

Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



April 2010, Spring Issue

April

Saturday 17th, 6 Bell Striking Competition at Shottesbrooke.

Competition between 4.30pm and 6.30pm. This will be followed by a skittles evening at the Jack O' Newbury pub.

May

Monday 3rd, 8 Bell Striking Competition (ODG), Chiltern Branch.

Saturday 15th, Branch Practice, Barkham(4), 10.30am - 12.00pm.

June

Saturday 19th, Branch Practice, Warfield(10), 7.30pm - 9.00pm.

July

Saturday 17th, branch practice, Wokingham St Pauls, 7.30pm - 9.00pm.

Notes from a New Chair!

Whilst that may sound like the start of a sales pitch from DFS, I just thought that I ought to put pen to paper (or, more accurately, finger to keyboard) now that I have been elected as Sonning Deanery Branch Chair.

For those of you who don't know me I am Simon Milford and I ring at Sonning. Those of you who do know me will recognise that it has been very many years since the description "new" was in any way appropriate. I will try to get round to the various towers in the Deanery as it will be good to meet up with more of you, as there were relatively few towers represented at the AGM in Twyford – and thanks to the Twyford team for arranging ringing, service, tea and meeting room, as well as the special guest appearance of Teddy Edward (no, not Jedward ...).

There were a couple of issues aired at the AGM that are worth mentioning here. Our Branch striking competitions (particularly the 8 bell) have been looking pretty sparse just recently, with only two teams participating in 2009. As was pointed out, when we invite judges from outside the Deanery to travel to us and to spend their time judging the competition, it is a pretty poor showing if we can only muster two teams.

So I would like to encourage as many teams as possible to enter the competitions this year. I realise that many towers don't necessarily have enough experienced 8 bell ringers to form a complete striking competition band, so please consider entering a joint band with another tower, or inviting willing volun-

teers to join your band. This is allowed for in the rules, and I am sure that the Branch Officers will be reviewing the Striking Competition rules to see if there need to be any changes in order to encourage more entrants. If you don't feel that you can ring a method then come and ring call changes. Coming from Devon as I do, I'd be very happy to hear some call changes being rung as a test piece!

The other issue was that of recruiting and encouraging new ringers, at a time when much of the Branch seems to be struggling for numbers to ring on Sundays. Representatives from Wokingham and Twyford offered to share their tips for seeking new recruits via the newsletter so hopefully there will be other articles which may provide hints and tips which towers can adopt and adapt as appropriate.

I'd also like to thank those people who have just retired from the Officers, namely Rachel Moss (Chairman), Andrew Moss (Secretary) and Aidan Hopkins (Webmaster), for their hard work in supporting the running of the Sonning Deanery.

I look forward to getting round to see many more of you during the year. If any of you have any suggestions or comments to offer, then please feel free to get in touch, either by phone or e-mail.

Simon Milford, Branch Chairman.

Sonning's Late Christmas Dinner (abridged)

For many years now Sonning bell ringers have had their Christmas Dinner in February or March when things are a lot quieter! This year we decided to return to a pub/restaurant that we had last used about six years before. It is the Shoulder of Mutton at Playhatch, and their speciality dish is (surprise, surprise) shoulder of mutton. The restaurant has featured on TV's The One Show as a signed photograph on the wall shows, and it has also won the Pride of Reading Dining Award 2007.

Most members and partners attended the meal and in total we were 22 at the dinner. Between the main course and sweet, Rob Needham gave a very short review (because he had a cold and a dodgy throat!) of the bell ringers' happenings since the previous dinner. The key event was of course that Claire Shuttleworth now has a 10-month old baby girl.

The ringers have attempted a quarter peal before many of the Sunday evening services, and Pam Elliston's organisation and persuasive telephone calls have encouraged several ringers from other towers to support our efforts on numerous occasions. In March 2009 the tower had organised a successful Quiz Evening to raise money for the branch bell fund.

For at least five years St Andrew's tower had been



The Tour de France takes to the "Big Country"

On Saturday 6th March an intrepid band, more the Magnificent 12 than the Magnificent 7, of Sonning Deanery ringers, assisted by a couple of very able helpers, travelled west to the Big Country near where, in years gone by, the phrase "here be dragons" was inscribed at the very west most boundary of the ODG. Yes, the Branch outing was to the Vale of the White Horse, with St George (aka Deputy Branch Ringing Master John Manley) taking the lead in case we did come across any of the old dragons. View <http://odg.org.uk/sdb/newsletters/2010/tourdefrance.pdf> for the full report.

at the top of the list of expired tower maintenance awards, and embarrassment finally drove us to another inspection. Several members worked hard on cleaning and adjustments, and in October we were delighted to improve from a Bronze award to a comfortable Silver. Around the same time, Sonning managed to win the branch's 8-bell striking competition (OK, so it was at Sonning tower and only two teams entered, but we did beat the tower generally reckoned to be the strongest in the branch).

And finally Rob pointed out that Sonning was capturing the market in Sonning Deanery Branch officers: Simon Milford is the new Chairman, Pam Elliston is the new Secretary, Eric Bowes remains Treasurer, Andrew Elliston remains a branch representative at Guild meetings, and Rob Needham remains Bookstall officer.

Rob Needham



Us and Them

1 – A lot of what we think and talk about as ringers revolves around the ringing itself: what we do, how we do it, when we are going to do it, with whom we are going to do it, and so on. As individual ringers, we might be more preoccupied with learning methods, with the difficulties of handling, or with organising the ringing. A few of us also spend time trying to help non-ringers to understand the fascinating world of ringing – the nature of the skills themselves, the richness of the heritage tradition, the unique nature of the music, the evolution of the technology, the social history, and so on.

2 – Many bands today find things difficult – they never seem to have enough ringers, and the ringers that they have, find it a hard to reach a good standard of performance, and even harder to extend their repertoire beyond the most basic methods. Many influences can lead in this direction, and once established, a state of continued 'struggling' can seem inevitable.

You might wonder what connection there is between the two previous paragraphs. If you recognise the state of affairs in (2) you might have dismissed the final part of (1) as of no relevance to you. 'We haven't got time to do things like that – we have our hands full trying to keep the bells ringing'. 'All we need from non-ringers is for them to come forward as new recruits, but we can't seem to get any'. 'No one wants to give up the time for ringing these days, there are too many competing attractions'. 'Anyway, ringing isn't very exciting in a struggling tower'. I have often heard those sentiments, if not those actual words.

At the AGM, there was a discussion on the state of ringing, and it was clear that some of us see things as 'the glass being half full', while others of us saw it as 'the glass being half empty'. As a result (I'm not quite sure how) I was asked to write some thoughts in the Newsletter about the relationship between ringers and non-ringers. Obviously that includes recruitment, but a relationship that starts and ends with recruitment isn't much of a relationship. I believe it is important to cultivate better awareness of, and a respect for, ringing among non-ringers in the communities within which we live and ring. I would like to start with a story.

Begging bowl or welcome sign?

Imagine that you are walking down the street of life, and you see a beggar sitting on the pavement. Next to him is a sign, not saying 'wife and kids to support' but 'Ancient art and historic bells to support'. And he is not asking you to drop money into a hat, he wants you to give up an evening a week to learn to ring bells with him. You've seen pictures of people swinging on bell ropes, and you wouldn't want your friends to know you did something odd (even if you had the time, which you don't) so you make your excuses and pass by. Of course if you met someone asking for money to restore the ancient church bells, which were becoming unringable, you probably would make a donation, because you quite like the sound of church bells, and you can afford it. You might even tell your friends about it, because heritage projects are the sort of good cause that you and your friends like to support. Now imagine that you are walking down the same street of life, and you see a poster saying 'Welcome to the fascinating world of ringing'. Next to it is someone smiling at you, who asks if you know what ringing is about. You say not really, but you like the sound it makes, and he invites you to step into a small exhibition about ringing. You aren't in a hurry, so you go inside. There are pictures and

models that show how ringing evolved, how bells are made and how they work. There is even an explanation of how bell 'methods' work, which you don't understand, but it looks fascinating. There are pictures of ringers old and young, big and small (you didn't realise bellringers were such diverse) and they all seem such nice, 'normal' people. You see a video of bells being rung, and you notice that one of them is being rung by a young girl standing on top of a large wooden box so she can reach the rope. Then you realise the same girl is standing next to you. She is 17 now, but was 14 when the video was made. She tells you that the bell she was ringing weighed $\frac{3}{4}$ ton, and she explains the technique of ringing a heavy bell. You are amazed. You look around the room and you can instantly see who the other ringers are, because they are all wearing tee-shirts with a big bell saying 'I'd rather be bellringing'. You begin to understand how people get hooked on ringing, and you leave the exhibition glad that you took the time to look round, and feeling very positive about ringing and admiring the obvious skill and enthusiasm of the ringers.

These two stories paint deliberately extreme pictures, and there are many possibilities in between, but I hope they will help you to put yourself in the position of 'them' rather than 'us'. 'They' are the non-ringing public, who typically know hardly anything about ringing (and what little they do know may well be untrue) but most of them like to hear ringing. So let's think about the outcomes of these two stories. The beggar didn't get any recruits, and went home feeling as miserable as ever. Maybe he didn't expect much success, based on previous experience. The people who walked past him remained just as ignorant about ringing as they were before, and they may even have got the impression that ringing must be dying out.

The mini exhibition succeeded on several fronts. A lot of people saw it and found it very interesting. They enjoyed themselves, and they went away much more knowledgeable about ringing. They were impressed with the enthusiasm and friendliness of the ringers, as well as with their obvious skill and dedication. Some of them intended to take up the offer to go and see the bells and ringers in action one day. The ringers went away feeling positive, because they could sense the interest in what they were doing, and the people they spoke to were very appreciative. But the exhibition didn't get any recruits! It might have done, but for the sake of argument, let's assume that no one volunteered on the spot. Even in recruiting terms, the exhibition sowed seeds. Many people went away feeling positive about ringing, and some of them in the future might decide they would like to try it. But even if they don't, they will provide a more fertile environment for others to do so. They might encourage their children to take up ringing. They might show admiration rather than scorn when a friend thinks about doing so, and thus tip the balance in favour.

But regardless of hard nosed recruitment, we should care about the people in the communities that we live in. We impose our performances and our practices on them, we live among them. If we are proud to be ringers, we should want other people to understand why. Ringing has a fascinating story to tell. We should not try to keep it to ourselves. I hope I have explained why it is important for us to develop positive relationships with non-ringers. This article has been about motivation. In a future article, I will discuss things from a more practical perspective.

John Harrison

Quarter Peals

15th January 2010

Easthampstead

1260 Grandsire Triples.

- 1 Paul Fox
- 2 Barbara Wells
- 3 Rachel Moss
- 4 Janet Menhennick
- 5 Ann Martin
- 6 Steve Wells
- 7 Eddie Martin (C)
- 8 Andrew Moss

Rung to celebrate the birth of Hannah Jean Bowler on 11th January. First child for Judith (former Tower Captain of Easthampstead) and Jonathan Bowler.

Ring for England

As you are all aware St George's Day is April 23rd. A request has gone out to all ringers to mark the day as a celebration of, and to raise awareness of, our traditional English culture and heritage.

The idea is for all bells to be rung at some point during the day. This could be general ringing, a quarter peal or peal.

If you do take part in any ringing to mark St George's Day then please send details to Sarah Boys to go in the next edition of the newsletter.

6th February 2010

Easthampstead

1260 Grandsire Doubles.

- 1 Barbara Wells
- 2 Ann Martin
- 3 Andrew Moss
- 4 Steve Wells
- 5 Rachel Moss (C)
- 6 Eddie Martin

1st inside to Grandsire - 3. Rung to congratulate Ant Perry and Maki Asami on their marriage on 7th January 2010 in Japan.

New Branch Officers

At the AGM at Twyford on Saturday 20th February the following people were elected as Branch Officers:

Chairman: Simon Milford

Ringling Master: Ken Davenport

Deputy Ringling Master: John Manley

Secretary: Pam Elliston

Education Officer: John Harrison

Treasurer: Eric Bowes

Webmaster: John Harrison

Branch Representatives: Andrew Elliston and Sue Davenport

Newsletter Editor: Sarah Boys

Independent Examiner: Steve Wells

28th February 2010

All Saints, Wokingham

1280 Plain B Major

- 1 Stephen Smith
- 2 Richard Woodward
- 3 Julie Goodchild
- 4 Fiona Harrison
- 5 Neil Curnow
- 6 Jonathan Goodchild
- 7 Jon Tutchter
- 8 John Harrison (C)

For evensong. Rung in memory of Jasmine May Harrison (9 August 1910 - 13 January 2010) mother of 8, grandmother of 4.

New Members

The following were elected and welcomed as members of the Guild at the Branch AGM at Twyford on Saturday 20th February.

Alistair Vorster Twyford

Simon Mabbott Twyford

Victoria Parkin Twyford

Jack Stanford Wokingham, All Saints

Rachel Leitch-Devlin from Twyford and Philippa Mitchell from All Saints, Wokingham were minuted as members of the Guild following their election at Branch Practices during the previous year.

From the Guild Committee Meeting held at Shipton-under-Wychwood, Saturday 13th March 2010

Before the meeting, members stood for the opening prayer and to reflect on the life of Peter Davies, who had died in office as Public Relations Officer.

The main meeting was preceded by the AGM of the ODG Bell Fund. Treasurer Brian Gatward explained the state of capital resources and where income came from.

The annual Ringing Day brought over £1260; branch fundraising raised £4500, of which over £2000 was raised by the EBSB; over £900 came from Gift Aid and tax refunds. After redistribution of investments with advice from the Diocesan Financial Adviser, it had been possible to obtain interest of around £18,000 in 2009, despite interest rate on bank account falling from around 3.5% to 0.6%.

In 2010, one grant had been paid - to Shiplake. It was clarified that grants to a tower could extend over more than one year. High Wycombe will soon require £200,000 of work; the Guild usually makes a grant of 10%, but may impose a limit of £9,000 to any one transaction. The full report can be viewed at http://odg.org.uk/sdb/newsletters/2010/gcm_march_2010.pdf

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