

# CHIPPING NORTON BRANCH

May 2024 Newsletter



## Update from Branch Chairman and Ringing Master

It seems to have been a busy year so far and the months are slipping by. So, I thought it about time we published some kind of newsletter. This is an opportunity to share with others how things are going within our branch and your own tower/benefice. I'm grateful to those who have contributed material and can only encourage others to submit something in the future.

As a branch we continue to face challenges with the relatively small number of ringers we have compared to the number of towers. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of recruitment and good teaching and would encourage all active towers to do what they can. This newsletter describes some of the initiatives that's happening within the branch.

Also within this newsletter there is some feedback from the recent Guild AGM. I want to congratulate Nigel Harrison who was elected as a distinguished member of the guild in recognition of his services to the branch and guild over many years. Well done Nigel.

David Salter  
Chairman and Ringing Master

## Branch AGM

In March the Chipping Norton branch AGM was held at Hook Norton. The number of people attending was a bit low compared to recent years but that only meant there was more cake and sandwiches to share around, all wonderfully supplied by the Hooky ringers. Draft Minutes of the meeting have already been circulated via tower captains but if you have not seen a copy please do get in touch. These draft Minutes will be approved at the next business meeting which will be the Branch AGM 2025. This is currently planned to be held at Burford on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

At the AGM all the current Officers agreed to stand again so there was no change. This was only possible after a rule change which allowed incumbent officers to continue in their role if no volunteers came forward. The current lineup is:

- Chairman – David Salter
- Secretary – Geoffrey Stretton
- Ringing Master – David Salter
- Deputy Ringing Master – Dan Austin
- Treasurer – Geoffrey Stretton
- Webmaster – Keith Mitchell
- Branch Representative – David Salter

Please do consider putting yourself forward if you would like to take on one of these roles in the future.

## The Claire Tarrant Award

Each year the branch makes an award in memory of the late Claire Tarrant and this year the shield was presented to Ken Wakefield of Spelsbury.  
Well done Ken!

## Proposal for the award

I would like to nominate a man who joined the Guild in 1960 but had been ringing for a few years before. A man who has been loyal to the church all this time, particularly to the Chase Benefice and it's ringable towers, also a particularly loyal member to this branch. I talk of Mr Ken Wakefield who I believe, over the years has held every position in office for the branch.



*Ken with the Claire Tarrant Shield*

And has been one of the six elected members of the Guild for many years.

Ken has helped on many of the Guild training courses, such as the Steeple Aston and Radley courses and has certainly helped many a ringer such as myself at his local tower practice on a Monday evening. His help to me when getting grips with Grandsire doubles and a bit later Cambridge S Minor was invaluable to me as it still is to others. Ken is still very much an asset, with his Guild and ringing knowledge, as well as his support for the branch and it's practices.

## **Branch Practices**

Branch Practices continue to be well attended and a full programme for the coming year is published via the branch website <https://chippy.odg.org.uk>. If anyone wishes to attend please do email David Salter (branch Ringing Master [brm@chippy.odg.org.uk](mailto:brm@chippy.odg.org.uk)) in case dates change and so avoid disappointment.

This year we have introduced a few 'special' practices which will focus on how we move 'towards better striking'. Hopefully everyone wants to improve their striking as this represents the 'Quality' aspect of what we do. However, this is often easier said than done. The first of these 'Special Practices' was held in April at Chipping Norton and was well attended. During this practice there were a number of exercises designed to encourage better listening skills. This included some ringers turning 180 degrees to face outwards and so forced to use their ears rather than their eyes! Hopefully it was a fun evening as well as getting everyone to think harder about better striking. Key learning points included:

1. Listening for your bell – particularly important when ringing a bell which might be odd struck or you are a little bell ringing over a big bell.
2. Use a box if necessary – if your backstrokes are always hitting the bell in front you need a box (see 3 below)
3. Make sure you are always in control of the bell – if the bell drops before you are ready then striking will always be bad. Don't ring a bell that is beyond your capabilities. This is fundamental bell control (see 2 above).
4. Engage with your inner rhythm – there are just three speeds to think about – quick, medium and slow. If you ring at the right speed you will be able to see the bell you are supposed to be following and striking will improve (engage ears – see 1 above).
5. Do not blindly follow the bell in front – trust your rhythm. The bell in front might be wrong!

In short, good striking is a skill that has to be worked at, but so worth it when done well. Never abandon good striking just to crash through some new method!

The **calendar of branch practices** for the rest of the year is as follows:

- May 28 Kingham (8) – Method of the Month: Grandsire Triples
- June 25 Burford (8) – Special Practice: 'Towards better striking'
- July 30 Chadlington (6) – Method of the month: Plain Bob Doubles
- Aug 27 Charlbury (6) – Method of the Month: Grandsire Doubles
- Sept 24 Little Compton (5) – Special Practice: 'Towards better striking'
- Oct 29 Shipton-u-Wychwood (8) – Method of the Month: Plain Bob Major
- Nov 26 Spelsbury (6) – Method of the Month: St Simons Doubles
- December No Branch Practice
  
- Saturday January 25 2025 Chipping Norton (8), Special Practice: 'Towards better striking'  
11:00 – 12:30 followed by lunch in the Crown and Cushion
  
- Saturday February 22 2025 Hook Norton (8) – Method of the Month, Little Bob Major  
11:00 – 12:30 followed by lunch in the Hook Norton Brewery

## ODG 6 Bell Striking Competition (including Raising and Lowering)

Last year the Branch hosted to Guild 6 bell striking competition and for the first time this included a raising and lowering competition. Hook Norton were the winners of the raising and lowering competition and are to be congratulated on their achievement.

This year the competition is due to take place on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2024. At the time of writing a venue has not been published but is expected to be somewhere in the Sonning Deanery Branch (South East corner of the Guild)

***If the Branch wishes to defend their title or compete in the general striking competition please will you let me know before 20th June 2024.***

If more than one team wishes to compete then we will be obliged to hold a branch inter-tower competition, probably sometime during July/August so please take that into account if you wish to enter.

## Feedback from the ODG AGM

### ODG Guild – AGM – Stoke Poges 18 May 2024

**The following are brief notes** taken by me from this meeting, regarding any relevant items which I thought may be of interest to the Chipping Norton Branch. Full Minutes of this meeting will be available via the ODG website.

**Bell Fund** - is a capital fund and as such monies are invested into it. This is a solid and stable fund. Grants are only given from the interest gained by the fund each year. The capital cannot be touched. Grant requests over this past couple of years have been low. If interest is not totally taken up during any year it is re-invested into the capital and thus become untouchable, and the capital grows. The fund is at present considered to be too large. **The meeting decided not to make any donation to the Bell Fund this year.**

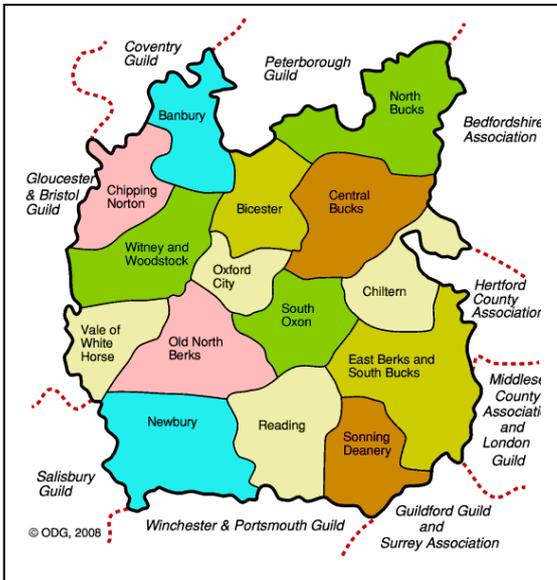
**Ringing World** – Donation of £500

**ART** – Donation of £400

**Tour Tower** – A donation was made to maintain this asset.

**Election of Officers** – Graham Clifton of Steeple Aston to continue as a Trustee.

**Student Membership** A new category to be introduced next year for all members 18 or younger and anyone still under full time education. It will be at a reduced subscription fee and different level of insurance cover will apply. Young person's Guild Representative will be required.



## Dates for your Diary

The ODG does publish a 15 year calendar which details where various guild events are to be held across the branches (there are 15 branches in the guild hence the 15 year calendar). The next big event hosted by Chipping Norton will be the Spring General Meeting in March 2026. Note this calendar is currently under review and it may not be available on the guild website.

Other events for 2024 include the following. This is not an exhaustive list so please do refer to the ODG website for further events and details.

- 9<sup>th</sup> June – ODG 10 Bell Practice at Abingdon
- 15<sup>th</sup> September – ODG 12 Bell Practice at High Wycombe
- 5<sup>th</sup> October – ODG 6 Bell Striking and Raising and Lowering Competition.
- 26<sup>th</sup> October – Steeple Aston course
- 17<sup>th</sup> November – ODG 10 Bell practice at Bicester
- 23<sup>rd</sup> November – ODG General Committee meeting (attended by branch secretary and branch representative)

**Presentations - Distinguished Membership Awarded** to Nigel Harrison of Burford Tower. This is in recognition of long service to both the Guild and the Burford Benefice. He has been tower captain at Burford for over 25 years. He has also been Guild secretary, deputy and branch ringing master for Chipping Norton branch. He has also regularly assisted with the Steeple Aston and Radley courses.

**Presentation of 2019 – 6 Bell Comp certificates** still catching up due to Covid 19

**Presentation of 2023 Striking Comp – Hook Norton Ringers – 1<sup>st</sup> Place Award** for Raising & Lowering on 6 Bells

**26 Oct Steeple Aston Ringing Course** – A volunteer is required to step forward and organise this event. Others will be needed on the day to help run it.

**Looking to the future** the Guild Rules are going to be amended next year to bring them into line with current needs & requirements. Making them less heavy on time allowing more time for ringing.

**General Committee Meetings** – There is a proposal to amalgamate the Spring and Autumn meeting into one to help reduce administration.

**Membermojo** – Unfortunately the Guild Treasurer was unable to make this meeting at the very last moment due to a sudden family commitment so this important issue will be discussed at a later date.

A full account of this meeting will be published shortly, when these minutes have been written by the Guild Secretary, I will forward to you all.

Geoffrey Stretton CN Branch Secretary 18 May 2024

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### News from Towers:

#### *Hook Norton:*

The festive season was a busy time for Hooky Bell Ringers, with both the ringing and social events in which we participated. The Bell Ringers annual Christmas party was kindly hosted by Tim and Helen Burchell and as always was a merry event. The Winter Warmer (a delightful drink fit for the occasion) which was given to guests on arrival started the evening off well. It also helped the chatter flow, before we all dug into the enticing food that everyone had contributed. This ranged from the scrumptious savouries to start followed by delicious desserts. The drinks continued to flow as is always the way with Bell Ringers and everyone had a good time. The following evening, we rang the bells for the carol singing held at the church by the Wigginton Carol Singers. After ringing, we joined in the singing, with the large crowd that had gathered and enjoyed the lovely refreshments that were served. We were complimented on our singing, with people asking, “Who is that group that is singing so beautifully?” Buoyed by this comment we are now contemplating on forming a Bell Ringers choir, after all we already have a conductor in the band! It was a really enjoyable evening, and we hope that we can take part again next year. In all, these were just a few of the highlights of the festive season, which is always the most exciting and busiest times of the year.

Mandy Gasson-Shields



Congratulations to Helen Burchell and Mick Austin for 35 years membership of the Guild. A quarter peal of Stedman Triples was rung to mark the occasion. This also happened to be the 150<sup>th</sup> Quarter peal for Helen Burchell the first of Stedman Triples.

*[Colin Lee, Dan Austin, Harry Gibson, Sally Austin, Helen Burchell, David Salter, Mick Austin, Graham Clifton – after the successful quarter peal]*

## ***Hook Norton outing***

Along with regular visitors and friends this year's Hook Norton tower outing was in and around the Devizes area. All towers, lunchtime food and pub arranged by Dan Austin (Deputy Ringing Master). First tower was St Mary's, a nice slow turning 17cwt 6 and former parish church. Listed bells that were easy to strike and a lovely old-fashioned sound. Second church just a five-minute walk, known as the castle church, now parish church, Impressive Norman tower inside and out, with a good ringing circle, 8 bells 19cwt, very nice.

After an excellent lunch by the Kennet and Avon Canal we went on to Melksham, a Taylor 8, 18cwt, nice ring where major & triples methods & plain hunt were rung. Finally on to Calne, a 23cwt 10, a light and spacious ringing chamber and easy-going bells. Here we managed to ring Grandsire & Stedman Caters, Little Bob Royal, plain hunt and call changes, where everybody excelled themselves.

Everybody seemed to have enjoyed the day, the ringing, and the company... success!



## ***Shipton u Wychwood:***

In December 2023 in Shipton a quarter peal of 1260 (one extent of Reverse Canterbury Doubles and 1140 of Plain Bob Doubles) was rung by:

1. Tracey Cooper
2. Cheryl A Watson
3. Chris Seers
4. Daniel J Watson (conductor)
5. Christine Stevens
6. Keith Mitchell

This was rung to commemorate David G Mitchell, brother of Keith.

In February 2024 some of Shipton Ringers, together with some from the Fairford area, visited St James Church, Colesbourne, Gloucestershire to ring as part of the Colesbourne Estate Snowdrop Festival.

Mike Brooks

## **Chadlington:**

We have been very fortunate to have doubled the number of Chadlington residents in our band. At the beginning of 2023 we started training Andrew Hutchings, a returning ringer from 35 years previously, Tracey Hutchings, Claire Chipchase and Jon Alsop with a dedicated tied practice. They were joined by three others who were keen to join the 'Ring for the King scheme' and whilst two of them with assistance managed this sadly other commitments precluded them continuing. So almost exactly a year ago as part of the Coronation ringing a completely Chadlington band rang rounds and call changes unassisted.

Andrew is now ringing touches of PB doubles and ringing cover for us, Tracey, Jon and Claire are enthusiastically mastering plain hunting and will soon be moving on to greater things. Many thanks must go to Matt Summers, Ken Wakefield and Mike Summers for all their dedicated assistance with the training. Our other ringers, Diane regularly rings for Sunday service, Sue is often away in Wales and Nina is taking a little break for personal reasons but hopes to be back with us soon. Bernadette from Ascott under Wychwood, who also learnt with us, rings for benefice services and joins us on practice night as well as regularly attending Shipton under Wychwood's practice, plain hunting and mastering ringing cover.

Keith Mitchell

## **ODG General Belfry and Maintenance Course**



In April the Chipping Norton Branch hosted the ODG General Belfry and Maintenance course. This was held in Church Enstone which proved to be a great venue for holding such an event. The course was superbly arranged and delivered by Tony Crabtree and other members of the Towers and Belfry committee. Whilst the number of students was low compared to previous events this meant that more time could be spent answering their questions and delving into the detail. Topics included general health and Safety, Rope management, pulleys, guides, sound control and maintenance schedules. There was an opportunity to ring the bells and understand how small changes can make a significant and positive difference to the experience a ringer may have whilst ringing.

We were grateful to Graham Clifton for his assistance, expertise and for sharing anecdotes from his time as a bellhanger. Overall, the event proved to be very informative and an excellent forum for students to share experiences.



## **Membership Trends**

Our Branch Chairman asked me to write a piece about recruitment, which coincidentally the Guild Master Katie Lane also thought very relevant in her opening welcome at the Guild AGM at Stoke Poges on 18 May 2024; I quote “we are walking with Eyes Wide Shut, if we allow ourselves to believe we will have enough ringers for the future of bellringing in this branch and the country as a whole. There are just not enough young ringers currently onboard capable of carrying us through the next 25 years”.

Do we need to recruit new ringers? Well, looking back through the record books over the recent past, I see the Branch has always been one of the smallest in the Guild. In 2000 it had its highest membership for many a year at 99. A dramatic blip occurred in 2003 as they dropped to 77, but by 2023 our numbers had recovered to a healthy 82 but over this past year it has fallen to 74. So perhaps we ought to think about recruiting. Even if it's just to replace those 8 lost members!

So how do we go about raising the numbers? We need to understand what caused them to stop in the first place. Are they leaving because they are no longer motivated enough or are they being dragged away by other events that seem more interesting and appealing to them?

### **Pros & Cons of Bellringing.**

**Pros:** Ringing allows you to make friends and enjoy a warm welcome when visiting bell towers wherever. Its free to learn and ring each week. Its enjoyable and satisfying when you master the skills needed to ring well and become part of a team. It's a very social activity, it's a challenge, and people like to be challenged both intellectual and physical. A variety of people come because they can hear the bells or know a ringer. They then get motivated by the social side of ringing and the sense of service to the community. **Cons:** Climbing 40 or more tower steps might just be too much to bear for an evening's entertainment. But whatever it is, we ought to make an effort to bring people back or recruit new into our towers. But where do we start to look for them?

### **The Church**

Members of the church congregation often see bell ringing as a church and community duty and it's always useful to have strong links to the church and they will always be there for Services.

### **Working-age adults**

Some towers see working-age adults as the ideal recruits. They are often married, settled, have a family in the village, kids at school or university and a job, no plans to move, old enough to show a commitment and bring along experience, intelligence, and yet are physically able enough to ring. And they can learn quickly.

### **Retirees**

This is a group that divides opinion. Are they worth the effort when they take longer to teach, probably won't become advanced method ringers, and might have to give up because of ill health (what am I saying!)? Well, retirees do have the time to learn, experience in working with teams, and professional skills and self-confidence learnt over many years during their working lives.

### **School and youth groups - Scouts and Guides**

This requires someone with vision, commitment, and passion. Organising an evening of fun and varied activities in the tower and church can lead to a trickle of young people who have asked to learn to ring. The adult leaders tell their friends, and this brings in further requests, spreading the word among the more active children in the area and the results can be extremely rewarding.

### **Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme**

The scheme gets children into the tower and learning to ring, but how many of them continue ringing afterwards? Some definite successes but many participants will get their report book ticked & signed and leave the tower, never to return!

### **Lapsed Ringers**

This should be our main group to aim for. We may know lapsed ringers living in our villages. They will have given up ringing for a number of different reasons, but those issues may not be relevant now so track them down and remind them where the tower steps are.

### **University students**

These are the bell ringing leaders of the future. Nurture them, train them and be proud of them. They won't be there in three years' time, but what you could have is a new intake each year.

With some effort from us all the Branch could effectively recruit new members and regain lapsed ones, giving us a more vibrant and active bell ringing community for the benefit of us all. Some of these suggestions may seem very simplistic but we must start somewhere.

I acknowledge that some towers have taken this challenge on board: Chadlington, under the direction of Keith Mitchell, has doubled the number of resident ringers over the past year. There is also good progress being made at Hook Norton and Chipping Norton. Chippy has been successful in recruiting 2 lapsed ringers and has been involved with the teaching of a growing number of new learners and has established a regular routine of practices.

Geoffrey Stretton – CN Branch Secretary