

MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting held by Zoom meeting on **Sunday, 26th February 2023** 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), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Charles Morrish (Branch Representative), Dick Peters (Branch Representative), Patricia Newton (Guild Steward), Jenny Bennett, Nigel Findley, Hedley French, Tim Pett, Janette Roberts

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Mark Cooke (Webmaster), Christine Birch, John Dowling, Michele Winter

3. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2nd October 2022**

Circulated and read, 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**

6-bell striking competition: Following the success of last year's competition, it has been decided that this year's competition will be held during the morning of Saturday, 10th June, at Long Wittenham.

Branch membership: There have been eight new members elected since the last ONB Branch Committee meeting. On 2nd January 2023: Matthew Young and Emily Young (both of Milton). On 14th February 2023: Greg Locke (Aston Tirrold), Amelia Butterfield (Brightwell), Rob Able, Paul Batho and Sarah Tenant-Flowers (East Hagbourne), and Simon Baker (Steventon).

Liz Woodhouse of the Vale of the White Horse Branch joined Wantage as an associate of their band.

Chris Surman advised of the death on 15th February of Jean Hazard, a former branch member and ringer at West Hanney for many years. Although Jean had had to give up ringing, she continued as Secretary at West Hanney until last year.

Practices: Branch practices have been held at East Hagbourne, Harwell and Wantage. Afternoon practices have been held at Cholsey, Chilton, Drayton and Brightwell. There was a surprise major practice at Brightwell, however the practice at Wallingford was abandoned through lack of support and a quarter peal of Stedman Triples was rung.

Events: The barn dance and supper at Harwell Village Hall, which was postponed from 2020 and 2021, was eventually held in November 2022. This was a great success, with almost seventy attending. Ticket sales, a raffle and bar takings raised £337 for branch bell restoration projects. Thanks go to the excellent band, Jigworks, and their caller, and to the Harwell ringers and friends for providing a superb supper for everyone. Ringing and refreshments took place on 2nd January at Steventon. This was a very popular event, with almost forty attendees. Thanks go to the Steventon ringers and friends for their hospitality and for providing a superb range of soups and cakes on such a cold morning.

Following my appeal in the Branch Newsletter about splitting the Branch Secretary job into three separate roles, I am very pleased to report that I have had offers from Bridget Taylor of Harwell for the role of arranging branch practices, and Mandy Winters of Blewbury for the role of organising branch events. I hope that their appointments can be ratified at the AGM, however we need to decide at the Committee meeting what names should be given to these new roles.

6. **JOINT RINGING MASTERS' REPORT**

Towers within the ONB responded magnificently at the time of national mourning for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and we are sure that tower captains are now turning their minds to ringing for the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. There should be more flexibility in terms of dates and timings, and individual church incumbents will have their own plans to work our ringing around. It will also be a good opportunity to raise awareness of bellringing within our local communities.

After a dip in branch membership, it is pleasing to see towers electing quite a number of new members recently. Please note that new ringers should be encouraged to join the Guild for insurance purposes, especially when they are no longer under direct supervision within the tower. Remember that new members can only be elected at an open evening branch practice or the Annual General Meeting in March.

At the beginning of February, Richard attended an excellent Tower Leaders workshop organised and run by Robert and Pat Newton. Also attending were new tower leaders Nigel Findley (Hendreds) and Josh Ball (Abingdon St Nicolas). Each branch within the guild provided a similar mix of three tower leaders to learn about skills necessary, what helpful resources are available, and to discuss the challenges and demands of the role. This was a very useful day, and I would recommend it to other new leaders if it is offered again next year. The output from the workshop will shortly be placed in a dedicated place for tower leaders on the ODG website.

Branch practices of all descriptions are unpredictable in terms of numbers. The most recent evening branch practice had just two visiting branch members attending. We hope that the warmer weather and lighter evenings will encourage better attendances. It will be especially good to see our new members coming along to experience new bells, and socially meet with other members. The new for 2023, bi-monthly 'advanced practices,' starting in March will be a trial that we hope will prove popular and helpful for members with intermediate ringing skills.

The North Moreton augmentation project is on track with the Faculty now issued. It is hoped that the new bells will be cast during March at the Royal Eijbouts Foundry and hung by Whites of Appleton in time for ringing for the Coronation. The new bells will incorporate the Royal Cyphers of the King and Queen Consort and will complete a truly historic octave dating from 1350 to 2023. Other projects are still in the early stages, but it is hoped that there may be some exciting news in due course for Sparsholt and East and West Hendred. As always we are sure that our branch membership will support these projects as we have all others. Disappointingly, the possible restoration of the long derelict bells at Culham does not have the support of the local PCC.

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. TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

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

In October, Steve Vickars and I started to run handling sessions alternately in Abingdon and Kirtlington. Each week we organised one teacher per learner, and at least one mentor for the less experienced teachers. Abingdon provided room for up to five learners at a time, with Kirtlington up to four. After three weeks, a small recruitment initiative in Abingdon meant we stepped up to weekly sessions. Kirtlington has continued to hold fortnightly sessions. Dorchester and Witney are joining in, holding bell handling sessions on Saturday mornings as part of the same Ringing School.

The Ringing School has given six new teachers of ringing the opportunity to teach in a supportive environment. Five are now considered to be close to qualifying as ART members and two have already been successfully assessed by ART. Of the learners, five have already completed the ART "Learning the Ropes" level 1 (bell handling) qualification.

It is anticipated that by the end of March, 37 one-hour sessions will have been run. 22 learners have attended a total of 95 hours of handling tuition. 28 teachers and mentors have attended a total of 134 sessions so far since 1 October.

ONB / Bicester Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) "Teaching bell handling" day course, Kirtlington, 22 Oct 2022

Steve Vickars, (Training Officer of the Bicester Branch) and I collaborated to put on an ART course to train new teachers of bell handling for our branches. The delegates included three from the Bicester Branch, two from the Witney and Woodstock Branch and one each from Oxford City Branch, the Old North Berks Branch

and the Vale of White Horse Branch. All attendees were invited to help teach learners at the Branch Ringing School on Saturday mornings until March 2023.

ONB / Bicester ART "Teaching from Rounds to Plain Hunt" day course, Abingdon, 18 March 2023

Steve Vickars and I are collaborating again in organising the above course, which will provide the skills and techniques necessary to build really good foundation ringing skills in one's ringers. It is designed for anyone involved in teaching a new band where the teacher can personally ring at least plain hunt.

Young Ringers

We hold monthly Sunday afternoon practices for young ringers. Most recently at Cholsey in November, Kirtlington in January and Drayton in February. Daphne has provided her sumptuous cakes, scones and biscuits for us on each occasion. Numbers have varied between 4 and 11 young people, plus the parents and tower captains who enjoy joining in with the refreshments on offer and 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 Oliver Lomax, have continued to come, bringing six more new learners this academic 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.

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.

The National Competition will be held in York in July 2023. The ODG squad currently includes Isaac and Elizabeth from Abingdon, Alban from Radley and Amelie from Brightwell, and Reggie, taught to ring at Abingdon School, has recently graduated into the squad.

Hopefully the young ringer practices I am organising will help more to reach the Plain Hunt on Seven standard needed before they can join the ODG squad.

8. TREASURER'S REPORT

In 2022 the membership of the Branch was 240, a decrease of 8 from 2021. There were 232 members who paid subscriptions, 3 Honorary members, 1 Life member and 4 associate members, who paid their Guild subscription through another Branch.

So far in 2023 we have 90 paid up members (from 11 towers) along with the 3 Honorary and 1 Life members plus 2 members who pay a subscription through another branch. 16 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 two fund raising events held in 2022. The BBQ (including the raffle & tea proceeds) raised £555 and the Barn Dance £337. Honey sales resulted in donations of nearly £200.

The Branch, for the sixth year, collected a voluntary £2 donation with subscriptions. £466 was collected in the year. Almost everyone made the contributions to put towards Branch bell restorations projects.

No grants were paid out in the year, but the Branch committee meeting recommended supporting the North Moreton augmentation to 8 and the rehang/augmentation of Sparsholt. The proposal to the AGM will be for grants of £1,500 and £3,000 respectively. There are no other known projects in the Branch as the Culham project has sadly come to nothing.

Five youth events were organised by the Branch, which resulted in a surplus of £24.

A donation was made to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund of £500.

The Branch, at the end of 2022, had funds in the region of £6,000 (£4,700 in 2021), which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch.

The accounts for 2022 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 confirmed that the proceeds from the sales by Richard Loyd of Rob Nickless' honey counted as donations to the branch.

Stuart advised that there was a likelihood of Guild annual subscriptions being increased in 2024. It was decided that a straw poll would be taken at the forthcoming Branch AGM to see if members would be happy to increase their voluntary donation (currently £2 per annum) towards branch restoration projects.

9. UPDATE ON PROJECTS

North Moreton: Richard Loyd reported that the project is progressing well. The Faculty has been obtained and the casting date is awaited. It is hoped that the work will be completed in time for the Coronation. As they will be the first two bells to be cast for Oxfordshire with King Charles III and Queen Consort Camilla's cyphers on the bells, the Oxford Diocese are planning to give media attention.

Culham: Richard Loyd advised that the Culham PCC have written formally to say that they have no interest in the bells and have no intention of carrying out restoration work. Branch Officers are meeting shortly to discuss this difficult and sensitive situation.

Sparsholt: Hedley French advised that the PCC is planning to formally discuss and approve the project to rehang the bells and augment them to six. It could be a little while before a Faculty is obtained. 2-3 people have already expressed an interest in learning to ring and they will attend a taster session in Childrey, followed by teaching sessions at the Branch Ringing School.

West Hendred: Nigel Findley said that initially there had been a plan to repair the 5th. However, as this will include taking the tenor out, it has been decided that it would be more sensible to rehang the entire ring of bells. The PCC will discuss at their next meeting and hopefully minute a decision to proceed.

East Hendred: Nigel Findley reported that it is still possible to ring the six bells. Therefore a decision has been taken that the bells will not be rehung until after the clock, which will be 500 years old in two years' time, has been restored.

Lockinge: Nigel Findley reported that the medieval frame for the four bells is unsuitable for full circle ringing and the bells have not been rung for possibly 125 years. The bells would need to be relocated further down the tower. Potentially there is a wealthy benefactor who might be able to help with funding.

Ardington: Nigel Findley reported that the PCC is interested in making the bells able to ring full circle and is meeting in two weeks' time.

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.

Stuart will also propose to the AGM donations of £1,500 to North Moreton and £3,000 to Sparsholt.

11. ITEMS FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

- **Agenda:** Creating the posts of Branch Practices Secretary and Branch Social Secretary will be added to the agenda.
- **Date and time:** The 2023 AGM will be held at 7.00pm on Saturday, 25th March, by Zoom meeting. The Chairman will arrange the meeting and set up voting.
- **Election of officers:** All officers present, apart from Richard Loyd and Philip Roberts, said that they would be prepared to stand again if there were no other nominations at the AGM. Charles Morrish said that he would be happy to become a Joint Ringing Master following his retirement in September. Richard decided to continue as JRM for another year, with Philip remaining in post until September. Jenny Bennett offered to stand as Vice Chairman.

Action for Secretary: Contact Mark Cooke to ask if he is happy to continue in the role of Webmaster.

12. SOCIAL EVENTS

- There will be a mini outing on Wednesday, 26th April, with three towers and lunch.

- There will be a branch outing and evening barbecue on 15th July.
- There will be a quiz and supper on Saturday, 18th November in Blewbury Village Hall.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Bridget Taylor of Harwell had asked if it would be possible to hold a branch quarter peal day/weekend/week. She thought that it would be an opportunity for developing ringers to consolidate their learning and focus concentration.
It was felt that this would be a very big and complicated event to organise. The Guild holds a quarter peal week every four years and so far ONB Branch has not participated. It was thought that it would be much simpler and more effective for individuals to ask either their own tower captains or the branch ringing masters to help them to arrange quarter peals for themselves. It was also thought that it would be just as useful to encourage attendance at branch practices.
- Mark Cooke, Webmaster, has updated the branch website. He would like members to take a look at it and give him any suggestions or new content.
- Rob Nickless asked whether everyone was still happy with having meetings by Zoom. It was decided to continue to hold Committee Meetings on Zoom, but most felt that from 2024 it would be sensible to hold the AGM as a face-to-face meeting, or possibly as a hybrid meeting with some attendees on Zoom.
- Philip Roberts asked whether the Branch would be entering the Guild's 8-bell striking competition now that the date was no longer on the May Bank Holiday Monday. Richard Loyd said that he would look into the possibility of this.
- Charles Morrish asked whether it might be a good idea to advertise in advance the methods that might be rung at the new 'Advanced' practices. Richard Loyd said that he will talk to attendees at the first practice to find out what they would like to ring at the next advanced practice, and possibly these methods could be advertised on the branch practice poster.
- Nigel Findley said that his PCC had asked him if there were any plans in place for ringing in the unlikely event of the King's death. Patricia Newton said that no such plans had been revealed so far. She expected that the Guild will announce plans for ringing for the Coronation as soon as they had details from the CCCBR.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This will be Sunday, 8th October 2023 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 8.52pm.

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