

EDUCATION OFFICER'S REPORT

This has been an excellent year for the Association, with progress being made on many educational fronts. The Education Officers have worked very hard on behalf of ringers throughout the Association, meeting regularly and organising a wide variety of activities in their branches, many for the first time.

The number of courses held in the Association has been nearly tripled this year, from the 60 held last year to over 170 this year. One of the points noted by the Education Officers last year was that branches already running a large number of courses felt that these not only helped ringers to progress but also had a major impact on their retention. The retention rate for recruits was a concern expressed by ringers at the AGM eighteen months ago. If it is indeed the case that courses help the retention of new ringers, then tripling the number of courses run also has a hidden bonus.

A course run by a former member of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers Education Committee was held in the Association. Organised by Jenny Cornwell in the Frome Branch, John Harrison put the listening skills of eighteen Association members to the test in a much enjoyed course held at Chilcompton.

Young ringers' practices and outings have blossomed in some areas this year. The Axbridge and Chew Branches have held joint monthly practices throughout the year, and the Taunton and Dunster branches have both held regular practices and sometimes these have been joint. The Ilchester Branch has run its first young ringers morning, and I look forward to being able to report next year that several other branches are running events for young people.

There has been a corresponding increase in the number of young ringers in our towers this year, and at the present time there are at least 80 in the Association. Our young ringers are also ringing peals and quarter peals. One very special quarter peal was rung by eleven year old Kaitlin Jarvis from the Axbridge Branch who had only been ringing for eight months. She was the first ringer to have been trained by an ITTS New Teacher (Mary Hannam) and Mentor (Pam Ebsworth) to have rung a quarter peal. Some of our young ringers are also taking office in their branches. Tom Mitchell has recently been elected as Deputy Ringing Master in the Dunster Branch, and Tobias Dando (Cary Branch) and Andrew Bawden (Dunster Branch) have recently been elected as Assistant Branch Education Officers. These are excellent achievements, and we look forward to seeing more of our young ringers active in this way in the future.

As a result of concerns expressed at the Association AGM eighteen months ago about the need to increase the number of teachers of ringing in the Association, the Integrated Teacher Training Scheme was started. The aim of the Education Officers was to get a Mentor (who would train the New Teachers) and one or two New Teachers started on the scheme in each branch as soon as possible. Six of the New Teachers who attended the first course have now passed the first module of the course. They are Jonathan Chapman (Ilchester), Mary Hannam (Axbridge), Richard Lee (Bridgwater), Keith Petersen (Taunton), Ed Sowerby (Cary) and Chris Stone (Ilchester). The Mentors responsible for training them have also passed this first module. They were Pam Ebsworth (Axbridge), Jill Hansford (Taunton), Annette Organ (Ilchester) and Anna Piechna (Cary). Another nine New Teachers and five Mentors are working towards completing this first module. The first Module 2 Course has just been held and was attended by 10 New Teachers and 6 Mentors. The feedback on the courses has been very good. It is hoped that some of the people who began the course first will receive their accreditation at the 2013 AGM.

As part of the ITTS Course the New Teachers and their Mentors have to teach new ringers. The ringers that they teach are able to take part in a progressive scheme called 'Learning the Ropes'. This is divided into five levels which take the learner from basic handling and raising and lowering a bell in Level 1, to ringing a quarter peal of Plain Bob Minor and calling 120 changes of a chosen doubles method in Level 5. The New Teachers have been very keen, and together with their Mentors, have been teaching a large number of new ringers. So far, in this Association at least 40 have been presented with their Level 1 Certificates.

Last year the Education Officers introduced a new Association Award for Young Ringers. This was intended for younger ringers at the start of their ringing lives to encourage them to progress and to build the skills necessary to enter the Young Ringer of the Year Competition. At the AGM this year we were able to present awards to 20 young ringers who between them had completed 91 tasks. Feedback received so far has been good with both young ringers and their teachers enjoying the motivation it provides, and tower captains and schools finding it very helpful as a scheme of work.

Last year the Education Officers completed a survey of Ringing Centres within the Association with a view to developing the number of such centres. At the time the only accredited ringing centre in the Association was at South Petherton. There were a few other towers with simulators being used as ringing centres - at Lydeard St Lawrence (using village hall facilities), Minehead (using the ringing room as a lecture room) and Chilcompton. The Education Officers felt that it was essential to increase this number, depending on finance available. Thus, the first new Ringing Centre to be equipped by the Association was used for the first time recently. This is at Hillfarrence in the Taunton Branch, and the second, for which the equipment has been ordered, will be at Barton St David in the Cary Branch. Barton St David is used by both the Cary and Glaston Branches for teaching.

Another important chance for ringers to progress is the variety of monthly practices organised within our branches. Here ringers are given the opportunity, and help, to improve their ringing, whether this is ringing on a higher number of bells or more complicated methods. Particularly pleasing has been the increase in the number and regularity of these practices this year.

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 throughout this year. I look forward to next year and what we can achieve together.

