# Bicester Branch

2021 has been a mixture of using virtual technology to maintain ringing prowess e.g the Ringing Room and Wheatley practices for some, our AGM by zoom again in February (15 members from 8 towers as well as the Guild Master, Katie Lane, the Guild Deputy Master, Tony Crabtree and the Guild Steward Colin Lee, and our ‘branch chaplain’ Penny Wood), Guild meetings virtually e.g. the branch secretaries/ Ringing Recovery or online seminars on recruitment and retention as well as, in the second half of the year, more ‘real’ ringing in individual towers as well as Branch Practices – masked and carefully distanced - in Bletchingdon, Weston-on-the-Green, Middleton Stoney, Ambrosden, Piddington and Caversfield.

Several towers were able to ring on 23 March (the day of reflection) as well as tolling to mark the death of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh on 9 April, and on 5 July, chiming, to acknowledge the NHS, Social Care & Frontline Workers’ Day.

Weston-on-the-Green and Kirtlington have taken the opportunity to improve their towers – using funding from the Branch of £1500 and £300, respectively, to help. Weston followed up improvements in 2020 and have now installed a new sound insulation ceiling, pulleys, ropes, lighting and power incorporating emergency escape lighting and heating, and access ladder whilst Kirtlington have completed last year’s replacement of pulleys and ceiling bosses by cleaning and re-painting the bell frame.

Gerald Bushby from Weston-on-the-Green rang his first quarter at Bletchingdon on 24 August and then followed it up with a second at his home tower on 7 October with an illustrious group of ringers – Tony Crabtree, conducting and ODG Deputy Master, Lesley Belcher, Chair of ART, Susan Read, head of the ringing school at Abingdon, Jeremy Adams, joint Ringing Master, Bicester Branch and Steve Vickars, Branch Training Officer. It was especially appropriate since all have given much time and effort to re-starting the band at Weston and improving the ringing chamber and bells.

On 5 November Eric Ball, from Middleton Stoney died – sadly he’d been too ill to come to the Branch Practice there in September, and will be much missed by many.

Kathryn Grant