

***Sonning Deanery Branch, Business Meeting,
22 November 2025 at 10.00am
St Michael Archangel, Warfield***

Minutes

Present:, Vikki Bullbeck (Branch Representative (Shottesbrooke)), John Coombes (Wargrave), Jason Crabtree (White Waltham), Ken Davenport (St Paul Wokingham), Sue Davenport (Treasurer), Peter Duggin (Warfield), Jan Glen (Secretary (Binfield)), John Harrison (Chairman), Nicola Lee (Arborfield and Barkham). Jane Mellor (Training Officer), Nigel Mellor (Ringing Master), Jennifer Moynihan (Newsletter), Claire Shuttleworth (Youth Officer, (Sonning)), Graham Slade (Hurst), Mike Sherrin (Sandhurst), Steve Smith (All Saints, Wokingham), Kate Titford (WSL), Steve Wells (Easthampstead), Judith Witting (Finchampstead), (15 towers and 8 Officers)

Apologies: Pam Elliston (Sonning), Simon Farrar (Twyford), Lesley Graves (White Waltham), James Moynihan (Deputy Ringing Master (All Saints Wokingham)),

Matters arising from the 2025 AGM:

None

Financial Update:

The Treasurer, Sue Davenport, reported finances are in a good position. Subs remain at £10 next year and will be collected in the usual way, one payment per tower. Please ensure that band members names are included when paying subs as the names must be reported to the Guild. Cheque or cash is fine, or bank details can be provided for a bank transfer.

Practices

Nigel Mellor asked for feedback regarding going to various towers for mid-week evening practices. Judith Witting said that not all the band at Finchampstead liked the branch practice joining them and therefore needs to manage how many they hold each year. Graham Slade asked if some of the mid-week evening practices could be held at a Hurst practice night. As Nigel is not available on a Monday, Graham would be happy to run the combined practice. Jason Crabtree asked how practices are organised in terms of what is covered. Nigel gave an overview of the elementary, focussed and advanced practices. The monthly elementary was so popular, a 2nd one was introduced. This has now evolved into the focussed practice as the learners have progressed. Nigel asked about elementary level ringers at towers, as no new elementary ringers seem to be coming forward. Nigel stated how important it was that experienced helpers supported the mid-week evening practices. John Harrison summarised that the branch tries to supplement what the towers can do.

Steve Wells commented that youngsters can't attend branch practices during the week so can only come to the Saturday ones, and 4 of the last 8 have been cancelled. Steve felt that some people were not happy using the link to confirm their attendance which was resulting in low numbers. Jan Glen highlighted that 9 people had used the link to confirm they couldn't attend the last practice, and these were ringers who normally do attend. Claire reminded everyone that the YR have a practice on the 1st Sunday of each month. There was a general discussion around the challenges of practices for YR, such as many have football or other sport on a Saturday. Also, if the parents are not available to drive them, they must agree to them going with another adult etc.

Branch training

Jane Mellor reported on a survey she undertook last year; there were fewer new learners (8), but more elementary ringers (27). 19 people stated that they teach with 14 of them having attended an ART teaching course, although very few have been accredited. John Harrison offers simulator sessions, but these tend to be attended by the same people each time. James Moynihan and Becki Shuttleworth are now both accredited for ART M1. Graham Slade continues to develop his band and has been nominated for an ART award. James Moynihan is planning to run a training day next March to provide progression through methods. A rope control session has been requested plus a ringing up and down session.

Jane noted that at the striking competition at White Waltham, most bands were ringing rounds, which indicates that many ringers would benefit from the elementary practices. Sue Davenport commented that many new members on the subs list one year are not on the list the following year. Jane said that we need people to engage and communicate and that it is disheartening when people don't respond to emails or surveys.

John Harrison commented that half the membership doesn't attend any branch practices, and the purpose of this meeting with tower representatives is to find out about their and their members' needs.

Youth Ringing

Claire Shuttleworth reported that the monthly Bucks & Berks YR practices are well attended, and their team came 2nd in a national competition. Branch YR practices were not well attended and were no longer viable. Steve Wells suggested having YR practices during the half-term holidays. Claire suggested that Steve finds a date for his 3 YRs and then arranges a YR branch practice with her. In response to John Coombes, Claire reported that there are potentially 12 YR in the branch.

The Treasurer asked everyone to ensure they noted their YRs when paying subs.

Action – Steve to look at finding a suitable dates for YR when his 3 are available.

Payments to Branch Towers

John Harrison provided a summary (full document on the website) regarding the proposal to pay something to towers for wear and tear when hosting branch practices. A general discussion followed with suggestions that people are pushed to contribute to the 'bell' at practices but countered by the fact that few people carry cash these days. Some, who can't always attend branch practices, are happy to pay a month sum. John clarified that the proposal was for an additional £5 on top of the existing £10 subs and, in response to Graham's question, clarified that we were discussing the proposal at this meeting and not voting.

Ken felt that if a branch practice was held with a tower practice, then additional payment was not required as the bells were already being used. Since the tower was effectively taken over, would a lesser amount be appropriate?

Action - John asked Ken to put forward a proposal for that scenario.

Tower Inspections

John summarised the document on the website which he stated is not a proposal but just airing ideas. There followed a discussion around maintenance and responsibilities between tower and PCC. John would like to hear from towers as to what help they might need, including the possibility of the branch paying for external inspections. Nigel suggested a questionnaire which was generally supported.

ACTION – JH to produce and issue a questionnaire.

Binfield Ropes

John again summarised the document on the website regarding a request from Binfield towards the costs of rope work, due to the high usage of Binfield for branch practices. John was sounding out the attendees' view before a potential proposal at the next AGM. The consensus was that the request was reasonable, and attendees were happy to support it.

Update on Guild Matters:

Vikki advised that the last Guild meeting had provided an update on Membermojo and an overview of the proposed Guild restructure.

Officer Vacancies

John reminded that all Officers are up for re-election at the AGM and encouraged people with ideas to come forward. James Moynihan is likely to stand down as Deputy Ringing Master as he will be going to university in October. Several Officers stated that they would be happy to step down if others would like to take on the roles (Ringing Master, Training Officer, Newsletter Editor and Branch Secretary).

2026 – 2027 draft calendar

The Secretary thanked those towers that had confirmed the branch practice dates on the draft calendar and asked that those that had not yet replied to please do so and provide alternative dates where necessary.

Mike Sherren confirmed that Sandhurst are happy to host the April 2026 6-bell striking competition but at the moment they don't know when the re-tuned bells will be installed. Vikki kindly offered Shottesbrooke as a last-minute stand-in if required.

Nigel said he would update the mid-week practice schedule for 2026-27 shortly. Jan will issue to towers when available.

Post meeting Note: After discussion, it was agreed that it would not be practical for WSL to host the February 2027 AGM, therefore another tower will be asked to take this on.

AOB:

Steve Wells asked for a show of hands for towers that have implemented the Guild Safeguarding policy. Several hands went up in response. Steve reminded everyone of the requirements and a general discussion followed. John summarised that the Guild provides recommendations, but each PCC sets the policy. Some towers reported that not all their members are prepared to undertake the training and asked what to do about those who refuse. It was clarified that the recommendation is for 16-year-olds and over to complete it, and some felt quite strongly that those under 16 should not be asked to complete it due to the nature of the subject matter.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their time.

The meeting ended at 11.10am

Actions

John Harrison to issue a questionnaire to towers regarding tower and bell maintenance.

Steve Wells to find a suitable date when his three YR are available and liaise with Claire to arrange a YR branch practice.

Ken Davenport to propose regarding payment to towers when sharing a tower and branch practice.