called 9 between you.....

Have fun

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if you want to e-chat about learning

change ringing on handbells