

MINUTES of the Branch Committee Meeting held by Zoom meeting on **Sunday, 18th February 2024** at 7.30pm.

1. ATTENDEES

Rob Nickless (Chairman), Jenny Bennett (Vice Chairman), Charles Morrish (Joint Ringing Master), Richard Loyd (Joint Ringing Master), Gillian Loyd (Secretary), Mandy Winters (Events Secretary), Bridget Taylor (Practices Secretary), Stuart Gibson (Treasurer), Susan Read (Training Officer), Daphne Pollard (Newsletter Editor), Dick Peters (Branch Representative), Peter Robson (Guild Steward), Nigel Findley, Hedley French, David Ockwell, Tom Palmer, Tim Pett, Julia Sargent, Colin Turner

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mark Cooke (Webmaster), Josie Irving (Branch Representative), Rachel Marffy, Michele Winter

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15th October 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

2024 EGM: An EGM was held by Zoom meeting on Sunday, 14th January. The proposal by Stuart Gibson, seconded by Richard Loyd, was accepted to increase the annual subscription to £15 per member from 1st January 2024. This consists of £10 annual subscription to the Oxford Diocesan Guild and £5 additional subscription to the Old North Berks Branch. Of this £5, half will go to branch restoration projects and half will be used to cover the costs of heating and lighting incurred by our churches at branch events other than those held on the regular practice night.

Also discussed was 'Membermojo' (online membership management software), which the Guild is planning to use from January 2025. This should improve the record of members and provide the Guild with a simpler way to communicate with its members. Membermojo is already being used by other Guilds and Associations, and is GDPR compliant. All branch members will be asked to provide their email addresses. For young members and those without email addresses, it will be possible to nominate someone's email address or to use a tower email address. This will need to be discussed at the AGM.

2024 AGM: Please note that the 2024 AGM will be held in North Moreton village hall at midday on Saturday, 9th March. It will be preceded by ringing at Long Wittenham (10.00 – 10.45am) and North Moreton (11.00 – 11.45am). It will be followed by lunch at the village hall. Please encourage members to attend.

Branch membership: There have been eight new members elected since the last ONB Branch Committee meeting: Clare Saunders (Appleton), Julie Culley and Kelly Kersey (East Hagbourne), Michael Barry, Elizabeth Deans and Naomi Keogh (Harwell), Alison Reid (North Moreton) and Chrissy Gidney (Steventon).

Practices: Branch practices have been held at West Hanney, Cholsey, Harwell, Wantage and Steventon. Afternoon practices have been held at Childrey, Chilton, Blewbury and Brightwell. Surprise major practices have been held at Milton, Brightwell and Wallingford. Advanced practices have been held at Drayton and Milton.

Events: Seventy members of the Branch took part in the Quiz Night in November, which was held in Blewbury village hall. Thanks go to the Blewbury ringers and friends who prepared a delightful and tasty two-course supper. The quiz was prepared and hosted by Anne Hales who returned from Cheshire especially for this event. Nine teams took part and the winners were 'Bats and Belles' of Wantage. The quiz and raffle raised £536.00.

Ringing and refreshments took place on 1st January at Drayton. Once again this was a very popular event, with over fifty attendees. Thanks go to the Drayton ringers and friends for their hospitality and for providing a wonderful range of soups and cakes.

6. JOINT RINGING MASTERS' REPORT

Branch practices of all descriptions are generally very successful and attendance numbers are usually excellent. We are extremely lucky in our branch to have so many practices available, possibly more now than we have ever had in our history. Each of these practices offers opportunities for development of individual ringing skills, combined with the chance to meet other members in a friendly and supportive environment. We would encourage tower captains to promote these practices to their teams, especially to newer members ready to expand their ringing capabilities.

Some of these practices might be described as 'busy' and we try to use the available time to maximise the benefit for everyone. This can be challenging, especially if we cannot always accurately assess everyone's wishes. We would very much appreciate it if attendees come along with a 'wish list' to help us to run these events. This is particularly important for the newly established advanced practices, which from feedback received are proving very useful. All feedback is appreciated!

ONB has a very proud history of looking after our bells when restoration is needed and, although there is currently something of a 'lull' in activity, there are quite a number of exciting projects in the pipeline, which will likely be mentioned during the meeting.

Charles is bringing some new ideas for ringing in the branch, one of which is a listening skills course. He has run three so far, all of which have been well attended and appreciated by members at various levels of expertise and experience. We recommend this to members when the next session is arranged.

Finally, our thanks to those who took part in the branch team who achieved a very creditable third place in the 10 bell Guild competition, held at Bicester in November. Also congratulations to the Blewbury team who represented the branch at the six bell competition held at Shipton Under Wychwood in October, coming fifth in a very closely fought competition.

The process begins again at our branch 6 bell striking competition to be held at Radley on the morning of 15th June. Please do your best to support this by entering a tower team, and of course novice teams are extremely welcome.

Thank you for your support.

7. TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

Oxon Ringing School (ORS)

As Training Officer of the Old North Berks Branch, I now help run the Oxon Ringing School for the benefit of learners in four ODG branches: ONB, Bicester, South Oxon and Woodstock and Witney Branches. We offer high-quality training to learners from the ONB at four Ringing Centres with the generous help of experienced teachers from a wide area, including many from ONB towers. Training is provided at two levels, bell handling on Saturday mornings on tied bells and foundation skills at evening practices. New Ringers benefit from a partnership between their tower and the ORS, both providing teaching in bell handling each week. Group teaching with up to four learners each being taught separately and all supervised by a mentor, gives a congenial atmosphere for all. Enrolment on the courses is necessary. Details may be found at: <https://odg.org.uk/info/oxfordshire-ringing-school>. The School is run by a committee of eight people, and is co-ordinated with the ODG Learning & Development Work Group

Training the Ringing Teachers of tomorrow

Using the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) training scheme, new teachers learn a range of techniques and skills to give confidence to teach successfully. Experienced teachers refresh and build on existing skills.

'Teaching bell handling' day course, Abingdon, 16 March 2024: David Sparling, an expert tutor from Essex will be running the day for up to twelve experienced ringers.

'Teaching from Rounds to Plain Hunt' day course, tba summer 2024: This will provide the techniques necessary to build 'foundation ringing skills' needed before plain hunt can be tackled effectively. It is designed for those who can Plain Hunt at least and are involved in teaching a new band.

Young Ringers

Our monthly Sunday afternoon practices for young ringers ceased in November 2023. Practices for young ringers are being held jointly by the Reading and Sonning Deanery branches, and also (from January 2024) in

the Vale of White Horse branch (Tony Crabtree) and in the “Northern Branches” (Colin Lee) of the ODG. I would like to see similar practices restart in our branch and would support anyone willing to organise them. 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, bring up to twelve boys each week. Dan, Joe and Josh, our younger fully-qualified ART teachers, help by teaching the boys to handle their bells. Most of the boys come to school 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.

Ringling World National Youth Competition (RWNYC), ODG team, London, July 2024

I have transported our young ringers to the monthly practices held for the ODG team for many years. The team ringing in the competition is drawn from a larger squad who meet to practise monthly. The National Competition will be held in London on 6 July 2024. The ODG squad currently includes Isaac, Samuel and Elizabeth from Abingdon and Amelie from Brightwell.

The Chairman noted that the Oxon Ringing School had been adopted by ONB Branch unknowingly. Susan Read advised that an advantage for her of this is that the School is in Abingdon on alternate weeks. There are thirty teachers, some from ONB, and during the last year fifty learners. The ART syllabus ‘from rounds to plain hunt’ is being taught and it is hoped to go as far as Plain Hunt and Plain Bob Doubles. Susan confirmed that what had started as the Branch Ringing School had now become an independent initiative. It is funded by payments of £60 per 10-week course and £7 per session, and so is self-funding and manages its own accounts. Stuart Gibson advised that the School is not insured through the ODG; however Susan Read confirmed that it was insured by ART. The Secretary requested that the Training Officer’s reports now be more tailored towards ONB use of the Oxon Ringing School.

8. TREASURER’S REPORT

In 2023 the membership of the Branch was 259, an increase of 15 from 2022. There were 251 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 2024 we have 96 paid up members (from 11 towers) along with the 3 Honorary and 1 Life members plus 3 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 2023. The BBQ (including the raffle & tea proceeds) raised £462 and the Quiz Night £536. Honey sales resulted in donations of £435.

The Branch, for the seventh year, collected a voluntary £2 donation with subscriptions. £514 was collected in the year. Everyone made the contributions to put towards Branch bell restorations projects. One of the grants approved at the AGM was paid out in the year, North Moreton (£1,500) towards the cost of augmenting to 8. The second approved grant remains unpaid - rehang/augmentation of Sparsholt (£3,000). There is one possible restoration project in the Branch - Little Wittenham, who are looking to re-hang the bells. A grant recommendation will need to go to the AGM in March.

Six youth events were organised by the Branch, which resulted in a deficit of £18. A donation was made to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund of £500.

The Branch, at the end of 2023, had funds in the region of £6,200 (£6,000 in 2022), which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch.

The accounts for 2023 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 reported that a further three towers had paid their subscriptions since the report had been issued.

9. UPDATE ON PROJECTS

Little Wittenham: Julia Sargent reported that Whites of Appleton had quoted £27,406 plus VAT to rehang the bells, removing the crown staples and providing new headstocks. The bells will be quarter-turned and retuned. So far Julia has raised over £12,000, which includes a grant of £5,000 from the ODG. The Faculty has been submitted and it is hoped that the work will take place in 2025.

Sparsholt: Hedley French advised that the original quotation from Whites of £35,000 needs to be updated and two more quotes obtained. The project to rehang the four existing bells and augment to six was now being included by the PCC as a part of a wider church restoration project. The Faculty has not yet been prepared. The PCC so far has only decided that repairs to the church roof are the highest priority. Hedley has been told that he cannot run the tower project separately; therefore the bell project will most probably not happen until 2025 and beyond.

West Hendred: The Faculty is still awaiting a decision from the DAC regarding frame support on the east-west axis. Whites have quoted an additional £2,000 and have said that the PCC will have to employ a builder to install the new beam. Fund raising is due to start. Whites have pencilled in the rehang in late 2025.

East Hendred: The bells are currently being rung regularly and, although they will need to be rehung, this project should not happen for about ten years.

Ardington: The frame is compromised for full-circle ringing. Whites are currently preparing technical drawings to correct. The Vicar is supportive and Nigel Findley is surveying the PCC for their opinions. Should the bell project happen it would most probably be two to three years in the future.

Lockinge: The late medieval frame is attached to the tower. The bells need to be lowered into a new frame in the middle chamber. There is a village benefactor who has paid for the clock restoration and might be able to help with funding the bell restoration. Should the bell project happen it would most probably be two to three years in the future.

Stuart Gibson advised that three quotations are not required for a Faculty application; however the Guild Bell Fund prefers three quotations. ODG grants are provisional and are paid following final invoice and inspection.

Tim Pett suggested that three quotations should be sought from Whites, O'Shea Engineering and either Nicholson's or Matthew Higby.

Nigel Findley stated that Whites are the preferred contractor for West Hendred because Nicholson's outpriced themselves by 50%, and Isaac O'Shea had upset people in the Hendreds. Tim Pett asked for this to be minuted.

10. DONATIONS FROM BRANCH FUNDS AND OTHER SUPPORT FOR PROJECTS

Stuart Gibson said that there are six potential bell projects that will probably be given grants averaging £2,500 per project (total £15,000). ONB currently has £5,000 available for grants, with a further £1000 becoming available each year. Therefore it could take 10 years to raise this amount without holding additional fund raising events.

Little Wittenham is the most advanced project and Stuart Gibson suggested that a grant of £2,500 be proposed at the AGM.

The grant for West Hendred will be considered at the autumn committee meeting when fund raising will have started.

11. ITEMS FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

- Membermojo
- Young ringers' practice co-ordinator
- Guild Steward report
 - Updated Branch guidelines and CCCBR Code of Conduct
 - New Guild Secretary and Odd Bob Editor
 - ODG 15 year plan
 - Permission for Branch Representatives' email addresses to be given to the Guild Secretary

12. SOCIAL EVENTS

- There will be a mini outing on Wednesday, 24th April, with three towers and lunch. Details will shortly be issued.
- The branch outing and evening barbecue will be held on 6th July.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Stuart Gibson advised that he will not be attending the AGM and that Jenny Bennett will give the update on Membermojo. The document that was sent to the Branch Secretary can now be emailed to the branch mailing list.
- Charles Morrish said that he had now held three 'Listening' Courses. These are still work in progress, and he was wondering if there had been any feedback from attendees and whether or not he should hold more courses. He currently has four ringers interested in attending. Richard Loyd said he had seen how much people had gained from the course and recommended all towers to send their ringers on the course. Charles said he will write a report for the Secretary to distribute to all tower captains.
- Richard Loyd said that he hoped that another Joint Ringing Master could be found to replace him within the next year.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This will be Sunday, 6th October 2024 at 7.30pm, by Zoom meeting.

After the Chairman had expressed thanks to everyone for attending, the meeting closed at 8.45pm.

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