

**Minutes of the Old North Berks Branch Annual General Meeting  
Held by Zoom meeting on Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

21 members attended the Annual General Meeting, including Katie Lane (Guild Master) and Patricia Newton (Guild Steward).

**1) Apologies for absence**

Received from: Stuart Gibson (Treasurer), Susan Read (Training Officer), Christine Birch, Nick Clarke, Chris Cook, John Dowling, Nigel Findley, Debbie Greenfield, Sarah Macdonell, Jeanette Owen, Janette Roberts, Bridget Taylor, Karen Walker, Michele Winter and Liz Woodhouse.

**2) Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

Circulated and read, the date in Item 2 was amended from 2022 to 2021. The minutes were then 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**

The Chairman thanked the Officers for all the work they do during the year and thanked all members for their support.

**Secretary's Report**

**Branch membership:** There have been twelve new members elected to the Guild since the last AGM: Andrew Lay (Abingdon), Bethany Williams (Harwell), Thomas Palmer and Mary-Clare Palmer (Drayton), Matthew Young and Emily Young (Milton), 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.

Sadly I have to report of the passing of Berice Large, a long-standing member of Marcham, and Jean Hazard, a former branch member and ringer at West Hanney for many years.

**Practices:** Branch evening practices were held at Radley, Blewbury, Cholsey, Brightwell, East Hagbourne, Harwell and Wantage. The practice at Cumnor was cancelled following the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II. Branch afternoon practices were held at Steventon, Cumnor, Marcham, Radley, Blewbury, Long Wittenham, Cholsey, Chilton, Drayton and Brightwell. Surprise Major practices were held at Milton, Drayton, Goring and Brightwell. The Surprise Major/Royal practice at Wallingford was abandoned through lack of support and a quarter peal of Stedman Triples was rung.

**6-bell striking competition:** This was held during the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> June 2022 at North Moreton and the ringing was excellent. Six teams entered the striking competition and the results were: 1<sup>st</sup> Wantage (34 faults), 2<sup>nd</sup> Abingdon A (35 faults), 3<sup>rd</sup> Blewbury (45 faults), 4<sup>th</sup> Wallingford (56 faults), 5<sup>th</sup> Abingdon B (58 faults), 6<sup>th</sup> 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, 27<sup>th</sup> April, to Lambourn, Brightwalton and East Ilsley, with lunch at the Crown and Horns, East Ilsley.

The branch outing took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> 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 £462.81 for branch funds.

The barn dance and supper at Harwell Village Hall, which had been postponed in 2020 and 2021, finally took place on 12<sup>th</sup> November. 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

**Joint Ringing Masters' report**

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 warmer weather and lighter evenings will encourage better attendances, with members coming along to experience new bells and meet up socially.

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. 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.

Towers within the ONB responded magnificently at the time of national mourning for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, with towers helping their neighbours by supplying 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! 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.

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 necessary skills and 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 be put in a dedicated place for tower leaders on the ODG website.

The North Moreton augmentation project is on track with the Faculty now issued and the new bells will be cast in April 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 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.

### **Training Officer's report**

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

This course provided skills and techniques necessary to build really good foundation ringing skills in one's ringers. Five ringers from ONB Branch attended (three from Abingdon, one from Harwell and one from Aston Tirrold) together with seven others.

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

There were twelve learners and eight trainee teachers. We 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 or Southern Group, alternating between twenty towers in the north and south. The trainee teachers took turns with the Tower Captain to run pieces of ringing to increase their confidence and ability to run practices.

#### **ONB / Bicester Branch ART 'Teaching Bell Handling' Day Course, Kirtlington, 22 Oct 2022**

This ART course was held 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.

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

Handling sessions were held alternately in Abingdon and Kirtlington, with one teacher per learner, and at least one mentor for the less experienced teachers. There were up to five learners at Abingdon, with Kirtlington up to four. After three weeks, a small recruitment initiative in Abingdon meant holding weekly sessions there. Handling sessions are now being held in Dorchester and Witney. The Ringing School gave six new teachers of ringing the opportunity to teach in a supportive environment. Five are close to qualifying as ART members and two have already been successfully assessed by ART. Of the learners, five have now the ART 'Learning the Ropes' level 1 (bell handling) qualification.

### **Young Ringers**

Rather than six outings a year we now have monthly Sunday afternoon practices. We have rung at Brightwell, Childrey, Stanford-in-the-Vale, Clanfield, Cumnor, Cholsey, Kirtlington and Drayton. Daphne Pollard 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 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 2022 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 unfortunately the other two were unable to attend.

There were eight teams in the method ringing category and the ODG team came joint fourth. The National Competition 2023 will be held in York in July. The ODG squad currently includes Isaac and Elizabeth from Abingdon, Amelie from Brightwell and Alban from Radley. 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.

### **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.

Following a vote to approve the financial statement for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022 (proposed by Dick Peters and seconded by David Endacott), the accounts were ratified.

### **5) Projects in the Branch**

**North Moreton:** Richard Loyd reported that the project to augment the ring of six to eight is progressing well. The Faculty has been obtained and the money for Whites and the local builder has all been raised. The bells will be cast on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 in Holland. They will be tuned at Whites on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April. The work should 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. There should be an article in The Times, and coverage by local and possibly national radio.

**Culham:** Jenny Dyer advised that the Branch has been offering support to the Culham PCC for rehangng the bells for over eighteen months to no avail. The PCC has been told in a report from Whites that the frame is in extremely poor condition and might not hold the static weight of the bells for much longer. Branch Officers are concerned that there is a risk of a major catastrophic incident and so contacted Alan Frost, the Diocesan Bell Advisor. Alan wrote to the Archdeacon, who immediately contacted the Culham PCC. The PCC said that they were aware of the situation and that they would do something about it at some point.

**Sparsholt:** Hedley French advised that the PCC has approved the project to rehang the bells and augment them to six. This will become a part of the current project to renovate the church. One third of the cost for the work to the bells has already been raised and the project might begin within the next year or so. 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 reported to the February Branch Committee meeting that initially there had been a plan to repair the 5<sup>th</sup>. 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 to the February Branch Committee meeting 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 to the February Branch Committee meeting 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 to the February Branch Committee meeting that the PCC is interested in making the bells able to ring full circle.

#### 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 Tim Pett and seconded by Tim Philip Roberts).
- It was agreed that ONB Branch will donate £1,500 to North Moreton (proposed by Josie Irving and seconded by Michelle X).
- It was agreed that ONB Branch will donate £3,000 to Sparsholt (proposed by Charles Morrish and seconded by David Endacott).

#### 7) Creation of two new branch officer roles

The role of Branch Secretary has considerably expanded now that there are thirty-two branch practices to organise each year together with four social events. It was agreed to create two new roles: Practices Secretary and Social Secretary (proposed by Gillian Loyd and seconded by Daphne Pollard).

#### 8) Election of officers

		<b>Proposed by</b>	<b>Seconded by</b>
Chairman	Rob Nickless	Richard Loyd	Dick Peters
Vice Chairman	Jenny Bennett	Dick Peters	Hedley French
Secretary	Gillian Loyd	Jenny Bennett	Andy Bennett
Practices Secretary	Bridget Taylor	David Endacott	Jenny Bennett
Social Secretary	Mandy Winters	Jenny Bennett	Josie Irving
Treasurer	Stuart Gibson	Philip Roberts	Josie Irving
Joint Ringing Masters	Richard Loyd	David Endacott	Dick Peters
	until September	Philip Roberts	
	from September	Charles Morrish	
Training Officer	Susan Read	Hedley French	Michelle X
Newsletter Editor	Daphne Pollard	Josie Irving	Michelle X
Webmaster	Mark Cooke	Richard Loyd	Philip Roberts
Branch Representatives	Josie Irving	Michelle X	Jenny Bennett
	Charles Morrish		
	Dick Peters		

There being no further nominations, the above were duly elected. Richard Loyd thanked Daphne Pollard for all her hard work in producing an excellent newsletter for the Branch.

Charles Morrish thanked Philip Roberts for continuing in the Joint Ringing Master role until September, when Charles is planning to retire.

#### 9) Election of new members

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

<b>Name</b>	<b>Tower</b>	<b>Proposer</b>
Luc Taperell	Cholsey	Jenny Jeskins
Mark Collett	Cholsey	Jenny Jeskins

They were seconded by Mary Friskney and were elected as members of the Branch and Guild.

#### 10) Social events

- Mini outing and lunch on Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> April to Islip, Bletchingdon and Kirtlington.
- 6-bell striking competition and breakfast on Saturday morning, 10<sup>th</sup> June, at Long Wittenham. Richard Loyd would like as many teams as possible to enter.
- Branch outing organised by Philip Roberts, followed by a barbecue at the home of Stuart and Naomi Gibson, on Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> July.
- Quiz night and supper in Blewbury Village Hall on Saturday, 18<sup>th</sup> November.

## 11) Any other business

- Richard Loyd, on behalf of Stuart Gibson, asked for the opinions of members present regarding an increase in 2024 of the voluntary contribution towards branch restoration projects (currently £2). It is likely that the Guild Annual Subscription will be increased to £10 in 2024, and Stuart wanted to know how members would feel about paying a voluntary contribution of £5, making a total of £15. There are several restoration projects in the pipeline and this would give the Branch the opportunity to offer support. There was some concern that a few members might decide not to pay the increased amount. Most members present felt that the increase was not unreasonable, and Katie Lane confirmed that the Guild Annual Subscription would not be raised to more than £10. In a straw poll, seventeen members were in favour of the increase to £5 and there were two abstentions. The Chairman asked members present to take this message back to their other tower members.
- North Moreton Monday evening practices will be held in Cholsey whilst the bells are out of action, apart from 17<sup>th</sup> April, when there is a branch practice scheduled in Long Wittenham.
- Katie Lane advised:
  - The Guild's Ringing Day will be held on Monday, 1<sup>st</sup> May, in the Chiltern Branch.
  - Timings for ringing on the day of the Coronation of King Charles III have not yet been announced. It has been suggested that ringing takes place whenever possible over the weekend.
  - The Guild AGM, activity day and 8-bell striking competition are being held at Broadwell on Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> May. There will be lots of fun things to do and members are encouraged to attend so that there is a quorum at the meeting.
  - The Guild Festival will be in Oxford on 8<sup>th</sup> July and this is only being advertised to Guild members. The Guild Service will be in Christ Church Cathedral at 11.00am. Many towers have been booked for ringing and there will be lunch.
- Rob Nickless is raising funds for six new bell ropes for the existing bells at North Moreton. He supplies 'Save our Bells' honey for the branch and also honey for the ODG. He is planning to hold a 'Meet the Bees' event, with a talk on honey production and an opportunity to see bee hives. The date is to be confirmed.
- Richard Loyd announced an event in Blewbury during the afternoon of 1<sup>st</sup> July. There will be a new illuminated glass peal board, which celebrates the peal rung by the Westminster Abbey Company of Bell Ringers in January 2020 for the installation of the new bell themed window. The Abbey ringers are returning on 1<sup>st</sup> July to ring another peal and there will be refreshments and drinks available during the afternoon.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the AGM on Zoom and hoped that next year's meeting will be held in person.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.23pm.

Signed.....

Date.....