

# Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



October 2024, Autumn issue

## Chairman's message



Our main focus in the Branch is to support local ringing, mostly by providing services and activities for you the members. But being preoccupied with local matters makes it easy to forget that we are a small part of the much larger ringing community. Thousands of other ringers are facing similar or worse challenges to us in recruiting, motivating and developing new ringers as they try to keep ringing active in their area. Our time is also just a brief period in the long sweep of ringing's history and its future. We are the custodians of an art that our predecessors passed to us and it is our responsibility to pass it on to future generations. Over the centuries ringing has had ups and downs. It survived the Puritans' hostility, and it got a boost from Belfry Reform when the Victorian church more or less took over ringing and introduced ringing for services, set up ringing societies and heavily promoted change ringing. Ringing prospered for much of the 20th century but it now faces serious threats. The number of ringers has reduced around 20% over the last forty years, and is set to fall even more as the post war generation, which has been the backbone of ringing for so long, finally bows out. With the current pattern of recruitment and development the next decade could see the number of ringers cut by a half, with many bands becoming unviable. To avoid that grim prospect we must find better ways to do things. We need to make ringing attractive to more of the type of people who are likely to take to it. And having got them through the door we need to be better at training them, so they can become competent more quickly. Above all we must inspire them to want to become committed long term ringers. And to do that we must surround them with a good physical and social environment and provide opportunities that will interest and challenge them. Doing all that won't be easy, nor will the changes needed for it to happen – change never is easy – but we are not alone. The Central Council's Ringing 2030 initiative is developing resources and ideas that can help achieve us all. There are three strands to Ringing 2030, focused on: More people wanting to learn to ring; Teaching them well and supporting their development; Putting a quality environment round them so they enjoy it. There's a lot more information about it at: [cccbr.org.uk/ringing-2030/](http://cccbr.org.uk/ringing-2030/) Take a look and think about what we could do locally. In the Branch we aim to provide opportunities over and above what individual towers can provide. Each year we offer around 70 practices ranging, from elementary to advanced, most of which are well attended. We also offer training courses on specific topics. So far 23 members have told us what they would like (over 100 individual requests) and we have run five courses so far. If you haven't already done so, have a look at what's on offer at: [odg.org.uk/sdb/training/courses.html](http://odg.org.uk/sdb/training/courses.html) Each November, the Branch officers meet your tower representatives to discuss what we do in the Branch and how it can best meet the needs of members and local ringing. Before then, please try to talk to your tower captain or correspondent about anything you think the Branch could do to support of ringing in this area, not just to make things better for those who are already ringing but to help us pass on a better future to those who will follow us. And if you think you could help make it happen, all the better. Enjoy your ringing, and I look forward to meeting some of you at forthcoming events.

John Harrison, [chairman@sdb.odg.org.uk](mailto:chairman@sdb.odg.org.uk)

## Guild 6 Bell Striking Competition

The Guild 6 bell striking competition was held in early October at Shottesbrooke, with a raising and lowering competition at Binfield. Congratulations to the winning team from Tilehurst and to the home team, Shottesbrooke for wonderful hosting and a credible 4th place. Photos and results on the SDB web site.

## News from around the Deanery

We are training a new ringer at Sonning called Pam; she actually lives in the village, a couple of minutes walk from the church - most of our ringers don't live in Sonning. As we already have a Pam they are distinguished by 'New Pam' and 'Captain Pam'. New Pam is an illustrator and artist, so I knew she would be interested when I met her for a training session and I said to her, "I was painting this morning". "Ah, what did you paint?", she asked, and her face fell when I said, "My garage door!"

In September we had a large group of ringers from Leatherhead visiting the tower, and one of their members was very knowledgeable about bells and their acoustics - he recorded a few dongs of each of our eight bells and even included the clock bell on the roof of the tower!

Rob Needham, Sonning

Recently our church, White Waltham, was part of the Heritage Weekend and did Church Teas. As part of the weekend, the church tower was opened and I carried out two tours. The first one went well, with 8 people attending. We gave a demonstration and a talk about bell ringing. Then I offered the chance for people to have a go. One person bounced the stay as they had pulled it a little bit too much, but no cause for concern. Or at least not at that point...

During the second tour we did another talk and demonstration and then offered visitors the chance to have a go. It was at this point that, whilst giving someone a go, the bell didn't feel right and I needed to shout "Let Go!" to the person. Problem was, I didn't let go and the stay had broken. Later I found myself at A&E being treated for rope burns. Note to self, if I tell someone to let go, I must also let go!!

Lesley Graves, White Waltham

Finchampstead rang a quarter peal of Plain Bob Doubles on Thursday June 6th as part of Ringing Out for Peace. 80 years since D-Day Landings. The quarter peal was followed by a celebration of D-Day + 80 with music, cake and bubbly organised by the Parish Council and ended with the lighting of the beacon on top of the church tower. Fortunately it was a dry, clear and nearly warm evening. <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1743063>

Tricia Amos, Finchampstead

At Arborfield, we were sad to hear of the passing of David Goodwin in August. David was a keen learner at Arborfield and our thoughts are with his wife, Joyce.

Jennifer Moynihan, Arborfield

## Book Corner

Last month, four of us from Arborfield and Sonning attended a talk by Steve Coleman, at St. Giles, Bletchington. Steve is the author of four books about ringing. The church was packed, the cake was delicious and it was a really enjoyable afternoon. The talk was aimed mainly at elementary ringers (and teachers) and covered ropesight (how to get it and how to survive without it) and learning methods. The key takeaway for me from the afternoon was that you cannot easily understand how another person learns something and that understanding what a learner understands when you say 'hunt to the back' for example, or what they see in their head is really important to helping them progress.

For me, Steve Coleman's books are brilliant. The way he explains things clicks in my head (especially how to ring touches of Grandsire). I recommend all adult learners to give them a try and I am happy to lend my copies out for you to have a look at before investing. Happy ringing and reading!

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## Holiday Ringing

As I type this, I'm looking out at the rain, clutching a cup of tea and thinking wistfully of the long-gone summer holidays. One of the lovely things about going on holiday is to have the opportunity to ring in different places. In my experience, I have never been anywhere where the band have not been incredibly welcoming to visitors. **Mary Ede** concurs, "I was on the Isle of Wight and rang at Whitwell. Very nice ring of 6. Made very welcome."

My top tip is to contact the tower captain first, just to check ringing times, and to keep trying if you can't make contact. The Facebook bell ringing group is a good place to ask for contacts. Here are a small selection of places that people have enjoyed ringing at on their travels:

### **The University Church of Great St. Mary's, Cambridge (24cwt 12)**

This is my favourite 12-bell tower. The bells were new in 2009 and just do exactly what you want them to do! The tower captain is incredibly welcoming and the band are very good indeed (but not intimidating!). They have a lot of visitors and the views across Cambridge from the top of the bell tower are fantastic. Practice nights are Mondays, and they welcome visitors to attend and to ring for Sunday service (morning and afternoon). There is also a young ringers practice at St Clements on Monday early evenings so if you are a young ringer you can get 2 grabs in one go! It is a 30 minute walk from the station so you can even go to the pub afterwards and not worry about driving.  
Jennifer Moynihan

### **The Peak District**

Not one tower but many! Whether it be the lovely 10 bell ring in Chesterfield (the crooked spire), the great 'Cathedral in the Peaks' at Tideswell (a 13cwt 8) or anywhere else, the bells and people are fantastic and the local walking is stunning.

**Jane Mellor** agrees, saying 'In September we found ourselves in the Midlands after some walking in the Peaks. Lichfield Cathedral (31cwt 10) was only a few miles so we ventured out to the South West Tower and luckily not a long climb. Not being a back end ringer, I caught hold of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to start but it felt quite heavy going and the ring was slow but the sound was gorgeous, deep and mellow. The fourth and fifth felt light but even so it is quite clear that unless you can ring slowly holding up on the balance every stroke you are not ready for these bells. The Verger and the Precentor of the Cathedral are both ringers, which is a great asset for ringer/church relations. Practice night is Monday.

### **St Laurence, Upwey (9cwt 6)**

I must confess to not actually having rung here, but we had a fabulous walk from the church to the pub over the other side of the village whilst James was ringing! Stunning countryside and views. An easy 10 minute drive from the centre of Weymouth and definitely one to put on your list if you are in the area. Jennifer Moynihan

### **New Forest**

**Andrew Mitchell** writes, I remember a lovely outing to some of the New Forest Towers some years ago:

Eling - by Southampton Water, lovely views; Lyndhurst - links to the "real" Alice in Wonderland; Minstead - links to Conan Doyle; Lymington - very sturdy tower with lovely ring of 8 bells. It took 2 people to ring up the tenor weighing around a ton. Street down to the river/Solent was also very nice. We had a very good cream tea - more than we could eat - somewhere near Minstead, if memory serves. Really enjoyed the outing.

### **St Andrew, Holt**

Spurred on by meeting a ringer at the Hurst show from Holt in Norfolk we decided to join the ringers for Sunday ringing on our week away in Holt during the fabulous hot week in July. Lucky us! What a great crowd of ringers. We rang rounds and crosses. Their ringing master called each change to 13254768, then asked the ringers to cross back to rounds. Next she just said 'crosses next' with all bells (well mostly) returned to that change. Another great way to teach call changes and place. Well done to Holt for encouraging several members to participate.  
Jane Mellor

## Sonning Deanery Branch Youth Ringing

After a busy summer of exams and waiting for exam results, our young ringers have been back to regular ringing. Many congratulations to all of those obtaining exam results this summer and good luck for the future.

This summer, many young ringers from the area attended the wedding of Peter and Sian Jasper in Marlow. Peter is the organiser of Berks and Bucks Young Ringers. As would be expected at a bell ringing wedding, there were opportunities for ringing after the service and a variety of quarter peals were rung on the day as well.

At the beginning of October, our young ringers joined up with Berks & Bucks Young Ringers and young ringers from Reading for a mini tower outing. We walked from Shottesbrooke to Waltham St Laurence and back, ringing at both churches. It was a lovely afternoon and the rain thankfully held off!

By the time this edition goes to press, some of our young ringers will have been on an outing to London, with Berks and Bucks and the Surrey Strikers. These events are great opportunities for ringers to broaden their social and ringing, as evidenced by James Moynihan who recently went to London to ring a successful peal of Surprise Minor with people he had met through youth ringing events (<https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1776279>).

Congratulations to Charley Smith who has rung over 25 quarter peals already this year, Becki Shuttleworth who recently rang her first peal of Lincolnshire Surprise Major and Charlotte Lee who rang her first quarter inside this summer.

Although we have some very keen and active young ringers who regularly meet up and ring, I know there must be more of them out there! If you have a young ringer at your tower, please do encourage them to come along to one of our events, or we could come and visit you at your tower.

*Claire Shuttleworth, [youth@sdb.odg.org.uk](mailto:youth@sdb.odg.org.uk)*

### Notes from Bellboard

Congratulations to Nigel Mellor and James Moynihan, who recently rang their 25th Quarter Peal together. <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1776090> and to Nigel and John Harrison who recently rang their 200th quarter peal together! <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1771185>

Congratulations to Katherine Holland on her first quarter peal and Lesley Cross on her 200th. <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1776130>

Congratulations to Jane Mellor for conducting her first quarter of doubles (and to Jan Glen and Julie Greenway). <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1756724>

Apologies to anyone I have missed who has rung a milestone recently. Please let me know of anything you would like included in the next newsletter. Ed

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