

Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers – Newbury Branch
Minutes of Tower Captains/Tower Correspondents Meeting
Saturday, 5th April, 2025 at 7pm
St Mary's Church, Shaw-cum Donnington, Newbury

Present: Kevin Rogers (Speen), John Durham (Bucklebury) Michael Hurst, Advanced Ringing Master, (Bucklebury), Rachel Backhouse , 1st Friday Ringing Master, Thatcham), Angela Brown (Stanford Dingley), Chris Maslen (Beenham), David Bebbington (St Nicolas, Newbury), Roy Pratley (Midgham, Shaw), Lucy Hopkins Till, Training Officer, (Kintbury), Mike Hopkins Till (Kintbury), Marcus Allum, Vice Chairman, (Yattendon), Mark Robins, Secretary, (Hungerford), Nick Annetts, Webmaster, (Lambourn), Maureen Velvick, Treasurer/Minute taker, (East Garston), & Martin Rice, Chairman (Newbury)

Apologies were received from: John Hibbert (East Ilsley), Mike Head (Peasemore), Rod Brown (Chieveley), Andrea Barletta (Hungerford), Tony & Sue Smith (Thatcham) & John Manley (Aldermaston)

Martin Rice asked that each tower representative should introduce themselves by name and then give a summary of their ringing numbers for practice & Sunday services:

David Bebbington – Newbury: So far this year ringing before Sunday services had taken place with not less than 10 & sometimes 12-13 ringers, Monday night practices saw an average of 17, which included visitors. They also had 4 learners under the age of 16, some due to the Duke of Edinburghs Award Scheme.

Chris Maslen -Beenham: Normally managed to ring for the 3 Sunday services with 4 ringers. They had 7 regular ringers for practice but should there be less than 4 then practices were cancelled. Aldermaston were supportive and the support was reciprocated.

Marcus Allum – Yattendon & Hampstead Norreys: Normally managed to ring for Sunday Services & had between 4 & 14 for practices which alternated between both towers. He reported that Bruce Lousley a longstanding ringer and former Tower Captain of Hampstead Norreys had recently died & asked that this should be recorded in the minutes. Bruce had been actively ringing until November last year.

Kevin Rogers – Speen: They have 10 members and usually have 8-12 for practices, the numbers included regular visiting ringers. Normally managed 5 for Sunday service, if there were less than 5 available, they wouldn't ring but this very rarely happened. They used a WhatsApp group to communicate & Round Robin email to communicate.

Angela Brown – Stanford Dingley: The treble was always chimed for Sunday Service and for weddings.

John Durham – Bucklebury: They have a core of 6 ringers including 1 learner & with the help of Angela Brown & Roy Pratley normally managed to ring for Sunday services. Practice night had a regular core but they did rely on visitors & depending on who attends they can ring Surprise & Minor.

Rachel Backhouse – Thatcham: They have 14 on the books, usually manage between 6 & 12 for a Sunday service and practices can be 6-16 with regular visitors. They have 1 under 16 learner.

Mark Robins – Hungerford: Usually manage 7 sometimes up to 8 for Sunday service, below 5 and they don't ring, this doesn't happen often. They normally get 6-16 on practice nights but do rely on

visitors. They use a WhatsApp group to communicate as it's useful to know in advance if ringing isn't viable for both practice & service. Despite a few recruitment campaigns they have no learners but it is a lively tower, with 2 outings per year and a regular QPs before the Sunday PM service.

Nick Annetts – Lambourn: Usually ring for service with 3 ringers, unfortunately one ringer works on a Sunday and another is in the choir so needed in church. Practices had been suspended through the winter months, due to visitors having to travel. Hoping to have a recruitment day within the next couple of months, someone has already expressed interest in learning to ring. Third Wednesday of the month we join with East Garston & Great Shefford for a Valley Practice, alternating between the churches.

Maureen Velvick – East Garston: With help from Lambourn, we can normally manage 6 for Service, including our learner. Practices are generally well attended & with visitors we manage to ring a wide variety from call changes to minor. As with Lambourn we join in with the Valley Practice held the 3rd Wednesday of every month.

Kintbury – Mike Hopkins Till: There are not any services so no ringing but for special services, Easter etc. a band can normally be found. Wedding ringing is also covered. Practice nights are usually 5-6 ringers.

Midgham/Shaw – Roy Pratley: No Service ringing but a band can always be found from around the Branch to ring for weddings. There was an idea to train a new band of ringers for Shaw to be discussed later in the meeting.

Although there were no representatives from Chaddleworth, Brightwalton or Great Shefford it is known that Great Shefford ring for Sunday services and help out at Chaddleworth and Brightwalton when needed. Practice night at Great Shefford is usually well attended & the ringers participate in the 3rd Wednesday Valley practice. Marcus Allum reported that Aldworth also managed to ring for services and had around 7 active ringers even though only 1 was a registered Branch Member. He also said that Farnborough bells rang for Sunday service using an automated chime.

Martin said he was pleased to see that most of the Churches seem to be active and managing to ring for most services.

Development Ideas - Towers seem to be getting together to bring along bell handling skills, progressing to rounds and call changes. Newbury focused on one bell for the learners, it can be silenced and learners can also, with the aid of visuals see how their handling relates to the bell movement. He said that Newbury would be very happy for any tower to make use of the facility, possibly with Tower Captains and Learners coming together. Lucy Hopkins Till handed out a list of any ringing requirement towers might need help with and ask those in attendance to tick where appropriate so she could assess & action the Branch needs.

Safeguarding - all Towers should be aware of their own churches Safeguarding rules and their own safeguarding officer. DBS checks should also be applied should towers have under age learners. Every ringer should have basic awareness and the Tower Captain should have at least a foundation. Thatcham had been asked to by their PCC to fill in a Volunteers Agreement. Some towers use a register to record those present in the ringing chamber. It was felt that this was a good idea to safeguard those present,

Recruitment - Most towers seem to be doing well with their own recruitment but to help those that weren't a Branch wide recruiting programme was discussed with the possibility of using the press and social media. Lucy Hopkins Till suggested that this could be combined with the CCCBRs "Ringing

2030", using their posters and advertising merchandise. She'd been tasked by the Central Council to compile a country wide list of good competent ringing teachers and would be contacting district and branch secretaries over the coming months. Lucy thought that a good environment to teach and bring people on was to get a group together so that they weren't pressurised or intimidated by more advanced ringers. It was generally thought that this was a good idea. Martin Rice reiterated his previous offer of using Newbury for this purpose.

Roy Prately then spoke about St Mary's, Shaw, at the moment he could muster a team from the Branch to ring for weddings but knew from speaking to the Shaw Clergy that they would really like their own band of ringers so the service ringing could be a regular thing. He was quite happy to produce a poster and advertise within the church magazine for anyone wishing to learn, he would be the main contact but asked that should anyone interested in learning come forward that help would be given in teaching. It was agreed that the Branch would help. Mark Robins would look into the "Yellow YoYo" the name given for the Central Council 2030 recruitment campaign to see if there were any ringing information that would help.

Branch Practices - Are going very well with both the 1st Friday & Advanced Practices being well attended. The practice held at Thatcham on April 4th proved popular & it was good to see all abilities trying their hand on 6 - 10 bells. A good variety of ringing and ringing abilities.

Mike Hurst said he plans to organise Advanced practices along the same lines and would include Minor methods

Lucy proposed the possibility of holding Saturday practices for those that can't make a Friday evening.

Branch Outing - Used to be quite popular when everyone could go by coach but now hire costs were prohibitive. There wasn't any interest in organising a full Branch Outing and towers seemed to be organising their own.

Branch Dinner – This also used to be quite popular and was held at the end of the Branch QP Week, this hadn't been the case for a few years. A few suggestions were made, using a hall, branch subsidy etc. but no organiser was forthcoming. The Curry & Quarter used to be quite popular too but numbers to that would be limited to the number of bells. There was no decision

Any Other Business - John Durham wanted to know if anyone knew of any virtual ringing room that would show the theory of ringing into practice, where you could see the bell changes. There seemed to be a disconnect between the 2. It was agreed that virtual ringing sometimes doesn't help, however there were lots of programmes available. Showing the changes on Handbells was given as an alternative.

Change of Bank Account – Maureen Velvick reported that the Branch bank account held at Lloyds would incur charges from April and suggested that the account was moved to another bank. After a quick discussion Metro Bank was the one that had most support. The move from Lloyds to Metro was put to the vote and was agreed by all.

Date of Next Meeting: Saturday - October 18th, St Mary's, Shaw

The meeting closed at 8:50pm