

MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting held on Zoom on Sunday, 10th October 2021 at 7.30pm.

1. ATTENDEES

Rob Nickless (Chairman), Charles Morrish (Vice Chairman), Richard Loyd (Joint Ringing Master), Philip Roberts (Joint Ringing Master), Gill Loyd (Secretary), Susan Read (Training Officer), Jenny Dyer (Ringing Recovery Champion), Janette Roberts (Branch Representative), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Patricia Newton (Guild Steward), Mary Friskney, Jeanette Owen, Dick Peters, Tim Pett, Daphne Pollard and Colin Turner

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Stuart Gibson (Treasurer) and John Dowling

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28th February 2021

Circulated and read, it was agreed that the Chairman would sign the minutes as a correct record of the meeting as soon as possible.

4. MATTERS ARISING

No matters arising.

5. SECRETARY'S REPORT

Branch AGM 2021

The AGM was held by Zoom meeting on Saturday, 20th March 2021. Twenty-five members attended, including Katie Lane (ODG Master) and Patricia Newton (Guild Steward).

It was agreed at the AGM that ONB Branch will donate £500 to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund.

Branch membership

There have been ten new members elected to the Guild: Caroline Ball (Childrey), Gill Murray, Rebecca Pocock and Cameron Watt (Cholsey), Gary Sumption (Letcombe Bassett), Katy Taylor (North Moreton), Bob Mannix (Steventon), Andy Bennett and Jenny Bennett (Wantage), Seth Christopher Hutchinson (West Hendred).

Sadly Angela Smith of Abingdon, Claire Ward of Steventon, Helen Diserens of Wallingford and Roy Thorpe of Brightwell have all passed away recently and will be sadly missed throughout the Branch.

Practices

No branch practices have been held since the start of the pandemic. We need to decide when we are going to start holding practices.

6-bell striking competition

This was held on 25th September 2021 at Steventon, and was followed by a service remembering Claire Ward (former tower captain of Steventon) and a traditional ringers' tea outdoors. Six teams entered the striking competition and the results were: 1st Wallingford (73 faults), 2nd Wantage (83 faults), 3rd Steventon (88 faults), 4th Blewbury (90 faults), 5th Abingdon (110 faults) 6th North Moreton (130 faults). Thanks go to Martin Rice of Newbury and Mark Robbins of Hungerford for judging the competition, Jack Jarvis and Rev. Phil Sutton for the service, John H Napper for playing the organ, and the Steventon ringers and friends for providing a superb tea.

Events

The branch outing was cancelled; however the barbecue took place at the home of Stuart and Naomi Gibson on Saturday, 11th September. Over fifty members attended and it was a great opportunity to catch up with each other for the first time since the pandemic began. As usual the food was excellent and out thanks go to Stuart and Naomi for hosting the event.

The barn dance and supper at Harwell Village Hall, which was postponed from November 2020, is now scheduled for 13th November 2021. I have recently been contacted by the dance band and asked whether we still wish to go ahead with the event or whether we would prefer to postpone it to another date. This matter will be discussed under item 12. Social Events.

6. JOINT RINGING MASTERS' REPORT

Many towers across the branch have returned to ringing and several are holding regular practices once again, although others are still either silent or are only ringing in a restricted way. We are hoping that the positive trend

will continue and ringing as we knew it will be restored without further lockdown or other measures during the coming winter.

Although branch practices have not yet been reinstated, judging by the enthusiasm for the BBQ and the attendance at the Striking Competition at Steventon, there is a chance that we will have a good return to these events. Six teams entering the competition, including two call change bands, was very pleasing indeed, and our thanks to the efforts of the branch tower captains for organising their teams. Surprisingly there have been already quite a number of new members elected, and this is encouraging.

We are most grateful to Jenny Dyer who kindly 'volunteered' to take on the role of Ringing Recovery Champion for our branch. We will endeavour, as will everyone, to help her in her initiatives to support struggling towers get back to a better and sustainable situation.

The Long Wittenham project was finally completed, and congratulations to Julia Sargent for her determination and leadership to complete this much needed rehang against all manner of difficulties! We understand that the result has been well worth the effort and we look forward to a branch practice there at some point.

No major restorations are currently active within the branch, but there are perhaps some very early indications that the long silent bells at Culham may potentially become possible. Watch this space, and if it does become a viable project, I am sure that the branch will rally in support.

7. TREASURER'S REPORT

So far in 2021 we have 235 paid up members (from 26 towers) along with the 4 Honorary and 1 Life members plus 5 members who pay a subscription through another branch. This makes a total of 245 members, which is around 20 down on the previous year. Only one tower has not paid their subscriptions to date.

There have been no funding raising events or activities as such, but the BBQ raised around £175 and the continuing honey sales a further £150.

The Branch made a donation to the Long Wittenham restoration of £3,000 but there have been no other significant expenses.

The Branch, at present, has funds in the region of £5,300, which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch.

8. RINGING RECOVERY CHAMPION'S REPORT

Having taken on this new role, it was important to meet with representatives from each tower in the Branch and I was encouraged to learn, at the 'Tales of Lockdown and Beyond' meeting, held on 17th April via Zoom, of the innovative ways bands were keeping in touch during lockdown including the online Ringing Room, regular Zoom meetings, email, Facebook, WhatsApp and newsletter. Furthermore, plans for a return to ringing and recruitment of new ringers post 'lockdown' included press releases, contacting schools, holding ringing open days, hiring a portable belfry, supporting the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, contacting lapsed ringers and those who may have moved to the area, and talking to local MPs, to name but a few – we are indeed fortunate to have tower captains and representatives in our Branch who are so enthusiastic and passionate about bellringing.

At a national level, the Central Council for Church Bell Ringers (CCCBR), in conjunction with the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) held a Recovery Convention from 8th – 13th May 2021, whereby presentations focused on ringing recovery. In addition, several online Recovery Champion National Network Meetings have taken place, which I have attended - presentations have highlighted the importance of collaboration, both within branches and further afield, to ensure ringing survives beyond the pandemic. The most recent meeting was to discuss a possible national recruitment campaign in 2022 and specific resources that might be required of the CCCBR and ART to support recruitment and retention of ringers, with recommendations to be reviewed by their joint Steering Committee.

Returning to Branch level, the outcome of the Guild Survey, carried out in April 2021, revealed the following data from the 20 towers responding:

- 5 towers identified new recruits post-lockdown, giving potentially 8 new ringers;
- 13 towers will be short of a full complement of ringers post lockdown;
- 8 towers had concerns about the aging profile of their bands;
- 70% were concerned that one or more members of their band might not return to ringing, equating to 23 ringers.

Whilst historical data, the survey results provide an indication of the support towers may need in the future, to ensure ringing thrives in local communities. My role, therefore, will be to establish the needs of each tower,

through a follow-up meeting to 'Tales of Lockdown and Beyond' for Tower Captains/Tower Representatives, and then to work collectively with our Ringing Masters and other Branch Members to facilitate the required support.

9. TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

ONB / VOWH ART Teaching Bell Handling Course, Longcot, 18 Sep 2021

Tony Crabtree and I collaborated to organise an ART course to teach twelve new teachers of ringing for our branches. An essential part of the training is to practise teaching learners under the guidance of a mentor. The Branch Ringing School provides an excellent opportunity for those on the course to get the supervised practice they need and hopefully to be assessed and to qualify as an ART teacher.

The twelve ringers on the course included three from the ONB (Jenny and Andy Dyer from Cumnor and Willow (18) from Abingdon). The others were two each from Central Bucks, Oxford City and Woodstock & Witney branches, one each from Newbury and Vale branches and one who came from Lincolnshire.

ONB Branch Ringing School, extra ringing lessons for learners from 25 Sep

The Branch Ringing School takes place in Abingdon for an hour each Saturday morning. The first session was on 25 September. We have four learners so far including two from Iffley, one from Brightwell-cum-Sotwell and one complete beginner from Letcombe Bassett.

As far as teachers are concerned, I will be giving priority to those who attended the recent ART course, but they are busy people and I may have to call on other teachers from our branch. They have been really helpful in previous years of the Ringing School. Debbie Greenfield has kindly agreed to cover for me if I am unable to be present.

Young Ringers

School aged ringers were allowed to restart ringing earlier than adults, so a small outing was held in June. We rang at Long Wittenham and Brightwell. Daphne provided her usual sumptuous cakes, scones and biscuits for us. The refreshments were unusually hosted in the garden of one of the eleven young ringers. Thirteen adults also came on the outing.

The Abingdon School Bell Club restarted after the lockdown in June 2021. The Club is now rather depleted because the three oldest ringers left school in July and will be starting their university courses shortly. But the teachers, Adam and Ollie, are back with two returning boys and two new boys who are currently learning to handle a bell in the Club.

Ringling World National Youth Competition (RWNYC), ODG team

I have been providing transport for young ringers to the monthly practices held for the ODG squad for many years and continue to do so. The team which rings in the competition is drawn from the larger squad who meet to practise monthly. I am pleased to report that when the ODG team won the Whitechapel Trophy at the RWNYC competition held in Worcester on 11 September, four of the thirteen-strong squad were from the ONB.

I am continuing to help with the ODG team for the 2022 competition which will be held in Exeter, but the ODG team lost five members through their being too old for next year. It will take a lot to get the new and remaining members of the squad up to the standard of those who have just left.

Proposal: Young Ringer meetings

There is no doubt that school aged young ringers need to practise with others of their age group if they are to be motivated to continue to ring. The ODG squad monthly practices are for the more able young ringers (able to ring plain hunt on seven). I feel there is scope for similar practices for all the other young ringers in our branch. This could be Sunday afternoons in between the more advanced ODG squad practices. We should identify all the young ringers in our branch and invite them to come to such a practice. We can tailor the practice to their requirements.

Following a discussion, it was decided that the Secretary will email those branch tower correspondents/tower captains whose bells are light and easy going, and ask if they are happy for their towers to be used occasionally on Sunday afternoons for young ringers' practices. The tower needs to have good ventilation, with access to a kitchen and toilet. She will report back to Susan Read with details.

Susan Read requested that the Branch supports these practices financially whenever there is a shortfall between donations received and expenditure.

Following the meeting the Secretary spoke to the Treasurer. Stuart suggested that the branch should fund any shortfall initially, and then review the situation at the next Committee Meeting in February 2022.

10. UPDATE ON BRANCH BELL RESTORATION PROJECTS

Long Wittenham: Richard Loyd reported that the project had been completed successfully and was a good job. The sound of the bells has been considerably improved. Thanks go to Julia Sargent for all her hard work in making this worthy project happen.

Culham: Richard Loyd reported that a meeting had been held between the Branch Ringing Masters, the Secretary, Jenny and Andrew Dyer and Andrew Steele (member of Culham Parish Council), with regard to the rehang of Culham bells. Andrew Steele has an interest in bells and also has contacts within the Friends of St. Paul, Culham. The bells have been unringable for over 60 years, following the ingress of rainwater that caused the frame to rot. Jenny Dyer volunteered to head the group, and Andrew Steele offered to approach the PCC to see if permission will be given to take the first step of asking Whites to inspect the bells and give an estimate of work required. The PCC met last week but there has been no feedback as yet.

Susan Read raised concern about the future viability of some churches. It was felt that, as Culham village is going to be rapidly expanded, there should probably not be a problem with the church, although this would have to be investigated before the Branch or Guild offered financial support.

Appleford: Colin Turner reported that one of the main support beams had been found to have rotted. Replacement would be a major job and there was no money or desire within the small church congregation to carry out the work.

11. BRANCH PROGRAMME FOR 2022

There have been no general, afternoon or surprise major practices. As some towers still have some restrictions on ringing (e.g. wearing of masks, limit on attendees, time limits, lateral flow tests, etc.), it was decided that the Secretary will contact all towers to ask about their individual situations and whether or not they would be happy to host branch practices. Hopefully practices will be able to resume in 2022 as long as Covid-19 regulations permit.

Tim Pett advised that one of the Abingdon ringers had asked if the Branch could purchase a CO2 monitor, which could be loaned to branch towers to check the various CO2 levels.

There was concern that CO2 levels can vary considerably in a tower depending upon numbers ringing, length of time ringing and weather conditions, etc., and so a monitor would be required for a period of time to take several measurements. There was also concern that the Branch could be liable if the monitor were to give a false reading.

Following the meeting the Secretary spoke to Stuart Gibson, Branch and Guild Treasurer. He advised that the Guild is about to purchase two CO2 monitors, which could be loaned to towers throughout the Guild. However, if a tower felt that the waiting list for these was too long, then it should make its own arrangements for purchasing its own monitor.

12. SOCIAL EVENTS

- **Barn Dance and supper in Harwell Village Hall on Saturday, 13^h November 2021:** It was decided to further postpone this event until 12th November 2022, and the Secretary said that she would advise Jigworks Ceilidh Band, to whom we have already paid a £50 deposit. Philip Roberts said that he would change the booking date for Harwell Village Hall.
- **New Year's Day Ringing and Refreshments:** The Secretary will ask branch members whether they are happy to attend the event at Blewbury or whether they would prefer the better ventilated option of Steventon.
- **April Mini Outing:** The Secretary will arrange this if Covid-19 regulations permit.
- **Branch Outing and Barbecue:** Philip Roberts offered to organise an outing if Covid-19 regulations permit. The Secretary offered to contact Stuart Gibson about the barbecue. (Following the meeting Stuart confirmed that he was happy to proceed with this.)

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Richard Loyd thanked all the tower captains who had fielded a team at the 6-bell striking competition. He also thanked Jeanette Owen, Daphne Pollard, Gill Loyd and the Steventon ringers for making the event so enjoyable. Jeanette Owen said that it had been a pleasure to host the event at Steventon.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This will be held by Zoom on Sunday, 27th February 2022 at 7.30pm.

After the Chairman had expressed thanks to everyone for attending, the meeting closed at 9.02pm.

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