

# Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter

October 2009, Autumn Issue

## Dates for your diary:

October

Saturday 17th, Sonning

8-bell Striking Competition, 10.00am-12.00pm followed by the Branch Practice 12.00-1.00pm

November

31st Oct - 8th Nov, Quarter peal week

Saturday 21st Arborfield

Branch Committee Meeting, 6.00pm-7.30pm followed by the Branch Practice 7.30pm-9.00pm

December

Saturday 12th, Branch Practice, Wargrave, 10.00am-12.00pm (with mince pies)

## Turn over a few stones...

...and you may be amazed what you find. That was my experience researching the history of Wokingham ringing.

Our bell restoration project came at a time when the church was actively looking outward to the local community. In fact, our project was rolled into a much bigger one to build 'The Cornerstone' community hall. In response, we organised many visits up the tower, and I gave talks about bells and bell-ringing to lots of groups. One group we contacted, The Wokingham Society, suggested that I might write an article on the history of the bells, which seemed a good idea, but when I started gathering information, the story rapidly outgrew an 'article', and it was obviously going to turn into a book. By coincidence, our 2004 restoration came exactly 300 years after our two oldest bells were hung, as part of a ring of six. That gave a 300 year framework for the main part of the book.

One of our band helpfully found a few mentions of bells or ringers in 19th century Parish Magazines, so I spent many hours wading through the rest of them (from 1865 to the present) looking for more. You would be amazed at some of the contents: railway timetables, opening hours of banks, the soup kitchen, 'St Paul's Coal Club', etc My wife (a member of the Wokingham History Group) suggested I look in the Berkshire Record office. Then there are indexes for The Ringing World (from 1911) and Bell

News (1881-1915). We have tower records too (minute books back to 1935 and scrap books back to 1978).

Historians know (but I didn't) that the more you dig the more you find, and that each answer points to yet more questions. You get hooked. As the story emerges it becomes more compelling, with a desire to find the missing pieces of each little jigsaw. For example F Lush and W Lush appear in the records of our members. I soon discovered that the brothers Frank and Walter Lush were coach builders to the royalty of most of Europe. But Wokingham had two F Lushes (both unhelpfully called Frank) and two W Lushes (Walter and William) in the late 1800s. Trying to unravel that puzzle took a lot of effort. It also added a poignancy, when I found a small wooden cross carved by Frank Lush from the oak frame removed in 1903.

As well as digging through documents, I managed to contact quite a few ex ringers or their relatives, in person, by phone or e-mail. Many provided me with old pictures as well as their personal memories.

When I started, I just wanted to 'do my bit for history', but a full scale book needed a clear view of who I was writing for. Was I only writing for ringers? I decided that I wasn't. I wanted to make the book accessible to non-ringers as well, to open the world of ringing to them. The book does that in a way that no tower visit ever could, because it doesn't just present a snapshot of current ringing; it follows successive generations of ringers through times of great change, through successes and failures. It looks at their relationships, and the role they played, for example in the formation of the Sonning Deanery Society, and in their relationships with the church. I almost feel I know some of the characters.

Ringing is the common thread throughout the whole story, but it is a sobering thought how much else has changed. When the bells were installed in 1704 we were using the Julian calendar. Europe was in the 'Little Ice Age'. Johnson's dictionary and Handel's Messiah had not appeared. The slave trade was flourishing. England had a seventh of today's population. Wokingham had regular bull baiting.

There is a lot more than ringing in the book: death in the belfry, warnings that the tower would collapse, pigeon catchers among the up-turned bells, fraudulent impersonation of the ringers, a donation from the Queen, a house called 'Ringwell', and much more. For more information see: [www.jaharrison.me.uk/book/](http://www.jaharrison.me.uk/book/)

John Harrison

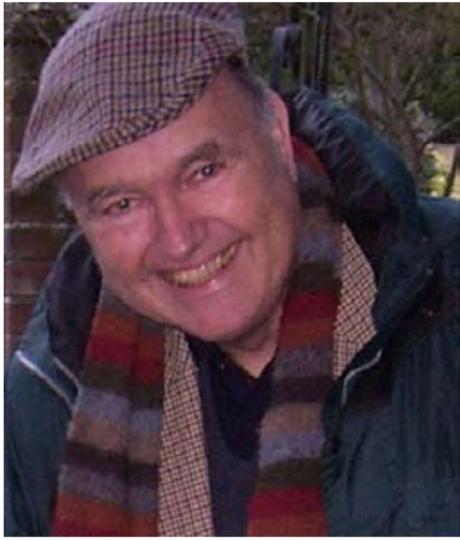
**The Bradfield Ringing Course** may be more familiar to some readers as the Sparsholt/Wantage/Crowthorne course. The course's current home is Bradfield College, Berkshire, where it has been based since 2008 and according to the course welcome statement it's 'still the same friendly and busy course'. It was my first course so I can't comment on previous courses, but based on my experience of another long-running residential ringing course I can confirm that high quality ringing training was provided in an atmosphere of friendship, encouragement and fun. Attendance on the course is by application and the number of students accepted is limited by the number of tutors and helpers; inevitably some applicants are disappointed. So, if you are competent ringer and like the idea of spending four days in the company of other like-minded people, totally immersed in ringing and helping students improve their ringing skills then I'm sure the organisers would love to hear from you. Nearly all the helpers in my group had been students on the course in previous years; they said they enjoyed being helpers and from the students' perspective each in their way made an important contribution to the course. The full residential cost to students in 2009 was £172 and this covered tuition, use of Bradfield College facilities, tower donations, the majority of meals, tea/coffee and biscuits. For those without their own transport, it is also worth saying that it is not essential that you bring your own means of transport, so I left Bruno at my Mum's place in Devon.



If you are able to at least raise and lower a bell and ring rounds and call changes unaided then there will be a group addressing the ringing skills you are currently trying to acquire or improve. This year there were 12 groups, each comprising five or six students, with a similar number of helpers, who under the guidance of an experienced tutor were working on methods ranging from rounds and call changes (Bell Experience), through the common minor and major methods and up to the dizzy heights of surprise major. Applicants are encouraged not to overestimate their potential progress between May and August (when the course runs) and to make their applications for specific groups based on a realistic assessment of their CURRENT ringing ability. I strongly endorse this advice; what little experience I had of ringing on unfamiliar bells and with unfamiliar bands prior to the course, suggested that my general inexperience would mean that I would probably struggle in any group other than Bell Experience. My decision to opt for Bell Experience was the right one, but by the end of the weekend I was working on aspects of plain hunt because tuition is tailored to each student.

The course comprises six group ringing sessions of 1.5 - 2 hrs duration and three theory sessions, plus about six optional theory or masterclass sessions covering subjects as diverse as practical ringing skills, rope splicing, hand bells and bell-ringing history. The optional sessions were particularly informative and the all tutors were friendly and approachable. All in all, I made many new friends, came away with the experience of a range of bells that I hoped to get and filled in numerous gaps in my ringing knowledge. Plus, I got to meet my No. 1 ringing hero Steve Coleman, whose book "The Early Bellringers Companion" has been a source of considerable encouragement during my struggle to learn how to change ring. I certainly recommend the course to anyone wishing to improve or extend their ringing skills. If I were not returning to the ringing desert that is Scotland for employment reasons, I would be eagerly awaiting the launch of the website for the 2010 course in January. Further details on the course and how to apply will be posted at <http://www.bradfield-ringing-course.org.uk/> or Mike Winterbourne, the organising team leader, can be contacted direct on 01264 790179, or at [team@bradfield-ringing-course.org.uk](mailto:team@bradfield-ringing-course.org.uk), or by snail mail: 11 Astor Crescent, Ludgershall, SP11 9RG.

Emma Tilston, Arborfield



## Christopher John Brown – obituary

Chris Brown died early on Sunday 23rd August, and his funeral service was held at St. Catherine's Church, Bearwood on Tuesday 1st September. The service was conducted by the Rev'd Haigh Etches, and this obituary is mostly an abridged version of his address made from details provided by Chris's wife Joanna (Jo).

Chris was born during the war, in Bristol, on 31st January 1943 – his parents' first child. His father saw him briefly before being posted to the Italian front. By the time he returned to Britain Chris was 3 years old and only recognised his father from the photograph on the mantelpiece. So Chris spent his early years living at Frenchay on the outskirts of Bristol – with his mother, grandfather and aunt.

As time went by, Pam, Peter and Catherine were added to the family, and they all have fond memories of their big brother. They remember him being adept at building wonderful things with Meccano, and experimenting with chemistry sets and electronics. He attended Bristol Grammar School, where he showed a great aptitude for maths, science and music. He played both the piano and the school organ for assemblies. He was sparing with words, and when he was asked to write a report on a school trip he famously wrote, 'The Abbey Gardens at Tresco are too beautiful for words.' – full stop!

When the family moved from Bristol to Portbury in his teenage years, Chris complained that living in the country ruined his social life – he had to leave films before the end in order to catch the last bus home! He was a keen bell ringer from his early teens, and rang in most of the Somerset and South Gloucestershire towers.

After school he went to Birmingham University, and there he met Jo Lonsdale on Valentine's Day 1962. At University he changed from Physics to Maths and did one of the early courses in Computing.

He became a graduate apprentice at Head Wrightson & Co., who were heavy engineers constructing bridges, dock gates, and sections of the London Underground. He worked at the iron foundry and had to get used to their strong Teesside accents and to their thick, sugary tea, which was heated on a hot casting.

Chris and Jo were married at Stockton parish church in 1965. They lived in Middlesbrough, and Chris went bell ringing at Stockton and other local churches and also played croquet at the Friarage, Yarm. He was also involved in work for the nuclear power programme.

His work had involved more and more computing – including computer controlled drills. He moved to Teesside Polytechnic to be in charge of, and control, the computer there. Their son Nicholas was born in 1971, followed by George in 1975. Those were years when high inflation affected the economy; Chris resigned and took a Diploma of European Management at the same Poly. He had an abiding interest in naval history (his great uncle had been in the Royal Navy) and he liked going over naval ships while in the North East.

In 1977 he was required to spend three months work experience, so Chris arranged his own placement at the European Division of ICL, based in Paris. He worked his placement there and was given a permanent job. So the family moved to Vernouillet sur Seine and

stayed there from 1977 to 1983. He started to do work for the European Commission, which continued when he came back to ICL in Bracknell, which involved helping member countries to work collaboratively. He stayed there until 1992.

When Chris was made redundant in the 1992 downturn he started his own business focussing on IT consultancy. He sold information from the Official Journal of the EU about public sector tenders to such companies that might wish to tender for those contracts. He also did some IT work involving sales and invoicing systems. Jo gave up her work as Senior Teacher at the Holt School to work alongside Chris in his business.

Chris took up bell ringing again, especially at Hurst, Sonning and St. Paul's Wokingham. He was a very regular supporter of those towers, was a Deputy Ringing Master of the branch for a time, and was very helpful to others being a calm and effective conductor. Some handbell ringers from St. Paul's rang for a few minutes in the churchyard just prior to the burial.

In 1987 Peter Giles phoned Chris to say that the Twyford Singers had lost their conductor and would Chris like to succeed him. Chris learnt the score of the first concert on the plane to Brussels. He thoroughly enjoyed being their conductor, and choir members remember how kind and generous and unfailingly patient he was with them, and particularly remember his great, beaming smile. He continued as their conductor until 2005. Some of the Twyford Singers sang a couple of his favourite pieces in the church as a tribute to him. The family also enjoyed his piano playing at home, and church members and other friends warmly remember Christmas carols together at Chris and Jo's home. Sometimes he helped out as organist at Bearwood and at Hurst. He and Jo hosted summer BBQs in their beautiful back garden, and he enjoyed gardening and strolls in the countryside.

There are sadder memories of Chris becoming ill in January – but for a long time being given no definite diagnosis – until it eventually emerged that he had a rare form of terminal cancer. Plans for a retirement move to Frome had to be abandoned, and Chris encouraged Jo to arrange a much more local move within Wokingham.

A little over a fortnight before he died he asked the Rev'd Etches to arrange for his confirmation in hospital. Chris said that as a boy he felt science explained everything, but as he got older he felt there was spiritual truth as well as scientific truth, and that he had been very impressed with Jo's faith as the years went by. He had done many things for the church but now wanted to opt in fully.

Chris's family have asked for their thanks to be passed on to all those who have given their support, and to those who have expressed their sympathy by card or letter.

Rob Needham

I currently have three sashweights that are superfluous to requirements. If anyone would like one or more of these as trapdoor counterbalances they are welcome to contact me on 0118 9401378. Each weight weighs 5 pounds.

Dave Sullivan, Wargrave

## Quarter Peals and Peals

### Is it really 50 years?

They say 'any excuse for a peal', but my peal record is quite modest. Most of my peals tend to be to mark events and anniversaries. I had vaguely thought about ringing a peal 50 years after I learnt to ring (in spring 1959 – I didn't record the exact date) but not done anything about it. Then I saw that a friend who learnt a few months before me, and with whom I rang pretty solidly until I left home, had done just that in November. And not only did he ring a peal to mark his 50 years, but he named a new method after the place where we learnt to ring – Kirkby-in-Ashfield. It was a small mining town, but since the demise of coal it now relies on light industry. When we rang there it was a five, but it is now an easy going eight (we both rang in the first peal on the augmented bells in 2001).

I decided that I would follow suit with a peal of Kirkby-in-Ashfield Surprise Major at Wokingham. In the band, I was able to get people who had rung with me at all stages of my ringing career. As well as current Wokingham ringers, there was Martin Kirk from Kirkby, Ken Darvill from Cambridge, and Nigel Herriott who used to ring at All Saints. We had some problems finding a date that suited everyone, but in the end chose 9th May. Thankfully it wasn't as hot as the same weekend last year, when we rang the twin peals at All Saints and St Paul's. I had assumed that our peal would be the second in the method, but then we discovered that Andrew Mills had rung it a week before in Dundee. That made



The band (L-R): Chris Cole, Jon Tutcher, Nigel Mellor, Ken Davenport, John Harrison, Martin Kirk, Ken Darvill, Nigel Herriott.

us the third – or so we thought. Later we discovered that Bernard Groves had rung it in Hampshire before Christmas, so that made us fourth. It seems to be very popular, which isn't too surprising since it is quite a nice method.

John Harrison

Saturday, 9 May 2009 in 2h51m (15-2-11), All Saints

5088 Kirkby-in-Ashfield Surprise Major, Composed by: Donald F Morrison (No 3835)

- 1 Martin J Kirk
- 2 John A Harrison
- 3 Kenneth J Darvill
- 4 Nigel AL Mellor
- 5 W Nigel G Herriott (C)
- 6 Christopher P Cole
- 7 Kenneth R Davenport
- 8 Jon P Tutcher

Rung to mark 50 years since John Harrison learnt to ring at Kirkby-in-Ashfield.

26th July 2009

St. Andrew's, Sonning, Berkshire  
1288 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Rob Needham
- 2 Brian Snell
- 3 Joyce Vernon
- 4 Alison Clayton
- 5 Pam Elliston
- 6 Alan K Barsby
- 7 David Sullivan (C)
- 8 Andrew Elliston

Rung as a birthday compliment to Alan Barsby.

9th August 2009

St. Andrew's, Sonning, Berkshire  
1280 Plain Bob Major

- 1 Rob Needham
- 2 Pam Elliston
- 3 John Harrison
- 4 Peter Kemm
- 5 David Willis
- 6 Andrew Elliston
- 7 Simon Milford
- 8 David Sullivan (C)

10th April 2009

St. Michael's, Sandhurst, Berkshire  
1260 Grandsire Doubles, 42 minutes

- 1 Clifford Hales
  - 2 Michael Sherren
  - 3 Graham Steele
  - 4 Simon Paterson
  - 5 Derek Palmer (c)
  - 6 Michael Paterson
- Rung half muffled before the Good Friday Family Service.

16th August 2009

St. Andrew's, Sonning, Berkshire  
1274 Plain Bob Triples

- 1 Rob Needham
- 2 Joyce Vernon
- 3 Alan K Barsby
- 4 Alison Clayton
- 5 David Willis
- 6 John Harrison
- 7 David Sullivan (C)
- 8 Keith Vernon

19th July 2009

All Saints, Wokingham, Berkshire  
1320 Cambridge Surprise Minor:

- 1 Mary Spence
  - 2 Barbara G Smith
  - 3 Stephen R Smith
  - 4 Simon C Farrar (C)
  - 5 Gram E Slade
  - 6 Jon P Tutcher
- For evensong

27th September, 2009

St. Michael and St. Mary  
Magdalene  
Easthampstead, Berkshire  
1280 Yorkshire Surprise Major  
(42mins)

- 1 Paul Fox
- 2 Ann Martin
- 3 Judith Bowler
- 4 John Manley
- 5 Barbara Wells
- 6 Anthony Perry
- 7 Eddie Martin
- 8 Steven C. Wells (C)

Rung as a compliment to Catharine and David Fox for their Golden Wedding Anniversary

Chairman	Rachel Moss	25 Brownrigg Crescent, Bracknell, RG12 2PY	01344 459978	chairman@sdb.odg.org.uk
Ringing Master	Ken Davenport	47 Brookside Wokingham RG41 2ST		brm@sdb.odg.org.uk
Deputy Ringing Master	John Manley			dbrm@sdb.odg.org.uk
Treasurer	Eric Bowes	7 Wield Court, Earley RG6 3TF	0118 9268076	treasurer@sdb.odg.org.uk
Secretary	Andrew Moss	25 Brownrigg Crescent, Bracknell, RG12 2PY	01344 459978	secretary@sdb.odg.org.uk
Training Co-ordinator	John Harrison	2 Murdoch Road, Wokingham, RG40 2DA	0118 978 5520	training@sdb.odg.org.uk
Branch Reps	Pam & Andrew Elliston	142 Butts Hill Road, Woodley, Reading RG5 4NS	0118 969 5967	committee@sdb.odg.org.uk
Bookstall	Rob Needham	15 Bodmin Road, Woodley, Reading, RG5 3RZ	0118 926 7724	librarian@sdb.odg.org.uk
Newsletter Editor	Sarah Boys	24 Tyler Drive, Arborfield, RG2 9NG	0118 9762413	editor@sdb.odg.org.uk
Webmaster	Aidan Hopkins	14 Harpesford Avenue, Virginia Water, GU25 4RD	01344 206173	webmaster@sdb.odg.org.uk