

Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



July 2012, Summer Issue



Busy times at Easthampstead

Over the past month, we have rung 3 quarter peals and attempted 2 more, had the tower open for the jubilee weekend and recruited a new batch of learners, 3 children and 2 adults.

For the Queen's Jubilee, our church held a very successful flower festival and the bell ringers were asked to participate, both with a flower arrangement and also to have the tower open for visitors.

Lots of visitors were interested in the bells and were shown demonstrations of how to ring a bell, with a TV link up in the belfry.

For the ringers flower arrangement, a bell wheel was borrowed from Wokingham St. Paul's, red, white and blue bell ropes from Sonning and Berkhamstead and with an idea from Rachel & Andrew's wedding photos, together with some original coronation bunting from 1953, we created a design called "Royal Bells". Rachel had only done "jam jar" flower arrangements before, so she was really pleased with the final result!

Barbara Wells

Diary of Events

Saturday 21 July

Hurst
4.30pm - 6pm
Branch Practice

Saturday 18 August

Binfield
4.30pm - 6pm
Branch Practice

Saturday 15 September

Wargrave
4.30pm - 6pm
Branch Practice

Saturday 20 October

Wokingham All Saints
10am - 12.8 bell Striking Competition
12-1pm General ringing

Monthly Tuesday afternoon practices at Binfield on 4 September and 2 October (provisionally). No practice in August.

Thanks to Andrew Dugdale from Aborfield who has kindly offered to print the newsletter for us free of charge.



The St. Andrew's, Sonning band

Branch 6-bell Striking Competition

The Sonning Deanery Branch 6-bell Striking Competition was held this year on Saturday 21 April at St. James, Finchampstead. This is a lovely church that has recently been completely refurbished. Across the grass from the church is a comfortable and roomy hall with good facilities, where the hosts put on an excellent tea.

The organiser of the event, John Manley our Ringing Master, couldn't be there on the day, so the event was run by our Deputy Ringing Master, Graham Slade. The judges, John and June Wells, were sitting in a room on the first floor, where they could easily hear the bells even with the windows shut. Five bands took part: Arborfield, Easthampstead, Finchampstead, Sonning, and Wokingham All Saints.

The judges commented on the bands' performances over tea. First there was some general advice for the bands:

- Ring something you are comfortable with [*a band gets no recognition or advantage by ringing a difficult method*]
- Place your best ringers as the front and back pairs
- Establish a rhythm during rounds and maintain it into changes
- Try to adjust for others' mistakes [*whatever that may mean!*].

The judges said that their marking was 'hard', that is, with each clip and gap being noted as an error. A particular fault often noted was clipping in 2nd place after leading. A summary of the judges' comments is as follows:

Team A [Easthampstead, 4th, 83 faults]: The rounds band, obviously inexperienced, did very well really. They rang more than 300 rows, but only 300 were marked; few rows were really clean but few really bad; the ringing got faster then slowed; perhaps someone had difficulty keeping the bell up, so the band rang faster to close up and avoid faults.

Team B [Arborfield, 5th, 150 faults]: also probably inexperienced, they over-stretched themselves with Grandsire and sensibly converted to rounds after some rows were obliterated; there was some cartwheeling and row length was inconsistent.

Team C [Finchampstead, 3rd, 73 faults]: Ringing Plain Bob Doubles, this was more confident, but with many clips and gaps producing a rather syncopated performance; rushed leads caused some cartwheeling; a fault at the beginning of a row tended to set up another fault later in the row.

Team D [Wokingham All Saints, 2nd, 53 faults]: Ringing Plain Bob Minor, there was more rhythm but sounded pedantic [i.e. slow]; the back bells wanted to ring slower than the light ones (this situation improved as time went on); there was a clear method mistake.

Team E [Sonning, 1st, 46 faults]: Ringing Plain Bob Doubles, the rhythm was good and consistent; faults were evenly spread, most being clips by small bells over large; these were the best rounds, and the second half of the method section was better than the first.

Our thanks go to the judges, and to the Finchampstead ringers who put on an excellent and extensive tea.

Andrew Elliston & Rob Needham

Visit to Lundy Island

In January, when I booked a boat crossing to Lundy on Saturday 23rd June, I imagined us lying on the warm, springy turf in the hot sun and watching puffins closeby. How wrong this image proved to be! Puffin watching was our original reason for visiting Lundy, but I then booked a 'go' on the bells of St. Helen, Lundy.

When they heard of our plans, several other Sonning ringers decided to join us, and they booked crossings for the same day. In the end we had seven ringers and two non-ringing spouses doing the trip. We travelled down separately on the Friday, stayed in B&Bs near Bideford, and all met up at the ferry early on Saturday morning.

The sea was rough, the wind cold, and the two-hour crossing severely tested our stomachs; only four out of the nine didn't feel sick at some time during the crossing. We climbed the long path up to the Island Office where we collected the key

and the ringing logbook. Then a short walk to the exposed church, which can be seen from many points in the south of Lundy.

It was a little disconcerting to find no lights on the stairs or in the ringing room – there had been a problem with the electrics the day before and the supply had not been turned back on at the mains! Our eyes soon adapted to the low light in the ringing room and we rang up the 10 bells in three groups with method ringing in between. There was some Bob Minimus with cover, and a nice-sounding touch of Bob Doubles on the five heaviest bells – these sounded glorious.

We had our picnic lunch together, keeping out of the wind by sitting in an alcove in the dry stone wall near the island's tavern and 'facilities'. We then split up and went separate ways to see other parts of Lundy. Three of the group walked the entire length of the island (at least 6 miles), four explored part of the West coast and came back along the more sheltered East coast (the only bit with some trees), and two joined a free, guided walk by a National Trust volunteer. We eventually saw black and white blobs in the distance that the guide assured us were puffins. They were difficult to identify because it had started to rain and the wind was buffeting the binoculars too much to get a clear view.

Between members of the group we saw seals, gulls, guillemots, razor bills, skylarks, meadow pippets, wheatears, puffins, petrels, a wren, and Lundy ponies (a cross between Dartmoor and Welsh ponies and now a breed in their own right). We also saw very large pigs, Soay sheep, many wild flowers, an area that the locals since 1755 have called 'the earthquake', and the remains of a Heinkel bomber that crashed in 1942. And we saw the grave of the island's vicar in the 1800s whose surname was actually Heaven; for a time Lundy was called the Kingdom of Heaven.

It rained for the two-hour crossing back to Bideford but the seas had settled a bit and less of us felt sick. For some this was achieved by sitting on the exposed top deck in the fresh air for the whole crossing. We warmed up with a big fish and chip dinner just across the road from the ferry docking point. Back to our various B&Bs, and a leisurely drive back home on the Sunday for five of us, taking in a National Trust property on the way. The other four extended their stay in the area for a day or two.

You are probably thinking that the trip sounds like a disaster, but as far as I could determine we all thoroughly enjoyed our little adventure and experience of Lundy!

Rob Needham

Getting comfortable

"Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin?" Older members will recall those words from *Listen with Mother* on the wireless (as we used to call it). The words came back to me while watching some of our less experienced members trying to get to grips with unfamiliar bells (some of them quite difficult) on the Branch Outing. It's important to be comfortable when ringing. I don't just mean the absence of discomfort (though that helps) I mean comfortable in the sense of feeling at ease with the bell. Some of the facial expressions that I observed suggested anything but comfort!

Partly it's about relaxing (in an alert sort of way) but above all it's about adapting to your bell – working with it rather than fighting against it. If you can do that, whatever your level of basic expertise, it will help you to ring better and with less effort. And there's more to it than experience – some long standing ringers are tense, and some relative novices are not. Anyone can take positive steps to be more at ease when ringing.

Let's start with speed. Left to itself, a bell will ring at constant speed. If the speed fits the ringing, then you only need the occasional nudge to keep the bell in the right place. Less exertion lets you ring with a lighter touch, so you can feel what the bell is doing, and you make smaller, more accurate adjustments. It creates a virtuous circle. If the bell's natural speed doesn't match the ringing, you have to force every blow into place, which takes effort and is less accurate. You might get this blow right, but if you set the wrong speed for the next blow, you will be fighting the bell at every blow. It's a vicious circle. It's also hard work and not very comfortable!

The bell's natural speed depends on how high it swings, which in turn depends on how hard you pulled it, and how far you let it rise. What you do at one stroke determines what the bell does on the next.



When you pull off, the speed won't be quite right, so you need to correct it in the first few blows. If it's too quick get the bell up a bit, and if it's too slow check it a bit. But getting the bell in the right place isn't enough, you must also wind down the effort needed to keep it there, so you can relax. You need to find the 'zero effort speed', at which nothing much would happen if you were to let go of the rope, with the bell still striking in roughly the right place. If you find you need effort on one stroke, try to adjust the speed so the next stroke needs less effort, by adjusting it to swing slightly higher or less high. When doing so, remember not just to modulate your pull, but also that you let the rope rise to the required height.

Many ringers grip the rope at a fixed spot, and try to make all adjustment by varying how far their arms rise. You can do that to a degree, but a better way (a more comfortable way that requires less effort) is to adjust the rope length so that your hands always rise to a comfortable stretch when the bell is at the desired height. That gives you more time to feel what the bell is doing as the rope rises, and it puts your arms into the best position to make sensitive, accurate adjustments, both of which help you to relax, with no fear of things going wrong. Even half an inch on the rope can make a big difference to the feel of the bell, and your ability to relax with it. If you don't regularly adjust your rope, practise doing so. Shorten (or lengthen) the rope until your hands go to a comfortable stretch, without too much effort, with the bell swinging at just the right speed. You may surprise yourself how little effort you can use to control the bell when the rope length is just right. Get into the habit of doing this adjustment whenever you catch hold.

If while you are ringing you feel the bell working against you rather than with you, don't just keep fighting it, try to get everything back into balance so you can relax again. And if you are going to ring a method, always use the opening rounds to get comfortable at Rounds speed, before you need to adjust the speed to hunt up or down.

So far so good. Now let's think about rhythm. The bell has a natural rhythm that you need to match in order to work with it. Your rhythm should allow you to feel what the bell ought to be doing, so you can feel any small deviations if it does anything different. Above all, the rhythm will help you to place the next blow confidently 'in the same place' as the last blow, without the need for external cues. You still need to listen and fit in with the other bells, but you need the stable base of being able to ring in the same place again.

Trusting your rhythm is also the best way to ring accurate handstrokes. If your hands rise to the handstroke with the same rhythm as they do to the backstroke, they will meet the sally at exactly the right place, and moving at the right speed. It's more accurate than eyeing a spot on the sally and trying to catch it. You can vary this rhythm by making your hands rise a little earlier or later to make the handstroke a bit quicker or slower, for example to adjust to an odd-struck bell, or when dodging. The timing difference is tiny, and you have to do it by 'feel', in much the same way that you would if you were trying to throw a ball so it landed slightly nearer or farther from you.

So, to paraphrase *Listen with Mother* – 'Are you are ringing comfortably? Then we'll begin'.

John Harrison (Branch Training Officer)



St Agatha's Day Feast

At the end of 2011 we, the ringers of Easthampstead Parish Church, were surprised to receive an invitation to a "St. Agatha's Dinner" by the clergy. It was set for St. Agatha's Day, Feb. 6, and all ringers were invited. In the end a dozen of us were able to attend.

We were very curious as to what to expect. I knew that St. Agatha is the patron saint of bells – or one of them – and this is probably due to the fact that she is usually portrayed holding a tray with her breasts on them, as they were cut off during her martyrdom. They do look quite like bells.

We found that our three clergypersons were all there waiting on us hand and foot, Fr. Guy, Fr. Peter, and the Rev. La, and they provided us with a tasty repast.

Fr. Peter then appeared with the piece de resistance, a slightly wobbly pink confection consisting of two mounds, each topped with a cherry. After being struck dumb with amazement for a moment, we burst into applause, and we tucked in heartily.

Thank you very much, Guy, Peter, and La, for such a thoughtful gesture and unfailing humour! We hope this will become an annual tradition!

Ann Martin



Unexpected drama at the June Branch Practice at Shottesbrooke



Bob Packer (tower captain) had asked me to unlock and welcome everybody, as he was busy that afternoon.

The weather was very windy.

I was driving quite speedily towards the church, as I could see ahead that a couple of cars had already arrived, when suddenly to my left a large tree uprooted and fell across the drive in front of me. Fortunately, I just managed to slow down and stop in time so that the tree did not land on me!

This photo was taken after the branch practice, when the branches that landed across the driveway had already been cut back by the Shottesbrooke estate staff !

Jacquie Hazell

Peals & Quarter Peals

Saturday 23 June 2012 in
2 hours 51 minutes
St Paul's Wokingham
5056 Quedgeley Surprise Major

- 1 Alan K Barsby
- 2 John A Harrison
- 3 June D Wells
- 4 Christopher P Cole
- 5 Geoffrey K Cook
- 6 Richard H Johnston
- 7 E John Wells
- 8 Kenneth R Davenport (C)

Rung to celebrate the Silver Wedding Anniversaries of Chris & Sarah Cole and Alan & Helen Barsby.
25th peal on the bells

Sunday 8 April 2012
White Waltham
480 St Simon's & 780 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Roger C Martin
- 2 Lesley A Graves
- 3 Simon D Smith
- 4 Derek R Smith
- 5 Caroline S Andrew (C)
- 6 Derek G Brayne

Rung for Easter Sunday and as a belated Birthday Compliment to the Treble Ringer on his 60th Birthday and Retirement in March.

Tuesday 5 June 2012
White Waltham
1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Thomas Andrew
- 2 Lesley Graves
- 3 Jacqueline Hazell
- 4 Roger Martin
- 5 Caroline Andrew (C)
- 6 Derek Brayne

For the Diamond Jubilee

Thursday 7 June 2012
Easthampstead
1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Tom Helyer
- 2 Ann Martin (C)
- 3 Anna Barker*
- 4 Barbara Wells
- 5 Paul Fox
- 6 Claudia Sommer

* First inside

For the Diamond Jubilee

Sunday 17 June 2012
Sonning
1296 Plain Bob Major

- 1 Alison Clayton
- 2 Derek J Barrett
- 3 Rob Needham
- 4 Andrew Elliston
- 5 Peter Kemm
- 6 Simon Milford
- 7 Robert Partridge
- 8 John Hearn (C)

Rung to celebrate the lives of David Montague, a master at Reading Bluecoat School, and of Wendy March, 1960 - 2012.

Tuesday 5 June 2012
Shottesbrooke
1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Martha Hazell
- 2 Lesley Graves
- 3 Naomi Andrew
- 4 Jacqueline Hazell
- 5 Caroline Andrew (C)
- 6 Robert Packer

For the Diamond Jubilee

Sunday 10 June 2012
Easthampstead
1260 Grandsire Doubles

- 1 Anna Barker
- 2 Ann Martin (C)
- 3 Tom Helyer*
- 4 Steve Wells
- 5 Edward Martin (C)
- 6 Barbara Wells

* First inside

Friday 15 June 2012
Easthampstead
1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Christine M Baldock
- 2 Rachel Moss
- 3 Sue Davenport
- 4 Ken Davenport
- 5 Andrew Elliston
- 6 Edward Martin
- 7 Edward J Manley (C)
- 8 Paul S Fox

Rung immediately following the wedding of Catherine Wells and Andrew Bryant, daughter and son-in-law of Steve and Barbara Wells who are ringers at Easthampstead.

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