

## **ART M1 training course, Chapel Allerton (Leeds) Saturday 21st June**

We have an active band of ringers at St Alkelda's in Middleham. However, like many other towers the band is relatively inexperienced and it is thanks to our enthusiastic tower captain, James Lundie, and Jonathan Couchman his predecessor, that we have progressed as well as we have. Prior to 2016 the band had dwindled to very few active participants and it was under their leadership that a new band of ringers were trained and the ranks began to swell again. In 2018 at the anniversary of the end of the First World War a recruitment campaign was started. Middleham had lost three of its ringers as casualties of that war and three new trainees were taken on in memory of them. I was one of those trainees. Several years on and we continue to develop. My personal ringing has progressed steadily (but perhaps a little slowly). I have now taken on the role of Assistant Tower Captain to James.

It was against this backdrop that I applied to attend the ART M1 Teaching Bell Handling course. As well as an opportunity to "rain check" my own technique I hoped to acquire the skills to support James in teaching new ringers when we take on our next batch of recruits. On 21st June I reported to St Matthews Church in Chapel Allerton, Leeds to be greeted by Neil Donovan, who would lead the course. From memory, there were 9 (or was it 10) students on the course. I admit to being a little apprehensive. Would my own level of experience be sufficient to enable me to become a proficient Teacher? My fears were soon allayed. Firstly, I was amongst students with a range of experience and proficiency. I wasn't the only student who was "stepping up" to help their prospective towers grow. Secondly, Neil was soon to explain that it is not always the best ringers who make the best teachers. Someone of my proficiency could, with time, become a good teacher of basic bell handling.

Neil, ably supported by Andrew Slade, proved to be an excellent teacher. He was clearly very knowledgeable and experienced and provided the right balance of information, challenge, and support. This was combined with some amusing asides to make for a very enjoyable day. The programme for the day was a fairly intensive 9 until 5, with coffee breaks in the morning and afternoon, and a break for lunch. This provided the right balance between periods of concentration and an opportunity to rest and chat with fellow students. Generally, a session on theory was followed immediately by an opportunity for practical deployment on the bells. We split into small groups to "teach" each other the elements of basic bell handling. Neil took us through teaching the basic back and hand strokes, combining the two, ringing up and down, and how to resolve handling problems. In so doing

both Neil and Andrew kept an eagle eye out to spot any of the handling problems we students arrived with!

Neil also spent time talking about the various methods of teaching, and how to teach more generally. When to be supportive, when to challenge, and how to tailor teaching to the student. Some people learn best through explanation, some through demonstration, some learn best through tactile guidance (having established permission to touch!) and so on.

Emphasis was also placed on this being the first step in learning to teach. The Art programme is designed to support the student teacher in progressing through to accreditation. The student is supported by a library of information, and importantly by both mentoring and assessment. Students are encouraged to start teaching as soon as possible after the course.

I left feeling positive and informed about how to teach bell handling to a beginner. I look forward to finding an innocent volunteer to practise on (with a mentor on hand to begin with)! I also left with a timely reminder of the importance of maintaining my own bell handling technique, and how easy it is to fall into bad habits.

For anyone hoping to teach, or to support beginners in your own tower, I would recommend the course as an enjoyable day very well spent.