

MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting held on Zoom on Sunday, 15th October 2023 at 7.30pm.

1. ATTENDEES

Rob Nickless (Chairman), Jenny Bennett (Vice Chairman), Richard Loyd (Joint Ringing Master), Charles Morrish (Joint Ringing Master), Gillian Loyd (Secretary), Stuart Gibson (Treasurer), Susan Read (Training Officer), Bridget Taylor (Practices Secretary), Mandy Winters (Social Secretary), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Dick Peters (Branch Representative), Peter Robson (Guild Steward), Nigel Findley, Tim Pett, Daphne Pollard, Janette Roberts, Philip Roberts, Colin Turner, Karen Walker and Michele Winter

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mark Cooke (Webmaster), Jeanette Owen, Mary Friskney and Rachel Marffy

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26th February 2023

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

Branch AGM 2023: The AGM was held by Zoom meeting on Saturday, 25th March 2023 and was attended by Katie Lane (Guild Master) and Patricia Newton (Guild Steward).

It was agreed that ONB Branch will donate £500 to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund.

Two new officer roles were created: Bridget Taylor was elected Practices Secretary and Mandy Winters Social Secretary.

Members were asked for their opinions regarding increasing the voluntary contribution towards branch restoration projects (currently £2) in 2024. It is likely that the Guild Annual Subscription will be increased to £10, and Stuart Gibson (Branch Treasurer) 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 continue to offer support. There was some concern that a few members might decide not to pay the increased amount, however most members present felt that the increase was not unreasonable. Katie Lane confirmed that the Guild Annual Subscription would not be raised to more than £10.

Guild Steward: Following the Guild AGM in May we now have a new Guild Steward, Peter Robson. I would like to thank our previous Steward, Patricia Newton, for all her help and guidance over the past years.

Branch membership: There have been thirteen new members elected to the Guild since the AGM: Millie Bauwens, Elizabeth McNeill, John Tuson and Sue Little (Abingdon), Valerie Stevens (Blewbury), Hector French (Childrey), Jim Gulliver (Drayton), Jazzy Gover, Julie Culley, Kelly Kersey and George Kersey (East Hagbourne), Susie Graney and Isaac Davies (Marcham), Chrissy Gidney (Steventon), Shelley Harris and Millie Gall (Wallingford).

Practices: Branch evening practices have been held at Drayton, Long Wittenham, Abingdon, (St Helen), Sparsholt and Childrey, Aston Tirrold, and East Hagbourne. Branch afternoon practices have been held at Cumnor, Benson, Cholsey, Radley, North Moreton and Steventon. Surprise Major practices have been held at Harwell, Drayton, North Moreton and Milton. Advanced practices have been held at North Moreton, Blewbury, Cumnor and Harwell.

6-bell striking competition: This was held during the morning of 10th June 2023 at Long Wittenham and was judged by Alan and Tine Marchbank. Six teams entered the competition and the ringing was good. The results were: 1st Blewbury (62 faults), 2nd Abingdon (63 faults), 3rd The DJ Specials Scratch Band (87 faults), 4th Wallingford (97 faults), 5th North Moreton and friends (102 faults), 6th Cholsey (112 faults). Thanks go to the Long Wittenham ringers for providing superb refreshments. Blewbury will represent the Branch in the Guild 6-bell competition on 7th October at Shipton under Wychwood.

Events: There was a well-attended mini outing on Wednesday, 26th April, to Islip, Bletchingdon and Kirtlington, with a pub lunch.

The branch outing took place on 15th July to Fulbrook, Churchill, Chipping Norton, Chadlington and Shipton under Wychwood, with lunch in Chipping Norton and afternoon tea at Chadlington. 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.

6. JOINT RINGING MASTERS' REPORT

Towers within the ONB responded magnificently to the call for ringing for the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. Coronations are rare events and bells play an important part in the national celebration. Well done to all the tower captains and members who responded so well and we are sure that your communities appreciated your efforts.

Branch practices of all descriptions are generally very successful and attendance numbers are steady or improving. The afternoon, advanced and surprise practices are particularly well supported. The evening branch practices are less well attended, but still provide good opportunities for local bands when even a few branch members attend. If the advanced practices continue to be successful we should consider them being a more permanent feature in the branch calendar. Feedback has been very positive and shows that these practices are providing a new learning experience for rising method ringers. We are open to suggestions.

The North Moreton augmentation project was the latest ONB restoration and it was thrilling to have achieved this in time for ringing for the Coronation. A magnificent effort; with Whites and Eijsbouts Foundry together with the project team pulling out all the stops to achieve everything on time. The worry of spoiling a lovely six was unfounded as the new bells blend superbly with the very old bells.

Charles has some new ideas for the branch, one of which is a listening skills course to help with striking. This will be piloted in November and is intended to make participants think about ringing in new or different ways – do we all really understand what is expected, can we pinpoint where problems lie and have we listened sufficiently to understand whether or not what has just been rung was any good? Attendance for the pilot course will be by invitation; however future courses will be advertised within the Branch.

Finally, we would like to thank Philip Roberts for his dedicated service as Joint Ringing Master. It is not an easy job and Philip has been very popular and has been an excellent ringing master. We have managed to persuade him to 'stand in' for the odd occasion when both of us are unavailable. We will also not lose his very popular jokes supplied for the Ringing Master Ramblings articles in the Newsletter. We would also like to thank Nick Clarke for leading the Surprise Major practices, as it allows us to concentrate on our own learnings.

Thanks to all for your continued support.

7. TREASURER'S REPORT

So far in 2023 we have 246 paid up members (from 27 towers) along with the 3 Honorary and 1 Life members plus 4 members who pay a subscription through another branch. This gives a total of 254 members, which is 14 more than in the previous year. Four towers have not paid any subscriptions to date (Moulsford, Letcombe Regis, Sparsholt & Appleford) but none have active members as far as I know.

The BBQ and Outing raised £462 continuing honey sales a further £300.

The Branch has donated £1,500 to the North Moreton augmentation project. There are other possible projects on the horizon, which I'm sure will be discussed, and any proposed 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 almost been self-funding. There has been a net cost of around £20 to date.

The Branch, at present, has funds in the region of £6,200, which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch.

8. TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

Oxon Ringing School

As Training Officer of the Old North Berks Branch, I have for some years concentrated on providing extra training for the learners of our branch. With the help of the many good teachers of ringing in and around our branch, we ran the Branch Ringing School, providing training in bell handling and the skills needed to ring plain hunt. In early 2022, we extended training sessions to learners from the Bicester Branch by running a second hour of teaching. We then started running Saturday morning sessions in both Bicester and the Old North Berks Branches. The South Oxon and Witney and Woodstock Branches then joined us. We use the excellent training methods developed by the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART), and have registered with the ART as an 'ART Hub' so that those wishing

to learn to ring from Oxfordshire will be directed to our services. In September, we became the Oxon Ringing School and received a large welcome parcel of ART books and the promise of lots of advice and support. We continue to offer extra high-quality training to learners from the ONB, but now at four Ringing Centres with the help of experienced teachers drawn from a wider area than before. We are grateful to quite a number of experienced teachers from ONB towers who help with the one-to-one handling sessions on Saturday mornings, not just at the Abingdon Ringing Centre. The Oxon Ringing School is run by a committee of eight people, including Robert and Tricia Newton who co-ordinate with the ODG Learning & Development Work Group for us. Two members of the committee concentrate on administering the Ringing School and four run the four Ringing Centres and ensure that high standards of teaching are maintained.

Foundation Skills practices

During the summer, we ran practices for those who could already control their bell on their own. We utilised a variety of fun, rounds-based ringing exercises to help the learners to improve on their bell control, listen to their striking and develop their rope sight. At the same time we checked their bell handling to try to ensure they did not develop any less than excellent ringing habits. The practices rotated round the four branches comprising the Oxon Ringing School.

Training the Ringing Teachers of tomorrow

In addition to teaching learners, we organise one day ART courses to help experienced ringers to share the best techniques for teaching ringing. The 'Teaching from Rounds to Plain Hunt' day course in Abingdon on 29 July 2023 provided the techniques necessary to build the 'foundation ringing skills' needed before plain hunt can be tackled effectively. This course is designed for anyone involved in teaching a new band where the teacher can personally ring at least plain hunt. Twelve ringers attended the course, taught by David Sparling from Essex. Each had been pre-arranged to work with a more experienced ringing teacher while they perfected their skills at teaching the material from the course. In the ART 'Teaching bell handling' day course in Abingdon on 23 September 2023, twelve experienced ringers were taught how to teach bell handling. The tutor was Clare McArdle, who runs the famous Birmingham Ringing School. Some of those on the course are already being supervised while they teach learners at the Oxon Ringing School on Saturday mornings. Hopefully they will be ready for assessment for membership of the ART in a few months.

Young Ringers

Monthly Sunday afternoon practices were held for young ringers at Islip (19 Mar), Dorchester (Apr 16), Longcot (May 14), Brightwell (Jun 4) and Goring (Jul 23). 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 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 Oliver Lomax, have continued to come, bringing up to twelve boys each week. We are glad that Dan, Joe and Josh our younger fully-qualified ART teachers help by teaching the boys to handle their bells week by week. Most of the boys come to school using the school buses from places scattered throughout Oxfordshire. It would be good to persuade more of them to join bands at towers near their homes, but this is not easy to arrange.

Ringing World National Youth Competition (RWNYC), ODG team, York, July 2023

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 this larger squad. The National Competition was held in York in July 2023. The ODG squad included Isaac and Elizabeth from Abingdon and Amelie from Brightwell. Reggie, taught to ring at Abingdon School, graduated into the ODG squad but decided with his (non-ringing) parents not to continue.

Susan advised that she would no longer be organising events for young ringers due to time pressures. She said that she had been organising these since 2012 and hoped that someone could be found to take over. She offered to write an email for the Secretary to send to branch members asking for a volunteer.

Charles Morrish thanked Susan for all she has done for young ringers in the Branch.

9. UPDATE ON BRANCH BELL RESTORATION PROJECTS

North Moreton: Richard Loyd advised that the project to augment the bells to eight had been completed in time for ringing on the day of the Coronation of King Charles III. The two new bells blend in well with the historic older

bells and have made a fine ring. He thanked Whites of Appleton, especially Mark Walker for his accurate tuning of the two new bells. New ropes have arrived at Whites and will shortly be collected and fitted.

Culham: Richard Loyd reported that there was nothing more to say. Despite warnings people are still using the room at the foot of the tower beneath the unsafe bells.

Sparsholt: Richard Loyd reported that things are still moving along. So far there is an offer of one new bell for the ring to be augmented. Further information should be available soon.

East Hendred: Nigel Findley reported that Whites of Appleton are checking the tenor bell bearings.

West Hendred: Nigel Findley advised that the PCC had agreed to rehang the bells. A faculty had been submitted but the DAC had a backlog. A bat survey has revealed the presence of bats in the tower and so work will only be able to take place at certain times of the year. The Treasurer advised Nigel to apply to the Guild for a grant before the next Trustee meeting in February 2024.

Ardington: Nigel Findley advised that Whites have produced a revised drawing for the bell frame enabling full circle ringing. One bell will have to be lifted above the others.

Lockinge: Nigel Findley advised that the potential benefactor has not yet said 'no' to paying for the rehang of the bells at a lower level in the tower. The clock is currently being repaired.

Little Wittenham: Mark Cooke advised that Whites of Appleton had recently quoted for work on the bells. This was more significant than had been hoped for, having had some work done relatively recently. Little Wittenham bells remain ringable but by arrangement only.

10. BRANCH PROGRAMME FOR 2024

Bridget Taylor reported that she had met with the Joint Ringing Masters to discuss a provisional draft for next year. She has now heard back from most of the towers and the list should be finalised within the next week.

11. 2024 AGM

It has been decided to hold a 'face to face' meeting in 2024 rather than a Zoom meeting. Abingdon kindly offered to host. There will be ringing at the two Abingdon towers and the AGM in the morning, followed by a 'bring and share' lunch. The Secretary will liaise with Susan Read and Tim Pett. The meeting will be held on either the 9th or 23rd March (TBA) as several of the Branch officers will be away on the weekend of 16th/17th.

12. SOCIAL EVENTS

Quiz night and supper in Blewbury Village Hall on Saturday, 18th November 2023: Mandy Winters asked everyone to encourage their tower members to come to the quiz. So far there are five teams.

New Year's Day 2024 ringing and refreshments: This will be held in Drayton.

Mini outing: To be held on 24th April 2024.

November 2024: Daphne Pollard advised that the work to the Radley Village Hall will not be completed and so we will not be able to hold the skittles evening. Mandy is asking branch members to give her their ideas for a new event. Mandy's suggestion would be a Pudding Club, with teams having a fun evening sampling a range of puddings and cheeses.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Nigel Findley has seven new ringers and wanted to know when they should join the Guild. This should be when they are good enough to ring safely and unaided on Sunday mornings. New members can be elected at the AGM in March and at any of the monthly evening branch practices, or the New Year's Day ringing event.
- Colin Turner pointed out that, at a recent branch practice, the Secretary had asked for three new members to be elected to the Guild but had failed to give details of the proposers. The Secretary apologised for failing to provide the relevant information on this occasion. Philip Roberts suggested that new members and their proposers should be encouraged to attend the branch practice for their election.
- Colin Turner questioned why the branch takes donations of £1 from attendees at the afternoon practices but not at any of the evening practices. Now that there are advanced practices in addition to surprise major practices, it might be sensible to ask for donations for the towers where the practices are being held. It was proposed by Charles Morrish and seconded by Jenny Bennett to put this matter to the AGM for a discussion amongst branch members.

- Stuart Gibson reminded that the Guild annual subscription will most probably be increased to £10 next year. The current split of subscriptions is £5 to the Guild and £3 to the Branch. Stuart was interested to know if the Branch would need more than £3, however it was felt that £3 was sufficient. The extra cash is required by the Guild for various services. The Branch would continue to ask its members to pay a voluntary contribution towards branch restoration projects.
- Richard Loyd advised that Blewbury had been placed 5th in the Guild's 6-bell competition. The results for the first five teams were very close and the team from the Reading Branch came first.
- Peter Robson, the new Guild Steward, said that he was enthused by the commitment he had seen from ONB Branch members and had had great fun at the barbecue.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This will be held on Sunday, 25th February 2024 at 7.30pm by Zoom meeting.

After the Chairman had expressed thanks to everyone for attending, the meeting closed at 8.25pm.

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