

Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers – Newbury Branch
Minutes of Tower Captains/Tower Correspondents Meeting
Saturday, 25th October, 2025 at 7pm
St Mary's Church, Shaw-cum Donnington, Newbury

Present: Graham Green (Speen), Michael Hurst, Advanced Ringing Master (Bucklebury), Angela Brown (Stanford Dingley), Roy Pratley (Midgham, Shaw), Lucy Hopkins-Till, Training Officer (Kintbury), Mike Hopkins-Till (Kintbury), Marcus Allum, Vice Chairman (Yattendon), Nick Annetts, Webmaster (Lambourn), Maureen Velvick, Treasurer/Minute taker (East Garston), Martin Rice, Chairman (Newbury), Mike Head (Peasemore), & John Manley (Aldermaston)

Apologies were received from: John Hibbert (East Ilsley), Rod Brown (Chieveley), Andrea Barletta (Hungerford), Mark Robins (Hungerford), Chris Maslen (Beenham) & Rachel Backhouse (Thatcham).

Minutes of 5th April – Accepted as correct with 2 amendments.

Angela Brown pointed out that although the minutes said that Stanford Dingley only chimed one bell for weddings this was incorrect. All 4 bells are rung for weddings. Martin Rice corrected the spelling of Pratley, it had been inconsistent, being incorrectly spelt as Prately. Amendments were noted & the Minutes signed.

Matters Arising

The Branch bank account had successfully moved from Lloyds to Metro however despite assurance that this would now be a free account (no charges) a letter had been received informing of the Metro's decision to introduce a £3 per month bank charge, starting December. Maureen Velvick advised the meeting that this charge was still £1.75 cheaper than Lloyds. It was generally felt that it would be a waste of time moving again as the probability of the same thing happening again was high.

Tower Updates:

Martin Rice – Newbury: Going reasonably well, as reported previously they had 4 Duke of Edinburgh award scheme girls back in the Spring. It was a tick off exercise and they didn't continue after 6 weeks, this was a shame as 3 were reasonably good and the hope is they will pick it up again in the future. Their older learners were progressing and were joining in Sunday Service ringing, rounds & call changes.

Marcus Allum – Yattendon & Hampstead Norreys: Normally managed to ring for Sunday Service, alternative towers. They generally had enough for the alternate weekly practices.

Graham Green – Speen: Since the last meeting they had installed a board on the ladder up to the belfry restricting access and also had attached a padlock to the rope pulley. This had been advised by the church Ecclesiastical insurance.

Angela Brown – Stanford Dingley: As mentioned in the Amendments of 5th April, otherwise nothing further to report.

Mike Hurst – Bucklebury: Learners were progressing, some faster than others, Daniel now is able to take part in the service ringing. Practices are variable with a steady 7 & they are grateful for the help of their regular visitors. Sunday service ringing is normally covered with the help of Roy and Angela.

Martin Rice – Thatcham: Going reasonably well, they have a mother and son ringing and also a mother with a baby which she brings with her.

Nick Annetts – Lambourn: Usually ring for service with 3 ringers, however we now have 3 learners, 2 of which we are hoping will soon be ready to join us, whilst 1 is taking a little longer.

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.

Maureen Velvick – Great Shefford: Usually manage a weekly practice and are sometimes joined by East Garston or they join East Garston, depending on numbers. Also attend the Valley Practice held monthly. Service ringing is normally covered and the ringers help with both Brightwalton and Chaddleworth when needed. The churches are the same Benefice.

Mike Hopkins Till - Kintbury: Only 1 local ringing, the rest come in from other towers to regularly practice, used really as a training session, some of the Highclere ringers belong to the Newbury Branch.

John Manley - Aldermaston: They have 4 resident ringers, but they prove hard to pin down for practice but 2 usually attend for service ringing, here are only 2 services per month. The other 2 don't due to tower politics. Practices are helped by Beenham and John also goes there to help with their practice nights. John said he had taught 3 & 1 is in progress from Kingsclere. They have very few weddings, the bells were always available for Quarter Peals if required. All the pulleys have been replaced.

Mike Head - Peasemore: Practices vary in number with only 5 this week but as high as 13 in the summer. Ringers are moving with difficulty onto Plain Bob Doubles & Grandsire & the striking is improving. Rod Brown always helps. There are other things being held in the village on a Thursday evening and so they lose some of the ringers then. The bells are popular with Peal ringers and Mike said that one that had been rung recently was the best ringing he'd ever heard, every lead was identifiable.

Marcus Allum - Compton: They had held an open afternoon which had been successful, he was teaching 4 learners on alternate Thursdays & was hoping that they were going to be ready to cover their own Christmas services. The youngest recruit being 10 years old.

Roy Pratley - Midgham - Ring once a month & the bells are used for a number of Quarter Peals. The pulleys & some fitments will need looking at they are plastic and getting old.

Roy Pratley - Shaw: Has no service ringing but is used regularly for Quarter Peals. Shaw had also been used as one of the Bradfield Ringing Course Towers. However neighbouring Shaw House had sent in a noise complaint as some of the ringing had interfered with an event that was being hosted. An agreement has been reached and there is to be no ringing on specific dates. Roy had a list of dates and has passed them onto the Branch. Wedding ringing is an exception. He also said that he'd tried really hard to recruit ringers throughout the summer using the Newbury Weekly News, the Out & About, the Church Bulletins & produced posters, which were on display. Someone had shown an interest but after a practice session in Thatcham they had decided not to continue. He hadn't given up hope and would try again. Lucy informed him that he hadn't wasted his time, he'd bought ringing to the attention of anyone that had read his advertising & good publicity was always beneficial. Recruitment across the Branch would be discussed in Any Other Business.

Any Other Business:

Martin informed the meeting that he had just discovered that Lucy is lead on the Central Council 2030 Recruitment Drive (YOLO), he asked Lucy to give a resume.

The drive was guided by 3 pillars. **Firstly:** Publicity on awareness, there were advertising aids and information available of the CCCBR Website. Items were available for purchase including customised banners. The aim of the Council was to recruit 20,000 ringers by 2030 with half of them being under the age of 30. Marcus commented that he didn't think that just a date of 2030 wasn't inspirational, not like a big national event, citing the Millenium and Ring for the King campaign. There was general agreement on this point. **Secondly:** Good Training and Development. **Thirdly:** Ringing Environment

in the Ringing Chamber etc., this included the cleanliness of the tower, was it a welcoming to new ringers.

She pointed out that over the Newbury Branch; we were short of at least 47 ringers. Although most towers seem to manage to ring for service, that was due to towers in close proximity helping one another out. Which brings in the question, should we hold a big recruitment drive across the Branch & should it be focused with every tower holding their own or should there be certain towers open where anyone interested could go and try their hand.

Mike Head asked if it would be ok to use a normal practice or would it be a special session. Lucy said she didn't think it mattered as long as there was a good teacher and there seemed to be quite a few across the Branch. Martin suggested that perhaps we could invite an ART teacher to come and give a talk and have a bit of a social event. A vote was held on this, but the suggestion was declined. It was generally felt that the towers were coping very well without instruction.

After lengthy discussion it was decided that most towers were managing the recruiting themselves using word of mouth and social media. Compton being a prime example. So maybe we should focus on one tower at a time. The general consensus was that a good starting point would be Shaw, Roy said he would be very grateful for all the help he could get. It was decided to set up a recruitment steering committee. Lucy suggested Nick Annetts for the Social Media side, he was happy to help. Marcus would come to the initial meeting to give advice on how Compton had achieved success but was not prepared to help further, he was already stretching himself. Roy would be included as would Raymond Obin from the church. It was decided that a further meeting would be held in Shaw, a date to be arranged between Martin and Raymond Obin. Attendees would be. Lucy & Mike Hopkins-Till, Martin Rice, Nick Annetts, Roy Pratley, Raymond Obin, Marcus Allum & Maureen Velvick. Nick would bring to the meeting an information leaflet that had been produced & available in both Lambourn and East Garston to anyone interested in their ringing and bells.

Before the meeting came to an end Martin said that the Guild Ringing Master, Katie Lane hadn't been receiving dates for our Branch Practices. Mike Hurst said he always sent out the Advanced Practice notices himself to the Branch Mailing list (this would include anyone from outside the Branch that had requested this) and she had received that however if notices were sent to Branch Members Only, she wouldn't receive this. Martin was going to let Rachel Backhouse and Mark Robins know to use the correct address to use.

Date of Next Meeting: Saturday 11th April, 2026 at St Mary's Hall, Shaw

The meeting closed at: 8:40pm