

Branch Secretary's report

Our branch AGM, held in February at St Paul, Wokingham, was attended by 26 branch members from 12 towers, together with Chris Mundy, Deputy Guild Master and Steve Rossiter, ODG Steward. All branch officers remained in post except for Jennifer Moynihan who stood down as Youth Officer and was replaced by Claire Shuttleworth, Rob Needham who stood down as Newsletter Editor and was replaced by Jennifer Moynihan and Steve Wells who stood down as Deputy Ringing Master and was replaced by James Moynihan, significantly lowering the average age of the committee. 14 new members were elected in 2024 with 8 returning members.

Shottesbrooke hosted the Guild 6-bell striking competition in October and entered a team that

represented the branch. With a high entry rate of 9 bands, Shottesbrooke achieved a very credible 4th place. Shottesbrooke was a lovely location for the competitions and many thanks go to the Shottesbrooke team for the excellent organisation and refreshments. The Guild raising and lowering competition was held at the same time at Binfield with 3 bands taking part.

In June the Hurst band hired the Touring Tower for the Hurst show with other branch members assisting. The tower was funded by the show as an “attraction” and community support. It was included in a children’s ‘Olympic challenge’ which ensured a good number of visitors. Names of people interested in learning more about bell ringing were noted and passed on to the relevant towers

Jan Glen

Ringing Master's report

The Elementary practices have not been quite as well attended this year with a couple cancelled in the summer. The practice has also moved on to being more of an intermediate level, in ART terms M2C rather than M2F. We have not seen as many new elementary ringers attend, is this because we don't have as many?

I'm proposing that in 2025 we replace one of the Elementary practices and change it to a focused method practice which can be on either 6 or 8 bells. We will alternate Elementary and the Focused practices on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings which will give everyone a chance to attend and to avoid clashing with their own local practice.

The ringing standard of those that have been attending the Elementary practices has continued to improve and for some of our members, a quarter peal has been organised so that they can achieve their ART LtR Level 3. As mentioned in my report last year, it is helpful to know whether you are planning to attend a practice, and it is greatly appreciated when you do let the organiser know.

The Advanced practice is still the least well attended and several practices this year have had to be cancelled.

In October this year, I tried a new approach, and we rang (successfully) a quarter peal (Bristol Surprise Major) in place of the Advanced Practice; this was repeated again in December when we successfully rang a quarter peal of Cambridge Surprise Major. In November we held the Advanced practice at St. Paul's Wokingham regular weekly practice. Would our members welcome a similar approach and run our Advanced practice by joining a local tower practice, run

by the branch in 2025?

Binfield Afternoon Practices have been held most months in 2024, they continued to be reasonably well supported. Depending upon who has attended the practice, occasionally ringing has been focused at an elementary level. We have though continued to ring plain, treble bob and surprise methods when possible.

The 6-bell striking competition was held at Shottesbrooke and judged by Marcia Dieppe. Marcia said it was good to see so many teams keen to compete and commended them, we had 8 teams enter in total. The local tower, Shottesbrooke won, and they represented the branch at the ODG 6 bell competition and came a creditable 4th out of 9 bands. Our branch entered the Guild 8 bell competition with ringers drawn from Wokingham All Saints, Easthampstead and Barkham/Arborfield, coming 5th out of 7.

101 Quarter peals (12 fewer than last year) and 8 peals (same as 2023) have been recorded for the Branch on the Ringing World's Bellboard website during the year. The leading tower once again was Shottesbrooke with a total of 53 quarter peals.

Our new DBRM, James Moynihan, has had the opportunity to run some of our branch practices which has particularly helped me as I have not been available for as many practices this year. We currently on average organise 5 practices a month and I am grateful to James and John Harrison and those others that have run practices when I am not available.

May I express my thanks to everyone who has supported Branch ringing activities throughout the year.

Nigel Mellor

Training Officer's report

Throughout 2024 training has been ongoing through the regular branch elementary, advanced and Saturday practices run mainly by the Ringing Master or Deputy Ringing Master.

John Harrison ran a training questionnaire in May 2024 identifying the need for listening, leading up and down in peal, raising and lowering in peal, and simulator experience. John has run 6 simulator and 1 listening course since.

Four members of the Sonning Branch have attended an ART M1 Module course in April 2024 for handling teacher training.

Two youth members attended their first ART M1 Module for teaching handling but are yet to teach someone to ring.

The officers ran a questionnaire to all towers regarding youth, early standards of ringing and teaching statistics.

From the results are to note:

- There are few youths currently as some youth were double counted.
- There are greater numbers at Elementary level than learning to handle a bell.
- It is encouraging to see the number of ringers who see themselves as teachers, but of these there are very few who will offer to lead branch events, special practices across the branch. E.g. raise and lower, focused elementary.

- Also encouraging to see that the ringers who are interested in ART techniques are now wider spread throughout the branch.
- Stronger towers remain at both Wokingham towers, Shottesbrooke, Sonning and Wargrave
- Ringers still wish to stay close to home to ring yet many state they don't have enough experienced ringers to progress.

Thinking ahead:

- With an increased number of elementary ringers, the elementary practices are essential now they have become embedded into the branch.
- Quarter peals (on any number of bells) could be considered more as part of the branch practice time or adjacent to it to consolidate learning.
- It is clear more focused practices at other levels (Nigel has started this replacing one elementary practice) are required but ringers also need encouraging to leave their tower and join other ringing in the branch.
- Nurturing teaching is still required
- All other specific teaching identified should continue as teachers are willing.

Suggestion

How about organising a ringing day and BBQ for the branch in the summer. Just to get ringers to get to know each other together and build ringing bonds?

Jane Mellor

Webmaster/Postmaster's Report

Website – The website has been kept up to date throughout the year. Updates included results and pictures from four striking competitions as well as newsletters, meeting papers and regular updates of the diary. Tower and officer contact details have been updated whenever I was made aware of any changes. Nothing was added to the downloadable resource area: odg.org.uk/sdb/download/

I will shortly update the information about e-mail services to reflect the Guild withdrawing support for its mailing lists and replacing them with services linked to the new online membership database.

Reference information on the website includes contact details for officers, an events diary, information and contact details for Branch towers, services offered by the Branch including training courses, newsletters, reference documents, past events, history of the Branch and useful external links. The website is at: odg.org.uk/sdb/

E-mail services – I managed the Branch e-mail lists for: Members, Officers, Towers, Wedding volunteers and Quarter peal volunteers.

The Members list included all members who provided an e-mail address plus several non-members who regularly ring in the Branch, and former members who had opted to remain in touch. It had 161 addresses at the year end (8 fewer than in 2023).

The Wedding volunteer list had 40 ringers subscribed (the same as in 2023). It was not used in 2024 (compared with twice in 2023). That suggests bands are more able to resource wedding ringing without asking for help (or maybe there are fewer weddings in churches).

The Quarter peal volunteer list had 12 ringers subscribed (the same as in 2023) and was used once in 2024 (not used in 2023).

I provide occasional support if needed to the tower lists, which are separately managed by each tower. Currently these are: Arborfield and Wokingham All Saints.

The lists are protected against spam, which is held so I can deal with it before it reaches members. Spam to the list is relatively rare and the messages I most frequently have to deal with are from members who thought they were replying to one of the officers but whose mail systems sent their message to the list despite the messages being marked for reply to sender.

During 2024 there was one occasion when an ISPs blocked mail from ODG addresses, which was resolved by the Guild Server Manager.

I supported the transition from using Guild e-mail lists to mailing being driven by the membership database by investigating all the addresses that were on the mailing list but could not transfer to the new system (because they are not current Branch members) to find out whether they were former members who have given up or moved away, new ringers who were not yet members but who take part in Branch events or ringers from outside the Branch who take part in Branch events.

Details of e-mail services are on the website at: odg.org.uk/sdb/services/email.html and as noted above this will be updated when the transition to the Guild's new system is complete.

John Harrison

Youth Officer's report

Within SDB we have a few very active young ringers. Not only do they ring at their home towers but frequently visit other practice nights and branch events. Between them they have managed to clock up an impressive amount of notable ringing.

As members of SDB our young ringers are lucky to have the opportunity to ring with a variety of youth groups, namely Bucks&Berks and ODG, who then also meet with other young ringers groups. This is a great opportunity to ring with a lot of other ringers their own age and ring at lots of different locations. This year they have been on outings to London twice and also to Solihull. On a more local level we had a mini walking outing between Shottesbrook and Waltham St Lawrence. Our ringers have also been key members of a couple of competition teams achieving an impressive 4th place at the RWNYS.

This April Bucks&Berks are hosting the South East Competition (SEECON) at Twyford. We are hoping we can enter at least one youth band, Bucks&Berks and possibly a scratch band of local young ringers who may not be able to commit to practices but could take part on the day.

We have a few other young ringers spread around the branch who I would love to join us. This year I have updated our database and email list with active ringers and send out reminders of the local young ringers practices. As mentioned, our youngsters have the opportunity to ring with a few different youth groups. At present we join with Bucks&Berks on the first Sunday of the month, with Reading young ringers on the 2nd Sunday of the month and with ODG ringers on 4th Sunday of the month. (all dates subject to confirmation). I have already sent provisional details out to all the young ringers, I will also share this with Tower captains. I would urge Tower Captains to talk to their young ringers to encourage them to join us. If they wish to join us for a practice, can I ask that you, or them, email me to check that the practice is going ahead. (For safeguarding reasons the location of the practices are not posted on the branch website).

Claire Shuttleworth

Bookstall Holder's report

After the clear-out of the book box at the last AGM, there has been almost no activity. I have sourced 2 books for people and am currently sourcing one more. I will continue to suggest books in the newsletter, but other than that, I feel that the bookstall is becoming obsolete as people can now download blue lines and other ringing information straight to their phones.

I'd be interested in a straw poll at the AGM to see if people still want/need the bookstall and if so, what books they would like in it. I am more than happy to continue as a contact point for people looking for books.

Jennifer Moynihan

Newsletter editor's report

Two issues of the newsletter were published last year. Another issue is due in late Spring. I would like feedback on which sections people find the most interesting.

Going forward, do towers and officers still want paper

copies? We currently print 30 copies but I propose we only need 1 per tower and 1 for the archive. The newsletter is available on the website. I will find out the cost of a smaller print run.

Jennifer Moynihan

Branch representatives to the Guild report

The March Committee meeting was held, as normal, after the Bell Fund AGM.

Reports were presented from all the Committees prior to the meeting and were taken as read. Members were elected to the Committees to fill vacancies.

An update on the Membermojo was given.

The Odd Bob Editor stood down and a discussion took place on whether or not this should be continued in hard copy or on line. The majority of the meeting voted to keep a hard copy.

At the November meeting the Guild budget for 2025 was agreed together with Guild subscriptions and peal fees. An update was given on Safeguarding.

Long discussions took place on Membermojo and the future makeup of the Guild.

The Guild Librarian gave notice that he would not be seeking re-election in 2025 and therefore a new Librarian and home for the library is required.

Sue Davenport.

Treasurer's Report

See accounts in separate document.

Sue Davenport