

EDUCATION OFFICER'S REPORT

The Education Officers have had a very busy time since the AGM. Three meetings have been held already and in between the officers have been very active in their branches.

The branch members views of education in the Association at the present time was summarised first. Points included positive feedback on 2010's recruitment drive, the need for more teachers in the Association, the difficulties of retaining recruits, that past Association training days had been appreciated, etc. This was followed by the opportunity for branch officers to share the good things that they were already doing in their branches. This proved to be a very rewarding activity, and highlighted the fact that there was a great deal more going on than most people realize.

All of the following were taking place in one or, more likely, several branches:-

- Courses for bell handling, call changes, plain hunt, raising and lowering and a great variety of methods. Over 60 were held
- Monthly practices with set methods for the evening
- Monthly ringing practices to provide the opportunity to begin ringing methods on a higher number of bells, on 8 or 10
- Monthly practices on 6 or 8 bells
- Monthly advanced ringing practices on 6 and 8 bells
- Young ringers practices and outings
- Bell maintenance courses
- Well-supported striking competitions, with separate competitions for rounds, call changes and method ringing

The following comments were also noted:-

- That although past Association courses had been appreciated it was agreed by most of those present that courses held within the branches were more effective and efficient
- Calling a meeting of branch tower captains had been a useful way to obtain information about what they felt was needed in the future
- Good communication with all the individual members of the branch via e-mail, to ensure that everyone received information, had proved to be very successful
- Sharing the load e.g. having a publicity officer in the branch had also proved extremely successful
- Supporting towers that were finding it difficult to develop was also a priority
- Courses within branches had been extremely successful and certainly helped in the retention of recruits

As a result of this sharing of good ideas I suggested that each branch Education Officer might like to start something that they thought was a good idea in their own branch!

As a result of comments expressed at the Association AGM about the need to increase the number of teachers in the Association I approached The Ringing Foundation in order to get a new initiative - The Integrated Teacher Training Scheme - started within the Association. The scheme is a modern training structure, designed to provide training in the teaching of bell handling and elementary change ringing, which will lead to accreditation. The first course has already been held, on 17th September, with nine New Teachers beginning the course, along with six Mentors from the Association who will supervise the New Teacher through the course. The feedback on this course was very good. Another group will be started during 2012, and it is hoped that some of the first group will receive their accreditation at the 2013 AGM.

Another course, organised in the Axbridge Branch by Pam Ebsworth, but open to other nearby branches was again run by the Central Council Education Committee. This looked at How to Run a Good Practice and included the theory of this subject, how to introduce foundation skills and practical experience using fun resources. This is another excellent way to improve the ringing experience and therefore the number of recruits and their retention.

Again, as a result of concerns expressed at the AGM about the lack of basic maintenance knowledge in many towers, I suggested that each branch should appoint a Basic Maintenance Officer. These would be trained if necessary, and would then be able to train a person or people at branch towers where no-one at present had the knowledge to carry out basic maintenance. Branch Education Officers have already found volunteers from within their branches to fill this office and it is hoped to get this scheme off the ground during 2012. Roly Backhurst and Mike Hansford have already agreed to carry out the training of the branch officers where necessary. Obviously it will be a long process, but gradually there will be more towers able to undertake their own basic maintenance.

I also wanted to review the Young Ringer of the Year Competition. A good competition, the review clarified rules that were unclear to competitors, altered the entry procedure which was proving difficult for some young people, reviewed the amount of prize money to be received and ensured that entry forms would be viewed by the Branch Education Officer to help ensure standardisation.

I also wanted to introduce a new Young Ringer Award. This was intended for younger ringers at the start of their ringing lives to encourage them to build the skills necessary to enter the Young Ringer of the Year Competition. The Education Officers spent their second meeting (and several hours afterwards) discussing the draft for this competition in order to have it ready to start at the beginning of September. Feedback received so far has been good with people feeling that it helped the young ringers to progress, was excellent motivation and encouraged young ringers to become more involved in ringing activities, and was a scheme of work for tower captains and schools.

The Education Officers have also completed a survey of Ringing Centres within the Association with a view to developing the number of such centres and ringing simulators in our area in the future.

A great highlight of any year is the privilege of working with new ringers, and this was accentuated this year after the very successful recruitment drive of October 2010. Many of these may be from the 'not so young' age group but the skills that they bring to ringing are very greatly valued. Their commitment, their loyalty, their willingness to get involved, and their interest in many different aspects of ringing, all bring a great deal to the life of a tower and branch. Let us not forget in all this talk of young ringers how important it is to welcome people of any age to our art, be they young or not-so-young, for it is one of the great traditions for which ringing is renowned.

There has been an increase in the number of young ringers in our towers this year, and a corresponding increase in the number of practices and outings organised for them. There are many more young ringers in our Association than people realise! Our younger ringers are also ringing peals and quarter peals. This year, for example, two fourteen year olds rang their first peal and one nine year old rang his first quarter. It needs everyone in the Association, and not just the Education Officers, to work hard to encourage more young people into our towers. It has been especially good to see young people running events this year - how many more can be encouraged to do this before next year? Tobias Dando's monthly Minor Methods Practice in the Cary Branch and Sam Shead's Association Young Ringers Practices have been very popular and much enjoyed. These are outstanding achievements, but to see more young ringers organising or helping to organise a practice would be excellent.

Your Education Officers are meeting four times a year. If there is something that you would like them to address please tell them! I would like to finish by thanking these Education Officers for their hard work, extremely positive attitudes and for the excellent support that they have given me in my first months in the post. I look forward to the next year and what we can achieve together.

JILL HANSFORD