

The Bell Tower, Perth

Learning to be a Bell Ringer

What you need to know about learning to ring the bells, and being a volunteer bellringer at the Bell Tower.

Why do people ring?

Bell ringing, or 'Change Ringing' in the traditional English style, where the bells swing in a full circle, is a fascinating and rewarding activity, combining a wide range of mental and physical skills. It is a group activity which combines physical coordination and mental alertness to produce the unique sounds of Change Ringing. However, learning to ring can take considerable time and be quite challenging. For many, the challenging parts are what makes it interesting and rewarding, but for others it may just seem frustrating. This is the same as acquiring skills in music, or sport, for example. Developing greater ability will always require a lot of practice. However, the combination of skills, teamwork, and the rich sounds that are produced, ensures a lifetime's enjoyment.

Many people ring as a contribution to church and community life; others enjoy learning a traditional skill which has been passed down for centuries.

Ringers everywhere enjoy the social aspects of their hobby, meeting regularly to ring bells for various occasions, including regular and frequent practice sessions.

Change Ringing can be quite addictive and it is common to find older ringers who started ringing when they were in their teens and have never grown tired of it. It is a very welcoming pastime, and visiting ringers are warmly welcomed at other towers, at home and abroad.

Safety

There are a number of important safety aspects related to ringing, which all ringers will be expected to follow. Moving bells and ropes have a lot of energy and if not handled correctly are capable of causing significant injury. Understanding and applying safety rules is essential and not negotiable. All instructors hold current Working with Children Check (WCC) cards, and care is taken to maintain a safe working environment.



The St Martin's Society of Change Ringers

The St Martin's Society of Change Ringers is the group of volunteer bell ringers at the Bell Tower, Perth. The name comes from St. Martin-in-the-Fields church in London where 12 of the present 18 bells were originally installed in the eighteenth century. The Society elects a Tower Captain, Deputy Tower Captains and other officers to manage the ringing at the Tower. Those who learn to ring regularly at the Bell Tower will be encouraged to

become members, and there is a nominal annual membership fee (currently \$20 per year). Those instructing will be members of the Society. They will be contributing significant amounts of their time to teach others, with the hope that they will come along regularly to ring the bells, once they are proficient.

The Tower is a significant tourist attraction in Perth. Therefore, the bells are rung frequently – usually at least three sessions per week - so that visitors can see and understand what is involved the ancient and traditional art of Change Ringing

Time Commitment

Before considering whether to learn to ring it is important to understand the time commitment, both to get through the initial learning process and then as a member of the band. Regular ringing times are Mondays (12-1pm), Thursdays (12-1pm) and Sundays (11am-1pm). While ringing occasionally takes place at other times, sufficient ringers are needed at these times on a regular basis. So those learning to ring will need to be able to come along to at least one of these sessions on the majority of weeks. Not only does this keep the bells ringing for our visitors but it enables ringers to maintain and improve their ringing skills.

When learning basic skills initially we will schedule a number of sessions close together – probably at times different to the regular ringing times. These sessions will be one-on-one with an experienced instructor. The more of these which learners attend, the quicker they will progress. While this stage should enable a ringer to develop the basics of controlling a bell safely, it is still some time, often

several weeks, before the learner will be able to ring accurately with others. And even for ringers with many years' experience there is always something new to learn.

At certain times free parking is made available for ringers; the Bell Tower is also well-served by public transport.



Who can learn to be a Change Ringer?

While some degree of physical strength is required, ringing a bell is well within the capabilities of most older children and adults. The ropes are adjusted to suit persons of average height, but shorter or taller people can easily be accommodated. Technique and coordination, developed with practice, are far more important than strength.

Good ringing requires all members of the band to ring as members of a team. So those who have musical skills or interests may have an advantage, but this is not essential. Change Ringing is based on sequences and permutations of the order in which the bells are rung, so good numeracy skills can also

be an advantage when progressing to more advanced ringing.

While people of all ages can be taught to ring, generally, as with most skills, younger people will progress more quickly. This should not put off more mature people from learning to ring as long as they realise that their progress at some or all stages may be slower. Unlike many sports where increasing age is a disadvantage, many people continue ringing until well beyond retirement.



Dress Standards

Because of the physical activity involved, comfortable clothing is essential. However, we also need to present a smart appearance to our visitors. Ringers are therefore encouraged to wear the St. Martin's Society polo shirts to identify themselves as Bell Ringers at the Tower.

Finding Out More

Those learning to ring become members of the team of volunteer bell ringers, and naturally certain commitments will be required. Please consider

these before making a final decision on whether to learn to ring.

If you are looking for an interesting and different pastime, then you might like to find out more about bell ringing by meeting some of the ringers, or coming along to one of the ringing sessions. Bell ringers come in all ages, shapes and sizes, but all share an enthusiasm for this traditional English art which is proudly continued at the Bell Tower in Perth.

By learning to ring you will be keeping alive an art that has developed over many centuries for future generations to enjoy.

Useful Links

To find out about the 'nuts and bolts' of Change Ringing see the Australia and New Zealand Association of Bellringers (ANZAB) pages, especially: <https://www.anzab.org.au/about.php>

Further information may be found on the UK Central Council site: <https://cccbr.org.uk>

To contact the Perth Bell Tower for more information or to be put in touch with one of the St. Martin's Society ringers, please email via the link at:

<https://www.thebelltower.com.au/contact-the-bell-tower/contact-the-bell-towervolunteers/>

