Sonning Deanery Branch Newsletter

October 2025, Autumn issue

Chairman's Message

Six teams entered the our 6-bell competition despite having to move it to avoid Easter. It was capably hosted by Lesley Graves and her team at White Waltham, and I was pleased to see both a youth team entering and a young ringer as one of the judges. Congratulations to Easthampstead who won, the first time for many years, and then went on to come a creditable 5th out of 8 in the Guild 6-bell competition at Cuddesdon.

We have occasionally entered a team in the Guild 10-bell or 8-bell competitions as well, but too few ringers were available this year so maybe next year. It would be good to see the Branch competing around the Guild more often. Competitions are a tiny part of our ringing but they remind us that quality matters, something that's easy to forget amid all our other concerns when turning up to ring week by week.

I was please do see five of our young ringers were in the Bucks & Berks Young Ringers team who were placed second in the advanced 8-bell call change section of the Ringing World National Youth Contest in July. In April, they won the southeast regional contest (SEECON) held at Twyford.

For many years we have checked before many, but not all, practices to make sure enough people are available. It has worked well and on the few occasions when there weren't enough it avoided anyone turning up and having to go home. At the AGM we discussed bringing all practices into line. Some members felt uncomfortable about the prospect of cancelling any third Saturday practices since they had been a feature longer than any of us can remember, probably since the early 1900s. But on balance the meeting agreed it was better to cancel if there weren't enough, rather than risk people turning up and being disappointed. The change was timely since there have been too few for a practice on three Saturdays since the AGM. Things were very different forty or fifty years ago. We only had one practice a month but it lasted 3 hours (6 – 9pm on a Saturday) and we often had thirty ringers present. We now offer five different 1½ hour practices each month so there are more opportunities, and we cater for a wide range of needs. The maximum number of members at practices in 2024 was: 20 (advanced), 19 (elementary), 15 (weekday), 13 (Saturday) but averages were around 11.

It's interesting to see how many practices individual members attend. As expected, some attend a lot (a few people over 30) and some far fewer. But 80 of our members (over half) didn't attend any of the 43 practices run last year. If you are one of them, I would love to hear from you. What do you get from your membership and what else could we do for you that you would appreciate? Contact me at: chairman@sdb.odg.org.uk or on 0118 978 5520.

Ringing has always marked events of local or national importance. Civic ringing was somewhat eclipsed when service ringing was introduced in the 19th century, but it still continues today, and in the last few years there have been many opportunities to mark public events with ringing. Most recently there was the 80th anniversary of VE Day, marked by ringing in eleven Branch towers (three quarter peals and eight general ringing sessions). Nationally, VJ Day on 2 August (when the war actually ended) got a lot less attention than VE Day, but it was marked by ringing in five Branch towers.

The Hurst band took a mobile belfry to the Hurst Show (with some help from others to man it). It produced some potential recruits, but just as important it helped raise people's awareness. People know the sound of ringing but we often forget that most of them have no idea of the skill, tradition or fellowship that lies behind the sound. So we need to work extra hard to raise awareness. We can all do that in a small way by talking to people about ringing and explaining what makes it special. Think back – when did you last talk to a non-ringer about ringing?

The holiday season seemed to pass very quickly but maybe on your travels you managed to ring at some new places and meet other ringers. Those of us at home in mid-August enjoyed a relaxing barbecue at the end of a day of quarter peals with several firsts. Thanks to Jane Mellor, Sue Davenport and others for arranging it all. The barbecue was the first social event the Branch has held for a good few years. If you think we should run more social events, please get in touch with Jan (secretary@sdb.odg.org.uk) or me. John Harrison

Nominations for ART awards

Becki Shuttleworth of Sonning was nominated for the Young Ringer award by Robert Needham. Robert commented that since Becki achieved LtR level 5 on 4th Feb 2024, she has achieved the following milestones:

Rung regularly at the St Andrew's Thursday practices and Sunday service ringing; Peals inside to Cambridge Major, Yorkshire Major, Lincolnshire Surprise Major along with 16 Quarter Peals of various number of bells and methods including first quarter of Caters in May; She is working up to ringing 8 Spliced of the standard 8 and has rung Yorkshire Royal at the Reading practice.

Becki often calls Call Changes for Sunday morning service ringing. She has also called a few touches at practices including Grandsire Doubles and Triples, Plain Bob Doubles and Minor, Plain Bob/Little Bob Minor spliced, and one touch of Grandsire Caters on the recent 10 bell course, as well as conducting 7 quarter peals. She has run the Young Ringers practices and organised a young ringers quarter peal for Remembrance Sunday at Arborfield.

Graham Slade of Hurst was nominated by Duncan Kendall for "excellence in recruitment and retention". Duncan nominated him because the band are very grateful for all the hard work that Graham has put in to re-establish regular Sunday Ringing at Saint Nicholas Church in Hurst. "This has certainly been a labour of love, and we wanted to recognise the dedication that Graham has shown to the Tower in teaching so many locals to ring."

The band of **Saint Nicholas, Hurst** was entered for the "band or cluster of the year category" by Peter Needham. The basis of this nomination was to reflect the outcome of Graham's hard work and the transformation of the band. Not since the 1950s or 60s has the Church had so many ringers on Sundays and it is a great achievement to know that frequently all ropes are taken for service ringing. The Band also has managed the portable Ringing Tower at the local show, has a couple of tower outings each year, rung several quarter peals, and not coming last in recent striking competitions! As well as a lively post ringing "discussion" in the pub after Monday ringing.

Although these were not successful in winning, the judges were extremely positive about all the nominations they had received. If you think there is somebody worth putting forward for an award next year, don't be afraid to request the forms and submit your nomination.

Duncan Kendall

Spring and Summer Firsts

Birmingham, St Martin
Sunday, 31 August 2025 in 57m (39–1–19 in C)
1344 Bristol Surprise Maximus
1 Paul E Bibilo
2 Charlotte D Linford
3 Simon J L Linford (C)
4 James H Moynihan
5 Bethan L Hensman
6 Harry M Turner
7 Jacob C W Hubbard
8 Henry J Stephenson
9 Rebecca A Davey
10 Mark R Eccleston
11 John S Warboys
12 George M Salter
First quarter of Surprise Maximus: 4

Easthampstead
Thursday May 29th 2025
1260 Plain Bob Doubles
1. Elliot Beasley
2. Stephen Wells
3. Barbara Wells
4. Andrew Mitchell
5. Rachel Moss
6. Jacob Richardson

Congratulations to Elliot Beasley on his first quarter.

6th April 2025
St. Andrew's, Sonning, Berkshire
1260 Plain Bob Doubles, 43 mins
1 Natalie Wells*
2 Pam Elliston
3 Geoffrey M Harvey
4 Claire Shuttleworth
5 Becki Shuttleworth (C)
6 Alison Clayton
* First quarter peal

Oxford Diocesan Guild (Sonning Deanery Branch)
Arborfield, Berkshire
St Bartholomew
Friday, 15 August 2025 in 42m (11–2–24 in G)
1260 Plain Bob Doubles
Rung for VJ Day

1. Emily Shuttleworth 2. Claire L Shuttleworth
3. Jennifer S Moynihan 4. James H Moynihan (C)
5. Becki Shuttleworth 6. Benji Bass

First quarter: 1; Congrats to Geoff and Enid Harvey on their 65th Wedding Anniversary.

SDB Bells and BBQ Day

On Saturday 17th August, many members of the branch joined together for the SDB Bells & BBQ Day. The day started with a quarter peal of Bob Doubles at Shottesbrooke which was then followed by a quarter peal of Cambridge Surprise Minor. In the afternoon a quarter of Bristol Surprise Major was rung at All Saints, Wokingham. Everyone then headed to St Pauls, Wokingham for the branch practice and to set up for the BBQ. The ringing was inclusive as the quarter peals ranged from simpler methods to more advanced methods which gave everyone an opportunity to attempt a quarter peal with support from ringers across the branch. The BBQ which followed was a great social event for the branch with the addition of some great food and a fun quiz from John Harrison. Thanks to the chefs and everyone who brought a salad or dessert. It was a fantastic day of ringing and a great BBQ social afterwards. I would like to thank Jane Mellor for organising with the aid of the St Paul's ringers, everyone who helped organise the day and set up the BBQ and everyone who joined us on the day.

Becki Shuttleworth



The band for Emily Shuttleworth's first quarter, anti-clockwise from front left, taken at the Bells and BBQ day.

Image: Christopher P. Cole

News from Finchampstead

After a rather long wait our new ropes arrived in early March. They are settling in nicely and we are getting used to their individual quirks.....slightly bouncy, stiff tail ends (but this is improving) and just different!
We were delighted to be able to ring for the installation service of our new Rector, Revd Gemma Donnel, on 10th April. The church was full for this special service, led by the Bishop of Reading, the Rt Revd Mary Gregory with the ringing heard and appreciated by all. Rev Gemma tolled the treble from the vestry during the service, managing a steady rhythm for 10 tolls, having had some expert tuition from one of our ringers beforehand!
Along with the rest of the country we will be ringing to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day on 8th May. We felt it would be a fitting occasion to ring a quarter peal on the new ropes.....let's hope we're successful! Ringing will be followed by other celebrations organised by the Parish Council, culminating in the lighting of the beacon on the tower roof.
Tricia and Judith, Finchampstead

Branch Practices

Sonning Deanery runs more Branch practices each month than any other branch in the ODG so there is always something for everyone to ring and grow.
The 1st Tuesday of the month and 3rd Wednesday of the month alternate between the Elementary practice and the Focused practice.
The 2nd Tuesday or Wednesday of the month alternate nights for the advanced practice.
The 3rd Tuesday afternoon is the 6 bells practice at Binfield.
There are also regular practices for Young Ringers.
See the diary on the branch website at https://odg.org.uk/sdb/diary/index.html#Top

Email reminders are sent out prior to each practice so the organisers know there will be sufficient people for the practice to go ahead.

A summer of teaching

Two learners, two youth teacher trainees, two mentors and lots of hard work to help Ishak learn to ring before he had to go back to Durham. We all did it with a little fun along the way. Ishak brought his mum, Nes, to learn too and as they are both Turkish and Nes doesn't speak fluent English there were challenges along the way.

It was thanks to Benjy, a returning ringer from about 6 years ago, enthusing a friend to learn how to ring. Ishak arrived very excited to learn to ring but his mum was a little nervous. Becki became quite adept at Nes's google translate and gradually Nes was able to relax.

Nigel and Jane were Becki and James' mentors with the Association Ringing Teachers ART, Module 1 which is a course to teach teachers how to teach handling a bell. We all started on 7th July and by 23rd Becki and James taught for 12 hours. Ishak (being younger and speaking English) managed to ring both strokes by 8 hours of teaching and Nes rang independently in the last half of hour on 23rd July. A great achievement by all.

Here Becki, James and Benjy are teaching the tension exercise to Nes, Ishak and Louie.





Keen to watch how his friend was progressing Benjy came along only to find himself learning to teach too. His willing brother Louie has also decided to reignite his ringing too and now Benjy is seeking a Module 1 course so he can go back to Bangor university and teach even more students. Very much good luck to him.

The ART M1 module teaches techniques and skills for handling teaching by an ART Tutor. The approach is to break down the whole action into component parts using exercises before adding them together again to teach the whole part whole action. It is a clear and structured process for the teachers to follow. When ready the teacher is then assessed for accreditation by an ART assessor. For the learner there is a scheme called Learning the Ropes which is a progressive learning scheme from handling to ringing quarter peals from level 3 onwards. Each level requires skills to complete with certificates of achievement, and a badge if you want.

Becki and James were assessed for accreditation as M1 teachers on 1st September. Kate Flavell, an ART assessor, passed them both so they are now ready to use their skills and grow more bellringers as they progress themselves. Good luck to them both.

Two learners, two teachers, two mentors and a great friend.

