

How to learn methods

(...and there's usually more than one way)

St. Martin's Guild of Church Bell Ringers

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Introduction

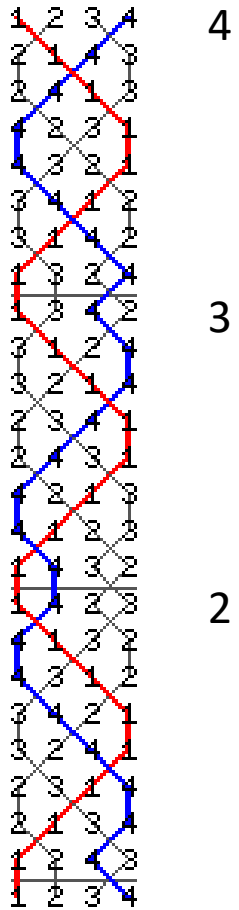
When needing to learn a new method, there are many ringers who simply refer to the Blue line and commit it to memory. This in itself is not a bad thing provided that the ringer can do this in a timely manner and has the brain capacity to keep inputting an ever increasing number of Blue lines. There are ringers who can do this with relative ease, but there are also many ringers who cannot.

A huge number of methods are interconnected with one another in a variety of ways, a bit like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. As such it is sometimes possible to ring a previously unknown method at very short notice by having the ability to make a few simple changes to an already known method, - sometimes whilst ringing.

Whilst I have used some example methods in what follows, the intention is not to focus specifically on those methods, but more to illustrate how they, and many other methods, can be easily altered and rung without the need to study a Blue line.

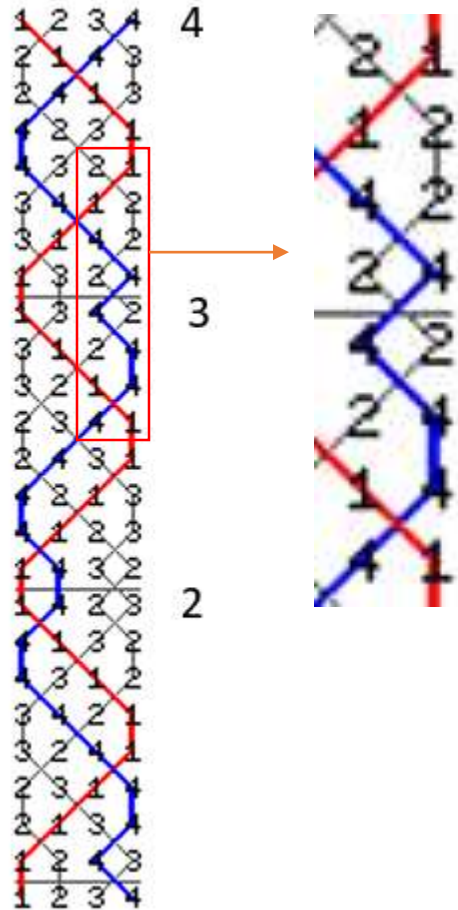
With the exception of Plain Bob Minimus which begins this presentation, all the methods referred to are plain minor methods which is more than sufficient for now. The same changes and adaptations can also be used when ringing odd bell methods, treble bob, delight and surprise methods.

Plain Bob Minimus – the usual way



On the right is the method written out with a Red line showing the path of the treble and a Blue line showing the work of the other three bells. These three bells all do the same work, they just start in different places. This work is mostly plain hunting except for the three points where the treble is leading. At these points, bells 2, 3 and 4 will either be making 2nds, dodging 3-4 down or 3-4 up. The diagram above shows these in the correct order moving clockwise as indicated by the arrows. It also shows where in the sequence to start depending on which bell is being rung. It is either this circle of work which needs to be memorised or, if the ringer is able to (not all are) visualize the Blue line.

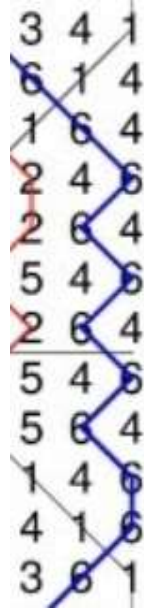
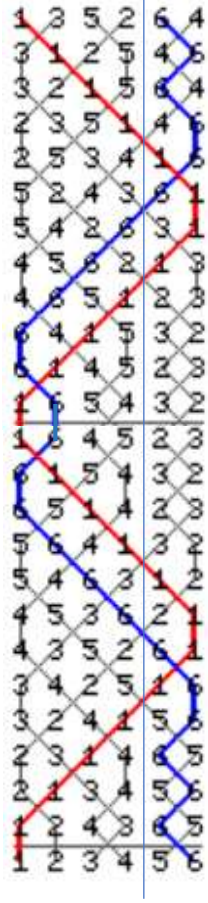
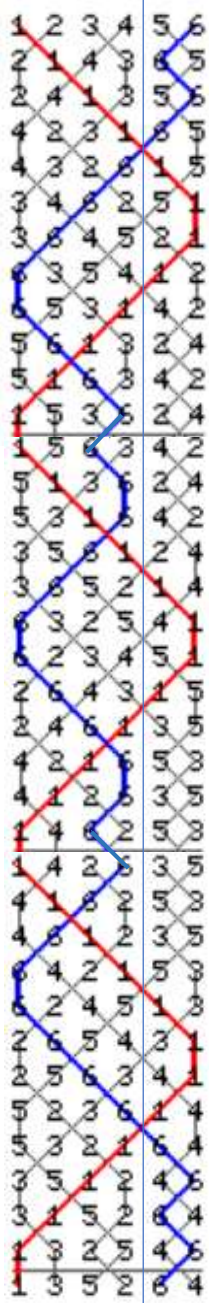
Plain Bob Minimus – a different way



On the far left is Plain Bob Minimus again, and next to it is just a section of it showing what happens in 3rds and 4ths places between the treble lying at the back in the first lead and returning to the back 6 blows later. As can be seen that leaves exactly the right amount of room for one bell to lie in 4ths prior to dodging in 3-4 down and another bell to dodge in 3-4 up prior to lying in 4ths. Due to the structure of the method, every time a bell arrives in 3-4 places it will have to carry out one or the other of these manoeuvres. The novice ringer can sometimes panic and, as a result, try and perform them the wrong way round. So, is there a way of sorting this?

As with any plain method, the treble here is just plain hunting, it doesn't do any dodging at all. In the example shown, bell number 2 has moved in to 4ths place immediately after treble which is moving into 3rds place. If bell number 2 thought they might be doing a dodge here, it would have to be with the treble which can't happen, so the only option is to stay in 4ths place and make the dodge with the next bell to arrive in 4ths place. The opposite is also true in that if on arriving in 3rds place the bell in 4ths place is not the treble, then dodge with whichever bell this is prior to making 4ths.

The only other rule to remember is to make seconds over the treble if it turns you from lead. That's it, - all the rest is just plain hunting.



Single Oxford Bob Minor

Here is an example of a less uniform plain method (the treble is just plain hunting) which can be learnt by committing to memory the cycle of work or by being able to visualise the Blue line. However, this can also be rung by using an already known Blue line and by keeping an eye out for when the treble is passed.

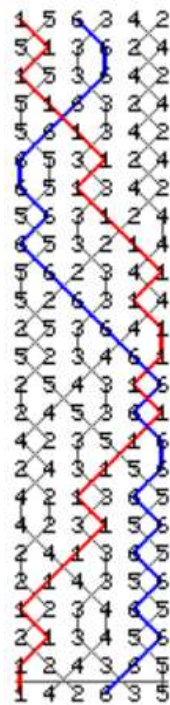
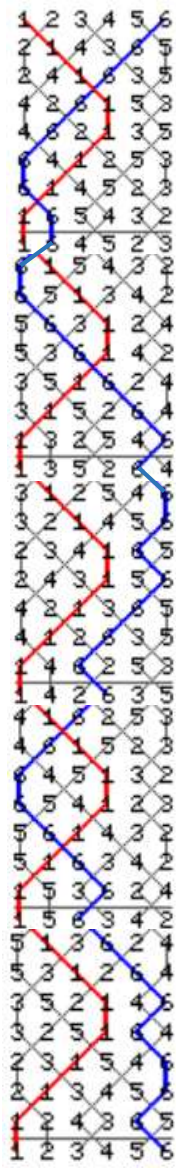
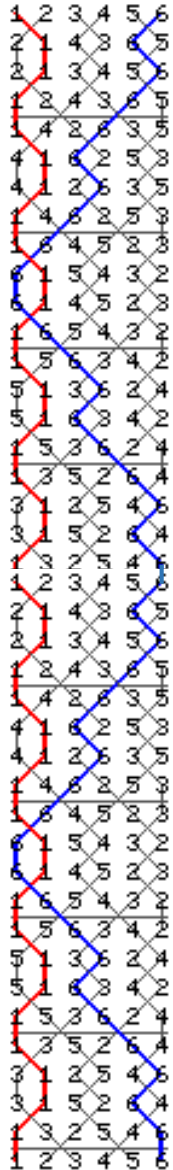
A line has been drawn vertically down the page as a visual aid and which separates the work happening in 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th place from what's happening in 5th and 6th place. Let's first look at the front four places.

The simple rule here is, if the treble is passed before reaching 4th place, then ring Plain Bob Minimus. The sections where the 3-4 dodges and the 2nds over the treble are can be compared directly with the Blue line in the previous slide. Note that the treble is passed in exactly the same place relative to what follows in both lines.

If, however, 4th place is reached when hunting out and the treble has not yet been passed, then carry on into 5th and 6th place to do either a triple dodge followed by 6ths or the other way round. Ah, but I here you ask, do I start this work in 5-6 by making 6ths first then dodging or is it the other way round? In the previous slide, when looking at the dodging in 3-4 it was seen that if the treble is the last bell to be passed, then there is no option other than to make 4th and then dodge. Exactly the same rule applies here, if the treble is the last bell passed, then make 6ths before triple dodging in 5-6. If it is not the treble which is passed last, then triple dodge with the last bell and then make 6ths.

Bastow Minor, Little Bob Minor and TB Minor

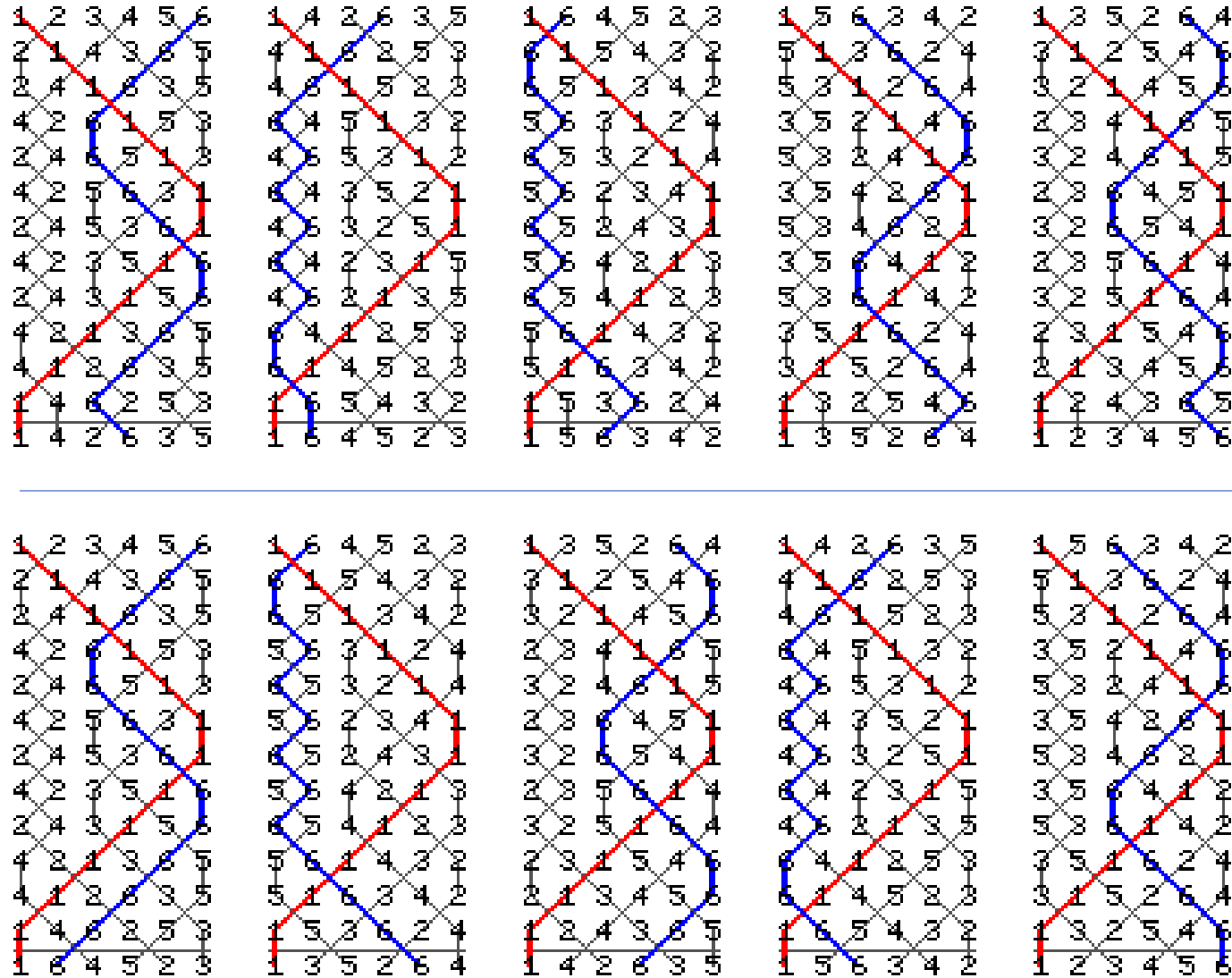
Despite the initially complicated looking line for Bastow (far left) it forms the basis of treble bob hunting (as opposed to plain hunting). What is actually there is two plain courses which I've done for a reason which I'll come to further down the page. With plain hunting the idea is to pass every bell once when moving from the front of the row to the back, and visa versa going the other way. Bastow can be learnt as a Blue line as can any method, but basically it's a simple case of three places forward and one place back repeated and remembering not to dodge when in 1-2 places. When ringing on higher numbers, having got to the 5-6 up dodge simply keep going up to 7-8 and so on.



The method in the centre is Little Bob Minor half of which is identical to Bastow (hence two course of Bastow being shown). This can be seen by looking at the lower half of both of the lines. The top part of Little Bob varies slightly in that the 3-4 dodges are not possible as the treble is "in the way" as it were. When this happens, simply keep plain hunting and, as in Plain Bob, make 2nds over the treble.

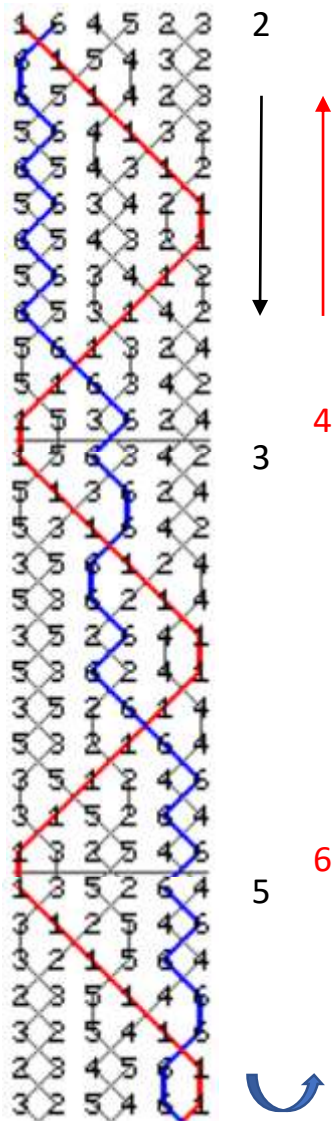
Finally the line to the right is a lead of a surprise minor method (any one will do). Looking at the line for the treble you will see is the same as Bastow but with the addition of dodges in 1-2 also. This treble path is called treble bob hunting as mentioned earlier.

St. Clement's Minor (top) and College Bob Minor (bottom)



Here is an example of how a further method can be quickly and easily rung simply by changing the last row of every lead. Like Plain Bob, St. Clement's (shown top left) has what is called a 2nds place lead end, ie a bell makes 2nds over the treble thus creating dodges in 3-4 and 5-6. However, if this last row is changed to a 6ths place lead end, this eradicates the 2nds being made and also the dodges in 3-4 and 5-6. As a result, we end up with the bells in a different order for this last row. From here though, they then carry on ringing St. Clement's but starting from a different point to where they would otherwise have been.

Lead end, half lead and double methods



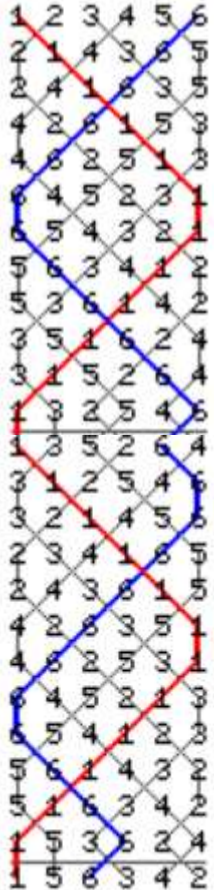
It's good to learn where the lead end is, the backstroke of the treble lead. When things aren't going right (it happens) the conductor will often say: "This is the lead end" so it helps if you at least know where you should be, - even if you aren't! Equally, particularly as methods become more complicated it's also good to know where the half lead is, the backstroke of the treble in 6ths. Lead ends and half leads are quite often points in a method where the Blue line goes from one piece of work to another. The lead ends also mark the start of a new place bell.

The method shown to the left is Double Oxford, - or at least half of it and it doesn't matter that it doesn't start from rounds. Already some parts of the Blue line here may be familiar, the triple dodges in 5-6 were seen in the Single Oxford on slide 6 and the same dodges in 1-2 in St. Clement's and College in the previous slide.

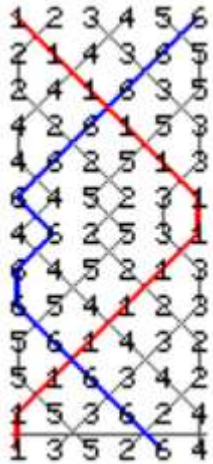
If a Blue line has to be learnt (sometimes there's no avoiding it) some ringers find it easier to learn half of it, going down the line in the usual way and at the mid-point, coming back up the line. This is indicated here by the place bells and arrows shown on the right of the method, Black for going down and Red for coming back up.

Reverse methods

Plain Bob



Reverse Bob



Having explained the lead end and the half lead, here is an example of when this knowledge can be a real bonus.

Plain Bob is a method in which the exciting stuff (dodges and the like) happens at the lead end, the rest is just plain hunting. In Reverse Bob (which is exactly what it is) the opposite is true in that the dodging occurs at the half lead and all the rest (the lead end included) is just plain hunting.

In the illustration shown on the left, the lead end of Plain Bob is lined up with the half lead of Reverse Bob. It can be seen that one is an exact reflection of the other. Placing a small mirror on the vertical line dividing the two methods will confirm this, which ever way the mirror faces.

Again this can be learnt as a Blue line should you so wish (no shame in that) however as ropesight improves it shouldn't be too difficult to ring this simply by knowing Plain Bob.

Finally, these two methods can be combined thus creating a Blue line with places and dodging at the lead end and the half lead and is called Double Bob, - the clue is in the name. So here is a case of three methods which it's possible to ring by just knowing one.

Summary

In terms of being able to ring more methods, bell ringing is not all about learning new Blue lines ad infinitum although there ringers who are able to and prefer it that way and that's fine. It's more about seeing the connections between certain methods and taking full advantage of that in order to be able to ring them more easily.

Next time a new method needs to be learnt for what ever reason, here's a few things to think about:

- By all means look at the Blue line but pause for a while before trying to learn it as a line
- Does it look like another method you already know, even just one place bell maybe?
- Do any bits of it look like the bits you've seen in other methods you know?
- Is it a 2nds place method or a far place method?
- Is it a reverse or a double method? (not to be confused with "doubles" methods)

If in time you think you might like to try ringing a few methods using some of these techniques, maybe start with a plain course of Plain Bob Minimus prior to attempting say Reverse Bob Minimus followed by Double Bob Minimus - you may surprise yourself so why not give it a go.

