

Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers – Newbury Branch
Minutes of Annual General Meeting
1st March, 2025 at 4pm
The Church of All Saints, East Garston

Present:

Stuart Gibson (Guild Treasurer), Peter Robson (Guild Steward), Martin Rice (Chairman), Maureen Velvick (Treasurer), Mark Robins (Secretary), Sue Smith (Midweek Ringing Master), Mike Hopkins Till (Advanced Practice Ringing Master), Chris Maslen (200 Club Organiser), Lucy Hopkins Till (Training Officer), Nick Annetts (Webmaster), Tony Smith, Rachel Backhouse, Mark Backhouse, Rosemary Evans, John Durham, Ros Durham, Mike Hurst, Angela Brown, Marcus Allum, Amanda Marchant, George Rabbitts, John Manley, Eric Edwards & Rebecca Gay

1. Welcome:

Martin welcomed Stuart Gibson (Guild Treasurer), Peter Robson (Guild Steward) and all those present at the meeting.

2. Act of Remembrance:

There were no deaths reported in the Branch during the year.

3. Apologies for Absence:

Katie Lane (ODG Ringing Master), Kevin & Lin Rogers, Roy Pratley, David & Debbie Bebbington, Kath Fitsell, Dave Thorpe, John Kape, Nigel Gay & Sarah Montgomery.

4. Minutes of 2024 AGM:

Acceptance of a true record was proposed by Peter Robson & seconded by Mike Hopkins Till, all in favour. Martin Rice signed them.

5. Matters Arising:

(j) Guild Representatives: Maureen Velvick noted that in the minutes it was suggested that a donation from ringers present at Branch practice might be taken for the host tower, in line with the midweek practice or perhaps from the Branch funds. This hadn't progressed. Those present agreed that it was a good idea and should be implemented, the voluntary donations to be made by those present at the practice, starting in April.

6. Officers' Report:

(a) Chairman: Martin was very pleased to see the higher number of Branch Members shown on Appendix: 1 of the Audited Accounts, an increase of 14 members over the year. The Branch numbers were healthy and from visiting towers over the year it was good to see the initiatives in training and recruitment across the towers.

(b) Midweek Ringing Master: The Midweek Ringing on the third Wednesday of the month followed by lunch at a local pub continued to remain very popular in 2024. Our first six visits last year were to Newbury Branch Towers, three to six bell towers, two to eight bell towers and the ten in Thatcham where we started in January.

We went to East Garston in March. For many of the Group this was the first ring here since the bells had been rehung. As Tony and I were on holiday in September, Maureen Velvick arranged to meet at North Moreton followed by lunch at the Red Lion in Brightwell-com-Sotwell. The final tower of the year was the six at St Mary Bourne, where only six members arrived on time as there was a road closure in the village and the diversion route was blocked by a lorry unloading. Tony & Kevin abandoned their cars and walked the last half mile.

Numbers of Members attending has varied from 12 in the holiday months to a maximum of 22 in some months. The standard of ringing has remained high with doubles and triples to surprise minor and major rung at most meetings.

My thanks to members for their continued support and especially Tony for his help.

(c) Branch Ringing Masters:

1st Friday, Martin Rice; Numbers vary with a minimum of 6 at the December practice but generally there are sufficient numbers to enable all ringing abilities with helpers if needed. The December practice might need looking at to see if it's worth holding. Angela Brown noted that the October practice in Beenham was also very low in numbers.

Advanced Practice: Mike Hopkins Till; Through 2024 there had been a change of approach using most of the 8 & 10 towers in the Branch. It was disappointing that some of the less advanced method practices weren't as expected, especially as they had been requested. There was no practice in December due to the proximity to Christmas. It was very difficult to run practices and pitch the right style.

Comments: Martin agreed that run practices to satisfy all was indeed difficult. Mike Hurst suggested it might help to mix up the towers a bit so use the 8s as well as the 6s for the 1st Friday, practice. He himself welcomed the chance to ring on higher numbers whilst learning. It was agreed that feedback from the Branch would be sought.

(d) Secretary: Mark said that over the last few years the job had been split between himself & the Branch Treasurer, he considered himself the Communication Secretary dealing with both Branch & Guild correspondence, gathering information and compiling the Branch Report for the Guild, he has learnt over the years what they expected. He'd also been using Membermojo the new Guild communication software and it would make the secretaries job less onerous. The treasurer took the meetings minutes and distributed them. The split seemed to work well & he saw no reason to change it.

(e) Treasurer: I hope you have all got a copy of the accounts in front of you and that they are clear to understand.

This is my first year as treasurer and I have to thank Martin for advice on the wording of the 200 Club & Chris Maslen for pointing out that I had put the 2025 projection the wrong way around. I'd also like to thank James Pryer who audited the accounts. For those of you that received an electronic copy, please note that the Income & Expenditure sheet is now showing the 2025 200 club subscriptions on a separate line for clarity & the 200 Club projection has been amended. The audited copies & the paper copies you have been given are correct.

If you have any questions then please don't hesitate to ask & I'll answer to the best of my ability

As you can see, we have a balance of £4589.12 of which £630 is earmarked for the 200 club & £25 for the Auditors renumeration, if approved. It leaves a balance of £3964.12 dormant in the bank. & with interest on the Deposit Account going down in April from 1.00% to 0.80%. It is something that we as a Branch need to think about. The CCLA Investment Management Ltd (Uks largest manager of ethical and sustainable investments for charities, churches & local authorities) that Stuart mentioned last year, in particularly The CBF Church of England Deposit Fund. The Deposit rate tracker at the end of February was showing 4.4500% and with yearly charges of less than 1% it's nearly 3 times the rate we are getting at the moment, which if we transferred £2k it would generate approx. £60 per annum whereas at the moment leaving it where it is the estimate would be approx. £17.

Comments: Mark Backhouse pointed out that the total shown in the income column was incorrect by £200. Maureen: apologised for the typo and would get it corrected. A discussion was held regarding the CCLA and it was proposed and accepted by all that this should be something we as a Branch should go ahead with. Stuart Gibson cleared up a misgiving about charity status that had been voiced by Mike Hopkins Till & stated that a lot of the ODG towers had taken this route. Maureen to liaise with Stuart as to the way forward.

(f) 200 Club Organiser: This is just a very quick report on the 200 club.

Firstly, I would like to give my thanks to all who bought subscriptions in the 200 club and all the Tower reps who went round and collected the money from the ringers.

For the few who don't know this was set up, before my time, to raise money for the ODG Bell Fund. The rules state that at least 50% of the money collected goes towards the Bell Fund and the remainder is given out in prizes. This year, there were 161 subscriptions, the same as last year, resulting in a total of £805.

As a consequence; I propose that, as last year we donate £405 to the ODG Bell Fund, the remaining £400 being prizes. I hope this meets with everybody's approval.

So far, we have had the Christmas draw and a draw last month. The prizes at Christmas were £100, £50 & £25 and last month's prizes were £75 and £25. There will be further draw next month with 3 prizes of £75 and 2 prizes of £25.

Proposal of £405 to be transferred to the ODG Bell Fund, accepted by all. Martin pointed out that the transfer was just over the 50% of the money collected so was within the rules. Stuart Gibson thanked the Branch for their donation.

(g) Webmaster:

Since the last AGM, the branch website is now being hosted by ODG, which was a tight turn around and as a result is now saving the branch hosting fees of circa £100 per year. The website was then relaunched with a brand-new look and feel.

Each tower now has their own dedicated page under the Towers page, with information on the church/bells, bell weights, finds us details and also a contact form. There is now an interactive branch map that upon clicking on a tower will take you to the dedicated tower page.

Looking at the year ahead, the focus on the website will be to get content for each tower's page. Newbury and Hungerford towers are good examples of content, as these were transferred from the old website. Plus adding more content such as photos of outings across the branch and any other news from the branch or towers.

Some stats since the launch of the new website (around the last 10 months) have seen 520 unique visitors. A unique visitor counts the visitors IP address and thus only records them once for example if they've visited the site multiple times. The most traffic on the website was seen in February this year (89) when all of the tower URL links on Dove's was updated to reflect the new website. Other than this the most popular months for visiting the website was around summertime.

The most visited pages on the website have been the Branch Towers, Tower Practices and Branch Map pages. Interestingly the Newbury Tower page was ranked the 3rd most visited page overall.

Comments: Martin thanked Nick for the work he'd put in and would encourage towers to send in their information, history of church & bells, facilities available & parking etc. Maureen said she found the calendar very useful. Mark Robins said Nick should be congratulated on the excellent work he has done. Rachel Backhouse found that any "request to ring" emails from visiting ringers were going to her spam account, Nick was happy to investigate and correct the problem.

(h) Training Officer: There had been training sessions covering Kent & Oxford both Minor & Major, a session of ringing up and down including leading and plain hunting in Bob Doubles. Ringing books and training bells were still available, the price of the bell remaining at £50. At the moment the training sessions were free but going back to the previous comments regarding donations at Branch Practices Lucy thought she might need to take the same approach.

(i) Newsletter Editor: Mark was still producing 2 a year and despite sending out request for content was finding himself chasing nearer the deadline. He said photographs were very welcome because you can always build a story around them. He doesn't get a lot of feed back but really enjoyed putting it together and it seemed to be well received. The comments he did receive were always good.

Comments: Sue Smith felt that Mark does a very good job and the meeting agreed

(j) Guild Representatives: There was nothing to report, both Martin & Lucy had not attended the last meeting but were intending to go to the next one which was to be held in Bucklebury on Saturday 8th March.

7. Election of Officers:

(a) Chairman: Martin Rice was proposed by Marcus Allum, seconded by Mark Robins. No other nominees, Martin duly elected. All were in favour.

(b) Vice Chairman: Marcus Allum was proposed by Mike Till, seconded by Amanda Marchant, all in favour. Marcus duly elected.

(c) Midweek Ringing Master: Sue Smith – happy to carry on. All agreed, . Sue duly elected

(d) Branch Ringing Masters:

Advanced Practice: Mike Till said he was stepping down and would not be up for re-election. John Durham was asked if he would like to take over the position but declined. Mike Hurst said he was happy to stand and would deputise for the 1st Friday Branch Practice Ringing Master & vice versa. Mike was duly elected.

1st Friday Ringing Master. Rachel Backhouse was proposed by Martin Rice. Rachel was happy to accept providing she had lifts to practices during the winter. All agreed – Rachel was duly elected.

(e) Secretary: Mark Robins was happy to carry on the way he was doing it now as long as the treasurer agreeable. All agreed, Mark duly elected.

(f) Treasurer: Maureen Velvick - happy to carry on. All agreed, Maureen duly elected.

(g) 200 Club Organiser: Chris Maslen - happy to carry on. All agreed, Chris duly elected.

(h) Training Officer: Lucy Hopkins Till - happy to carry on. All agreed, Lucy duly elected.

(i) Newsletter Editor: Mark Robins - happy to carry on. All agreed, Mark duly elected.

(j) Webmaster: Nick Annetts – happy to carry on. All agreed, Nick duly elected.

(k) Guild Representatives: Martin Rice & Lucy Hopkins Till – happy to carry on. All agreed, both were duly elected.

8. Election of New Members:

Julie Harmer (Kintbury), Heather Harmer (Kintbury), Rosie March (East Garston), Helen Cooke & Charlie Cooke (Thatcham), Nathan Lewis (East Ilsley) – there were no objections and they were all elected.

9. To Approve Auditors Honorarium £25: The meeting agreed that this was acceptable. Maureen Velvick to organise. James Poyer was happy to carry out the Audit again for 2025. All agreed.

10. Date and Venue for 2026 AGM: 7th March, 2026. St Lawrences' Hungerford.

11. Vote of Thanks: Rev. Julie Mintern, for leading the service. Lucy Hopkins Till, for playing the organ. Maureen Velvick, Amanda Merchant & Rebecca Gay for organising the tea. Nick Annetts for the printing & the Valley Ringers (East Garston, Great Shefford & Lambourn) for providing the delicious refreshments. Marcus Allum added his thanks to all the Committee, especially the Ringing Masters for all their work.

12. Any Other Business: Chris Maslen said had the Branch heard anything about the 80 years anniversary of the ending of World War II, he'd heard whispers regarding organised ringing across the nation for the event. The Branch had heard nothing from the Guild, Stuart Gibson would investigate and send out any relevant information.

Maureen Velvick bought up the possibility of reintroducing the Tower Captain/Tower Reps Meeting, they hadn't been held for some years. Lucy Hopkins Till had previously mentioned at the 2023 AGM but no results had been forthcoming, Maureen said she wasn't in favour of having meetings for meetings sake but did feel we ought to try and get together at least quarterly. Emails and Zoom Meetings are all very well but are just as easily forgotten whereas a physical meeting generates a good interactive discussion. The meeting agreed that they should be reinstated for the next year & that they should be held centrally, the first one being held in St. Marys, Shaw within 6 weeks of the AGM.

Stuart Gibson informed meeting that there were a few vacancies with in the Guild and Central Council, if anyone present were interested or knew of anyone that would be. He also said that the Higher number practices held within the Guild had been widely advertised and that the method for the 8 bell Ringing Competition was going to be Stedman Triples. Talking about Membermojo he informed the meeting that most of the information for the Guild Report could now be gathered from the new software. Guild officers had access to the distribution lists. Newbury Branch list looked mostly up to date & not to forget to inform them of any new members and make sure they register of Membermojo, He also explained that lapsed members would automatically be removed from the database at the end of the year when their subs expire.

The meeting closed at 17:20