



Knowing where you are

Someone once said "You could be forgiven for not knowing where you should be, but there is no excuse for not knowing where you are". A desire for perfection? If you think about it, it is quite reasonable. Where you should be depends on the vagaries of the method, and how far you have got. Knowing that relies on memory, avoiding distraction, and so on - all fallible. But where you are is an observable fact.

Even so, you do see ringers who obviously don't know what place they are in. The symptoms include:

- Drifting along in the same place, when supposedly hunting up or down
- Being higher than last place or lower than first place
- Audibly counting places that bear no relationship to where they actually are

One might excuse some of these on the basis of confusion, poor bell control or not being able to correct the error soon enough, but that does not explain those cases where the error lasts for many blows, with no visible attempts to get back in place.

This month we think about how ringers keep track of where they are.

Counting blows

This is the most extreme form of counting and we will deal with it first. You can count every blow and put a mental emphasis on your place. For example ringing rounds on the 4th you would count:

123456123456 123456123456 etc

Counting off the sounds you hear like this helps you to hear how your bell fits in with the ones next to it, so you can tell whether you are striking accurately in the right place. It is useful when you learn to ring rounds, and even experienced ringers find it a good discipline at times. At the start of a touch, you should check whether your bell is odd struck - it gets harder once you are in changes. On higher numbers of bells the blows come closer together, so it is easy to confuse your bell sound with the one next to it, especially in the middle. Counting helps you sort things out more quickly.

The blows come about three a second when ringing six, or four a second on eight. Counting every one fills your head, so it is hard to think about anything else - especially involving words or numbers. If you are already counting (and probably 'saying' in your head) several numbers a second, there isn't time to say to yourself anything complicated like '3-4 down' as well.

But there are other ways, so you should not need to do it very often.

Feeling the rhythm

The bell strikes at the same point in each swing, and this is linked to the rhythmic movement of your arms. Once you have learnt where this is, you 'know' when to expect it as your arms rise to each stroke. Some people quote little rules about the bell striking when your hands pass various bits of your anatomy. They are approximately correct, but they ignore the fact that people have different length arms, and that not all bells strike exactly the same.

The best way is just to 'learn' it. A bass drummer knows when his drumstick will hit the drum without needing to look. You can test yourself by ringing a single bell and saying 'dong' at the precise moment when the bell strikes. Anyone observing you can tell when you get it right.

Listening

Listening is the only way to know whether you are striking accurately in the correct place. Counting, or the rhythm of your arms can cue you when to listen, but only your ears can tell you whether the sound of your bell fits in with the others.

With practice, you should be able to learn to listen to the whole row and 'know' where (say) 4th place is, in much the same way that you could look at a row of 6 cups and 'know' which is the fourth from the left, without having to count to it. This needs practice, and because it is something you do 'internally' you might not get a lot of feedback on how well you are doing. There are tapes available to help you learn to listen more accurately, and when using them, you do know how well you are doing.



Counting your places

This is what most ringers mean by 'counting'. You only count the place where your own bell is. That is a lot less counting - once every couple of seconds, rather than three or four times a second. Rather ironically, most people count when they pull off at each stroke, rather than when the bell strikes a second or two later.

Most ringers use this form of counting when they learn to hunt. It helps them to keep track of where they are, and therefore when they need to change speed and hunt in the other direction. Even this more relaxed form of counting still makes a continual intrusion on your 'thinking space', and here too, there are other less intrusive techniques you can develop that will let you, at least partly, dispense with the need to count every place.

Seeing

Ropesight is invaluable for seeing what is happening, including seeing where you are. Even in a mix-up you should be able to learn to see roughly where you are from looking at the ropes. Think of the ropes like swimmers in a race. They rush up and down in a pack with some leading and others lagging. They keep changing order, but stay in a pack. Your rope should be somewhere in the pack. (You can't see it most of the time, but you can feel where it is). Try to develop your ropesight so you can look at the overall pattern of the ropes and see roughly where you are, certainly at the level of 'front', 'middle' or 'back'.

One of the most important things to spot is if for any reason you are in danger of running out of the pack, ie going below first place or above last place. That will leave you in big trouble - you should never be there (in any normal method) and will make it very confusing for everyone. So get back, quickly.

There is advice on how to develop ropesight in *Ringling Skills* and *The Tower Handbook*.

Hand and Back

Dividing ringing into handstrokes and backstrokes makes knowing where you are a lot easier. In an ordinary (right place«Right place method - One where places are only made from handstroke to backstroke.») method you strike in all the even places (2, 4, 6, ...) at handstroke going up, and at backstroke going down. In Minor for example, there are only three handstrokes when hunting up (in 2nd, 4th and 6th place). It is quite hard to confuse these even if you are not counting, since one is 'at the front', one 'in the middle' and one 'at the back'. In many methods, this split is even more obvious with dodges, places, etc. occurring in 1-2, 3-4 or 5-6.

In Major, there are four pairs of places (1-2, 3-4, 5-6 and 7-8) but you should still be able to separate them. (Think of them as: 'front', 'in from the front', 'in from the back' and 'back'). With more bells, the places near the front and back are still fairly easy to see, but it gets harder to see places 'somewhere in the middle'. It can be done though - it is all a matter of what you get used to - but it is much harder. Almost certainly there are experienced ringers who count their places on 10 and 12 but would rarely do so on 6 or 8.

Wrong place«Wrong place method - One with places made from backstroke to handstroke (as well as from handstroke to backstroke).» methods include portions of 'backward hunting' where the hand-back rule above is reversed. That means you can't rely on which stroke you are on to resolve small ambiguities in your position unless you know whether you are hunting forward or backward at the time. It is notable that many people make more mistakes in wrong place methods.

Odd bell methods like Grandsire and Single Oxford have the dodging in odd pairs of places (4-5, 6-7, etc). The hand-back rule still applies, but you need to be aware that the backward step in the dodges is on the handstroke rather than the backstroke. Again, it is notable that methods like Double Norwich Caters, which have work under the Treble in even places (3-4, ...) but over the Treble in Odd places (4-5, ...) cause more problems with people trying to do things one place from where they should.

Another article will look at how to read the signs for 'where you should be'.

Tail End