

**MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting** held at Highfield, The Winnaway, Harwell, on **Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2020** at 7.30pm.

#### **1. ATTENDEES**

Rob Nickless (Chairman), Philip Roberts (Joint Ringing Master), Richard Loyd (Joint Ringing Master), Gill Loyd (Secretary), Susan Read (Training Officer), Janette Roberts (Branch Representative), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Dick Peters (Branch Representative), Tim Pett, Karen Walker, Michelle X, Claire Ward

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

Stuart Gibson (Treasurer), Nick Clarke, Debbie Greenfield, Daphne Pollard, Julia Sargent, Bridget Taylor, Colin Turner, Nicola Turner

#### **3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

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

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

No matters arising.

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

- Since the last Committee Meeting, monthly branch practices have been held at Cumnor, Brightwell, Drayton and Harwell. Mid-week afternoon ringing practices have been held at Harwell, Chilton, Blewbury and Brightwell. Surprise major practices were held in Harwell and Drayton. Unfortunately the practice in Drayton was abandoned through lack of support. Susan Read has continued to organise events for young branch members during the school holidays.
- Since the last Committee Meeting we have gained nine new members: Felicity Mashedor (Abingdon), Fin de Massa and George Plant (Brightwell), Nick Speller and Emily Speller (Cumnor), Bobbi Cookson and Mary Leneis (Steventon), and Andrew Jones and Meredith Wilson (West Hanney).
- Congratulations go to the Abingdon ringers, who represented the Branch in the Guild's 6-bell striking competition at the beginning of October and were placed first. They have been invited to represent the Guild in the Four Shires 6-bell competition. The branch band ringing Grandsire Caters in the Guild's 10-bell striking competition in Warfield was placed fourth.
- On 9th November over 60 members and friends attended the quiz night and supper in Brightwell Village Hall. Thanks go to Roy Thorpe and his ringers for hosting the event and to Anne Hales of Blewbury for devising and comparing the quiz. The event raised £521 (including a raffle) for branch funds.
- New Year's Day 2020 ringing with refreshments was held at Wantage and there were over thirty attendees. Thanks go to Celia Leeson Cox and all the Wantage ringers for the excellent refreshments. This was once again a very happy occasion for the Branch and a good start to the New Year.

Tim Pett advised that the Four Shires 6-bell competition was not being held this year.

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

- Branch practices continue to be our primary concern. Some are very successful and well attended such as the recent afternoon practice at Brightwell with members from many branch towers enjoying a good convivial time. In contrast there were insufficient numbers (7) for the Surprise Major practice at Drayton which was abandoned. This was disappointing when a special message of encouragement had gone out which drew some people from a distance to come. As the second largest branch in the ODG in terms of membership, we really should be able to support this level of branch ringing activity. By comparison, the branch social events are probably more successful than

ever. Unfortunately it is usually the longer serving and dedicated members plus a few of the newer recruits who tend to support the branch practices and we are most grateful for their support. We are not sure what else the branch officers can do to improve the situation as we think the problem can only be resolved through the local tower captains and correspondents. The problem is not sufficiently dire to take drastic action such as abandoning any of the current offerings, but it is something that we can continue to address to membership and Tower Captains at the AGM and through the newsletter.

- We wish the Steventon ringers well with their newly started tower practices and hope that branch members will offer their support to help Claire build a local village team. Congratulations go to Julia Sargent for her great dedication to the Long Wittenham project, and we look forward to enjoying the fruits of her labours later this year after the long awaited restoration. Letcombe Bassett bells have now been restored and perhaps we may hold a future branch event there.
- We would like to encourage all branch towers to try to enter a team for the striking competition hosted by Steventon. Some towers are unable to field a full team, but to encourage participation we would welcome 'joint teams' or 'scratch bands' taking part. Rules do not permit these teams to represent the branch at the Guild competition in the event of such a team winning the competition.
- Thanks to all for your continued support.

It was felt that branch practices should continue as they are the only opportunity for new members to join the Guild other than at the AGM. Also it can only need two additional members to go to a branch practice to make a big difference to what can be rung at that tower. It is up to tower captains to encourage their own members to attend.

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

### **ART Courses on how to teach bell handling**

May I congratulate the following local ringers who, having attended an ART course in teaching bell handling, have recently been accredited as Associate Members of the Association of Ringing Teachers, and who have been kindly helping to teach learners with the ONB Branch Ringing School:

Mark Vincent of Harwell (10<sup>th</sup> August), Debbie Greenfield of Harwell (31<sup>st</sup> October), Daniel Gillett and Joseph Gillett both of Abingdon (25<sup>th</sup> January) and Rosi Rollings of West Hanney (25<sup>th</sup> January)

### **ONB Branch Ringing School - Extra lessons for new learners (LTR1 Handling group)**

A ringing course on Saturday mornings was started in March 2019. Advertised through the branch network, the idea is that learners from our branch should learn together from the best teachers in our branch. Towers can send their learners for additional tuition to that provided in their own tower. Since July, the lessons have all 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 at learning to ring so they can take more advantage of the practices in their own towers. The teachers are able to get lots of practice at teaching and the chance to complete their ART qualification. Branch learners have numbered five or six per week on average over the last six months.

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

From April 2020 we will restart our weekly visits to different towers, overlapping with the practice nights of those towers and with the ringers from those towers ringing with our branch learners. Many of the learners who have been attending the Saturday morning sessions are ready to ring with others, to try other bells and to meet other ringers.

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.

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

- Events organised during school holidays for young ringers have consisted of:
  - 30<sup>th</sup> October – Vale of White Horse outing with 11 YRs, 10 adults. Ringing at four towers from mid-morning to mid-afternoon and serving a ploughman's lunch.

- 2<sup>nd</sup> January – Horspath and party games, carols on handbells with 15 YRs, 14 adults. Ringing on the six plus refreshments, games and handbells at Village Hall.
- 19<sup>th</sup> February – Ringing at three towers in Newbury with walking between.
- Suggested future dates in school holidays:
  - 15<sup>th</sup> April – Clanfield area
  - 28<sup>th</sup> May – Goring area
  - 5<sup>th</sup> August – Bicester area

The LTR2 weekly visits to tower practices will be arranged from mid-April to September by Susan with the tower captains. Susan will run the ringing for the first hour and then the tower captain will take over.

There is an ART course at Kirtlington on 2<sup>nd</sup> May to teach ringers how to run a practice. The Chairman cautioned the need to be careful not to undermine existing tower captains, as they should be involved in the take up for the course.

## 8. TREASURER'S REPORT

- In 2019 the membership of the Branch increased by 6 compared with 2018, at 279. There were 271 members who paid subscriptions, 6 of which were a member of the Guild through another Branch. In addition there were 6 Honorary and 2 Life members.
- So far in 2020 we have 43 paid up members (from 7 towers and 2 unattached) along with the 6 Honorary and 1 Life members plus 3 members who pay a subscription through another branch. 20 towers have not 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 2019 was the Quiz evening at Brightwell. This raised £521 including the raffle with an additional £301 from the BBQ (including the raffle) following the outing. New Year raised £90 with the raffle contributing a further £74. Honey sales raised £341.
- The Branch, for the fourth year, collected a voluntary £2 donation with subscriptions. £560 was collected in the year. Almost everyone made the contributions to put towards restorations projects. The Branch supported the work at Steventon with a grant of £1,500. The branch has committed to support both the projects at Long Wittenham and Letcombe Bassett.
- Five youth events were organised by the Branch resulting in an overall cost of £19.
- Donations were made to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund (£300) and the Oxford Diocesan Guild Restoration Fund (£150).
- The Branch, at the end of 2019, had funds in the region of £6,347, which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch.
- The accounts for 2019 have been examined and circulated ready to be presented for approval at the AGM.

## 9. UPDATE ON PROJECTS

**Appleford:** Further consideration will be given to the rotten beam this spring. No decision to repair it has been made at this stage as the extent of necessary work is not fully known.

### **Long Wittenham:**

Thanks go to all members who have helped and supported the with the fund raising appeal. The target set has been exceeded, which is fortunate because an additional £1,400 is required for scaffolding. The faculty has not yet been granted because Alan Frost wanted full details of the retuning to see if it was necessary. Whites have sent these to him as outlined in their quote, together with the comment that these bells may be the worst in the area. The Church will be celebrating its 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary on June 21<sup>st</sup> this year, so it was agreed that work will not start on the bells before then. Whites have quoted £5,000 to pain the frame. This sum has not been included in fund raising and would take the money raised for a rope guide and ropes. Could branch members pain the metal frame with bitumastic paint and deal with a few rust spots? No firm decision has yet been made on the rope guide. Some of the ringers are saying that this is not needed and

could be ugly. Another wants to continue to investigate a ringing gallery. It could be many years before the funding for this is available. If there were a rope guide it could easily be removed at a later stage.

**Decisions:** Philip and Richard will assess the safety aspect of this work and report to the AGM. It was felt that a rope guide is essential for teaching new learners (as proved at Steventon). The Branch Committee will write to Long Wittenham and suggest the installation of a rope guide.

**Letcombe Bassett:** Work has almost been completed and a grant of £500 will be paid once finished.

**Sparsholt:** Whites of Appleton have advised that work will commence soon.

**Abingdon, St. Nicolas:** A full report from the architect has revealed that the cracks are more substantial than was originally thought, and tie bars are needed across the tower. This work, which will be paid from church funds, is going out to tender and so will take a few months, hopefully being completed by summer. Unfortunately some new flats have been built by the church and residents have moved in whilst the bells have been silent.

#### 10. DONATIONS FROM BRANCH FUNDS AND OTHER SUPPORT FOR PROJECTS

- **ODG Funds:** As the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund and ODG Restoration Fund have recently merged, it was proposed by Dick Peters and seconded by Susan Read that the Branch Committee recommends to the AGM the donation of £450 to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund.
- It was noted that the provisional grant of £3,000 to Long Wittenham for bell restoration is still outstanding.

#### 11. ITEMS FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

- **Election of officers:** All officers present said that they would be prepared to stand again if there were no other nominations at the AGM. Philip Roberts, Richard Loyd, Gill Loyd and Dick Peters advised that this would be their last year in office.
- **Additional item:** The Guild AGM on 16<sup>th</sup> May.

#### 12. SOCIAL EVENTS

- Mini outing with three towers and lunch in the Bucklebury area on Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> April.
- Branch outing in the Sonning area and evening barbecue on Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> June.
- Barn dance and supper on Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> November in Harwell Village Hall. £50 deposit has been paid to Jigworks Ceilidh Band, with £440 to be paid on the day.

#### 13. GUILD AGM ON 16<sup>TH</sup> MAY

- The 8 bell striking competition (method: Plain Bob Major), tea and AGM will be held in Blewbury.
- The Secretary will arrange local towers to be open during the morning and early afternoon, with lunch provided at North Moreton.
- We will ask Alan Griffin if he can provide his dumbbell attached to Abel for use in Blewbury church for a 'striking competition' for individuals. We will also ask Tony Crabtree about his mini ring.

#### 14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- The Secretary had received an email from Graham Stoter, Tower Captain at Wantage regarding branch membership. One of his ringers attends the branch ringing school in Abingdon. Susan had discussed this person becoming a Guild member, but Graham thought that he was not yet ready. Therefore Graham has asked:
  1. Should there be an agreed level of ringing skills in order to be nominated?
  2. If so, what standard should be reached before being nominated to become a member?
  3. Should only the home tower be able to nominate?

The Guild Rules only state that a candidate must 'be competent to ring for Sunday Service'. It was felt that this assumes that ringing should be completely unaided for at least rounds and call changes. It was also felt that only the tower captain or a representative from the tower can nominate a member to their own tower.

- The Secretary said that she had some posters from the Guild to distribute to all towers regarding Guild public relations.
- Claire Ward asked for helpers to provide cakes for the tea at the branch AGM. She also advised that weekly practices had started on Wednesdays in Steventon.
- Richard Loyd requested as many teams as possible enter the branch striking competition. Although these teams would not be able to represent the Branch at Guild level, he welcomed joint tower teams and scratch bands to enter.
- Susan Read said that she was providing Teaching Record booklets to all members of the branch ringing school. These would help to improve communications between all ringing teachers.

**15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

This will be Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020 at 7.30pm, at Dornie Lodge, Bessels Lea, Blewbury, OX11 9NW.

After the Chairman had expressed thanks to everyone for attending, to all officers for submitting their reports before the meeting, and to Janette and Philip for their hospitality, the meeting closed at 9.22pm.

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