

Conducting - *some personal thoughts*

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AIMS

To start with, let us consider what we are trying to achieve:

- To ensure that the ringing sounds good outside
- To teach and encourage "learners"
- To maintain the interest of "experts"
- To ensure the truth of what is rung

The main priority is certainly to consider the external impact of what we ring. The non-ringer in the street is not concerned about whether a fancy method or a complicated touch is being rung, but about the striking. Indeed the best option, for instance for weddings, may often be well-struck rounds and call changes.

The next two priorities are perhaps interchangeable, being concerned with the needs of the ringers. In some ways, we are all "learners", if we want to be, and the ringing should contain some elements to enable and foster that learning. For the rest, the choice of what is rung should aim to be varied enough to keep them interested.

Already we have some conflict in the aims; Tom Ridgman says that he always calls the same touch of Grandsire Doubles on a Sunday morning. With the first aim in mind, he's trying to minimise mistakes, whether or not it is interesting for the ringers.

Finally, bottom of the list in my opinion, is that the touches rung should be true. Peals (and possibly quarter peals) are the only place where not repeating a row actually matters; for most of our ringing experience, it is not essential. There is no harm in missing out a call and putting it in a course later, if for instance that allows the ringing to settle down first, or if (however unlikely) you forget a call, unless of course it makes the ringing over-run the service! There are plenty of false touches that are either useful for teaching or fun, or both, and I will mention some later.

THE ROLE OF THE CONDUCTOR

So, how do we achieve the aims outlined above? Perhaps some of this is the role of the tower captain and you, as the conductor, may or may not be able to choose the method or the touch. However while you are in charge of a particular touch, many of the decisions that have to be taken immediately are down to you.

I consider the conductor's priorities to be:

1. Put in the calls
2. Stay right yourself
3. Assess the quality of the ringing
4. Advise on striking
5. Correct method mistakes

Note that the commonly held belief that the conductor should be able to correct all mistakes is down at the bottom of my list. An inability to do so should not be allowed to deter potential conductors from having a go - we need all the conductors we can get. Someone has to call the touches, and getting the calls in the right place is the top priority for that person. It is vital to stay right yourself, so that you have a frame of reference for what you are doing.

Then, remembering the main aim above, the conductor should try to ensure that the ringing sounds good outside. If possible, avoid the frequently heard instruction "Listen to it!"; the vast majority of ringers are trying to listen to their ringing. There sometimes seems to be a "political correctness" that stops anyone being singled out. But as a ringer, I need to know whether a general instruction applies to me; I'd much prefer to be told individually that, for instance, my leading wasn't right, rather than have everyone else uncertain about whether the conductor was referring to theirs. The role of the conductor may extend to stopping the ringing if necessary - it's often better to get back to rounds, rather than just standing the bells, as this sounds better outside.

I'm also a believer in prevention of mistakes, where possible. Particularly in a longer piece of ringing, such as a quarter peal, if a ringer

is making repeated mistakes, try to work out why this is. Then you can hopefully give advice or pointers before the next mistake is made; a quarter peal can be a teaching process, not just a test. Another useful role in this context is encouragement; some ringers need reassurance that they are doing something correctly.

SOME GENERAL POINTS

Belt and Braces

Try to have at least two pointers to where you are going to place the next call. For instance, in Plain Bob Doubles, if you're not unaffected yourself, you should know who is, as well as your work at the next Bob. Then you've hopefully got reassurance that the call is indeed in the right place, as, for instance, you know you're about to run in at the Bob, and you can see the observation bell above you.

Recovering from mistakes

If you realise that you, or someone else, has made a mistake, this isn't the end of the world. If you've missed a call, you can just wait and put it in next time round. If it's in a quarter peal of Doubles, say, you can call another 120 embedded in the miscalled one, then go back to calling the first 120. There is a great science about getting touches back to rounds after an error, but in Doubles, you can just start calling a 120 and it must come round at some point (although possibly not where you're expecting, so be on your toes!).

Not Finishing With a Bob

One of the difficulties for a learner in a touch is knowing what to do after a call. To give them more practice at this, I tend to try not to finish the touch with a call, as the cry of "That's All" lets them off the hook of having to decide what work comes next.

Avoiding Counting

Particularly if I'm trying to hold a coursing order in my head at the same time, I find it quite difficult to count anything else, such as the number of calls I've made or the number of leads since the last call. When I called my first peal of Plain Bob Major, I found a composition that never had a block of 3 Homes, to avoid ever having to count them. There are various ways round this problem, like finding some marker for the final call, for instance knowing the 4th makes the Bob.

Bluffing

There are several "last-resort" instructions for various methods, which cover the most common mistakes, when you don't know what has happened. "Last Whole Turn" can be useful for Stedman, "In the Hunt" for Grandsire, "Slow Bell" for Kent and "Dodge Now" for the lead end in lots of methods!

"Isle Of Man"

A mnemonic for calling a 120 of Plain Bob Doubles (or a 180 of Plain Bob Minor). The initial letters stand for "In", "Out" and "Make It", i.e. run in, run out and make the Bob. Note that this can be rotated to start from any letter; OMI or MIO. So, for instance, if you start by running out, the next call will be to make the Bob, then to run in.

Rotation of Touches

Most touches, when written out as a sequence of calls, can be started at any point. For instance, a fictional touch might be PBPSB. This could be started one lead later, with the first P now coming at the end, i.e. BPSBP. Or it could be PSBPB, SBPBP or BPBPS. The touch will still be the same length. The exception to this is touches that do not come round at the normal place, as you can't join the start to the end to complete the loop. [NB Nicholas Small talked about this in "Round Blocks".]

Useful Touches

Some of these are useful for teaching, when you either want to affect people at a certain position, or to leave them unaffected. Some are useful for variety, as they are rarely used. Some are useful as they are quite simple to call. Hopefully at least one of these will be a useful addition to your repertoire of touches.

NB As Richard Pargeter said, one of the best things you can do with any of these touches, is to write it out, to see which bells work together and which are affected by the calls. Try rotating the touches, to see if it better does what you want when you start it in a different place.

PLAIN BOB DOUBLES

100: PBPPB, repeated

Apart from being a welcome alternative to the same old 120s, with more calls too, this touch can be useful in learning the bobs gradually. One of the bells is only ever unaffected or runs in, another is only unaffected or runs out. As written above, the bell that only runs in is the 2nd, the bell that only runs out is the 5th. Rotating the touch you can get any one you want to do either. Just write it out and see.

	<u>2345</u>
	3524
B	3542
	5234
	2453
B	2435
	4523
B	4532

	5243
	2354
B	2345
<hr/>	
	2345
	3524
B	3542
	5234
	2453
B	2435
	4523
	5342
B	5324
	3452
	4235
B	4253
<hr/>	
	2345

120: PB PPB PPB PPB P

Note that this touch is false, but again it makes a pleasant change. It also affects each bell equally - everyone does each piece of work at a Bob once. A Bob is called every three leads, but note that rotating the touch may cause it to have an extra occurrence of rounds in the middle.

GRANDSIRE DOUBLES

	2345
<hr/>	
	2534
	2453
B	5324
	5432
	5243
B	4352
	4235
	4523
B	2345
<hr/>	

90: PPB, repeated twice (i.e. called three times)

Another false touch, but unusual for Grandsire, in that the 3rd is unaffected, making 3rds at each Bob, so it can be rung for someone who hasn't yet learned the calls. Note again that rotating the touch will cause it to have an extra occurrence of rounds in the middle.

120: PSBS, repeated twice (i.e. called three times)

Apart from the touch with a call at alternate leads, this is the only other true 120 of Grandsire. Here the 5th is the observation bell, doing the same work as in the usual 120, viz. alternately 3rds and double-dodge 4-5 up. But now all the calls in 4-5 up are Singles, with the 3rds being alternately Bobbed and Plain. Note that in each SBS block, the bells work together in pairs, so you can keep an eye on them. The pair of the observation bell does double-dodge 4-5 down, 3rds, double-dodge 4-5 down. The other two bells do 2nds, double-dodge 4-5 down, long 3rds and long 3rds, double-dodge 4-5 up, 2nds. Once that whole block has been done with one partner, the next lead is a plain, which brings you a new partner for the next block of three. I'm afraid it's easier to see in practice than to write down on paper!

	2345
<hr/>	
	2534
S	4325
B	2543
S	3425
	3542
S	2435
B	3524
S	4235
	4523
S	3245
B	4532
S	2345
<hr/>	

This touch can be rotated to give BSPS (repeated twice), which also has the 5th as observation bell, or SBSP or SPSB (each repeated twice), each of which has the 3rd observation.

**ST SIMON'S BOB DOUBLES, ST MARTIN'S BOB DOUBLES, ALL SAINTS PLACE DOUBLES
REVERSE CANTERBURY PLEASURE PLACE DOUBLES**

	2345
<hr/>	
	4253
B	3542
B	2435
	3254
B	4532
B	2345
<hr/>	

60: PBB, repeated

Makes a change from the usual PBPBPB

	2345
<hr/>	
	4253
B	3542
B	2435
B	5324
	2543
B	3425

120: PBBB, repeated twice

One way to call this touch is to call a bell "affected", that is, call a Bob every time that bell will be affected by the call, just missing out the call when the bell is unaffected. Note that in All Saints, the observation bell ends up ringing plain courses of Reverse Canterbury.

B 5234
 B 4352
 5423
 B 3254
 B 4532
 B 2345

PLAIN BOB MINOR

72: PPB, repeated

This touch is useful for many Minor methods. One bell is called to make the Bob twice. Note that in Plain Bob Minor, that bell should be the 4, 5 or 6; otherwise you get an extra plain course, making a (false) touch of 132. In Cambridge, the touch is 8 leads (192 changes), but in Little Bob, it's just 2 leads (16 changes)!

23456
 35264
 56342
 B 56423
 62534
 23645
 B 23456

120: PBPBPBPBPB

A good touch for giving everyone practice at doing Bobs, as each bell is affected once in each position. The downside of this is that there is no simple observation bell to call the touch from, and it can be surprisingly difficult to call, trying to remember whether you had a call at the last lead or not. I try to work out what I will be doing at the next call, rather than try to count the leads.

23456
 35264
 B 35642
 54326
 B 54263
 46532
 B 46325
 62453
 B 62534
 23645
 B 23456

120: PPPSS, repeated

This is just the usual "make a call every time the observation bell is in 5-6 (up or down)"; as written here, the 5th is the observation bell. However, this touch uses Singles for every call, rather than Bobs. In general, in any touch, a pair of Bobs at consecutive leads can be replaced by a pair of Singles - however the touch may not then be true.

23456
 35264
 56342
 64523
 S 46235
 S 64352
 45623
 52436
 23564
 S 32645
 S 23456

180: PPPPB, repeated twice

This is basically the same as the usual 120 in Plain Bob Doubles. But rather than calling 3 Bobs at 4 blows behind, you have the choice of calling the 3 Bobs unaffected in either 5-6 down or 5-6 up. Alternatively, from an affected bell, you can use the "Isle Of Man" mnemonic, running in, running out and making the Bob.

23456
 35264
 56342
 64523
 42635
 B 42356
 25463
 56234
 63542
 34625
 B 34256
 45362
 56423
 62534
 23645
 B 23456

GRANDSIRE TRIPLES

168: PPPB, repeated twice

If called unrotated, the 4, 6 and 7 are the observation bells, with 6 and 7 dodging together at the back at each Bob, while the 4th does double-dodge 4-5 up at each Bob. The 2, 3 and 5 each only ever go in and out of the Hunt and are unaffected in 3rds.

234567
 253746
 275634
 267453
 B 342567

354726

375642

367254

B 423567

452736

475623

467352

B 234567
