

Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



February 2024, Winter issue

Chairman's message



We recently held the 8-bell striking contest, joint with Reading Branch and hosted by them. Since Covid we have found the number of teams entering competitions has dropped, so I was pleased that this time we had a very good response. Ironically we had to limit the number of entries. We thought we might be able to enter an elementary team, and a combined team of young ringers from both branches but another event at the church put a tight time limit on the ringing, and so we had to limit the number of teams.

One of the teams was from Hurst, which hasn't entered a competition for many years. Hurst and Easthampstead were the leading bands in the Branch when I moved here in the 1960s. Hurst has been through a lean period in recent years but I'm delighted to see their fortunes changing again, with Graham Slade building up the band. As well as entering the striking competition they also recently rang a quarter peal, a significant step for them and much appreciated by the villagers who like to hear their bells rung. On the back of that local interest, Graham was able to generate some excellent publicity – not just for the Hurst ringers but for ringing in general – with coverage in the local press.

It's an example we can all follow. From time to time there must be things that your band or one of your ringers does, that would be of interest to non-ringers if they knew about it. It's very easy for us to remain hidden in our comfortable little bubbles and ignore the world outside, when we could be actively trying to spread the message about ringing. Don't hide your light under a bushel.

Spring will soon be here, and with it the Branch 6-bell competition on Saturday 20th April. This year it will be held at Shottesbrooke, a lovely church in an attractive parkland setting, so please think about entering a team (or even teams). If you don't have quite enough of your own ringers for a team you can include a substitute from another tower. It would be good to match the turnout in 2019 (the last pre-Covid year) when seven teams entered in what proved to be an enjoyable event.

As this newsletter will appear around the time of the AGM I hope you will want to join me in thanking all those who put in so much effort on your behalf to ensure there are lots of opportunities for ringing in the Branch, especially to the two Ringing Masters, Training Officer and Secretary. In particular I'd like to thank Steve Wells, standing down as Deputy Ringing Master and Rob Needham, standing down as Newsletter Editor after this edition.

I hope you are looking forward to another year of ringing. Please get in touch with me or any of the officers if you have ideas for how we could improve the ringing or any other services we provide in the Branch.

John Harrison, chairman@sdb.odg.org.uk

More to ringing than pulling the ropes

When talking and writing about ringing I have often emphasised that it is a many faceted activity. As well as being a physical and mental skill, it intersects with other areas of expertise, including technology, history, music and maths. So as well the challenge and satisfaction of performance, ringers can find interest from exploring other aspects.

One example is composition. We all know that bobs and singles can produce touches, and that if you need to call a quarter or a peal there are plenty of compositions to choose from, but have you ever thought about who produced the compositions, or how or why?

Ringers have been devising compositions for centuries, even before the separate concepts of a plain course and call emerged. In the early days ringing was mainly on lower numbers of bells and their aim was simply to produce true extents (what they called 'complete peals') i.e. to ring every row just once. As ringing on higher numbers became increasingly common completeness became an unrealistic target (a standard peal of Major uses an eighth of the available rows and on twelve it's around one in 10,000), which enabled composers to be more selective.

A lot of modern composers strive to include the more musical rows in their work. But that sometimes leads to complicated compositions that are more difficult to call.

Some composers aim for simplicity, where the pattern of calls is simpler and well structured, making it easier for less experienced conductors to learn, remember, and check that things are still on track while ringing.

A few composers aim for specific lengths, with date touches being the most obvious example. Matching the length to the year means each year needs a new crop of compositions.

Whatever the composer's aim, the need for truth (ie no repetitions) is so engrained in the ringing ethos that it is needed for all but simple training touches.

I first composed in my youth when I was running an active band keen to do something new. That was for a 1964 date touch, and in fact all my compositions have been date touches, either because none were published when we needed them or in recent years, when they are published, because I needed something simpler for the band that would be ringing.

When I started, the only tools available were pencil and paper, and the compositions were only published on paper, but now it's very different. Several aids and proving tools are available but I suspect most composers start to work out their ideas on paper. The big change in recent years is *CompLib*, which does for compositions what *BellBoard* does for performances. So ringers can publish their work and they can also search to see what others have done.

On the home page *CompLib* has a 'leading publishers' display, and I recently spotted that one of the Branch's keen young ringers was at the top of the list. I've watched James' progress as a ringer and more recently a conductor, and I am delighted to see him trying his hand at composition – and with more vigour than I ever did. I only composed when I needed something to ring whereas James has explored much more widely what is possible.

When I looked there were 92 compositions ranging from Minor up to Sixteen, half of which were Major. Most of them were quarters or peals, with a few long lengths, the longest being 35,420 Grandsire Cinques.

Needless to say, the first time James conducted a quarter of Surprise Major he called his own composition.

John Harrison



Four families, eight ringers

Three young ringers took part in a successful quarter of Kent Treble Bob Major at All Saints Wokingham on Sunday 28th January. James, one of the young ringers, even conducted the quarter. Details are on the back page.

Date touch on New Years Day

A date touch composed and conducted by our chairman, John Harrison, was rung at All Saints Wokingham on the first day of the new year. A date touch is a composition such that each bell rings 2024 times to match the year number. This was successfully achieved, and was more notable because the band featured both an 80 and an 86 year old, and next to the oldest ringer a 16 year old. Details are on the back page.



First peal for a young ringer

At Shottesbrooke on 16th December, young ringer Charley scored her first peal ever at the age of 12! And Martha rang her first peal in the tower. The peal was conducted by Charley's dad Simon. Details are on the back page.

Sonning young ringer — Learning the Ropes

Recently there has been fast progress for Becki Shuttleworth, one of St Andrew's, Sonning, young ringers. In December Becki was awarded her *Learning the Ropes* level 3 certificate. Becki is a fast learner and her tutor (me, Ed.) had not been keeping up with signing off her achievements in her LtR progress booklet. When this was done, Becki achieved her level 4 pass just one week after level 3! Since then, Becki has completed level 5 of LtR and will soon be awarded her certificate. Congratulations to her.

Rob Needham

Learning the Ropes at Wargrave

St Mary's, Wargrave, follow the ART *Learning the Ropes* scheme. Early on in 2023 Liz attained her level 2, having mastered all the basic skills ready to progress to Change Ringing. Towards the end of 2023 our newest ringers (both 'Ring for the King' recruits) Penny and Alice, were both awarded their level 1. Now they are both very competent at ringing rounds and are ringing for Sunday Service, enabling us to ring all eight. At a recent practice, all three were presented with their certificates by tower captain John. For a few months we have been delighted to have Sally rejoin us after a break from ringing when at university and on a placement on Fair Isle. She is now moving to Cheltenham to do a masters degree, and have the opportunity to ring on the lovely new 12 at the minster. Alice and Penny have started ringing call changes, and Liz is plain hunting having recently rung the treble to Plain Bob and the second to Grandsire.



Vinni Sullivan - Wargrave Ringing Master

Unusual Visitor at St James' Finchampstead

In January we were contacted by a lady who said she had discovered that one of her ancestors, John Soane (a 6 x great grandfather), had been a churchwarden at St James and his name was inscribed on the tenor bell, so please could she come and see it. Coincidentally, I had seen her post on the *British Genealogy* Facebook page and noted that she had said that contacting churches when researching family history was a good tip and that sometimes, although not always, people were kind enough to help, and she was so honoured and excited to be invited to see the bell with her ancestor's name on it. I hadn't realised that it was our tower she had contacted as she didn't name the church and it was fairly obvious that she wasn't very local.

She and her husband duly arrived one Wednesday evening and went up to see the tenor. She had a go chiming the treble which she was thrilled to do, and then they watched us raising the bells and stayed for the rest of the practice, which they found very interesting and asked us lots of questions.

John Soane died in 1798 and is buried in the churchyard. In fact, the names of the churchwardens are on all the 1792 bells, but only the tenor has the additional inscription:

Thy praise and glory, Lord we will resound
To all the listening nations round,
And with our tongues and voices raise
To Thee, O God, our songs of praise.

1792 Thomas Allen and John Soane, Churchwardens

Tricia Amos

By searching on *BellBoard* I have found performances of the frequent ringers from the middle of October 2023 until the end of January 2024, listed in alphabetical order of member's surname. My apologies to any members whose performances I have missed.

Vikki Bulbeck, Shottesbrooke & Clewer: 35 Quarter Peals (QP), 4 Peals (P)

Chris Cole, St Paul's Wokingham: 8QP (4 in hand), 4P (2 in hand)

Lesley Cross, Shottesbrooke: 16QP, 1P

Ken Davenport, St Paul's: 6QP (3 in hand), 4P in hand

Pam Elliston, Sonning: 5 QP

Simon Farrar, Twyford: 2QP 1P

Kristin Fitch, All Saints Wokingham: 2QP, 1P

John Harrison, All Saints Wokingham: 14QP (6 in hand), 5P (1 in hand)

Jacqueline Hazell, Shottesbrooke: 25QP, 1P

Martha Hazell, Shottesbrooke: 21QP, 1P

David G Maynard, All Saints Wokingham: 5QP, 25P (15 in hand)

Nigel Mellor, All Saints Wokingham: 11QP (5 in hand), 16P (3 in hand)

Janet Menhinick: 21QP (8 in hand), 13P (1 in hand)

Sue Portsmouth, Sonning: 43QP (40 on Ringing Room)

Charley Smith, Shottesbrooke: 16QP, 1P

Simon D Smith, Shottesbrooke: 20QP, 1P

Stephen R Smith, All Saints Wokingham: 5QP, 2P

Vinni Sullivan, Wargrave: 9QP (3 on Ringing Room)

Below is a small selection of peals or quarters achieved in the Branch between October 2023 and February 2024.

The selection is based on young ringers being involved, a 'first' for one or more of the ringers, or just that they are interesting or challenging. *Ed.*

St Paul, Wokingham, Berkshire
Thursday, 2 November 2023 in 45m

1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Debbie McLaren
 - 2 Geoffrey M Harvey
 - 3 Derek Palmer
 - 4 Geoffrey K Cook
 - 5 Alan K Barsby
 - 6 Kenneth R Davenport (C)
 - 7 Christopher P Cole
 - 8 John McLaren
- Half Muffled for the All Souls Eucharist

St John the Baptist, Shottesbrooke
Saturday, 16 December 2023 in 2h 48

5040 Doubles (2m): 2520 x St Martin's Bob Doubles; 2520 x Plain Bob Doubles

- 1 Martha C Hazell
 - 2 Charley Smith
 - 3 Jacqueline M Hazell
 - 4 Simon D Smith (C)
 - 5 Vikki E M Bulbeck
 - 6 Lesley S Cross
- Ringer 2: 1st Peal (aged 12)
Ringer 1: 1st Peal in Tower

St Michael and St Mary Magdalene, Easthampstead
Saturday, 20 January 2024 in 2h 56

5088 75th Birthday Surprise Major

- Donald F Morrison (3650)
- 1 Elizabeth S Menhinick
 - 2 Beryl R Norris
 - 3 Jackie Roberts
 - 4 Janet E Menhinick
 - 5 Michael H D O'Callaghan
 - 6 Nigel A L Mellor
 - 7 Mike Pidd (C)
 - 8 Martin J Turner

Arranged as a Birthday compliment to Janet.
Rung to mark the Golden Wedding anniversary of Barbara and Steve Wells, ringers at this church for 50 years.

St John the Baptist, Shottesbrooke
Sunday, 5 November 2023 in 41m
1259 Doubles (3m)
480 Reverse Canterbury, 480 Plain Bob, 299 Grandsire

- 1 Jon Boughton (43)
- 2 Cordelia Thompson (19)
- 3 Peter Jasper (37) (C)
- 4 Sian Robinson (29)
- 5 Holley Wakeling (19)

A 'prime number' quarter peal - a prime number of changes (1259), in a prime number of methods (3), rung in a prime number of minutes (41), starting at a prime number time (17:29), on a prime number date (5/11/23), on a prime number of bells (5), by ringers who all have a prime number age!

St John the Baptist, Shottesbrooke
Thursday, 28 December 2023 in 41m

1260 Doubles (4m)
420 x Hertfordshire Bob; 360 x Lancashire Bob; 240 x Herefordshire Bob; 240 x Nottinghamshire Bob.

- 1 Martha C Hazell
 - 2 Edward C Westlake (C)
 - 3 Jacqueline M Hazell
 - 4 Simon D Smith
 - 5 Vikki E M Bulbeck
 - 6 Lesley S Cross
- First in methods for all.

All Saints, Wokingham, Berkshire
Sunday, 14 January 2024 in 45m
1250 Yorkshire Surprise Major
Composed by James H Moynihan

- 1 Jennifer S Moynihan
 - 2 Helen M Maynard
 - 3 Becki Shuttleworth
 - 4 Stephen R Smith
 - 5 John A Harrison
 - 6 Nigel A L Mellor
 - 7 James H Moynihan (C)
 - 8 Jon P Tutcher
- Rung before Celtic Evening Prayer.
First of Surprise and on 8 as conductor

St Paul, Wokingham, Berkshire
Sunday, 12 November 2023 in 48m
1260 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Mary Ede
 - 2 Geoffrey K Cook
 - 3 Geoffrey M Harvey
 - 4 Derek Palmer
 - 5 Richard M Bishop
 - 6 Christopher P Cole
 - 7 Kenneth R Davenport (C)
 - 8 Peter J Davenport
- Half Muffled for Parish Mass and Act of Remembrance.

All Saints, Wokingham, Berkshire
Monday, 1 January 2024 in 70m

2024 Spliced Bob Major
24 Little, 2000 Plain, 1 com
Composed by John A Harrison

- 1 Kristin L Fitch
 - 2 Geoffrey M Harvey
 - 3 Nicola M Lee
 - 4 Stephen R Smith
 - 5 James M Champion
 - 6 Alan K Barsby
 - 7 James H Moynihan
 - 8 John A Harrison (C)
- Rung to welcome the New Year.
First date touch: 7.

All Saints, Wokingham, Berkshire
Sunday, 28 January 2024 in 46m

1280 Kent Treble Bob Major

- 1 Charlotte N Lee
 - 2 Jennifer S Moynihan
 - 3 Claire L Shuttleworth
 - 4 Jane A Mellor
 - 5 Nicola M Lee
 - 6 Becki Shuttleworth
 - 7 James H Moynihan (C)
 - 8 Nigel A L Mellor
- First Treble Bob – 1
First of Kent TB – 2 & 6

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