

# **The Essex Association of Change Ringers**

Registered Charity No. 292250

## **The Future and where are we going.**

The “2A’s” discussion paper.

The formation of the Association in 1879 is well documented. It is a “territorial Association” and as such was amongst the first to be formed, pre dating the diocese of Chelmsford by a good number of years. The boundaries have been well defined now for some time <sup>1</sup>

The objects of the Association are:

1. To further the work of the Church by the ringing of bells and to promote all aspects of the same.
2. To provide financial assistance to Churches within the boundaries of the Association for the purpose of maintaining and improving their bell installations.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Southend and District Guild was wound up in 1969 and for administrative purposes the Association was divided into six “Districts” (previously 5) very little has changed in terms of structure – only occasionally has a tower been transferred from one District to another and then only to meet local requirements. Even then the northern Districts were not affected. Historically the district structures were based on railway routes and stations of which many are now demolished and, to a lesser extent, bus routes all of which has little relevance at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. century.

Districts are not balanced in terms of the number of towers, the largest District having more than twice the number than the smallest. The workload of District Officers is thus proportionately imbalanced.

For about the last thirty years –say since the centenary celebrations in 1979 - the Association has been one of the leading territorial ringing organizations although this may have been the result of the earlier work carried out by the “Ginger Group”.<sup>3,4</sup> The Association has benefited from a series of high quality, motivated officers all of whom have contributed to forwarding the objectives.

Over the last decade or so a great deal has been achieved. We have seen the “Ring In 2000” campaign introduce a considerable number of new people to the art of ringing and more recently the successful 125<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary celebrations year.

However all of this is history. The challenge the Association faces now is where are we going from here? There are no special events on the horizon upon which we can focus. It is worth noting here that at least 50% of the current Association membership has been elected since 1979.

Since the Ginger Group reported the pace of life has changed quite dramatically not least in terms of communication with electronic communication coming increasingly to the fore.

There are massive and exciting challenges ahead for all association members if we are to fulfil our objectives, not least in passing on to the next generation the skills that our art requires.

A number of fundamental questions must be asked such as:

- 1 How are we to meet the objectives if indeed they are still relevant?
- 2 Is the District structure now correct?
- 3 Is a programme of district meetings and other events relevant today?
- 4 Has the Association outlived its purpose?

There are of course many more questions that could, and indeed should, be asked but the object of this discussion paper is not to put them forward but to provoke discussion amongst all of the members.

There are two fundamental questions and these are:

- 1 Does ringing in Essex need any organisation i.e. the Association?
- 2 Do we need to change anything?

It must be stressed here that there is absolutely no point in changing anything unless it can be clearly demonstrated that by introducing change significant improvements in the efficacy of the Association can be made.

It has been said that “Districts are Divisive”. This may well be true in as much as there does seem to be this invisible wall around them that prevents, or at least seems to restrict the free movement of many ringers about the Association area. Perhaps this is the crux of the whole issue – movement is so much more readily available to the vast majority of members than it was say 40 years ago.

Are District Meetings of any relevance? With good modern communications groups of ringers can easily arrange to meet up as and when they want to without the formal structure of district officers, services and meetings. Would other groupings be more efficient? However beware a Deanery based set-up as this may well be more divisive than the present Districts and of course the Deanery boundaries are subject to change beyond our control. There are already many non-Association based mid-week ringing groups that meet regularly

If there were no districts would the whole Committee have to be elected at the Annual General Meeting? This in turn depends upon the Committee structure – is this correct?

Should the Association be leading the way with recruiting and teaching? The Essex ringing Course is now fully incorporated within the Association structure and there are two recognised Ringing Centres as well as a number of towers equipped with ringing simulators so that a much more structured approach to recruiting and teaching should be possible. If this is the way forward should the Association set any standards with regard to instruction in the absence of any lead from outside bodies such as the Central Council?

The present “management structure” places a considerable workload burden on the officers. Should subscriptions be increased and a secretary be paid to run the affairs say on a one day a week basis? This would be of considerable benefit should districts be abandoned.

Should discussions be held with Diocesan management with a view to getting a joint approach to ringing, the way forward and where ringing fits within the church?

How about actively promoting ringing in schools and colleges – in particular aiming to get more young people involved? Many youngsters perceive the church very far removed from being “cool”. What should we be doing to address this?

The way forward would appear to be to hold far reaching discussions amongst the membership and this must include as many members as possible not just the active minority (about 10%). One object of any changes would be to create a structure that would encourage all members to become more active.

Ringing has a future but it is up to us all now to act to determine how bright that future is.

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<sup>1</sup> The Essex Association of Change Ringers – Rule number 4.

<sup>2</sup> The Essex Association of Change Ringers – Rule number 2

<sup>3</sup> Change Ringing in Essex; *Joe Roast*.1978.

<sup>4</sup> Contemporary Annual Reports and Minute Books.