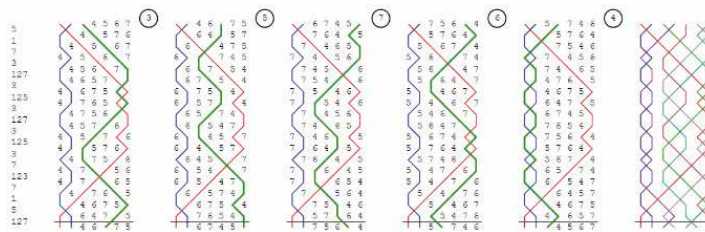


Replacing the Central Council Decisions – Part 3

By *Tim Barnes* (on behalf of the task group)



Introduction

In previous *Ringling World* articles (Jan 26th and Mar 2nd 2018) John Harrison and I provided updates on the project to develop a new framework to replace the current Decisions (CRAG proposal H). It's been hard going, and we were not able to keep to the timetable we set ourselves, but we have now reached the point where we're ready to begin a ringing-community-wide consultation on the draft framework.

Some additional context may be helpful at this point. The Decisions have been described as a sideshow – they've generated decades of controversy and heated debate, but their detail tends only to be of concern to a relatively small number of ringers who are interested in such matters. Certainly, ringing has more important problems to solve than updating the Decisions. Many would agree that the bulk of ringers' collective energy should be focused on areas such as recruiting new ringers, developing and retaining existing ringers, maintaining and expanding rings of bells, and even reorganising the larder.

But as with many sports and activities, there's value in having a well-thought-out governing document, even though its detail may not be widely read. For example, most fans of Formula 1 will never read its 70 pages of sporting regulations and 105 pages of technical regulations – they don't need to to enjoy the sport. But if something unexpected happens on the track, racing fans would expect there to be a rule or procedure to handle it, rather than seeing race officials left flummoxed. Similarly, most ringers will enjoy method ringing without ever needing to pore over the detail of the framework, but its existence provides a foundation for the Exercise, and also provides a reference source for when technical questions arise or precise meanings need to be checked.

In launching this consultation, we're therefore not suggesting that large numbers of ringers ought to take part. Reviewing the framework and providing feedback will take time, and many will have better ways to spend their ringing hours. If at least 20 people participate in the consultation, we'll be pleased with that level of feedback. If we get more than 50 responses, we'll be surprised (but still pleased).

Types of feedback

For those who would like to take part, we'd be happy just to receive feedback on the parts of the framework you're interested in – there's no expectation that every participant will comment on every section of the framework.

Different participants can also choose to provide different types of feedback, as they wish. The consultation survey asks

for feedback in the following 7 areas, and participants should feel free to comment on as many or few of them as they like:

- Typos and grammatical errors;
- Inconsistencies in layout, formatting, numbering, etc;
- Suggestions for ways in which the wording could be improved to increase clarity;
- Comments on whether or not you could understand the various sections of the framework as written, and if not, which are the problematic areas;
- Comments on the definitions and requirements themselves – whether you agree or disagree, and if you disagree, what you would change;
- Specifically on method classification (section 4), your preference between Alternative A and Alternative B, and/or your other thoughts – this is discussed further below;
- Any other comments you'd like to make that aren't covered above.

Structure of the framework website

The framework website (cccbr.github.io/method_ringing_framework) is divided into 17 different sections, as listed on the left of each web page. Many of the sections have '+' buttons that, when clicked, reveal additional content: examples, explanations and technical comments.

As explained in section 1 (Introduction), only the unexpanded parts of sections 3 to 9 are intended to become the actual framework. For those who prefer reviewing a printed document, the content of the framework can also be accessed as a standalone pdf document by clicking on the link near the bottom of section 1.

All the other material on the website, including the expanded parts of sections 3 to 9, is supporting documentation intended to help in the understanding of the framework, or to further assist ringers in communicating about method ringing.

The relevance of this distinction is that the Central Council will likely implement a defined procedure, including consultation, for making future changes to the framework, whereas supporting material will be updated by the Council's proposed Technical workgroup when the need arises.

The rationale for the framework

The key features of the framework were outlined in the Mar 2nd *RW* article, so I won't repeat them here. Our mandate called for the

framework to be permissive and simple, while maintaining historical continuity. We believe we've achieved the intended permissiveness with the new constructs that the framework recognises. Historical continuity is also achieved – the vast majority of ringers will not be affected by the framework being implemented, unless they choose to take advantage of some of its new features, such as using more than one cover bell.

Simplicity was more of a challenge. It's a stretch to describe the framework as simple, but this is due to method ringing's inherent complexity that results from both its mathematical foundation and its rich history. But we've tried to make the framework as simple as possible, and have included many explanations and examples to make things clearer.

It may be useful at this point to summarize the rationale for, and purpose of, each of the major areas of the proposed framework. The framework boils down to supporting five key elements of method ringing:

1. Methods & Method Naming

Several years ago, I flew halfway around the world to Australia, joined a ringing practice, and was asked if I knew Bristol Royal. What I was being asked was immediately clear. It's quite an achievement, and one led by the Central Council, that ringing has a single, global method library that everyone in the world uses. But for this to work, two things are needed: definition of what a method is, and requirements for what gives a band the right to name a new method and have it added to the library.

2. Performances & Performance Reporting

Performance is the general term we've used in the framework to refer to different lengths that people ring and usually publish on *BellBoard* and/or in the *RW*: peals, quarter peals, and to a lesser extent, half peals, date touches and short touches.

BellBoard and *The Ringing World* provide what might be thought of as the spectator side of ringing. We generally don't watch and listen to other bands' ringing performances in person, but we enjoy reading about them. We also enjoy keeping statistics on our own ringing, and reading analyses of leading quarter peal and peal ringers, leading towers, and so on. These spectator and statistical aspects both require a common understanding of what words like peal and quarter peal mean, as well as related specialist terms such as stage, spliced, extent and true.

3. Record Lengths

Record lengths are one of the most competitive elements of method ringing.

These days, attempting to break a record in a popular method such as Stedman, Cambridge or Bristol is a serious undertaking given the existing records. To ensure fairness to both existing and new record holders, it's important that a new record is rung under the same conditions as the previous one. Fairness is also reinforced by umpiring requirements.

4. Method Classification

In terms of cost vs. benefit, framework support for the three elements above has a strong case. Setting out the definitions and requirements for methods & method naming, performances & performance reporting, and record lengths can be done with not too many words and not too much complexity. While it's hard to get the wording and structure exactly right to avoid ambiguity and cover all scenarios, once this is done, the resulting language is reasonably straightforward.

The situation is less clear-cut for method classification and particularly for method extension. Method classification drives the words such as "Bob" and "Surprise" that appear in method titles. Method title = Method name + Classification + Stage. E.g. Plain Bob Minor and Cambridge Surprise Major. Principles don't have a class word – e.g. Stedman Caters. Some methods have multiple class words – e.g. Tenpo Differential Little Surprise Maximus.

The current classification system is quite complex to follow, especially for methods with more than one hunt bell. How much benefit these classifications provide to ringers is debatable, but they do give some information about a method's structure. The current system evolved over many decades – if we were starting from scratch, we'd probably come up with a much simpler system.

However, these classifications are now part of our heritage. If we make significant changes to the classification system, many method titles would change and we'd need a mapping table to interpret historical ringing records, including peal and quarter peal boards.

Classification also enables reuse of method names. While there's no shortage of possible method names, perhaps a band would like to ring and give a new Major method the name 'Guildford' to mark a special occasion related to that city. Guildford Surprise has already been named, as has Guildford Delight. But Guildford Alliance is available.

So, classification has some benefit, and the cost of making significant changes in terms of loss of historical continuity is hard to justify.

But perhaps we could make some smaller changes to the classification system to achieve some simplification and make the class words in method titles more meaningful to more ringers. After much discussion, the framework team couldn't agree on a single proposal to bring forward into the consultation. We've therefore included two classification sections in the website – 4A and 4B. 4A keeps the existing classification system mostly in place, but attempts to make it easier to follow. 4B makes some relatively small changes to make the classes more tightly defined and simpler

to understand. However, this changes the method titles of around 2-3% of the existing methods in the library. We'll publish a list of the methods that would be retitled – we believe none are widely rung, but this is to be verified. We'd welcome feedback on which of the two alternatives is preferred, or if there are other ideas on how to approach method classification in the new framework.

5. Method Extension

The cost-benefit case for method extension is the most questionable. On the benefit side, most ringers immediately see the connection between Plain Bob, Grandsire and Stedman at different stages, and if Stedman Doubles and Triples were named, but then Stedman Caters was given a different name, many would find that nonsensical.

The relationship between different stages is a little harder to discern for more complex methods such as Cambridge and Yorkshire, and harder still for methods like Bristol. But study of the place notation for these methods soon reveals the patterns that produce the extensions. Yorkshire S Major, for example, has been extended and named at all even stages up to Sixteen. If the extension to Eighteen was rung, it wouldn't make sense for it to be named anything other than Yorkshire.

Also, ringers comfortable with higher stage ringing often enjoy "completing the family" – e.g. ringing quarter peals or peals of Cambridge at all stages from Minor to Maximus (or even higher).

Method extension requirements therefore provide benefits. But they come at considerable cost in terms of the complexity of the processes that generalise the way many methods in the library are extended.

For now, the framework team has largely kept the existing method extension rules in place in the new framework, with only limited changes that mostly remove the more arbitrary constraints and address inconsistencies in the current Decisions (the latter primarily relating to non-palindromic methods). Instead we focused on explaining the existing extension rules much more fully in the framework than they are in today's Decisions, including with worked examples.

We've also separated the extension rules into two parts. The framework itself only specifies the key principles behind method extension (section 8). The detailed implementation (section 13) is outside the framework so it can be improved and expanded over time by experts in the Council's proposed Technical workgroup.

The complexity of method extension can also be mitigated by making software tools available to do the place notation crunching. For example, Graham John's CompLib site (www.complib.org) shows possible extensions for many lower stage methods in the library (see the Related Methods section), and it's expected that method extension tools will continue to be developed to provide more functionality.

Overall, the framework team's view is that there are further developments and improvements that can be made to the method extension requirements, but these will require

time to develop as well as thorough testing (which will involve software development). We therefore envisage these being implemented at a later date as a 'Version 2' of the framework.

Mapping the five elements to the framework

The five elements above were presented in roughly ascending order of complexity. The framework doesn't fully follow this order – the reason being to avoid as many forward references as possible. For example, method naming (section 5) and performance reporting (section 6) have some dependencies on method classification, so it makes sense for method classification (section 4) to come before these two.

For anyone looking to study the framework in roughly ascending order of complexity, we'd suggest going in the following order:

- Section 3: Fundamentals of Method Ringing
- Section 5: Method Naming
- Section 6: Performance Reporting
- Section 7: Record Lengths
- Section 9: Related Roles
- Section 4: Method Classification
- Section 8: Method Extension
- Sections 10-14: Ancillary material

Only the very committed will want to study section 13, which has the detailed steps for method extension.

Consultation timing

There's no fixed timetable for the consultation – we'd prefer to take as long as needed to do this properly, rather than hit a fixed date. If the reform motions pass at the CC meeting on May 28th, the Executive can implement the framework at any time, subject to the call-in provision. The reform motions also implement the current Decisions into the new CC rulebook, so until such time as the new framework is agreed and implemented, the existing Decisions remain in place.

As an initial target, we'd be grateful if participants could complete the consultation survey by **Sat Jun 30th 2018**. Once we've processed the feedback received, we'll then determine whether subsequent round(s) of consultation on updated version(s) of the Framework are needed. An update will be published in *The Ringing World* whenever a further round of consultation is initiated.

We'll use the FAQs page on the framework website (Section 17) to respond to common questions and suggestions arising in the consultation. Once the consultation is completed, we'll publish the outcome in *The Ringing World*.

Accessing the consultation survey

The consultation survey can be accessed at www.surveymonkey.com/r/96H5BKB.

Many thanks in advance to everyone who takes the time to study the framework and provide feedback.