

Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers

East Berks & South Bucks Branch

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Clewer on Saturday 27th April 2019

The AGM was preceded by ringing, tea and cakes, and a short service led by Rob Taylor. The Chairman, John Davidge, opened the Meeting at 4.55 pm. The meeting was attended by the Guild Master, Katie Lane and 29 Branch members representing 11 towers.

The Chairman welcomed the Guild Master, Katie Lane.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Diane Darren, Claire Dickson, Janice Dieppe, John Dieppe, Marcia Dieppe, Carol Hughes, Fred Reynolds, Mandy Salter, Ted Westlake and James White.

2. Minutes of the HYM held at Burnham on 13th October 2018

These had been circulated prior to the meeting and were accepted with no amendments.

3. Matters Arising

i) New officer: Jan Galloway proposed and Angela Darvill seconded the proposal to create a new office of Young Ringers Organiser. This was accepted.

4. Obituaries

The following obituaries were read:

Beryl Coombs, April 1940 - June 2018 (Written by Jane Thornley, read by Robert Newton)

Beryl was a loyal and dedicated bellringer at St Giles', Stoke Poges for many years from her first signing as a ringer in the tower visitors' book for Remembrance Sunday in 1987 until her last Evensong ringing in April 2018 shortly before her final illness. There is a photograph in the ringing chamber of the ringers from 1992 which include Beryl and the legendary Gladys Barker who rang there from 1915 when they first allowed females to ring the bells. Beryl began ringing in 1985 when attending a hand bell ringing course at Denman College, the Women's Institute centre in Oxfordshire with her friend Gladys Pratt and this stimulated her interest into ringing the real thing - church bells. Although she continued to enjoy hand bell ringing, having her own two octave set and often ringing with a group of like-minded friends; they regularly visited Guildford Cathedral for the annual festival of handbell ringing held in October.

She told me she had rung the treble to several quarter peals, and these are recorded in the visitors book - her first being Grandsire Doubles rung on 23rd January 1991; a combination of Plain Bob and Grandsire Doubles on 12th November 2000 (rung half muffled for Remembrance Sunday) and again Grandsire Doubles on 7th April 2002 (rung half muffled in memory of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother).

She also rang for weddings at St Mary the Virgin, Farnham Royal and St James', Fulmer with her friend Bridget Farren as neither parish had more than a basic core of ringers. Bridget remembers she was always in charge of the catering when branch meetings were held at St Giles' due to expertise gained from her membership of the WI.

She was an quietly supportive member of the ringing band at St Giles' with unlimited patience for us rookie ringers with our particular nerves on bell handling and always encouraged us to look back and see how far we had progressed, we appreciate her kindness.

James Brooks (read by Jane Cockman)

When I learnt to ring here in 2000, I heard stories of the Clewer tower in the 1970s, when Jim Brooks captained a very enthusiastic tower. The accomplished band of ringers composed several new methods (just look up Clewer in your favourite blue line search engine). And one Easter Sunday, the band rang a quarter peal for each of the five services. Jim himself rang in 27 full peals in this tower.

Jim left his mark on the tower. He made a bespoke handbell table for the tower's collection of handbells, and a very useful working model of a ringing bell for teaching purposes. And he made the panel to give a separate bell chamber. When our bells were rehung some years ago, we were thrilled to find that the entire panel was easily removable to enable bells to be moved in and out. But probably most impressive was that when, in the '60s, the number 3 bell had to be recast, Jim himself took it down and later rehung it, cutting a hole in the floor/ceiling, removing the turves which had been used for soundproofing, and negotiating the bell past roof beams.

Jim had left for the West Country by the time I started ringing, but I did meet him and rang with him on a couple of occasions. The last time he came to the tower, he was in the process of giving away his many decorative bells, and I was proud to receive this one. So Jim may have passed in body, but his spirit lives on in this bell tower that he loved so well.

Derek Francis (read by Ken Darvill)

Derek Francis died in August last year, aged 87. For many, especially those who knew Derek when he lived around here in the 1960s and 70s, his defining characteristic was that he was a bell-ringer.

He started ringing as a boy at Warfield Church, apparently when his voice broke and he was thrown out of the church choir! In February 1954, he was elected a member of the Guild. Two years later, the girl Pat who was to become his first wife, joined him in the ringing tower. "If you can't beat them, join them" she used to say, obviously realising that hitching up to Derek meant hitching up to a life in the belfry! They began their married lives in Tylers Green, and in 1958 he joined the ringers at High Wycombe church – this presented an exciting and challenging extension to his ringing. Then the family moved to Beaconsfield, proximity to the station for his daily commute into London being the major motivation there. I sometimes travelled back on the train with him and learnt that he would drop off to sleep sitting on the train, but unfailingly would wake as the train passed under the Amersham Rd bridge on the approach to Beaconsfield station. He moved his allegiance from High Wycombe to Beaconsfield tower and rang there regularly: twice every Sunday and again on practice night, he was also Tower Captain for a number of years. It was at this point that ringing became a family activity, with both Jill and Diane learning. For him, dedication and commitment were essential attributes in whatever he undertook, and he expected his family to be the same.

He kept meticulous records of all his ringing achievements – he rang a total of 90 peals, and 120 quarter peals.

His major achievement however, and his lasting legacy, is the role he had in the late 1970s in the restoration of the bells at Beaconsfield church. Restoring a peal of bells is a massive and expensive task, but with Derek as the driving force, he kept himself and six fellow bell ringers motivated in completing this monumental project.

Two years of relentless fund-raising and two years of extremely hard work, he and the rest of the team giving every spare minute they had to undertake what was essentially a D-I-Y job on the restoration, the bells were rung for the first time on Christmas Eve, 1977. In his account of the project, he concludes 'It has been a very worthwhile and interesting task, and I would not have missed it for anything we have learned a great deal'.

But his bell ringing days came to an end in 1984 when he moved to Switzerland.

Somewhat poignantly, looking through his record of the Beaconsfield restoration project was one of the very few things which still sparked memories and a response from him in his last days when with dementia he moved back into the area living in care homes in Cookham Dean and High Wycombe.

Jim Muller (read by Angela Darvill)

Jim Muller was an Oxford Diocesan Guild member and a ringer at Cookham from 1959. He did a stint as Branch Secretary in 1968 and another as Cookham Tower Captain from 1968-1974. In mid-1975 Jim and his wife, Judy, moved to Seer Green and Jim became an active member of the Beaconsfield Band.

In 1977 he was a part of the "home-grown" Beaconsfield work-force that installed a concrete ring beam and did major work on the new frame after it was discovered that Death Watch Beetle had invaded the timbers of the old frame. His influence at Beaconsfield was not limited to the tower. He was an active member of the Churchyard Work Party and designed and helped to plant the little "Garden of Remembrance" situated a short distance from the south porch of the church.

Jim retired from his job with I.C.I. in the mid-1980s and the family moved to Wales where he continued his ringing and was able to spend plenty of time in his garden. He died in February aged 84 and his Memorial Service was full of happy memories from friends and family of his activities both as a ringer and in the "great outdoors".

A period of silence was observed in memory of these people, and also of Freda Belson (Burnham).

5. Officers' reports

a) The Chairman's report had been circulated in advance. There were no further comments or questions.

b) The Ringing Master's report had been circulated in advance. Peter Jasper added that monthly practices had taken place during the day and some in the evening and pubs had been pre-arranged. Numbers at practices had been variable. Special methods had been circulated, including Slough Royal and Annable's London (2 versions), and Bristol had been rung at Lane End. A stay had been broken at Lane End, and a gudgeon had gone during the pre-AGM ringing at Clewer. Peter would not be standing again; he thanked Angela Darvill as Deputy Ringing Master.

c) The accounts and Treasurer's report had been circulated in advance. The accounts were proposed by David Cornwall, seconded by Peter Sippitt and accepted nem con.

Alison Bailey asked whether the Branch was responsible for paying for things like the broken stay. The chairman explained that the Branch does not have to, but funding was offered. The broken gudgeon at Clewer would be regarded as wear and tear.

6. Election of members

The following had been nominated for membership of the Guild by members of their towers:

Clewer
Ann Thompson (Branch only)

Hughenden
Jessica Dixon

Fulmer
Valerie Foa
Brian Mawer

Winkfield
Adam Horsefield

High Wycombe
Gillian Blair

All new members were elected.

7. Election of Officers for 2018/19

Katie Lane (Guild Master) took the chair for the election of chairman. John Davidge was proposed by Patricia Newton and seconded by David Cornwall. John was elected unopposed and took the Chair again. The following Officers were elected or re-elected:

Ringing Master – no nomination. Officers will invite people to run individual practices.

Deputy Ringing Master – Angela Darvill, Beaconsfield (proposed by Jan Galloway, seconded by Robert Newton)

Secretary – Patricia Newton, High Wycombe (proposed by John Davidge, seconded by Georgine von Enckevort)

Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Michael Bayley, Penn (proposed by Angela Darvill, seconded by David Cornwall)

Newsletter Editor – Patricia Newton, High Wycombe (proposed by David Cornwall, seconded by Rosalind Garrett-Bowes)

Young Ringers Organiser – Josie Godfrey, Cookham and Peter Jasper, High Wycombe elected as joint officers (proposed by Patricia Newton, seconded by Rosalind Garrett-Bowes)

Branch Representatives on the Guild General Committee (3) Jan Galloway (proposed by John Davidge, seconded by Robert Newton), Rosalind Garrett-Bowes (proposed by Jan Galloway, seconded by Peter Sippitt), John Davidge (proposed by Robert Newton, seconded by Peter Jasper).

8. Appointment of other Managers

IT Manager and Webmaster –Ken Darvill, Beaconsfield (proposed Patricia Newton, seconded John Davidge)

Independent Assessor – Peter Blower, High Wycombe (proposed by Michael Bayley, seconded by Robert Newton)

100 Club Manager - Margaret Carlyle (proposed John Davidge, seconded Georgine von Enckevort)

9. Report and Accounts of Fundraising Committee

The Branch secretary read the following report that had been written by Derek Fowles:

Despite having no major events we still managed to send £1400 to the Bell Fund, but due a breakdown in the Treasurer's computer in December resulting in the loss of the details of 2018 accounts the payment will not appear in the Guild's Bell Fund accounts until next year. Together with £600 from the 100 Club this means we sent £2000 – by far the largest donation from a Branch.

We continue to run stalls at both Branch and Guild events, also non-ringing events such as Maidenhead Charities Fair, Beaconsfield Country Fair and Littlewick Show; Angela also runs an occasional stall after morning service at

Beaconsfield which has proved highly profitable. Our largest customer is the Loughborough Bell Foundry Museum which makes bulk purchases of our mugs for sale in their museum shop. The Committee continues to meet regularly (about every other month).

The chairman thanked the Fund Raising committee. They do a lot of work and raise a lot of money, and he commented that most of the committee members had been doing this for very many years. New members are always welcome to join the committee.

10. Bucks and Berks Young Ringers

Josie Godfrey reported that Young Ringers' practices had taken place almost every month and there had been extra practices for the striking competitions. 10 to 15 youngsters attend, and methods range from rounds to Cambridge Minor. She thanked those who had supported the practices and had allowed the use of their towers. The young ringers had entered the Ringing World National Youth Contest and SEECON (South East England Contest) where they came 4th. There had been two teams in the EBSB 6-bell contest which came 2nd and 3rd out of three. They are looking forward to the 2019 RWNYC. Josie noted that the young ringers had broken fewer things at practices than the Branch had at its practices!

11. Future Branch Events

Robert Newton noted that there had been a lot of entries in the Lorna Newton Contest and he hoped that there would be good support for the Branch 6-bell contest at Turville on 8th June.

The Secretary noted that there was a Training Practice (Rounds to Plain Hunt) at Burnham on the morning of 8th June. She had also booked High Wycombe for a 10/12 bell practice on Saturday 3rd August.

Simon Taylor asked whether the new arrangement for times of practices would continue. The Secretary responded that the programme had been set for the rest of this year and that the officers would be planning the programme for next year in about August. They would welcome feedback regarding the change of date and times to help them with their planning. The Chairman explained that this year had been an experiment to see if particular times attracted more members.

12. Guild Matters

Katie Lane, Guild Master, thanked the branch for the efforts in fund raising and all that we do for the Guild. She drew attention to the Guild AGM that would be at Great Missenden on Saturday 18th May and urged people to attend. She reported that the new website is now functioning. The Website Manager (Tim Hayward) depends on members to send him news, so do consider sending details to him as well as to the Branch newsletter.

13. Draw for 2nd round of the Lorna Newton Contest

Results of the draw were as follows:

Denham	vs	Lane End
Turville	vs	Clewer
Penn	vs	Dorney/Hitcham
Chalfont St Giles	vs	Bray "Delight"
Cookham	vs	Winkfield
Bray "Surprise"	vs	Amersham
High Wycombe "B"	vs	Hughenden

14. A.O.B.

Ken Darvill, Branch Website Manager, noted that the Lorna Newton draw and results are now listed on the website. He had sent an email asking Tower Correspondents to check their tower details on the website, especially with regard to ringing times, facilities, etc. Ken would also add postcodes for the churches. He encouraged members to keep an eye on the website and to send their news.

The Chairman thanked the Clewer ringers for their hospitality, - Vikki, Jane and Maureen for the food, Rob Taylor for taking the service and Heather Henry for playing the organ.

The meeting closed at 5.41 pm