

ONB Officers' report to the 18th March 2017 Annual General Meeting

Secretary's report

- We have continued to hold monthly branch practices, bi-monthly surprise major practices and monthly mid-week afternoon practices. Before the January practice at North Moreton, twenty-five learners and helpers enjoyed lunch at a pre-practice social in The Bear.
- Susan Read organised events for young branch members: an outing and treasure hunt in Cambridge held jointly with young ringers of the Ely Diocesan Association in March, a walk from Letcombe Regis to Childrey with a quiz in May, ringing and rounders at Harwell in August, a visit to the falconry centre at Millets Farm with ringing at Marcham in October; skittles and ringing at Radley in December; a treasure hunt, magic show and ringing at Brightwell in February.
- Since the 2016 AGM, we have gained four new members from three towers: Charles and Rachel Morrish (Milton), Margaret Richards (Cholsey) and Jo O'Reilly (Wallingford). Ellen Bramhill (Blewbury) was re-elected to the Guild.
- On 27th April, the afternoon ringers had a mini-outing to Chieveley, Peasemore and East Ilsley, with lunch at the Crown and Horns in East Ilsley.
- The Branch outing on 18th July was organised by Philip Roberts of Harwell. Over twenty branch members and friends visited Goodworth Clatford, Hurstbourne Priors, Whitchurch, Longparish and Highclere, with a pub lunch in Whitchurch and afternoon tea at Longparish. In the evening there was a well-attended barbecue at the home of Stuart and Naomi Gibson. Thanks go to Philip, Janette, Stuart and Naomi for arranging a good day for the Branch. The proceeds of the barbecue and raffle went into the branch fund and will be used for future restoration projects.
- The branch was not represented at the Guild's 6-bell striking competition because the Abingdon ringers were not able to raise a band. Richard Loyd has had an attractive trophy made for the winners of our 6-bell competition to hold for a year (a model bell wheel and clapper), and this has been belatedly presented to Abingdon for winning the 2016 competition.
- The branch band entering the Guild's 10-bell striking competition in Banbury was placed equal third with EBSB Branch, only one percent behind the Newbury ringers who came second.
- The quiz and supper evening at Brightwell on Saturday, 12th November, was very well attended by fifty-two branch members, their families and friends. Thanks go to Roy Thorpe, the Brightwell ringers and the quiz master, Robert, for their magnificent organisation of the evening, which started with ringing on the newly rehung bells. Nine teams entered the quiz and Blewbury were the winners. The event raised £410 for branch funds.
- New Year's Day 2017 ringing with refreshments was held at Abingdon, St Helen and over forty people attended. Thanks go to Susan Read and all the Abingdon ringers for the excellent refreshments, from interesting and tasty soups through to delicious cakes. This was once again a very happy occasion for the Branch and a good start to 2017.

Joint Ringing Masters' report

- The numerous and varied branch practices are often well or very well attended and cater for ringers at all skill levels. The regular monthly practices give beginners and advancing learners the chance to ring with the added strength from experienced branch members, and can introduce new ringers to others from different towers, giving the opportunity to share learning experiences.
- Recently the number of branch members attending evening practices has dramatically declined. The reasons for this are unclear but it is a trend that we need to reverse in order to maintain their future. Conversely, the monthly afternoon practices are extremely well attended by ringers at all levels, and are a good means for advancement at the intermediate level. The Surprise Major practices are also going well with good attendance by members from within ONB and also neighbouring branches.
- Although there are many practices to attend, having 'joint' Ringing Masters shares the workload. We are very grateful for the help of experienced 'volunteers' who have kindly stepped into our shoes on the few occasions neither of us could attend.

- Despite this picture the branch does have its challenges. Many of our bells have had major overhauls, which have really helped ringing and teaching at these towers. However, some of our bells are difficult to ring, which adds to the problem of recruiting locally. Hopefully the branch will continue its excellent work to support new restoration projects to increase the potential for more recruitment in the future.
- The age profile of branch members is increasing year by year, although this is now somewhat balanced by the brilliant efforts by Susan and several others in recruiting young ringers in recent years. However there is a shortage of people with sufficient youth and energy, combined with suitable leadership experience, to become our future Tower Captains or Branch Officers. Some experienced ringers have moved to our area recently, and we know of several lapsed ringers who have returned to ringing after many years and are making a real difference at their towers. Let's hope this trend continues so as to introduce some new faces to the leadership roles.

Training Coordinator's report

This position is currently vacant.

Treasurer's report

- In 2016 the membership of the Branch was 264 (4 more than in 2015). 255 members paid subscriptions, 5 of whom were members of the Guild through other branches. In addition there were 7 Honorary and 2 Life members.
- So far in 2017 we have 117 paid up members (from 12 towers and 3 unattached), together with 7 Honorary and 2 Life members, plus 4 members who pay a subscription through another branch. Branch subscriptions must be paid over to the Guild before the end of March to ensure members benefit from the Guild Insurance policy.
- The main fund raising event in 2016 was the Quiz evening at Brightwell, which raised £410. The New Year's ringing at Blewbury raised £66, the BBQ proceeds were £195 and the BBQ raffle raised £80. There were no active restoration projects in the branch so these proceeds have been retained, unlike in earlier years when they were donated to a specific project.
- For the first time, the Branch collected a voluntary £2 donation with the annual subscriptions. Almost everyone made the contribution to put towards restoration projects. Again this has been retained awaiting a suitable project.
- Five youth events were organised by the Branch, resulting in a small surplus.
- Donations were made to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund (£250) and the Oxford Diocesan Guild Restoration Fund (£100).
- At the end of 2016, the Branch had funds in the region of £3,530, which is well in excess of the reserves required by the Branch. Suitable restoration projects are needed!