

Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



February 2022, Winter



Chairman's message

When Covid hit nearly two years ago we realised it would be disruptive, that it would cause some losses and that we would need effort to recover after the pandemic passed. At first we thought that might be in a few months but then we realised that it would take much longer. Now emerging (we hope) from the fourth wave it's becoming clear to everyone that Covid will not 'pass', it's here for the long term. We don't yet know how long before the damaging waves of infection will give way to something in the background that we can learn to manage and 'live with', but however long it is we need to accept that things won't get back to how they were before. Can we perhaps turn that into something positive by doing things better than how we did them before?

During the autumn Nigel, our ringing master, had a series of discussions with the leaders of each band in the Branch to explore what they would need to recover, and what sort of support the Branch could provide to help recovery (there's a summary of the results on the website). This then fed into a discussion during November's Business Meeting about the way ahead. All bands were invited to be represented at the meeting (though not all were) and several things emerged from the discussion – some short term and some long term.

Several bands asked about training for steeple keepers, and the Guild is running a course for us in February.

There was also interest in the Branch hosting a course on teaching, since most bands will need to recruit but not all of them are well equipped to teach new recruits. We agreed to investigate this and Jane our Training Officer will be taking this forward.

There was agreement that the Branch should restart ringing practices, but for the time being aim to hold them at safer (i.e. better ventilated) towers. We had already re-started the Surprise Major practices (at Hurst, which is more open) and the first two were well attended – by fully masked ringers. We will also broaden these to be 'Advanced practices' and not exclusively Surprise. We are also re-starting the midweek practices at Binfield (which is relatively open) and the elementary practices (moved to Binfield). This led to a discussion about how we run practices and I agreed to write about it (see separate article).

There was also general support for organising quarter peals to help people consolidate what they have learned. These could act as follow-up to practices, shortly afterwards.

The ringing masters will be developing these ideas as we open up ringing so please let them know what sort of practices you would like to attend. Contact: brm@sdb.odg.org.uk

Practice style

At November's meeting I agreed to write something about the discussion on different styles of practice. The custom of holding 'ringing meetings' at different towers was established in the 1880s to 'encourage mutual support between the ringers throughout the Deanery', and that rationale still holds. We encourage members from different towers to attend practices where they can ring on different bells and to get to know ringers from other towers. It can give them opportunities to ring things they might not otherwise be able to, and ideally the opportunity to hear and take part in some well struck ringing.

That ideal was easier to achieve 40 years ago when we had three hour practices, often attended by around 30 ringers, which made it easier to offer something for everyone, with plenty of support. Now numbers are fewer and practices are shorter, so it's harder for the ringing master to give everyone what they want – especially anything out of the ordinary –

The meeting discussed the desire for more practices to have a particular focus. By knowing in advance what to expect, anyone needing to prepare could do so, confident that the effort wouldn't be wasted.

Focused practices aren't new. The elementary practices, introduced a few years ago, focus on the needs of ringers at an early stage of their development, and Surprise Major practices cater for advanced ringers in a way that wouldn't be possible in a general practice. (The single topic courses we run are also focused but they aren't regular.)

Focused practices must be good for those who attend because they attract similar numbers to general practices despite having much smaller target audiences. But the ones we've run so far don't cover everyone's needs. The best we offer a lot of our members are the traditional practices where we ring whatever we can depending on who turns up. They aren't focused on someone else's needs, but the statistics show that the majority of our members don't consider them worth attending, so they are less likely to feel part of the Branch community.

The challenge is to run practices (or other events) that will attract more of our members, and the way we discussed trying to do that was to provide a range of focused practices (because they seem more effective) but to focus them on the needs of more members. The obvious gap in what we currently offer is between 'beginner' and 'advanced'. It's not an easy gap to fill because 'intermediate' ringers vary quite a lot in their needs. There's also a practical constraint – a practice too narrowly focused might not appeal to enough members to make it viable, so there needs to be a balance.

However we do it, any form of focused practice will require more planning – not just to provide the appropriate 'diet' but to ensure enough of the right people will be there to benefit. That can prove to be more difficult than actually running the practice. As well as knowing in advance who is coming (like we do already with some practices) it may need careful choices of day/time to avoid clashes for participants with other events. If you have any ideas for how we can make practices meet the needs of more of our members, particularly 'intermediate' practices, then please contact Nigel at: brm@sdb.odg.org.uk

If we can provide something for all our members by putting more emphasis on focused practices, should they replace the traditional unfocused 'anyone turns up' practices? That will depend on whether members continue to support them when there are alternatives. If they don't then the effort could go into practices that are better supported. Of course there will always be some events where anyone can turn up and ring, for example before or after the AGM or other meetings.

John Harrison, chairman

'Anyone turns up' or 'Walk in' Practices

In John's article above he distinguishes between focused and 'anyone turns up' or 'walk in' practices. At present there are two series of 'walk in' practices: the daytime Branch Practice on the third Tuesday of the month at Binfield and the traditional Saturday Branch Practice, which is held at different towers and times of the day. The current schedule of these Saturday practices for 2022 is shown below. All types of practice are shown on the branch website at: odg.org.uk/sdb/diary/index.html

Day	Date	Tower	Activity	Time
Sat	19 Mar	Sandhurst (6)	Ringing practice	16.30 – 18.00
Sat	23 Apr	Binfield (6) TBC	Branch 6-bell Striking Competition & tea	16.00 – 18.00
Sat	23 Apr	Various towers	'Ringing for England' – St George's Day	
Sat	21 May	Hurst (8)	Ringing practice	10.30 – 12.00
Thu	02 June	Various towers	The Queen's Platinum Jubilee	
Sat	18 June	Sandhurst (6)	Ringing practice	16.30 – 18.00
Sat	16 July	Binfield (6)	Ringing practice	10.30 – 12.00
Sat	20 Aug	Hurst (8)	Ringing practice	16.30 – 18.00
Sat	17 Sep	Sandhurst (6)	Ringing practice	16.30 – 18.00
Sat	19 Nov	TBD	Business Meeting	16.30

Ringing forums

Ringers have always discussed, argued and shared ideas – not just in the tower and the pub but more widely. In the 18th & 19th century they used the columns of local newspapers, in the 20th century they used the letters page of *The Ringing World*, and now they do it electronically.

Few people had heard of e-mail 30 years ago when Ken Olum of MIT set up the ChangeRingers e-mail list, the first digital ringing forum that enabled ringers anywhere to tap into the experience and knowledge of other ringers quickly and easily. It's still running (now hosted on the Ringing World server) and has been joined by other lists discussing ringing history, ringing theory, and even a 'virtual ringing pub'.

The mailing lists work well but with the increased use of Facebook in recent years ringers have created a plethora of Facebook Groups as well – so many that it can be hard to keep up with them all. I know of: Bellringers, Bellringing, Bellringing webmasters, Bellringing memes, Ringing simulators, Publicity recruitment and PR in bellringing, Ringing training, Amateur steeple keepers, together with lots and lots of local ringing groups.

The Facebook groups are widely used but in many ways are not suited to serious discussion. For example, the order in which you see things is controlled by a hidden Facebook formula and you don't have any control over it. In fact if you leave Facebook to check something and then return you can't always find what you were looking at. And there are no systematic archives (by topic, date, etc.) that most e-mail lists have, so if a topic has come up before it can be hard to find it.

The Central Council has now provided '*Ringing Forums*' to support discussions and questions about anything related to ringing. It's been designed for ringers, by ringers. Discussions on different ringing related topics are listed together in one place, making it easy to join in, whether to ask a question or just to see what others are discussing on things that interest you. Everyone uses their real name, which is more friendly than when people hide behind pseudonyms.

To get a flavour of what it can offer you, go to: ringingforums.org/

John Harrison

Learners at Binfield

Jan Glen reports: "2 of our 4 new learners who joined at the end of October have dropped out, but the other two are making good progress. We are very grateful to Ken and Sue Davenport and Steve Wells for their ongoing tuition and support."

Peals, Quarter Peals & interesting rings

By searching on *BellBoard* I have found the following performances from the end of September 2021 until now, listed in alphabetical order of member's surname. My apologies to any members whose performances I have missed.

Vikki Bulbeck, Shottesbrooke, Clewer: 22 tower bell quarters, 2 tower bell peals

Chris Cole, St Paul's: 2 tower bell quarters, 2 hand bell peals, 6 hand bell quarters

Kenneth Davenport, St Paul's: 3 tower bell quarters, 4 hand bell peals

Pam Elliston, Sonning: 9 tower bell quarters

John Harrison, All Saints Wokingham: 7 tower bell quarters, 1 hand bell peal, 8 handbell quarters

Jacqueline Hazell, Waltham St Lawrence: 16 tower bell quarters, 1 tower bell peal

Martha Hazell, Waltham St Lawrence: 12 tower bell quarters, 1 hand bell peal, 3 hand bell quarters

Nigel Mellor, All Saints: 10 tower bell quarters, 4 tower bell peals, 11 hand bell quarters, 4 hand bell peals

Jane Mellor, All Saints: 7 tower bell quarters

Peals, Quarter Peals & interesting rings (cont.)

Janet Menhinick, Sandhurst: 2 tower bell peals, 20 hand bell quarters, 4 hand bell peals

Sue Portsmouth, Sonning: 12 tower bell quarters, 81 virtual quarters on Ringing Room

Graham Scott, Eashampstead: 2 tower bell quarters, 2 tower bell peals, 20 virtual quarters on Ringing Room

Simon Smith, Shottesbrooke: 9 tower bell quarters, 1 tower bell peal

David Sullivan, Wargrave: 7 tower bell quarters

Vinni Sullivan, Wargrave: 7 tower bell quarters, 24 virtual quarters on Ringing Room

Holley Wakeling, Waltham St Lawrence: 3 tower bell quarters

Shiplake, Oxfordshire

St Peter and St Paul

Monday, 18 October 2021

1260 Plain Bob Triples

1 Lucy Smith (grand-daughter)

2 James Champion

3 Pam Elliston

4 Sue Portsmouth

5 Lavinia Sullivan

6 David Sullivan

7 Robert Partridge (C)

8 Stephen R Smith II (son-in-law)

Wokingham, Berkshire

All Saints

Sunday, 7 November 2021 in 48m

1264 Plain Bob Major

1 Helen M Maynard

2 Jane A Mellor

3 Stephen R Smith

4 Stephen C Bates

Sonning, Berkshire

St Andrew

Sunday, 7 November 2021 in 47m

1260 Plain Bob Doubles

1 Rob Needham

2 Geoffrey M Harvey (C)

3 Pam Elliston

4 Richard Bennett

Sonning, Berkshire

St Andrew

Sunday, 6 February 2022 in 52m

1260 Grandsire Triples

1 Pam Elliston

2 Graham E Slade

3 Alison Clayton

4 Jenny M Page

5 Sue Portsmouth

6 Bob Partridge (C)

7 Kenneth R Davenport

8 Andrew Price

Twyford, Berkshire

St Mary

Tuesday, 28 December 2021, in 42m

1260 Grandsire Doubles

1 Edward Owen

2 Graham Slade

3 Matthew Steele

4 Richard Bennett

Easthampstead, Berkshire

St Michael and St Mary Magdalene

Sunday, 6 February 2022 in 44m

1260 Plain Bob Minor

1 Rachel Moss

2 Barbara Wells

3 Andrew I Mitchell

4 Anna Stowe

5 Daniel Chafen

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