

Sonning Deanery Branch, Business Meeting, Wokingham St Paul's, 21st November 2015, 5p.m.

Apologies Lesley Graves, Alison Clayton, John Coombes

Financial update: the Treasurer, Sue Davenport, reported that as at 18th November 2015:

General Fund £1,823.68

Bell Fund £3,278.90

Total Funds £5,102.58

held in: Current Account £ 257.15

Deposit Account £4,845.43

Officers for 2016: No officer wished to stand down and nobody asked to be considered for election.

Training: The Training Officer, Jacquie Hazell, circulated a list of proposed training sessions on the first Friday evening of each month, starting on December 4th 2015. The sessions would alternate between basic and advanced with learners signing up for the session in advance. The basic practices would have 2 or 3 learners and enough helpers to ensure progress by the learners. The Secretary said that other branches had found it helped the learners at basic sessions to come to the training session with a mentor. Learners are already allocated to the first session (rounds & call changes, and plain hunt). The practices will take place at Waltham St Lawrence and Twyford. The chairman, John Harrison, offered to add the dates to the branch website diary [*done*].

Branch publicity/recruitment event: previously, the opinion of towers about hiring a mini ring for a publicity/recruitment event within the Branch gave a poor response (6 from 17 ringable towers). The officers felt it was worth fleshing out the idea with some more detail of scope, venues, and dates, which our chairman undertook and presented to the meeting. In summary 2 venues were considered suitable for a 'branch-wide' event, and pros and cons were:

Hurst Show, last weekend of June, Sat and Sun or just one of those days [*mini-ring better value over 2 days*], thousands of visitors, we might not be charged for a pitch, event a bit horse oriented?, not so central to the branch, some clashing with weddings and/or service ringing for the helpers?

Wokingham Country Fair, bank holiday May 2nd, held in Elm field between railway station and town centre, good public transport, well advertised, a bit more central to branch, clashes with ODG 8-bell striking competition and Ringing Day for the helpers.

The cost of a pitch/stall is small compared with the cost of the mini ring, e.g. the hire of Charmborough mini-ring is £200 for 2 consecutive days, transport cost £55. Steve Wells suggested that the mini-ring should be booked soon, even if a deposit has to be forfeited later; at present the Charmborough mini-ring is available on both dates above. The BBC *Countryfile Live* show at Blenheim Palace, where a mini-ring will be in use, is in August 2016 and so does not clash with either branch event.

Competent ringers from the branch will be needed to man the mini-ring, to help people 'have a go', to give out information/leaflets and to answer questions. A rota could be created so that nobody needs to be there for the whole day; helpers may get free entry to the whole event. The meeting agreed to sound out the towers again now that dates and more details are available.

Communication with adjoining branches and districts: The Guild Master has asked branches to consider what we could (or already do) share with neighbouring branches and districts, and talk for a max of 2 minutes about it at the forthcoming ODG General Committee Meeting. Our chairman listed: sharing event calendars, joint striking competitions, shared training courses, joint outings, exchange of newsletter articles, and officers attending each other's AGM. No further ideas from the floor were forthcoming.

Rolling Ring challenge on St. George's Day: *Ringing for England* says that in the past there has been wonderful support for St. George's Day from ringers. The idea has grown to get as many towers as possible in branches throughout the country to ring for some time during the day of Saturday April 23rd, and so set a national record. It will bring the ringing world and ringers into the national limelight and get more people of all ages interested in joining us.

Steve, our Ringing Master, suggested that, as it is a Saturday in 2016, there could be a succession of towers in our branch doing some ringing at different times, and that some ringers could travel between several different towers during the day to help make up numbers. Steve was asked to draw up a proposed schedule of towers and times for presentation to the AGM.

Recording of non-active members: Our membership survey showed a significant number of members who never or rarely ring. We are concerned that counting them as 'resident ringing members' of the Guild distorts the statistics and can give a misleading impression of the health of ringing in the Branch. Jacquie mentioned a similar survey done recently by North Bucks branch that showed only about 70% of the ringers 'on their books' were active ringers. Sue Davenport offered to modify the *Request for Subs* form to add a definition of what makes an inactive member, and to record the number of inactive members of the tower.

Towers open during Heritage Weekend (2nd weekend in September): In 2016 the Central Council will be promoting this with as many towers as possible taking part. The organisers of Heritage Weekend are working on a combined logo that includes a bell for use in publicity; this is a major opportunity for local publicity. Towers are urged to be open to the public for some time that weekend – demonstrations of ringing are not essential.

Update on Guild matters by Branch Reps: Sue and Jacquie, our Branch Reps, said that little of real importance had been covered at the Guild meetings they attended. They felt that the March meeting was too tightly controlled, and that the item billed as *Branches Recruitment & Retention Discussion* was not a discussion at all.

Making the AGM more attractive to our members: Our branch AGMs follow a very traditional format: ringing, service, tea, AGM, ringing. Our chairman asked us to think about how to hold it in a more interesting way. Ken Davenport said that having a Branch AGM was required by the Guild rules, but how it was 'packaged' (i.e. what else was organised on the same day as the AGM) was up to the branch. He suggested that the branch had to change the 'AGM package' quite often so that it didn't become stale.

2016 'skeleton' calendar: competitions / practices / meetings: Rob Needham circulated the latest draft calendar of Saturday branch practices and identified the changes from the previous version. He asked tower correspondents to try and book their tower's date and times with the appropriate church officer and let Rob know the outcome by the end of this year.

Branch events, fundraising / quiz / outing: Pam Elliston offered to organise a branch outing on a Saturday in October 2016, but the actual date will depend on knowing the date of the joint 8-bell Striking Competition [*see below*].

AOB

- a) **Date of joint Reading/SDB striking competition:** This is organised by Sonning Deanery in alternate years with Reading branch. The date for the competition this year (2015) was set by Reading branch only when the Reading F.C. fixture list was known! Should Sonning do the same for next year's date? After some discussion it was agreed that our branch should follow suit; it would benefit our Branch as well as Reading.
- b) **North Bucks branch survey:** The Secretary said that he had only received the survey results by email on the day of this Business Meeting and that it made interesting reading. He said he would circulate it to tower correspondents.

The meeting closed at 6.20 p.m.