

**Minutes of the Old North Berks Branch Annual General Meeting  
Held in North Moreton Village Hall on Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

34 members attended the Annual General Meeting, including Peter Robson (Guild Steward).

**1) Apologies for absence**

Received from: Katie Lane (Guild Master), Stuart Gibson (Treasurer), Mandy Winters (Social Secretary), David Endacott, Nigel Findley, Duncan Francis, Mary Friskney, Jill Garlick, Robert Haine, Oliver Hyde, Mary Leneis, Sarah Macdonell, Rachel Marffy, Janette Roberts, Julia Sargent, Graham Stoter, Alban Walker, Mark Walker, Teifi Walters, Michele Winter and Liz Woodhouse

**2) Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

Circulated and read, two typos were amended and the minutes were then signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

**3) Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting held on Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

Circulated and read, the minutes were signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the meeting.

**4) Matters arising from minutes of both meetings**

There were no matters arising.

**5) 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**

**2024 EGM:** An EGM was held by Zoom meeting on Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> January. The proposal by Stuart Gibson, seconded by Richard Loyd, was accepted to increase the annual subscription to £15 per member from 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

**Branch membership:** There have been twenty-nine new members elected to the Guild since the AGM: Millie Bauwens, Samuel Fuentes, Simon Fuentes, Sue Little, Elizabeth McNeill, Hannah McNeill, Crispin Mugabi, Tim Stedman and John Tuson (Abingdon), Valerie Stevens (Blewbury), Hector French (Childrey), Jim Gulliver (Drayton), Julie Culley, Jazzy Gover, George Kersey and Kelly Kersey (East Hagbourne), Daniel Atkins (East Hendred), Michael Barry, Elizabeth Deans and Naomi Keogh (Harwell), Susie Graney and Isaac Davies (Marcham), Alison Reid (North Moreton), Chrissy Gidney (Steventon), Shelley Harris and Millie Gall (Wallingford), Nicky Kauert (West Hanney), Jonathan Diggle and Jennifer Dimbylow (West Hendred).

Two members were re-elected to the Guild: Clare Saunders (Appleton) and Ian Gillingham (Unattached).

Sadly I have to report the death of Jackie Gardner, a long-standing member of Blewbury.

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

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

**Guild 10-bell striking competition:** The branch band was placed third, ringing Little Bob Royal at Bicester on 25<sup>th</sup> November.

**Events:** There was a well-attended mini outing on Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> April, to Islip, Bletchington and Kirtlington, with a pub lunch.

The branch outing took place on 15<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 hearty 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.

Ringling and refreshments took place on 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

### **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 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. As the advanced practices continue to be successful they are now a 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 any suggestions.

Some of our 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.

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 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.

Our branch 6 bell striking competition will be held at Radley on the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> June. Please do your best to support this by entering a tower team, and of course novice teams are extremely welcome.

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.

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

#### **Oxon Ringing School (ORS)**

The Branch Ringing School has now become a part of the Oxon Ringing School, 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. The School was formed for the benefit of learners in four ODG branches: ONB, Bicester, South Oxon and Woodstock and Witney Branches. High-quality training to learners from the ONB is offered 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. 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>.

#### **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**

Using the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) training scheme, new teachers learn a range of techniques and skills to give the confidence to teach successfully. Experienced teachers refresh and build on existing skills. The 'Teaching from Rounds to Plain Hunt' day course is designed for anyone involved in teaching a new band where the teacher can personally ring at least plain hunt. This course provides the techniques necessary to build 'foundation ringing skills' needed before plain hunt can be tackled effectively. In the ART 'Teaching bell handling' day course, experienced ringers are taught how to teach bell handling.

## **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 and in the 'Northern Branches' of the ODG. Ideally, I would like to see similar practices restart in our branch and would gladly 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. Teachers, Adam Jenkins and Oliver Lomax, come and bring up to twelve boys each week. We are glad that Dan, Joe and Josh our younger fully-qualified ART teachers help by teaching bell handling. Most of the boys live 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)**

The team ringling in the competition is drawn from a larger squad who meet to practise monthly. The National Competition was held in York in July 2023. The ODG squad included Isaac and Elizabeth from Abingdon and Amelie from Brightwell. 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.

Susan Read advised that all teachers at the Oxon Ringling School are ODG members and are teaching ODG learners, therefore Stuart Gibson had confirmed that they would be covered by the Guild's insurance.

The Chairman asked if the Guild is taking an active part in the Oxon Ringling School. Susan Read advised not at the moment although that should happen in the future. Currently the School consists of four branches teaching bell handling, all new learners are welcome to join and would need to register through the ODG website. The Chairman asked Susan to confirm that, as the Oxon Ringling School is not solely made up of ONB Branch members, it is a separate entity from the Branch.

## **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 paid up members from 14 towers, along with the 3 Honorary and 1 Life members plus 3 members who pay a subscription through another branch. 13 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.

Following a vote to approve the financial statement for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 (proposed by Josie Irving and seconded by Dick Peters), the accounts were ratified.

## **6) Projects in the Branch**

**Little Wittenham:** Julia Sargent had 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 but not retuned. There are no trapdoors and so Whites are planning to do the work in situ. The project team are currently considering having trapdoors installed and this would change the costing for the project. So far Julia has raised over £12,000, which includes a grant of £5,000 from the ODG. The Faculty has been submitted and Whites had advised that the work could take place as early as September 2024.

**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,

but hopes that this decision will be changed as the bell project would most probably not happen until 2025 and beyond. So far £11,000 has been raised, with a further £4,000 promised. Hedley is hoping to raise the remaining funds over the next eighteen months and asked for details of any charities that are known to donate to bell projects.

**West Hendred:** Nigel Findley had reported that 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 rehanging in late 2025.

**East Hendred:** The bells are currently being rung regularly and, although they will need to be rehung, this project should not need to 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. Nigel Findley had said that 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.

#### 7) **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 Stuart Gibson and seconded by Mark Cooke).

Stuart Gibson had advised 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 a grant of £2,500. This was proposed by Susan Read and seconded by Richard Loyd and agreed by all present.

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

#### 8) **Young ringers practices coordinator**

The regular practices for young ringers ceased six months ago. Susan Read suggested that someone might like to take on the role of Young Ringers Practice Coordinator to arrange practices in the future. No one at the meeting offered to take this on, so it was agreed that the Secretary will contact branch members to see if anyone is interested.

#### 9) **Election of officers**

		<b>Proposed by</b>	<b>Seconded by</b>
Chairman	Rob Nickless	Jenny Bennett	Josie Irving
Vice Chairman	Jenny Bennett	Philip Roberts	Josie Irving
Secretary	Gillian Loyd	Beryl Jones	Andrew Forman
Practices Secretary	Bridget Taylor	Dick Peters	Mark Cooke
Social Secretary	Mandy Winters	Jenny Bennett	Josie Irving
Treasurer	Stuart Gibson	Tim Pett	Philip Roberts
Joint Ringing Masters	Richard Loyd	Daphne Pollard	Susan Read
	Charles Morrish		
Training Officer	Susan Read	Bridget Taylor	Mark Cooke
Newsletter Editor	Daphne Pollard	Jenny Bennett	Josie Irving
Webmaster	Mark Cooke	Bridget Taylor	Karen Walker
Branch Representatives	Josie Irving	Andy Bennett	Jenny Bennett
	Charles Morrish		
	Dick Peters		

There being no further nominations, the above were duly elected.

#### 10) **Election of members**

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

<b>Name</b>	<b>Tower</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Seconded</b>
Karen Adamson	Cumnor	Jenny Dyer	Susan Read
Jenny Beech	Cumnor	Jenny Dyer	Susan Read
Liane Beech	Cumnor	Jenny Dyer	Susan Read
Oaken Walker	Radley	Daphne Pollard	Richard Loyd

The following were re-elected as members of the Guild

<b>Name</b>	<b>Tower</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Seconded</b>
Ieuan Hallas	Abingdon	Susan Read	Brian Read
Nicole Olaveson	Cumnor	Jenny Dyer	Brian Read

Sarah Barnes was transferred from Abingdon to Cumnor.

Alexandra Marchbank was transferred from Great Linford, Buckinghamshire, to Abingdon.

Colin Turner commented that it would be good if new members, together with their proposers, attended their election meeting.

#### 11) Social events

- Mini outing and lunch on Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> April to Drayton St. Leonard, Warborough (TBC) and Dorchester with lunch in The George, Dorchester.
- Branch outing organised by Philip Roberts, followed by a barbecue at the home of Stuart and Naomi Gibson, on Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> July. This will be the last barbecue at Stuart and Naomi Gibson's and we are extremely grateful to them for hosting this event for so many years. We will be looking for a new venue for next year.
- Skittles evening with supper on Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> November, at Wallingford Sports Park. The price will most probably be £15 per person. There will be a bar for purchasing drinks.

#### 12) Membermojo

From January 2025 the Guild is proposing to use a professional software package called Membermojo to record details of all its members. Members will be asked to supply their email addresses to aid the way that the Guild communicates with them. The system is GDPR compliant. Minors will be asked to nominate either their parents or guardians or an adult tower member to receive emails on their behalf. Adult members who prefer not to supply their email addresses will be asked to nominate one of their tower members to receive emails on their behalf.

If anyone has any questions, they should direct them to Stuart Gibson and/or Jenny Bennett, who are both on the Guild's Membermojo project team.

#### 13) Guild Steward

Peter Robson advised that:

- Karen Pyle is standing down as Guild Secretary for meetings and Rob Needham is standing down as editor of Odd Bob. Anyone interested in either of these positions should make themselves known.
- The Guild Server Manager is requesting updates if tower correspondents change or their email addresses change. [Note: The Branch Secretary already does this for ONB Branch.]
- The Branch Guidelines are being updated and will soon be given to Branch Secretaries and Chairmen.

#### 14) Any other business

- Richard Loyd reminded everyone about the Branch 6-bell striking competition, which will be held on Saturday morning, 15<sup>th</sup> June, at Radley. The Church Room has been booked and there will be refreshments. This will be a fun and social event and it is hoped that as many teams as possible will enter. The competition is open to all ringers from rounds and call changes upwards. Tower teams, joint tower teams and scratch bands are all welcome to enter, however only a tower team can represent the Branch at the Guild's 6-bell competition in October. Please note that tower teams can invite one member from another tower in the Branch to join them.
- Charles Morrish said that he had already held three successful 'Listening' courses and was planning to arrange another. Please contact him if you are interested in attending. The sessions last up to two and a half hours and are fast-moving and fun.

Jenny Bennett thanked all the North Moreton ringers and families for providing what looked to be a superb lunch for everyone.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the first 'in person' AGM since 2019.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.58pm.

Signed.....

Date.....