

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

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.

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 Diggie 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 10th June 2023 at Long Wittenham, 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 represented the Branch in the Guild 6-bell competition on 7th 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 25th November.

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.

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.

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.

Gill Loyd

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 15th 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.

Richard Loyd and Charles Morrish

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.

Ringing World National Youth Competition (RWNYC)

The team ringing 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

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.

Stuart Gibson