

**Minutes of the Old North Berks Branch Annual General Meeting
Held by Zoom meeting on Saturday, 19th March 2022**

29 members attended the Annual General Meeting, including June Wells (Guild Safeguarding Officer) and Patricia Newton (Guild Steward).

1) Apologies for absence

Received from: Katie Lane (Guild Master), Christine Birch, Chris Cook, John Dowling, David Endacott, Rachel Marffy, Bridget Taylor and Michele Winter.

2) Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday, 20th March 2022

Circulated and read, the minutes were signed by Richard Loyd on behalf of 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

Branch membership

Ten new members have been elected to the Guild since the last AGM: 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 Claire Ward of Steventon, Helen Diserens of Wallingford and Roy Thorpe of Brightwell have all passed away and will be sadly missed throughout the Branch. 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

There were no practices during 2021. Despite hoping to start practices in January 2022, the first practice held was the afternoon session at Drayton on 23rd February 2022.

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 our thanks go to Stuart and Naomi for hosting the event.

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

Joint Ringing Masters' report

During the autumn 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 with regard to an increase in 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.

Although there were no branch practices in 2021, 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.

It has been decided to postpone the 2022 branch 6-bell striking competition, which was scheduled for 19th March, until the morning of 18th June to allow more time for teams to prepare and for the weather to improve.

We are 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.

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 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.

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. The twelve ringers on the course included three from the ONB (Jenny and Andy Dyer from Cumnor and Willow (18) from Abingdon). 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 September 2021 – 2 April 2022

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 April 2022

Tony Crabtree and I have collaborated again. The day course will provide 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. Of the ringers booked on the course so far, there are five from Old North Berks Branch (three from Abingdon, one from Harwell and one from Aston Tirrold).

Young Ringers

Our young ringer offerings have changed from only 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 Pollard has provided refreshments on each occasion. Numbers have varied between 10 and 12 young people plus the parents and tower captains who occasionally make 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 Ringers practices.

Ringling World National Youth Competition (RWNYC), ODG team

I have provided transport for our young ringers to the monthly practices held for the ODG squad for many years. 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 came from the ONB.

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 practices I am organising will help more of the young ringers to reach the standard needed to join the ODG squad.

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.

Following a vote to approve the financial statement for the year ending 31st December 2021 (proposed by Dick Peters and seconded by Josie Irving), the accounts were ratified.

5) Projects in the Branch

Culham: Whites have carried out an inspection of the bells and fittings. A small team has been set up, which includes branch officers and Andrew Steele of Culham Parish Council, and is headed by Jenny Dyer. The team is planning to meet up with members of the Culham PCC at North Moreton, where a similar rehang has taken place alongside reordering of the church. This meeting is being hosted by Rob Nickless. The situation at Culham is highly sensitive and so a gentle approach is being taken.

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

- It was agreed that ONB Branch will donate £500 to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund (proposed by Stuart Gibson and seconded by Tim Pett). Stuart Gibson thanked the Branch on behalf of the Bell Fund Trustees.
- There were no other recommendations.

7) Election of officers

Janette Roberts said that she wished to stand down as Branch Representative. The Chairman thanked Janette for all the work she had done for the Branch over many years.

| | | Proposed by | Seconded by |
|------------------------|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Chairman | Rob Nickless | Gillian Loyd | Jenny Dyer |
| Vice Chairman | Charles Morrish | Daphne Pollard | Dick Peters |
| Secretary | Gillian Loyd | Rob Nickless | Josie Irving |
| Treasurer | Stuart Gibson | Richard Loyd | Charles Morrish |
| Joint Ringing Masters | Richard Loyd Philip Roberts | Josie Irving | Jenny Dyer |
| Training Officer | Susan Read | Philip Roberts | Jenny Jeskins |
| Newsletter Editor | Daphne Pollard | Susan Read | Rachel Morrish |
| Webmaster | Mark Cooke | Dick Peters | Susan Read |
| Branch Representatives | Josie Irving Charles Morrish Dick Peters | Philip Roberts | Richard Loyd |

There being no further nominations, the above were duly elected.

8) Election of new members

The following were proposed as new members of the Branch and Guild:

| Name | Tower | Proposer |
|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Sarah Macdonell | Wantage | Dick Peters |
| Alban Walker | Radley | Daphne Pollard |
| Susie Pocock | Cholsey | Jenny Jeskins |
| Frances Higham | Cholsey | Jenny Jeskins |
| Anna Hurst | Cholsey | Jenny Jeskins |
| Hedley French | Childrey | Jane Valentine |
| Lynn Burridge | Brightwell | John Dowling |

| | | |
|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Lindsay Lott | Blewbury | Richard Loyd |
| Karen Bishop | North Moreton | Rob Nickless |
| Charlie Nickless | North Moreton | Rob Nickless |
| Wendy Muggeridge | Wallingford | Mary Friskney |
| Marion Preston | Cumnor | Jenny Dyer |
| Neil Weston | Abingdon, St Nicolas | Susan Read |
| Ben Williams | Harwell | Philip Roberts |

They were seconded by Josie Irving and were elected as members of the Branch and Guild.

The Chairman was very pleased that there were so many new members after Covid-19 and welcomed them to the Guild.

9) **Survival and recovery of ringing (national initiative)**

Jenny Dyer reported that she had recently sent a short survey to all the towers in the Branch, asking what support is being given to other towers or is needed at a local level. So far the feedback she has received has been very positive. Jenny is hoping that all towers will be able to ring for services and on practice nights, and will liaise with branch officers to provide any necessary support.

10) **Social events**

- There will be a mini outing and lunch on Wednesday, 27th April.
- There will be a branch outing organised by Philip Roberts, followed by a barbecue at the home of Stuart and Naomi Gibson. Date to be decided.
- The barn dance and supper at Harwell Village Hall, which was postponed in Novembers 2020 and 2021, is now scheduled for 12th November 2022.

11) **Safeguarding**

Richard Loyd thanked June Wells, Guild Safeguarding Officer, for attending the branch AGM. He said that, after communications on Safeguarding from the CCCBR in The Ringing World had been discussed at the recent Branch Committee Meeting, he felt that it was important for June to clarify some complicated issues:

- Every three years all ringers aged 16 and over are required to take the online 'Basic Awareness' course, which takes approximately 1 hour 15 minutes.
June advised that it had been agreed by the C of E National Safeguarding Team and the Oxford Diocese that all church volunteers, including bell ringers, choir members, sides persons, flower arrangers, etc. need to complete the Basic Awareness Course. This course makes everyone aware of the meaning of Safeguarding and helps them to know what they should do if ever anyone makes a disclosure to them.
- Every three years, all tower captains are required to take the online 'Foundation' Course, which takes approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.
June advised that, until Christmas 2021, all tower captains had been expected to take the Leadership course. However this had been reduced to Foundation level by the C of E National Safeguarding Team with agreement from the Oxford Diocese. The course needs to be completed regardless of whether or not there are any young ringers or vulnerable adults in the band.
- Every three years some ringers, particularly those training a large number of young ringers, will need to take the 'Leadership' Course. This course consists of two 1 hour 30 minute sessions, and requires advance preparation and a post course interview.
June advised that the Branch Training Officer, who teaches a number of young ringers, needs to have taken the Leadership course. In addition there are several Guild Officers who have been identified by the Guild Master who also need to take this course.
- What should be done if a ringer refuses to take the required course?
June said that tower captains should ask their ringers to complete the course. However it would be up to each Parish Safeguarding Officer to ensure that this was done. Tower captains should promote the courses, but responsibility lies with each parish. Parish Safeguarding Officers and tower captains can stop someone ringing if they have refused to do the relevant course. Tower Captains need to supply their Safeguarding Officers with the names of all their ringers.
- What happens if there are visitors to the tower?
Visitors' names should be entered in the tower register. There should be a local ringer, who has completed the Foundation course, at service ringing and at any practices.
- On many occasions Safeguarding issues go unnoticed. What is the Church seeking to achieve?
June advised that the Church is making everyone aware of the types of abuse that can happen and letting them know what is the correct thing to do if ever anything comes to their attention.
- One to one training of ringers with no one else present.
June advised that this is permitted but not considered to be wise. If a child is being taught, this could be done in the presence of a parent. It is also ideal to have two adults in the car if transporting young ringers.

- Booking a course
This can only be done online through the Safeguarding portal on the C of E website. Courses are free of charge. Awareness and Foundation courses can be completed at home and, if necessary, in more than one session. If a ringer is not computer literate, they can do the course with their Parish Safeguarding Officer or another suitable adult.
- DBS checking
Safeguarding training is in addition to DBS checking. Tower Captains and anyone teaching young people or vulnerable adults need to be DBS checked.

There were some questions asked that June was not able to answer in full. She promised to give the answers to the Branch Secretary. [Note: The responses to these questions are at the foot of the minutes.]

12) Any other business

- Richard Loyd asked if anyone could suggest a judge for the branch 6-bell striking competition on 18th June.
- Pat Newton said that, as a follow up to ringing survival and recovery, there will be a meeting on 30th April in Witney for all branch training officers. Each branch is invited to send 2 or 3 members.
- Jenny Jeskins asked if all branch towers are now accepting visitors on their practice nights. The Chairman suggested that it would be sensible for any visitors to telephone or email the tower correspondent in advance.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the AGM. He also thanked all branch officers for supporting the Branch since Covid-19, and hoped that branch practices and social events will continue.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.27pm.

Signed.....

Date.....

Responses to unanswered Safeguarding questions:

What is the definition of a vulnerable adult?

It should be noted that the Church includes ‘vulnerable adults’ in their policies. The official definition of a vulnerable adult, or an adult at risk, is a person over the age of 18 who is unable to take care of him or herself OR unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation. This is unlikely to apply to many, if any, ringers but ringing must take seriously its responsibilities to ensure the wellbeing of all ringers.

Do vulnerable ringers have to complete the training?

All ringers should complete the pathway. Where people have struggled to complete it due to IT issues some parishes have developed buddy systems so people have support with the technology. It could be that someone might for example have a learning disability, that means that their learning age is below 16, when we wouldn't expect people to complete the training anyway so this might be relevant in some cases. Most exemptions would need to be considered on a case by case basis.

Is the Basic Awareness training transferable between organisations?

No - within the Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework 2021 it states that the only core learning pathway that would be portable is the Methodist Foundation course for the C of E Foundation course, as this has been analysed as comparable.

How early in the induction process should the training happen?

It is expected that people work to achieve the acquired level of learning as soon as is practicably possible upon starting a new role. This would be when they start to take part in practice and Sunday service ringing.