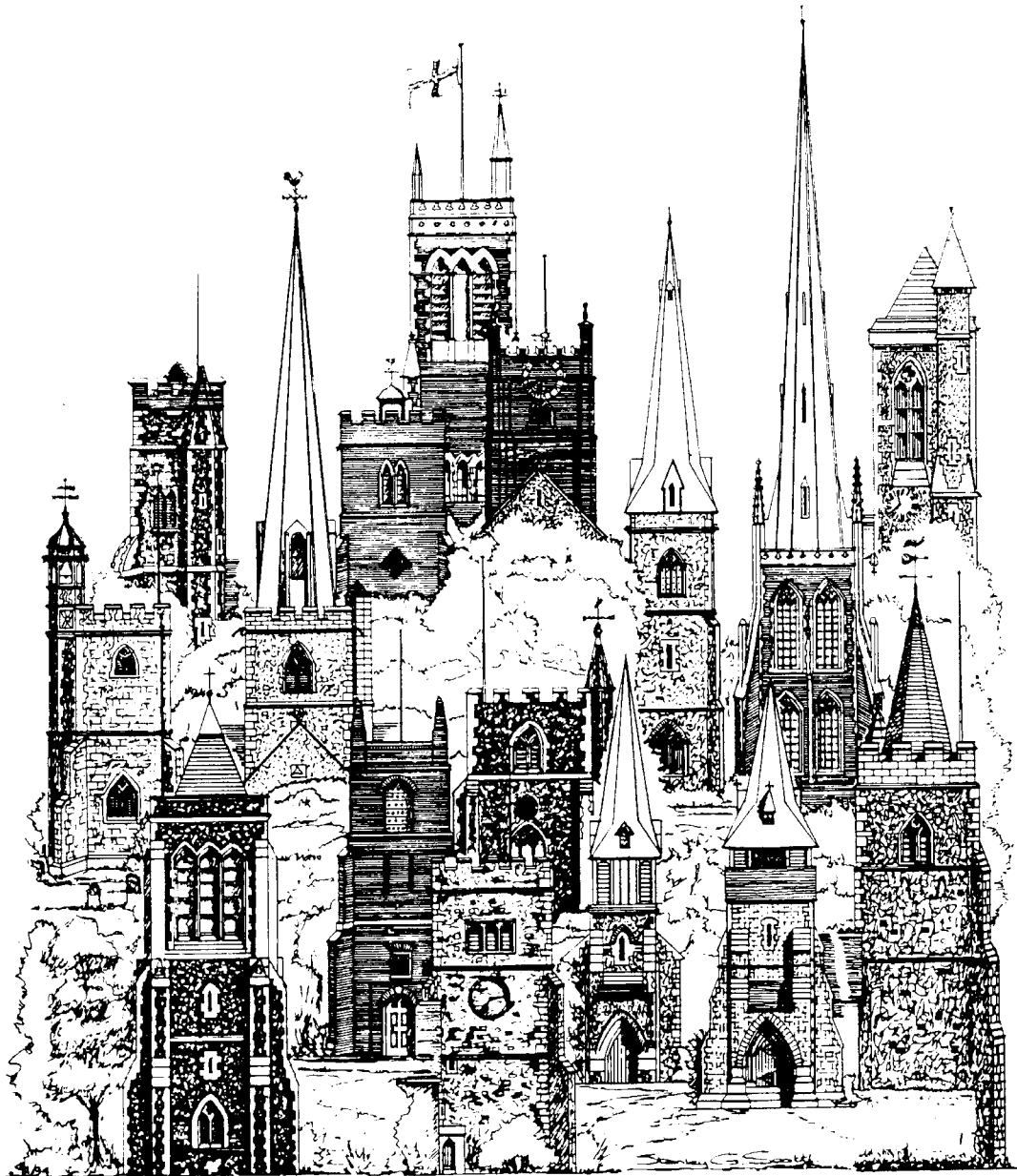


Sonning Deanery Branch

NEWSLETTER

March 2006



Oxford Diocesan Guild
of Church Bell Ringers

Branch Masters Report – 2005

In general branch practices were well attended, averaging 12 people per practice through the year and methods rang ranged from call changes to spliced surprise major.

I hope that this continues and improves through 2006.

In hindsight, this year was not the best year for me to have taken on being Master for health reasons. This has meant that I have not been able to put as much into the role as I would have liked. However, I also feel that, as a relatively new active member of the branch I did not receive the support necessary to carry out this role to the best of my ability.

Although experienced in 'ringing circles' generally, having been District Master in Surrey, Ringing Master at University, Divisional Secretary in Sussex and Tower Captain at a few towers, I found being Master of this branch a completely different experience.

I started the year with enthusiasm, but unfortunately this did not last long. I was given the impression that the branch wanted to move on and encourage members to take part in events. However, very often I have been told that this or that cannot be done because that is not how it was done in the past.

Also the communication in the branch, and Guild, has not been as it could be. I appreciate that this now being resolved with the Branch Website now up and running, a big thank you to Aidan for all his hard work on this.

If the branch is to move forward it needs to change. This can only happen if

- The members tell the officers what they would like
- The officers listen to the members
- The officers communicate with the members

I wish my successor the best of luck.

Rachel Moss

Ringling Master's Wotsits

Last year, the Branch adopted a mission statement – ***More Fun, More Opportunities, More Involvement***. Whilst there has been a significant improvement over the last year, with several things happening in line with this statement, there is still a long way to go.

More Fun. Several of this year's Branch Practices include other attractions such as a picnic or mince pies. In addition to this, we are planning to have a large social event such as a Barn Dance or Quiz Night, which should be a lot of fun for everybody: ringers and non-ringers.

More Opportunities. As always, there are Branch Practices, which everybody is welcome to attend. These are a fantastic opportunity to ring on some different bells and to attempt more advanced (or simply different!) methods from those rung in your home tower. There is a semi-regular Surprise Practice, which currently takes place at Wokingham All Saints – there are plans to make this more accessible in the future. Aidan is planning to re-introduce the 10 bell practices held at Warfield, probably on a bi-monthly basis. I am hoping to provide more opportunities for advancement, in the form of quarter peals. This is an excellent way to consolidate a recently learned method. You will hear more about this soon.

More Involvement. Not many Branch members attended the AGM this year, which is understandable as it's a boring meeting, which can seem quite detached from the actual ringing. The Officers are still seeking ways of involving the members which does not include boring meetings. The problem of communication within the Branch is still an ongoing one, but the situation is improving with email and the website. The Officers are totally open to suggestions and criticisms (but go easy on the criticism or we might all quit!), and we really want to make the Branch something that you want to be part of.

The next Branch Practice is at Warfield at 7:30pm on 18th March. This is a great opportunity to experience ringing on 10. If you have ever rung rounds on 6 or 8, come and have a go on 10! If you have ever rung Plain Bob Minor, come and try Plain Bob Major or even Royal. The special method for the practice will be Grandsire Caters, which is printed on page X and can be found in any diagrams book, or on the internet. It would be fantastic if we could ring some surprise royal too!

The Branch 6 bell striking competition is fast approaching, so get practising! A band can ring called changes if they wish, or any method of their choice. If you don't have enough ringers for a band, let me know, and we can arrange scratch bands.

The Guild Festival is on 8th July this year, and promises to be excellent as this year is the 125th anniversary of the Oxford Diocesan Guild. Please book this date into your diary!

Louise Marshall

HOLY SMOKE!

The tower and bells of St.Paul's, Wokingham were rededicated by the Bishop of Oxford the Rt Rev Richard Harries during a service held on the evening of Monday the 20th February and led by Father John Connell, our parish priest. A well attended service saw a large number of the congregation joined by local dignitaries, representatives of the fire brigade, bell founders, contractors, scaffolders, stone masons and other craftsmen involved in the restoration, plus our own and visiting ringers, and a few old tower friends such as Hugh Baxter and Elaine Baber (who both now live in Wiltshire and ring at Uffington). Hugh a previous tower foreman played a significant part in the last re-hang of the bells that took place in 1987.

The service started with the dedication of the porch and bells and the symbolic handing over of one of the ropes to the current tower foreman (Ken Davenport) while the rest of the band rang the bells right on cue when the bishop said "let the bells ring out..." (Luckily our new loud speaker in the ringing chamber provided a very clear version of the audio from the priest microphones). The bishop also unveiled an ornate plaque in the porch of the church to commemorate the event.



A TV at the back of the church connected (via a wireless connection) to a CCTV camera in the belfry allowed live images of the bells being rung to be seen from inside the church. (I plan to write an article about our 'BellCam' installation for next month's newsletter).

Ringling also took place after the service allowing a number of visitors their first chance to try out the bells, and then the ringers joined the rest of the congregation for a pleasant evening in the parish rooms where copious food and drinks were provided.

During the evening Father John thanked the fire brigade for their magnificent efforts in managing to save the church, and the architect and other craftsman that took part in the two year restoration project. He presented the bishop, fire brigade and each company with framed photos of the tower and spire.

He also thanked the Ecclesiastical Insurance company for footing the bill of over half a million pounds for the restoration (ouch!), and ended up by pointing out that the people in the room with smiles from ear to ear were....

the *bellringers*.

Your Newsletter



NEEDS YOU

Please write articles on:

- Outings
- Achievements (ringing and non-ringing)
- Events/ Incidents
- Adverts for forthcoming events
- Personal Announcements (births, engagements, etc.)
- Anything else you found interesting

Send your contributions to editor@sdb.odg.org.uk, post to the address on the back cover or see me around.

Daniel Chafen

Grandsire Caters

Special Method for the Branch Practice at
Warfield on 18th March at 7:30pm

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St. Pauls Wokingham on Meridian TV

To coincide with the rededication service, Meridian TV agreed to run a piece on the regional news, so the preceding Tuesday night they sent a camera man to film us practising for the dedication service.

Ken took him up in the belfry where he courageously climbed up the vertical ladder to the platform above the bells (carrying his large camera) and filmed both before and while we rang. We had to ring up, ring some rounds and down against straight away since we were not convinced he would stay put if we stopped ringing and we did not want to risk his climbing between the bells while they were up. We were also concerned that he might not have a real understanding of the level of noise experienced in a belfry with the bells ringing, but with his ear defenders on he seemed perfectly happy.

He also filmed the ringers (and ropes) while we rang, both from inside and outside the ringing circle, not such an easy job with such a large camera and limited space and moving ropes. It's also hard to keep a straight face and concentrate on ringing when you have a camera close up pointing at you...

As the reporter did not come along that evening, the cameraman got Father John to act as the reporter and ask some questions while he filmed a short interview with some of the bell ringers to get their opinion of the new bells.



The final news item was shown on both the lunch time and evening news on the day of the dedication (20th February). It was a nicely put together short item (about 3 to 4 minutes in total) during which they showed some of the original footage of the fire, photos (provided by Peter Davenport) of various stages of the restoration and some very nice film of both the bells and the ringers. Several of us appeared in it, however for only a couple of seconds, but they did get a nice shot of my tummy and my arms....

Unfortunately they did not use the interviews with the ringers instead they included interviews with father John Connell and one of the church wardens in which they discussed the project as a whole.

Several of the band recorded the news item, so if anyone wishes to see it you may be able to borrow a tape from one of us.

Chris Cole

A Cup of Tea and a Chat

Very few of the towers in the Branch go to the pub after a practice night – 3 or 4 out of 17 (and a couple of others go occasionally). It is such a shame to lose this fine ringing tradition! And there are other things to be said for it too...

- Ringers get to hear and give information (e.g. if the tower correspondent is not confident talking in front of group, this can be their opportunity to pass on information from the Branch – or a ringer can make an announcement such as their engagement!).
- Ringers can get to know each other (companies don't spend thousands on team-building exercises for nothing!), and the Tower Captain can gain an understanding of each member's ringing ambitions, and can then lead the practice in a more informed way.
- Decisions are often made away from the tower (e.g. where / when to go on a tower outing). If two or three people discuss something or decide on something important, the opinions of those not present at the discussion are often never voiced.
- Ringers can discuss ringing: there is often no opportunity for tutorial sessions (e.g. passing on an easier way of learning a method), or for analysing the evening's ringing (e.g. why the doubles methods went better than the minor methods) during the practice session.
- Socialising can be fun, and it's a good way to make friends!!

I fully appreciate that not everybody likes to visit pubs because of the noisy, smoky atmosphere (myself included), so perhaps there are other ways to socialise...

Arborfield, for example, have a social every month – they go to the church hall after ringing, and chat over tea and cake. I have rung at other towers (not in this Branch) who have a tea break during the practice! It seems that the more social towers are often the liveliest and most welcoming towers.

If your tower has no facilities (i.e. a plug socket for a kettle!) and no church hall (and your ringers don't want to go to the pub), then perhaps you could take it in turns to bring a flask along. Or, if this is too difficult to arrange, even a jar of sweets can do the trick! There are always sweets at Warfield, and handing them round provides a convenient break for any announcements – or just a chat.

Louise Marshall

Tower Open Afternoon at St. Pauls Wokingham

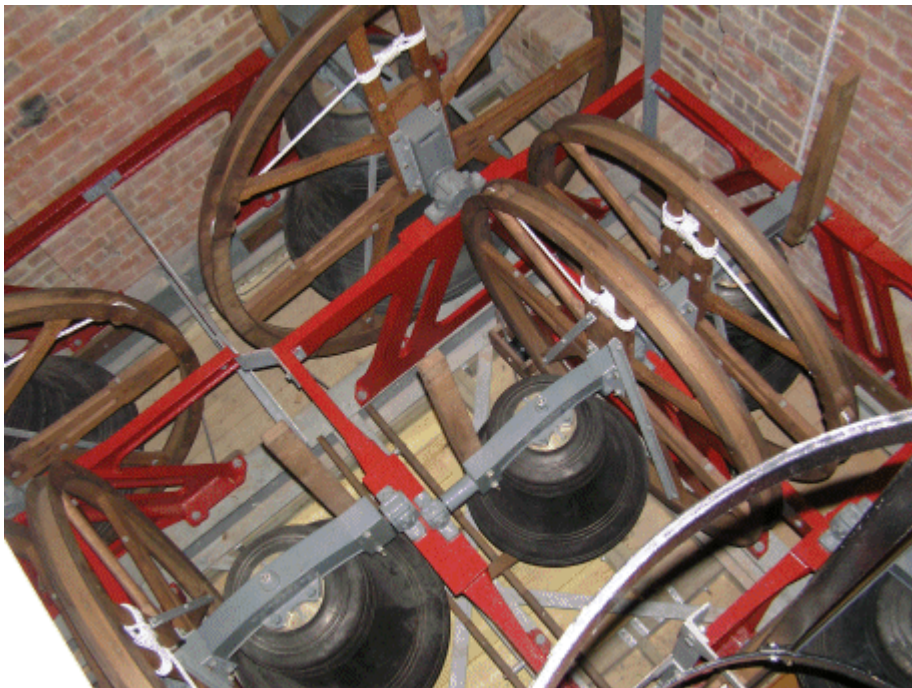
The weekend following the dedication of the bells, saw the St. Paul's tower opened to the public and congregation (and a few visiting bellringers) to give them the opportunity to come up and see the restored tower and bells.

We were not sure how many people would show up and were therefore astonished that for three hours the tower was packed with visitors. At times we had so many that it was difficult to find space to ring even a single bell. During the afternoon we collected £87 in donations for the tower restoration fund (we are still about £5000 short of the £30,000 needed to pay for additional work that was not covered by the insurance).

We were able to give demonstrations of one of the bells being rung, while visitors were able to watch the bell turning over on a flat screen TV in the ringing chamber connected to the CCTV camera in the belfry. This added a new and interesting way of showing people how a bell actually works, and is also a strange sensation for the ringers to actually see the bell they are ringing, turning over.

A number of mainly younger visitors also got to try their hand with a few pulls and seemed to enjoy themselves. I think most were surprised at how gentle a pull was required.

The visitors were able to enter the middle room above the ringing chamber and climb the short ladder into the belfry, most sticking their heads up at least as far as level with the bells to get a view of them.



The cleanest belfry you will ever see, it will not stay like that for long.

Painting the Tower Red???

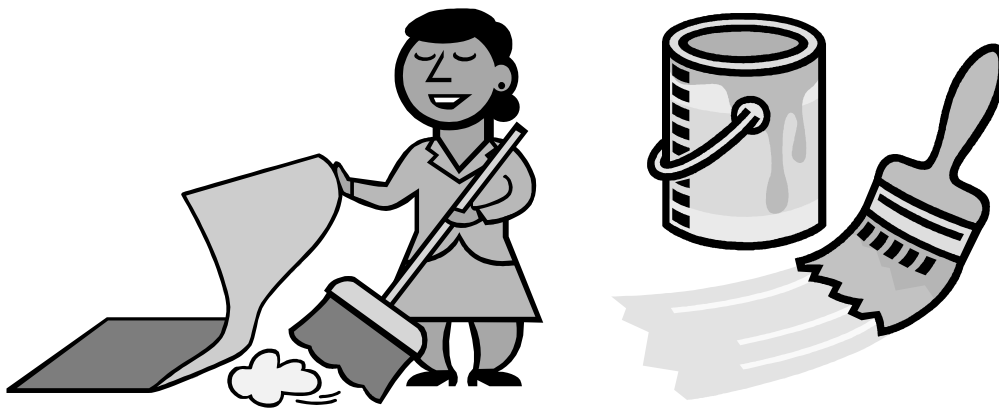
At Wargrave we've just had our AGM and we decided to improve the rather stark and austere aspect of the ringing room and also to improve the tower electrics somewhat. We're going to replace the two inaccessible light bulbs hanging from the ceiling with spotlights on each wall, shining up on to the ceiling. We're also improving the lighting on the stairs and in the middle chamber, and adding 13A power points in the ringing chamber, the middle chamber and the bell chamber.

Then we're repainting the ringing chamber in something a little more modern than plain white, and getting a new carpet to replace the hand-me-down one we've had for so long. We'll probably be getting ringing mats. Did you know that Ikea do just the thing, coincidentally called "Ringum", for £8.99 each?

And THEN (the most important thing) we're going for the guild Tower Maintenance Award scheme.

Perhaps we ought to have a branch Tidy Towers competition. Other guilds have them!

Dave Sullivan



29 January 2006
St Michael's ,Sandhurst

1260 Plain Bob Minor

- 1 Fiona Sherren *
- 2 Genine Leslie
- 3 Derek Palmer
- 4 Graham C Steele
- 5 Michael J Sherren
- 6 Janet E Menhinick

To welcome the safe arrival
of Melissa Kate Piper, newest
Granddaughter of 3.

* 1st quarter on 6.

5th February 2006
St. Andrew's, Sonning

1288 Plain Bob Triples

- 1 Ken G Baker
- 2 Brian Snell
- 3 Rob Needham
- 4 Joyce Vernon
- 5 Pam Elliston
- 6 Andrew Elliston
- 7 Michael Dane (C)
- 8 Keith Vernon

26th February 2006
St. Andrew's, Sonning

1288 Grandsire Triples

- 1 Pam Elliston
- 2 Andrew Elliston
- 3 Brian Snell
- 4 Ken G Baker
- 5 Rob Needham
- 6 Chris J Brown
- 7 Michael Dane (C)
- 8 Keith Vernon

1st March 2006
St. Andrew's, Sonning

1260 Plain Bob Minor with cover

- 1 Brian Snell
- 2 Pam Elliston
- 3 Alison Clayton
- 4 Andrew Elliston
- 5 Chris J Brown
- 6 Michael Dane (C)
- 7 Rob Needham

Rung for the Ash Wednesday
evening service



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Forthcoming Events

Saturday	18th March	Branch Practice	Warfield	7:30pm
Saturday	15th April	Guild Handbell Day	Reading Branch	
Saturday	22nd April	6-bell Striking Competition followed by Branch Practice	White Waltham	4:00 – 6:30pm 6:30 – 8:00pm