



Newbury Branch Newsletter Christmas Edition—2021

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Officers 2020/21

Chairman:	Martin Rice	01635 30709	jmartinrice@gmail.com
Vice Chair:	vacant		
Ringing Masters:	Mike Hopkins Till	01256 350718	mike.mktill@gmail.com
	Sue Smith	01189 844966	suesmithmrsad10@gmail.com
Webmaster:	Julia Deady	01635 528482	julia.deady@gmail.com
Secretary:	Mark Robins	07759 680054	mdrobins@hotmail.com
Treasurer:	Tony Smith	01189 844966	tonysmithmrads@gmail.com
Newsletter Editor:	Mark Robins	07759 680054	mdrobins@hotmail.com
200 Club:	Chris & Rosemary Maslin		chrisandrosemary@bravo7.plus.com
Training/Guild Rep:	Lucy Hopkins Till	01256 350718/0766 833004	lucy.pahopkins@me.com



From the Chair

Well, we've come through quite a dramatic, traumatic couple of years.

My last report was at Easter, 2021, when we were just beginning to think about ringing again after a year of no 'real' ringing, when some of us attempted virtual ringing, when we held Zoom meetings and when there was much uncertainty about how we would get back to normality. The development of vaccines against Covid-19 was well under way; I had my first jab at the end of April. Announcements from the Government and from the CCCBR were eagerly awaited and we did indeed get back into our towers. Ropes, wheels, stays, sliders, etc were checked, we started raising our bells again, and local residents greeted the glorious sound with genuine joy.

Where are we now? I don't have accurate figures, but I guess about 80 to 90% of our ringers have returned. Bill Butler and Fred Simmons have passed away; some ringers are unable to return due to infirmity and illness, and some are reluctant to return for various Covid-related reasons. In some towers this means being frustratingly one or two short compared to what was the norm before the pandemic struck.

On the other hand, the ringers of Lambourn and Hampstead Norreys are enjoying newly refurbished bells after their highly successful restoration projects. And the ringers at East Garston are making great fund-raising efforts to restore those difficult bells. I look forward to reading more about this in the pages of this newsletter.

The Branch first-Friday practices have re-started, and have been aimed at 6-bell ringing. We had our first get-together in September at the refurbished bells at Hampstead Norreys. The Marshall Shield was awarded that evening to Hampstead Norreys, with special thanks to John and Sheila Craig who lead the project and raised the sum required in remarkably short time, and despite everyone being in lock-down.

The Branch lunch-time outings have also re-started, and provide a very pleasant mid-week break for those of us who don't have work commitments. Thanks go, of course, to Sue Smith for organising these.

And the future? As I write this, the omicron variant of the virus is spreading rapidly, and restrictions are being brought in. Quite what affect this will have on ringing is not clear. The Branch AGM next March may well be another Zoom occasion. With the fall-off in the number of ringers at each tower, we may have to think of new ways to organise Sunday service ringing, and tower practices. Where a group of churches have a rota of services, perhaps a group of ringers, from the various churches would follow that rota week by week. Tower practices could perhaps also become shared between churches. Such arrangements would obviously need mutual enthusiasm, but it might mean that towers that would otherwise be silent would be ringing out.

Martin



Midgham—A quarter peal in memory of Di Bridle

Oxford Diocesan Guild

Midgham, Berkshire

St Matthew

Saturday 13th November 2021 in 44m

1260 Grandsire Doubles

1 J Martin Rice

2 Marcus Allum

3 Angela M Brown

4 Richard J Marshall

5 Mark Robins (C)

6 Anthony D Smith



Rung in memory of Di Bridle

East Ilsley



On Saturday 25th September, after the enforced absence of any ringing for many months, we decided to have a gentle morning's ringing and socialising for our usual Monday Evening ringers to ease ourselves back into action.

We, consequently, enjoyed an hour's ringing both at Hampstead Norreys and Yattendon before taking lunch at The West Berkshire Brewery.



It was a great way to spend a Saturday morning and something similar in The Spring of 2022 seems a good idea and something to look forward to.

John Hibbert

Bucklebury

With the easing of Covid restrictions, we've restarted ringing at Bucklebury, albeit with reduced numbers as some of our ringers have lapsed. Eighteen months of virtually no ringing, despite some virtual ringing has taken its toll. We ring on Sunday mornings with much appreciated help from Roy Pratley who helps us out when Midgham don't ring.

On Thursday nights we usually meet 6 or 7 and only occasionally more. This leads to a dilemma: do we just stick to the tried and tested methods like Grandsire and Stedman doubles, plain bob, little bob and Cambridge minor, go for a quarter, or try something new? The first option is, quite frankly, boring unless there are learners for whom ringing these methods is a teaching exercise. After a day's work, there is little enthusiasm for a quarter and again it would be in one of the standard methods and of little benefit to anybody. So, what about the third option?



I acquired a copy of the *Little Purple Ringing Book* and found this to be a goldmine. The doubles and minor sections have not only the basic methods, but also the standard, but not often rung methods such as Single and Double Oxford, St Clements and their variations. Going further there is a selection of less well known methods, all of which are simple enough that they can be looked at and rung on a practice night.

We started off by having a look at methods having Stedman slow work as the front work; Fabian minor and its double version Double Dunkirk. On other nights we've explored Alliance methods (Perivale Alliance, River Wey Little Alliance) and other obscure methods such as Dewsbury bob minor (Single Oxford, reversed). All these methods have been selected pretty randomly on the night and rung, usually with a fair degree of success.

In my opinion, this approach is not only interesting and entertaining, but useful. When learning to ring methods, many people master Grandsire, plain bob and Stedman, then try to make the transition to surprise, usually Cambridge. This is a great leap and needs an entirely new way of looking at and learning methods. Ringing simpler, but different methods helps to build up the repertoire of bits of work (multiple dodging, making places) needed in these more complex methods, has a much greater chance of success and instils the habit of learning new things on the spot.

All are welcome at Bucklebury on Thursday nights, but be prepared to ring something new. The methods won't be difficult – I have to learn them on the spot too! – but it will make for an interesting evening.

John Durham

Sue's Midweek Group

The last ringing before the pandemic started, was on the 19 February 2020 at Shalbourne, Wiltshire.

Nobody could believe that the Midweek Group would not meet again until 22 September 2021. Carefully I had been watching the Covid figures. It was very important that we did not begin ringing too soon, also we needed a very airy ringing room on the ground floor and probably the most important of all that our eating venue would have to have tables and chairs well spaced out.



After some thought I decided that Hannington, Hants would be the best place to start. A ground floor ring, in the corner of the Church, plenty of room for people to space out, two large doors which opened into the Church and people could easily spread out into the Churchyard. Mandy the Landlady at The Vine, at Hannington is very adaptable, flexible and helpful and allowed us to spread out into the Conservatory AND the food is excellent. The Church and The Vine proved to be a very popular venue and the largest number ever, twenty four, people attended. Adrian Moon decided to give his son's vintage Austin Seven a trip to the outing which added to the day for the car enthusiasts.

In October we visited Pangbourne. Parking is not very easy in Pangbourne and Tony went to town on printing instructions on how people should park. We enjoyed the bells, a complete ring of Ruddle bells which has a frame which spans diagonally across the tower. We had lunch at the Red Lion, Upper Basil-don.

The next Outing was to Checkendon, over the River Thames, in Oxfordshire. The bells are rung from a balcony and there are many old murals in the Church. David Dickens gave us permission to ring here after he had checked with the school that the bells would not inconvenience them on this occasion. We lunched at the Red Lion, Stoke Row.



HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A COVID FREE 2022

Sue Smith

Newbury

After a long break due to Covid restrictions, St Nics bell ringers resumed Sunday morning service ringing with Grandsire Doubles on 30th May 2021. No sooner were we back in action than Martin Rice fell off his bike, cracked a rib and dislocated a finger. This did not hold Martin back for long, as he was soon ringing the lighter bells, much to the frustration of Eleanor! The Monday practice night resumed on 9th August, initially concentrating on Doubles methods including St Simon's, then expanding into Grandsire, Stedman and Cambridge methods with impressive numbers of attendees.

At the tower AGM in August, Martin Rice decided to stand down as Tower Captain. Martin's 50 year plus association with St Nics bells thankfully will continue as he brings as much enthusiasm as ever in the capacity of Ringing Master, jointly with Tony Skilton. David Bebbington has taken over the role of Tower Captain. The band would like to officially thank Martin for the unprecedented and tremendous service and dedication he has given to ringing at St Nic's over the past five decades in many capacities, but for many years as Tower Captain. Since returning, post pandemic restrictions, Martin's enthusiasm for ringing, its analysis via 'Cirel' (his proprietary computer software that analyses striking precision), the tower and its clock (with his remote internet data logging system) has helped drive the successful return to ringing at St Nics.

On a cold and windy Saturday 6th November, the band rang for its only wedding of the year.

The St Nic's ringing room had an 'Autumn clean', with many interesting artifacts and historical records being discovered in its clock cupboard. Once catalogued, these will form the basis of a new archive for the tower. Some interesting photos were unearthed, including the one shown below where the St Nics bell ringers are seen presenting Fred and Noreen Tallett of the Globe Inn, Newbury with a retirement present, thanking them for their hospitality shown towards the ringers during their time as landlord and landlady. Eight of the twelve ringers in the photo have been identified (Heather Joyce, Ros Durham, Heather Joyce's brother? Barbara Joyce, Phillip Grover, Howard Eggleston, Henry Lawrenson, John Durham.), can anyone help to identify the others?



Deb Bebbington attended the ART course in October and has been helping Sue Read teach new recruits at St Helen's in Abingdon. St Nics now has three ringers who have attended the ART course and recently completed the DBS process, David Bebbington, Martin Rice and Deb, and is now gearing up to attract new recruits to teach. If any Newbury branch tower has people, young or old wanting to learn to ring, but no capacity to do so, David, Martin and Deb would be willing to help out.

Finally, during the ringing room clean out, the St Nics hand bells, dating from the 1880's were retrieved from their long hibernation. Thirteen of the nineteen bells survive (any information on the whereabouts of the other missing six would be welcome), and the tower is investigating their possible restoration and the formation of a hand bell band. If you are interested in joining or helping with any future hand bell band, please let David know.

David Bebbington

Speen

We rang down the Speen bells in March 2020 and, apart from the tolling for Prince Philip, only started ringing again in July 2021. The timing was spot-on as we had two weddings within days of resuming. Generally, we took it fairly easy to start with: after lockdown, the brain couldn't always bring back every method but the muscle memory was fine.

Not long after, a check on the belltower revealed a family of ringed doves had taken up residence, with the inevitable resulting mess, and the fledglings were not yet ready to leave. Fortunately (or unfortunately) they didn't seem to mind the noise but they have now finally departed. In the meantime, we had a setback when the clapper on the no 2 bell sheared off mid-practice. Thanks to steeple-keeper Dave Thorpe, it was quickly replaced by Whites of Appleton. Again, the replacement was very timely, just in time for Remembrance Sunday. In the interim, practising on 5 bells proved a good discipline.

Now Sunday ringing and practice nights are back to as-normal-as-they-can-be and we were delighted to provide the venue for the December branch practice. Let us hope any further precautions can be limited.

First practice after lockdown



Mary Hills

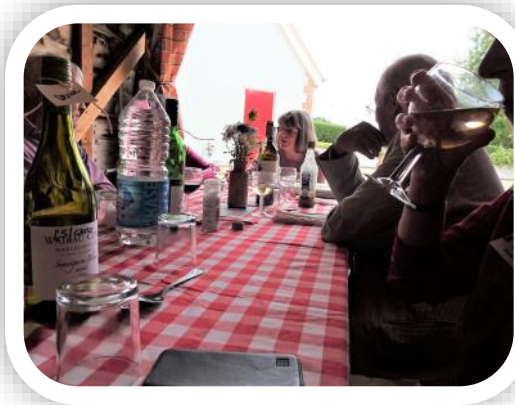
East Garston

We've had a wonderful year of fundraising in East Garston and are hoping to start work on the restoration of our bells in the middle of next year. There are two provisos, the first one being that the PCC want us to have at least £30k in the bell fund and the second; we are waiting for the results of a tower inspection, apparently there is some urgent structural work that needs carrying out that could impede our progress.

I'm really pleased to report that the first condition we will be able to meet, we have raised £24k so far and expect this to have risen to £27k before the end of the year. The second is out of our hands but I'm hopeful that we will be able to proceed.



We had another hiccup at the end of September, we had half muffled for a funeral and then were banned from entering the bell chamber due to the ladder. It was deemed unsafe to be using. We must be the only tower in the country that rang half-muffled for their Harvest Festival. Since then, the weather has got colder and the bells hadn't been oiled so they became very hard to ring, so we had to tell the PCC that we wouldn't be able to ring again until some general maintenance had been carried out. Thankfully permission was granted and the bells are now greased and back in action



Back to the fundraising; during the summer months we were approached by a local couple who offered to host a couple of paella lunches, it's their speciality. These were so successful they offered to host a third. Those of you that supported the event will testify as to their success. We had excellent food, eaten in good company in lovely surroundings.

We are also running a local lottery, run along the same lines as the 200 club, this has proved very successful and added £4k to the bell fund. A few of the winners have also very kindly put their winnings back into the bell fund which to date has added in excess of £500. We are hoping to run it again next year, a few of the participants have already asked if we will.

Another success was a treasure hunt held one Sunday afternoon, we were lucky with the weather and the support. Around 50 people, including families attended and spent a lovely afternoon strolling around the village following clues, both written and picture as well as collecting items such as feathers, leaves etc. The event finished in the village hall where homemade cakes were served with Tea and Coffee.

East Garston (continued)

In October we were lucky to host a metal detecting event, it was organised by Colin and Carol Silk, Amanda Marchant's parents and held in fields owned by Jonathon and Jeffrey Rabbits at Maidencourt Farm, £1225 was added to the fund from this event. Detectorists came from as far away as Wales and Hayling Island with the early birds arriving around 7:30am. What a lovely enthusiastic band of people they were and I'm pleased to say they weren't disappointed, many objects of interest were found.

December sees us holding a Christmas Bazaar and once again the support has been amazing. One of our supporters offered to run a "pre-loved" jewellery table, put an appeal out around her friends and neighbours and the result was astounding. So much so she had to pay a visit to Dreweatt Neate auctioneers in Newbury where some of the donated jewellery will be put for auction in January.

Our next big fundraising event will be a sponsored walk on April 9th, a group of us are going to walk the Lambourn Valley Way, with a possible couple of extra miles added on. This event will be added in the New Year to the Greenham Trust funding platform as a fundraising event to enable us to go further afield for sponsorship.

Thank you all for your support and encouragement.



Maureen Velvick

Shaw

This year, as with every other church, ringing has been very limited. In May, the bells were checked for any problems like birds nests, bearings, ropes, pulleys and anything that gives ringers confidence to ring. Thanks go to Richard Marshall and Mark Backhouse.

There have been two Weddings, one in June and one in July. For each wedding, where possible, the ringers were in Bubbles as the Covid restrictions eased. In August there was a visiting band and on the First Friday in September a general ring was arranged by Martin Rice. At the end October, there is a visit from another band, this time from Cirencester, Hereford, Hastings and Bath.

I have been looking after Shaw bells for many years and before me, Sue Gore. As with many churches there is a shortage of available ringers to help out. Most of the time, Shaw bells are silent for services, which is a shame because Shaw is well supported with a large congregation.



Roy Pratley

Thatcham

We have been closely following the CCCBR guidelines in relation to Covid 19. Back in May we started ringing with a few of our band wearing masks, taking lateral flow tests and ringing socially distanced bells 1,3,5 7 8,10 on Sunday mornings. As the rules became increasingly relaxed, we eventually returned to ringing as normal, even ringing Yorkshire Surprise Major one Sunday morning, and ringing further Surprise Major methods together with Grandsire & Stedman Caters on practice nights. However the number of our ringers has decreased. Margaret Robinson will not be returning following a fall in the summer. Her husband John has not yet returned. I thank them both for their considerable contribution to the tower over many years.

We held a socially distanced, mask wearing, delayed AGM in the Church on 3 August, chaired by our Rector, Canon Revd Mark Bennet. The meeting opened with prayers remembering Di Bridle who died on 4 August 2020. He said it was sad that we had not yet been able to ring the bells in her memory and that we should when restrictions to ringing have been lifted. (See below.)

Our Secretary/Treasurer, Janet John, did not seek re-election. She was presented with some flowers as a small token of thanks for the efficient way she had conducted her duties for the previous six years. John Kape was elected as the new Secretary/Treasurer. All other positions remain unchanged.



As I write this report, the number of Covid 19 infections is rising rapidly and we have reverted to ringing with masks, which has meant that our numbers available to ring has again reduced, as not all our ringers wish to ring with masks.

Our ringing room is poorly ventilated. Having followed the articles in the Ringing World, we purchased an Aranet 4 monitor to check the carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels when ringing. By having the ringing room door, tower door and window open with a desk fan in the window, we have mostly achieved levels of CO₂ below the recommended level of 800 ppm. This is not a long term solution and the PCC have applied for a Faculty to install permanent mechanical ventilation. This is very much "work in progress" at the moment.

A "Time to Remember Service" is held here annually at the beginning of November. Our Rector was particularly keen for us to ring this year as the names of all those who had died during lockdown would be read out during the Service. We arranged to ring a half muffled quarter peal of Grandsire Triples prior to the Service and to dedicate it to Di Bridle's memory. Soon after arranging it, Bill Butler and our Rector's father died and we were pleased to include them in the dedication footnote.

Thatcham (continued)

We were all saddened to learn of Bill Butler's death on 21 October. Bill had been an active member of the congregation and a tower member here for many years and Tower Captain for most of that time. Past and present members of the Tower met on the following evening, where our Rector led us in prayer prior to us ringing half muffled touches in his memory. Bill's funeral on 11 November was attended by a large number of people including many ringers, some of whom had travelled long distances. Bill's son, Richard, and I



agreed the ringing arrangements for the funeral. The bells were half muffled and there were 3 touches of Grandsire Caters before the service, 2 by named local ringers and 1 immediately before the service by Guild Officers and some of Bill's peal ringing friends arranged by Tim Pett. As the coffin left the church a named local band rang a touch of Grandsire Caters, followed by ringing open to all. All the ringing was of a very high standard and a fitting tribute to someone who had contributed so much to ringing here and to the Guild.

Our longest serving member, Ron Christopher was diagnosed with colon cancer at the beginning of November. He was fast tracked for an operation in early December. He spent a week in hospital and is now back home convalescing after a successful operation. We look forward to welcoming him back to ringing in the Spring next year.

Best wishes to all for a happy Christmas and a return to normal ringing in the New Year.

Tony Smith

William Butler

Bill Butler died on 21 October 2021 and his funeral on 11 November at St Mary's, Thatcham was attended by many ringers from far and wide.

Bill started his ringing career in 1945 when he learned to ring at Clewer. He joined the Oxford Diocesan Guild in 1946 and rang his first peal in 1947. In 1961 Bill moved to Thatcham with his family where he became the Tower Captain that same year, a position he held for 47 years. He also became the Ringing Master of the Newbury Branch, a position which he held until 1966. He went on to become the General Secretary of the Oxford Diocesan Guild, its Master, a Vice-President and a Trustee.

He represented the Guild on the Central Council from 1957 to 1960 and again from 1966 to 2012, serving as the Chair of the Central Council Education Committee from 1975 to 1986 and the Chair of its Library Committee from 1999 to 2005. He was a Life member of the Central Council from 2012 to 2018 and was made a Fellow in 2018.

While he was chair of the Education Committee, the first of many weekend residential ringing courses was held under Bill's overall leadership. He also ran courses at Fittleworth and for several years he taught a residential handbell course at Denman College, then the HQ of the Women's Institute. Having started his working life as an industrial chemist (which was the job he took up at AWRE Aldermaston when he arrived in the area), he found that he so enjoyed teaching ringing that he decided to change careers to become a workplace trainer, initially still at AWRE but later moving into management training for the Ministry of Defence, a job he held until his retirement.

Bill's interest in peal ringing continued from his early ringing days right up to 2018 when he rang his final peal, conducted by Graham John, making 71 consecutive years in which he had rung at least one peal. In all he rang 3,540 peals of which he called 2,007. 158 of these were on handbells, of which he called 118. Among the highlights were the multi-spliced peals called by Tim Pett and Tony Peake in the 1970s and 80s which included more than 100 spliced methods at every stage from Doubles to Maximus and also calling the 100th peal at Thatcham in 1984 and the 1,000th in 2011. He rang peals with 114 first pealers, most of which he called. He rang over 1,000 peals with each of Peter Bridle, Tim Pett and Colin Turner.

Bill was a prolific writer. He wrote *Doubles and Minor for Beginners* (1980), *Triples and Major for Beginners* (1986), *The Beginners' Guide to Change Ringing on Handbells* (1988) and *1668 And All That* (1997) for the Central Council. In 1981 the Oxford Diocesan Guild published his *100 Years of the Oxford Diocesan Guild*. Many articles and short pieces have appeared in the *Ringing World* from his *Prolific Peal Ringers* and *On This Day*. He also wrote and published extensively on local history (and in 2012 was the first person to be awarded the Civic Award for contributions to the community of Thatcham). But probably the book for which he will be best known was his *Musical Handbells*, published in 2000, the research and writing of which took 40 years to complete.



Over his long tenure as Tower Captain at Thatcham, as Branch Ringing Master and on residential courses, Bill ran thousands of practices and taught hundreds to ring. His interest in people, his infectious love of the art, his explanatory skill and his deep knowledge of the subject nurtured many people from beginner to able ringer. He travelled the world as a ringer, taking part in ringing and peal tours and handbell symposiums in the Americas, Africa, Australasia and Asia. His enthusiasm for organising outings created hundreds of enjoyable days out for many ringers. His willingness to organise weekly peals year after year gave opportunities to many aspiring peal ringers. Tony Smith mentioned that whenever he visited a tower elsewhere, as soon as he mentioned where he came from, the response would always be "Do remember me to Bill Butler".

Bill's ability to ring two tower bells, and to conduct touches while doing so, made it possible to ring methods that otherwise would not have been possible, and he called two double-handed tower bell peals after meeting short.

Bill was also very active in tune ringing on handbells. He founded the Barfield Handbell Ringers in 1965 and was its conductor until 2016. He attended many regional and international rallies and symposiums, and in 1998 he delivered a ground-breaking lecture on the Origins of Handbells at the International Handbell Symposium in Japan.

Bill was married twice, meeting both of his future wives in the bell tower. He married Audrey (a ringer at Slough) in 1953, but Audrey died of cancer in 1969 leaving him as the sole carer of three children, aged 11, 7 and 4, while holding down a full-time job at AWRE. He married Jennifer, a Thatcham ringer, in 1971 but she too died of cancer in 2000. His and Jennifer's dear friend Rosemary was his close companion in his final decades.

Bill continued to be involved in Thatcham tower after stepping down as Tower Captain. As Tony Smith says: "When I was elected Tower Captain in 2009, Bill remained an enthusiastic member of the Tower and never interfered. He willingly took part in striking competitions, evening outings and often conducted the Sunday Evening quarter peals."

Since learning that Bill had died, many ringers have written to offer their reflections on Bill's impact on them and on ringing, and this from Katie Lane and Ken Darvill (the Master and the General Secretary of the ODG) was typical: "Bill was respected and celebrated by so many ringers and for so many different talents. His was an eminent presence because of his skills, his astuteness, his judgement, his humanity. Bill's firm, gentle guidance with new ringers gave confidence and inspiration; more experienced ringers enjoyed the challenges presented; Guild officers knew that his wise counsel would always be a steady hand on the rope."

Mark Robins added his own thoughts on Bill's contribution: "Apart from his practical skills and far reaching influence, Bill's library and lecture props were also of major benefit as he was always willing to lend them when they could be put to good use in a recruiting drive or similar initiative. He had a model bell and a large collection of display boards with a study of bell inscriptions that sparked plenty of interest in the history and tradition of the exercise which I used in our tower open days.

While one of the leading ringers in the land, author, authority on hand bells etc, Bill had a down-to-earth side too and attended the Branch Practices to help along novices and generally support ringing in the Newbury Branch at all levels with his friendly, laid back encouragement. One of the last of the "old school" ringers, he was a character along with many of his contemporaries and there are none like him coming up through the ranks. He was known and liked by all who knew him (practically every ringer) and his passing leaves a large void that will be almost impossible to fill. I am sure I join the ranks of many who will miss him."

Considering his breadth of interests, his skills and his energetic enthusiasm over so many decades, his contribution to the exercise was truly exceptional. He will be missed by many.

Richard Butler

Hampstead Norreys & Yattendon

The highlight of the year was ringing again when restrictions lifted, especially for Easter Sunday when we were able to ring for the first time on the newly-restored bells at Hampstead Norreys. What a difference all that work has made! The bells are ringing smoothly, the re-tuning is noticeable, and the new rope guides greatly help in making the long draught more manageable, especially for learners. The bells at Hampstead Norreys were previously difficult to hear from the ground floor (especially at weddings when the organ was playing), but leaving the old rope holes in the floors now means they are more audible.

In June we were able to have an open tower at Hampstead Norreys, which brought in five new ringers. Two are returning to ringing after longish breaks, the other three are starting from scratch. This is a challenging but manageable number and all are progressing well with dedication and patience, and the friendliness and support of the whole band. Welcome to Kate, Katie, Chris, Freddie and Tom.



We are still ringing as a combined team, with practices alternating between the two churches, and the increase in ringers means we now have 8 or 9 for Sunday services. We are receiving positive comments from both villages and we often have people dropping by learn more about the bells – the advantage of ground floor rings. A significant achievement was ringing for both COP26 and Remembrance Sunday in both churches simultaneously, possible for the first time since the 1970s.

We wish everyone a very happy Christmas, and the very best for 2022. At Yattendon and Hampstead Norreys, we're looking forward to welcoming a couple more new ringers, taking our newbies through to plain hunt and beyond, and eventually celebrating (hopefully in the Spring) our postponed 2021 Christmas dinner.

Marcus & Tessa Allum

Guild Ten Bell Striking Competition

I really thought that this competition would be cancelled after circumstances seemed to be conspiring against it. Initially, this event was to be held at Aston Clinton, but then problems were found with the bells, making it necessary to go elsewhere. Sensing a chance of holding the event at Newbury with obvious travel and home-team advantage, Newbury was offered, but we were too late. The competition would now be held at Amersham (even further away than Aston Clinton), but a nice 12 in a nice town nonetheless. Then Amersham stated that we had to vacate the premises by noon, so the results and prize giving would have to be held elsewhere. Anyway, as in previous years, I duly recruited a band of suitably willing and able victims ringers and we put our entry in. With the time constraint, all teams would be ringing earlier than usual, so we had no opportunity to practice other than the official 3 minutes leading into the test-piece. That was the down-side, but the up-side was the very simple prescribed touch, 270 Grandsire Caters in repeated 5 lead courses, so we were in with a chance I thought.



As always, the gathering is also a social event where ringing acquaintances are renewed over coffee and bickies, while listening to the opposition's test pieces. My hopes of a respectable result were helped along when noticing trips and clips during other bands ringing so, as long as nobody went wrong, we had as good a chance as any. Our turn quickly came around and we marched nervously up the stairs to the ringing room, which had all the windows open as a Covid precaution, so, with a bit of snow about, it was chilly to say the least. Our policy in previous competitions has been to make all our mistakes in the practice sessions, and this time was no exception, with trips and clips made while we got used to the bells and the test piece. For best chance of success, the band had been placed early on in the planning stage and the test piece explained, so ringers could study their own piece of work, who they dodged with etc. This seemed to help as we then went on to ring a mistake-free and very respectably struck test piece, leaving us patting ourselves on the back for a job well done as we trooped, relieved and pleased, down the stairs to freedom.

So, the results were:

EBSB	81%
Reading	75%
Newbury	72%
ONB	66%
Banbury	65%
VoWH	63%



The results were due to be announced later that afternoon at Cuddington, so we all decided not to wait but to head for home, some of us via a very nice coffee shop in Amersham High Street.

Mark Robins

Midgham—Harvest Festival

On Sunday 2nd Oct. Midgham held the Harvest Festival service. To mark the occasion six ringers got up early from their warm beds to ring a quarter peal. I have been ringing for many years at Midgham and I think this could be a first for a Harvest Festival. On behalf of the Church, thank you team for very fine ringing.

Roy Pratley

Oxford Diocesan Guild

Midgham, Berkshire

St Matthew

Sunday 2nd October 2021 in 41m

1260 St Clements College Bob Minor

1 Ben Waller

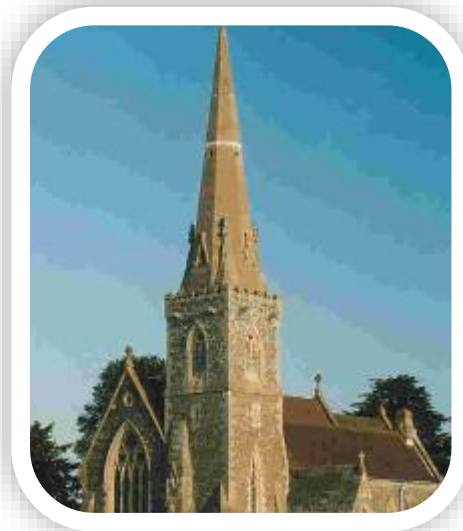
2 Carol Waller

3 Angela M Brown

4 Ken Waller

5 Joanne A Waller (C)

6 Mark Robins



For the Harvest Festival service



Hungerford

Well, we soon got back into the swing of things once Boris said it was ok to ring again. Our Sunday service band took no prompting to return to normality, or as close to it as we could get, and we were soon ringing on 6 on Sunday mornings and holding our usual practices. Our regular visitors also returned, supporting the locals, making for the busy practices we knew before. We have had three weddings, the first while still locked down, so they had ringing on 3, provided by our Tower Captain Andrea, her husband Maurice and daughter Amelia. The following two weddings had full eight bell ringing, which was very well received by the audiences (confirmed by them not asking for their money back).



In September, we started ringing quarters again, at first, bread and butter stuff, Grandsire Triples, and then on to Single Oxford Bob Triples and most recently, for the Town Carol Service, St Nicholas. We have also had visiting quarter and peal bands to add to the schedule for the bells.

Apart from the ringing, we have also resurrected our post-practice pub visits which some missed almost as much as the ringing during lockdown. Anyway, it does (or did) seem that things were almost normal again but now, with the Omnicron variant upon us, we expect everyone to do a Lateral Flow Test before each ringing session, to best keep ourselves safe. As we go to print, we look forward to a full Christmas ringing programme and our traditional outing before New Year, to be reported on in the next edition. Meanwhile, on behalf of our Captain and Ringers-

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.

Mark Robins



Fred Simmons, 1933 - 2021

Fred has been ever present at East Ilsley Bellringing practices, outings and social gatherings for well over 40 years.

His cheery quips and anecdotal stories kept us amused over the years and endeared him to anyone lucky enough to know him well. One of his favourite stories that he often told happened at first light on a winter's morning as Fred was walking to work down the Main Street in Compton. A work colleague was cycling to work when a low flying duck glanced off the bonnet of an approaching car and knocked the unfortunate cyclist off his bike. Fred's graphic description of the incident, the cyclist's reaction and his dishevelled state as he lay on the ground needed to be heard to be believed. However, an even better description always followed on the fate of the duck as it regained consciousness in the car of its female rescuer.

Fred had lived in Compton for most of his life and was employed on farms and in gardens for all of his working life. He was a true countryman and had a rhyming saying to fit most weather and seasonal patterns.

He loved his Bellringing and had been the long-standing tower captain at Compton, enthusiastically maintaining and keeping the bells ringing for many years. More recently, Fred had been ringing for and attending services at East Ilsley and his strong voice when singing hymns that he liked will be remembered and missed by our congregation for a long time.

As most of you will know, Fred died in action whilst ringing for a service at East Ilsley. Not a bad way to end a long and active life doing something he loved right up to the end.

We will miss him.

John Hibbert

East Ilsley, Berkshire

St Mary

Tuesday, 14 December 2021 in 45m

1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Jane Hibbert
- 2 Emma Hibbert
- 3 Patricia Napper
- 4 Josie Irving
- 5 Stuart Gibson
- 6 John Napper
- 7 John Hibbert (C)
- 8 Peter Birtwhistle



***Fred and Barbara celebrating their
Diamond Wedding Anniversary***

**Rung in memory of Fred Simmons,
a long time supporter of this tower, on the day of his funeral.**

Fred Simmons (continued)

I was very sorry to learn of the passing of Fred Simmons. As many will know, Fred was tower captain of Compton for many years and I have very fond memories of ringing with Fred and his very enthusiastic young band of ringers in the early 80s. Sadly we are all not so young as we were then but some of us are still enthusiastic! I was honoured to be included in the quarter peal in his memory at Compton on 11th December.

Marcus Allum

Oxford Diocesan Guild

Compton Berkshire

Saturday 11th December 2021 in 42m

1260 Grandsire Doubles

- 1 Angela Brown
- 2 J Martin Rice
- 3 Richard Marshall
- 4 Adrian Moon
- 5 Mark Robins (C)
- 6 Marcus Allum



Rung in memory of Fred Simmons

Motorcycling Bellringers—Isle of Wight by Hovercraft

With our group organiser Martin Hough, now living on the Isle of Wight, we had a very nice weekend's ringing there back in early Autumn as restrictions eased. As previously reported, we are from all over the country and are organised and exist as a group, solely via Facebook. So, on our way back to the mainland, there was a flurry of "this is me and my bike on the ferry" photos shared around. I thought I'd go one better and posted a short video of the hovercraft overtaking the ferry which sparked interest in this being the last public, fare paying hovercraft still running. Consequently, a plan was hatched to take a band back to Ryde via hovercraft, and ring there. It was then suggested we also get the Island Line train to Brading and Shanklin and ring at those two eights as well. So the plan was set and we met at Southsea Parade on a chilly November Saturday, eagerly anticipating our ten minute "flight".



Having never flown quite so low before, it was an experience not to be missed and following a brief spell bumping gently along the wave tops, we were ashore in Ryde (landed?) and on our way up the hill to ring. A very respectable quarter of Grandsire was called by Martin and then we enjoyed a fish and chip lunch before catching the train to Brading. We attempted a quarter of Single Oxford Bob Triples there (unsuccessful) and then back to the station enroute to Shanklin, only to find that we had the train times wrong, and we had no chance of getting there, ringing a quarter, and getting the train back for our departure in time. So, we went there anyway and rang a few touches on these difficult bells, then headed back to the train. Although only scoring one out of three planned quarters, it didn't spoil our "grand day out" even though there was not a motorbike in sight.



The "Island Line", newly-reopened after major refurbishment. The rolling stock are ex London Underground, all renovated and like new, inside and out. We travelled mostly in the dark, so it was strangely just like being on the tube in London.



The Hovercraft Band

*Matt Thewsey, Adrian Buswell, Dave Thorpe, Michelle Waymont-Palmer, Alex Hunt, Me
Martin Hough, Peter Harris*

Mark Robins

A big thank you to all those who contributed to this edition.
Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

*Wishing everyone a
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year*

Mark Robins
Editor



Lincoln Cathedral

This years' lights look incredible, so I couldn't resist sharing.