

MINUTES OF GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING

Held online on Saturday 13 March 2021 and attended by 47 Committee members.

The meeting was chaired by Catherine Lane, Master, who welcomed members to the meeting and reminded them that the meeting would be recorded. She also re-iterated an invitation to all General Committee members to attend the Bell Fund AGM, to be held online at 3pm on the following day, 14 March.

Minutes are subject to confirmation at the next General Committee meeting.

1. Apologies

16 apologies for absence were received. A list of members attending will be recorded.

2. Any other urgent items of business

See Item 13

3. Minutes of the meeting on 28 November 2020

Rosalind Garrett-Bowes queried the interpretation in the minutes of the discussion about the Branch subscription levels for 2021. The panel agreed to look again at the minutes to ensure clarity – see the Postscript below. On a vote, the minutes were accepted as a correct record with 93% of attendees in favour. Proposed by Ken Darvill, seconded by Stuart Gibson.

4. Matters arising

a) Public Relations Working Group

Catherine Lane reported that the small PR working group had been meeting and making slow but useful progress since the last meeting and she thanked its members. More expertise would be welcome and anyone able to offer any should contact her.

b) F.E.Robinson Bowl

A photograph of the rose bowl was shown to those members present, although the pandemic was delaying its delivery to the Guild. This year the bowl will be awarded virtually to the winners of the forthcoming Quiz Nights.

5. Correspondence

None had been received.

6. Reports of and elections to subcommittees

a) Education (Learning and Development Workgroup)

Robert Newton reported that it was not known when courses could resume. Some ringers may be nervous about returning to face to face training courses and what support would be available. However there was some excellent progress to report during 2020, in particular by the Badgers handbell group. Members were encouraged to read Lindsay Powell's report on the group's activities.

On another positive note, the Guild has ordered ten pairs of e-bells which are available for Guild members to borrow and potentially purchase.

The 2021 Training meeting, originally advertised for 20 March, will now take place on 10 April, online. Details will be sent out shortly and the meeting will address training requirements for recovery across the Guild.

The Ringing World National Youth Competition is currently planned for 11 September at Worcester.

Joyce Vernon has stood down from the Working Group. She has, however, kindly offered to continue to find helpers for courses.

The following General Committee members were re-elected to the Working Group, proposed by Stuart Gibson and seconded by Ken Darvill: Colin Newman, Robert Newton, Tony Crabtree, Patricia Newton, Elizabeth Mullett, Lindsay Powell.

The Working Group report was passed on a vote with 93% of members present in favour, proposed by Robert Newton and seconded by Stuart Gibson. Patricia Newton asked for it to be recorded that she and Robert Newton had been unable to vote.

b) Towers and Belfries

Tony Crabtree reported that all 14 current members of the Workgroup are willing to continue. Tony Crabtree, Alan Marchbank, John Davidge, Chris Potter, Keith Vernon, Graham Clifton are the General Committee members seeking re-election.

Tony Crabtree reported that geographical coverage across the Guild is good but new members are welcome. Anyone interested should contact Tony Crabtree.

Face to face courses had not been offered since lockdown began but the group has been looking at online courses and rebuilding web pages with much more technical material now available. Members remain available to do Ringing Recovers and Bell Fund inspections.

The report was accepted unopposed, proposed by Tony Crabtree and seconded by Stuart Gibson.

c) Finance and General Purposes Committee

Ken Darvill reported that three General Committee members require election – Robert Newton, Alan Marchbank and Graham Clifton are the current additional members.

The report was accepted and the members re-elected unopposed, proposed by Ken Darvill and seconded by Stuart Gibson.

7. a) Peal Secretary report

Ken Davenport's report noted the lower number of peals rung in 2020 due to restrictions on ringing. 86 peals were rung in 2020 compared with 271 in 2019.

The report was accepted unopposed, proposed by Catherine Lane and seconded by Stuart Gibson.

b) Safeguarding Officer report

June Wells reported that there had been no face to face training in the past twelve months. However a new development in the Diocese was that the training requirement for Tower Captains had changed. Last year the C2 and C3 (leadership) courses had been merged and Tower Captains were no longer required to attend C2. A discussion was planned with the Learning and Development Working Group to develop and deliver in-Guild training for Tower Captains as aspects were felt to be very valuable.

June Wells also noted that the Central Council is working on online safety and on how we audit safeguarding activity.

Alan Marchbank noted that he and others had been invited to refresher safeguarding training, to be run by the Methodists in Milton Keynes on an ecumenical basis. It was unclear whether the training would include safeguarding in a bellringing context, but Alan would report back to Guild Officers.

The report was accepted unopposed, proposed by June Wells and seconded by Stuart Gibson.

c) Librarian's report

Doug Beaumont reported that requests for information or to borrow material had in fact increased in the past twelve months. Although in-person visits to the library were not currently possible, Doug encouraged anyone in need of information to get in touch with him.

The report was accepted unopposed, proposed by Doug Beaumont and seconded by Stuart Gibson.

d) Webmaster's report

Ken Darvill presented the report in the absence of Tim Hayward. A great deal of work had been done to reorganise the new website, including providing greater access to officers to update pages and to post new material. There had been some reorganisation of the menu and file structures on the test site ready to go live in May, and the new Guild logo would be introduced.

The report was accepted unopposed, proposed by Ken Darvill and seconded by Stuart Gibson.

e) Server Manager's report

Richard Stanworth reported good progress on costing and planning for the server upgrade. The aim was to have sufficient capacity to host all Guild activities, including Branch online spaces and additional email support. A cost increase of just 12% would provide double the server capacity and greatly increased bandwidth. Transfer to the new server would take place in approximately two months.

The report was accepted unopposed, proposed by Richard Stanworth and seconded by Stuart Gibson.

f) Report Editor's report

Heather Browning reported that the 2020 Report was to go to the printer imminently. This year electronic copies of the Report would be available as PDFs well as 560 hard copies and any members not requiring a hard copy were encouraged to let Heather know. Currently, distribution posed a challenge: meeting in a car park somewhere in the centre of the Guild to hand over bundles of reports could be the most practical solution.

Heather thanked Branch Secretaries and Richard Stanworth for his help in providing all Tower Correspondents with generic email addresses.

Catherine Lane offered her thanks for the Report Editor's work during this exceptional year. The report was accepted unopposed, proposed by Heather Browning and seconded by Stuart Gibson.

8. Diary of Events

Ken Darvill reported that the 8 bell Competition has been cancelled and the 2021 AGM will take place online. Currently it is hoped that the Ringing Day will go ahead in September, as will the Michaelmas course on 25 September, the Six Bell Striking Competition on 2 October, the Steeple Aston course on 30 October and the Ten Bell Striking Competition at Aston Clinton on 27 November. The November General Committee Meeting will be hosted by Cuddington.

The Ringing Festival had been planned for July 2021, very soon after Covid restrictions are likely to be lifted. It was therefore decided to postpone it for two years. Catherine Lane reported that she was in contact with the Oxford Society and had booked Christ Church (Cathedral) for 8 July 2023. Magdalen College is unable to host the service but a reply from Christ Church is awaited.

9. Posts specified in Rule 9(c) and (f) (iii): Notification of officers not willing to stand for re-election

Catherine Lane reported that four posts would fall vacant and strongly encouraged members to come forward to help fill them. The posts are:

1. Central Council Representative, to replace Ken Davenport, who has stepped down
2. Minutes Secretary (joint role), to replace Elizabeth Mullett, who has stepped down
3. Assistant Server Manager, to replace Colin Newman, who has left the Guild area
4. Website Manager, to replace Tim Hayward, who has stood down.

10. Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2020

The accounts have been audited and Susan Read was thanked for her work on them. As expected, both income and expenditure for the year are lower than for 2019.

Subscriptions for 2021 are due on 31 March although this year a grace period until 30 April will be allowed.

Rosalind Garrett-Bowes noted a potential omission in the wording of Note 1: Stuart Gibson agreed to check the text and correct as necessary.

Stuart Gibson reported that a restricted Youth Fund had been created to receive youth-specific donations, including donations from the Bradfield courses to be used for youth training. It was still a possibility that the Guild as a whole could become a registered charity in future, but in the meantime it was hoped that the creation of a restricted fund might encourage HMRC to allow Gift Aid.

The accounts were accepted on a vote with 97% of those attending in favour, proposed by Stuart Gibson and seconded by Ken Darvill.

11. Donation proposals for the 2021 Annual General Meeting

The following proposals by Stuart Gibson were accepted:

£2,000 to the Bell Fund (unopposed, seconded by Ken Darvill)

£200 to the Ringing World (by 97% of those present, seconded by John Davidge)

£750 to the Association of Ringing Teachers (by 78% of those present, seconded by Kathryn Grant)

12. Survival and Recovery post-Covid

Catherine Lane commended to the meeting the collaboration between the Central Council and the Association of Ringing Teachers which had produced comprehensive recovery plans including the concept of Recovery Champions.

Within the Guild, each Branch is connected to its Steward and volunteer Recovery Champions will work in each area.

Ken Darvill noted that here is an evident keenness to get back to ringing, but return to ringing needs to be gentle and there may be some ringers who need individual support to return.

13. AOB

Stuart Gibson updated the meeting on the member database. He had looked at some software products which might be suitable for the Guild, in particular one called LoveAdmin. He will research further and update officers as this work progresses.

14. Thanks

Catherine Lane thanked those attending the meeting, and all members for their efforts to keep some normal organisation going during this exceptional year. She also thanked John Harrison and Colin Newman for their organisation and hosting of the meeting behind the scenes. The meeting closed at 4.22 pm.

Postscript

In clarification to the point raised by Rosalind Garrett-Bowes about the Minutes of the last meeting and the level of Branch subscriptions, Ken Darvill writes to clarify:

The problem was that the debate and resolution at the November 2020 General Committee meeting about the Ringing Members subscriptions did not reflect the message that had preceded it with respect to the level of the 2021 subscription, in particular the Branch allocation. The F&GP had previously recommended a lower Guild allocation and that Branches should be able to set their own level of Branch allocation. Some Branches had already prior to the F&GP indicated that they would set a lower Branch allocation and other Branches had got that message. In retrospect the resolution should have been fine-tuned to reflect that.

On the day following the last General Committee, the Guild Master, Deputy Master, General Treasurer and General Secretary agreed a form of wording recognising this situation which was sent to the Branch Secretaries. The critical part of that email was:

At their meeting yesterday, the Guild General Committee decided to leave the subscriptions for 2021 unchanged from recent years. Thus the Resident Ringing Member's subscription stays at £8, of which £5 is payable to the general Guild and the remainder is held by the Branch. The General Committee has a responsibility to set the level of subscriptions. However some Branches may feel that in view of the limited activity during 2020 they will reduce the subscription that they ask members to pay thereby reducing their allocation but still paying £5 to the general Guild.