

Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers

East Berks & South Bucks Branch

Minutes of the EBSB Branch AGM at Boyne Hill, Maidenhead on Saturday 22nd April 2023

The meeting was attended by 35 members representing 15 towers, plus Stuart Gibson (Guild Hon, General Treasurer)

1. Welcome and Introduction:

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting. He thanked local Doreen Young and her helpers for providing refreshments, Rev. Jeremy Harris for the very interesting service and the brilliant organist. He also welcomed Stuart Gibson, General Treasurer, who was standing in for the Master.

Apologies were received from:

Katie Lane (Guild Master), Francoise Allen, Jane Cockman, Lesley Cross, Matthew Johnson, Jacquie Hazell, Martha Hazell, Fred Reynolds, Tina Ruff, Mandy Salter.

2. Minutes of the Half Yearly Meeting held on Saturday 8th October 2022 at Lane End

These had been circulated via the User Group. They were adopted and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Obituaries:

Diana Cook (tribute by John Davidge):

Diana may have been unknown outside Chalfont St Giles where she was an extremely regular ringer and a very good treasurer. She joined Chalfont by accident as she wanted to ring at Amersham but practice night was the same as choir practice which took greater precedence. She rang at Chalfont for about 15 years and is missed a lot.

Dave Hossack, Frank Blagrove and Victor Mitchell (tribute by Vikki Bulbeck)

The Windsor area lost three fantastic tower captains last year. They had all retired due to health reasons but were still involved and were all inspirational. Dave Hossack came to ringing a lot later in life than the other two (who both rang for 70 years plus). Dave's wife started first. He was an engineer and was so intrigued by how things worked that within a year of hearing of bellringing he was helping to rehang the bells at Clewer. He had all the drawings and technical specification. He had a brilliant workshop which contained all sorts of things. Dave was very happy just being a Clewer ringer so would not have been known by many. In the tower he motivated people to get the best out of them and created a fantastic atmosphere in the ringing chamber.

All three were gentlemen – all family orientated. Ringing was very important to them but family came first.

Frank Blagrove was a legend. He rang at Clewer, Windsor Parish and the Curfew Tower, and far and wide, even internationally. He always had a story to tell. Others have reported that Frank learnt to ring in west Middlesex but he said that while he (as a teenager) was cycling along the church path at Clewer Bill Butler stopped him, wrestled him off his bike and took him in to learn to ring. A full obituary for Frank was printed in the Ringing World (No. 5824 p 1165-1166). He was an amazing person.

Vic Mitchell was a gentle soul. Wonderful chap. He carefully guided the ringers at the Curfew tower for about 15 years. He was also part of the wider community at the Castle and he was active with the bowls club.

All three gentlemen are sorely missed but they were lucky to have them in Windsor.

Hugh Neill 1937–2022, a former member of St Mary's Amersham (tribute by Jan Galloway)

Hugh was born in Ilford and educated at Brentwood School before going to St Catherine's College, Cambridge in 1955 to study Mathematics. Whilst there he learnt to ring and became a member, and later in 1958, master of the Cambridge University Guild. He rang his first peal at Harston, Cambridgeshire in November 1956. He was elected to the College Youths in 1957.

His career as a teacher of mathematics led him to Worcester, London, Durham and finally back to London as Chief Inspector of Mathematics for the Inner London Education Authority and was involved in developing the National Curriculum. He was a published author of mathematics text books. After university and with a young family and work commitments, he stopped ringing for a while.

Whilst looking for a place to live for the move to London, he and his wife Jean found a house in Chorleywood. On their way back up to Durham, Hugh remarked, "Pardon the pun, but that address rings a bell". The road was

also the address of a fellow ringer from his Cambridge days, Peter Windley, who was deputy tower captain at Amersham.

So, in the 1980s, Hugh returned to ringing and became part of the band at Amersham, under Alan Ainsworth and was soon ringing many peals and quarters there. He rang a total of 522 peals, his last being at Amersham in 2003.

During the time he had stopped ringing, his daughter started to learn to ring and he went to pick her up one day. Not realising he was a ringer, she was horrified when he caught hold to ring and said "Dad, you can't do that, you don't know what you're doing." To which he replied, "Haven't you ever noticed my College Youths certificate at the bottom of the stairs!"

Hugh was one of the people who taught me to ring and was always very encouraging to me, helping me to progress and stretch my method repertoire. I still have his hand-written explanation of the parts of Cambridge Minor. He was also very encouraging to our young ringers and rang in 19 first peals, including mine, my daughters Jill and Liz and many others. He was also instrumental in encouraging my daughters in their studies and getting Jill to join the Cambridge Guild when she went up.

In 2008 he was diagnosed with an incurable, progressive muscle disorder, Inclusion Body Myositis. Determined to get the most out of his legs whilst he could, he and Jean continued to go on their much loved walking holidays with friends despite regular falls. As his disease progressed, he explored the world using sticks, then a walking frame, then in a wheelchair.

Although the muscles throughout his body wasted, Hugh's brain never faltered. In 2019 he turned his mind from writing mathematics books to writing codeword puzzles. His first book of codewords was published in March 2021 and his second in January last year. Two more books were on the way despite him having great difficulty both typing and seeing. And he never stopped playing his beloved bridge, playing online since lockdown. His last game was on August 12th 2022, the day he was admitted to hospital with breathing difficulties and just one week before he died.

I was delighted to be asked by his daughter Rachel to organise a band to ring after his funeral service at St John the Baptist, Aldbury. We rang a half- muffled quarter of Grandsire Doubles, the band made up of some of Hugh's friends who had rung with him in the past. Several people were unable to be included so we rang another quarter peal of Cambridge Major at Amersham a week later.

Hugh was a dear friend and Stuart and I spent many happy holidays with him and Jean. He was a great lover of wines and together we explored many small vineyards in France. Some have become our favourites and we return to them frequently to stock up our supplies, which is not so easy now. Gone are the days of bringing back a car loaded high with cases of wine!

Maureen Cleary (tribute read by Sheila Bruce, long-term friend of Hambleden tower and ringers, on behalf of the current band):

Maureen rang at Hambleden for more years than the current band can remember! We believe she started learning in the 1980s and there is a recollection that she started because some of her children wanted to learn, so she accompanied them. The children soon dropped out but Maureen continued.

Maureen rang as she did everything else in life – with a huge grin on her face and with so much enthusiasm, it didn't matter whether she was in the right place or the wrong place (or even sometimes, ringing a different method to the rest of the band!). She lit up every room with her infectious sense of fun and zest for life. She was the caring person who noticed that someone in the village was struggling and she would quietly adjust her own routine to help, even though she cared for her own mother at home until shortly before her death at the age of 111.

A keen cyclist throughout her life, she rode in the London to Brighton cycle race and, with her husband Jim, cycled from Land's End to John O'Groats in the 1990s. Maureen was a devoted rower until she was 80 and, living alongside the Thames, would be up at the crack of dawn to row before the day got started. She was fit and strong because of her rowing and she thought nothing of ringing the heaviest bells in our tower. At one time, Maureen used to ring all the bells up and down for weddings by herself because several of the band couldn't ring up/down, something she didn't think twice about doing.

Maureen's hospitality was legendary. If there wasn't a party for her to be the life and soul of, she just got on and organised one (including roping the bellringers into organising a Burns Night supper party for the whole village!). She was at the centre of the Hambleden social scene in all of its guises, whether that was church teas, Lent lunches, delivering Meals on Wheels, the WI, keep fit or bell ringing. Everybody loved Maureen and she loved everyone back. She didn't think of herself as anything other than "ordinary" and "not doing anything special", but in truth she was an example to us all as a kind, caring, fun-loving person who got the most out of life.

In ringing terms, she was loyal and dependable and tried her best when learning methods although it did not come easily to her. She rang five quarter peals of doubles before the bells were augmented to 8, and was a member of bands in heats of the Lorna Newton contest. Sadly, her ringing came to an untimely end when hip pain prevented her from standing for long or from climbing the tower stairs. This restriction on her mobility must have been exceptionally frustrating to one as active as Maureen, but she bore it with a smile, as she did with everything.

Maureen died after having a stroke in September 2022, a week short of her 84th birthday. She is greatly missed.

Anne Agg and Audrey Birt were also remembered even though they both moved away from the Guild some years ago. Ken Darvill mentioned that Anne had moved to Beaconsfield in the 1980's with her husband Rex and son Andrew. They made a terrific difference and were the cornerstone of the Beaconsfield band for very many years. It was a great shock to lose Anne at a stage when she still seemed to be so vibrant. Patricia Newton said that Audrey rang at Slough with her husband Jeff who was a former Branch Deputy Ringing Master. She continued to ring at Slough after Jeff's death until she moved to Devon to be near her son.

A minutes' silence was observed in memory of these people.

5. Officers' Reports:

a) Ringing Masters (written by Matthew Johnson, read by Vikki Bulbeck):

We continued to hold general practices twice a month across the branch with a mix of morning, afternoon and evening. Midweek training practices were well attended as was a surprise practice at Hughenden focusing on Cambridge and Yorkshire.

Towers across the branch rang out for the Platinum jubilee last summer, and again in mourning in September for the death of Queen Elizabeth. Thanks to the steeple keepers across the branch, the support of the Towers and Belfries committee and particularly John Davidge for getting so many bells rung.

The branch had lots of success in striking competitions last year, retaining the guild 10 bell trophy and winning the 8 bell competition. Our young ringers had their best ever result coming 3rd in the call change category of the Ringing World National Youth Contest. Congratulations to all teams who entered the branch 6 bell and Lorna Newton competitions.

It is fantastic to see so many new names being proposed for membership and to hear of success of recruitment drives.

b) Young Ringers Organiser (Peter Jasper):

The Bucks and Berks Young Ringers have had another hugely successful year. Monthly practices have been arranged regularly with methods ranging from Rounds and Call Changes to Surprise Minor, Stedman Triples, Grandsire Caters and beyond with up to 25 people attending practices, which can be quite a challenge to manage. In addition, on outings held jointly the Surrey Strikers and Go Ballistic (Salisbury DG) they had some excellent ringing around the Hackney area of north London as well as an extremely well attended outing to the city and Westminster where the young ringers rang at St Margaret's in Parliament Square where only 4 bands are allowed to ring in a year so they were extremely fortunate to go there, as well as ringing on two of the city twelves. Membership of the Bucks and Berks Young Ringers has continues to swell with 29 children having attended a practice or event in the past year wearing their Bucks and Berks Young Ringers branded polo shirts with pride.

Four of last year's competition band left in September but all are still ringing at University and one has now been elected as President of the Exeter Colleges Guild.

Despite that the Bucks and Berks Young Ringers have continued to compete exceptionally well at striking contests. A new competition band came 4th at South East England Contest and are well placed going into the Ringing World National Youth Contest that will be in York in July. The crowning achievement in the last 12 months has been the spectacular result in the National Competition which saw the Bucks and Berks Young Ringers beat 20 plus teams to be placed 3rd in the country, only beaten by Essex and Kent who draw their ringers from a much larger area. Their reserve also stood in for one of the Norfolk Young Ringers and helped them to come in the top ten.

Peter informed the meeting that after nearly 7 years of running the Bucks and Berks Young Ringers (that started off as a small school club) he would be stepping back from the day to day running of the band. Running something as big as the Bucks and Berks Young Ringers is a very large job. Not only are there 12 monthly practices but also striking competitions, contest training practices, outings, transport to youth contests and organising clothing. All these things need to be done and it is now too big a job for one person. In addition it is also important that for any successful group nobody remains at the helm for too long and becomes a block on fresh talent to come up through the ranks and take the group into potentially new and exciting directions. He proposes that the role is split with Simon Smith taking on the day to day running of the Branch side of the Bucks and Berks Young Ringers and he will continue to support the outings and competitions where he hopes that his knowledge and contacts continue to be of use. He thanked members of this Branch who had allowed the young ringers to ring at their towers or who have been able to help at practices or have consistently allowed Branch funds to be spent to support the children ringing within the local area. He also asked that tower captains encourage their under 20's to get involved with the Bucks and Berks Young Ringers as he believes 67 children in this area have done so since he started organising practices in 2016.

Peter was thanked formally from the Chair for his work over the past 7 years. Jon Boughton also gave a vote of thanks to Peter. He said that the enthusiasm that Peter gives at the practices that he runs is no small part of how successful the young ringers have been. Four young ringers were present who he was sure would say how much fun it is ringing with Peter, and also on the transport to the contests on the "fun bus".

6. Treasurer's report and 2022 Accounts:

The assessed accounts and Treasurer's report had been circulated in advance. Ros Garrett-Bowes noted that the subscriptions were back to £8 with £3 going to the Branch, boosting the income for 2022. It was confirmed that the Branch would continue to support the Bucks and Berks Young Ringers for another year.

7. Election of New Members:

The following had been nominated for membership of the Guild:

Catherine Cook (Amersham)
Sean Wright (Bray)
Elisa Musson (Bray)
Jacqueline Botley (Burnham)
Rita Blyth (Chalfont St Peter)
John Lever (Chalfont St Peter)
Laura Griffen (Hughenden)
Catherine Hopkins (Lane End)
Jack Francis (Marlow)
Tristan Hart (Marlow)
David Byrne (Penn)
Andrew Williams (Penn)
Layla Ballard (Stoke Poges)
Anne Milne (Stoke Poges)
Ellie Gowers (Turville)
Rose Wordham (Wraysbury)
Ellie Wordham (Wraysbury)

The following had been nominated for re-election to the Guild:

Angela Bass (Chalfont St Giles)
Norman Iley (Clewer)
Kay Weallans (Cookham)
Timmy Mallett (Cookham)
Lynn Funnell (Winkfield)

All were elected unopposed.

Certificates were presented to the four new members who were present at the meeting.

8. Election of Officers:

Robert Newton took the chair for the election of chairman. John Davidge was proposed by Jon Boughton and seconded by Angela Bass. John was elected unopposed and took the Chair again.

The following Officers were elected or re-elected:

Ringling Master – Matthew Johnson (proposed by Jan Galloway, seconded by Stuart Galloway)

Deputy Ringling Master – Vikki Bulbeck (proposed by Jan Galloway, seconded by Stuart Galloway)

Secretary – Patricia Newton (proposed by Jon Boughton, seconded by Rosalind Garrett-Bowes)

Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Rosalind Garrett-Bowes (proposed by Vikki Bulbeck, seconded by Margaret Carlyle)

Newsletter Editor – Patricia Newton (proposed by Sheila Bruce, seconded by Diane Darren)

Young Ringers Organiser – Simon Smith (proposed by Peter Jasper, seconded by Vikki Bulbeck)

Branch Representatives on the Guild General Committee (3) John Davidge, Angela Darvill and Jan Galloway (all proposed by Patricia Newton, seconded by Robert Newton)

9. Appointment of other Managers:

IT Manager and Webmaster – Ken Darvill

Independent Assessor – Peter Blower (proposed by Robert Newton, seconded by Ken Darvill)

100 Club Manager - Margaret Carlyle (proposed by John Payne, seconded by Vikki Bulbeck)

All appointed unopposed.

10. Report and Accounts of Fundraising Committee:

The assessed accounts and Treasurer's report had been circulated in advance.
No further comments were made.

11. Any Other Business:

a) Stuart Gibson, Guild Treasurer and Treasurer of the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund, thanked the Branch for its contributions to and continued support for the Bell Fund. The Fund is now offering grants of 20% of the cost of bell work. Currently (since the merger of the Restoration Fund and the Bell Fund) there is no lower limit but it does only support repairs and renewals, not routine maintenance. The Chairman also noted that it is possible to get grants from Branch funds.

Stuart also brought to the attention of the meeting the Guild Festival that will be in Oxford on Saturday 8th July.

b) Marcia Dieppe thanked the members for their generous donations towards tea. There was a surplus that was given to Branch funds.

c) Website: Ken Darvill requested more photographs for the website, particularly of the young ringers – it would be nice to have at least one of them. Also the photographs that are currently on the website tend to make us look 10 or 20 years younger so it would be good to have up to date photos, particularly of people actively ringing but also socialising. Suitable photographs should be sent to Ken. It was noted that parental permission is required for the inclusion of young ringers in photographs.

Sean Wright (Bray/Maidenhead) works in photography and kindly offered his services if required.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed after 48 minutes.

12. Lorna Newton Contest:

The draw was made for the second round of the competition. Some bands had not yet rung their first round heats but plan to soon. The results of the draw were:

Hughenden	vs	Bray
Turville or Wraysbury	vs	Amersham
Beaconsfield/Penn	vs	Windsor Curfew Tower
Lane End	vs	Chalfont St Giles or High Wycombe "B"
Winkfield	vs	Chesham

13. 100 Club:

The monthly draw for the 100 Club was made. Margaret Carlyle pointed out that the 100 Club also supports the Oxford Diocesan Bell Fund and donated about £650 last year.

Patricia Newton
May 2023