

| BICESTER BRANCH

We continued with our increasingly popular Branch Practices until March – numbers ranged from 7 to 18 but all enjoyed the variety we were able to accommodate. In addition Steve Vickars arranged a focussed practice in February in Bletchingdon for five ringers concentrating on trebling and ringing inside to doubles and minor methods. Between January and March five of our learners attended the sessions offered by Susan Read and ringers from the Old North Berks Branch.

With Covid-19 restrictions curtailing real bell ringing from April several branch members have been regularly joining in weekly virtual practices led by Steve Vickars using the Ringing Room website to learn and practice methods aiding the progress of all – also achieving first virtual quarters for Sally Cross and Gerald Bushby trebling and covering to doubles quarters. Steve conducted a quarter including Gus Bridges, Charlie Bates and three others in a virtual quarter peal to mark the 90th birthday of Avrill Banton, Judith Vickars' mother, on 29 October. <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1398556>. 14 members of the Kirtlington, Bletchingdon, Weston and Islip towers also joined in a virtual Christmas social and quiz event on 21 December.

At our AGM we elected three new members; Steve Vickars was elected as Training Officer, Gus Bridges was elected as Deputy Webmaster and Anne Martin allowed herself to be persuaded to take over as Treasurer in addition to her existing role as Guild Representative. We are very grateful to Sally Wale, Treasurer since 2006. Joint Branch Ringing Master, Richard Haseldine, arranged our annual outing for 25 April in the Milton Keynes area but sadly it couldn't take place.

We were delighted that Charlie Bates rang his first quarter inside of Grandsire Doubles at Kirtlington on 1 March which meant he achieved his 'ART Learning the Ropes Level 5' less than eighteen months after starting to ring. Other ringers achieving ART awards include Sue Carter, gaining ART Learning the Ropes Level 3 in January, after successful quarter peals on treble and tenor, and David Grimshaw, gaining Level 2 in February.

At least seven towers within the Branch were able to ring for services, weddings as well as VJ Day in the summer. Stratton Audley marked the death of long-serving ringer, Ron Howarth, by plain hunting on three – with Ron's wife, Dorothy, and Old English sheepdog, Brontë, in attendance.

Several towers have taken the opportunity of a closed church and bell tower for more extensive cleaning and maintenance. Weston-on-the-Green have adjusted the circle of ropes, making them much easier to ring, made electrical improvements as well as adding a new ceiling which will considerably quieten the noise of the bells in the ringing chamber. What a pity we haven't yet been able to test them to date.

Finally our Website Officers, Steve Vickars and Gus Bridges, have migrated the Branch website to <http://bicester.odg.org.uk/wordpress/>

Kathryn Grant