

Secretary's Report

I am reliably informed that 2008 got off to a good start with New Year's Day ringing and refreshments at Wantage, the home tower of our Newsletter Editor (who was also conspicuous by his absence). Thanks go to the Wantage ringers, who followed/ignored Peter's instructions to the letter.

Branch practices so far this year have been less well attended than in recent years. It was a cold February evening when we assembled at Harwell, but those who braved it had a warm welcome and helped to make a difference to the practice. Again only a few Branch members made it over to Sunningwell, but we had a very useful Plain Bob Doubles and Minor practice, with plenty of rounds and call changes thrown in for some of our newer members. Strangely the lack of foresight in advertising the recent practice at Childrey did not have a negative effect on the number attending. More came to this practice than to any other this year and we managed a course of Cambridge Surprise Major!

Kate Crennell continues to organise monthly improvers practices on mid-week afternoons and extends a welcome to all to attend, either as learner or helper. Richard Loyd organises Surprise Major practices on the first Wednesday of alternate months (February, April, June, August, October and November) and all who are learning from Cambridge onwards are invited.

The Branch six-bell striking competition was held prior to the A.G.M. in Drayton on a cold but dry Saturday in March. Three teams entered this year, with Wallingford coming a good first, followed closely by Blewbury and Abingdon. Wallingford will go forward to represent the Branch at the Guild six-bell striking competition in October. Thanks go to Hilarie Rogers and Kay Tuckwell for coming over from the South Oxon Branch to be our judges.

At the A.G.M., the status quo was maintained amongst the Branch Officers. Thirteen new members were elected from six towers and one lapsed member was re-elected. After some discussion (interrupted by a gleeful incoming text message from an absent Welsh rugby-loving Branch member), it was decided that £200 be donated from Branch funds to the Guild Bell Fund. It was also decided that 'Donation to the Guild Bell Fund' be an item on the agenda for consideration at future A.G.M.s.

Whilst discussing forthcoming social events, the question of attendance at the A.G.M. was raised yet again. Only 29 out of over 250 Branch members came to the meeting at Drayton. It was suggested that, in future years, we might hold some sort of social event after the meeting. If any of you have any ideas on what we as a Branch can do to improve attendance (other than have the dates of the rugby union six nations championships changed), please let me know. All suggestions will be considered, if not implemented!

In the meantime, I can only say to the missing 220+ is that you passed up on the chance of a really good tea provided by the Drayton ringers (thank you) and a very entertaining meeting, which ended with a mini 'Antiques Roadshow' courtesy of Richard Loyd's tendency to impulse buy and Duncan Webb's interesting old photograph.

Since the A.G.M. we have had another new member elected to the Guild from Letcombe Regis. Also this spring, we have sadly lost Colin McInnes, who was a former tower captain at West Hendred.

The next date for your social diaries is Saturday, 5th July. This is the date of our Branch outing, kindly being arranged by Philip Roberts of Didcot. Following on from the success of last year, this outing will take the same format. There will be ringing in the morning and afternoon, finishing at Witney. This will be interspersed with a pub lunch and afternoon tea. Full details will be distributed soon to all tower correspondents. In the evening of the same day, Stuart and Naomi Gibson will again throw open their conservatory and garden for a Branch barbecue. No doubt competition will be fierce on the croquet green and the less energetic amongst us can enjoy the garden whilst others display their trampolining skills. This is always a great day, so please make every effort to come along and join in the fun.

Another date for your diaries is Saturday, 15th November, when the Blewbury ringers are holding a Barn Dance and Supper in their village hall. More details will follow nearer the time, but do start brushing the cobwebs from (and polishing) your dancing shoes now!

Gill Loyd