

**Sonning Deanery Branch – Business Meeting,  
St Michael and St Mary Magdalene Easthampstead, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Ken and Sue Davenport (St Paul's Wokingham), Hugh Dempster (Finchampstead), Lesley Graves (White Waltham), John Harrison (All Saints Wokingham), Jacquie and Martha Hazell (Waltham.St.Lawrence and Shottesbrooke.), Andrew Mitchell (Easthampstead), Rob and Pauline Needham (Sonning), Sue Portsmouth (Sonning), Darren Smith (Arborfield), Steve Wells (Easthampstead), (*9 towers*)

**Apologies:** Alison Clayton (Sonning), John Coombes (Wargrave), Nicola Lee (Barkham), Nigel Mellor (All Saints Wokingham)

**Matters arising from the 2019 AGM:** A proposal to transfer funds from the General Fund to the Bell Fund was not carried at the AGM but did open up discussion on use of funds. The SDB skittles trophy which had been held at Sonning for some years was donated to the Bradfield training course, and Sue P reported that it had been awarded at the 2019 course to the winners of the mini-ring striking competition. There is still no volunteer within the SDB to coordinate social activities. Safeguarding training was discussed; training is available through the Guild if not offered by individual parishes, and generic training should be tailored to be tower-specific. It is also good practice to agree policies with the PCC.

**Financial update:** the Treasurer, Sue Davenport, reported:

General Fund	£2700.93
Bell Fund	£2367.36
Total Funds	£5068.29.

**Review of Branch Practices:** Steve Wells reported that the monthly Branch Practices had an average attendance of 13; morning practices tend to be the most popular, though a mixture of mornings and afternoons is still required as other commitments mean that some ringers are unable to attend at a particular time. A new elementary practice is to be introduced to assist ringers in the jump from rounds to the start of method ringing (*this is now being held at All Saints Wokingham and is proving popular and helpful.*). The monthly Tuesday practices at Binfield cover a range of abilities, including everything from Rounds and Call Changes to Surprise Minor; it is proposed to change the dates of this practice from the first Tuesday to the third Tuesday in the New year, subject to confirmation with Binfield tower.

**Branch Training:** We currently have no Training Officer. John Harrison has arranged 10 courses since the survey of needs, covering requirements with the highest demand and those which are easiest to organise. Steve Wells has attempted to organise a bob calling course, but this fell through as only 5 people accepted. Binfield and Warfield were identified as towers requiring targeted support, John Harrison will relaunch the survey of requirements as people have changed since the last survey.

**Young Ringers Training:** The Youth Officer, Rob, summarised the Young Ringer (YR) training. A training session is held once a month and of the last 9 practices, 3 have had to be cancelled due to lack of numbers. Rob stated that the average number of SDB YRs at a practice (i.e. not including YRs from other branches) was 4.2, with 6.3 adult helpers. There are 23 Young Ringers on the books at present (including one from EBSB), although some do not attend the practices. Some of the more experienced YRs are being encouraged to assist in running the practices, and some have taken part in national YR competitions in London and Liverpool. Two have attended the ART Module 1 course, and one is now teaching a friend to ring.

**Publicity:** John Harrison started by stating that ringing needs publicity! Work needs to be done to build on the 'Ringing remembers' initiative in 2017/2018, which recruited a lot of new ringers in the Branch, but there is a lack of suitable local 'vehicles' to allow us to raise the profile of ringing and to encourage recruitment. It was suggested that towers could work together. Towers could encourage local groups such as Guides and youth groups to visit. Sue Davenport mentioned having a stall in a town centre where people could learn get information about ringing (she is having a stall related to flower arranging in Wokingham) There have been articles in the local press recently, and Jacquie Hazell mentioned that Lesley Graves has done a good article with photos in the local magazine. Jacquie has also uploaded videos to a local Facebook group. John requested that each tower discusses what they believe the Branch should be doing in terms of publicity; this should not be left to the towers alone. Jacquie Hazell confirmed that the Branch needs to be a resource for the towers; they should not be left by themselves to try to advertise their presence.

**Update on Guild matters:** Jacquie Hazell said that as the next meeting is only one week away, there was nothing new to report. There is an EGM of the Bell Fund Committee immediately before this meeting to discuss the amalgamation of the Bell Funds (*this was approved at the EGM*). Sue D said that the new Guild web site is largely sorted out. The size of the Committee is being discussed, with a thought that the Branch Representative posts should be abolished; both our representatives (Jacquie and Sue D) think that this is a bad idea.

**Future pattern of Branch practices:** It was agreed that evening practices should be dropped as these are not popular. Surprise Major is the most popular regular practice, as it covers a need which is beyond most tower's individual capability. It was suggested that the new elementary practice could move around, although finding suitable towers/dates/times could then become a problem. It was confirmed that the intention is to move the day of the Binfield practice in 2020.

**Investment in ringing:** John Harrison confirmed that what towers are short of is not bells, but ringers, opportunities and accessories such as simulators. There are benefits from investment, such as in the sound control system at Wokingham All Saints which gives greater flexibility such as permitting two practices per week. Twyford has done the same thing. Simulators are very useful for extended practices for learners, obviating the need for numbers of experienced ringers to be available each time. Towers are asked to think about what would improve their training and ringing opportunities and add flexibility. There is money in both Branch and Guild to assist; contact John Harrison to discuss any requirements

**Officer vacancies:** There is still no Training Officer, which means that John is still covering that area as well as his other Branch commitments. The Youth Officer (Rob Needham), Secretary (Sue Portsmouth) and Deputy Branch Ringing Master (Steve Wells) all indicated at the meeting that they will stand down at the AGM. Job advertisements for these posts are on the Branch website. If anyone would like to consider taking up any of these posts or knows of someone in their tower who might be interested, they should contact the current officer or John Harrison in the first instance.

**2020/21 draft calendar: competitions / practices / meetings:** Sue Portsmouth has prepared a first draft of the schedule, and requested that towers discuss and confirm the suggested dates to her as soon as possible. We are aware that some towers are not able to confirm bookings more than a few months ahead, but it would be helpful to know this too, so that potential problems are not overlooked. The schedule is open to discussion and change, so if any tower already knows that it might have a problem with a date allocated to it, please let Sue P know.

**A.O.B:** Darren Smith said that Arborfield has 13 handbells which are surplus to its requirements; he was advised to check with the church as to who owns them before any decisions are made. Darren also asked what fees other towers receive for ringing at weddings. This identified that Arborfield's £15 per rope is slightly low compared with other towers in the Branch.

John Harrison thanked the attendees.

The meeting closed at 6.20 p.m.