



# *Newbury Branch Newsletter*

## *Christmas Edition—2022*

### **Contents**

<b>2</b>	<b><i>Officers 2022/3</i></b>
<b>3</b>	<b><i>From the Chair</i></b>
<b>4</b>	<b><i>ODG Six Bell Striking Competition</i></b>
<b>5</b>	<b><i>Ringling for the State Funeral</i></b>
<b>6/7</b>	<b><i>Dry weather problems</i></b>
<b>8</b>	<b><i>Bill Butler's memorial boards</i></b>
<b>9</b>	<b><i>Newbury</i></b>
<b>10</b>	<b><i>Thatcham</i></b>
<b>11</b>	<b><i>Cleaning Stanford Dingley's bearings</i></b>
<b>12</b>	<b><i>Thatcham Festival</i></b>
<b>13</b>	<b><i>Bucklebury</i></b>
<b>14</b>	<b><i>Bucklebury</i></b>
<b>14</b>	<b><i>Sue's Midweek Group</i></b>
<b>15</b>	<b><i>Cold Ash Mummers</i></b>
<b>16</b>	<b><i>ODG Ten Bell Striking Competition</i></b>
<b>17</b>	<b><i>East Garston</i></b>
<b>18</b>	<b><i>Pop-up Party</i></b>
<b>19</b>	<b><i>Speen</i></b>
<b>20</b>	<b><i>Ron Christopher—Obituary</i></b>
<b>21</b>	<b><i>Ron Christopher—Tributes</i></b>
<b>22</b>	<b><i>End</i></b>



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## **From the Chair**

Christmas Greetings!

Branch activities are, on the whole, continuing to be well supported, including the first and third Friday evening practices and the mid-week lunch group, and Branch representation in the Guild striking competitions.

In the last newsletter I mentioned the frequent cancellations of tower practices, but this appears to have been just a summer thing, with fewer notifications going out during the autumn. I do notice there are fewer in attendance at tower practices, however, as we lose ringers through various causes. The number of subscriptions forwarded to the ODG from the Newbury Branch this year was 126, compared to 135 in 2021.

Some towers have been very successful at recruiting new ringers and this will have to continue and spread to all the towers in the Branch if we are to see our numbers increase again. The CCCBR have launched the Ring for the King initiative: a recruitment drive with the selling point of ringing for the coronation of King Charles in May next year. There has been some positive publicity on TV and radio, and there is some good material available at

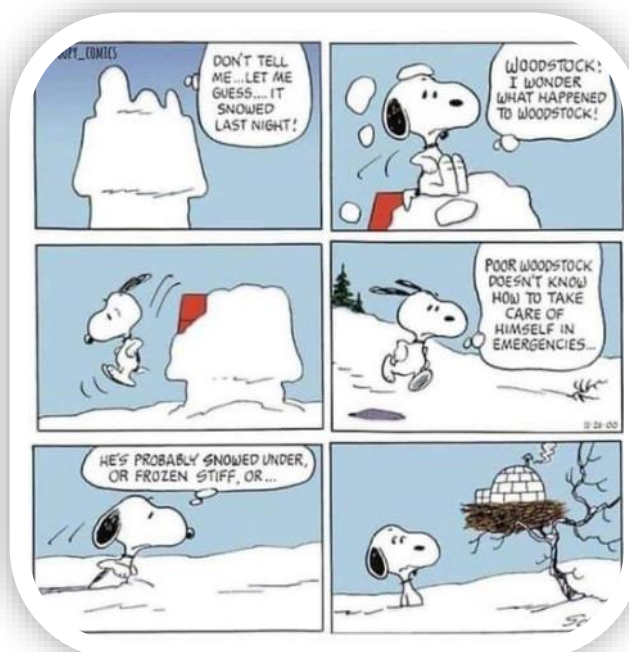
<https://cccbr.org.uk/2022/11/04/ring-for-the-king>

for towers to use.

I hope you have some good ringing over Christmas and the New Year.



## ***Martin***



## Guild Six Bell Striking Competition

Well, what a result! We beat Reading, we beat High Wycombe. In fact we beat everyone except Faringdon. Very satisfactory! Faringdon did ring really well with only 10 faults. High Wycombe and Reading are usual favourites among the commentators, but it didn't happen for them this time. We did have a slight home-team advantage with advance knowledge of the odd-struckness of the bells but, that said, the 240 Grandsire Doubles we rang, was a very good performance.

1st	Vale Of White Horse	Faringdon	10 faults
2nd	Newbury	Newbury	14 faults
3rd	North Bucks	Shenley & Loughton:	16½ faults
3rd	Reading Branch	Reading, St Mary	16½ faults
5th	Old North Berks	Wantage	17 faults
6th	East Berks South Bucks	High Wycombe	23 faults
6th	Witney & Woodstock	Church Hanborough	23 faults.



## State Funeral of Her Majesty the Queen

With Operation London Bridge announced, many towers across the Branch rang half, or fully muffled for the state funeral. Here are some of those recorded on Belboard:

### **Oxford Diocesan Guild**

**Lambourn, Berkshire**

St Michael and All Angels

Monday, 19 September 2022 in 60m (20-2-0 in D)

#### **Rounds and Call Changes**

J Rebecca Gay

Jeanne Lambourn

Amanda Marchant

Maureen Velvick

Nick Annetts

Shaun Page

Tyler Velvick

Colin Smith

Nigel Gay

Rang before the State Funeral and in memory of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Bells 1-7 fully muffled and bell 8 half muffled.

Sarah Montgomery was included in the ringing as a learner.

### **Oxford Diocesan Guild**

**East Ilsley, Berkshire**

St Mary

Monday, 19 September 2022 in 45m (8-1-13 in G)

#### **1000 Grandsire Triples**

- 1 Jane Hibbert
- 2 Patricia Napper
- 3 Nicola Franks
- 4 Josie Irving
- 5 John Napper
- 6 Adam Jenkins
- 7 John Hibbert (C)
- 8 Emma Hibbert

Half Muffled on the day of The Funeral of Queen Elizabeth II



**Shaw**



**Hungerford**



**Midgham**

### **Oxford Diocesan Guild**

**Hungerford, Berkshire**

St Lawrence

Monday, 19 September 2022 in 45m

#### **1260 Plain Bob Minor**

- 1 Cath Fittell
- 2 Andrea Barletta
- 3 Mike Winterbourne
- 4 Jenny Jones
- 5 David Thorpe
- 6 Mark Robins (C)
- 7 Maurice Barletta

Rung half-muffled on the occasion of the State Funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second

## Recent Dry Weather Problems

This year has brought a whole new range of steeple keeping problems to the bells that we so love to ring. These problems, caused by the extremely dry summer had already begun to show themselves in Hungerford, even before an email from "Head Office" arrived in our in trays...

"The seven feels really weird" someone said..."Oh it must be your bell handling" someone else was heard to say! Others then tried it and opinion was mixed, "It feels like the wheel is loose" was the main opinion so, when the clamour was at its most intense, and the bells were down, I climbed the staircase to have a look. Everything actually looked and felt fine except that the stay on the seven could be moved left and right quite easily by hand. All the other stays were checked and found to all suffer from varying degrees of looseness. So after all stays were tightened ringing continued, as did the complaints, now spreading to other bells as well. So up the staircase again, and with a considerable amount of extra heaving, which was more effective on the smaller bells I have to say, we did indeed have a severe case of "loose wheels", so whilst whistling that old Dolly Parton favourite...all the nuts and bolts on all the bell wheels were checked and tightened, which on Hungerford's relatively young ring of bells was a fairly easy job indeed. The long dry summer had indeed taken its toll on the bell woodwork, shrinking parts of it to the point that, if left, it could pose a risk of more serious damage.



For Speen however the problem was exacerbated by the fact that the bells are much older and that so much more of the bell mechanics are wood based and so, when I got a call from Kevin and we both checked the bells, it soon became obvious that there was considerably more work to be done there! The Speen bells all date from 1810 and still have their cannons intact. The bells are however all mounted on wooden headstocks! Five of the bells are still held onto these headstocks by their original cannons (see picture 1), however on bell number two one of these cannons, where it was originally moulded into the crown of the bell, had parted company at some point in the distant past and so the two bell has had four holes drilled into it's crown so that the metal headstock fittings can be bolted directly through the crown of the bell (see picture 2), thereby removing the stresses on the cannons themselves.

*Continued overleaf.*

## *Dry Weather Problems—Continued*

So after all our checks it eventually became apparent that we not only had loose wheels, but also loose bell straps, yes...the bells themselves were not securely held onto their headstocks! On top of this all the clappers were also loose meaning that they were not necessarily striking the bell in line with the swing of the bell. All this was worsened by the fact that all the nuts and bolts are severely rusty and hadn't been loosened for many years, if ever. So with help from Kevin, Graham and some hefty spanners from Justin, loads of muscle, a large club hammer or two, loads of WD40, and the purchase of a rather specialised deep socket spanner with a long breaker bar, all the relevant nuts were eventually loosened and then tightened appropriately. Two of the clapper bolts however were close to the end of their threads and so large washers were inserted under the clapper nuts in order to achieve the required tightness. Many thanks go to Kevin Graham and Justin for their help in resolving this interesting saga and making the ringing at Speen safe again.

## **Dave Thorpe**



## Bill Butler's Memorial Boards

Those of you who have been ringing at Thatcham, will have noticed that there are many peal boards recording significant events and milestone performances. On the south wall of the ringing room there are three oak memorial boards, the second one is dedicated to Audrey Butler, Bill's first wife and the third one is dedicated to Jennifer Butler, Bill's second wife. Some years ago, Bill said that he would like a memorial board for him in the vacant fourth space.

Following Bill's death in October 2021, I began investigating in early 2022 where we could obtain a similar oak board. A joinery company in Theale were approached and were happy to accept our order for the oak board and put us in touch with a sign writer in Waterlooville. Around this time I discussed with our Rector, Revd Mark Bennet the possibility of dedicating this board at a service later this year. He has always been very supportive of the ringers and suggested it would be fitting to record Bill's last tower bell peal at Thatcham on a new peal board. Graham John researched the peal records and established that this was a peal of Meall Nan Eun Surprise Royal rung on 24 November 2015. Graham proposed an appropriate footnote. There was some doubt as to whether the person who had made the previous peal boards would be able to provide a new board in time. It was therefore decided to commission the Theale joinery company and the Waterloo sign writer to make the new peal board. Roy Pratley transported the plain boards to the signwriter and collected them when they were ready.



Revd. Mark Bennet decided that both boards would be dedicated at a Time to Remember Service on Sunday 20 November. I invited those ringers who had taken part in the peal together with an open invitation to ODG members to join us in the ringing before the service and to attend the service. We were pleased that Bill's son Richard, six of the peal band and Katie Lane, the current Master of the ODG joined us for ringing before the service. The ringing was of a high standard, including call changes, Yorkshire Surprise Royal and a service touch of Grandsire Caters. A number of other ringers attended the service. Mark Backhouse displayed both boards on easels at the front of the church, where everyone had a chance to inspect them at close quarters. He and Roy Pratley subsequently erected the new boards in our ringing room.

Both boards are a fitting tribute to someone who contributed so much to ringing at Thatcham and to ringing in general.

**Tony Smith**

## **Newbury**

The second half of 2022 was dominated by the sad passing of Queen Elizabeth II on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September. The bells at St Nicolas were rung the following day at 12noon for one hour, fully muffled with the tenor half muffled. Newbury Weekly News were in attendance and videoed the ringers and the bells ringing in their mournful way. Here is a link to the article:

<https://www.newburytoday.co.uk/news/for-whom-the-bells-toll-9273257/>,

On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September the bells were rung open, immediately following the Proclamation of the new King in London. During the period of mourning the bells were rung half muffled on five occasions. On the day of the funeral, Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September, the bells were rung fully muffled immediately before the service at Westminster Abbey. On a cheerier note, a St Nicolas band, consisting of Eleanor Rice, Andy Osborne, Tony Skilton, Martin Rice, Mark Robins and David Bebbington took part in the ODG six-bell striking competition at St Mary's, Shaw, ringing a touch of Grandsire doubles and came second out of six bands, with Faringdon winning. The St Nicolas bells were rung for the occasion of the Service of Thanksgiving for Queen Elizabeth II at St Nicolas' Church on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November, for which MP Laura Farris, Mayor of Newbury Gary Norman, The Queen's racing manager John Warren and his wife, Lady Carolyn Herbert, the Princess of Wales' brother, James Middleton and the queen's retired racehorse 'Barber Shop' were in attendance and listened to the bells. This link takes you to a full report with photos:

<https://www.newburytoday.co.uk/news/service-of-thanksgiving-for-the-queen-9283403/>



The bells were rung for one wedding during the second half of the year, on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November. The tower continues to teach one young student to ring as part of his Skills section for his Duke of Edinburgh award. If anyone knows of any other young people wanting to learn to ring, for their DofE award or for any reason, St Nics is well set up with several experienced teaching members available to help.

***David Bebbington***

## **Thatcham**

September was a difficult month for us at Thatcham. September is typically a month when a number of us take holidays, following the school children returning to their studies. Once the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had been announced we made arrangements to ring the bells half muffled on the days and times proposed by the Central Council, with the ringers that would be available. On Friday 9 September we rang a quarter peal of Grandsire Doubles on 2,3,4,5 & 6. On the day of the funeral call changes and touches of Grandsire Doubles were rung.



On 30 September, we received the sad news that Ron Christopher had died at home, just six weeks after his 90th birthday. The following evening twelve present and past members of our band were joined by Martin and Eleanor Rice and were led in prayer by our Rector Revd Mark Bennet before some general half muffled ringing on the back eight bells. We rang the back eight bells half muffled again for Ron's funeral on 26 October. See Ron's Obituary for more details.

As reported in the previous Newsletter, we enjoy a positive relationship with Thatcham Town Council who invited us to take part in the Thatcham Festival of the Arts. Rachel Backhouse organised this with a morning and afternoon session on Saturday 22 October. See Rachel's Report for more details. At the afternoon session I was surprised and delighted that former Thatcham ringer Fiona Hockedy appeared in the ringing chamber, some thirteen years after her twin boys were born. She is now ringing with us regularly.

On Sunday 20 November two memorial boards for Bill Butler were dedicated at the Time to Remember Service. See the separate article for more details.

With Sue Smith, Rosemary Evans and Amanda Miles attending infrequently due to continuing health problems a core of seven of us have kept the ringing going on Tuesdays and Sundays. We have been pleased to welcome a number of visitors from the Branch and Andover District to our practices. Recently we have been busy ringing for various Carol Services and took the opportunity to ring a quarter peal of Cambridge Surprise Royal before the Community Carol Service on Saturday 10 December with help from our visitors; our first of Royal since the start of the Covid Pandemic.

With best wishes to all for a Happy Christmas and a Healthy New Year.

***Tony Smith***

## **Stanford Dingley – Cleaning the bearings**

The treble and second bell at St Denys are hung on plain bearings and they've not been going so well recently. At the request of Tower Captain Angela Brown, Mark Backhouse, Adrian Moon and myself went to lift these two bells, clean and re-grease the bearings. Mark has a wealth of knowledge and experience of church bells having worked at Whitechapel Bell Foundry until it closed. He brought along a car load of timber pieces as well as a few tools, which we hauled into the bell chamber using a rope tied to a bag. Access to the bells starts with a vertical ladder to the first floor, then a clamber under a few beams and a short flight of open steps to the bells.



When we visited the tower previously, there was what appeared to be a dead crow hanging up inside the louvres. However, we were assured by Angela that it was a stuffed one put there to try to deter living ones. This time we weren't phased when confronted by this body, now lying on the bell chamber floor.

We had to remove the wheels before lifting the bells. Adrian and I had been educated in this by Mark at Thatcham but it wasn't an easy task. Having undone the bolts holding the spokes of the upper and lower halves of the wheels together and undone the bolts holding the wheels to the headstocks, we tried to separate the two halves. There are tenons from the top half into the lower part just either side of the headstock. They were so tight that it took at least half an hour to separate them using wooden wedges between the wheel and the headstock.

There was nothing to hang any tackle on to the lift the bells so we put wooden blocks under the rim of the treble (2 ¾ cwt), opened the bearing caps and with the aid of two lengths of timber, resting on another straddling the frame on the other side, Mark lifted the bell a few inches whilst Adrian and I shoved more blocks underneath to support the bell clear of the bearings. This procedure was repeated for the second bell, which weighs a little over 3 ½ cwt.

Once the bells had been lift clear of the bearings by a few inches, it was a fairly straight forward but mucky job to clean off the old grease from the gudgeons and bearings. Lashings of new grease were applied and then each bell eased back in place followed by re-assembly of the wheels.

The two bells now swing freely and smoothly and shouldn't require attention for a good while. The other two bells are on ball bearings so don't need any work.

***Richard Marshall***

## **Thatcham Festival**

The Thatcham Festival runs for about ten days in late October, organised by the Mayor and town council, and the programme covers a wide variety of events from exhibitions and talks to walks and performances, some free and others chargeable. Tony was asked a couple of years ago whether the ringers would be interested in participating but then it all had to go on the back burner due to Covid. The Town Council came back to us this year and somehow I was delegated to be our point of contact and organiser.

It took a few e-mails and a phone call (thank you Mark) to get them to understand what we could and couldn't offer. I had to send a synopsis of our 'event' and then write a 50 word piece for the brochure. I chose the same Saturday as the craft fair in the church in the hope that people might be coming our way already! Did we want timed tickets? Well not really as some stay only a few minutes and others for half an hour depending on their level of interest.

Half the belfry was roped off so that demonstration ringing could take place safely with the on-lookers sat on the other side. Supervised backstrokes were on offer to those aged over 12 (which we had made quite clear in the brochure) who showed an interest. Several people had a go.

Thanks to Richard we were able to have a camera looking at some of the bells and displaying on a monitor in the ringing chamber so that our visitors could see what is happening upstairs when we ring the bells.

Graham provided some excellent photos that I had laminated, and some other material used previously. We also had three different types of publicity leaflets that I obtained through the Central Council. I was a little surprised on asking round that the ODG doesn't have very much in the way of material to loan out but Pat Newton from High Wycombe kindly sent over a few bits. Maureen from East Garston also lent us a 3D printed model bell – thank you Maureen.

We set a gazebo up outside the tower door (thank you again Richard) where we had some display material for those who weren't able to climb the stairs. Other information was displayed on the ringing chamber walls and window sills.

Thanks to Richard, Adrian, John, Roy, Mark and Tony for being the hands on crew upstairs while I sat outside under the gazebo and monitored (not always successfully!) the numbers up the tower. We also had to control traffic on the stairs to ensure no-one met somebody coming the other way, using additional lighting switched on/off from either end when the stairs were occupied / free.

We ran a couple of two hour sessions with around 15 visitors in the morning and 30 in the afternoon. Climbing the stairs to the 'secret' part of the church was a big draw. We had to disappoint those who thought they would be able to get up onto the roof. It's not an easy access (three separate ladders, one vertical) and goes through the bells.

Several people seemed very keen and took away the leaflet with contact details and said they'd be along on practice night. Not one has turned up which was a little disappointing. We have however had one lapsed ringer coming along on Sunday mornings (currently other commitments on practice night) so welcome back Fiona.

***Rachel Backhouse***



## Bucklebury

In common with towers around the Branch, at Bucklebury we marked the passing of the Queen with half-muffled ringing on the Friday after the announcement and on the day of the State funeral, together with a half-muffled quarter of Grandsire. We marked the proclamation of Charles III, with 'open' ringing. A lot of crawling under bells putting on, taking off and putting back on of muffles!

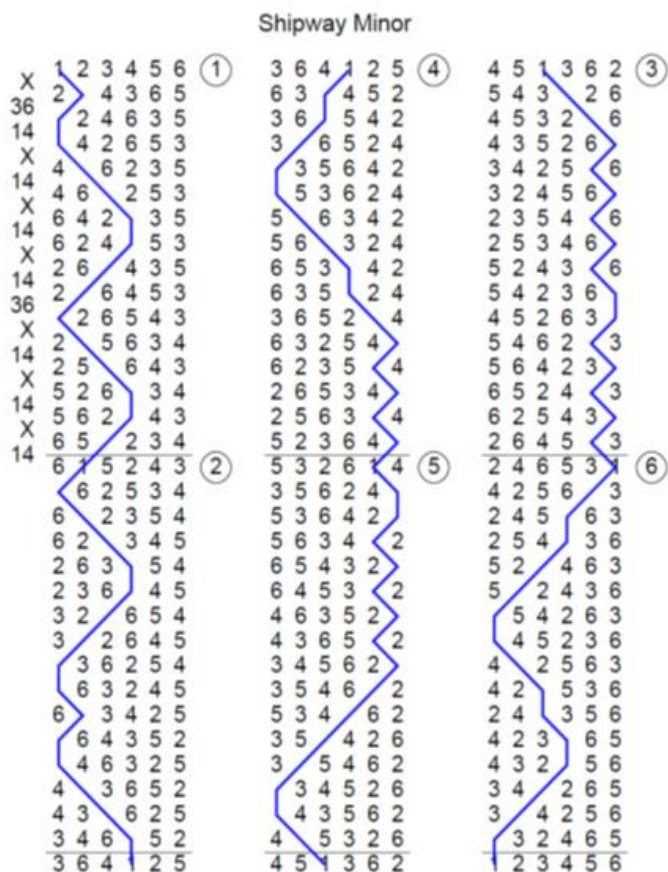
When things settled back down, we resumed our normal routine. On Sunday mornings we usually manage 5 or 6 with the much appreciated help of Roy Pratley. Thursday night practices are pot luck. One week we're meeting 5 or 6 and going through the minor and doubles books to find new things to ring, the next week we're (almost!) ringing London Major. A major blow to our ringing has been the absence of Angela Brown. As many are aware, she had a fall and broke a bone in her elbow. Though active and mobile, she has been finding ringing painful and has had to stop temporarily. We knew it must be serious when she started dropping out of and refusing quarter peals! We wish her well and hope to see her back ringing in the new year.

Our pet method of late is Shipway. This is basically Stedman on even bells – quick and slow eights rather than sixes with the slow work going to fourths rather than thirds and triple dodges above. Like Stedman it extends by adding dodges in 7-8, 9-10 and 11-12, with Stedman-like calls, but like Stedman the calls are different at the basic, minor, stage. We've even managed to contract it down to minimus which could be useful on Sunday mornings.

Other things we've been ringing include Barsham Treble Place Doubles (essentially Kent doubles), Double Bob, although our attempts at touches with calls at the half-lead weren't very successful. I'll often get a theme running through a practice, and so as well as Double Bob we rang Double Oxford and Double Court. Double Grandsire anyone?

To me, one of the attractions of ringing is the great variety of methods that exist. Though many of them are complex and require a fair bit of pencil and paper work, there are enough methods out there that can be looked up and rung virtually on the spot. In our situation where we will often meet with just five or six ringers, all of whom are Surprise Major or Royal ringers, opening a book and picking a method to ring at random is much more rewarding than just ploughing through the old standards of Grandsire, plain bob or Cambridge.

*Continued overleaf*



### *Bucklebury continued:*

After losing our youngsters to University, we've started a recruitment drive, latching on to the Central Council's 'Ring for the King' campaign. The Church was having a coffee morning and was happy for us to piggyback onto this by opening up the tower and letting people have a pull on the bells – down of course. We've now got one learner at the basic handling stage and another has expressed interest and will hopefully start learning after the Christmas hiatus.

We welcome all visitors on practice nights – though it might be as well to check that we are practicing. If you have anything you particularly want to practice, we can usually help. If not, then be prepared to ring anything that takes my (quirky) fancy.

**John Durham**

### **Sue's Midweek Group**

The planned August outing to Mapledurham was cancelled at short notice due to filming taking place at Mapledurham House. Roy Pratley arranged for us to ring at Midgham and the Coach and Horses were pleased to accommodate us. Tony and I were away. Pete Bridle was the ringing Master and John Kape took the lunch orders. Tony and I were away again in September for the outing to Brightwalton where Martin Rice was the Ringing Master. Kevin Rogers took the lunch orders for the Red Lion at Chieveley.

We went to Mildenhall in October, where the local entertained us with details of local history, before we adjourned to the Royal Oak at Marlborough. Some of the lady members also took the opportunity to do some shopping. Our outing in November was to Drayton, our only eight this year. Lunch was a short distance away at the Plum Tree at Milton. However, the road was closed and the detour took us back through Steventon where some three way temporary traffic lights had broken down causing long tail backs. Everyone eventually arrived at the pub, where we had an enjoyable lunch.

Thank you, again, to those who undertook various tasks during my absences. Best wishes to everyone for a Happy Christmas.

**Sue Smith**

**Merry  
Christmas**

## **Cold Ash and Hermitage Mummers**

Once again the Mummers will be out and about just before Christmas. The Cold Ash and Hermitage band has been going for over 25 years under the encouragement of local bellringer Richard Marshall. The history of mummers is obscure though the name is used in some Medieval texts and Shakespeare may have had mummers in mind when he wrote of the 'rude mechanicals' in A Midsummer Night's Dream. But it's now thought that mummers as we know them don't have such a long history although they may be built on very old myths, legends and word-of-mouth.

There are several types of mummers play – the traditional Christmas one as we perform, Plough Monday plays, performed in early January, Pace Egg plays performed in the run up to Easter. Others are, or were, associated with Halloween and All Souls Day. Particularly in the Christmas play, most of the characters are disguised having lots of ribbons from their hats covering their faces. Some bands in the past were completely covered so there was no chance of indentifying the players.

There are three forms of play – hero/combat, recruiting sergeant and sword dance. Ours is a hero/combat play in which the villain, the Turkish Knight, challenges King George to a sword fight. The Turkish Knight is slain but then the Doctor is called and he, magically, revives the dead hero. We have various other characters including Christmas Boy, Father Christmas (not dressed in red and white), King George's Man, Princess Sheba (a character we've borrowed and re-invented), Mr Jack Finney, who's a quack, Johnny Jack who pleads for his poor family, Billy Wit (not sure why he's there) and Beelzebub. We start and finish with the Mummers' song 'God Bless the Master of this House' and usually have a section of Cold Ash Brass to accompany us.



After each performance we pass the hat round and collect for Macmillan Cancer Support. A rough calculation shows that we have collected nearly £30,000 over the years as well as bring Christmas cheer, fun and laughter to audiences.

**If you'd like to catch us this year here's our tour:**

**Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December: 8pm The Bunk, Curridge; 8.30pm The White Horse, Hermitage; 9pm The Fox, Hermitage**

**Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> December: 8pm The Cottage Inn, Upper Bucklebury; 8.30pm The Castle, Cold Ash; 9pm The Spotted Dog, Cold Ash.**

**Times are approximate (to allow for drinking!)**

***Richard Marshall***

## Guild Ten Bell Striking Competition

This year, the competition was hosted by VOWH branch at Shrivenham, an easy going and nice to ring ten. Normally the test piece for this competition alternates each year between Caters and Royal, but this year, it was the same as last year, Grandsire Caters except that the organiser made it a more complicated touch which was more difficult to strike.

Following our now-established format, I set up the practice for the morning of the competition, Saturday 26th November at Newbury. This went quite well and allowed us to familiarise ourselves with the work of each bell, having placed the band ready for the competition. So off we went to Shrivenham and it came to our turn. Although we started ok, our test piece was scuppered by mistakes towards the end of the second of three courses and we accumulated an unfortunate set of faults putting us bottom of the score table. A bit despondent, I reflected on finishing last for the first time since I started organising the branch team for the Guild event. It was however, pointed out that only 6 of the 15 branches in the Guild actually entered a team, so we were really 6th out of 15, a much better way of looking at it! The judges comments were that we were a bit uncomfortable with the bells and got off to a tentative start, then we had a poor spell, but recovered well and rang nicely towards the end.

Despite our performance, the day was an enjoyable one, with some nice ringing and socialising to be had. There was however, one incident worth mentioning. Those queuing for the newly installed loos inside the church, could hear the faint sound of handbells, which soon proved to be emanating from inside the disabled cubicle. After a bit of door banging by one of those queuing patiently for their turn, three ringers sheepishly emerged along with their handbells and it turned out they had been ringing a quarter peal! They had assumed, as it was only for half an hour, that it would be ok to commandeer the disabled toilet for this purpose! The error of their ways was duly pointed out but the quarter still appeared on belboard [Ringing World BellBoard](#).



### The Results

EBSB	60 faults
VOWH	62 faults
Reading	64 faults
Old North Berks	75 faults
Banbury	102 faults
Newbury	123 faults

**Mark Robins**



## East Garston

Season's greetings from East Garston!!



We were hoping to have our bells back and in place to ring for Christmas but unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstance, illness, over run projects etc. it will now be 2023 before we see them. They will definitely be back for the Coronation and we're pleased to say we should have at least a band of 6 to ring them.

We had a progress report from White's at the beginning of December and were really pleased to hear that the bells have all been tuned, apart from the listed number 5, new wheels have been made and the new headstock are in progress. We are hoping to pay them a visit once the headstocks have been fitted to the bells.

Whilst the bells are out of the tower a local ringers working party have cleaned debris out of the bell pits and repainted the remaining metal fixtures in the Bell Chamber.

The beams installed and used by White's for the removal of the bells have been purchased by the PCC and will remain in place, a platform is to be fitted to the top of one of them to allow easier access to the roof for maintenance and for the raising/lowering of the various flags.

A new ladder has been installed to allow safer access to the bells from the Ringing Chamber, loose floorboards have been replaced and the doorway to the Ringing Chamber mended, the frame had become loose from the walls.

Lambourn have offered us their surplus carpet tiles; we are hoping there will be enough to cover the space we have. Unfortunately, due to the work being carried by the carpenter in the tower we are not allowed at the present time to go and take measurements. Fingers crossed.

White's, very kindly allowed our clock winder (Peter Cook) & his wife to visit their premises to watch the Tenor be re-tuned. They both had a very enjoyable couple of hours and were enthralled with all they saw.



**Maureen Velvick**

## Pop-Up Party

And now, in the words of the immortal Monty Python, for something completely different....

Up until the start of the pandemic, this band, predominantly comprising the Waller family, augmented by Mike Hurst, myself, and now Jo's partner Gary, rang a triples quarter on a Friday evening once a month. It became a bit of a tradition to have the December one at Hungerford and bring a few drinks and nibbles along to celebrate the season. This year, Ben the organiser decided to resurrect it and we duly gathered to do the deed. Appropriately, he came up with an unnamed triples method which, if successful, would be named Hungerford New Bob Triples. Well, after a couple of false starts while we got to grips with poo-traps inherent in the method, we settled into some nice ringing and rang the quarter. Pleased with ourselves, a little celebration then ensued.



### **Hungerford, Berkshire**

St Lawrence

Friday, 23 December 2022 (12-1-8 in G)

### **1260 Hungerford New Bob Triples**

[View composition](#)

- 1 Ken Waller
- 2 Carol Waller
- 3 Michael Hurst
- 4 Joanne A Waller
- 5 Ben Waller
- 6 Mark Robins (C)
- 7 Joanne Waller
- 8 Gary Sheppard

Believed to be the first quarter peal in the method,  
Hungerford New Bob Triples: 345.1.7.123.7.5.7, le 125  
(372645).

Rung as a birthday compliment to James Hurst.



## Speen

Graham Green rang the toll for HM Queen Elizabeth on 9 September and we also rang half muffled before the local memorial service on 16th and before the funeral on 19th. Otherwise, most practices and Sunday ringing have gone ahead, only occasionally limited to 5 bells. We also had fun with single minimus and double minimus on 6 bells to suit the skills of a particular practice band.



Others may have caught the BBC Radio 4 programme on John Taylor and Co of Loughborough, called Bells That Still Can Ring. Radio may not be the best medium for explaining the bell casting process but there were various interesting stories. Complaints about the state of our roads are nothing new: various local authorities were less than thrilled by the condition of their roads after Great Paul had been transported through their areas.

## **Bells That Still Can Ring - BBC Sounds**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001fwcz>

## **Mary Hills**



**Obituary**  
**Ronald C Christopher**  
**13.08.32 to 30.09.22**

Ron was a ringer at Thatcham for 75 years. He was born in Thatcham where his father was a policeman. He attended St Bartholomew's School in Newbury. It was here, along with some of his fellow students that he was encouraged to take up ringing by one of the school masters. He subsequently became Tower Captain at Thatcham for a number of years until he handed over to Bill Butler in 1962. Ron and Rita had two daughters, Kay and Rachel. Kay became a competent ringer, but did not continue after her marriage in 1988

He married Rita at her local church in Woodland St Mary on 11 February 1961. They lived in various houses in Thatcham, finally moving, in recent years to a bungalow within walking distance and earshot of the Church. Ron was always busy making things and gardening in addition to his ringing. Although in his late eighties Ron set about various tasks in the bungalow and the garden with his usual enthusiasm.

Ron was a loyal member of the Thatcham Tower and could be relied upon to attend the weekly practices, Sunday Service ringing, wedding ringing and quarter peals, until his health prevented him from climbing the stairs regularly. He did however manage to attend the occasional practice, even in his final months. He was a regular visitor at East Ilsley and Bucklebury practices. He enjoyed good striking and particularly enjoyed ringing and calling Stedman Triples, his favourite method. Thatcham Tower AGM's chaired by the Rector are often lively occasions and Ron contributed to the debates with his strong opinions.

Following Ron's successful bowel operation in December 2021, it was very worrying to learn that he had cancer of the liver a few months later. He was told that the local band would be ringing a quarter peal to celebrate his 90th birthday on 13 August 2022. His wish was that it should be rung on the back eight bells as these were the bells on which he started his ringing at Thatcham. A well struck quarter peal of Grandsire Triples was rung by Thatcham and Newbury Branch Members. By now Ron was quite unwell and was able to listen from his chair with the window and door open. Unknown to the ringers at the time the quarter peal was recorded by Kay's husband Martin.

Ron died at home on the morning of 30 September 2022. The following evening Revd Mark Bennet led the Thatcham ringers in belfry prayers before various half muffled touches were rung on the back eight bells, including Stedman Triples. Martin and Kay brought Rita in their car to listen to the ringing at the base of the Tower. Kay decided to climb up to the ringing room to express her thanks and was persuaded to ring in the final touch of the evening.

The evening before the funeral on 27 October the Thatcham Ringers met to ring a half muffled quarter peal of Grandsire Triples. The half muffled ringing before and after the funeral service was again on the back eight bells. There were many ringers at the funeral service remembering Ron who had been a much respected ringer at Thatcham and throughout the Newbury Branch. The entry music for the Cremation Service the following day was the recording of Ron's 90th birthday quarter peal. Our thoughts are with Rita and the family at this time.

***Tony Smith***

## **Tributes to Ron Christopher**

When I started attending Newbury Branch functions some sixty odd years ago, I remember Ron as being someone to be respected, admired and, in my case, revered.

I don't ever remember seeing him when not wearing a collar and tie. Always polite but not someone to be argued with as he always got his facts right.

I remember one Newbury Branch AGM many years ago when a proposition was put forward by a misguided member that The Newbury Branch be disbanded and amalgamated with The Reading Branch. Ron was immediately on his feet and instantly and articulately shot that proposition to shreds, along with the proposer.

His bell handling was neat and tidy, his striking accurate and he could be relied upon to ring without error, a model bellringer in many ways.

Another occasion that I remember with amusement featured Ron and myself. After a successful peal attempt of Cambridge Surprise that I'd organised at East Ilsley, Ron suggested that I'd only invited himself and Bill Butler to ring because I wanted to ring in the first peal on the soon to be augmented bells at Thatcham. We agreed to differ and, in the heat of the moment, I vowed never to ring a ten bell peal at Thatcham. Not to my credit, I know, and my stubbornness is not to be underestimated or admired but Ron and I maintained our friendship.

I regretted being unable to attend Ron's funeral but have many fond thoughts of him to remember. How we will miss his support and wisdom.

### ***John Hibbert.***

When I was a novice, Ron's plain speaking had quite an influence on me while I sought to climb the ability ladder and at Thatcham and Branch practices, he would take time to explain things and have patience while I tried to get it right. Stedman being his favourite, I always remember at Newbury, after a particularly well rung quarter or touch, him announcing to the band

***"if you can ring Stedman that well, you don't need to learn anything else".***

The Newbury Branch will be much poorer without him.

### ***Mark Robins***

**And last but not least, something seasonal and topical,  
The Ukrainian Bell Carol from UTube.....**

[Колядка "Щедрик" Schedryk - "Ukrainian Bell Carol" - YouTube](#)

**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**

Deadline for the Summer edition—Friday 30th June 2023