

ODD BOB



Newsletter of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers
website: odg.org.uk/



Young Ringers at Longcot, April 2021

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From your Editor...

Don't forget to check regularly the Guild website at odg.org.uk/ and your branch website. This Odd Bob and past issues are held on the Guild website.

The EBSB Fund Raising website address is: bellfund.org.uk.

Rob Needham

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

As members should expect, a record of their membership is maintained on a combination of paper and computer systems. These records are used solely for the administration of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers and for notification of future events to members. They are not made available to anyone for commercial purposes. If any member wishes to inspect the records held, please contact the Guild Secretary.

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Master's Mutterings

In the eighteenth century Remondini, an Italian ecclesiastic, listed seven occasions for ringing church bells in church towers: (Ref. George Tyack *A Book about Bells*)

- To gather people to the sacred functions of the church
- To signify its festivals
- To rouse the souls of the faithful to render devout thanks to the Highest for benefits received
- To implore divine help against the tempests of the air and the ferocity of the spirits of hell
- To decorate the solemn entry of princes and prelates
- To increase the happiness and gaiety of public processions and songs of praise to the Lord
- To make fervid the piety of the faithful in relation to the dead.

One of the reasons that the houses of medieval towns were built close together around a church was to place its people and property under the protective sound shadow of the bells. Bells were rung to dispel storms, quench fires, ward off human enemies, and stop disease. Would that it were as simple as that! We would have been ringing day and night to alter the course of the last year's tribulations. Putting 'wicked spirits' to flight, even in modern times does not come without effort and expense and so, despite the desires, hopes and wishes of our ringers, the impact of the pandemic has thwarted our ringing for many months.

But, quoting from the Beatles song *Hey! Jude!* ringers 'take a sad song and make it better'. Handbells are being rung to welcome worshippers to services, single bells are



regularly heard at 6p.m., tolling has been accomplished to celebrate the life of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and small family groups have managed to ring together for the important Christmas and Easter services. In cities, towns and villages there are appreciative comments from people who are delighted to hear the

bells and have noticed their silence during the months of lockdown.

There is now a glimpse of headway and hope that we will be able to ring together before too long; already there are plans for younger ringers to resume practices within certain, strict guidelines. Our responsibility is to ring for church services as soon as we can without jeopardising the safety of ringers, or members of the church community. It may take longer to enjoy practices and real-life social gatherings; we must remain patient.

There are ringers in most branches who have volunteered to act as *Branch Recovery Champions*; they and the Branch Stewards will be making contact with their towers. It has become clear that, for some people, the amount of information being sent out is confusing and not always appreciated. I understand the sentiment, but my explanation is that we have been focussed on keeping the Guild members connected, informed, and valued; we will try to minimise the communications and make use of the Guild website to roll out details. The main message is that there are a great many ringers willing to help with any ringing-related matter – just ask. Email or call me, Tony Crabtree the Deputy Master, Ken Darvill the Secretary or Stuart Gibson the Treasurer; or contact your Steward or Recovery Champion and someone will be able to help.

There is an inscription on a 17th Century bell, but where it is I do not know, which, despite the unusual language to 21st Century society ears, makes me think of our resolution, perseverance, and determination to return to full-circle, church bell ringing:

“Pull on brave boys, I’m metal to the back, but I’ll be hanged before I crack”.

Catherine Lane, Guild Master

A Grand Day Out – ODG Youth Practice, Longcot

Well afternoon if we are going to split hairs, but it was definitely the sentiment in my car load of young ringers heading to Longcot on the 25th April for the first ODG young ringers practice since February 2020. As one of them said, it was very exciting to be able to go somewhere, other than your home tower, to ring. [Photo on front cover – Ed.]

The return to ringing for young ringers, defined as 18 and under is aligned to the guidance for out of school youth activities. This allows young ringers to meet with all the relevant risk assessments being done.

We were welcomed by the incumbent who was thrilled to have all eight bells ringing again, Tony Crabtree who had organised the tower for us, and local ringers who were putting up Tony’s mini-ring. Young ringers are currently only allowed to spend an hour in the ringing chamber, the mini-ring proved a popular alternative ringing activity.



Longcot was an excellent venue, a ground floor ring with access directly from the church yard and bells of a suitable weight for young ringers. A beautiful sunny day with, if anything, slightly too much wind at times. We had access to the Methodist hall who allowed us to use their toilets and kitchen. It really would not have been a young ringers practice without cake, for which we have Daphne Pollard to thank.

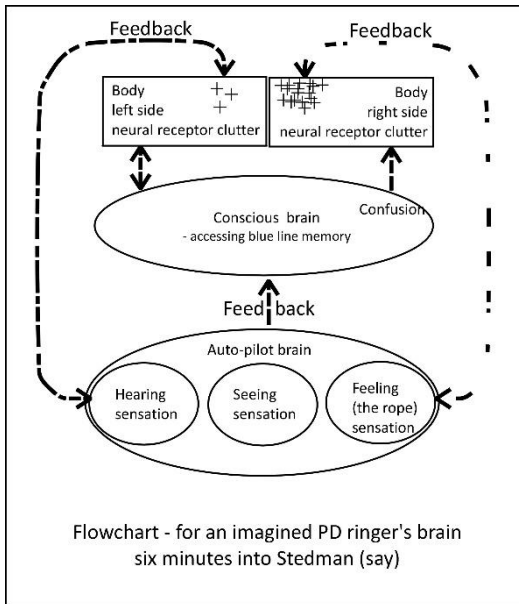
For some of the ringers this was the first time they had rung a bell for over a year, for others the first time they had rung on eight. As ever the focus from Colin Newman was on good striking rather than complexity of methods. Listening from outside it was great to hear the bells ring slower and slower almost from balance to balance and then quicker and quicker an excellent exercise in bell control.

Thank you to all involved in organising the practice. I am looking forward to the next one, keeping to tradition it will be the 4th Sunday in May.

Jenny Page

Ringling and Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's UK data indicates that about 1 in 180 people in the age range 50 to 89 have the disease. Its diagnosis may not be as alarming as many other threats to our wellbeing, but PD remains an incurable and debilitating affliction that can take decades to develop, and its approach is stealthy, with the first signs often being deceptively mild.



My PD first appeared 25 years ago – with a loss of smell and taste – which the doc said was due to a nasal obstruction. I was then 52. Thereafter, my ringing stumbled forward through a few Surprise methods to a modest degree of striking regularity until, six years ago, during an unrelated investigation, a much younger GP noticed a few mobility symptoms in me, and sent me to a neurologist. With his diagnosis, I discovered why, in the preceding years, my handstrokes had been occasionally and inexplicably falling on me. So I began to search for information.

It soon became evident that PD is a strange and little understood disease. It (and some

of the drugs used to treat it) can result in tremors, an inability to move, a loss of balance, a shuffling gait (peculiarly pronounced in confined spaces), a loss of word recall, writing that diminishes in size, a high and quiet tone of voice, obsessions, an

uncontrollable twisting (dyskinesia), depression, apathy and many other problems. But it isn't fatal, although it will, sooner or later, put an end to your bellringing. All that victims can do is achieve its early recognition and thereby do what they can to delay its progression. From my own amateur reading upon the subject, PD might be imagined as a 'furring up' of some of the neural receptors in the brain – often with a one-side-of-the-body bias. In my case, which seems to be fairly typical, after a few minutes of ringing, the furred up 'right hand pull' receptor accumulates a clutter of signals that confuse my ability to switch from the auto-pilot to the conscious part of my brain – and take corrective action. (In fact when it happens I am usually too surprised to act.)

The standard medication offered for PD is Levodopa, and this will probably keep a sufferer going for a few years. But the desirability of maintaining a serious exercise regime to supplement the medication is becoming widely accepted these days. For myself, I receive neuro-physiotherapy three times a week consisting of at least 30 minutes vigorous exercise – see www.annierainbow.co.uk. The effect has been remarkable and hopefully I shall be able to cope with simple stuff for some years yet.

I would be very happy to talk to anyone interested in the subject – especially if they can offer advice - but please bear in mind that I possess no medical qualifications and can only react from a personal perspective. It would at least be interesting to discover how many ringers are in this boat.

Peter Wiltshire, p.wiltshire10@btinternet.com

Safeguarding

The many signs of Spring all around us and the continued good news from the vaccination programme and its effect on statistics mean we can all look forward to what we hope will be a much more 'ringer friendly' summer than in 2020. With that in mind, this seems to be a good time to take stock of safeguarding practices within our Guild and its branches and towers, to ensure that we have a safe environment that even the youngest and most vulnerable of our ringers can thrive in.

There are of course many places from which you can get good guidance on safeguarding practice: our own website, the CCCBR site, and the C of E site are amongst these. However, it's perhaps worth listing a few basics here as a sort of tick list to have in place before we get back to 'normal':

- All tower captains and trainers of young people should have a DBS check through their Parish or, if systems locally are not in place yet, you can do this yourself
- All tower captains and trainers need to complete online safeguarding training modules C0 and C1
- NOTE it is no longer a requirement within the Diocese to complete face to face C2 training
- Parents of minors should complete a permission to ring form which should be stored securely at the church

- When teaching young people it is best to have two responsible adults present
- The above also applies to transportation of youngsters
- A register of those present at practice and service ringing should be kept, preferably including an indication of a person responsible for monitoring behaviour in the tower
- It is the parents' responsibility to ensure their child gets to and from ringing safely
- Be aware of who the parish safeguarding officer is and display the information and contact details clearly in the tower
- For health and safety purposes, a clear notice displaying correct location should also be on display, in case it is necessary to call the emergency services.

This is quite a long list but much of it soon becomes routine once it's in place.

One further note on training, you will see from the above that C2 is no longer a Diocesan requirement, but that doesn't mean that it is not worth doing something similar to further enhance your understanding. With that in mind, we as a Guild are considering our own version which will offer opportunities to discuss ringing-specific safeguarding with fellow tower captains and trainers. It is well worth recommending to all of the ringers in your band to complete C0. After all, safeguarding isn't just for leaders, it's a responsibility we all have, both within ringing and the wider world, to be aware of abuse and to protect those most vulnerable from it.

I wish you all a happy and safe return to 'proper' ringing. Long may it last.

June Wells, Guild Safeguarding Officer

Learning and Development

There have been regular and fruitful meetings of the group via Zoom with a clear and obvious focus on what is deliverable under Covid restrictions. Modified Terms of Reference, reflecting a change of emphasis, were agreed by the General Committee, so the former *Education Sub-Committee* is now officially the *ODG Learning and Development Workgroup*. Colin Newman has been re-elected as Chairman and Robert Newton as Secretary. Joyce Vernon, who has been a key member of the group, has decided to 'retire'. We are most grateful to Joyce and Keith, particularly for their dedication in recruiting helpers for the Radley and Michaelmas courses over many years.

There was good feedback from the Training Meeting on 10th April, with representatives of eleven branches in attendance. We hope to make a decision in July about the feasibility of running the Michaelmas, Steeple Aston and Ten-bell courses in 2021. One positive outcome of our collective Zooming experience is that course tutorials may, in future, take place to a large extent online. Webinars have proved effective in providing high quality training: *Strike it Right* (Colin Newman), *Handbell Ringing* (Tom Hinks) and *Recruitment and Retention* (Elva Ainsworth) were delivered in the first three months of the year. At the time of writing, we are looking forward to

a presentation on returning to ringing and the *Survival & Recovery Toolbox* by ART Chair, Lesley Belcher. Recordings of the striking and handbell presentations can be found via the L&D section of the Guild website and it is hoped that others will join them soon. Also, there are links to Central Council and ART pages, which are well worth investigating.

With tower bell ringing (as we know it) suspended, handbells have been utilised for change ringing in various parts of the Guild and with the addition of online options, probably by more people than ever before. Lindsay Powell has given the L&D Workgroup a summary of the very effective and successful development of the Badgers Handbell Ringers group, which has expanded from the VOWH Branch into Oxford and has provided wonderful opportunities for practice and quarters, both 'in person' and virtually, and some peals. Anyone requiring support or advice regarding handbell opportunities and ringing is urged to get in touch. The Guild has invested in several sets of eBells. These can be 'hired' for a short period prior to possible purchase if anyone has doubts about whether they will be suitable for them. Please contact Stuart Gibson if you are interested.

It is encouraging that groups of young ringers have been permitted to practise together from mid-April and we hope that the deferred national event can take place in Worcester on 11th September. Our own young ringers' 'Lockdown Award' concludes at the end of August and, at the time of writing, it would be good to have some more entries, please!

Robert Newton (Secretary, Learning and Development Workgroup)

Ringling Room and me

Are you keen to make new friends, stay busy and learn more about the theory of method ringing than you ever realised that there was to learn? Then join Ringling Room!

I cannot remember exactly how and when I first became aware of Ringling Room, but I cannot imagine life without it now. It is an ongoing development by a young couple in Massachusetts, which means that various tweaks appear from time to time, including an April 1st option to ring cowbells – which one UK band promptly used to ring a quarter peal. A more recent addition is a separately-developed 'bot' called Wheatley, which can be used to ring any unassigned bells, or can enable a single ringer to practice a new method by ringing all the other bells.

For those who have not used it yet, Ringling Room is a virtual platform that allows ringers to meet via laptops or other devices in different towers and use key presses to ring everything from rounds to peals. To date, there have been six peals using the tower bell setting, the first of which, on 2nd July last year, included two local ringers, Colin Newman and Anna Sherwood.

My first practices on the platform were challenging, as everyone was still getting accustomed to the technology, and variable internet speeds and failures (usually of the separate 'chat' channels) did not help – but as wider opportunities opened up for more frequent practices, progress became much quicker. How could we ever have imagined that (to) Zoom would become a verb – along with the companion phrase 'You're muted!'

From my early attempts, including a first entry on BellBoard (60 Stedman Doubles on 24th June 2020 by Loddon Hub ringers to celebrate Geoff and Enid Harvey's Diamond Wedding anniversary) I have become involved in a number of other groups through the Ringing Room Take-Hold Lounge on Facebook, and now 'ring' at least once every day at practice nights for local towers, and at various other sessions. There are also opportunities for quarter peal attempts, and although the failure rate is high, often due to technical issues, I have been successful in various methods, from Plain Bob Doubles to Little Bob Royal.

One perhaps unexpected benefit from virtual ringing is that there is time to concentrate on the method without having to worry about bell handling; learning methods then seems to become easier, and as for counting places – it becomes routine as it is so essential to virtual ringing, where rope sight is much harder for most ringers. Soon now, to see how this translates into actual ringing ...

On Ringing Room, everyone has been so welcoming, and because there are no distances to travel, I have met up with many new people, not only from around the UK, but also from the US. One of the UK groups is planning an actual get-together once the rules permit later in the year, and we all hope that Ringing Room sessions will continue even after we are able to resume ringing in our towers.

Sue Portsmouth, St Andrew's, Sonning

Towers & Belfries Committee

The T&B committee has met once since the last Odd Bob report – using Zoom, in March. The meeting attendance remains about a dozen, which is excellent with nearly all members and certainly higher than using face-to-face meetings. However, the quality of discussion and debate inevitably suffers in “virtual” meetings. Our next meeting is planned for August at Radley church hall and we are looking forward to seeing each other.

After losing several courses to covid, we finally have one pencilled in the diary for mid-October at Ivinghoe, where we had planned to be a year ago. Please watch out for details and feel free to email the secretary tbsecretary@odg.org.uk or me tbchair@odg.org.uk if you would be interested in attending. Students will have theory sessions, options to visit the belfry itself and will be able to study a wide range of artefacts. This includes ropes, splices, pulleys, wheels etc, which we use to explain the causes of rope wear and other issues such as rope handling. We will also have chunky items like headstocks and clappers too. Obviously, the final details will depend on the state of the pandemic. Depending on demand we may run another course before the end of the year and certainly during February 2022 – covid permitting.

There is a big demand for rope splicing [*see back cover – Ed.*] and we are happy to support local courses with tuition. We want people to come ready to learn skills they can put to good use in their local towers, whether splicing ropes or spotting preventive measures so that the rope wear can be reduced and rope life extended. There are many good splicing videos on YouTube (as well as some not so good...). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb-6YwA2e2Y> is instructive.

One consequence of the pandemic is that a lot of effort has been put towards on-line resources. The T&B page of the ODG website [Towers and Belfries - Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers \(odg.org.uk\)](https://www.odg.org.uk) has quite a lot of new material and also directs you to useful material elsewhere. You will find all the contact details and the services offered by our members.

We would still like more members. Fourteen may sound a lot, but we have three counties with 450+ towers on the patch. You don't have to be experienced but you do need to be interested in learning and gaining from the expertise of the other members.



The Tower Maintenance Award is still active, despite the pandemic, and you can read an up to date report in the *2020 ODG Annual Report*. There have been several new enquiries and those towers will benefit from a full inspection and the opportunity to ask questions and get lots of advice. Inspections are free.

Since the last Odd-Bob report, Committee members have been active, within lockdown constraints, with TMA (Tower Maintenance Award), grant inspections and general advice at the following places: Hampstead Norreys, Long Wittenham and Lambourn (Bell Fund Grant inspections), Witney (general advice), South Leigh and Wavendon (TMA and general advice), Wheatley (TMA), Slapton and Broadwell (restoration & augmentation), Kirtlington (grant inspection) and Great Linford (church reordering affecting the ringing room). There have also been many “return to ringing” inspections done on behalf of or with the local ringers.

Tony Crabtree, T&B Chairman

Librarian's Report

There have been 10 library enquiries since Odd Bob issue 103. These have been about:

- Peal at Banbury on 10/9/1933: first for Robert Higham
- Membership status of ringer at Chesham on 20/11/1966
- Date of William Simmonds' first peal – St Giles Reading, 23/10/1920
- Date of William Gibbs' first peal – Chipping Norton, 2/11/1893
- Query re ringers in 2 peals in 1965, at Stanton Harcourt and at Wantage
- Whether peal rung at Wootton on 31/3/1928 was in the ODG annual report
- Query about two F Appletons who rang at Wootton/Woodstock early in 20thC
- Summary of information in Guild library “Badges and Certificates” folder
- Date of John Rance's first peal – 20/5/1910 at Winkfield
- Guild lapel badge transferred to Central Council library on request.

The enquiry about the Badges and Certificates was a first for two reasons. Firstly it came about through the presence of the folder categories which the material in the library has been sorted into over several years; and secondly it was found via the pdf version of the on-line library catalogue, added to the Guild archive website just recently in August 2020. So, progress is being made.

The transfer of the lapel badge to the Central Council library was a secondary outcome of the Badges and Certificates enquiry. There were two grey badges, that is badges without the standard chrome plating, in the Guild library. It seemed sensible to have one copy in each of two libraries rather than two copies in one library, so one of them was transferred on request to the Central Council for permanent retention. Copies of Guild badges have not as a rule been kept in the library, so in fact this style (hollow canons on the bell) with and without the chrome plating are the only ODG badges in the library.

The Covid-19 restrictions have meant that it has not been possible to visit the library during the last year. After May/June 2021 this situation will hopefully change, so if anybody would like to visit the library after that time, please enquire. But I am always happy to look up information you need, so please let me know if you have any queries.

Doug Beaumont, Guild Librarian

News from the Branches

Banbury

On 17th April the AGM was held by Zoom. The meeting started with a minute's silence for the Duke of Edinburgh, whose funeral had just been held, and for four of our ringers who have died in the past six months: Bill Harvey of Banbury, Jean Butler of Wardington, Robin Tuckey of Rousham and Geoff Ellacott of Bloxham. All the Branch Officers were re-elected to serve the Branch for another year. The subject of getting ready to ring again once restrictions have been lifted was discussed. Everyone is waiting for the time when they can meet up again in person.

Neil Clare of Somerton reports that for the Duke of Edinburgh's death he rang the tenor bell 99 times on the Saturday at noon and 99 times on the following Saturday at 2pm before the funeral. He also electronically chimes the tenor on angelus for services to signify we are still in the pandemic.

Alison Varney of Bloxham reports that she has been attending Ringing Room practices after being invited by a fellow Ladies Guild Member and has found that once she got used to the format she really appreciates that this is helping her to recall methods.

Graham Clifton of Steeple Aston reports that Ringing at Steeple Aston has happened on a couple of occasions. We rang five bells twice on Christmas Day for two services and again on Easter Sunday.

The big thing that has happened is the replacement of bell number 3. Our old 3rd was not the most tuneful bell and it was thought it was not cast for Steeple Aston as all the inscriptions had been removed. Last year a second bell of the right size came available. The Rector and PCC agreed I could proceed with the idea as long as I did not fund raise within the village. After grants from The Bell Fund, The Banbury Branch and the Doris Field Trust, and a number of donations, I was able to purchase the bell and order a new headstock for it. The bell was installed by the local ringers on Saturday 10th April. Although it sounds very good on its own we will have to reserve judgement until we can ring it with the other bells.

Liz Smith from Bodicote reports that a group of Branch members from several towers got together to form a team to enter the second of the Guild Zoom Quiz Nights on 10th April. The event was well organised, with questions covering a wide variety of topics and sufficient time allocated for discussing answers in a private team break-out room. At the end of an enjoyable evening the team was rather stunned to discover that their collective knowledge resulted in them being placed joint first with 3 other teams. It just shows that random bits of information on almost any subject can occasionally come in useful!

Branch member Elizabeth Smith is currently working with Will Bosworth, editor of The Ringing World (RW), to produce new designs for Christmas cards to be sold as part of the merchandise range offered by the RW. It's a few years since they've introduced any new designs so it is hoped that these cards, which are being designed free of charge, will prove popular and be another useful revenue stream for bell ringers' weekly magazine.

Rosemary Hemmings

Bicester

Since November's Odd Bob ringing life in the Bicester Branch has been limited but there is activity behind the scenes.

Weston-on-the-Green and Kirtlington have taken the opportunity to improve their towers – with the help of funding from the Branch of £1500 and £300 respectively. Weston have installed a new sound insulation ceiling, pulleys, ropes, lighting and power incorporating heating and emergency escape lighting, and an access ladder. Kirtlington have completed last year's replacement of pulleys and ceiling bosses by cleaning and re-painting the bell frame.

Our website has been moved, with the expert help of Gus Bridges and Steve Vickars, to the ODG's servers – this involved migrating over 60 pages, and 320 posts and checking content. Around 3000 individual visitors used the website during 2020 and we now have the ability to have separate mailing lists for members, officers, and tower correspondents. Do visit us at www.bicester.odg.org.uk

Seven ringers are still regularly using the Ringing Room with Wheatley practices and fourteen members, representing five towers, also joined in a virtual Christmas social and quiz event on 21st December. Four teams took part in the ringing quiz (organised by Judith and Steve Vickars) which was won by Kirtlington rather appropriately.

We held our AGM on 13th February by Zoom, with fifteen members present from eight towers as well as the Guild Master, Katie Lane, the Guild Deputy Master, Tony Crabtree, the Guild Steward, Colin Lee, and our 'branch chaplain' Penny Wood. In addition, some members have taken the opportunity to join in Guild meetings, e.g. the branch secretaries / Ringing Recovery or online seminars on recruitment and retention. On 23rd March, the day of reflection, several towers tolled a bell at midday and again to mark the death of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh on 9th April. As one person commented on the Weston-on-the-Green Facebook page, 'Listening to the church bells is so moving'. There was the opportunity for slightly more joyful ringing on Easter Sunday – and more to come we hope!

Kathryn Grant

Central Bucks

[No news received – Ed.]

Chiltern

Like all branches, we have done very little ringing in the past few months. Some towers have managed to keep ringing a very limited number of bells with family bubbles. Several towers tolled for the first anniversary of the covid lockdown on 23rd March. Tolling also took place in most towers following the death of The Duke of Edinburgh, either on Saturday 10th April or prior to his funeral on 17th April.

Also on 17th April we held our AGM by Zoom. We were pleased to welcome Tony Crabtree, Chairman of the Towers and Belfries Committee, and Guild Treasurer Stuart Gibson to the meeting. All officers were re-elected, although we will be needing both a new treasurer and secretary as both these essential officers will be retiring soon.

We spent a large part of the meeting discussing returning to ringing and what help our towers might need to start regular ringing once more, hopefully later this summer. A further meeting was held on 22nd April to discuss the branch development and returning to ring, which identified a number of ideas and helpful suggestions for the branch to offer towers, ringing leaders and individuals.

At the AGM we were very pleased to hear that the restoration of the bells at Slapton is finally close to getting started, this project having been fund raising and trying to find the most economical way of augmenting to 6 bells for a very long time. Tony Crabtree was in touch with Slapton PCC and suggested a number of helpful ideas to support the project and help fund the sum they still needed.

Clare Carpenter

Chipping Norton

With the introduction of another lockdown in December, there were few opportunities for ringing as most towers need to depend on several households to provide the ringers to make up the numbers.

Three bells were rung at Hook Norton for Christmas and Easter by the members of one family and this has continued when services have been allowed.

Many churches continue to offer online services, though more now have actual services, but no ringing except where it has been pre-recorded.

There has been a good interest in ringing for those occasions when it was requested that one bell should be rung. A few towers marked the *National Day of Reflection*. Nearly all of the branch's towers rang in memory of the Duke of Edinburgh on 10th April but less on the actual day of the funeral. Some very appreciative comments have been made by those who listened to the tolling.

Continuing the reflective atmosphere, we are sorry to record the deaths of six former branch members over the last few months. These were Bob Withey (Hook Norton), Nick Leadbetter (Ascott-under-Wychwood) and Bill Bamford (Little Compton).

Brian Hall, who lived at Windrush, was a member of the G & B Association as well as the ODG. He rang at Burford where he had helped with training ringers and had rung many peals and quarter peals during his lifetime.

Derek Fowler, of Charlbury, was a stalwart member of St Mary's Church and well known in the community.

Just recently Jean Datson, formerly of Spelsbury, passed away on 19th April aged 96. She learnt to ring in 1943 and was a founder member of the 43ers. She was an honorary member of the ODG.

All of these ringers had contributed many years of faithful service. May they rest in peace.

Branch officers have taken part in Zoom meetings organised by the ODG when possible. Another member has 'attended' Ringing Recovery meetings. We await the results of the ODG survey with interest. The expected outcome is that more ringers will be required across the branch and there is a concern about recruitment.

Virtual practices using Ringing Room, and Zoom pub sessions continue at Hook Norton. At Charlbury, handbell-ringing has preceded morning services when allowed and this has been greatly appreciated by the congregation.

A provisional date has been arranged for the Branch 2021 AGM and it is hoped that this will take place at Ascott-under-Wychwood on 26th June subject to the Covid restrictions at the time.

Weddings that have been postponed are being re-booked, in some cases for the third time so it may be a busy time for ringers once some ringing is allowed.

Christine Harris

East Berks and South Bucks



*Hughenden: Back row – David Cornwall, Andrew Ottaway, Verity Nicholls, Ian Desborough
Front row – Revd Tracey Jones and Cordelia Thompson*

Ringing during the past few months has been very limited. Two towers (Denham and Cookham) have Ellacombe chimes which have been used (every week during Lockdown at Denham), and at Winkfield there has been ringing by single people or household bubbles for Sunday services and on Wednesdays (when the church was open). They have even recruited non-ringing family members to chime bells. Bells were tolled at about ten towers for the National Day of Reflection and there was some social distanced ringing for Easter, but when the death of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh was announced there was

much activity. Bells were tolled at 18 (or more) towers in the Branch. At Hughenden and Beaconsfield [see back cover – Ed.] they took the opportunity to involve six people in tolling for the funeral – one at a time, changing over every 5 mins, while the others socialised outside in the sunshine.

Of special note is the ringing at the Curfew Tower at Windsor Castle. The tenor was tolled 99 times at 30 second intervals on Saturday 10th April by William Stungo, and on Saturday 17th April Edward Westlake tolled the tenor nine times at 1 minute intervals in parallel with cannon fire from the east lawn of the castle during the funeral procession. This could be heard on the television and radio broadcast and sounded very dramatic. On each occasion the clapper was tied so that the bell could be raised and lowered silently and the ties removed for the tolling. James White was on frame duty ensuring that the bell did not turn again, and Vikki Bulbeck was downstairs timing and liaising with the army personnel.

We held a very successful Tower Captains' meeting on Zoom. This was attended by 26 people representing 22 towers. Prior to the meeting a questionnaire had been circulated asking what ringing had been done at each tower, how bands had been keeping in touch and what concerns there might be as we return to ringing. Discussion topics included the CCCBR roadmap for returning to ringing, the role of Recovery Champions and the Survival and Recovery Toolbox.

Some problems may need to be addressed regarding bells, churches and ringers as we get back to our towers. It was pleasing to note that most bands had been keeping in touch with each other either by Zoom, email, phone calls or social gatherings (when allowed), and six bands had been using Ringing Room. However, several towers were concerned about a shortage of ringers and the need for help with refresher sessions for their less experienced members.

Towers have been booked for Branch Practices for the second half of the year, but we await confirmation of what restrictions will be in place after June before we can confirm details of these practices.

Pat Newton

Newbury

Following the relaxation of Covid restrictions last summer we, once again, found ourselves locked-down and unable to ring. Not all has been quiet though, as the Hampstead Norreys and Lambourn bell projects continued to successful completion. Following test-rings and final adjustments, both towers, along with the rest of the Branch, returned to silence apart from isolated occasions.

Most towers tolled one bell for the funeral of HRH Prince Phillip, and some have rung limited numbers for services. Hungerford managed to ring three bells for a wedding, the ringers being from the same household. Some have kept things moving with regular Zoom meetings and others have taken part in the ODG ringers quiz, held remotely.

Of those who responded to the ODG recovery survey, most had reported no ringing, the majority didn't expect problems getting going again and bringing ringers back after such a long time. Several towers have now had their bells and fittings inspected in preparation for them being rung again and we wait with eager anticipation for the rules being relaxed so that we can return to normal ringing.

Mark Robins

North Bucks

[No news received – Ed.]

Old North Berks

Once again our AGM was held successfully by Zoom meeting. It was ably hosted by our Chairman, Rob Nickless and was attended by twenty-five members, including the Guild Master, Katie Lane, and our Guild Branch Steward, Patricia Newton. Dick Peters said that he wished to stand down as Vice Chairman and Branch Representative. The Chairman thanked Dick for all the work he had done for the Branch over the past six years and Charles Morrish was elected to take his place. All other branch officers remain in position. Our Treasurer, Stuart Gibson, reported that in 2020 the membership of the Branch was 261, a decrease of 16 from 2019.

There have been no new branch members elected to the Guild for over a year. Sadly we have lost three of our members. John Money of Cholsey passed away in December 2020 after a short illness. John was 95 years old and was a long-standing member of the Guild, joining in 1940. Angela Smith of Abingdon passed away in February 2021, aged 91. She rang her first peal for the Guild in 1949, probably first joining around 1947, but had a break in Guild membership of about fifteen years when her children were young. Claire Ward of Steventon passed away suddenly on Easter Sunday. Claire regularly rang at Steventon, Milton and Drayton and was a great supporter of the Branch, and was a regular helper with the refreshments for the Radley Course. They will all be sorely missed.

I am pleased to say that the rehangings of Long Wittenham bells and the installation of a rope guide has been successfully completed. Work planned at Abingdon, St Nicolas, had to be postponed until April in accordance with Covid-19 regulations and should be completed in June.

On a more sociable note, we are planning to have a 'local towers' outing, followed by a barbecue in July. The barn dance and supper at Harwell Village Hall, which was postponed from November 2020, is now scheduled for this November. Both events are of course subject to Covid regulations.

Gill Loyd

Oxford City

Oxford City branch have been keeping well during the lockdown. A recent AGM has elected an interim ringing master (Steve Everett) who usually resides in Turkey, but is currently back in Oxford, and while the majority of ringing is online is able to contribute whichever country he is in! This has also led to the resumption on branch practices, alongside several healthy tower practices, all held on ringing room. The branch practices have given some a chance to try out Ringing Room where their towers have not started their own practices too. Other towers have maintained social contact on a weekly basis, but decided not to venture into Ringing Room.

There has been great progress within the branch with lots of members progressing really well and learning new methods – those who like a bit more hand holding have enjoyed the confidence they get from being able to have a line beside them when first ringing a new method, and we hope that when we get back into towers and used to ringing actual bells again we will be able to capitalise on all this progress.

Handbells have also been popular, both online and in person when allowed outdoors, with some towers providing this as service ringing outside their churches.

Headington would like to congratulate Katy and Peter Routh on the birth of their daughter Beatrice in March – she attended her first online practice at less than two weeks old!



Rachel Croft

Reading

Ringling Room has been popular throughout Reading Branch with many towers forming their own groups, or bands have formed to include ringers from several different towers. An added advantage has been that the few people who have still been travelling for work have been able to join from wherever they have found themselves.

Church bell ringing has obviously been very limited but the towers at Goring and at Streatley have benefited from having a local family able to ring for particular occasions. St Giles-in-Reading also managed ringing for the service at Christmas thanks to the Barrett family, and at Easter another family rang for the service. St Peter's Caversham, St Mary the Virgin Reading, SS Peter and Paul Shiplake and St Michael's Tilehurst all rang for service when permitted and many more towers tolled a bell for HRH Prince Philip.

There are various active groups of handbell ringers within the branch, some long established and others fairly new to the game. The ringers at Mortimer have taught themselves from scratch and are now ringing methods. Central Reading has an active group ringing peals and quarter peals at Redlands Road, and the group in Tilehurst have begun ringing again in recent weeks. Since Easter, handbells have been rung for service outside Reading Minster by the local band and friends.

Lindsey Barker

Sonning Deanery

Easthampstead have recommenced ringing on a Sunday ringing 3 or 4 bells, and White Waltham ringing 1 or 2 bells. All Saints Wokingham have been ringing handbells outside for Sunday service and have also rung 5 handbell quarters on the lawn so far this year. Our Branch Elementary Practices have started up again, albeit on Ringing Room, until we can move back into the tower.

A number of towers were able to ring In Memoriam of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. On the 10th April, Arborfield, Easthampstead, Hurst, Sonning, Wargrave, and Wokingham All Saints (9th April) rang 99 tolling, half-muffled. White Waltham rang Nine Tailors and 99 tolling.



Lesley and Simon Graves

Prior to the funeral on 17th April, half-muffled tolling was rung by Binfield, Easthampstead, Sonning, Wargrave and Wokingham All Saints. Twyford rang half-muffled rounds on five, followed by tolling on the tenor. At White Waltham, Simon and Lesley Graves tolled half-muffled for 40 minutes on the same bell without stopping, receiving positive comments from the locals. Wokingham All Saints also rang quarter peals on handbells on 11th and 17th April. In the week prior to the funeral, Binfield, Easthampstead and Warfield rang 99 Grandsire Doubles on Ringing Room.

Some people love Ringing Room, others can't get on with it. Sue Portsmouth, a ringer in our Branch, has really taken to it, and her report about her ringing development using Ringing Room is on page 8 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Stop press: St Andrew's Sonning ringers at their first practice for 14 months on 20th May – a somewhat breathless affair!



Jan Glen

Young Ringers

Happily we've been able to get young ringers back into the tower in the last week or so. The EBSB youth officer, Peter Jasper and I have combined forces to be able to make a band with both strong and beginner ringers to give everyone a chance to ring to whatever standard they can. This means we've been able to advance those who were only able to ring a bell on their own before lockdown to ring in rounds! It's been great to see everyone and to have bells ringing in churches again. I hope we can incorporate as many young ringers as possible into our practices, and we aim to have a band for the RWNYC in Worcester on the 11th September this year!

Holley Wakeling, SDB Youth Officer

South Oxon

[No news received – Ed.]

Vale of the White Horse

[No news received – Ed.]

Witney and Woodstock

With limited, socially distanced ringing taking place in only a few towers, the branch has very little news to report. The majority of towers are taking a very cautious approach, preferring to wait until all ringers have received both vaccinations or until the Covid alert level is reduced to level 2.

In the meantime, Andrew Goldthorpe has created a Guild-hosted, GDPR-compliant, branch email distribution list. This means that going forward, instead of all correspondence from committee members being distributed via Tower Correspondents, all branch members with an email address who have not opted out of the list should directly receive email communications.

Tower Correspondent email addresses are also now Guild-hosted and tower specific, rather than personal, e.g. bampton@witneyandwoodstock.odg.org.uk is now

forwarded to the individual, rather than a personal email address being required.

The branch website is also Guild-hosted, has been updated, and can be found at this address:

www.witneyandwoodstock.odg.org.uk

The greatest concern of most towers has been the loss of ringers in the interregnum. There have been a number of useful webinars prepared and hosted by the Guild, the CCCBR and ART, which have been communicated to all our ringers, as well as tips and tricks for recruitment and returning to ringing.

Turning to some really good news, with ringing having largely been at a halt, this year has afforded different opportunities at St James the Great, South Leigh. Steeple Keeper Martin Spurrier seized the moment to embark on a year-long, much needed refurbishment of the ringing chamber, improvement of safety measures in the bell tower, and work in the clock chamber and on the clock.



Photo: David Smith (left) and Martin Spurrier in the refurbished ringing chamber

Recently completed, we are in awe of the countless hours of thought, the attention to detail and the labour that he single-handedly gave to this, and of the remarkable transformation he accomplished. Not to mention the donation of an Edwardian pendulum clock, in keeping with the ring of eight bells installed in 1907.

Our gratitude also goes to Chris Moxon, our Ringing Master until October, who generously funded the refurbishment.

Meanwhile, Heather Horner, Tower Captain, turned her attention to the ancient churchyard, in places very overgrown. In December and again in March, she led a working party of parishioners to clear large areas of rough growth, scatter wildflower seeds and plant new hedging in gaps. This was part of an ongoing community project to improve biodiversity.

The working party in March coincided with an invitation from Marie Curie Foundation to toll a church bell at 12.01 in remembrance of a year of Covid. The west doors of the refurbished ringing chamber were opened for all to admire its transformation.

A single bell was also tolled 99 times on the death of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh and again for his funeral.

We are delighted to have recently recruited three more ringers to expand our core band of five. All are 'false beginners', with a little previous ringing experience. The search is now on for one or more teachers to carry the band forward.

David Smith, ex-Tower Captain at St James', has decided to step down as Tower Correspondent. We would like to thank him for his dedicated service in both roles over many years, and for his continuing interest in all tower matters. Evadne Vallance takes over as Tower Correspondent and St James' looks forward to welcoming visiting ringers when restrictions allow.

Evadne Vallance , Andrew Goldthorpe

Paying Peal Fees electronically

If you would like to pay peal fees electronically, instead of sending in cheques, then please contact the peal secretary (peals@odg.org.uk) to obtain the details. Thank you.

Stuart Gibson

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Diary of Events for 2021

Some of these dates may change, so you should check the odg.org.uk web site for diary updates on an ongoing basis.

TBC	To Be Confirmed	AGM	Annual General Meeting	AP	Advanced Practice
BP	Branch Practice	EP	Elementary Practice	HY	Half Yearly Meeting
QM	Quarterly Meeting	RCP	Ringling Centre Practice	SC	Striking Competition
SM	Surprise Major	SP	Surprise Practice	CM	Committee Meeting

[Because of the coronavirus constraints, very few forthcoming ringing events have been set, so there are not many diary entries to publish – Ed.]

JUNE 2021

Sat	26	Chipping Norton	AGM	Ascott-u-Wychwood(6)	3.00pm
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SEPTEMBER 2021

Sat	18	Banbury	Ringling Day	TBC	TBC
Sat	25	In east of ODG	Michaelmas Course	TBC	TBC

OCTOBER 2021

Sat	2	N Bucks	Six-Bell Striking Competition	TBC	TBC
Sat	30	Banbury	Steeple Aston course	Steeple Aston	TBC

NOVEMBER 2021

Sat	27	C Bucks	November General Committee	Cuddington	TBC
Sat	27	Banbury	Ten-Bell Striking Competition	Steeple Aston	TBC



ODG Maintenance course – rope splicing



***Beaconsfield:** L to R: Geoff Hopkinson, Jennifer Slade, Angela Darvill, Ken Darvill, Kerry Smaje, Bill Edwards*