

Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



May 2020, Summer Issue

Chairman's welcome



When I was elected chairman I never imagined I would be presiding over so much non-ringing. But here we all are, in a situation we never prepared for. The officers have been debating what we can do to support you, the members, in these strange times.

It's quite hard given the wide range of needs. I know that some members are only interested in ringing for their church, and if you can't do that are happy to wait until you can. But I know that others are concerned that their hard won skills and knowledge could fade from lack of practice, which is why we've been thinking about possible training, and encouraging you to try the relatively new experience of on-line 'ringing' (see separate articles).

But whichever end of that spectrum you lie on, I hope you all value the fellowship that ringers offer one another, and with physical

contact removed you are using whatever technological substitutes are available to help plug the gap. We are actually very lucky to have such options available. When I started ringing there was no Internet. The only two way remote communication was the telephone – and very few people had one.

We've tried to provide variety. Rob Needham's appeal for 'pandemic poems' produced quite a few responses, which have been compiled and are now on the [website](#). The ringing anagrams had a smaller response, but one person got them all correct and one nearly did.

I hope you have taken the opportunity to look at some of the ringing videos posted by the Central Council of Church Bell-ringers. They showcase the breadth of ringing covering everything from bells around the world, how bells are made and everything else and are great if you have 2 minutes or two hours to spare. You can find them [here](#):

Please get in touch if you have any questions or suggestions.

John Harrison, Chairman

Sonning Ringing Outing, March 14th 2020



This outing was organised by Pam Elliston, the Sonning captain, and included 4 towers in the area between Camberley, Basingstoke and Reading – so not too much driving. We were very lucky that the outing took place just before the 'lockdown' of the Covid-19 pandemic. The weather was kind, and we had an interesting set of towers to ring at. The outing was supported by 11 Sonning ringers, two from Henley, and two from Eversley who didn't do the whole day.

The first tower was Holy Trinity at Hawley, the only 8 of the day, and then St Mary, Eversley, a light six. Lunch was at the New Inn at Heckfield, and in the afternoon we rang at St Michael, Heckfield (5) and All Saints, Swallowfield (6), where the photo was taken by Peter Kemm.

It was a most enjoyable and interesting day and our thanks go to Pam for organising it.

Rob Needham, Sonning

How to carry on ringing during lockdown...



Since lockdown, Easthampstead ringers have been practising every Thursday! They also ring before their virtual church service on a Sunday morning. How? By using Ringingroom.com. More importantly, Thursday ringing has been followed by a virtual trip to the “Green Man”, glass in hand!

If you haven't done so, I strongly recommend your band tries Ringingroom.com because:

- It's fun
- It keeps your band together.
- It's very social
- It maintains your ringing skills
- It develops skills of counting, listening and rhythm which will improve ringing once back in our towers.
- You can learn new methods.



It is different to ringing in a tower but, over the weeks at Easthampstead, we have become more skillful. We regularly ring various doubles, minor and triples. One of my young ringers has rung Cambridge Minor for the first time and another is moving on from Plain Hunt to Bob Doubles! We even rang for VE Day and they are recorded on Bell Board. (<https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1359126>; <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1359131>)

I “ring” with Binfield in their Ringingroom.com “tower” on a Monday. We ring lots of rounds, call changes and doubles. Two of their ringers have moved on from Plain Hunt to PB Doubles!

Tuesday is Warfield whose band is benefitting from rounds and call changes, Plain Hunt – plus “The Old Manor” virtual social life afterwards.

You can see what other bands are doing as they are recording their achievements on Bell Board - including quarter peals on three continents!

Ringingroom.com only enables bells to be rung from your keyboard. You also need an audio or video conference with the band to co-ordinate ringing. This should be on a different device to the laptop or PC used for Ringingroom.com e.g. your phone. At Easthampstead and Binfield we use Skype. At Warfield we use Zoom. Groups have been established on Skype or Zoom for each tower so sessions can be booked and which ringers can join and leave the audio as they wish during the ringing. There are always some technical issues to begin with but soon things settle down.

You are all very welcome to join and ring at Easthampstead practices – or just observe. If you contact me at dbrm@sdb.odg.org.uk, I will arrange for you to gain access to Easthampstead's Ringingroom.com and their Skype group. You just need your own Skype ID.

I do encourage all bands to “have a go”. I am more than happy to help set it up and join in with your practices to get you going.

Steve Wells, Deputy Ringing Master

Initial Experiences of Virtual Handbell Ringing

Over the last few weeks I have been working with a couple of other people on several remote virtual ringing platforms, [Ringingroom.com](https://ringingroom.com), Handbell Stadium and Muster (using Abel). Handbell Stadium as the name implies is specifically designed for handbell ringing, but Ringing Room and Muster can be used for both single bell ringing and handbells.



When we ring remotely an audio channel is required to allow setting up of who is ringing which bells, to make calls etc. I have tried both Skype and Discord (<https://discordapp.com>). Although Skype works well enough as an audio channel, it is not that easy to set up group calls whereas Discord allows channels to be set up that are easily joined. For both cases a pair of headphones or earphones are necessary to avoid echo and ideally both apps should be run on the same PC. The PC of course will need either a built-in microphone or one attached to it.

Recommendations for using Ringing Room

- It will work on any computer/tablet/phone platform with a browser, however a PC is recommended.
- Use either Google Chrome or Firefox, Microsoft browsers have had some issues. Safari works on a Mac, but again the software behind ringing room is likely to work better with Chrome.
- Agree which audio channel to use with all participants. I would recommend that you use Discord and set up your own group within it and share that with your ringers inviting them to join (a link can be created in the app). Although Discord can be run in a browser, I would recommend downloading the app. Once this is set up both a chat and voice channel may be created, ringers can then join without the organiser having to set it up and call each ringer as you have to in Skype.
- When first entering Ringing Room, the organiser should create a 'Ringing Room' which will then be given a number ID. This number should then be shared using the voice or chat channel on Discord.
- Once the Ringing Room has been created other ringers may join it. They will be requested to enter their name which will then be displayed in the Ringing Room. From this point whoever is organising the ringing should ask ringers to assign themselves to a specific bell(s). Pressing 'SHIFT' and the bell number will both assign the bell to the ringer and place the bell at the bottom of the screen. There is a help screen on the Ringing Room website.
- The ringer should press the number associated with the bell they have been assigned to ring the bell, left and right arrow keys also work. Although using a mouse 'click' will work, it is slower and can disrupt the striking.

Persevere....

It is likely that it will take a few goes using Ringing Room for your band to become used to it but it is worth persevering with as it does become easier. Users of Abel or other bellringing simulators are likely to find it easier. One of the current downsides is the noise created when users press the keyboard, if pressed too hard it can be distracting. One way we have overcome this 'keyboard distraction' is using motion sensors. Some users of Abel will have them, and they work by sending the keyboard stroke to Abel by using a separate piece of software, Handbell Manager. Handbell Manager has been modified to allow it to be used with Ringing Room and Muster and this new version is expected to be released soon on Graham John's website. There has also been a recent software development to allow an Android phone to be used as a motion sensor.

Handbell Stadium is being developed by Graham John and requires motion sensors to use it. It is in the very early stages of development with future 3D graphics planned to make it much easier to ring. I have tried an early beta version of the 3D graphics Handbell Stadium application and my initial impression is that it will really benefit ringers who have a more 'visual' approach to their handbell ringing.

Muster is the latest virtual ringing platform and has been designed to work with Abel as the front-end application. The principle of operation is similar to Ringing Room allowing remote users to ring bells with keystrokes or motion sensors. Abel in this case is not being used for ringers to ring with (i.e. you do not select a method to ring) but just to create the moving image and sound of a ringing bell. Our initial testing showed that we could ring a little faster than the other two simulators, however it did suffer from what appeared to be Internet buffering, with bells ringing on top of one another occasionally. It is though in the very early stages of development and I expect there to be further development of the software. The big advantage and attractiveness with Muster is the familiarity the Abel interface and the lower latency than Ringing Room and Handbell Stadium.

Success!

We have achieved a couple of quarter peals of Plain Bob Minor; one on Ringing Room and the other on the 2D version of Handbell Stadium. Both have been slow (42 minutes for Ringing Room and 50 minutes for Handbell Stadium) compared to normal quarter peals on handbells. Handbell Stadium was possibly slower than Ringing Room due to the way the 2D graphics work. One other variable that needs to be taken into account when ringing longer lengths is the reliability of the Internet connection. Whilst ringing both quarter peals we did experience one or two instances of bells appearing to rush or ring on top of one another. One could blame this on the ringers, but it was clearly the Internet connection causing it for some of the cases of bad striking!

I should also note that this review is current as at the time of writing as all these virtual ringing platforms are still under development and constantly evolving. Whilst we are locked out of churches and prevented from ringing with our friends, these virtual ringing solutions certainly merit trying. It will require a few hours of investment in your time to become used to them, but well worth it in the end.

Nigel Mellor, Branch Ringing Master

What we did in the war

'What did you do in the war' is a classic question normally directed at people, but can we ask it of the Branch? We don't have the records to know every aspect, and the people who remember are no longer with us, but we can look at the effect on membership, which gives some indication. I recently posted a link to my report about this, and here is a bit more of the story behind it.

It began as part of the publicity for what we assumed would be lots of VE Day ringing. I've written several articles about local ringing for the history slot of *The Wokingham Paper*, and this seemed a good opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. I wanted to go beyond the well known generalisations, like ringers being killed and bans on ringing, with something a bit more substantial. I chose to look at the effect on membership because I could draw on reasonably good records in Guild reports, etc.

In the event, getting the data turned out to be harder than I expected. Some years' reports didn't list names, some towers joined the Branch part way through the periods involved, some people moved towers, and some members had the same name & initial as others.

I soon realised that membership outside of the war periods was changing, so I needed to look at more years before and after to understand what was happening. The data I gathered are probably not perfect, but I think I managed to extract some useful conclusions – which weren't all what I expected.

From 1904 (the earliest year I studied) up to the war membership grew by 25%. Maybe that wasn't surprising – the Edwardian era was one of optimism and the Branch, founded in 1880 at the height of Belfry Reform, was still relatively young.

I expected membership during the war to fall since it imposed constraints on everyone, and for 2½ years ringing after dark was banned, which meant no practices for men who worked, and no ringing for the popular evensong services except in summer. Bands were certainly under pressure with a third of members away at the front by 1916.

But the membership (including those who were away) kept on rising throughout the war, and it peaked in 1919, a year after the war ended – I wasn't expecting that. It then dropped by 20%, with no further growth during the whole of the inter-war period. Perhaps that fits with the idea of widespread disillusionment after the war, though it would need more evidence to be sure.

The second war was completely different. Numbers fell about 15% in the first year, and then crashed to less than half when ringing was banned in 1940. But after the ban was lifted in 1943 a few years of rapid growth took numbers back to pre-war levels. Maybe that too reflects the rather different mood of the time.

Another idea turned out to be wrong when I looked at turnover of members rather than just the totals. Twenty Branch members, nearly two per tower, were killed in the first war. I had assumed that war deaths left a large hole in our ranks, but although they were tragic losses, in terms of membership turnover, losing five members per year over a four year war, was far lower than the average 'normal' loss of fifteen per year before the war.

The story about women ringers turned out to be a bit different too. They appeared in the Branch during first war, but only in small numbers and only in three towers: (Hurst, Twyford & Wokingham All Saints) and their numbers barely increased over the next twenty years. It was only after the second war that we recruited significant numbers of women. By 1950 their numbers had grown to 20%, and today it's around half.

Click [here](#) if you'd like to read more.

John Harrison, All Saints Wokingham

Ideas for keeping in touch during lockdown

Keep learning: During the enforced silence of Sonning's bells, our oldest and very experienced ringer, Geoff Harvey, is producing a series of training emails for the Sonning band and inviting comments and questions.

Look to the future: Another initiative is that each Sonning member has been asked to choose something new to ring when lockdown is lifted, either something they have never done before or something not done successfully before. They can then use time during the enforced 'silence' to study and learn their choice.

Stay in touch: whether it's a weekly Zoom call or an email it's great to keep in touch. One of our ringers, Katie, designed us a great quiz on 'Bells' last week. Not too long, and a real variety of rounds covering interesting facts from Dove (How many unringable towers are there?); anagrams of things found in a tower, matching towers with their county and spotting towers around the Branch. She's happy to share it with other Towers if you'd like some fun. Email:

Ka_marsden@yahoo.co.uk.

Rob Needham, Sonning

Peals & Quarter Peals

Easthampstead

Sunday, 1 December 2019
1260 Bob Triples

- 1 Daniel Chafen
- 2 Anna Stowe
- 3 Barbara Wells
- 4 Elliott W Aldridge
- 5 Connor D J Wignall
- 6 Rachel Moss
- 7 Stephen C Wells (C)
- 8 Andrew I Mitchell

First of triples inside 4 & 5.
For Advent carol service

Easthampstead

Thursday, 9 January 2020
1260 Stedman Triples

- 1 Stephen C Wells
 - 2 Kevin J Lovell
 - 3 Barbara E Wells
 - 4 Rachel Moss
 - 5 Judith M Bowler
 - 6 Anthony C F Perry
 - 7 Graham N Scott (C)
 - 8 Daniel Chafen
- In fond memory of Stanley G Scott (Stan), ringer at this tower for over 50 years including four periods as tower captain.

Sonning

Sunday, 5 January 2020 in
1264 Plain Bob Major

- 1 Geoffrey M Harvey
 - 2 Derek J Barrett
 - 3 Rob Needham
 - 4 Sue Portsmouth
 - 5 Pam Elliston
 - 6 Lavinia M Sullivan
 - 7 Alan K Barsby
 - 8 Adrian Nash (C)
- For Choral Evensong.

Sonning

Sunday, 19 January 2020
1264 Plain Bob Major

- 1 Derek J Barrett
 - 2 Vikki E M Bulbeck
 - 3 Pam Elliston
 - 4 Sue Portsmouth
 - 5 Lavinia M Sullivan
 - 6 Alan K Barsby
 - 7 Kenneth R Davenport (C)
 - 8 Anthony W Gordon
- For Choral Evensong.

Easthampstead

Wed 22 January 2020
1260 Stedman Triples

- 1 Martin Turner (C)
 - 2 Stephen C Wells
 - 3 Barbara Wells
 - 4 Janet Menhinick
 - 5 Lynne Jordan
 - 6 John A Harrison
 - 7 Pete Jordan
 - 8 Paul Fox
- In memory of Stanley G Scott on the day of his funeral.
Greg Jordan wishes to be associated with this quarter peal.

St Paul, Wokingham

Saturday, 25 January 2020 in 3h 4
5088 Lessness Surprise Major
Composed by Stanley Jenner

- 1 Robert A Partridge
- 2 Geoffrey K Cook
- 3 Stuart F Gibson
- 4 Catherine M A Lane
- 5 Steven J Field
- 6 Christopher M Tuckett
- 7 Kenneth R Davenport (C)
- 8 Stephen R Smith II

For the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. With the band's best wishes to Chris Cole for a speedy recovery from his operation today. First in the method: 5.

All Saints, Wokingham

Saturday, 25 January 2020 in 2h 48
5024 Lessness Surprise Major
Composed by David G Maynard

- 1 Kristin L Fitch
- 2 Helen M Maynard
- 3 Tom Blomley
- 4 Stephen R Smith
- 5 David G Maynard (C)
- 6 John A Harrison
- 7 Jon P Tutcher
- 8 Nigel A L Mellor

Rung on tower dinner day by a band of regular ringers at All Saints. Thinking of Chris Cole. First in method - 3,4. Circled the tower - 8.

Sonning

Sunday, 2 February 2020
1260 Plain Bob Triples

- 1 Katherine Croshaw
 - 2 Pam Elliston
 - 3 Geoffrey M Harvey
 - 4 Sue Portsmouth
 - 5 Rob Needham
 - 6 Adrian Nash
 - 7 Andrew CP Gunstone (C)
 - 8 Alan K Barsby
- First on eight: 1
For Choral Evensong

Shottesbrooke

Sunday, 2 February 2020
1260 St Simon's Bob Doubles

- 1 Martha Hazell
 - 2 Vikki E M Bulbeck (C)
 - 3 Jacqueline Hazell (C)
 - 4 Derek R Smith
 - 5 Simon Smith (C)
 - 6 Richard Hazell
- Wishing a fond farewell to Ringer of 4, just before his move to Somerset.
Derek has rung at Shottesbrooke, and with the members of this band, for many years and will be greatly missed; he taught (or jointly taught) 1,3,5 & 6 to ring.
Good Luck Derek!

Twyford

Saturday, 15 February 2020
1320 Cambridge Surprise Minor
1 Pam Elliston
2 Matthew Steele
3 Sue Portsmouth
4 David Sullivan
5 Lavinia Sullivan
6 Simon Farrar (C)

First Cambridge: 2

Sonning

Sunday, 16 February 2020
1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Geoffrey M Harvey
 - 2 Vikki E M Bulbeck
 - 3 Pam Elliston
 - 4 Sue Portsmouth
 - 5 Lavinia M Sullivan
 - 6 Alan K Barsby (C)
 - 7 Adrian Nash
 - 8 Lesley S Cross
- For evensong and to celebrate 70 years of ringing for Geoff Harvey.

Easthampstead

Thursday, 20 February 2020
1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Stephen C Wells
- 2 Andrew I Mitchell
- 3 Daniel Chafen
- 4 Simon Chapman
- 5 Rachel Moss (C)

First inside 2.

Easthampstead

Thursday, 22 February 2020
1260 Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Harrison Wignall
- 2 Stephen C Wells (C)
- 3 Barbara E Wells
- 4 Daniel Chafen
- 5 Connor D J Wignall
- 6 Andrew I Mitchell

First quarter peal 1.

Binfield

Saturday, 22 February 2020
1320 Kent Treble Bob Minor

- 1 Connor D J Wignall
- 2 Elliott W Aldridge
- 3 Anna Stowe
- 4 Daniel Chafen
- 5 Graham N Scott
- 6 Stephen C Wells (C)

First treble bob 1. First in method 2.

Quarter Peals cont...

All Saints, Wokingham
Saturday, 23 February
 1250 Yorkshire Surprise Major

1 Mary Spence
 2 Kristin L Fitch
 3 Jane A Mellor
 4 Adrian P Nash
 5 Steven J Field
 6 Nigel A L Mellor (C)
 7 John A Harrison
 8 Jon P Tutcher

For evening service. First Yorkshire inside - 2

Sonning
 Sunday, 1 March 2020
 1260 Plain Bob Minor

1 Geoffrey M Harvey
 2 Lavinia M Sullivan
 3 Sue Portsmouth
 4 Derek J Barrett
 5 Pam Elliston (C)
 6 Alan K Barsby
 7 Rob Needham

For choral evensong on St David's day. The band send get well wishes to Lesley Cross and Katie Thomas.

Shottesbrooke
 Saturday, 7 March 2020
 1260 St Simon's Bob Doubles

1 Martha Hazell
 2 Jacqueline Hazell (C)
 3 Sue Portsmouth
 4 Pam E Elliston
 5 Vikki E M Bulbeck (C)
 6 Holley Wakeling

Rung for Phyllis Pittman's 90th Birthday on 10th March.

Wokingham, Berkshire
 2 Murdoch Road
 Tuesday, 3 March 2020 in 2h 24 (11 in G)
 5056 Plain Bob Major
 Arranged by D G Maynard

1-2 John A Harrison
 3-4 Nigel A L Mellor
 5-6 David G Maynard (C)
 7-8 Neil G Curnow

First peal of Major on handbells and first handbell peal for 44 years: 1-2
 First on an inside pair: 3-4
 First handbell peal for 36 years: 7-8

Sonning
 Sunday, 15 March 2020
 1280 Yorkshire Surprise Major

1 Pam Elliston
 2 Sue Portsmouth
 3 Lavinia M Sullivan
 4 Vikki E M Bulbeck
 5 Graham E Slade
 6 Robert Partridge (C)
 7 Jon P Tutcher
 8 Andrew CP Gunstone

For choral evensong.
 To celebrate the arrival of Arthur Harvey, great grandson of Geoff and Enid Harvey.
 Also a first birthday compliment to Dora Rathbone-Lubbock, granddaughter of Andrew Gunstone.

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