

Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers

East Berks & South Bucks Branch

Minutes of the EBSB Branch AGM at St Andrew, Clewer on Saturday 26th April 2025

The meeting was attended by 23 members representing 11 towers, plus Katie Lane (Guild Master)

The Annual General Meeting was preceded by a special meeting to approve the transfer of the Branch bank account from Lloyds Bank plc to Metro Bank. This was accepted nem com.

1. Welcome and Introduction:

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and thanked the Guild Master for attending. He thanked Canon Brian Shenton for taking the service and the Clewer ringers (Rob Taylor-Ailes, Diane Darren and others) for making arrangements for the afternoon and providing refreshments.

Apologies were received from:

Stuart Gibson (Guild Treasurer), Françoise Allen, Sheila Bruce, Mick Francis, Jill Glennerster, Roger Hagon, Roger Lewiston, Mandy Salter, Peter Sippitt and Simon Smith.

2. Minutes of the Half Yearly Meeting held on Saturday 12th October 2024 at Fulmer

These had been circulated via Membermojo. They were accepted and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Obituaries:

Herbert Ephraim Druce, Penn 6th January 1915 – 7th May 2024

(Obituary written by Alison Bayley and read by Judy Weaver)

Herbert 'Drum' Druce was a prominent figure in the village of Penn since his birth in Beacon Hill, Penn on January 6, 1915. He had two half-brothers and a younger brother Ernie and went to school in Penn until he was nearly 14 years-old.

As a young boy, Herbert would run errands for the villagers, going to High Wycombe to do their shopping, travelling on the horse and cart which was driven by his father, the village carter, and to Beaconsfield to collect packages from the station. He would often sit on the wall of the Crown Inn, looking after the horses while his father went in for a pint. He recalled watching the bells from Holy Trinity Church Penn being loaded onto his father's cart ready to be taken to Beaconsfield station to go for repairs at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. From an early age, he worked at Slades Garage in the blacksmiths until the introduction of the motor car. In 1940, Mr Druce was turned down by the RAF but worked at Heston Aircraft in Slough. After two years, he moved to their High Wycombe disposal factory.

After the war ended, he returned to working at Slades as a mechanic, serving thousands of residents with petrol and repairing their cars until his retirement.

Herbert married his wife Gwen in 1945. They had two daughters, Rosemary and Sue, who sadly died in a coach crash in 1989.

Gwen passed away in 2005, just before her 90th birthday and their Diamond wedding anniversary.

Herbert from the age of seven was a chorister and candle boy at Holy Trinity Church, becoming a bell ringer at the age of 14 and eventually captain of the ringers, a post he held for many years. Eventually he handed over this role to Alison Bayley, but he continued to ring until in 1979 when he was forced to stop due to arthritis in his hands. He continued in the choir and as crucifer for many years and was always interested in the ringing.

To mark his 100th birthday four Penn ringers assisted by Robert Newton the then Master of ODG and Chris Mew the then President of Central Council of Church Bellringers rang a quarter peal of Doubles (3m) St Simon's, St Martin's & Plain Bob.

Herbert listened to the ringing and afterwards tolled the treble with Alison on hand to help. A celebration was held in the Crown Inn opposite the church afterwards. Herbert remained a life member of the ODG until his death.

Herbert continued to live in Penn until the age of 107 when he moved to a care home to be near his daughter Rosemary. It was here he died at the age of 109 and 122 days, the oldest man in Leicestershire and the 5th oldest man in the UK.

A minutes' silence was observed in his memory.

5. Officers' Reports:

a) Ringing Masters (Matthew Johnson)

We have continued to hold 2 general practices each month. Average attendance has been about 13 (minimum 4, high 19). There have been more surprise practices – one with methods up to Bristol and one more basic for Cambridge and Yorkshire. More focused practices are planned. Practices at Hitcham and Turville will be targeted at basic levels.

There was a new members outing in 2024 to Clewer, Cookham and Shottesbrooke; Katie Lane joined the novices at lunch time to talk about the Guild. There will be a similar outing this year on 20th September. New members should be encouraged to attend to meet others at similar experience levels.

The Branch hosted the Guild 8-bell competition and AGM at Stoke Poges. Members were thanked for their help with stewarding and providing lunch.

£800 was collected by the Branch for the ODG Sponsored Ringing Week and we won the trophy for the most money raised per member.

The Treasurer and Secretary were thanked for their work collecting and forwarding membership data to the Guild for Membermojo.

b) Young Ringers Organiser (written by Simon Smith, read by Rob Taylor-Ailes)

In May & June last year, the Bucks and Berks Young Ringers (B&BYR) visited Burnham & Easthampstead and then had four competition practices throughout June at Amersham, Warfield, Twyford and Shiplake. This was building up to the Ringing World National youth contest (RWNYC) in London at the start of July.

The team had a fantastic day out to London, with a team of 9 young ringers ranging in age from 9 to 18 years old. As well as the striking competition, contest day includes a tower grab which this year saw the B&BYR ring at a selection of other towers ranging in weight from $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt (the Charmborough Ring) to the 41 cwt twelve at St Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside. The Bucks and Berks Young Ringers, drawn from children from across the local area, rang in the call change category as an eight-bell team, ringing 160 rows of call changes including Whittingtons and Queens.

As you may remember, our band came an amazing joint 4th out of 13 bands, improving on our 6th place from the previous year. I'm sure you'll agree, an incredible effort.

Following on from the competition, we usually have a break from monthly practices in August and resume in September. We have visited Horton, Shottesbrooke, Waltham St Lawrence, Beaconsfield, Clewer, Marlow, Hughenden & Twyford (twice!) in our Sunday practices through till April. Ringing everything from rounds all the way, to Surprise Minor, even Surprise Major on the odd occasion and incorporating a walking visit between 2 of the towers in October. Also in October, the group attended a joint outing with the Surrey Strikers to Docklands in London, visiting 4 towers and utilising the extra connection to East London that the Elizabeth Line provides. In the last month we not only competed, but also hosted, the Southeast striking competition on our home turf.

As you have hopefully seen, our team won the competition, competing against 6 other teams with a high standard of ringing and, by all accounts, a very tough competition to judge. If you know or are lucky enough to have any of the young ringers who participated ring in your tower, please make a fuss of this fantastic achievement. This was a first for our team and something that they should be extremely proud of.

Preparation is now in full swing for the National Youth contest in July, this year in Birmingham.

I would like to thank all of those who, for the recent competition, helped, opened towers, provided transportation, organised and provided refreshments for this event. It felt very much like a collaborative effort, and without everyone's freely given time, would not have been possible. I would also like to say a thank you to all of those that have helped out our band this year, the towers who graciously let us practice on a Sunday afternoon, the parents and helpers of the young ringers who end up as a taxi service driving about all over the place, and the continued support of the branch and the Guild, who provide funding to help us keep the costs as low as we can for our young ringers.

This year has seen our attendance average 7 young ringers, from a pool of 14 individuals, who have attended at least 1 practice. I would like to encourage any of you who are, or know, any young ringers, to come and join us. We are very inclusive and are happy to include anyone who can just about handle a bell all the way up to surprise ringers and conductors.

Robert Newton requested that congratulations be sent from the meeting to the young ringers.

6. Treasurer's report and 2024 Accounts:

The assessed accounts and Treasurer's report had been circulated in advance.

The accounts were proposed by John Davidge, seconded by Jan Galloway and accepted by the meeting.

Vikki Bulbeck asked if subscriptions would be collected through Membermojo next year. Katie Lane (Guild Master) responded that it is the intention to use Membermojo for this purpose in the future but probably not for next year because there is a lot to sort out to make it possible.

7. Election of New Members:

The following had been nominated for membership of the Guild:

New Member	Tower	Nominated by:
Joseph Noaman	Amersham	Jan Galloway
Alex Brodie	Bray	James Gladwyn
Laurianne Griffiths	Fulmer	Celia Thomas
Sally West	High Wycombe	Patricia Newton
Isabella Hambleton Barry	Lane End	Jane Fowler
Ollie Painter	Marlow	Mick Francis
Natalie Rodgers	West Wycombe	Lyn Lee
Anne Hare	West Wycombe	Lyn Lee
Bradley Lema Alvarez	Winkfield	Anthony Bish

These nominations were seconded by Rob Taylor-Ailes
All were elected unopposed.

8.. Election of Officers:

John Davidge stood down as Chairman.

The following Officers were elected or re-elected:

Chairman – Rob Taylor-Ailes (proposed by Jan Galloway, seconded by Vikki Bulbeck)

Vice Chairman – Robert Newton (proposed by Patricia Newton, seconded by Jacqueline Hazell)

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

Deputy Ringling Master – Vikki Bulbeck (proposed by Matthew Johnson, seconded by Diane Darren)

Secretary – Patricia Newton (proposed by Marcia Dieppe, seconded by Jacqueline Hazell)

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

Newsletter Editor – Lyn Lee (proposed by Robert Newton, seconded by Rosalind Garrett-Bowes)

Young Ringers Organiser – Simon Smith (proposed by Vikki Bulbeck, seconded by Jacqueline Hazell)

Branch Representatives on the Guild General Committee (3) - John Davidge and Jan Galloway (proposed by Rosalind Garrett-Bowes, seconded by Robert Newton). The third post remains vacant.

9. Appointment of other Managers:

IT Manager/Webmaster – Rory Haines (proposed by Ken Darvill, seconded by Marcia Dieppe)

Independent Assessor – Peter Blower (proposed by Jan Galloway, seconded by Robert Newton)

100 Club Manager - Margaret Carlyle (proposed by Rory Haines, seconded by Jacqueline Hazell)

It was noted that Margaret would like to stand down after this year. The 100 Club year ends in September so it would be good to find someone to take over who can work with Margaret in the autumn when the subscriptions are collected for the next year.

All appointed unopposed.

10. Report and Accounts of Fundraising Committee:

The assessed accounts and Treasurer's report had been circulated in advance. Another good year but a couple of the public events were a little disappointing – one because of lack of preserves and one because of the weather. Sales at Guild events trickle through and members were thanked for their support.

11. Discussion regarding future Branch Practices:

Vikki Bulbeck noted that the Ringing Masters are trying to make the practices more focused. There are two mid-week practices coming up but there could be more if there were volunteers to run them.

Advanced warning will be given for practice methods (keeping them relatively standard) to try to make the practices more enticing. If there is something that you would particularly like to practise, let the Ringing Masters know. They want to help local bands to progress.

Matthew Johnson noted that we currently try to visit all towers in the year, but questioned whether we should use "simpler" towers more often. They would welcome feedback from the membership.

12. Membermojo and Guild matters:

Katie Lane (Guild Master) reported that setting up Membermojo had been extremely time consuming. It is working extremely well in some aspects but there have been a few teething problems.

Details of the Guild AGM have been circulated via Membermojo and members are encouraged to attend. The Central Council Mobile Belfry will be available for use by ringers and non-ringers, manned by ODG members. Katie Lane had indicated her intention to stand down as Master but Karen Pile, Guild Secretary, is standing down this year so Katie will continue for another year. There are other people standing down but hopefully all vacancies are now covered.

There is likely to be a Guild New Members event in September but the venue has not yet been booked.

Patricia Newton noted that of the 290 Branch members only 123 had signed up for EBSB mailings through Membermojo. From the 33 towers in the Branch only 19 tower captains and 20 tower correspondents had signed up. This means that some towers are no longer receiving information about Branch practices, etc. She encouraged all members to access their Membermojo page and tick the relevant box to receive Branch mailings.

13. Any Other Business:

Patricia Newton thanked John Davidge for his work as EBSB Chairman, a post which he had held for 24 years. During that time he had not only attended and chaired virtually all Branch and Officers' meetings and officiated at striking competitions, but had regularly supported Branch Practices and run training practices, in addition to his work on tower maintenance through the Towers and Belfries Committee. He was presented with a small token of appreciation.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed after 55 minutes.

14. Lorna Newton Contest:

The draw was made for the second round of the competition. West Wycombe had received a bye through to the second round but withdrew at this stage.

Clewer/Windsor St John	vs	Burnham
Hughenden (drawn against West Wycombe so receive a bye through to the final)		
Winkfield	vs	Cookham
High Wycombe "B"	vs	Beaconsfield/Penn
Lane End	vs	Chesham

Jan Galloway noted her disappointment at the number of byes in the first round.

Patricia Newton
May 2025