

# ODD BOB



Newsletter of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers  
website: [odg.org.uk/](http://odg.org.uk/)



*Daphne Pollard with presentation plate*

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## **From your Editor...**

Don't forget to check regularly the Guild website at [odg.org.uk/](http://odg.org.uk/) and your branch website.

In particular the EBSB Fund Raising website address is: [bellfund.org.uk](http://bellfund.org.uk).

Rob Needham

## **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**

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## **Master's Mutterings**

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The May addition of Odd Bob is usually distributed at the Guild AGM and is full of news and planned summer events.

No so in this year of Covid19. As I write the Prime Minister is in intensive care, there are many thousands of people struggling to maintain a livelihood and many others grieving for family and friends, victims of the virus.

The pattern of our summer ringing events has been sorely affected. I am particularly sad for the young ringers who would have been representing the OGD in York; so much hard work, dedication and anticipation all diminished in a moment. Weddings, outings, social events – even the AGM and the Ringing Day all cancelled with so much disappointment to everyone involved – at this point I can hear you thinking ‘AGM?’ and I smile because I know it's not everyone's idea of an enjoyable day out!

Hopefully, by the time this copy is read by you all, we will be out of lockdown and ringing again. The more likely scenario is that we still have restrictions on our movements and activities and our towers will remain silent. When we are able to return to ringing there is likely to be some discussion on how we do it. The decision should be with the priest in charge of your church; there could be recommendations from the Diocese, the CCCBR or some other significant authority. If the decision were mine I would chose to ring half-muffled for a short while to recognise the sadness, strife and trauma that the country has experienced, and then ring open to show our gratitude to those who have helped us through the dark time, and to celebrate our hope for the future.

Meanwhile, I have great admiration for everyone who is experimenting with *e-ringing*, it sounds challenging and fun and I am glad that it is bringing pleasure. I just hope that it is not the real future for ringing because I became a ringer for the melody of church bells sounding out on Sunday mornings, the other delights came later.

It is the Sunday bells that I miss most of all and I long to be sharing those times with friends again.

Catherine Lane, Guild Master

## **Daphne Pollard**

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Daphne Pollard started ringing at Radley in 1953, taught by the redoubtable Marie Cross. Sixty six years later she is still ringing at Radley, now as tower captain. In recognition of her continuous devoted service, Radley ringers and PCC created a commemorative plate, and presented it to her at the 2019 Christmas dinner. She is seen on the front cover with some of the band, from left to right: Charlie Milward, Oliver Hyde, Sally Mulholland, Ann Belcher, Emily Walker, Claire Ward, Daphne Pollard, Lisa Astbury, Maurice Belcher, Audrey Fowlie, Martha Young.

Charlie Milward

## **Young Ringers New Year outing to Horspath**

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For the Christmas school holiday outing we visited a light six, Horspath, just outside Oxford. And seventeen school-aged ringers came! [see photo on back cover.] They represented seven branches of the ODG, mostly fairly local but some coming from as far as Bloxham, Tilehurst, Faringdon and Clanfield. They were aged between ten and eighteen years old. Almost all the ringing was just by the young ringers, with lots of rounds and call changes, but also some Grandsire, Plain Bob, Stedman and Kent.

The young ringers said how much they liked the Christmas Cribs displayed in the church, (and the mince pies left over from Christmas Day).

And to recognise the season we had a party in the nearby Horspath Hub! We started with some party food kindly provided by Daphne, then played party games and rang carols on handbells. It was good to see the young ringers enjoying each others' company.



Susan Read, Training Officer, ONB Branch

## **Young Ringers outing, Newbury area**

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*Below is Bobbi's report on the outing to Newbury for young ringers, held on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February. Bobbi is 12 years old and rings at Steventon each Sunday. She has been attending practices at Harwell and Abingdon and is just beginning to learn plain hunt.* Susan Read

Our latest Young Ringers outing took place in and around Newbury on a chilly February day in half term. It was a really great day and I got to make lots of new friends who were all excellent ringers. The most fun part of the day was getting to try the bells at three different church towers. We started at Speen, walked on to Shaw (in the wind and rain!) and finished at St Nicholas' in Newbury town centre. St Nicholas had really loud bells which apparently my brother could hear from the other side of the town!

Trying out at different towers gave me a bit more confidence when facing new bells. It was a really great day and I am looking forward to future outings.

Bobbi Cookson

## Junior ringers report, CBB outing to Cambridge

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 we went on an outing to Cambridge with about 40 fellow bell ringers from 15 different branch towers but mainly from Aylesbury, Stewkley and Wing.

The first church we went to was a 6-bell tower called St Edward King & Martyr. This tower had very nice bells, however, every bell seemed to be different in that no bell felt like another when ringing which was very interesting. Also, bell 3 had the sally very high so we had to have someone tall to ring that bell.

The second church we went to was another 6-bell tower called St Bene't's Church.



This church had a ground floor ring which was new to us as we have only rung at churches where the bells are rung from part way up the tower. Before heading out to the next church, we went and had some lunch at St Catharine's College (*photo*) where we had an amazing tour and learnt some of the history connected to the different areas of the college.

The third church we went to was an 8-bell tower called The Church of Our Lady

and The English Martyrs. This tower had really heavy bells where they needed two people to ring up the tenor which was 31cwt. The fourth church we went to was another 8-bell tower called St Andrew The Great. This church was a more modern church compared to the other churches we visited.

And finally, the fifth tower we went to was a 12-bell tower called Great St Marys (*photo*) with 24 cwt tenor, the University Church. This tower was one of our favourite towers because the bells sounded lovely and when you went to where you could see the bells they were very pretty and covered in beautiful patterns. Being from Wing, we were able to ring the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup>. Also, if you carried on going up the tower you can go on the roof and you have a lovely view of Cambridge.

Although we were the two youngest and smallest ringers, we really enjoyed this trip to Cambridge as we got to experience new towers and different sized bells. We just wanted to say a massive thank you to all the churches for letting us ring there; St Catharine's College for providing us with lots of delicious food and finally a big thank you to Maddie Knightley for setting up everything in Cambridge and the branch for arranging the whole trip.



Alexandria Harrison-Poole & Evelyn Pye, All Saints, Wing

## The Previous National Ringing Ban

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We virtually have a suspension of all ringing in the UK whilst the coronavirus is in the country. During World War 2 there was also a ban on ringing but that was clearly for a different reason and had in some ways a different impact. Its ending coincided with a significant event in my family.

The ban was introduced by Winston Churchill's Government in June 1940. The Government passed a *Control of Noise Defence Order* in June 1940 completely banning the ringing of bells throughout the land, but with one exception. They were only to ring out if there was a German invasion. There were appeals particularly from the Archbishops to allow ringing for Christmas both in 1940 and in 1941, but the Government insisted that the ban could not be relaxed even for a day.

One consequence was an increase in the number of ringers taking to change ringing on handbells and of course they had no limit on social interaction. The number of handbell peals increased during the ban. One imagines also that handbell quarter peals were rung although I have not been able to find those documented in either the Guild reports or *The Ringing World*. There is a letter in *The Ringing World* from a Lincolnshire ringer who was concerned that the sound of handbells might be breaking the Defence Order, so wrote to the Chief Constable. A police constable was sent to investigate, but having listened for the handbells from outside including with the windows open deemed that they were not breaking the law.

Some ringers removed or tied the clappers, so that they could continue some activities, including teaching. Guild and Branch meetings continued throughout the war, with handbell ringing the attraction during the ban. In those days few people had cars and those that did were restricted by petrol rationing. Bill Butler's book *100 Years of the Oxford Diocesan Guild* records a quote from the then General Secretary about the 1941 Annual Meeting: "No ringing, no dinner, no tea, but plenty of rain!".

In November 1942 there was a great victory for the Allies at El Alamein and Churchill wanted to lift the spirits of the public, so he decided the most appropriate way for everyone to celebrate was to order all bells to be rung. Several towers in EBSB turned out to ring including Burnham. Ten girls aged between 11 & 14, all trained since the outbreak of war rang, seven of whom had not heard their bell speak before. Although not officially lifted, the ban was not strictly enforced for that Christmas so there was some ringing.

In the following 3-4 months the Government came under increasing pressure to remove the ban, particularly from members of the House of Lords. The threat of invasion was virtually nil and the Forces top brass revealed that they had no procedure to initiate the ringing of bells even if we were invaded. So from Easter 1943 bells could be rung on Sundays and finally at the start of June all restrictions were lifted. The ban did not seem to have had a longer-term impact on ringing. Our Branch had 15% more members in 1948 compared with 10 years previously.

And the significant event in my family: my parents were married on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1943 and benefited in being the first wedding in St Albans to have the bells ring out after the ban ended.

Ken Darvill – Beaconsfield

## Education *Still* Matters

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The Education Sub-committee met at Aston Rowant in January and via video-conference in April. Colin Newman and Robert Newton have been re-elected as Chairman and Secretary respectively. We welcome Elizabeth Mullett to the group. Positive feedback was received from the Steeple Aston and two ten-bell courses held in the autumn. Sadly, the Training Meeting and Radley Course were postponed owing to Covid-19 lockdown. The difficult decision has been taken to postpone the 2020 Michaelmas and Steeple Aston courses as well. It is felt that the implications of continuing social distancing are likely to make such activities very difficult, if not impossible for the foreseeable future. A decision about the anticipated ten-bell course(s) will be made in the summer, when the situation is clearer. Ten-bell courses can be planned within shorter timescales, as there are fewer towers, helpers and students to organise. Hopefully, there will be a full range of courses in 2021.

The ART Conference took place at Hilton in Derbyshire shortly before ‘lockdown’ and was very well supported. Lesley Belcher chaired the AGM while Colin Newman and Tony Crabtree were heavily involved in plenaries on good striking and tower management. The day produced extremely positive outcomes.

Of the four entries for the 2019/20 *Young Ringers’ Award*, just two submissions were received; well done, Jack and Holley! The results will be announced at the Guild AGM, although presentation may be a little more challenging than usual.

Colin Newman is planning a video-conference to replace the March Training Meeting, later in the year. Watch out for further details in due course.

Some guilds and associations (Kent and Middlesex, for example) publish online educational materials and support. We, too, are intending to deliver training, including via ‘webinars’. Subjects suggested so far include conducting, handbells and computer assisted learning but there must be further areas in which Guild members would be interested. Please let us know and we will do our best to oblige. It is not our intention to ‘reinvent the wheel’, so if you know of some really good resources, please let us know where they can be accessed. The great thing about many of these resources is that they are freely available and can be shared for the benefit of all. One effect of the current restrictions is that online training will inevitably have increased and, surely, this will be maintained as life returns to ‘normal’.

One significant deprivation of our current situation is the lack of opportunity to hear bells being rung. There are many recordings available, both off and on-line, from the mundane to the esoteric (try 12bell.org!) and there’s always *Bells on Sunday*, beloved of early and late birds, to counteract our withdrawal symptoms. Why not give them a try?

Please get in touch with us about any of the above: [edchairman@odg.org.uk](mailto:edchairman@odg.org.uk) or [edsecretary@odg.org.uk](mailto:edsecretary@odg.org.uk) and please keep safe!

Robert Newton (Education Sub-committee Secretary)

## **Safeguarding**

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In this time of coronavirus lockdown, it seems that many of the safeguarding concerns for our ringing community have been put on hold. However, for completeness, it is worth reporting that the last safeguarding ‘event’ was the C2 training course which was held at Radley in November 2019. The course was well delivered and received, and particular thanks are owed to Daphne Pollard who opened up and provided refreshments on the day. Future training is likely to be done through regional courses organised by the Diocese, but of course this is also on hold indefinitely.

The Guild Safeguarding Policy has been updated and is available on the website. There have been some small amendments to this, most noticeably a reference to the membership of tower communication groups such as *WhatsApp* for our young people. The important thing with these is that parents are included in the group along with their children, and that for the youngest members, under 14 years, communications should be solely through parents. Of course, on line abuse is something that can still be happening within ringing as well as within the wider community so vigilance is still necessary here.

With the absence of ringing in our towers, it would be easy to lose contact with some of our more vulnerable ringers but I’m confident that, in the way that ringers do, we will all be looking out for each other whilst using some of the virtual platforms to maintain our social grouping. I’m sure we are all looking forward to the time that we can open our towers and ring together again.

June Wells, Guild Safeguarding Officer

## **Towers & Belfries Committee**

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The committee has met twice since the last Odd-Bob. One matter of concern had been the uneven spread of membership across the Guild. I am pleased to say that we have recently welcomed Philip Dobson and Chris Potter to the committee as well as welcoming back Alan Marchbank. We now have much better coverage in the North East of the Guild. Indeed, the only significant gap is now in the extreme South East of the Guild. Any expressions of interest, particularly from that locality would be very welcome.

Our recent belfry courses were popular as was the February rope splicing and management module at Radley Church Hall which was very busy and fully subscribed again this year. Students enjoyed the wide range of artefacts (pulleys, wheels etc) which we used to explain the causes of rope wear and other issues such as rope handling. We want to ensure that students come away with more than just an understanding of how to mend a broken rope.

We were hoping to run two more courses in 2020 but the June course is certainly cancelled. The general tower course on 19<sup>th</sup> September at Ivinghoe remains in the diary. Invitations for this course will go out as soon as possible but expressions of interest are welcome at any time.

There is a big demand for rope splicing and we are happy to support local courses with tuition. We want people to come ready to learn skills they can put to good use in their local towers, whether splicing ropes or spotting preventive measures so the rope wear can be reduced and rope life extended. There are many good splicing videos on YouTube (as well as some not so good...).

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb-6YwA2e2Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb-6YwA2e2Y) is instructive, particularly as it uses three-colour rope for ease of demonstration. Anyone who wants to prepare for a course can order themselves a “Swedish fid” (curved steel splicing spike) on-line and use one of these videos to get some practice prior to the course. While you can use an ordinary wooden spike, the Swedish fid makes splicing tough bell ropes much easier. The videos don’t always explain the techniques for tough ropes in detail as they usually tend to deal with ordinary soft ropes rather than bell ropes.

At the last meeting, besides inspection reports and planning courses, we discussed the general availability of advice and website downloads. We considered how best practice could be shared across the country. The CCCBR is considering ways that it can offer video or downloadable advice on a range of topics. It is also looking at holding webinars during the virus lock-down and I am assisting with that.

Since the last Odd Bob report, Committee members have been very active with TMA (Tower Maintenance Award), grant inspections and general advice at the following places: West Challow, Stoke Goldington, Little Horwood, Arborfield, North Stoke, Weston on the Green, Wendover, Letcombe Regis, Letcombe Bassett, South Leigh, Dorchester Abbey, Penn, Winkfield, Slapton, Fulmer and Combe. The Tower Maintenance Award (TMA) scheme continues and towers are encouraged to join in. Inspections are free and there is much to be gained from the inspection and the advice you may receive, so please get in touch if you would like a visit.

Tony Crabtree – Chairman

## **Librarian’s Report**

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Doug Beaumont, Guild Librarian

There have been 13 library enquiries since Odd Bob issue 101. These have been about:

- Peal report at Wooburn in newspaper 1915
- Peal at Great Marlow on 2/11/1985
- C Bonner's tower before Henley in early 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Peal at Ottery St Mary on 28/12/1987
- Peal at St John Windsor on 11/11/1973
- Membership information for EBSB member in 1960s
- Arthur Pike, ringer in Reading area early 20<sup>th</sup> century
- War-time annual reports borrowed
- Ringing of two methods, St Peter and St Paul
- Obituary of Nicholas Martin, ringer from Kent
- Any Guild members attached to Broadwell before 1911
- Sonning Deanery Branch subscriptions around time of World Wars
- Guild Deputy Master in late 1940s/early 50s, Captain Alban Poyntz.

**Electronic archive.** Several further annual reports have been added to the archive website: 1922, 1935, 1937-1939, 1944-1946, 1949. Thank you to John Harrison for scanning the bulk of these. The first 50 pages of the first Guild minutes book (1880-1917) have also been added to the archive website. These are a difficult read on account of the hand-writing. If anyone else would be interested in taking images (scans or photos) of Guild material, please let me know. For information the archive website address is <http://www.archives.odg.org.uk/>.



*Photo 1*



*Photo 2*

Some photographs of the library are attached, showing approximately 80% of all the material in the library. Photos 1 and 2 are of the bookcases housing the Bell News (blue) and Ringing World (green).

As librarian, you get to learn about odd nooks and crannies of Guild history. One of the enquiries listed above was from a ringer from Teignmouth asking about Captain Alban R. Poyntz. He was Deputy Master of the ODG in the late 1940s and early 1950s and is still remembered by another Teignmouth ringer. Captain Poyntz became Deputy Master after he lost the vote to be Master to Rev. C. Elliott Wigg. He seems not to have been very happy about this because soon afterwards he moved a motion at a meeting that a decision about who should be Master should not be made by a “snap vote” at an AGM. This motion was carried. Captain Poyntz moved to Teignmouth a few years later. He asked that when he died he should be buried at sea. This form of burial was duly carried out when the time came, and the same has not happened in Teignmouth before or since.

The Covid-19 restrictions mean that it is not currently possible to visit the library. I am still however happy to look up information you need, so please let me know if you have any library queries.

## News from the Branches

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### Banbury

In December the Advent Carol Service was held at Cropredy with ringing beforehand and mince pies afterwards. There was as usual the annual tradition of ringing at Deddington on Boxing Day and at Banbury on New Year's Day. Branch Practices and Advanced Practices have been held to cater for all abilities plus some special request training days.

Two peals were rung in the Branch towards the end of the year. One at Rousham of mixed doubles, seven methods in memory of Dave Tuckey who had been a ringer there for sixty years and who had died in the summer. It was the first peal for Jack Knowles of Steeple Aston. 1. Jack A Knowles, 2. Sue McCouaig, 3. Daniel J Austin, 4. Sally A Austin, 5. Graham J Clifton (c), 6. Lawrence A White.

The other peal was rung at Wardington and was of seven minor methods, and was rung for the 101<sup>st</sup> birthday of Evelyn Phillips, a resident of the village. It was sad to hear that the lady had died last month. 1. Barry J Davis, 2. Catherine M A Lane, 3. Rosemary K Hemmings, 4. E Susan Burchell, 5. Graham J Clifton, 6. Colin M Lee (c).

There have been several quarter peals of firsts in method rung over the past few months including Heyford Doubles at Lower Heyford, Steeple Aston Surprise Major at Steeple Aston, 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Surprise Major, (this was to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Liz Smith and one of a series of quarter peals that she rang with Branch members over the weekend).



1280 70th Birthday Surprise Major

- 1 Alison Varney
- 2 Colin M Lee (C)
- 3 Elizabeth A Smith
- 4 Rosemary K Hemmings
- 5 Sue Burchell
- 6 Lionel D Smith
- 7 Alan J Griffin
- 8 Richard A Smith

Part of the 70th birthday celebrations for 3.

Other quarter peals rung were: Single Canterbury Minor, Anniversary Doubles, 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday Treble Place, and a quarter peal of 11 different doubles methods. A quarter peal of Bob Major at Banbury was Graham Clifton's 600<sup>th</sup> quarter peal as conductor and Barry Davis's 750<sup>th</sup> quarter, and a quarter of Grandsire Caters was rung for the engagement of Banbury ringers Catherine Smith and Matthew Jones.

The Steeple Aston tower handbell ringers raised over £1,400 for Arthritis Research through their annual Christmas time ringing around the village. This would not have been possible without a great team of youngsters taking part. Jack Knowles of Steeple Aston featured in the Christmas edition of the Ringing World with his gold badge from the Sherbourne teaching scheme

Unfortunately, due to covid-19, from early March all Branch activities have been cancelled including the planned social evening with quiz and Branch AGM.

Rosemary Hemmings

## **Bicester**

During the last six months we continued with our increasingly popular Branch Practices (until March) – numbers have ranged from 7 to 18 but all have (I think!) enjoyed the variety we've been able to accommodate. As others find (and we debated some of the ideas raised in the *Ringling World* article by Marianne Fisher at our AGM in February) it's sometimes difficult to achieve everyone's wish in 90 minutes, so Steve Vickars arranged a focussed practice in February in Blethingdon for five ringers concentrating on trebling and ringing inside to doubles and minor methods. In January five of our learners attended the sessions offered by Susan Read and the Abingdon team – sadly now stalled.

In 2017 the Branch contributed £150 to Kirtlington to buy a simulator which has now come into its own – several members have been using it which has given the opportunity to practice (virtual) ringing skills.

At our AGM we elected three new members; also Gus Bridges was co-opted as Deputy Webmaster and Anne Martin allowed herself to be persuaded to take over as Treasurer in addition to her existing role as Guild Representative. We are very grateful for the diligence and care taken over the years by Sally Wale, who has been our Treasurer since 2006 – thank you Sally! Those of us who could stay enjoyed supper afterwards at the *Black's Head* organised by Sue Macready.

We were delighted that Charlie Bates rang his first quarter inside of Grandsire Doubles at Kirtlington on 1<sup>st</sup> March, which meant he achieved his 'ART Learning the Ropes Level 5' less than 18 months after starting to ring. As well as teaching him Steve captained the 2<sup>nd</sup> placed team *The Ringers* (all family members!) in the 31<sup>st</sup> annual Kirtlington quiz, which is a keenly-fought competition. Over the years, the *Islip Invaders* (also a predominately ringing team) have even won the competition but this year I'm sad to report they came joint 22<sup>nd</sup>, narrowly avoiding the wooden spoon.

Kathryn Grant

## **Central Bucks**

The Central Bucks Branch started the last stretch of 2019 in good heart. We had a very useful branch committee meeting in the late autumn, with a lot of good ideas being put forward for developing branch ringing. These were taken forward by the committee and a new schedule put in place for 2020. We had found our new(ish) progressors 8-bell practices, run monthly during a tower's normal practice session, to be very useful and this has been used as a guide to put more sessions in place. Having had a call for practices aimed at those just moving into ringing with others, we have introduced a "beyond rounds" monthly Saturday morning practice, being held at either Waddesdon or Hardwick. We then added a progressors 6-bell practice to match the 8-bell, these alternating monthly between Bierton and Chearsley, specifically designed for those moving beyond touches of Plain Bob and Grandsire.

At these sessions we have rung St Clements, Double Oxford and their variations, as well as the St Simon's doubles group and the occasional course of Surprise Minor.

This means that we now have four practices scheduled each month, with the regular second Saturday still giving the opportunity for general ringing. Every one of these has been well attended and the enthusiasm has been very encouraging.

In addition we have organised some training courses. These started with a raising a lowering handling course in January, at Chearsley on tied bells, which was so well received and oversubscribed that we held another in March, just before lockdown. Unfortunately the February session for young people had to be postponed. We feel thwarted that such good ideas, which had been well received, are now not being followed through. But then, it is the same for us all.

In addition to the practices, we also had a lovely coach and walking outing to Cambridge, in the last week that their bells were open for ringing. Some of our younger members report on that elsewhere in Odd Bob.

Our AGM in February was held at Wingrave and we had a good representation of members from towers across the branch. Eleven new ringing members were elected from six different towers, together with Ted Robinson as an associate member. Ted's wife Jan was Branch Master for a number of years and remains on our committee. Ted can be seen at most of our events and is our regular photographer for special occasions. We are delighted that he has formally joined our ranks as a non-ringing member. Despite giving notice of their intention to step down, no-one has come forward to replace Jeremy or Anne Pratt, Chairman and Secretary/Training Officer respectively, who have agreed to carry on in their roles until their planned move away from the area (now of course much delayed). We did however appoint a new Treasurer, Ailsa Knightley from Stewkley, and thanked John Lomas for his work in the role over the last few years.

Like ringers across the country, we look forward to a return to practice and service ringing. In such a rural branch as ours, ringing provides a very important social activity, which is much missed.

Anne Pratt

## **Chiltern**

Attendance at our branch practices has been increasing over the past few months. Our December practice was as usual followed by festive food and drink. The January practice at Wendover attracted a record attendance which enabled everyone to ring methods that individual towers often struggle to manage. As with everything else, ringing obviously came to an abrupt halt in mid March, which for Chiltern was just a few days prior to our AGM, which was therefore cancelled. We will hope to hold it before the end of the year, but obviously depending on whether ringing resumes this year and our members feel they can risk meeting together again.

The annual inter-branch striking competition held every October, the Orchard Cup, was hosted by Central Bucks branch this time. Unfortunately only one Chiltern tower was able to field a team, Cheddington. Other Chiltern towers had ringers on holiday, away ill, too few regular ringers to make up a band, or weddings to ring for, which prevented them participating. We hope that the competition this year, hosted by Cheddington, will be able to go ahead.

The branch was saddened to hear of the death in early March of John White, a stalwart of both Aston Clinton and the branch. A memorial service will hopefully be held later in the year since, of necessity, his funeral had to be a much more private service than had originally been intended by his family.

Like everyone, we hope that our members and their families are keeping safe and well and send our good wishes to everyone affected by coronavirus.

Clare Carpenter

## **Chipping Norton**

The December branch practice, which took place at Charlbury, was followed by seasonal refreshments. Charlbury church was hosting a Christmas Tree Festival which added to the conviviality of the occasion.

The first two branch practices of 2020 were held at Chipping Norton and Leafield respectively and followed by pub lunches.

Several towers in the branch participated in sponsored ringing for the ODG Bell Fund at the end of February.

The Branch AGM took place at Burford on 7<sup>th</sup> March. Our thanks go to the vicar of Burford for arranging the service, and to the Burford ringers for the splendid tea that was provided. Keith Mitchell was elected as Ringing Master and Mick Austin stood down from being joint Ringing Master. Jenny Lewis is now Branch Treasurer. The other officers remain as before.

The Claire Tarrant Award for 2020 was presented to Russell Ingham of Charlbury. Russell has helped out with restoration work at Taynton and other towers in the Branch over the past two years.

Christine Harris

## **East Berks and South Bucks**

The Christmas Social at the Fitzwilliam Centre behind Beaconsfield church was supported by 52 members and partners. Penn ringers helped the local band to provide an excellent buffet and various quizzes and games to entertain us. Wishing each other a merry Christmas and happy New Year on leaving, none of us could have had any idea what 2020 would have in store.

A training practice at Hughenden, Branch practices at Chenies and Dorney, a surprise practice at Stoke Poges and Tower Captains meeting at Bray had all been reasonably well supported. New recruits at various towers in the Branch were making good progress and the Branch seemed to be in good shape – until the Covid-19 lockdown started.

Fortunately the Leap Year Sponsored Ringing Week came earlier. There was special ringing at eight towers. Four quarter peals and a peal were scored and £819 (plus gift aid) was raised/donated to the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund.

On 19<sup>th</sup> January Cliff Blundell celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. He and Angela moved to Burnham in 1960 where Cliff was Tower Captain for very many years, and they had been the backbone of the Burnham handbell group. Sadly, just 6 weeks later Angela passed away.

Another long-standing EBSB member, Derek Fowles, died on 22<sup>nd</sup> March. At his home tower of Bray, Derek had served as tower captain, deputy captain, steeple keeper and treasurer. He was also very active at Branch and Guild level holding the posts of Branch Ringing Master, Branch Treasurer (1982 to 2003), Secretary of the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund, Chairman and Treasurer of the EBSB Fund Raising Committee, a Trustee of the Oxford Diocesan Guild and a Managing Trustee of the ODG Restoration Fund.

Joyce Pearson had also been a ringer at Bray. After living in a care home for many years she passed away on 11<sup>th</sup> April. None of the deaths were related to Covid-19 but sadly funerals for Angela, Derek and Joyce have had to be restricted family affairs. Their many ringing friends remember them with fondness and gratitude and would welcome the opportunity to celebrate their lives when the opportunity arises.

So, how are we coping with the lockdown? At many towers, members are looking out for each other by email, phone calls, WhatsApp, etc. At Clewer they have gone one step further by setting up a virtual Friday night practice using Zello and *Ringling Room*. At their second practice five of the ringers took part and mastered rounds, call changes and plain hunt.

The Guild Secretary and previous Guild Secretary, Ken and Angela Darvill, rang handbells in their garden on Easter morning prior to watching the service from Beaconsfield online.

A couple of weeks prior to the lockdown peregrine falcons were seen taking an interest in the tower at All Saints, High Wycombe. Now they only have the clock chimes to disturb them as they nest on a ledge just above the louvres.



We begin to wonder how we will get out of this lockdown situation. When will we be able to re-schedule AGM's, courses and striking competitions? When we are eventually allowed to ring together will we have to wear face masks and rubber gloves, or will the ban go on until there is no further risk? Above all, we hope that everyone stays fit and well and returns to ringing with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

Pat Newton

## **Newbury**

As with the rest of the world, the bells of the Newbury Branch are now sadly silent, but things are stirring nonetheless. The “virtual-belfry” web-based *Ringling Room* software is now in use by the Newbury band and is being tried out by others. With a bit of practice, methods are possible and quite a fun way to avoid “skills fade”. This new way of ringing will, I’m sure, go from strength to strength as bands get used to it.

There is now also *Handbell Stadium*, a simulator developed by Graham John and his son Ted. This allows handbells to be rung over the internet using motion sensors to translate the bell motion into a digital signal for display on the dispersed ringers' PCs. *Handbell Stadium* also meets the Central Council's rules for peals on simulators and the first quarter was rung on 13<sup>th</sup> April.

WhatsApp groups have also sprung up to allow ringers an informal way of staying in touch and sharing pictures etc. Group face-to-face video apps such as Zoom and Skype have all gained in popularity to have "virtual" pub nights and socials, keeping the team spirit alive and ringing bands together until we can, once again, meet for real.

Before everything changed, we had quite a busy run up to Christmas, with Remembrance Sunday and the traditional half-muffled ringing at most towers. This was also the tenth anniversary of the St Mary's, Speen band being formed from members of the congregation, with the first training sessions. Ten years on and the now thriving band held an anniversary dinner to celebrate [*photo on back cover*].

Into the Christmas season and extra services requiring plenty of ringing were supplemented by a quarter of Christmas Delight Major at Hungerford, followed by their Christmas outing to the Swindon area, held just after Boxing Day.

East Garston now has the support of the wardens and clergy to have the bells restored, so the ringers have started fund-raising. Lambourn's restoration work continued until the lockdown with sound weld booked for June, re-hang in August and ringing again for the patronal festival in September, a timetable that will be revisited once work is allowed to resume.

Taylor's work on Thatcham bells was completed in January with some help from the ringers, and they went on to celebrate long-standing ringer and secretary of 14 years Margaret Robinson's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, albeit remotely, with an engraved Whitechapel bell. Our quarter peal week in February was quieter than usual, but successful nonetheless, with eight quarters scored involving three firsts and much valuable experience gained by learners. The Branch Dinner, traditionally held on the last day of quarter peal week, was the usual friendly and sociable event and was enjoyed by all.

Mark Robins

## **North Bucks**

[*No news received – Ed.*]

Brian Baldwin

## **Old North Berks**

ONB Branch's autumn social event for 2019 was a quiz evening and supper held in Brightwell Village Hall in November. Over sixty members and friends attended and showed how competitive they really are when divided into teams. The quiz was split into two, with a superb supper of various delicious casseroles followed by excellent desserts. Thanks go to Roy Thorpe and his ringers for hosting the event and to Anne Hales of Blewbury for devising and running the quiz. The event raised £521 (including a raffle) for branch funds.

New Year's Day 2020 ringing with refreshments was held at Wantage, and there were over thirty attendees. Thanks go to Celia Leeson Cox and all the Wantage ringers for the excellent refreshments. This was once again a very happy occasion for the Branch and a good start to the New Year.

The restoration of Long Wittenham bells has been delayed, but thanks go to all members who have helped and supported the fund raising appeal. The target set has been exceeded, which is fortunate because an additional £1,400 is required for scaffolding. No firm decision has yet been made on whether there will be a rope guide. Investigations into the construction of a ringing gallery are being carried out, however it could be several years before the funding for this is available.

A full report from the architect of St Nicolas, Abingdon, has revealed that cracks in the tower are more substantial than was originally thought, and tie bars are needed. This work, which will be paid from church funds, is going out to tender and so will take a few months, hopefully being completed by summer. Unfortunately some new flats have been built by the church and residents have moved in whilst the bells have been silent.

Sadly, the onset of Covid-19 and the lockdown in March has prevented our holding any branch practices since then, and also our AGM, six bell striking competition and April mini-outing were cancelled. It was a great shame that we had to cancel the competition because it had been planned for the recently re-hung bells at Steventon. Hopefully we will be able to reschedule the competition there next year. We will most probably have to cancel our summer outing and barbecue, and possibly also the barn dance planned for November.

We hope for better times in the future and that everyone is staying safe at present.

Gill Loyd

## Oxford City

[No news received – Ed.]

## Reading

St Mary's and St Giles in Reading have been going for coffee after ringing on a Sunday, at least since the Oracle shopping centre was opened in the 90's, so rather than miss out on this social occasion there is a virtual coffee morning every Sunday at 11am. We are not an exclusive group and it is great to welcome friends from towers such as Tilehurst and Caversham. Thanks go to Pete Ellis for organising these so efficiently. The regular attendees were joined this week by Pam, the Branch's previous secretary, who is now based in New Zealand, so it



was great to see her again.

Thanks must also go to Steve Rossiter from St Mary's for organising what has now become a weekly virtual ringing practice on a Tuesday evening using Ringingroom.com.

We also look forward to when we can get back to celebration quarter peals. Ruth Hine of St Giles and her husband Rob celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on 19<sup>th</sup> April. A cake from a local baker and a cup of coffee had to suffice for the celebratory meal – hopefully we can ring for them before their next anniversary!

Lindsey Barker

## **Sonning Deanery**

**Young Ringers:** Since the previous Odd Bob there have been four Sunday afternoon practice sessions for our young ringers; the last one was held jointly with Berks and Bucks young ringers. The average number of SDB young ringers attending has been a healthy six per session, including the record of nine at Twyford in December. It is most gratifying to see the steady improvement in the ringing ability of the more experienced YRs: Little Bob, Kent, Stedman, Cambridge Surprise Minor, Cambridge Surprise Major...

**Elementary Branch Practice:** In November 2019, our Branch Ringing Master initiated a regular monthly ringing practice for members who are at the early stages of bell ringing; these are held on the first Tuesday evening of the month, at All Saints, Wokingham. Five have been held so far, until all ringing stopped in March. The practice covers everything from having just learnt to ring in rounds up to ringing Plain Bob and Grandsire. It is run along the ART (Association of Ringing Teachers) methodology which is designed to have intermediate steps to help jump the hurdle from rounds to change ringing. There has been an average of 14 people attending and the feedback extremely positive.

**ODG 10-bell striking competition:** This took place in November at Warfield church, and the branch entered a team, perhaps spurred on by the fact that the tower used for the competition was in our branch. The test piece was Grandsire Caters, and the team rang very well and came third; their certificate is shown online at [odg.org.uk/odg-six-bell-and-ten-bell-competition-certificates](http://odg.org.uk/odg-six-bell-and-ten-bell-competition-certificates) .

**Learning the Ropes:** Since the last issue of Odd Bob a number of Sonning Deanery Branch ringers have been progressing in the *Learning the Ropes* programme. In December, Holley Wakeling of Waltham St Lawrence (Loddon Hub) achieved Level 5. In January Elizabeth Sutcliffe of Wargrave (Loddon Hub) and Jamal Khan of Warfield passed Level 1, and Tabitha Mills of Wargrave achieved Level 2.

**Sonning Ringing Outing, Mar 14<sup>th</sup>.** 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. It was very lucky that the



outing took place just before the ‘lockdown’ of the Covid-19 pandemic. The weather was kind, and there were 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 they 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 thanks go to Pam for organising it.

**Sonning and lockdown:** During the enforced silence of Sonning’s bells, their oldest and very experienced ringer, Geoff Harvey, has been producing a series of training emails for the Sonning band, and inviting comments and questions. 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.

**Officers’ meeting and lockdown:** We held a Skype Officers’ meeting specifically to focus on actions we can take during the suspension of ringing, to help develop and maintain skills, as well as providing some light relief. Actions included encouraging members to use ringing apps, encouraging Towers to use *Ringing Room*, and to hold Branch *Ringing Room* practices. We are also looking at using *Ringing Room* to help encourage hand bell ringing within the branch. We are also investigating possible exercises to help maintain physical ringing condition.

Jan Glen

## **South Oxon**

Our final Branch Practice in 2019 was at Aston Rowant, after which we enjoyed mince pies, stollen and hot drinks. Thank you Aston Rowant for your hospitality! Another social occasion witnessed six new members being elected to the Guild – our AGM took place at Ewelme at the end of February, just before the Covid-19 lockdown put an end to our social interaction. Several of our towers are keeping in touch via email and phone calls, and everyone is enjoying the glorious Spring weather.

Sadly, during March, we were notified of the deaths of two of our long-standing ringers. Marion Cherry was regularly ringing at Benson until a few weeks before she died. She had been elected to the Guild in 1955, so had been a member for 65 years. John White had been a ringer at Aston Clinton and, for the last few years, at Drayton St Leonard. He was a former Deputy Master of the Guild and was Deputy Training Officer for the South Oxon Branch where he was instrumental in the training and encouragement of several new ringers. Bells will ring in celebration of their lives when the social isolation measures are lifted.

Several quarter peals have been rung throughout the year. Aston Rowant rang a farewell to their rector who departed for a new parish. Chalgrove welcomed their new vicar, with evening ringing prior to the inauguration service. Berrick Salome rang in memory of their former church organist who had moved to Scotland a few years ago. They held a mirror service of remembrance to coincide with the service in Scotland. Benson's bells rang out to celebrate the birth of Benji and Hayley's daughter, Ellie, and members from several South Oxon towers came together to ring a quarter peal at St Laurence, Warborough to congratulate Ken Webb on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Ken learnt to ring at Warborough in 1982 and still rings for Sunday services.

Whilst several of our towers have enough members to ring for their own services, we are always grateful to those itinerant ringers who regularly turn up to support practices, wedding and service ringing at towers that are struggling for ringers. A grateful thank you to those dedicated people who visit towers week in, week out, to help with training of new ringers, and to continue to develop those with a little more experience. Without your help South Oxfordshire would be a much quieter place!

Jane Willis

## **Vale of the White Horse**

*[No news received – Ed.]*

Lucy Laird

## **Witney and Woodstock**

At the end of 2019, Alison Merryweather-Clarke resigned as Acting Tower



*Alison Merryweather-Clarke & Heather Horner*

Captain at South Leigh, judging that our new band are now sufficiently fledged to be independent. This enables her to focus on her own tower at North Leigh. Our appreciation for her dedicated tuition and tireless support over more than four years cannot be overstated. Succeeding her, Heather Horner was elected Tower Captain at the Branch AGM in February 2020, supported by Chris Moxon as Ringing Master.

South Leigh hosted the Witney & Woodstock branch AGM this year, at which there was well-attended bell ringing followed by a hearty tea in the village hall. We are also delighted to welcome Martin Spurrier and Mike Collett as our new steeple keepers following the resignation of Ian Thompson after four years efficient maintenance. This changeover was the catalyst for implementing some long-planned improvements to the rope guide circle in the tower. Our thanks go to Martin, Tony Crabtree, Andrew Goldthorpe and Anthony Williamson for practical assistance on a long cold February day.

In November, a Quarter Peal of Grandsire Doubles was rung in celebration of the new ministry of The Reverend David Spence as Associate Vicar for the Benefice of St Mary's, Cogges and St James'. This happened concurrently with his induction service at Cogges.

In March, a Quarter Peal of Grandsire Doubles was rung in celebration of the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of David Smith, a bell ringer since 1953 and Tower Captain at St James' for over ten years. There were appropriately 1,390 changes completed in 51 minutes.

St. Mary the Virgin, Freeland: The bells were recorded for inclusion in a Christmas Play that was broadcast on Witney Radio on Christmas Eve.

St James the Great, Stonesfield: It is with great sadness that we record the death of our friend Simon Haviland, and pray for his wife Jenny and all the family and friends in their loss. Simon has been a faithful and very active member of the Stonesfield congregation for many, many years, serving in so many ways – PCC, bellringing, church unlocking, foodbank – to name but a few; he has also contributed so much to village life, not least through publishing the Slate village magazine. The funeral was held on Friday 3rd April at 2.30pm in the 'new' churchyard at the top of Brook Lane.

Andrew Goldthorpe

## **Paying Peal Fees electronically**

If you would like to pay peal fees electronically, instead of sending in cheques, then please contact the peal secretary ([peals@odg.org.uk](mailto:peals@odg.org.uk)) to obtain the details. Thank you.

Stuart Gibson

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## Diary of Events for 2020

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Some of these dates may change, so you should check the [odg.org.uk](http://odg.org.uk) web site for diary updates on an ongoing basis.

TBC	To Be Confirmed	AGM	Annual General Meeting	AP	Advanced Practice
BP	Branch Practice	EP	Elementary Practice	HY	Half Yearly Meeting
QM	Quarterly Meeting	RCP	Ringling Centre Practice	SC	Striking Competition
SM	Surprise Major	SP	Surprise Practice	CM	Committee Meeting

*[Because all forthcoming ringing events have been cancelled or postponed as a result of the coronavirus lockdown, there are no diary entries to publish – Ed.]*



*Speen's Tenth Anniversary Dinner*



*Young Persons Event at Horspath, 2nd January 2020*