

MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting held on Zoom on Sunday, 2nd October 2022 at 7.30pm.

1. ATTENDEES

Rob Nickless (Chairman), Richard Loyd (Joint Ringing Master), Philip Roberts (Joint Ringing Master), Gillian Loyd (Secretary), Stuart Gibson (Treasurer), Susan Read (Training Officer), Janette Roberts (Branch Representative), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Patricia Newton (Guild Steward), Margaret Brock, Nigel Findley, Hedley French, Jeanette Owen, Dick Peters, Daphne Pollard and Karen Walker

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Charles Morrish (Vice Chairman), Jenny Dyer (Ringing Recovery Champion), Andrew Dyer, Christine Birch, Mary Friskney and Tim Pett

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27th February 2022

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 2022: The AGM was held by Zoom meeting on Saturday, 22nd March 2022. 29 members attended, including June Wells (Guild Safeguarding Officer) 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 four new members elected to the Guild since the AGM: Andrew Lay (Abingdon), Bethany Williams (Harwell), Thomas Palmer and Mary-Clare Palmer (Drayton).

Practices: Branch evening practices have been held at Radley, Blewbury, Cholsey and Brightwell. The practice at Cumnor was cancelled following the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II. Branch afternoon practices have been held at Steventon, Cumnor, Marcham, Radley, Blewbury and Long Wittenham. Surprise Major practices have been held at Drayton and Goring. The Surprise Major practice scheduled for Milton was cancelled through lack of support.

6-bell striking competition: This was held during the morning of 18th June 2022 at North Moreton and the ringing was excellent. Six teams entered the striking competition and the results were: 1st Wantage (34 faults), 2nd Abingdon A (35 faults), 3rd Blewbury (45 faults), 4th Wallingford (56 faults), 5th Abingdon B (58 faults), 6th Radley and Steventon (71 faults). Thanks go to Keith Osborne from Kent and William Stungo from Berkshire for judging the competition, and to the North Moreton ringers and friends for providing a superb breakfast.

Events: There was a well-attended mini outing on Wednesday, 27th April, to Lambourn, Brightwalton and East Ilsley, with lunch at the Crown and Horns, East Ilsley.

The branch outing took place on 23rd July to Weston on the Green, Aynho, Adderbury, Sandford St. Martin and Stonesfield, with lunch at the Red Lion, Adderbury and tea at Sandford St. Martin. Thanks go to Philip and Janette Roberts for organising the outing. It was followed by a barbecue at the home of Stuart and Naomi Gibson, attended by almost sixty members, partners and friends. As ever the food was excellent and thanks go to Stuart and Naomi for hosting the event. The day and a raffle raised £554.00 for branch funds.

The barn dance and supper at Harwell Village Hall, which was postponed from November 2020 and 2021, is now scheduled for 12th November 2022. We need to decide whether we still wish to go ahead with the event or whether we would prefer to postpone it to another date.

6. JOINT RINGING MASTERS' REPORT

The sad news of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and the immediate implementation of 'Operation London Bridge' dominated the news. The response of bellringers around the United Kingdom and Commonwealth was immediate and it was definitely 'all hands to the pump'! In spite of the detailed and much publicised plans, there was still some confusion about when muffles should be applied and when removed for the proclamation. However, from all accounts, our branch responded magnificently with towers helping their neighbours with ringers and fitting muffles when resources were short. For instance, a plea for four muffles to allow the infrequently rung bells of Sparsholt to be rung muffled was very quickly fulfilled. Well done to everyone!

Around the branch there have been a number of new members elected to the Guild, some successful teaching advances, and national training courses being attended. This is all good news and quite a healthy sign that the branch is recovering well. However, we all still need to focus on recruiting new ringers to sustain the branch and ringing for the longer term. Maybe the prospect of learning the basic skills in time to ring for the Coronation of King Charles III might be an incentive for some?

Although no bell restorations are officially active within the branch, there are some exciting prospects for Sparsholt and North Moreton. Disappointingly, the possible restoration of the long derelict bells at Culham does not appear to have the support of the local PCC. More information on all three of these will be discussed at the meeting.

Finally, we have both been Ringing Masters for several years and have stayed on to maintain continuity in the post Covid period. However, it is definitely high time for some 'new blood' with new ideas and energy. We would both be happy to continue to support and help new JRMs during their first year if needed.

Thanks to all for your continued support.

7. TREASURER'S REPORT

So far in 2022 we have 229 paid up members from 25 towers, along with the 3 Honorary and 1 Life members plus 4 members who pay a subscription through another branch. This makes a total of 237 members, which is around 12 down on the previous year. Two towers have not paid any subscriptions to date (Didcot & Letcombe Regis).

The BBQ and Outing raised £554, and continuing honey sales a further £193.

The Branch has not made any donations to branch restoration projects so far in the year, but there is one possible project on the horizon and one likely to go ahead. Donations towards these will need to be discussed and put to the AGM next year.

The Young Ringers events held so far in the year have been self-funding.

The Branch, at present, has funds in the region of £6,400, which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch.

8. RINGING RECOVERY CHAMPION'S REPORT

Firstly, I would like to thank Tower Captains and their representatives for all their dedication in supporting this initiative. Overall, following the pandemic, there has been a positive return to ringing within the Branch, with many new recruits, and this is extremely encouraging.

Whilst nationally, the Ringing Recovery Steering Group has now run its course and closed in the summer, there is still some follow-up from the Branch Survey to address. Where towers identified the need for extra ringers on Sundays, support at practices and/or help with recruitment, a meeting is to take place with the Branch Ringing Masters, to discuss how the Branch and its members can support, with follow-up to those towers individually.

9. TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

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

Tony Crabtree and I organised this course to provide skills and techniques necessary to build really good foundation ringing skills in one's ringers. Designed for anyone involved in teaching a new band where the teacher can personally ring at least plain hunt, five ringers from ONB Branch attended (three from Abingdon, one from Harwell and one from Aston Tirrold) together with seven others. Four ringers have been assessed and three accredited so far. I expect that further ringers will be accredited with ART within the next six months.

ONB Branch (Summer) Ringing School, 18 Apr – 29 Sep 22

Twelve learners and eight trainee teachers participated. The Branch Ringing School took up to five learners and three trainee teachers to a different practice night each week throughout the summer. They were allocated to either the Northern Group or the Southern Group, alternating between twenty towers in the north and south. In most of the towers, the trainee teachers took turns with the Tower Captain to run pieces of ringing. We were generally made very welcome. Both the learners and the trainee teachers increased their confidence and ability to ring / run practices.

ONB / Bicester Branch ART "Teaching Bell Handling" Day Course, Kirtlington, 22 Oct 2022

Steve Vickars and I are collaborating to organise an ART course to teach twelve new teachers of bell handling for our branches. There are twelve places on the course of which six are filled so far. We will be inviting all those on the course to help teach learners at the ONB Branch Ringing School on Saturday mornings until March 2023.

ONB and Bicester Branch (Winter) Ringing School, 1 Oct 2022 – 31 March 2023

This winter Steve Vickers and I are running bell handling sessions alternately in Abingdon and Kirtlington, both of which towers have simulators, enabling us to teach ringing without bothering the neighbours. The hope is that the Bicester Branch will also gain some new enthusiastic teachers and recruit more learners in the future, and be able to run its own Ringing School in the future.

Young Ringers

We have changed the young ringer offering from six outings a year to monthly Sunday afternoon practices. Since February, we have practised at Brightwell (13 March), Childrey (10 April), Stanford-in-the-Vale (15 May), Clanfield (10 July) and Cumnor (14 August). Daphne has provided her sumptuous cakes, scones and biscuits for us on each occasion. Numbers have varied between 2 and 10 young people plus 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, bringing four more new learners this calendar year so far. We are glad that Dan and Joe Gillett, two of our younger fully-qualified ART teachers help by teaching the boys to handle their bells week by week. One of the older boys from the school has started attending the Young Ringer practices. It would be good to persuade more of them to join bands at towers near their homes.

Ringing 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. The National Competition was held in Exeter in July, and the ODG squad included Joe from Abingdon, Amelie from Brightwell and Isaac from Marcham. On the day, Joe conducted, but one of our team was unable to come, being ill with Covid. Simon, aged 9, rang instead, one handed, having broken his arm a few weeks earlier. Sadly, Amelie was unable to go because it was her school sports day. There were eight teams in the method ringing category and the ODG team came joint fourth. I am continuing to help with the ODG team for the 2023 competition which will be held in York. Hopefully the young ringer practices I am organising in the branch will help more to reach the Plain Hunt on Seven standard needed before joining the ODG squad.

10. UPDATE ON BRANCH BELL RESTORATION PROJECTS

Culham: Richard Loyd reported that a meeting had been held recently between the Branch Ringing Masters, the Secretary, Jenny and Andrew Dyer and Andrew Steele (member of Culham Parish Council). Confirmation to proceed had not been forthcoming from the PCC and it was felt that the potential project is going nowhere. However the bells are valuable and should be protected and not allowed to become derelict. The report from Whites of Appleton stated that the frame cannot be guaranteed for supporting the static weight of the bells in some areas. Jenny will arrange a meeting with the Vicar to ask what the PCC envisages for the future of the bells. She will discuss the possibility of removing the bells before the church reordering takes place and will explain the role of the Keltek Trust.

The Secretary will place the minutes of all meetings about Culham, together with some pertinent emails, into the back of the AGM Minute Book so that we retain full records.

Sparsholt: Whites of Appleton have quoted for the rehangings of the four bells at a cost of £23,865 + VAT. Augmenting the ring to six will cost a further £22,921 + VAT. There are possible deductions of approximately £3,500. Hedley French has cleared the ringing chamber and the bells are rung occasionally, most recently on the death of HM The Queen and the Proclamation of King Charles III. Hedley advised that there is an immense amount of support from the village to have the bells restored and augmented. He has successfully applied for a grant of £8,000 from the ODG Bell Fund and he hoped that the ONB Branch will also support the project, which he thinks will take 2-3 years.

The Treasurer will recommend at the 2023 AGM a donation from the Branch of £3,000.

North Moreton: Richard Loyd advised of the current project to augment the ring of six bells to eight. Donors have already been found for one of the new bells and it is hoped that a donor will soon be found for the other bell. Whites of Appleton have quoted £34,489 + VAT for the work, with possible deductions of £1,885. The church's architect has been consulted and has no objections. Alan Frost, the Diocesan Bell Advisor, has also been consulted and has no objections, but would need to know the exact inscriptions on the new bells. There is a provisional grant of £3,500 from the ODG Bell Fund.

Richard Loyd (seconded by Dick Peters) proposed that a donation of £1,500 from branch funds be recommended at the 2023 AGM. There were no objections.

East Hendred: Nigel Findley advised that, possibly because the wooden frame had dried out over the summer months, the tenor bearing mounts had worked loose. Following the advice of Mark Walker of Whites of Appleton, the bolts were tightened and the tenor is now ringing again. Whites have recently inspected the bells and have estimated that a rehang would cost approximately £64,000 + VAT, with some possible deductions. The last complete overhaul of the bells was in 1889. Nigel was not yet sure whether the PCC would agree to all of the recommended works. Philip Roberts and Tony Crabtree were planning to inspect the bells on behalf of the ODG.

West Hendred: Nigel Findley advised that the bells were not currently being rung and that a report was awaited from Whites of Appleton.

Ardington: The bells at Ardington are currently unringable because of the installation of a chiming apparatus several years ago. The ODG and ONB Branch only became aware of this when it was too late. Nigel Findley says that the electronic system has recently been replaced, and he is hoping to be permitted to take photographs of the bells and the inside of the tower. There is enthusiasm from the Vicar, the PCC and the village to have the bells rehanged for ringing once again, and Whites of Appleton will be invited to make an inspection.

It was decided not to recommend grants from branch funds for Ardington, East Hendred and West Hendred until more information became available.

11. BRANCH PROGRAMME FOR 2023

Steventon have kindly offered to host the New Year's Ringing and Refreshments on Monday, 2nd January.

We are hoping to go to Sparsholt and Childrey for a branch practice on the same evening, and to have a practice at Cumnor (the one scheduled there was cancelled following the death of HM The Queen). It would also be possible to hold a practice at East Hendred, but not at West Hendred. The Secretary will arrange branch evening and afternoon practices, together with the Surprise Major practices.

12. SOCIAL EVENTS

Barn Dance and supper in Harwell Village Hall on Saturday, 12th November 2022: It was decided that this event will go ahead. The hall is still booked and so is the band.

November 2023: We are due to have a skittles evening in Radley, however Daphne Pollard advised that the Village Hall is scheduled to be closed in the autumn for renovation. It was decided to hold the skittles evening in 2024. The Secretary said that Blewbury would host a quiz night in November 2023.

13. BRANCH SECRETARY ROLE

I have been Branch Secretary for the past eighteen years and have not been able to find anyone interested in taking on the full position. I am now finding this role excessive and feel that the secretary job could be split into three:

- Branch Secretary – each year arranging three business meetings, taking minutes, writing reports for the Guild Annual Report, two Odd Bobs and two branch newsletters, and also dealing with emails from and to the Guild.
- Ringing Events Secretary – arranging and advertising branch afternoon and evening practices and also surprise major practices.
- Social Events Secretary – organising New Year's Ringing and Refreshments, and the April mini outing. Planning and advertising the barbecue and autumn social event.

If no one wants to take on the whole of the secretary's role at the 2023 AGM, I would be happy to stay as branch secretary solely, but only as long as the ringing and social events are handled by other people. There is already one volunteer for 'Social Events Secretary' and I am talking to someone else about the 'Ringing Events Secretary' role. If anyone is interested in any of these roles, please can they contact me before the AGM.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Nigel Findley reported that it will be the 500th anniversary of the East Hendred clock in three years' time. There will be a major effort to get the clock going by then as the mechanism needs repairing. The clock does not have a face on the tower. Nigel will send more details when available.

- Pat Newton said that it was good to see everyone on Zoom and that she had been impressed with how well the branch works together on restoration projects.
- Susan Read said that the Branch Ringing School, together with the Bicester Branch, were holding classes in Abingdon and Kirtlington on alternate Saturday mornings.
- Gillian Loyd congratulated Wantage in representing the Branch in the Guild's 6-bell striking competition on the previous day. Wantage had come 5th in a very close competition and were only seven faults behind the winners, Faringdon.
- Richard Loyd said that he intended to run the branch 6-bell striking competition in 2023 as a separate event from the AGM because it had worked so well in 2022. He was thinking of asking Long Wittenham to be host tower on a Saturday morning in June.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This will be held on Sunday, 26th February 2023 at 7.30pm, possibly again by Zoom meeting.

After the Chairman had expressed thanks to everyone for attending, the meeting closed at 8.54pm.

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