

## **Minutes of Sonning Deanery Branch Business Meeting, White Waltham, 16<sup>th</sup> Nov 2013, 4.15 p.m.**

[Text in these minutes that looks like this is for clarification and was not discussed at the meeting.]

**Present:** Simon Milford, Rob & Pauline Needham, Ken & Sue Davenport, John Harrison, Steve Wells, Lesley & Simon Graves, Alison Clayton, Aidan Hopkins, Jacquie and Martha Hazell, Graham Slade, Judith Atkinson and Andrew Elliston.

**Apologies** from Wargrave tower; Judith Atkinson was representing both Barkham and Arborfield towers. Towers not represented were: Binfield, Finchampstead, Sandhurst St Michael, Sandhurst Immaculate Conception, Twyford, Waltham St. Lawrence, and Wargrave.

**Matters Arising from Minutes of 2012 Committee/Business Meeting** John Harrison pointed out that no Branch Practice (BP) analysis had been done because nobody had been actioned to do it. Rob Needham offered to do the analysis of attendance numbers v. start time of BPs. Ken Davenport asked whether the Guild definition of 'committee' still applied now that the Committee Meeting is called the Business Meeting, and this was confirmed. [*The Guild rules require us to have a 'committee' of tower representatives and officers that meets each year, but do not specify what the meeting should be called. We changed the name of the meeting to give our members a clearer view of what it was for.*] Graham Slade confirmed that in 2013 the Branch Outing has not taken place. Rob said that the "outing being organised by Waltham St. Lawrence" became a joint outing with Sonning, and that towers who do not do outings on their own would benefit by combining with another tower.

**Financial update** Sue Davenport read out her interim financial report and offered to send it to Rob by email. Steve Wells said that the previous year's financial accounts had not yet been inspected and he offered to do it at the same time as the 2013 financial accounts; this was accepted with thanks.

**Striking competitions** The *BP & other events* schedule was issued; the meeting pointed out that the proposed date for the 6-bell competition was in Holy week, so the meeting agreed to make it the following Saturday, 26th April.

**Combined SDB/Reading 8-bell competition** For the proposed combined SDB/Reading 8-bell competition in October 2014 and beyond, Rob was urged to obtain formal agreement (in principle) from Reading Branch to a combined competition before discussing details with them.

**2014 Branch Practices & Meetings** The *BP & other events* schedule was discussed; Hurst was replaced by Twyford for the AGM in Feb. 2015, and Hurst was moved to the July 19<sup>th</sup> BP. Sue would check whether the 21<sup>st</sup> June (a.m. or p.m.) was OK for a BP at St. Paul's and inform Rob, who would then issue a revised schedule to all towers. [*The plan is for all towers to confirm their events by the AGM in Feb. 2014 – ideally by the end of 2013 when John will put up 2014 events on the Branch calendar.*] There was some discussion (unresolved) as to whether any evening BPs should be scheduled, particularly as the survey had shown the least popular time to be late evening. Morning practices in the winter months were preferred.

**Duration of BPs** After some discussion, the meeting agreed that BPs should be advertised as 1½ hours long, but with the understanding that they may be extended for another half-hour if those present wished. [*To make the extension possible, towers should book a 2-hour slot with their church.*]

**Officers for next year: John Harrison, Training and Simon Milford, Chair, wish to stand down.** In addition Graham said that he and Simon Farrar were not prepared to be Ringing Master (RM), nor did Simon wish to continue as a Deputy RM. [*So, at the 2014 AGM, the branch will need at least 3 more members willing to come forward and take on the role of an officer.*]

Steve said that to help any member who might consider filling one of these roles, up-to-date Job Descriptions are needed. Rob offered to circulate the existing branch officer job descriptions to all current officers and ask for corrections/additions, [*so that John can put correct job descriptions on the branch website. Then the Secretary can email to all members a request for branch officer nominations.*] Alison suggested that she put a similar request in the next branch newsletter. [*Since the meeting John has located the most recent (incomplete) version of the job descriptions and offered to update them, concentrating on responsibilities rather than tasks.*]

**Weekday Practices.** John said they were ticking over with just enough attendees most months to make them viable, although in some months there were quite a lot there, and occasionally he had to cancel it for lack of numbers. Rob suggested that another tower from Binfield (current location) might benefit from holding the weekday practice. Ken suggested that other towers are asked if they would benefit from a move of the weekday practices to their tower. Simon suggested that Alison could put this in the next Branch newsletter.

**Future of the Branch.** There was a lot of discussion about recruiting new ringers, training them, and how to make the Branch more useful to its members. Rob's view was that recruitment of new ringers was fundamental to the Branch's future, and that this had to be done by individual towers; it wasn't something that a small branch could do for towers. Several members said what their tower has done to recruit learners. Rob offered to pull together all the ideas on how to attract new ringers and issue it to towers, perhaps with some input from John and Steve who seem good at attracting learners to their towers.

Jacque said that in her view Striking Competitions were of no use to most members, and that for many members BPs are too intimidating. She thought the branch should, instead, be organising events that were more sociable and attractive to members, such as having about 4 mini ringing outings a year at some local towers within the branch, and a good lunch at a nearby pub. Ken urged the branch not to 'throw the baby out with the bath water' and to try some of the new ideas in parallel with conventional BPs.

The meeting pointed out that we need to ensure that those who are recruited have a good experience of learning to ring, which will affect retention. Jacquie mentioned that she is now a full member of ART (the Association of Ringing Teachers), and that all the people she had met who had done the ITTS 'teaching bell ringing' course thought that it was an excellent system. Rob reminded the meeting that a Module 1 ITTS course will be held at Abingdon in mid January, and he asked towers to try to put one of their members on the course. [Latest news: *this course is now full, but an additional course in the area is being considered.*]

John reminded the meeting of the comprehensive questionnaire about *BPs and Related Events* that he published in early 2012, and the results should be revisited for ideas on how to make BPs more attractive to the membership (see [http://odg.org.uk/sdb/documents/minutes\\_reports/Results.pdf](http://odg.org.uk/sdb/documents/minutes_reports/Results.pdf)).

#### **Branch events**

Graham Slade apologised for not organising a Branch Outing in 2013 and offered to set one up for Spring 2014.

#### **Any other business**

**Branch Newsletter** Alison said that Andrew Dugdale, whose company has kindly been printing the branch newsletter for free, is moving to Spain, and therefore the newsletter will have to be printed, and paid for, elsewhere. Sue said that the branch's finances were now stronger because of Andrew Dugdale's support of the branch, and that money would be available for printing the limited number of copies required, which is 1 per tower and 2 for Guild librarian.

**Stedman's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary reports** Rob asked for information about all successful pieces of ringing for Stedman's anniversary. John said that All Saints had failed with the date touch of Stedman, but had rung 300 Stedman Triples.

The Chairman thanked the ringers of White Waltham for hosting the meeting and for providing a generous tea. He closed the meeting at 5.45 p.m., and the meeting was followed by ringing at the branch practice.

Rob Needham, Hon. Sec., Sonning Deanery Branch