

MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting held at Highfield, The Winnaway, Harwell, on **Sunday, 25th February 2018** at 7.30pm.

1. ATTENDEES

Rob Nickless (Chairman), Philip Roberts (Joint Ringing Master), Richard Loyd (Joint Ringing Master), Stuart Gibson (Treasurer), Gill Loyd (Secretary), Susan Read (Training Officer), Mark Cooke (Webmaster), Janette Roberts (Branch Representative), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Dick Peters (Branch Representative), Mary Friskney, Cliff Garlick, Tim Pett, Daphne Pollard, Claire Ward

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Ian Minns (Newsletter Editor), Nick Clarke, Debbie Greenfield, Colin Turner, Nicola Turner

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1st October 2017

Circulated and read, the Chairman signed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING

- **Guild membership and insurance:** All those who started to ring on the May 2017 course (and are still ringing) have joined or are about to join the Guild.
- **Coffee morning in Didcot:** This was very successful and over £400 was raised.

5. SECRETARY'S REPORT

- Since the last Committee Meeting, monthly branch practices have been held at Cholsey, Wallingford, North Moreton and Abingdon, St Nicolas. Mid-week afternoon ringing practices have been held at Milton, Chilton, Blewbury and West Hanney. Surprise major practices were held in Drayton, Brightwell and Harwell. Susan Read has continued to organise events for young branch members during the school holidays.
- Since the last Committee Meeting we have gained fourteen new members: Amelie Wymer (Brightwell), Daniel Gillett and Joseph Gillett (Abingdon), Simon Young, Jo Walshe, Rachel Marffy and Tom Coates (Aston Tirrold), Toni Robinson, Lily Robinson and George Barber (Letcombe Regis), Adam Clarke (North Moreton), Paul Wooldridge (Sunningwell), Tim Lancaster (West Hanney) and Nicola Kerry (Unattached).
- Congratulations go to the Wallingford ringers, who represented the Branch in the Guild's 6-bell striking competition at the beginning of October and were placed third. The branch band ringing Stedman Caters in the Guild's 10-bell striking competition in Olney was placed first and will represent the Guild in the Tewkesbury Shield competition on 5th May 2018, ringing a course of Cambridge Surprise Royal.
- The barn dance and supper evening at Harwell on Saturday, 11th November, was very well attended by just over one hundred branch members, their families and friends. Thanks go to Janette and Philip Roberts, Kathryn and Dave Roberts-Locke, the Harwell ringers and the dance band 'Jigworks' for their magnificent organisation of the evening. The dance raised £263 and the raffle £190 for branch restoration projects.
- New Year's Day 2018 ringing with refreshments was held at Appleton and there were almost thirty attendees. Thanks go to Sylvia Harrison and all the Appleton ringers for the excellent refreshments, which ranged from tasty soups through to delicious cakes. This was once again a very happy occasion for the Branch and a good start to 2018.
- On Sunday, 21st January 2018, there was a meeting of Branch Officers. At this we discussed the recent ringing accident at St Helen, Abingdon, together with ways we can improve safety in the Branch and support the Abingdon ringers.

6. JOINT RINGING MASTERS' REPORT

- All scheduled branch practices have taken place with encouraging attendance at both the Surprise Major and Afternoon practices, and there has been an improving attendance at the evening monthly practices at various towers. The poor attendance at evening practices has been a concern for a while but there have been some useful practices with new members attending recently. We hope that this trend continues and we encourage tower captains or other branch members to try to come with new ringers to at least one of these practices in a year.

- Susan Read will report separately on the branch training initiative, but it is good to see several new ringers now becoming proficient and supporting their local towers as a result of this effort. We add our appreciation to all the branch members who have helped and supported Susan this year.
- The enormous local and national media attention given to the unfortunate incident at Abingdon St Helens highlights our need to be extra careful with all aspects of safety in the tower. Another serious incident will surely create a major story for the press and potentially result in unwanted investigations into the safety of ringing generally. We urge all members, whether in a position of responsibility or not, to be vigilant and highlight any areas of concern which could compromise the safety of our ringers. This can range from the condition of our bells and fittings, to dangerous practices or horseplay in the tower, safety of minors in the tower and transporting to and from practices, supervision of novice ringers, etc.
- Finally, the branch has had a period of little activity regarding bell restoration, with Brightwell being the last significant project. There is currently a nascent plan at Long Wittenham which if it becomes a reality would be an excellent and worthwhile project for us all to get behind.

7. TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

Outings and events for young ringers

- Events organised during school holidays for young ringers have consisted of:
 - 25 Oct 2017: Ringing in Witney & Ducklington with a walk between the towers and refreshments
 - 3 Jan 2018: Ringing in Bladon & Woodstock with a walk between the towers and refreshments
 - 14 Feb 2018: Ringing in Old Marston & Headington, card games and a ploughman's lunch
- A date in the Easter holidays 2019 has been agreed with the Oxford Society for a mid-week outing to Oxford for young ringers
- Any ideas from branch members for future outings/activities will be welcomed.

Branch Ringing School

The Branch Ringing School idea came from the Birmingham Ringing School, a very successful venture by the St Martins's Guild. It is based on the 'Learning the Ropes' (LTR) syllabus used by the Association of Ringing Teachers. The idea is that learners from our branch should learn together from the best teachers in our branch, providing a steady stream of new ringers to all our towers.

- The ringing lessons have continued from July 2017 as the LTR2 (rounds and call changes) group on Saturday mornings (9.30 – 10.30 am) at a variety of branch towers, with local ringers who kindly gave up their time to act as helpers. Two learners have dropped out, one because of illness and the other because Saturdays didn't suit him.
- From January 2018, the LTR2 (rounds and call changes) group have moved to a different practice night/tower each week from 7.00 – 8.00 pm. This group of three has now been joined by four ringers from Aston Tirrold and there is room for others to join in. With the cold dark evenings in February, numbers dropped off so the practices for the remainder of February have been cancelled. The intention is to recommence after Easter when the evenings are light again.
- From January 2018 a group of three new ringers, the LTR1 (handling) group has started on Saturdays (9.30 – 10.30 am) at a series of different branch towers. They are very keen and learning very quickly. As they improve and can ring reliably on their own, I will move them to the LTR2 group. A fourth young lady has just joined and there is room for others to join the group.
- One of the ringers who started learning in May 2017 has got to the point where he has the control and is ready to start learning plain hunt. Ideally we should start a third class each week to teach plain hunt in a LTR3 group. There are certainly lots of ringers who would benefit from such a course. However I am finding organising, staffing and running two groups each week quite draining so will leave that for now until I have found someone willing to share the administrative and training load as Training Coordinator.
- I would like to thank all those who have opened their towers, helped to teach and rung with the learners from the Branch Ringing School. Their help is much appreciated.

It was thought that an LTR3 course would place an extra burden on Susan, and so it was suggested that the learner concerned should learn in his own tower or go to another tower's practice night.

8. TREASURER'S REPORT

- In 2017 the membership of the Branch was the same as in 2016, at 264. There were 255 members who paid subscriptions, 6 of which were a member of the Guild through another Branch. In addition there were 7 Honorary and 2 Life members.
- So far in 2018 we have 108 paid up members (from 11 towers and 1 unattached) along with the 6 Honorary and 2 Life members plus 5 members who pay a subscription through another branch. 16 towers have not yet paid their subscriptions to date. Branch subscriptions must be paid over to the Guild before the end of March to ensure members benefit from the Guild Insurance policy.
- The main fund raising event in 2017 was the Barn Dance at Harwell. This raised £453 with an additional £224 from the BBQ following the outing. Honey sales raised £184 and the Outing raffle £33.
- The Branch, for the second year, collected a voluntary £2 donation with subscriptions. Almost everyone made the contributions to put towards restorations projects. Again, this has been retained awaiting a suitable project, which potentially could be Long Wittenham. £474 was collected in the year.
- Four youth events were organised by the Branch resulting in a small loss (£4). Donations were made to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund (£250) and the Oxford Diocesan Guild Restoration Fund (£100).
- The Branch, at the end of 2017, had funds in the region of £4,797, which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch.
- The accounts for 2017 have been examined and circulated ready to be presented for approval at the AGM.

9. UPDATE ON PROJECTS

- **Long Wittenham:** Julia Sargeant had recently had an informal meeting in the church with Peter Collinson (Tower Captain), Jill Garlick, Stuart Gibson, Richard and Gill Loyd. They discussed the Whites of Appleton bell inspection report (bells to be removed and retuned, and to be returned with new fittings and refurbished wheels). A new ringing gallery was also recommended. An application was then made for an ODG grant and this was successful at 20% of the cost of the work to the bells, and will remain so for a period of up to three years. Julia is speaking to the PCC about this project. Other work is needed in the church (toilet, kitchen and south aisle) and the meeting felt that it would be easier to raise one large sum of money at one time, rather than raising it piecemeal per individual project. The Long Wittenham PCC will be invited to North Moreton to see what was achieved there.
- **Steventon:** Claire Ward is going to ask Whites of Appleton to inspect the bells.
- **Culham:** The possibility of a project to restore Culham bells was discussed. There might be an opportunity for some funds to come from the developer of new houses in the area. Susan will talk to the new external examiner at St Helen, Abingdon, who lives in Culham.

10. DONATIONS FROM BRANCH FUNDS AND OTHER SUPPORT FOR PROJECTS

- **ODG Funds:** The Committee will recommend to the AGM that £250 be donated to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund and £100 to the ODG Restoration Fund.
- The Treasurer, seconded by Dick Peters, proposed recommending to the AGM that a provisional grant of £3,000 be given to Long Wittenham for bell restoration.

11. ITEMS FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

- **Guild 8-bell striking competition**

Tim was disappointed that, yet again, the Branch was unable to raise a team. This could be because of the date (May Bank Holiday Monday), the method (Double Norwich Court Bob Major) or the proximity to the Tewkesbury Shield competition (5th May). It was suggested that the Branch could ask the Guild again to reconsider the possibility of holding the 8-bell competition in March on the afternoon of the same day as the General Committee Meeting, which could be moved to the morning.
- All officers present said that they would be prepared to stand again if there were no other nominations at the AGM.

12. SOCIAL EVENTS

- Mini outing with three towers and lunch in the Hungerford area on Wednesday, 25th April.

- Branch outing and evening barbecue on Saturday, 21st July.
- Skittles evening with fish and chip supper at Radley Village Hall on Saturday, 10th November. The hall has been booked.
- New Year's Ringing and Refreshments 2019: the Secretary will approach the Wantage ringers.

13. SAFETY IN THE BRANCH

Following the ringing accident at St Helen, Abingdon, on Friday, 19th January 2018:

- A meeting of Branch Officers was held on Sunday, 21st January to discuss the accident and ways that safety can be improved in the Branch.
- Tim Pett reported that the two churchwardens in Abingdon are conducting an inquiry into the circumstances of the accident. Hopefully there will be a report which will include 'lessons learned' and will detail any changes that might need to be made.
- A loss adjuster from the Guild's insurers has made an inspection re safety in the tower. The injured boy is almost completely recovered and will probably not be making a claim on the insurance now. However we need to bear in mind that this might change in the future.
- The Guild does not have a designated Safety Officer – is this a missing role? N.B. Individual churches are responsible for their own safety and safeguarding.
- After the Abingdon report has become available, the Joint Ringing Masters and Secretary will meet to discuss various safety points, which they will distribute to Branch towers by email.
- Claire Ward reported that she is now in charge at Steventon and said that she has decided that the bells will be kept in the down position in between ringing.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Claire Ward reported that Steventon, Drayton, Sutton Courtenay, Milton and Appleford now form the DAMASCUS parish. Nicola Turner is arranging a monthly joint practice for these towers.
- Armistice 11th November 2018: Towers are being asked to ring 'open' at 7.05pm.
- Celebrating 100 years of Womens' Suffrage: 2nd July 2018 is the 90th anniversary of the 1928 Equal Franchise Act.
- There will be an updated version of the Data Protection Act in May 2018.
- Currently there is no ringing at East Hagbourne because of sickness and injury.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This will be Sunday, 7th October 2018 at 7.30pm, at Dornie Lodge, Bessels Lea, Blewbury.

After the Chairman had expressed thanks to Janette and Philip for their hospitality, the meeting closed at 9.10pm.

Signed..... Date.....