

State of Ringing in Towers Affiliated to the Guild of Devonshire Ringers Spring 2023

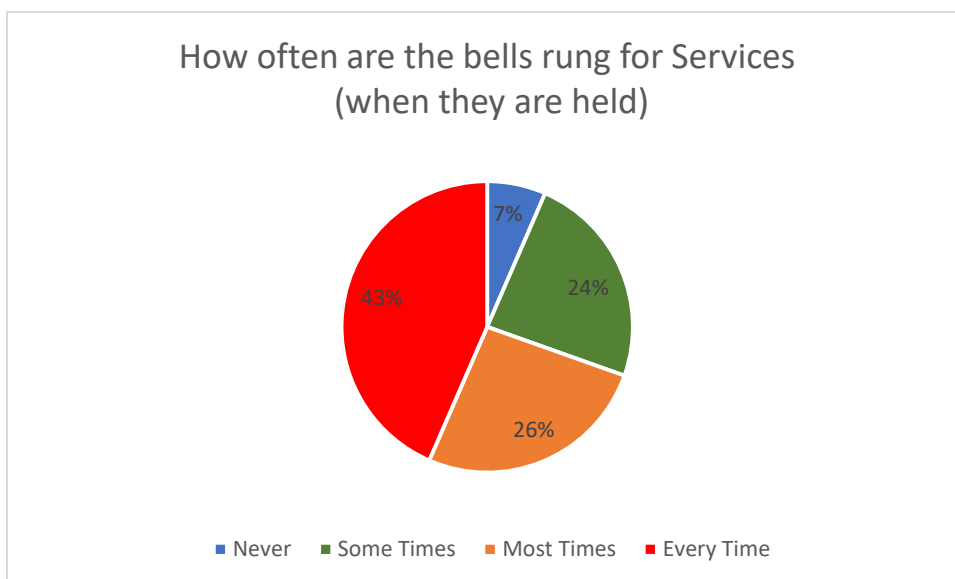
The Recruitment and Retention Work Group has undertaken a survey of ringing in Guild affiliated towers to help direct future plans for recruitment and training.

Responses were received from 95 (92%) of the 103 affiliated towers. There is no regular ringing at five towers, owing to a lack of ringers (n=3) or structural problems (n=2). In addition, one tower is closed for worship, although there is still a regular bell ringing practice. Ringing at the Cathedral is organized rather differently from other towers, so it has not been included in the analysis.

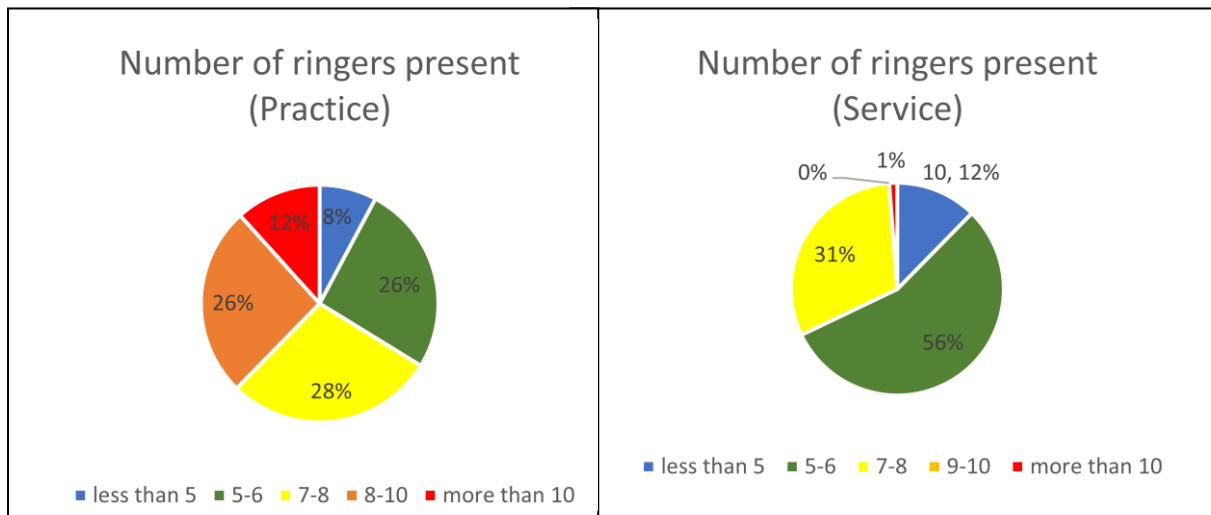


Over sixty percent of Guild towers hold a practice most weeks, or every week. However, 20% of towers hold no practice. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the ringers in these towers get no practice, as they may attend another tower, but it does mean that the presence of the bells is not being advertised.

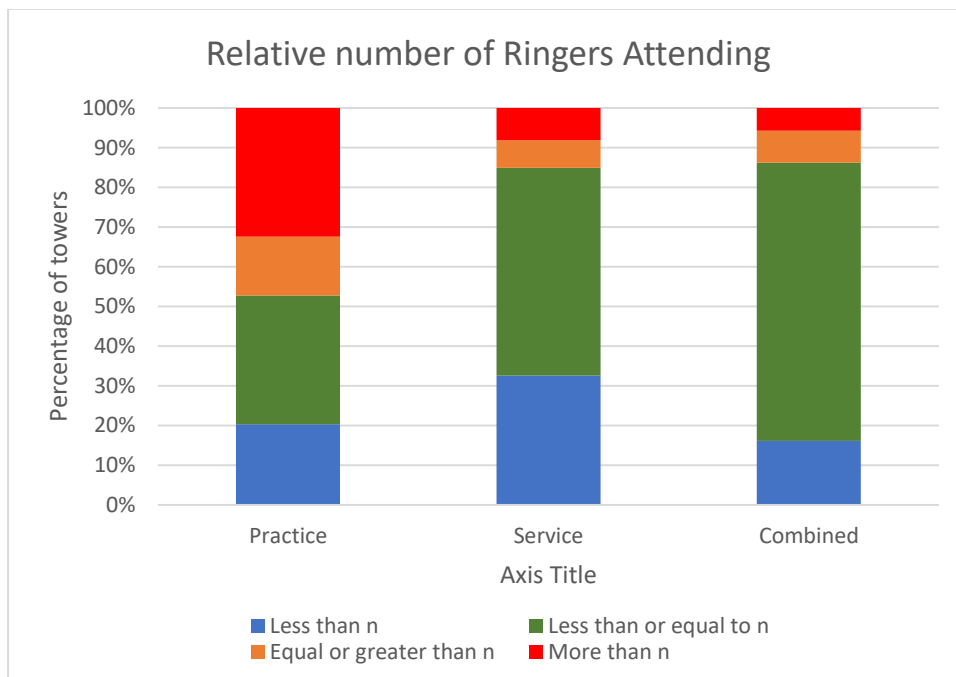
A similar picture is seen for service ringing, with almost seventy percent of towers ringing every Sunday or on most Sundays when there is a service in the church.



The number of ringers who attend practices and service ringing ranges from five to more than ten. It is not surprising that the number of ringers present for service ringing is lower than at practices, as many ringers attend more than one practice, but the times of service ringing tend to coincide and thus prevent ringers from ringing at multiple towers.



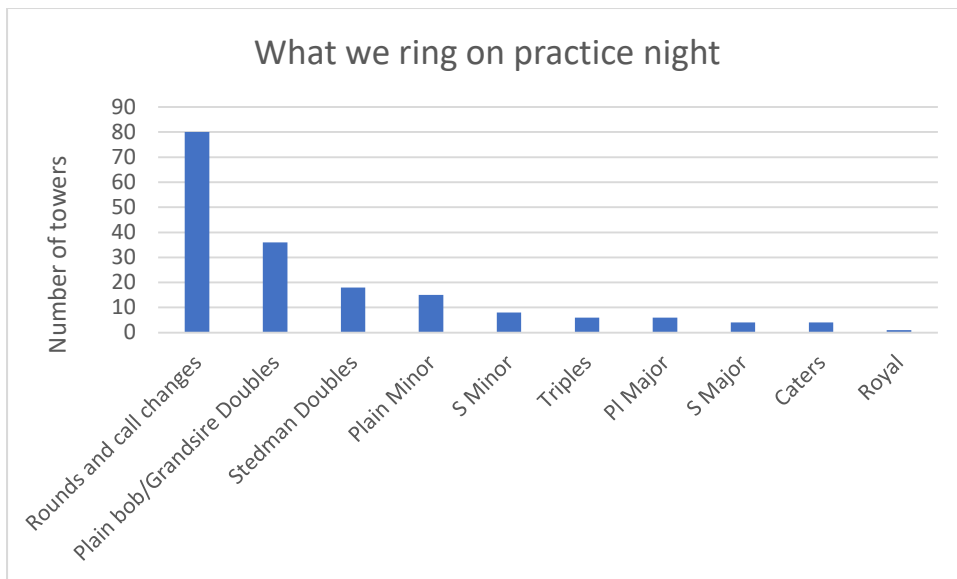
However, it may be more useful to compare the number of ringers present with the number of bells in the tower.



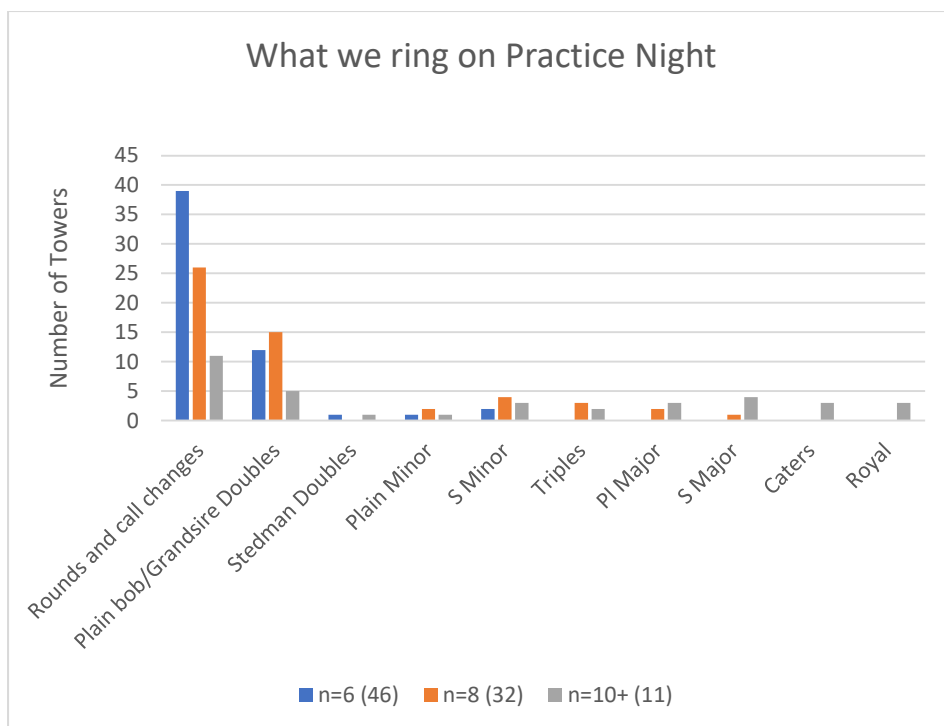
This shows that on practice nights approximately fifty percent of towers have more ringers than bells, but twenty percent of towers do not have enough ringers to ring on all the bells. For service ringing, only fifteen percent of towers have enough ringers to ring all their bells, whereas thirty percent of

towers do not have enough ringers to be able to ring all their bells. If these data are combined, fifteen percent of towers never have enough ringers to ring all their bells, and another fifteen percent always have enough ringers for the number of bells in the tower. The remaining seventy percent of towers are sometimes able to ring all their bells.

In terms of what ringing takes place on practice night and for service ringing, almost all towers ring rounds and call changes. As one might expect, the number of towers drops off as the level of complexity increases. However, about a third of towers manage to ring at least some method on five or more bells.

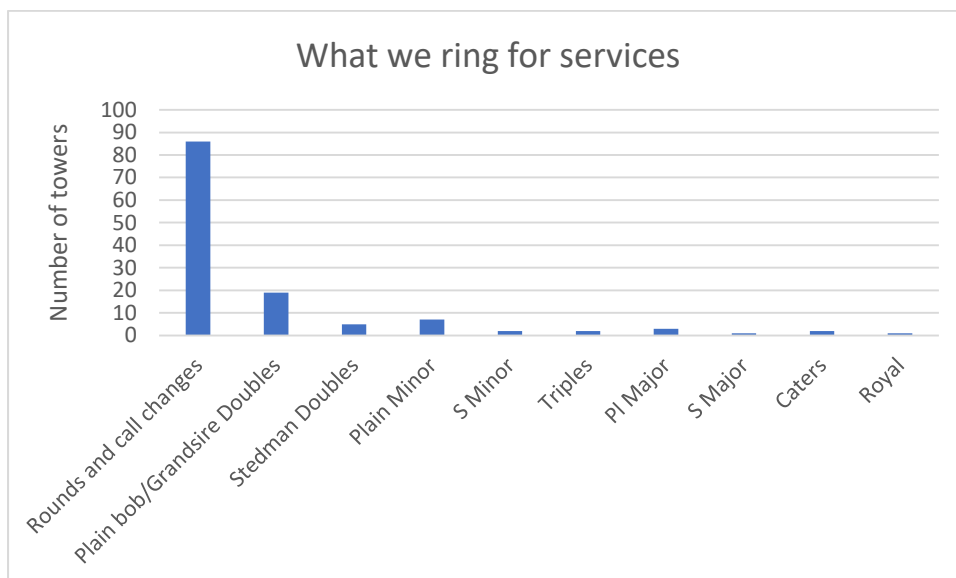


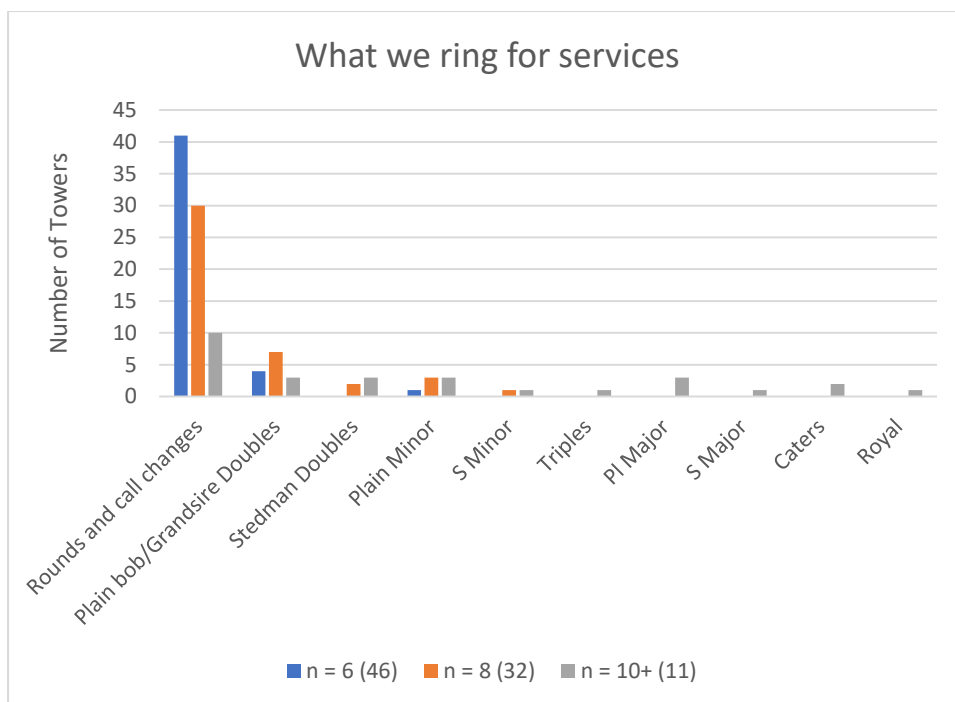
If we examine this data in more detail and look at what gets rung in our 6-bell, 8-bell and 10+ bell towers, the pattern is broadly the same, with the majority of towers ringing rounds and call changes; the number of towers where different methods are rung likewise decreases with the complexity of the ringing.



However, it is also apparent that if you want advanced 6-bell ringing, you probably need to go to an 8-bell tower, and if you want advanced 8-bell ringing, you probably need to go to a 10-bell tower. This suggests that although there may be enough ringers to ring all the bells at many practices, there are often not enough competent ringers to ring method on all the bells.

The pattern for service ringing is similar, but the ringing is more conservative: more towers ring rounds and call changes, and fewer towers carry out any method ringing. This is probably both because fewer ringers are present and because fewer more experienced ringers present are present.





If we look at the complexity of method ringing in relation to the number of bells in the tower, we find that very few towers ring anything more complicated than Plain Minor methods; those that do are towers with 10 or more bells. Of our towers with 10 or more bells, fewer than 20% ring anything as complicated as Caters for service ringing.

50 towers have recruited at least one new ringer in the last six months, and there have been approximately 120 new recruits in total. Almost all towers said that they have somebody competent to teach new recruits and 22 towers have at least one ART-trained or accredited tutor. 19 towers have a ringer who is or might be interested in learning to teach bell-handling.

There are approximately 730 bells in Guild-affiliated towers, but we only have approximately 490 Guild members. There are probably ringers who are not Guild members and there may be some Guild members who are no longer active as ringers, but calculations based on these figures reveal a deficit of 240 ringers. In an ideal world we might want 1.2 or 1.5 times as many ringers as bells, which means that the deficit is actually much larger. Clearly the recruitment over the last six months, which has been helped by the “Ring for the King” initiative, is a significant step, but we need to continue the effort to recruit a further 100 to 200 ringers.

The “heat map” below shows the location of all Guild-affiliated towers, with colour-coding to indicate the number of ringers present relative to the number of bells. There appears to be no pattern to the distribution of inactive, struggling or thriving towers, as determined by the simple criteria used in this survey.



Conclusions

The results of this survey show that we are far from the utopian ideal of an active band in every tower, with method ringing being performed on all the bells – Doubles and Minor in 6-bell towers, Triples and Major in 8-bell towers etc. However, there is regular ringing in almost all the Guild-affiliated towers.

This survey presents a snapshot in time and does not indicate whether things are getting better or worse. However, as it has been conducted only a year after a pandemic, it seems reasonable to suppose things are improving. There are encouraging signs, such as the number of new recruits currently being trained. While we need to continue recruiting, we also need to ensure that our current recruits continue to progress into competent and enthusiastic ringers.

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 May 2023