

**MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting** held at Dornie Lodge, Bessels Lea, Blewbury, on **Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup> October 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), Janette Roberts (Branch Representative), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Dick Peters (Vice Chairman & Branch Representative), Bob Anderson, Mary Friskney, Tim Pett, Daphne Pollard, Colin Turner, Nicola Turner, Claire Ward

#### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Ian Minns (Newsletter Editor), Mark Cooke (Branch Webmaster), Julia Sargent

#### **3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

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

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING**

The Joint Ringing Masters and the Secretary have not yet met to discuss safety points in towers. The Abingdon report is currently confidential because legal proceedings are being taken.

#### **5. SECRETARY'S REPORT**

##### **AGM**

Twenty-nine members attended the Branch AGM in March. There were no changes to branch officers. Two new members were elected to the Guild. The meeting approved a donation of £250 to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund and a donation of £100 to the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers Restoration Fund. A provisional grant of £3,000 was made to Long Wittenham for rehangng and retuning the 6 bells.

##### **New members**

Since the AGM there have been eight new members elected to the Guild: Odette Dawkins, Willow Gathergood-Dains and Michelle X (Abingdon); Thomas Addison and Helen Stutley (East Hagbourne); Sebastian Small and Bridget Taylor (Harwell); and Jackie Chan (Marcham).

##### **Practices**

Evening branch practices at: Steventon, East Hagbourne, Aston Tirrold, Childrey and West Hanney.

Afternoon branch practices at: North Moreton, Blewbury, Marcham, Radley, Cumnor and Drayton.

Surprise major/royal practices at: Wallingford, Brightwell, Goring and Milton.

##### **Striking competitions**

Wallingford won the Branch 6-bell striking competition in March and represented the Branch in the Guild competition yesterday. A branch band entered the Tewkesbury Shield 10-bell competition in May and, unfortunately, was unable to complete the test piece, which was a plain course of Cambridge Surprise Royal.

##### **Events**

Susan Read has continued to organise events for young ringers during the school holidays.

On 25<sup>th</sup> April, the afternoon ringers had a mini-outing to Burghclere, Kintbury and Hungerford with lunch at the John O'Gaunt in Hungerford.

The Branch outing on 21<sup>st</sup> July was organised by Philip Roberts of Harwell. Over twenty branch members and friends visited Tadmarton, Bodicote, North Aston, Deddington and Steeple Aston. This was an excellently organised outing and included a pub lunch in Adderbury and afternoon tea at North Aston. It was followed by a barbecue at the home of Stuart and Naomi Gibson with 60 in attendance. As usual, the food was superb and there was fun on the croquet green. Thanks go to Philip, Janette, Stuart and Naomi for arranging a good day for the Branch. The proceeds of the barbecue and raffle went into the branch fund and will be used for future restoration projects.

#### **6. JOINT RINGING MASTERS' REPORT**

- All scheduled branch practices have taken place, with an improving attendance at the evening monthly practices, especially from newer ringers who have stayed on after the learner's practices. We hope that this trend continues and again encourage tower captains and others to attend with new ringers 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 of the new ringers integrating into the branch events and practices. Several branch towers are adding to this surge in new ringers with their own training and recruiting activities.
- Having achieved first place in the Guild 10 Bell striking competition, unfortunately the pressure of the national competition at Tewkesbury Abbey proved too much and our branch team failed to complete the test piece. We hope to do well again this year in the Guild 10 bell competition. The Wallingford 6 bell team representing the branch achieved success in the Guild striking contest this weekend and came 2<sup>nd</sup>. Unfortunately the branch was unable to muster sufficient support for the 8 bell competition in May.
- Finally, the branch after a period of little bell restoration activity is now looking at two exciting restoration projects: Steventon and Long Wittenham. It is likely that the Steventon project will be completed in the coming months, but the larger and more complex project at Long Wittenham may take longer. We look forward to the improvements at both towers and the consequential local recruitment and training opportunities.
- Thank you to all members who have continued to support the branch practices and ringing activities.

## **7. TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT**

### **Outings and events for young ringers**

- 4<sup>th</sup> April: Ringing at Iffley and Cowley, with a guided tour of Iffley church
- 29<sup>th</sup> May – 1<sup>st</sup> June: Ringing Club in Abingdon
- 3<sup>rd</sup> September: Ringing at St Giles, Oxford, with a quiz and handbell ringing

### **Outings planned**

- 25<sup>th</sup> October: Cholsey with refreshments and games
- 2<sup>nd</sup> January: Ringing at Radley with skittles and handbells in the Village Hall
- 13<sup>th</sup> April: All day ringing event in Oxford with young ringers from Gloucestershire
- 29<sup>th</sup> September: (tbc) Ringing at South Stoke, Streatley and Goring

### **Branch Ringing School**

- There are five levels in the ART 'Learning the Ropes' (LTR) syllabus, but so far we are only teaching the first two levels: LTR1, Bell Handling and LTR2, Foundation Skills. I would like to start teaching the third level, LTR3, Plain Hunt but am not sure we have the resources yet.
- In January we started a new LTR1 group of learners on Saturday mornings with three learners, two from Abingdon and one from Marcham. When they were able to ring rounds, they joined the other (LTR2) group. In May 2018 I stopped running the Saturday handling sessions.
- We are about to start teaching our third LTR1 group of new learners on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October. I have no definite numbers yet but have had several expressions of interest.
- I am immensely pleased with the help I have been given by other ringing teachers from all over the branch. I arrange for three ringing teachers to teach at each LTR1 Handling session. As the learners progress beyond handling to LTR2, Foundation Skills, it is less necessary to have other teachers present, but it is often useful to have a second teacher, especially at practice nights where the whole band is comparatively inexperienced.
- Between January and May we ran both LTR1 and LTR2 sessions every week, which was quite hard work. We are about to start another period of holding two sessions each week so will need more teachers to help again. Although we are using the ART syllabus, all experienced ringing teachers are welcome to help. I am really glad that there are so many good ringing teachers in our branch and that they have been so generous with their time. Nevertheless, I would like to recommend that each tower tries to find someone from their band who is willing to train as a teacher of ringing, not only to help with the Branch Ringing School but as a way of training the next generation of Tower Captains, with the mutual support of others from other towers.
- There are currently only 19 ONB towers which I can book reasonably often. I have started occasionally taking the sessions to towers outside our branch and have been once each to Benson, Dorchester and Witney. Altogether we have used 28 different towers so far. Attending so many towers is proving to be a big advantage as the learners are not frightened to ring in other towers, are happy to attend branch events and know most of the branch officers.

Susan requested more frequent practices at a branch level for young ringers. The Guild practices for the national youth striking competition are only open to those who can ring at least plain hunt on 7. This was discussed:

- Saturday practices would be difficult in some towers with weddings and other restrictions. It would not be easy to find enough towers in which these additional practices could be held.
- Ringing is for all people and all age groups and some were not keen on branch practices being age selective. It was felt that 'ad hoc' events for young ringers were acceptable.
- Susan was asked if she could demonstrate that this request was actually coming from the young ringers themselves. It was felt in several towers with young ringers that it is difficult to get them to commit to regular attendance at their own tower practices.
- It must be emphasised that everyone is always welcome to attend current branch practices, with the exception of the surprise major practices.

## 8. TREASURER'S REPORT

- To date 264 members have paid full subscriptions bringing the branch membership to 272 with the 6 Honorary, 2 life and 6 members who pay their subscription via another branch. This is eleven more than last year.
- The majority of towers managed to pay their subscriptions by the new due time of March this year, the remaining six managed to pay by mid-September.
- The majority of members paid the voluntary £2 restoration fund contribution. All the members that did not pay were from one tower and, as last year, I suspect the reason was a communication failure.
- There is one outstanding grant for Long Wittenham and there are two further potential projects within the branch.
- Branch fund raising in the year has been strong with the BBQ and outing raising £389 before tower fees of £100. Honey sales have yielded £152. Young Ringers events have cost £75 this year so far.
- The branch has funds totalling £6,290 of which £1,104 is held in the CFOB and £5,186 at Lloyds. The increased in funds is mainly due to the collection of the additional £2 per member for Branch Restoration projects.

## 9. UPDATE ON PROJECTS

**Long Wittenham:** An email from Julia Sargent stated that so far the only grant received was from the Doris Field Trust (£1000), with promises of £8600 from ODG and ONB branch. Applications are going in to the Sharpe and Baron Bell Trusts. £400 has been received from donations. Julia has been asked by Rev. Sue Booy's not to submit more applications until there has been a meeting to discuss further work in the church, which will include the possibility of a ringing gallery. Rev. Sue was planning to commission a feasibility study for this and had the money to do so. Julia said that she has not been invited to any more PCC meetings.

**Steventon:** Nicola Turner advised the meeting that Whites of Appleton had inspected the bells and were recommending new pulleys, clappers and bearings, the re-rimming of the wheels and the installation of a rope guide. This will cost £15,000 + VAT. Both the PCC and Alan Frost have agreed to the work being done and a Faculty has been applied for. So far £10,000 has been raised and it is hoped that the work will be completed in the first half of 2019.

Richard Loyd, seconded by Philip Roberts, proposed that the recommendation of a grant of £1,500 from branch funds be put to branch members at the March 2019 AGM.

**Appleford:** Whites recently visited Appleford with Nicola Turner. They were unable to make an inspection because of the excessive amount of pigeon droppings in the belfry, ringing room and on the stairs. After kestrels have fledged, a pest control company will re-net the windows and clear up the droppings at a cost of around £5,000. Once this has been done, Whites will return to inspect the bells.

**Marcham:** Bob Anderson advised that the Marcham ringers have recently spent most of their fund on new bell ropes and the PCC paid to replace 2 cracked stays. Unfortunately one of these new stays was not installed correctly. Whites have made an inspection and have said that the tenor stay needs to be replaced and other work to the clappers needs to be done at a cost of £1795 + VAT. Bob asked the meeting if the branch could help with fund raising.

The Treasurer advised that Marcham should apply to the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers Restoration Fund but must not include the cost of the new stays. The Branch will also only cover restoration and not maintenance costs.

It was noted that the PCC can reclaim VAT, so Bob will check to see if the PCC will pay for the work. He will come back to the Branch and ask for financial assistance if he needs to.

**10. BRANCH PROGRAMME FOR 2019**

- The Secretary will soon be writing to towers to arrange practices for 2019
- Rob Nickless invited the Branch to North Moreton for the New Year’s Day Ringing and Refreshments.
- Nicola Turner offered to speak to the Rector of the DAMASCUS parishes to see if it would be possible to hold the branch striking competition at Sutton Courtenay before the Secretary approaches John Napper.

**11. SOCIAL EVENTS**

**Skittles evening with fish and chip supper in Radley Village Hall on Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup> November**

- The cost will be £12 for adults and £10 for children eating from the children’s menu. This needs to be paid to Daphne by 29<sup>th</sup> October.
- Daphne will find out what food, other than fish and chips, will be available so that the Secretary can include this on a poster to be distributed around the Branch.
- There will be a raffle.
- Beer and soft drinks will be available. Attendees should bring their own wine and other drinks.

**12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- Janette Roberts said that there will be a coffee morning in Didcot on Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> November. Half of the proceeds will go to the Steventon restoration appeal and the other half to Didcot’s lighting project.
- Richard Loyd advised that there is a project in Blewbury to install a new contemporary stained glass window with the theme of bells and ringing, at a cost of approximately £80,000. He said that there had been a full back page article in The Ringing World. So far £24,000 has been raised in cash and a grant for £1,000 has also been received. He is hoping that there will soon be a large grant from the Cottam Will Trust. A saxophone concert is being held in the church on the evening of Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> November, to which branch members are invited at a cost of £12 each (includes a glass of wine and nibbles).

**13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

This will be on Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2019 at 7.30pm, at Highfield, The Winnaway, Harwell.

After the Chairman had expressed thanks to Gill and Richard for their hospitality, the meeting closed at 9.00pm.

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