

Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers-Chipping Norton Branch

Minutes of the 2025 AGM

Held at St. John the Baptist Church Burford - Sat 1 March 2025

The meeting opened at 16:35 with the following attending: Geoffrey Stretton, David Salter, Keith Abbott, Michael Haynes, Catherine Lane, Trevor Withell, Sally Austin, Keith Mitchell, Ken Wakefield, Helen Burchell, Dan Austin, Mick Austin, Chris Harris, Dan Glyde, Andrew Pickett, Bernadette Collins, Peter Kenrick, Jonathan Muller & Christine Stevens.

1. Chairmans Welcome

David opened the meeting by welcoming all present and began with a vote of thanks for everyone who helped with the organisation of the AGM, especially Andrew Pickett for the venue, Christine Stevens for the refreshments, Jonathan Muller for playing the organ, and to Rev Cedric Reavley for conducting the service. David also welcomed Catherine Lane (Guild Master)

2. Apologies were received from:

Jon Alsop, John Snowden, Tony Merry, Mandy Gasson-Sheilds, Karen Roberts, Peter Harris, Elaine Byles, Jo Cook, Nicki Unwin, Mike Brooks, Joy Brooks, Cathy Elliott, Christine Seers, Alison Minson & Mike Summers

3. Claire Tarrant Award

Two nominations had been received which were duly discussed at a Branch Committee meeting. The winning candidate was decided by casting votes. The majority winner was **Laura Cooper of Shipton-under-Wychwood**. The Chairman read out a supporting statement with the reason why those who proposed Laura thought she would be worthy of the award. Well done to Laura who is a young but deserving winner. Unfortunately, Laura couldn't be present at this AGM so the shield will be presented to her at the next Branch Practice.

4. Minutes of the 2024 AGM

Helen Burchell proposer the minutes be accepted as a true record – seconded by Ken Wakefield and all voted in favour.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Membership – From the Secretary

Membership retention is down on last year as we lost 12 ringers, with people decided for various reasons that they would like to stop ringing as age was catching up on them. One member transferred out to the Banbury branch, but two extremely experienced ringers transferred in from Banbury. We did gain three new members during the course of the year however the overall numbers fell from 82 to 75.

New Member: Rachel Horton-Harpin of Hook Norton tower was proposed as a new member but was not able to attend this meeting. Proposed by Jonathan Muller and seconded by Sally Austin, she will be presented with her certificate at a future Branch/Tower Practice.

7. Chairmans & Ringing Masters Report

David thanked everyone for their support during the last year, both to the Branch but also to himself having completed his second year as Chairman.

He also thanked the other officers of the Branch for their work and commitment in the running of this branch. David said he was particularly grateful to Geoffrey for continuing to take on the role of secretary, even though he initially only accepted as a temporary measure. This is in addition to his work as branch Treasurer. David suggested two key priorities for our Branch - recruitment and striking. Our branch has 20 towers with bells capable of being rung - but it's a fact we only have 6 active bands - including Chipping Norton, Hook Norton, Chadlington, Charlbury, Shipton-under-Wychwood and Burford, with some of these bands regularly ringing bells in neighbouring villages. So there are some really busy and dedicated ringers out there and they are to be applauded for all they do. So against that background it's pleasing to see various successes from across the branch with new ringers either coming forward or being taught. If you are an active tower and don't have any new recruits, then you should be encouraged to do whatever you can to attract new ringers.

On the second point about striking, we all know it's not always easy and we all do our best, but sometimes just a small word before a touch can be enough to focus the mind and make a significant difference to the striking. Good striking is the quality aspect of what we do and should be at the forefront of our minds whenever we ring.

With this in mind it was hugely satisfying to see Hooky tower win for a second time the guild 6 bell raising and lowering competition and so retain the Guild Coronation Shield donated by Robert Newton. Not only that but they also came a very credible 3rd in the main 6 bell striking competition, so well done to Hooky.

As a concluding thought David made an observation, and it is a recurring theme, but we need more volunteers to take on officer roles. Without volunteers to fill these roles then the branch will literally cease to exist. David currently fills 3 roles as Chairman, Ringing Master and Branch Representative, Geoffrey is doubled up as both Secretary and Treasurer. If anyone is willing to consider helping out then please, please do come forward.

8. Secretary's Report

Annual Report returns were requested in early Feb and some changes made. As well as the normal updating of members against each tower, there were postcodes to correct and practice times to update. Changes were also made to non-ringing Tower Correspondents at Chastleton, Little Compton & Salford. Our thanks go to all these new churchwardens who have agreed to do this task on our behalf.

Unfortunately, during 2024 we saw the loss of yet another Branch Tower at Salford, when the remaining resident ringer Nick Hill moved away from the area.

It was very pleasing and an honour for the branch to have Nigel Harrison of Burford elected to Distinguished Membership of the Guild in recognition of his long services to the branch and guild over many years.

The year will be remembered by all Branch Secretaries for Membermojo, which consumed many hours of our time to get members registered in time for the deadline in November. Many zoom meetings to attend too but we finally got there with just a few casualties along the way when some non-resident members decided not to continue in the branch. Even as recently as this Feb, we were being asked to visit our Membermojo accounts and update them. Some voiced opinions that this wasn't necessary, but I can confirm that we will need to do this every year ongoing from now, and especially this coming year as the system beds itself in. The online form may require changing as extra details are added as Guild or Branch Officers ask for additional item of information. Next year, when subscription is done through Membermojo, we will be asked to login to make our payments, so yes it will become a necessary annual task to perform.

The 11 Branch Practices through the year went well with good turnouts from the majority of the towers holding up very well. Average attendance was 15 with all practices being well supported by the Hook Norton & Burford ringers.

9. Treasurers Report

Geoffrey gave a good report on the Branch Accounts (attached) which showed that the General Current Account finished with a deficit of £14.80. He explained that the increase in subs from £8 to £10 last year only benefited the Guild. The share to branches stayed the same at £3 a member, and as we lost 7 members during that year and as this is our only form of income, there was less income to the branch.

The CBF Deposit Fund – better known as the **C/N Bell Fund** increased by £435 as interest yielded a healthy £278.50. The fund currently stands at £5,610.88.

As in previous years, he will add £100 to the £45 collected from individual donations given during this year's collection of subscriptions and deposit the sum of £145 in this fund.

At the end of the presentation of this account, questions ranged from how one obtains access to the fund when money was wanted, to what is the annual limit available from the interest, to what does the fund actually invest in. Geoffrey promised to enquire into all these questions and to get back to the membership with the answers in the near future.

As is the normal procedure the Treasurer asked if the branch wished to donate £100 to the ODG Bell fund. This was proposed by Sally Austin, seconded by Keith Abbott and carried unanimously.

There being no other questions regarding these or the earlier accounts they were proposed by Dan Austin as being a true record and seconded by Trevor Withell. Carried unanimously.

10. Webmasters Report

Keith stated that the website is now back up and running after being down at the start of the year. Apparently, it was caused by an update to WordPress which meant loading a backup version which unfortunately did not contain the latest post, but I was able to rewrite it and luckily still had a copy of the photograph. It would be great to have new content so pictures and further information about your towers in addition to any items of interest and news would be gratefully received.

11. Election of Officers

Current Branch Officers are: -

Chairman – David Salter

Hon. Secretary: Geoffrey Stretton

Hon. Treasurer: Geoffrey Stretton

Ringling Master/Training Officer – David Salter

Deputy Ringling Master – Dan Austin

Branch Representative – David Salter

Newsletter Editor – see secretary above

Webmaster: Keith Mitchell

The Chairman, Treasurer & Web Master, who have all been in post now for 3 years are willing to stand again, there being no other nominations.

Branch Secretary - There was a nomination from the floor that **Trevor Withell of Hook Norton** was prepared to take on this role. He was duly proposed by Keith Mitchell and seconded by Dan Austin

The proposal was carried unanimously by those present, and he was duly thanked for taking on this role as a Branch Officer by all.

For the following 2 positions the current Branch Officers have come to an end of their 3 years term and so volunteers need to be nominated for the following posts:

Ringling Master/Training Officer As no one came forward to take on this role David Salter agreed to continue in the role for a further year.

Proposed to continue in the post by Mick Austin and seconded by Keith Abbott

Deputy Ringling Master. As no one came forward to take on this role, Dan Austin agreed to continue in the role for a further year.

Proposed to continue in the post by Andrew Pickett and seconded by Helen Burchell

12. Updates from the Guild – given by Catherine Lane - Guild Master

Catherine started by declaring that the ODG is the largest Guild in the world having been started back in in 1851 by the clergy. It now has a membership of greater than 2,500 ringers.

She continued by enlightening us on the difficulties of the previous administrative structure of the Guild and why there had been the need to introduce Membermojo

Prior to Membermojo, the organisation had no real idea of its members ringing abilities or its true age makeup, which was needed for insurance purposes and for it to be a web-based system that ran online for ease of access for the officers using it.

Members are now responsible for maintaining their own personal records and can choose to opt in or out on how much or how little correspondence they wish to receive from the Guild or Branch.

We were reminded to take care with emails. When getting communications from any Guild Officers that needs you to reply, you are asked to remember to take care and reply to Sender only.

The Guild structure is going to change so why do we need to restructure? Because we need to communicate in a modern way. To that end, we now have a Communications Officer which will help enormously.

Existing committees were never structured properly, and officers spent too much time making decisions but then not actually having enough time to act on those decisions. Hopefully these changes will greatly reduce the amount of administration and duplication and allow more ringing to take place. Old committees never took any actions. They were given lots of suggestions but just never had the time to put anything into practice. She used the slogan “we need you as members to give us permission to get a move on”.

Other Guild topics covered:

ODD BOB: We are grateful for Catherine Grant who has taken on the role of ODD BOB editor.

Branch Secretaries are asked to dig out old Branch AGM minutes and pass them on to the Guild Librarian Douglas Beamont. Don't allow them to get lost.

Catherine explained that she had intended to stand down from her role as Guild Master but has now delayed that decision because Karen Pile needs to stand down from her position as Guild Secretary for personal reasons and it was thought that if the two of them retired at the same time it would cause too much upheaval in the Guild.

Other future changes: Guild Rules need to be re-written to allow things to move forward much faster.

Last year there was talk of the Branch Representatives being elevated to a higher status within the Guild and to be known as a Branch Spokespersons, but this idea has for the moment been toned down and put on the back burner as it was moving too quickly against other changes within the Guild. So, changes are coming, but not this coming year.

Projects: The Guild is looking to fund more applications for Sound Proofing of towers to help with the increasing number of housing developments within villages that are springing up near churches. A case of let's try and stay ahead of the game and not alienate potential new recruits.

13. Forthcoming Events & Meetings

8 March – Spring General Committee & Bell Fund AGM at Bucklebury
25 March – C/N Branch Practice – Spelsbury

29 March – Radley One-Day Course

5 April – ODG Training Officers, Secretaries & Ringing Masters at Bletchington – 10.00 – 14.00. *This meeting includes a ring*

29 April – C/N Branch Practice

5 May – ODG Bell Fund Ringing Day - 08.00 – 17.00

17 May – AGM and 8 Bell Striking Competition (South Oxon Branch)

4 Oct – 6 Bell Striking Competition (Oxford City)

22 Nov – Autumn General Committee Meeting & 10 Bell Striking Competition (Bicester Branch)

14 March 2026 - Guild Spring General Committee Meeting to be hosted within the Chipping Norton Branch. The venue is still to be decided.

14. AOB – There was no other business to discuss

15. Vote of thanks – A vote of thanks had been recorded at the beginning on the meeting. Thanks to Rev Tom Putt and his team for the use of the church.

Next year's AGM will be held on 7 March 2026, which is expected to be at Chadlington

There being no further business the chairman closed the meeting at 17.25