

MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting held by Zoom meeting on **Sunday, 27th February 2022** at 7.30pm.

1. ATTENDEES

Rob Nickless (Chairman), Philip Roberts (Joint Ringing Master), Richard Loyd (Joint Ringing Master), Gillian Loyd (Secretary), Stuart Gibson (Treasurer), Susan Read (Training Officer), Daphne Pollard (Newsletter Editor), Janette Roberts (Branch Representative), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Charles Morrish (Branch Representative), Jenny Dyer, Mary Friskney, Jeanette Owen, Tim Pett, Colin Turner

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mark Cooke (Webmaster), Patricia Newton (Guild Steward), Gary Sumption, Michele Winter

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10th October 2021

Circulated and read, after three minor typographical amendments, Richard Loyd signed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting on behalf of the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING

No matters arising.

5. SECRETARY'S REPORT

2022 AGM: The 2022 AGM will be held by Zoom meeting during the evening of Saturday, 19th March.

6-bell striking competition: Although currently scheduled to take place on Saturday, 19th March, this might be postponed until later in the year.

Branch membership: There have been no new members elected since the ONB Branch Committee meeting on 10th October 2021.

Colin Turner has advised that Dawn Smith, a former Guild member from Milton, died at the beginning of December. She and her family moved away from the village many years ago, but both she and her son Ian were very involved with the new bells project.

Practices: Despite planning to start practices at the beginning of 2022, no branch practices had taken place because of the Omicron variant of Covid-19. However it was decided that practices would be recommenced with the afternoon session at Drayton on 23rd February 2022.

Events:

Hopefully there will be a mini outing (3 towers and lunch) on Wednesday, 27th April.

We need to arrange a date for the branch outing and barbecue.

The barn dance and supper at Harwell Village Hall, which was postponed from Novembers 2020 and 2021, is now scheduled for 12th November 2022.

6. JOINT RINGING MASTERS' REPORT

At the time of the autumn committee meeting there were signs of normality returning to ringing at tower and branch level. However Omicron put everything back and once again the winter period was very restricted in terms of increased activity and the first events, such as the New Year's Day ringing and January branch practice, were cancelled. However, there are now brighter signs and it is sincerely hoped that we might at last be able to begin to have more freedom to organise events and move around towers and practices more easily.

We continue to be grateful to Jenny Dyer in her role of Ringing Recovery Champion for the Branch, and for the information that she obtains from the ODG and national groups. It would appear that our Branch is in much better shape than many, and this is surely a result of the dedication and resolve of our tower captains and branch membership. Well done everyone.

There are a number of new members being elected and also some successful teaching happening, and if this trend is sustained then we should recover well and have some enthusiastic new faces to take the Branch forward in the coming years.

We should discuss the timing of the branch 6-bell striking competition. At the moment it is scheduled for 19th March, but it might be wise to delay this to the morning of 11th or 18th June to allow more time for teams to prepare. To be discussed later.

No bell restoration projects are officially active within the branch, but there are some exciting developments to potentially restore the long silent bells at Culham. Whites have recently inspected and have reported their recommendations to the PCC for consideration. Branch officers are in close contact with the incumbent and PCC to support their decision process, and to advise on available financial opportunities should they proceed. Culham bells are a light 6 cast by Whitechapel during the 1920s and enjoyed a very short ringing career of less than 50 years, becoming derelict due to water ingress in the tower during the 1960s. Should this project become a reality it would be a very exciting prospect for our membership to support, and we hope to bring some positive news of developments in the coming months.

Thanks to all for your continued support.

7. 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. So far, four of the twelve who attended the course have been accredited as Teachers of Bell Handling and many of them continue to help teach our learners at the ONB Branch Ringing School on Saturday mornings.

ONB Branch Ringing School, 25 Sep 21 – 2 Apr 22

The Branch Ringing School has taken place in Abingdon for an hour each Saturday morning. The first session was on 25 September. A rota of sixteen teachers has taught twelve learners: four each from our Old North Berks branch and Oxford City branch, and two each from Woodstock & Witney and Bicester branches. We have averaged four learners each week, all taught individually for an hour.

ONB / VOWH ART Teaching from Rounds to Plain Hunt, Longcot, 23 Apr 2022

Tony Crabtree and I have collaborated again. The day course provides the skills and techniques necessary to build really good foundation ringing skills in your ringers. The course is designed for anyone involved in teaching a new band where the teacher can personally ring at least plain hunt.

The ringers booked on the course so far are five from our Old North Berks Branch (three from Abingdon, one from Harwell and one from Aston Tirrold), three from Bicester branch, two from Central Bucks branch and one each from the Witney & Woodstock branch and Lincolnshire. Three more ringers are on the waiting list.

Young Ringers

As discussed at the autumn ONB committee meeting, we changed the young ringer offering from six outings a year to monthly Sunday afternoon practices. Since November, we have practised at Shiplake (21 Nov), Drayton (Dec 12), Longcot (9 Jan) and Brightwell (13 Feb). Daphne has provided her sumptuous cakes, scones and biscuits for us on each occasion. Numbers have varied between 10 and 12 young people plus the parents and tower captains who enjoy joining in with the refreshments on offer and occasionally making up the numbers necessary for some of the more advanced methods rung.

The Abingdon School Bell Club has continued to meet weekly during term time at St Helen's Church, Abingdon. The teachers, Adam Jenkins and Ollie Lomax, have continued to come with two more new learners this term. We are glad that two of our younger fully-qualified young teachers help by teaching the boys to handle their bells. One of the older boys from the school has started attending the Young Ringer practices.

Ringling World National Youth Competition (RWNYC), ODG team

I have been providing transport for our 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 continuing to help with the ODG team for the 2022 competition, which will be held in Exeter. Currently, there are three young ringers from the ONB in the squad (two from Abingdon and one from Brightwell). Hopefully the young ringer practices I am organising will help more of the young ringers to reach the standard needed to join the ODG squad.

Susan Read reported that she had recently received emails from several tower captains thanking her for the Saturday morning training sessions, which had helped their ringers to improve. She said that she had a group of new ringing teachers for when sessions would move to practice nights in the spring and summer.

8. TREASURER'S REPORT

In 2021 the membership of the Branch was 247, a decrease of 16 from 2020. There were 237 members who paid subscriptions, 4 Honorary members, 1 Life member and 5 associate members, who paid their Guild subscription through another Branch.

So far in 2022 we have 58 paid up members (from 7 towers) along with the 2 Honorary and 1 Life members, and 0 members who pay a subscription through another branch. 20 towers have not paid any subscriptions to date. Branch subscriptions must be paid over to the Guild, usually, before the end of March to ensure members benefit from the Guild Insurance policy.

There were no fund raising events in 2021 but honey sales resulted in donations of £203. The one social event, a BBQ, raised £159.

The Branch, for the fifth year, collected a voluntary £2 donation with subscriptions. £472 was collected in the year. Almost everyone made the contributions to put towards Branch bell restorations projects. The Branch supported the work at Long Wittenham with a grant of £3,000. The Branch has no other bell restoration project commitments at present. However, there is one potential project at Culham but this is in the very early stages.

Three youth events were organised by the Branch in the latter half of the year, following the shutdown caused by the pandemic. These resulted in a surplus of £26. A Donation was made to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund of £500.

The Branch, at the end of 2021, had funds in the region of £4,700, which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch.

The accounts for 2021 are being circulated with this report and are currently being independently examined. They should be ready to be presented for approval at the AGM.

Just one note from the accounts – the Branch is holding £1,600 for Long Wittenham following the completion of the restoration project as the PCC didn't wish to hold the excess funds. This is restricted money only to be used for expenses relating to the bells at Long Wittenham.

Stuart Gibson reported that a further six towers had paid their subscriptions since the report had been issued. He confirmed that the annual subscription for the Guild is still £8 for 2022, with a request for a voluntary donation of £2 for branch restoration projects.

9. UPDATE ON PROJECTS

Culham: Jenny Dyer reported that the rehang of Culham bells could be a possibility for the next project for the Branch. Whites had recently made an inspection and had quoted for the work required to rehang and retune the bells and provide new fittings. A small project team from the Branch (including the joint ringing masters, the treasurer, the secretary and Jenny) were inviting members of Culham PCC, Friends of Culham church, and Andrew Steele (Culham Parish Council) to meet at North Moreton Church, where a similar restoration had taken place. The bells at North Moreton are easily accessible and so Whites' technical terms can be explained. Possible next steps will be discussed; however we are proceeding gently and with care not to upset anyone at Culham. It is important that we get our priorities right so that we can establish a project there. More news will become available as and when it becomes relevant.

Appleford: Colin Turner advised that there is no desire to carry out restoration work at the moment.

10. DONATIONS FROM BRANCH FUNDS AND OTHER SUPPORT FOR PROJECTS

Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund: It was proposed by Stuart Gibson and seconded by Susan Read that the Branch Committee recommends to the AGM the donation of £500 to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund.

11. ITEMS FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

- **Agenda:** Survival and recovery of ringing (national initiative) will be added to the agenda.
- **Date and time:** The 2022 AGM will be held at 7.00pm on Saturday, 19th March, by Zoom meeting. The Chairman will arrange the meeting and set up voting.
- **Election of officers:** All officers present, apart from Janette Roberts, said that they would be prepared to stand again if there were no other nominations at the AGM. Philip Roberts, Richard Loyd

and Gillian Loyd again advised that they would prefer this to be the last year they would stand for office. They said that, if no one came forward at the AGM, they would try to seek out potential new officers before the next AGM. The Chairman thanked Janette for all the work she has done for the Branch over the many years.

Action for Secretary: Email branch members to ask for nominations either before or at the AGM, and advise which officers are willing to stand again.

12. SOCIAL EVENTS

- There will be a mini outing on Wednesday, 27th April, with three towers and lunch.
- There will be a branch outing and evening barbecue in July. Philip Roberts and Stuart Gibson will liaise to decide a date.
- There will be a barn dance and supper on Saturday, 12th November in Harwell Village Hall. £50 deposit has been paid to Jigworks Ceilidh Band, with £440 to be paid on the day.

13. SURVIVAL AND RECOVERY OF RINGING (NATIONAL INITIATIVE)

Jenny Dyer, ONB Branch Recovery Champion, advised that the national network meetings are still running and the last meeting was in November.

Jenny had met with the other Guild recovery champions and had asked Katie Lane, Guild Master, if another meeting could be held, however there was insufficient interest at that time. Hopefully there will be a meeting soon.

At Branch level, now that restrictions have been removed we are freer to ring and towers are becoming more active. There are still some towers with low numbers of ringers, or with a number of older ringers or who need help with teaching new ringers. Jenny has a communication ready to send that will ask towers what, if any, support they need, as she would like as many towers in our Branch as possible to be active.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Charles Morrish asked if it would be possible to hold some branch 10 bell practices so that we could be better prepared for the Guild 10-bell striking competition. Richard Loyd advised that occasional practices had been held prior to the pandemic, but there had been a lack of support. Tim Pett said that anyone interested in ringing on 10 bells would be very welcome to attend the St Helen's Abingdon practices.
- Mary Friskney asked whether branch members should make contact with towers before visiting on their practice nights. Although there is no legislative guidance to be followed or enforced, individual towers have different interpretations and so there is no definitive branch recommendation. It was decided it would be sensible in advance to make sure that a practice is actually happening and that visitors are welcome.
- Jeanette Owen advised that Jack Jarvis of Steventon will have been a Guild member for 75 years on 17th May of this year. It was decided that this would be marked in the minutes of the AGM to acknowledge his duty and service to Steventon and the Guild. There will be a quarter peal of Grandsire Doubles at Steventon on the day and Jack will take part in it, his only concern being that he is able to stand in one place for 45 minutes.
- Richard Loyd advised that he had sent an email to those towers that potentially might take part in the Branch 6-bell striking competition, asking if they would prefer it to be rescheduled from 19th March to a later date. He had received several replies and had decided that it will now be held at North Moreton during the morning of Saturday, 18th June, when the weather will be warmer and towers will have had more time to practice for the competition. He will contact tower captains to let them know.
- Richard Loyd raised the issue of safeguarding. He believed that the CCCBR were recommending that all ringers should complete Level 1, and wanted to know how towers would respond if one of their ringers refused to do this and threatened to give up ringing. If it was not compulsory then there would not be a problem. However there were mixed messages, with the Guild Safeguarding Officer stating in an email that the CCCBR and Church of England were 'recommending' this, whilst the

attachment to her email (taken from The Ringing World) stated that 'ALL RINGERS have always been expected to take 'Basic Awareness' online training. This requirement is in line with other church volunteers and has always been supported by CCCBR. The new framework makes this mandatory for all ringers and, again, this is supported by the CCCBR.'

Action for the Secretary: Contact June Wells, Guild Safeguarding Officer and ask:

- Was Level 1 mandatory or only recommended for all ringers? And, if mandatory;
- How should tower captains deal with ringers refusing to complete Level 1?
- Also, would June be happy to attend our AGM and discuss this issue?

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This will be Sunday, 2nd October 2022 at 7.30pm, by Zoom meeting.

Richard Loyd thanked the Chairman for hosting the meeting.

After the Chairman had expressed thanks to everyone for attending, the meeting closed at 8.43pm.

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