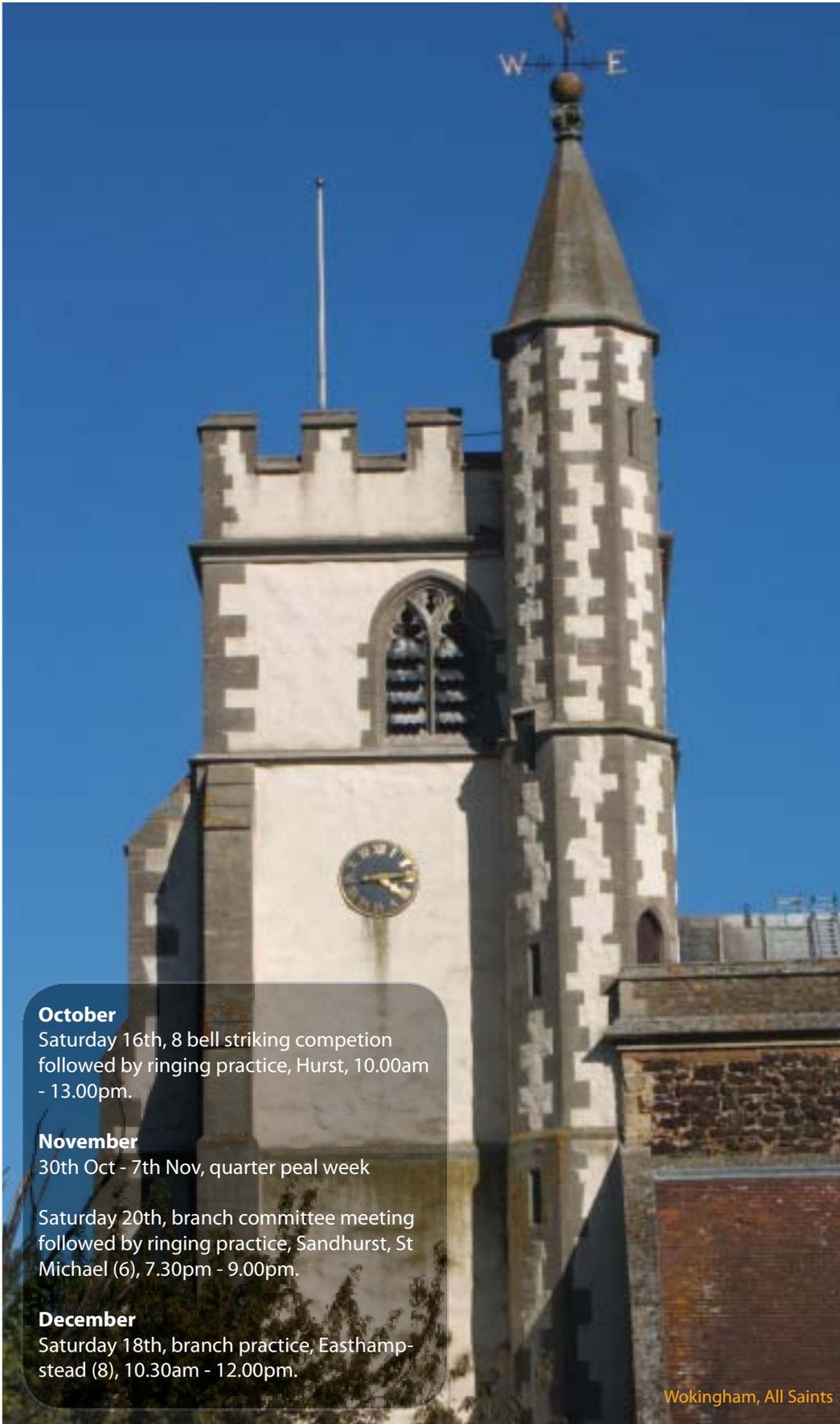


Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



October 2010, Autumn Issue



Heritage Open Days

The public likes heritage, so with a weekend focus on heritage, and many other buildings including the Town Hall open to the public, it makes sense to join in and show people what goes on inside a bell tower. As a result, 80 very interested members of the public went up the tower at All Saints Wokingham. We gave them 'the full works'. In the ringing room they had a brief introduction and history, an explanation of how a bell works, and a demonstration of a bell being rung. In the clock room they saw the historic clock and our interesting solution to internal acoustics. In the bell chamber they saw (and heard) the real thing, together with explanations of bell hanging, tuning and our sound control. Finally, on the tower roof they enjoyed the spectacular views



– as far as the Chilterns, since it was a very clear day.



As always, it was hard work for us – there was a queue when we opened at 1.00pm and the last group left at 5.30pm. But it was well worth it. Our visitors were really interested in what they saw, and really appreciative of the opportunity to visit us. John Harrison

October

Saturday 16th, 8 bell striking competition followed by ringing practice, Hurst, 10.00am - 13.00pm.

November

30th Oct - 7th Nov, quarter peal week

Saturday 20th, branch committee meeting followed by ringing practice, Sandhurst, St Michael (6), 7.30pm - 9.00pm.

December

Saturday 18th, branch practice, Easthampstead (8), 10.30am - 12.00pm.

Wokingham, All Saints

Us and Them (2b)

In the last article, I talked about news coverage and tower visits. This time I will discuss going to them and talking about ringing.

Giving talks avoids the physical constraints of the tower. You need to do some preparation, both thinking about what to say and obtaining props (a bell rope and a model bell are good) and pictures. You can supplement your own pictures from various sources, including the material on the Central Council website at: <http://ccabr.org.uk/pr/pubs/bellsandbellringing/>. Include some recordings as well. You need to be flexible in your talk – I've been asked to do everything from a 20 minute after dinner speech to a whole evening illustrated lecture, and most levels in between. Adapt what you say to your audience – an assembly talk to a primary school needs to be very different from a lecture to a civic society.

You may be able to latch onto someone else's event or activity, for example you could run a ringers' stall at a local fair or church fete. Even one of the 'standard' stalls like a lucky dip, can help to make your presence known, and if you include some sort of poster or some pictures about ringing, or maybe a model tower or bell, then you can inform the public as well. And of course, you can talk to people. Ask them how much they know about ringing. Ask them what they think ringers look like. Ask them if they have ever thought about learning to ring. Invite them to come and see you ring. A good recent example of latching onto someone else's activity was when 'Teddy Edward' had a tour up Twyford tower recorded on video for the children. He is a small teddy bear, who likes to find out about different aspects of church life.

I'd like to end with some thoughts about the message that we want to put over. Someone once said that everything is split into three parts, like Gaul. I can't remember who it was, and I'm not a good enough historian to know whether Gaul really was split into three, but I find it is often true. There

are three specific threads of interest we can develop: bells, ringing and bellringers. (I deliberately included all three in the subtitle of my book *Living Heritage*, which I wrote about in the Autumn 2009 Newsletter). Each of the three is special in its own way, and together they provide a richer picture. Let us remind ourselves of a few of the things that make each strand special.

Bells – The moving parts weigh several cwt, or even tons – no other musical instrument comes near that. The bells swing full circle, which is amazing, and they are controlled by a rope from below to a precision of a tiny fraction of a second, which is even more amazing. The way bells are made is unique, and seeing them cast is spectacular. The sound of a bell is more complex than most musical instruments – and what the ear perceives is not always what you might expect – yet the shape that determines the sound evolved largely by trial and error.

Ringling – English-style sequential ringing co-evolved with the unique way of hanging bells to swing full circle, which makes such ringing possible – because the timing can be accurately controlled. The mechanics constrain change ringing by only permitting bells to move one place per change, but that constraint provides a subtle balance between randomness and predictability, which makes the music coherent and attractive to the ear. Change ringing has strong mathematical underpinnings, more so than most other music, and the quest of ringing composers to maximise the music while adhering to the requirement for 'truth' is still advancing, aided by computers. Method names seem to fascinate people, and they come in families, a bit like plant names.

Bellringers – Active ringers range from childhood to well past retirement – something matched by few other activities. Ringers come from all walks of life, with some of the most gifted having had relatively humble lives outside ringing. Ringers excel through skill and technique, not by brute force – on most bells strength is not even an issue. Ringers achieve performances that would be unthinkable for conventional musicians, like three hours of continuous 'playing' with no musical score. The Exercise is like a huge extended family – walk into almost any tower in the world, and you will be invited to ring with them.

As I said in the previous article, we have a fascinating story to tell. We just have to get out there and tell it. Non ringers really do find it fascinating when they know what is involved. In my next article I will discuss recruiting.

John Harrison

Sonning Bell Ringers at Upton Snodsbury

Yes, it is a real place – the village that our previous vicar at St. Andrew's, Sonning 'retired' to about two years ago. It is a pretty, quiet village east of Worcester, but in Chris Clarke's view it isn't disturbed often enough by the sound of its church bells! Chris always said that he liked hearing the bells at Sonning, which is just as well as the vicarage is right beside the tower and Sonning's bells are loud.



Chris is still taking services in his 'retirement' and he issued an invitation to the Sonning congregation, choir and bell ringers to make a day trip to Upton Snodsbury and take part in their Choral Evensong.

We had nearly a full coach when we set off from Sonning church immediately after the Sunday morning service there. The weather was kind and the journey down passed through lovely countryside, particularly round Upton Snodsbury itself. We arrived in plenty of

Training Update

The Branch has run two courses so far this year: one on elementary bob calling, and one on rope splicing. Two more courses are in the process of being planned: on raising and lowering in peal, and on method learning. We haven't completely cleared the backlog of courses that have been requested, but we are making good progress, after a lull last year.

Several people are waiting for courses that need a few more takers in order to run them. In particular, we need a few more for a bell maintenance course, so if you are interested, or if your tower needs someone able to undertake maintenance tasks, then please let me know.

John Harrison,
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time to have a good look round the village, and some of the bell ringers climbed to the top of the church tower for an excellent view of the area.



Then we enjoyed an excellent tea in the smart church hall before the bell ringers went over to the church to ring before the service. The bells had been fitted with new ropes just a fortnight before, some of the rope lengths were a bit odd, and we were informed that the stay on the second was cracked! The local branch's ringing master was there to help out plus a few 'local' ringers. We were also joined by Brian Wetherall, a ringer at Sonning for several years but now living in Droitwich, and by Mike Dane, ex captain of Twyford and a regular supporter of Sonning who moved away to Wellesbourne.

There was about 40 minutes of ringing before the service, including some Cambridge Surprise Minor. The choir then sang before and during the Choral Evensong; Chris took the service in his usual relaxed and pleasant manner, and we then left Upton Snodsbury for an uneventful coach journey home.

Rob Needham

Congratulations to...

...Chris Gillies and Louise Thomasson, two of St. Michael's Sandhurst ringers who were married at Grasmere on 7th August. Louise started learning to ring with us last September and has been an enthusiastic member of the band, so



much so that she has been a great ambassador for us, encouraging friends and colleagues to come and try it. With all this talk about ringing Chris came along in February and took to it in no time. Both are now valued contributors to our Sunday service ringing.

Quarter Peals

2nd April 2010

St. Michael's and All Angels, Sandhurst

1260 Grandsire Doubles

- 1 Clifford Hales
- 2 Genine Leslie
- 3 Graham Steele
- 4 Michael Paterson
- 5 Derek Palmer (c)

25th July 2010

St. Andrew's, Sonning

1284 Plain Bob Minor with cover

- 1 Rob Needham
- 2 Lavinia M Sullivan
- 3 Alison Clayton
- 4 Pam Elliston
- 5 Andrew Elliston
- 6 David Sullivan (C)
- 7 Peter Kemm

Rung as a birthday compliment to Alan Barsby

15th August 2010

St. Andrew's, Sonning

1299 Grandsire Doubles

- 1 Rob Needham
- 2 Joyce Vernon
- 3 Pam Elliston
- 4 Andrew Elliston
- 5 David Sullivan (C)
- 6 Keith Vernon

Striking Competitions

You may recall that the branch held a 6 bell striking competition earlier in the year, at Shottesbrook. Full details of who rang what, along with comments from the judges, the results, and even team photos, are available on the branch website. It was a very enjoyable day and there was a write up in a previous edition of the newsletter.

We are fast approaching the 8 bell competition this year, which will be held at Hurst, starting at 10.00am on Saturday 16th October. I'd like to encourage lots of teams to enter so that as many of you as possible can enjoy the benefits of taking part in a striking competition.

So, why do we hold striking competitions? Well the main aim is to improve the standard of ringing throughout the branch – by allowing people to listen to other bands' ringing and to allow them to ring in a controlled environment where the objective is to ring as well as possible. It is also an occasion for ringers to meet other ringers from around the branch and to realise that even experienced ringers sometimes find striking competitions cause them to have "stage fright"!

Whilst there is a competitive aspect (the branch needs to select the band to represent it at the Guild Striking Competition) this is just one aspect of the event. In fact all teams who enter can be considered as winners, because each will gain from the experience, either through just being able to ring at a new tower, or by being able to meet other ringers, or just by facing up to the challenge and knowing that you can achieve a striking competition performance.

Everyone has to start somewhere and I, more years ago now than I care to recall, remember taking part in my first striking competition. I was ringing in a band where all of the other ringers were much more experienced than I was, and we certainly didn't win, but I took part, realised that such events were meant to be fun as well as a learning experience and, since then, I have rung in many striking competitions. The occasions where I am in the winning band are still very few and far between and can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand! Some will recall that Sonning won the 8 bell striking competition last year but I should declare now that one reason that they won was because I wasn't ringing – if fact I wasn't even in the country!

So, please all consider entering. The rules allow for method ringing, or call changes or rounds, as appropriate to the ringers who are taking part. Well struck rounds will trump over a poorly struck method so please don't be put off by not being able to ring an 8 bell (or 7 bell) method. The rules also allow for composite teams so, if you can't find a complete 8 from your tower feel free to join with another tower, or just put your name forward and we'll see how many people there are who want to ring and we'll try to arrange to match you up with others in the same boat. Think of it as the campanological equivalent of speed dating! So, I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible there on October 16th. Hurst bells are really nice and much easier to ring than some other 8s in the branch! Simon Milford

5th September 2010

St. Andrew's, Sonning

1260 Plain Bob Triples

- 1 Lavinia M Sullivan
- 2 Joyce Vernon
- 3 Alison Clayton
- 4 Pam Elliston (C)
- 5 Brian Snell
- 6 Rob Needham
- 7 Andrew Elliston
- 8 Keith Vernon

Rung to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ordination of the Rev. Michael Forrer, Associate Vicar of St. Andrew's.

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