## OXFORD DIOCESAN GUILD OF CHURCH BELLRINGERS BICESTER BRANCH

### MINUTES AGM HELD BY ZOOM SATURDAY 13TH FEBRUARY 2021

**(1) OPENING REMARKS** Mrs Teresa Carter (Vice President) took the chair. She welcomed the Guild Master, Katie Lane, the Guild Deputy Master, Tony Crabtree, and the Guild Steward, Colin Lee, as well as 14 other members, from 8 towers, of the Branch to the meeting (as well as Penny Wood, Lay Reader). Teresa spoke of the difficulties over the previous year and the efforts of many to keep some momentum and activity going and paid particular tribute to Richard Wale who had died in August and, although not a ringer, had contributed in many ways to the Branch over the years, acting memorably as host and cook for the Branch’s striking competition BBQ.

**(2) APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** Willie Haynes, Anne Martin, Sally Cross, Helen Parkinson, Sue and James Carter, Michael MacArthur

**(3) MINUTES OF LAST MEETING** The minutes of 15 February 2020, which had been made available on the Branch website, were accepted on the proposal of Sue Macready, seconded by Judith Vickars, and signed subsequently.

**(4) MATTERS ARISING** None

**(5) CORRESPONDENCE** All under subsequent items.  
Katie Lane spoke of the year when church services have necessarily been held online leading to shortfalls in income via collections and the possibility of church closures – none planned currently in the Diocese of Oxford. She said that rescuing bells from redundant churches, if necessary, would be easier should any churches be forced to close in the future.  
**(6) OFFICERS’ REPORTS**Secretary (Kathryn Grant) and Branch Ringing Master (Jeremy Adams)  
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/>   
On the proposal of Sally Wale, seconded by Sue Macready, the report was adopted. All in favour.   
Treasurer (Sally Wale)   
At the last AGM (2020) I asked to stand down as Treasurer, and it was agreed that Anne Martin would take over as Treasurer of the Branch. Last year was difficult for me and Covid 19 didn’t help so the handover has only just taken place and is almost completed. I agreed to finish off the year 2020 accounts to make the handover more straight forward. Anne Martin is now collecting the subscriptions for 2021 and continuing as Treasurer from now on.  
On 31st December 2020 the financial situation was as follows: Current Account: £714.28. Deposit Account: £6,937.78. The interest for the year was £29.33 and the interest rate down to 0.222%. Cash £103.15  
There were 65 paid up ringers a drop of 4 from the previous year. This amounted to £520 in subscriptions, wedding donations £110 (2019) weddings. Please note that it will be most unlikely that there will be any wedding donations this year. Outgoings were: £325 for Guild Subscriptions and a donation to the amalgamated Bell and Restoration Funds of £300. Secretarial expenses for 2020 will appear in the accounts for 2021.  
The donation of £1,500 to the bell restoration at Weston-on-the-Green, which was agreed at the AGM last year, will shortly be sent to Weston-on-the-Green. Income over expenditure was £34.33.  
The accounts were once again audited by Chris Rippon – Treasurer of Islip Village Hall. A letter of thanks has been sent to him on behalf of the Branch.  
On the proposal of Steve Vickars, seconded by Jeremy Adams, the report was adopted. All in favour.

Report from Guild Representative (Anne Martin)   
For information on the Guild, see the Guild website: <http://odg.org.uk/> The papers and minutes for the General Committee meeting of Nov 2020 (which brings together the latest topics in the Guild) are on the website. (Search for General Committee). Some of the papers are also reproduced in *Odd Bob* issue 103. Publications from the Guild: *Odd Bob* – Printed May and November - Next Issue May 2021 – now available on Guild website. Latest at *Odd Bob* Issue 103. Annual Report – next issue available March 2021. Meetings of the various committees have taken place over Zoom since March 2020. Subscriptions 2021 – kept as previous year, £8 per ringer.

* *Education sub-committee* Sadly, it was not possible to run any of the Guild courses in 2020 and the Radley Course has already become a casualty for 2021. Decisions about the other courses will be made when more is known about the possibilities of a proper return to ringing.
* *The Young Ringers’ Award*. Normally, the next phase would run from April ‘21 – March ’22 but under the current circumstances this is not realistic. However, it is proposed to run a special one-off ‘lockdown’ version of the Award to acknowledge the progress made by youngsters in ringing-related activities during the pandemic.
* The Education sub-committee is to be re-named the Learning and Development Workgroup. The change would simply update the language used to describe learning and development within the Guild and no change to the group’s way of working, objectives or deliverables is envisaged. Delegated financial authority would remain as at present, as would the group’s membership structure. Terms of Reference for the Learning and Development Workgroup can be found in the Gen Comm papers Item 12 Work has been done on making the education section of the Guild website more user friendly and creating better links to other resources.
* *Towers and Belfries sub-committee Report* General availability of advice and website downloads. This has now widened to the material produced by CCCBR as well as ART, who are producing some excellent downloads with assistance from T&B experts. Work is now starting to update the T&B page and the material available through it. All current Tower Maintenance Awards are be extended by a year. The Tower Maintenance Handbook has been updated ready to be uploaded onto the new Guild website; and numerous ‘return to ringing’ inspections have been facilitated as towers planned to resume ringing. Sadly, all courses had been cancelled in 2020.There is a big demand for rope splicing and T&B are happy to support local courses with tuition. They want people to come ready to learn skills they can put to good use in their local towers, whether splicing ropes or spotting preventive measures so the rope wear can be reduced and rope life extended. There are many good splicing videos on YouTube (as well as some not so good...). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb-6YwA2e2Y> is instructive.
* *Discussion on Date of Eight-Bell Striking* *Competition* about moving the date of the Eight-Bell Competition from the May Day Bank Holiday to the same afternoon and at the same location as the Guild AGM. The Ringing Day would remain on the May Day Holiday. The guild is concerned that we need an activity that will attract members to the Guild AGM. The experience in recent years is that the striking competitions are a draw and provide a good social occasion. They would use this to encourage the competition participants and their groupies to stay for the AGM business meeting. Historically the host branch has provided much of the necessary quorum for the meeting but this year is a particular concern because the host branch (i.e. Bicester) is small. There may also be some members who are still reluctant to mix at events and meetings because of the Covid virus. The Guild will trial this approach in 2021 with a review and discussion at the November 2021 General Committee Meeting.
* *Report of Finance and General Purposes sub-committee* A Public Relations Working Group has been set up. It is keen to get the website up to speed and is investigating updating the Guild logo to make it more dynamic and yet still identifiable as representing the Guild. The Guild is investigating having the AGM based on combining members on Zoom with a meeting based in a hall or church. The aim would be to encourage more members to attend AGMs in either of the two ways The Guild will review the Covid-19 situation in deciding what to do about the May Ringing Day, Guild AGM and Eight-Bell Contest.
* *Other Matters* The Guild Treasurer will begin to prepare an application to HMRC for the Guild as a whole to become a registered charity, pending further discussion at the AGM. (Previously it had been suggested the Youth Fund alone should become a registered charity). The Guild Treasurer has also been considering the Guild’s membership database in the light of GDPR (the General Data Protection Regulation 2018). Work on the database would be needed if charitable status for the Guild overall is sought. The Guild Treasurer invited two or three branches to contact him if they are interested in trialling an updated approach to Guild records.
* *Safeguarding* During lockdown, there has been some virtual ringing, chief among these being Ringing Room and Handbell Stadium. These platforms have offered an opportunity for ringers to get together. Members are reminded that, if the young and vulnerable are involved in these ‘get togethers’, it is important to remember the basic principles of safeguarding. The main rule of thumb is to be aware. Organisers should make sure that parents are kept informed and, as with What’s App or other communication groups, receive a copy of any messages or invitations to participate. Publication of photographs of young people. should only happen with the express permission of parents, especially where names are also included.
* *Diary of Events 2021* Face-to face meeting will be unlikely before April 2021. It is hoped that the new Covid-19 vaccination programme will enable restrictions to be eased. A number of 2021 events have therefore been left in the diary, including the AGM in May, the 8 bell competition and the Ringing Day. There will be further discussions as the Covid situation unfolds.

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| St George’s Day | Friday 23 April |
| Ringing Day Banbury Branch | Monday 3 May |
| AGM and Eight-Bell Striking Competition Bicester Branch | Saturday 15 May |
| Guild Festival Oxford | Friday, 23 July |
| Michaelmas Course In east of Diocese | Saturday 25 September |
| Six-Bell Striking Competition North Bucks Branch | Saturday 2 October |
| Steeple Aston Course Steeple Aston | Saturday 30 October |

On the proposal of Kathryn Grant, seconded by Judith Vickars, the report was adopted. All in favour.

##### Training Officer’s Report (Steve Vickars)

In January, Sue Carter gained her ART Learning the Ropes Level 3 certificate, having successfully completed quarter peals, the result of attending a number of focused practices and travelling to other tower practices giving opportunity to treble to touches of Grandsire and Plain Bob Doubles. In February we held a focused practice at Bletchingdon with experienced ringers supporting five Bicester Branch ringers in trebling and ringing inside to Doubles, Minor and Surprise Minor methods. Six recent Bicester Branch recruits attended regular handling sessions held at St Helens Abingdon on Saturday mornings Between January and March 2020. Andy Wilkinson, having attended an ART Module 1 (teaching handling) course in 2019 also attended to assist the Abingdon Ringing School ringers teach handing, with Steve providing mentoring support. Charlie Bates made great progress in his learning of methods and ringing quarter peals in 2020, achieving his ART Learning the Ropes Level 5 in March, with a very nicely struck quarter inside to Grandsire Doubles in March. Charlie also regularly attended the ODG Young Ringers’ practices and events, involving walks, games and practicing for the Ringing World Striking Competition, sadly cancelled.   
With the advent of COVID-19 restrictions on real ringing and teaching, Steve has led weekly virtual practices from April 2020 to the present, using the Ringing Room website to learn and practise methods; a further benefit of keeping teams from four towers in the Branch involved in regular ringing and related social activities. Six ringers have completed virtual quarter peals, including first quarters for Gerald Bushby and Sally Cross trebling and covering to doubles quarters. In another encouraging development, ringers from the Branch also signed up for online seminars run by the Gloucester and Bristol Branch summer and winter schools covering aspects from striking, learning methods, ringing up and down to standing behind and bell frame maintenance. In addition to the use of Ringing Room, the Branch has successfully used the Wheatley software programme, allowing us to supplement ringers on Ringing Room with computer generated ringers to ring specified methods at a good pace while also adapting to human striking. I thoroughly recommend using Ringing Room with Wheatley to develop understanding of methods and good striking. If anyone is interested in trying this out, I am more than happy to run a session.   
Like all of you, I am looking forward to a return to normality with real ringing and teaching of handling, but believe that the past year has seen exciting developments in online ringing aids which can still provide benefit even after return to normal ringing practices.

##### Website Manager (Steve Vickars and Gus Bridges)

Usage of the Branch website over the past year has, understandably, reduced. However, despite Covid lockdown curtailing much of our real ringing activity, during 2020 the website received some 3000 individual visitors, and around 20 posts were added at regular intervals including communications from the Guild and the CCCBR.

Due to the continuing process of migrating the website (containing over 60 pages, 320 posts and thousands of media items) to the ODG servers, we updated both old and new sites. We are also taking the opportunity to review certain pages, adding more content from Dove’s Guide on the Tower pages. Many thanks for Gus’ assistance in helping with this additional work.

In December 2020 with the help of Anthony Cole and the Guild web team, we successfully migrated the Branch website from its old host on Anthony’s server to the ODG servers. The old website is now to all intents and purposes, offline. We are going through final checks and fixing of broken links and retrieving missing content, expecting to complete in the next week. In addition to migration of content, we are in the advanced stages of setting up three Branch distribution lists on the Guild-hosted site, for all members, officers and tower correspondents. Benefits of these include:

compliance with Data Protection, the ability for individual members to amend their details and unsubscribe, as well as Branch officers able to add and remove list members without the need for specialist technical intervention.

Interestingly, the Webmaster’s report of 2011 records that the Branch attempted to migrate to the guild server at that time, so ten years later we seem to be finally about to complete the process!

Our sincere thanks go to Anthony for his generous and patient support for the Branch website and distribution list for over more than a decade!

The intention is for the role of Web Manager to move fully to Gus, with Steve happy to continue to provide and assistance if needed.

On the proposal of Jeremy Adams, seconded by Teresa Carter, the report was adopted. All in favour.

**(7) ELECTION OF NEW MEMBERS**No new members

**8) ELECTION OF OFFICERS**The following were elected: President: Willie Haynes Proposed: Teresa Carter S: Kathryn Grant

Vice Presidents: Jeremy Adams Proposed: Steve Vickars S: Mandy Jones

Vice Presidents: Teresa Carter Proposed: Judith Vickars S: Sally Wale

Secretary: Kathryn Grant Proposed: Sally Wale S: Sue Macready

Treasurer: Anne Martin Proposed: Steve Vickars S: Teresa Carter

Guild Representative: Anne Martin Proposed: Jeremy Adams S: Sue Macready

Training Officer: Steve Vickars Proposed: Teresa Carter S: Gus Bridges

Joint Ringing Master: Jeremy Adams Proposed: Richard Haseldine S: Judith Vickars

Joint Ringing Master: Richard Haseldine Proposed: Jeremy Adams S: Judith Vickars

Website Manager: Gus Bridges Proposed: Judith Vickars S: Jeremy Adams

**(9) GUILD/ BRANCH EVENTS**

Colin Lee and Tony Crabtree gave an update on the Guild AGM scheduled for hosting by the Bicester Branch. This could be a ‘hybrid’ occasion if necessary with elements held by zoom, possibly at a tower or by the use of the mini-ring.

**(10) DONATION TO THE BELL FUND**

On the proposal of Teresa Carter, seconded by Jeremy Adams £200 will be given to the fund. All in favour.

**(11**) **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The appointment of the auditor for the 2021 accounts to be confirmed.

**(13) DATE OF NEXT MEETING** AGM on Saturday 12 February 2022 – (Weston-on-the-Green proposed venue).