

ONB Officers' report to the 25th March 2023 Annual General Meeting

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 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 £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 12th 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 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.

Gill Loyd

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 Findlay (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.

Richard Loyd and Philip Roberts

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, and Amelie from Brightwell. 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.

Susan Read

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