

Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter



May 2024, Spring

Chairman's message



Spring is always a hopeful time of year with lighter evenings, warmer weather and greenery bursting forth wherever you look. It's also a time when a lot of things happen. April was busy with the Branch 6-bell competition coming hard on the heels of Easter (and just before 'Ringing for England' on St George's Day).

We had a good entry for the competition with eight teams, some from bands that haven't entered for a while. The Shottesbrooke ringers were very efficient hosts, providing more refreshments than we could have consumed. They also won, by a narrow margin, so they will go on to represent the Branch in the Guild competition in October, which this year will also be at Shottesbrooke.

We had a slight problem in the run up to the competition when we realised that the rules didn't reflect changes we had made (to the 8-bell rules) in recent years to encourage more teams to be able to participate. Competition rules are normally approved at an AGM but the officers felt we should use our delegated powers to act between AGMs (providing we report what we have done to the members at next meeting). In this case we changed the rules to ensure that teams we knew wanted to enter, notably an Elementary Team, would be able to do so. We also decided to have a full review of the rules, which we will present to members for approval, so if you have any views please let us know. See: odg.org.uk/sdb/documents/rules/6-BellRules.pdf.

May was also a busy ringing month. If you like tower grabbing there was the ODG ringing Day on the May Day holiday (Monday 6th) with 17 towers open in the Oxford area, and the proceeds going toward the Guild Bell Fund. Then on the morning of Saturday 18th, the Guild 8-bell competition was held at Stoke Poges (all teams had to ring a set method, St Clement's College Bob Major) and the Guild AGM was in the afternoon. The Sonning Deanery team came a credible fifth in the 8-bell competition, which was won by EBSB branch. For details see the Guild events page: odg.org.uk/events/

I hope you enjoy your ringing, and as ever, please get in touch with me or any of the officers if you have questions, or suggestions for how we could improve what we do.

John Harrison chairman@sdb.odg.org.uk

Terminology Untangled

Have you ever heard a conductor saying that they will call 'wrong, 3 before, middle and home' and not had a clue what they were talking about? Well look no further - terminology untangled will explain it all! Home, wrong, middle and before are all calling positions to change the coursing order of bells to put together a true touch (one in which a row is not repeated). Let's look at each call:

Home - this is a call (bob or single) that is made with the effect of placing the tenor in the highest place bell at the lead end (e.g. for major, 8ths place bell).

Wrong - this is a call (bob or single) that is made with the effect of placing the tenor in the second highest place bell at the lead end (e.g. for major, 7ths place bell).

Middle - this is a call (bob or single) that is made with the effect of placing the tenor in the third highest place bell at the lead end (e.g. for major, 6ths place bell).

Before - this is the most complicated one. The before is when, at a bob, the tenor runs out. At a single, the tenor may be unaffected if it is a 6ths place single or it may make seconds (although this is extremely uncommon).

So what does this mean? Well, these all effect the coursing order! This is the order in which all bells pass each other. For many methods, in a plain course this order is 53246. A home changes bells 324, middle 246 and wrong 532 (the before is again the complicated one, changing bells 5, 3 and 6). A bob changes 3 bells from ABC to BCA, e.g. a wrong will change the order 53246 to 32546. A single changes ABC to CBA.

James Moynihan, dbrm@sdb.odg.org.uk

News from around the Deanery

A date touch composed and conducted by our chairman, John Harrison, was rung at All Saints Wokingham on the first day of the new year. A date touch is a composition such that each bell rings 2024 times to match the year number. This was successfully achieved, and was more notable because the band featured both an 80 and an 86-year-old and a 16-year-old (picture below).



The All Saints date touch band.



The Shottesbrooke team.

We entered three teams in the joint 8-bell striking competition, hosted by Reading at Tilehurst on 20th January. Congratulations to the Reading teams who came 1st and 2nd. We also held our own very successful 6-bell striking competition at Shottesbrooke on 20th April, judged by Marcia Dieppe. Eight teams took part with a mix of experienced through to new ringers. Thanks to the local ringers for providing excellent refreshments during the competition. Congratulations to the winning Shottesbrooke team (above).

Jan Glen

News from St Andrew's, Sonning

It was a busy time for St Andrew's bell ringers over the Easter period. On the evening before Good Friday the bell ringers held their 'Christmas' dinner at the Shoulder of Mutton, Playhatch. There were 14 of us at the dinner, and we enjoyed both the meal and the company.

On the Saturday afternoon after Good Friday, we organised and ran the 'Open Tower' session as part of the church's Easter events. The easter egg hunt in the churchyard proved to be more popular than our open tower – surprise, surprise! – but nevertheless we had at least 30 visitors, including a group of 10 young teenagers from STAY (ST A(ndrew's) Y(outh) group. We had two ringers at the foot of the staircase, acquainting the visitors with health and safety issues; two ringers in the ringing room, telling the visitors about ringing, the bells and a demo of ringing the tenor; and two on the tower roof to grab people's ankles as they leant over the parapet to see George Clooney's house! So the Open Tower event was good in that nobody was injured, but bad that nobody expressed an interest in learning to ring.

Rob Needham

Book Corner

This month, I have been reading 'Raising and Lowering in Peal' a Central Council publication by John Harrison. I really struggle to ring bells up and down, let alone in peal, and this book has really helped me. I finally understand what I should be looking and listening for in my attempt to ring in the correct place.

I also recently finished reading 'Toll for the Dead' by MS Morris. This is a detective story/murder mystery, set in the village of Hambleton and involves bell ringing. I don't know if the authors are ringers, but the descriptions of ringing are accurate and it is a fun read. It is the last book in a series, but it can be read as a stand alone novel.

If you are need a bell ringing book, let me know and I will do my best to source it!

Jennifer Moynihan, bookstall@sdb.odg.org.uk

Change ringing in hand – a hidden art

When I mention handbell ringing to non-ringers they invariably assume I'm talking about tune ringing. That's not so surprising since they've quite likely seen handbell tune ringing whereas ringing changes in hand is hardly ever heard or seen in public. That's a pity because from the listener's perspective:

- Handbell ringing is often better struck than tower bell ringing (precision timing is easier without half a ton of metal on the end of a rope).
- The music of change ringing in hand is much easier to hear and appreciate (handbells make a crisper, clearer sound than tower bells).

Many ringers (unless they happen to ring handbells or know someone who does) probably don't realise just how much handbell ringing there is. For example, last year over two thousand handbell quarters and over six hundred handbell peals were rung – around one in eight of all quarters and one in six of all peals – and over 2,700 ringers took part in ringing them.

What attracts people to ringing in hand? It can be more rewarding – the features above apply to the performers as well as the audience – and it benefits from what sociologists call 'hygiene factors':

- You usually sit down to ring, rather than having to stand up all the time.
- You can perform almost anywhere that's convenient. So on a chilly winter evening you can ring in a nice warm room rather than having to go up a cold bell tower .
- You are usually in more comfortable surroundings, probably with refreshments on hand when needed.

Without the physical aspects of ringing a tower bell you can step up the mental side by ringing two bells, one in each hand, which is easier than you might imagine because you can ring the pair as a pattern rather than separate lines, and like any skill it gets easier with practice. Some people even find that learning to ring a pair of bells helps them understand the method better when ringing it in the tower.

An unexpected bonus for handbell ringers came during the Covid pandemic because we could return to ringing outdoors long before we were allowed to ring in towers. I started organising Sunday afternoon quarter peals on the lawn in June 2020, and have continued organising them ever since - though we now ring indoors except in warm weather.

How do you get started? Ideally regular practice with experienced ringers, as you do in the tower, but that might not be easy. Tower bell ringing is public – you can see the tower, and there's probably a notice in the porch or a website with information. But most handbell ringing is private, and so harder to find unless you know someone who knows. In this area we are fortunate to have a lot of handbell ringers and opportunities to ring and progress once you get started.

Handbell ringers without local access to in-person ringing can use E-bells: ebells.co.uk/ to ring in Handbell Stadium: handbellstadium.org/, and several groups regularly do so.

If you would like to find out more, please contact me or either of the ringing masters (Nigel & James)

John Harrison



Bucks & Berks Young Ringers at South East England youth Contest (SEECON)

In April, 8 youth bands from the South East competed in a striking competition in Bushey, Hertfordshire. The vicar welcomed us with his appreciation of our skills and dedication to being the “voice of the Church” and how essential the young ringers were in continuing this important role. After a rocky practice, we settled into the competition piece working as a good team. The Bucks & Berks (B&BYR) team came 7th and we were proud of ourselves especially as we had a fairly novice band who hadn’t all rang together before the day, and we also had the youngest ringer at the age of 8 (many boxes were needed!). After a great lunch organised by “Young at Herts” the afternoon was topped off by an outing to 3 surrounding churches, and of course a team “debrief” in the pub. Excitingly, next year Bucks & Berks will be hosting SEECON in the Sonning Deanery! In the months ahead, B&BYR will be meeting frequently in preparation for the Ring World National Youth Contest (RWNYC) which is to take place in London this July.

Becki Shuttleworth

Sonning Deanery Branch Youth Ringing

Since November, the young ringers in SDB have been very active. Not only do they ring at their home towers but frequently visit other towers’ practice nights and branch events, making lasting friendships and having a lot of fun. Between them they have managed to clock up an impressive amount of notable ringing.

In December, the school holidays allowed our young ringers to descend on mass to the Branch afternoon practice at Binfield with the added attraction of mince pies and cake on offer. The holidays also brought the opportunity to join up with the ODG young ringers for their Christmas ringing and social at Shiplake. On the first Sunday of every month our young ringers join up with EBSB to attend Bucks & Berks Young Ringers. This gives a great opportunity to ring together with others of their own age and in April they travelled to Bushey in Hertfordshire for the South East England Contest (see above).

Last year, SDB young ringers started meeting once a month with young ringers from the Reading branch. This allows an opportunity for some local ringing with other young ringers and a chance to visit some different towers. We have rung at Shiplake, Sonning, Twyford, Caversham and St Giles in Reading. In June, we will be in Nettlebed. We also plan to have another mini-walking outing later in the year based around Shottesbrook. All these practices will be run by one of the young ringers, Becki.

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.

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