

## The Guild Master's Report 2008

By now many of you have seen me at a number of practices, either District or tower. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have welcomed me into their towers and allowed me join in the practice.

When attending practices, especially District practices, I am starting to see what has been highlighted before; the same faces within the same areas. With the exception of one or two new members it is a shame that the support for many District events does not attract more in the way of an inquisitive member or two, who would join in with the usual group and aid in swelling numbers, and possibly encouraging more of their fellow tower members to attending once every so often.

Some District AGMs also suffer the same fate. From the time when I first started ringing and seeing large numbers turning out, it would seem we are reduced to very few attending. Where there are many towers and members in a District, is it too much to ask that tower members make an effort in representing the view of their tower? The same can be said for District practice meetings. We are all struggling, but where this is not made obvious District/Guild help cannot be offered.

Spending time collating the numbers of members through the past Annual Guild reports, I presented a report to the Management Committee in 2007. The detail provided clear evidence that during the run up to 2000 we secured many new members, however since the turn of the new Millennium numbers have dwindled away.

Wanting to try and reverse this trend I suggested looking into two areas; recruitment and support of new recruits. The latter in my mind is not an education item but solely rests with each band and their attitude towards those wishing to try our art and coming forward to ring.

This will be the second year since that presentation and we are no further forward in making suitable arrangements to secure opportunity to encourage people to try what I deem to be an enjoyable hobby, which relies on a group to make it succeed.

Nobody is saying that the collected group have to do wonderful things with regards to method ringing, just the need to keep our belfries active is paramount and in some Districts we are falling well short of any action to make this happen.

The simple fact is that we shall lose towers through lack of support, and the same will happen with District practices too. A simple example is Eardisland, an easy going ring of eight, but the only way in which service ringing takes place is by the generous support of ringers from other towers with only one or two who could be described as active Eardisland tower members. Many more towers are now following the same course!

It is also the case that some District towers are very active in encouraging people to ring. Bromyard District members have given up some of their practices to teach a new band for Much Cowarne and I was also impressed with the change in fortunes for Whitbourne. Similarly much has and is still happening in the Bridgnorth District and it is also a hot topic in Ledbury District.

As I have already stated we are all in the same boat so why not strike up a dialogue with those who are having success and attempt to replicate what works?

I am also encouraged by members who wish to support and grow the knowledge of those who can already ring but want to do more, Ashley Fortey and Kris Perruzza have both been having success in their venture to encourage regular and ongoing Surprise Major and Minor training events, making steps to promote a supporting structure for those who are unable to find a tower within their area, where they can ring these methods on a regular basis. In theory the more people who turn up to such opportunities may in turn encourage others to go and naturally the levels of those attending will increase along with their confidence and maybe, just maybe, more splinter practices will form to encourage others.

The amount of proposed new young members during the recent AGMs is also good news, although very limited in certain Districts. I would like us all to take personal action to assist and promote the young members with their ringing and to encourage them to join in joint District activities. This is where I believe some of the old fashioned barriers will be removed and a more interactive arrangement will take place which may encourage more young people to 'have a go' at ringing. I would like to thank in advance those Towers and members who have young band members and wish to support such a move; again Kris Perruzza has been very supportive in starting to push these groups to interact and I hope that all Guild members will support these efforts.

I have not mentioned the 2011 events as we constantly push this at all meetings. I will however remind all members that we need ideas on things to do through that year and please can people put themselves forward for support roles? Many hands do make light work

So as you have read, I am very conscious that we are losing members over time and in some areas seem not to take appropriate actions soon enough to balance this natural wastage. I also want young members to enjoy ringing. It must be very difficult in schools where their schoolfellows wind them up and stigmatise their hobby, sometimes enough to stop them ringing. If they join with other young people this may encourage them to keep ringing and withstand their negative peer pressure.

As always, thanks to everyone who takes part in the running of tower and District practices and events. The value of your support is immeasurable and would be greatly missed if you were not there.

Thanks also to my fellow Guild officers, Management team members both past and present and the officers of all the Districts.

I hope that 2009 will allow every one of us to continue to enjoy our ringing.

With very best wishes.