

MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting held at Dornie Lodge, Bessels Lea, Blewbury, on **Sunday, 6th October 2019** 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 (Branch Webmaster), Janette Roberts (Branch Representative), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Dick Peters (Vice Chairman & Branch Representative), Tim Pett, Daphne Pollard, Dave Trotman, Colin Turner, Karen Walker, Claire Ward

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Katie Lane (Guild Master), Ian Minns (Newsletter Editor), Cliff and Jill Garlick, Julia Sargent, Nicola Turner

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24th February 2019

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

4. MATTERS ARISING

The Abingdon report continues to be confidential because legal proceedings are being taken.

5. SECRETARY'S REPORT

AGM

Thirty-one members attended the Branch AGM in March. There were no changes to branch officers. Ten new members were elected to the Guild. The meeting approved a donation of £300 to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund and a donation of £150 to the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers Restoration Fund. The provisional grant of £3,000 made to Long Wittenham for rehangng and retuning the 6 bells is still outstanding.

New members

Since the AGM there have been no new members elected to the Guild.

Restoration projects

The branch officers agreed to donate £500 from branch funds to the restoration of Letcombe Bassett bells.

Practices

Evening branch practices have been held at: Chilton, Cholsey, Wantage and Wallingford. The August branch practice at Sunningwell was abandoned because not enough people came.

Afternoon branch practices have been held at: West Hanney, Milton, North Moreton, Childrey, Brightwell and Steventon. The July practice at Radley was abandoned because not enough people came.

Surprise major/royal practices have been held at: Drayton, Appleton, Goring and Milton.

On 24th April, the afternoon ringers had a mini-outing to Warborough, Chalgrove and Dorchester Abbey, with lunch at the White Hart in Dorchester.

Striking competitions

Abingdon won the Branch 6-bell striking competition in March and were asked to represent the Branch in the Guild competition on 5th October.

Events

The Branch outing on 13th July was organised by Philip Roberts of Harwell. Over twenty branch members and friends visited Dunstable, Ivinghoe, Linslade, Whitchurch and Quinton. This was a well organised outing and included a pub lunch in Linslade and afternoon tea at Whitchurch. It was followed by an excellent barbecue at the home of Stuart and Naomi Gibson with over 50 in attendance. Once again 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

After reporting in February that attendance at Branch practices was improving, sadly the opposite is the case for the second half of 2019, with even the usually well attended afternoon practices declining in numbers. The evening practice at Sunningwell was abandoned due to only 4 members showing. This is disappointing, and we would welcome some supporting words and actions from tower captains to encourage their ringers to attend branch events. The practices require planning and advertising to the membership by the secretary, and organisation by the masters at the practice. There is little else that officers can do, and if the membership

generally does not want to be involved at branch level, then the practices can be abandoned for 2020. That would be a very disappointing state of affairs for the second largest branch of the Guild. Many branch members who normally would support branch practices, are also involved in the various training events, and it may be an explanation that their time availability is one cause for the dwindling attendance.

On a more positive note, the bell restoration at Steventon is a great success, the bells now being much easier and more suitable for training a local band. We wish the Steventon ringers well for the future and hope that branch members will offer them their support to help build a local village team. Thanks to the determined efforts of Julia Sargent, we are very pleased to report that she has successfully raised sufficient funds for the rehangings of Long Wittenham bells by Whites during 2020. This is a long overdue restoration, and we very much look forward to this happening. We have no information of the planned Sparsholt and Letcombe Bassett restorations.

We would like to thank the branch officers for their work and dedication to keeping the branch alive, and hope that the current decline in support is just a temporary trend.

The Secretary pointed out that there is only one business meeting per year (AGM), and abandoning branch practices will mean that there will be no other opportunities during the year for conducting branch business, such as the election of new members, without calling for an EGM.

The Training Officer said that she is currently not holding training sessions during the evening, which used to be combined with branch practices.

It was felt that some members might not attend branch practices because of the fear of going wrong in front of people they do not know. This includes members not attending branch practices held in their own towers.

Decision: A letter from the Branch Committee and signed by the Chairman will be sent to all tower captains. Richard and Gill Loyd will compose this and email it around all those present at this meeting for comment.

7. TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

Young Ringers

Outings and events

- **Saturday 13/04/19 Ringing Fest in Oxford (all day event booked with the help of the Oxford Society):** 19 YRs plus lots of adults. Rang at seven towers. Lunch time competition with Alan Griffin's dumb bell.
- **Wednesday 29/5/19 Whitchurch & Pangbourne:** 8 YRs and 7 adults. Rang at Whitchurch followed by watching filming of CBeebies on the river. Refreshments and board games before ringing at the second tower.
- **Wednesday 7/8/19 Berrick Salome, Drayton St Leonard & Shabbington:** 8 YRs, 9 adults. Rang at three light sixes and had refreshments at the last tower.
- **Wednesday 27/8/19 Old Marston:** 9 YRs, 8 adults. Ringing plus refreshments at Old Marston.

Outing planned

- **Wednesday 30/10/19 Vale of White Horse outing:** Ringing at four towers from mid-morning to mid-afternoon and serving a ploughman's lunch.

Suggested future dates (in school holidays)

- Thursday 02/01/20
- Wednesday 19/02/20
- Wednesday 15/04/20
- Thursday 28/05/20
- Wednesday 05/08/20

Branch Ringing School

ART Courses on how to teach bell handling

Two courses were organised on 11th May and 29th June. Seven ODG young ringers attended the Abingdon course. All the new teachers from the Old North Berks Branch have been helping to teach with the Branch Ringing School and three of them will soon have Associate Membership of the Association of Ringing Teachers.

Extra lessons for new learners (LTR1 Handling group)

A ringing course on Saturday mornings was started in March 2019. It continues to date and has been very successful with average attendance of four learners and five teachers. Initially held at a variety of towers, since July, these have been held at St Helen's, Abingdon, so that the excellent facilities with the simulator may be used. The learners are really pleased to be able to make good progress so they can take more advantage of the practices in their own towers. The teachers can get lots of practice at teaching and the chance to complete their

ART qualification. Learners have come from six towers in the North of the Branch and outside it: Abingdon (2), Dorchester (4), Drayton (1), Steventon (2), Sutton Courtenay (1), Wantage (1).

Weekly visits to practice nights around the branch (LTR2 Foundation Skills group)

From January 2018 the LTR2 (foundations skills) group moved to a different practice night / tower each week from 7.00 – 8.00 pm. They have now all found towers they can attend each week so the weekly sessions were discontinued at the end of August 2019.

Now that some of the LTR1 Handling group are getting to the stage of needing to ring with other ringers as well as continuing handling lessons, I wondered about starting the weekly visits to other towers again. Currently we are using the simulator in Abingdon for teaching handling and using six bells for teaching the Foundation Skills (rounds, etc.). Perhaps we should start the weekly visits to practice nights again in the spring.

ART Award for Recruitment and Retention

I am pleased to report that at the ART AGM in March, our Branch was highly commended for the work of our Branch Ringing School. In particular the judges were impressed by two facts, firstly that between thirty and forty teachers from the entire branch teach our learners, and secondly that visiting so many towers brought the branch together and helped the learners to feel more confident to visit other towers and take part in Branch events.

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.

Susan Read suggested to the meeting that it would be good to have a tower in the south of the branch with a ringing simulator. This would give an alternative tower at which practices could be held regularly. It was felt that Cholsey could be approached, but a simulator would not be needed in this tower.

8. TREASURER'S REPORT

- To date 262 members have paid full subscriptions bringing the branch membership to 276 with the 6 Honorary, 2 life and 6 members who pay their subscription via another branch. This is seven more than last year. There is one tower still to pay any subscriptions. The majority of towers managed to pay their subscriptions by the new due time of March this year, the remaining 2 (that have paid) managed to pay by the end of June! – thank-you – an improvement on last year.
- There are two outstanding grants (Long Wittenham and Letcombe Bassett), with one being paid to Steventon.
- The majority of members paid the voluntary £2 restoration fund contribution. All the members that didn't pay were from one tower and as last year I suspect the reason was a communication failure!
- Branch fund raising in the year has again been strong with the BBQ and outing raising £465 before tower fees of £100. Honey sales have yielded £275.
- Young Ringers events broken even so far this year.
- The branch has funds totalling £5,980 of which £1,111 is held in the CFOB and £4,869 at Lloyds.

9. UPDATE ON PROJECTS

Long Wittenham: An email from Julia Sargent stated that fund raising for the estimated costs for project is on target. Whites revised estimate of September 2019 is £33780. The date for work to begin is scheduled for December 2020, but could be sooner if there is a cancellation. There are three grant applications outstanding: OHCT, who meet very soon; Garfield Weston; and the Baron Bell Trust (applied in April 2018). Whites have recommended a rope guide, however we have decided that we might want to construct a gallery in the future and so would not need a guide. We are having new wheels and will buy new ropes if funds are available. An additional 5% is being factored in as contingency funding. This means we need at least another £4000 to make sure everything is covered. The response from the village for this project has been excellent, and the desire to keep the bells ringing is evident from funds we have received so far.

Steventon: Claire Ward advised that work has been completed. New ropes are awaited and also a visit from Whites to look at the set of the 5th and the odd-struckness of the 2nd. Compliments are being received from the village when the bells are rung. Blewbury is currently holding Friday evening practices at Steventon whilst their new stained glass window is being installed and everyone is very welcome to attend.

East and West Hendred: Dave Trotman reported that a pulley and a broken stay have been replaced at East Hendred, and the carillon hammers are to be rewired before Christmas. He is still awaiting Whites to report on both of the towers and Richard Loyd offered to remind them.

Appleford: Colin Turner reported that the tower has been professionally cleaned and netted to prevent a recurrence of bird droppings. There has been water ingress which has caused a beam to rot at one end. Work to repair this will take place during spring 2020. Appleford church has no money and so any work done there will be purely to allow occasional ringing only.

Abingdon, St Nicolas: Tim Pett reported that a piece of masonry had fallen into the nave. Ringing has been suspended for a few weeks whilst repair works take place. The bells can only be chimed at present.

10. **BRANCH PROGRAMME FOR 2020**

- The Secretary will soon be writing to towers to arrange practices for 2020.
- Wantage have invited the Branch for the New Year's Day Ringing and Refreshments.
- Claire Ward said that she was happy to check to see if the branch striking competition and AGM could be held at Steventon.

11. **GUILD 2020 AGM AND 8-BELL STRIKING COMPETITION**

The Guild's 2020 AGM and 8-bell striking competition are due to be held in the Branch on 16th May. Blewbury ringers are happy to host this event.

12. **SOCIAL EVENTS**

- **Quiz evening with supper in Brightwell Village Hall on Saturday, 9th November:** The cost will be £10 each for jacket potatoes and salads, etc. Anne Hales of Blewbury is setting the quiz.
- **New Year's Day ringing and refreshments 2020:** To be held in Wantage.
- **Mini outing:** To be organised by the Secretary on Wednesday, 29th April 2020.
- **Outing and Barbecue:** This will be held on Saturday, 27th June 2020.
- **Barn Dance:** Philip Roberts offered to check the availability of Harwell Village Hall on Saturday, 14th November 2020. If confirmed, the Secretary will check the availability of Jigworks Ceilidh Band.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- Daphne Pollard said that Ian Minns is moving to Somerset but will be available to write the editorial for the next newsletter. She is happy to continue to produce the newsletters but will not write the editorials. Philip Roberts suggested that a card be sent to Ian to thank him for all his work.
- Tim Pett announced that Abingdon had won the Guild's 6-bell striking competition yesterday and said that they had been invited to represent the Guild in the Four Shires 6-bell competition.
- Abingdon ringer Angela Smith has recently celebrated her 90th birthday. She still rings on Sunday mornings. Pat Pugh, a former Abingdon ringer, had also recently celebrated her 90th birthday. Philip Roberts asked for the Committee's congratulations to be passed on.
- There will be a jazz concert in Blewbury Church on Saturday, 16th November. This is a fund raising event for the new stained glass window celebrating bells and bell ringing. The cost is £15 and includes a glass of wine or beer. Everyone is welcome and tickets are available from Gill Loyd. The dedication service for the window will be on Tuesday, 7th January at 7.00pm and all are welcome to attend. A peal will be rung during the afternoon by the Westminster Abbey Company of Bell Ringers.

14. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

This will be on Sunday, 23rd February 2020 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 8.55pm.

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