

**Minutes of the Old North Berks Branch Annual General Meeting  
Held by Zoom meeting on Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

24 members attended the Annual General Meeting, including Catherine Lane (ODG Master) and Patricia Newton (Guild Steward).

The Chairman thanked everyone for joining the Zoom meeting and said that it would be a different type of AGM because of Covid-19 restrictions.

Before the meeting a minute's silence was held in memory of Cliff Garlick (East Hagbourne), Brian Hunnisett (Blewbury) and Denis Parfoot (West Hanney)

**1) Apologies for absence**

Received from: Philip Roberts (Joint Ringing Master), Janette Roberts (Branch Representative), Colin Turner and Nicola Turner.

**2) Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

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

**3) Matters arising from minutes**

There were no matters arising.

**4) Officers' reports**

**Secretary's report**

**2020 AGM and 6-bell striking competition**

The AGM was postponed from 21<sup>st</sup> March 2020 due to the Covid-19 situation and the striking competition cancelled.

**Branch practices**

The Branch continued to hold monthly branch practices, bi-monthly surprise major practices and monthly mid-week afternoon practices until the onset of Covid-19. The evening practice at Sunningwell, the afternoon practice at Radley and the surprise major practice at Drayton were abandoned through lack of support.

**Membership**

Eleven new members have been elected since the last AGM: Felicity Masheder (Abingdon), Fin de Massa and George Plant (Brightwell), Nick Speller and Emily Speller (Cumnor), Megan Bardsley and Oliver Bardsley (Milton), Bobbi Cookson and Mary Leneis (Steventon), and Andrew Jones and Meredith Wilson (West Hanney). Angela Smith (Abingdon), John Dowling (Brightwell) and Darren Williams (Harwell) were re-elected to the Guild.

I am very sorry to have to report the death of Cliff Garlick in October 2019. Cliff was a member of the Guild for sixty-one years, joining in May 1958. During that time he gave unstinting service to the tower of East Hagbourne, and to the wider ringing community. His dedication to both his tower and the Branch cannot be emphasised enough as both were integral to his whole life. I am also very sorry to report the deaths of Brian Hunnisett of Blewbury and Denis Parfoot, formerly of West Hanney. They are all sadly missed.

**Restoration projects**

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

**Guild striking competitions**

Congratulations go to the Abingdon ringers, who represented the Branch in the Guild's 6-bell striking competition at the beginning of October 2019 and were placed first. The branch band ringing Grandsire Caters in the Guild's 10-bell striking competition in Warfield was placed fourth.

**Social events 2019**

On 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019, the afternoon ringers had a mini-outing to Warborough, Chalgrove and Dorchester Abbey, with lunch at the White Hart in Dorchester.

The Branch outing on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2019 was organised by Philip Roberts of Harwell. Over twenty branch members and friends visited Dunstable, Ivinghoe, Linslade, Whitchurch and Quainton. A pub lunch in Linslade and afternoon tea at Whitchurch were included. It was followed by an excellent barbecue at the home of Stuart and Naomi Gibson with over fifty in attendance. Thanks go to Philip, Janette, Stuart and Naomi for arranging a good day for the Branch. Proceeds went to branch funds.

On 9<sup>th</sup> November 2019 over sixty 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.

## **Social events 2020**

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.

All other scheduled branch events were cancelled, including the April mini outing, the branch outing and barbecue. The autumn social, which was to have been a barn dance in Harwell Village Hall, has been rescheduled for Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

## **Guild AGM 2020**

This was to be held in Blewbury, however it was cancelled and held by Zoom meeting.

## **Joint Ringing Masters' report**

Branch practices continue to be our primary concern. Some are very successful and well attended with members from many branch towers enjoying a good convivial time. In contrast there were insufficient numbers for practices at Sunningwell, Radley and Drayton and these were abandoned, which was disappointing. 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 to them. 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 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 are continuing to address to the membership and Tower Captains at the AGM and through the newsletter. Thank you to all members who continued to support the branch practices and ringing activities.

Unfortunately the Covid-19 lockdown brought about an abrupt cessation of normal ringing activity for everyone. Although some very limited ringing for special services or occasions has taken place recently in some towers across the branch, it is unlikely that branch ringing as we remember it, will not return for some time to come. It goes without saying that any ringing must adhere strictly to the current Central Council Guidelines applicable at the time: <https://cccbr.org.uk/coronavirus/> and with the permission of the local incumbent. It was pleasing to see that some towers made efforts to briefly ring at least a few bells to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VJ Day.

All ONB ringing events have been cancelled until such time as the situation improves, and of course we will all hopefully return with gusto when that day arrives. In particular there will be a need to focus on recruitment and training ringers of all abilities in our towers as and when conditions permit.

In the meantime, many towers have been maintaining social contact through Zoom and other platforms, which is extremely beneficial to maintaining some form of sanity during the crisis, whilst keeping ringing bands connected with each other as the bells remain silent.

Phillip and I had both discussed standing down as joint Masters at the 2021 AGM but with 2020 being such a 'non year', we might be persuaded to continue for one more year to help ensure a smooth transition to two new masters in 2022.

## **Training Officer's report**

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

- 13<sup>th</sup> April 2019 – Ringing Fest in Oxford with 19 YRs and lots of adults. Lunch time striking competition with Alan Griffin's dumb bell.
- 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019 – Whitchurch and Pangbourne with 8 YRs and 7 adults. Ringing at both towers together with refreshments and board games.
- 7<sup>th</sup> August 2019 – Berrick Salome, Drayton St Leonard & Shabbington with 8 YRs and 9 adults. Rang at three light sixes and had refreshments at the last tower.
- 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019 – Old Marston with 9YRs and 8 adults for ringing and refreshments.
- 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019 – Vale of White Horse outing with 11 YRs, 10 adults. Ringing at four towers with a ploughman's lunch.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2020 – 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 2020 – Ringing at three towers in Newbury with walking between with 14 YRs and 13 adults.

As with all ringing, no events have been run since the outing to Newbury.

Two of the masters at Abingdon school (Adam Jenkins and Oliver Lomax) have run an after-school ringing club since 2011 in collaboration with various Abingdon ringers. It has been run at St Helen's, Abingdon once a week during term time. In March, eight boys were attending each week, some of whom had been ringing with the club for around six years. Since lockdown in March, the school has continued to run a full timetable online with the boys participating from home. Adam and Oliver have continued to run the club, but online using Zoom and Ringing Room. When we are allowed to ring again, it will be interesting to see whether the experience of ringing plain hunt on Ringing Room helps the boys to ring better plain hunt in the tower.

## **Branch Ringing School**

### **ART Award for Recruitment and Retention**

I am pleased to report that at the ART AGM in March 2019, 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.

Sadly, no ringing training has taken place since March 2020 when we went into lockdown

### **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 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)

### **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 and have come from several towers.

### **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 members of the LTR1 Handling group are getting to the stage of needing to ring with other ringers as well as continuing handling lessons, I am thinking of starting the weekly visits to other towers' practice nights in the spring.

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.

### **Future prospects**

We will think about how to restart ringing training when ringing itself has settled down and we know how things stand.

## **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.

The Branch supported the work at Steventon with a grant of £1,500, and work at Letcombe Bassett with a grant of £500. There is one grant for Long Wittenham that is still outstanding.

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.

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.

So far in 2020, three towers have not paid their subscriptions to date. Of those that have paid subscriptions, all but three towers did so by the due date of the 31<sup>st</sup> March. All subscriptions paid so far this year have included the voluntary £2 restoration fund contribution.

Income for 2020 has only been subscriptions and one young ringers' event. Expenses have been mainly subscriptions to the Guild, with the grant to Letcombe Bassett (£500) being paid at the end of March and a deposit for a Barn Dance in November 2021 (£50).

The branch currently has funds totalling £7,013 of which £5,894 is held at Lloyds and £1,118 at the CCLA.

Following a vote to approve the financial statement for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, the accounts were ratified.

## 5) Projects in the Branch

- **Long Wittenham:** Peter Collinson reported that the faculty had been granted and the PCC, with Julia Sargent, were planning to meet Whites of Appleton to plan the procedure required before work could start. Whites will also be asked to paint the frame due to Covid-19 restrictions and the timescale will be dependent upon their availability. Currently there are no plans for a rope guide. Concern had been expressed about the visual appearance and it had been decided to wait until the bells had been rehung to see if one was needed.

Claire Ward said that the rope guide at Steventon had made a huge difference, especially with the go of the smaller bells, and that the church congregation liked the look of the guide and the appearance of the ropes, especially when the bells are down.

Richard Loyd asked Peter what would be the protocol for evaluating the need for a guide when one had already been recommended by Whites.

Peter was unsure as to whether there were sufficient funds for a rope guide, and also said that a faculty would be required. Additionally £200,000 needs to be spent in other areas of the church.

Rob Nickless said that we would hold a meeting of Branch Officers to discuss the matter and gain clarity for everyone.

- **Steventon:** Claire Ward reported that the work to rehang and refurbish the bells, and to install a rope guide, had been successfully carried out by Whites of Appleton. Prior to Covid-19, there had been regular practices, with the Blewbury ringers joining whilst their bells were out of action because of the new west window installation. Ringing had taken place prior to services under Covid-19 regulations. There have been no complaints from neighbours. New ropes had recently been fitted and netting had been put against the louvres to prevent pigeon ingress. Nicola Turner and Nick Clarke had cleared the bells of pigeon detritus. A lock had been placed on the foot of the ladder to prevent unauthorised access.
- **Abingdon, St Nicolas:** Brian Read reported that the tower needs to be strengthened before the bells can be rung. Following tendering, the work is due to commence on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021.
- **Letcombe Bassett:** Richard Loyd advised that the three bells have been rehung and refurbished by Whites of Appleton.
- **Appleford:** We will wait for Colin and Nicola Turner to give an update.

## 6) Donation to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund and other recommendations

- Following the merger of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers Restoration Fund with the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, it was agreed that ONB Branch will donate £450 to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund (proposed by Stuart Gibson and seconded by Charles Morrish).
- There were no other recommendations.

## 7) Election of officers

As it was a relatively short time until the 2021 AGM, the current officers were proposed by Karen Walker and seconded by Charles Morrish. All were elected again, however the Secretary will contact Mark Cooke and Janette Roberts to make sure that they are happy to stand until the next AGM.

Chairman	Rob Nickless
Vice Chairman	Dick Peters
Secretary	Gillian Loyd
Treasurer	Stuart Gibson
Joint Ringing Masters	Richard Loyd Philip Roberts
Training Officer	Susan Read
Newsletter Editor	Daphne Pollard
Webmaster	Mark Cooke
Branch Representatives	Josie Irving Janette Roberts Dick Peters

## 8) Election of new members

There were no new members.

## 9) Branch practices

- It was decided not to arrange any branch practices for the time being.
- Claire Ward offered to host the Branch AGM and striking competition at Steventon on Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021. It was agreed that, should there still be Covid-19 restrictions, the AGM would be held on that day by Zoom meeting and the striking competition would be postponed.

**10) Social events**

- It was still uncertain as to whether the outing and barbecue could take place. This will be decided later in 2021.
- The barn dance and supper at Harwell Village Hall, which was postponed from November 2020, is now scheduled for 13<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

**11) Any other business**

- Catherine Lane (ODG Master) said that she was pleased to see everyone at this stressful time.
- Patricia Newton complimented Rob Nickless for chairing such a professional meeting. She said that EBSB Branch had booked a few events for next year but no ringing practices as yet. She advised of the need to keep in touch with tower members.
- Brian Read said that he was curious to know what other ringers were doing throughout the Branch. Daphne Pollard offered to edit a short newsletter that will be distributed by email. She said that she would ask all tower correspondents to provide news of what is happening at their towers. Karen Walker recommended using Ringing Room as a good experience.
- Dick Peters, seconded by Karen Walker, proposed a vote of thanks to Rob Nickless for his skilful hosting of the meeting.

**12) Date of 2021 Annual General Meeting**

Next year's AGM will be held on Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

The Chairman thanked Catherine Lane and Patricia Newton for attending. There being no further business the meeting closed at 5.04pm.

Signed.....

Date.....