

Suffolk Guild of Ringers
Belfry Advisory Committee (BAC) - Minutes

Venue - Tostock church and PH: 15th October 2024 at 19.30 hrs

Present – C Davies (Chair), C McArthur (Sec.), C Birkby, A Moulton, J Taylor, J Stevens, M Steggles, T Hart.

Apologies – W Girling, C Girling and J Flatters. N Whittle has recently been in hospital and the meeting sent best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Thanks to M Steggles for arranging the nights venue and the ringing.

1. **Minutes of previous meeting** - 22 May 2024 at Troston, agreed as accurate and signed by chair.
2. **Management committee feedback** - A grant request has been received from St Mary le Tower (St M le T), Ipswich. It requested support for a new installation of 6 dumb bells, for use with an Abel simulator and six laptops in a manner like the St Peter Mancroft Ringing Centre. The committee unanimously believe that this project falls outside the current BRF guidelines. However, given its importance to the future of the Guild, the GMC, at the 23 Jun meeting, agreed to make a £3K grant from general funds with an additional £1.2K granted from the 'Green Bottle' fund specifically earmarked for IT. No decision was made on any inspection requirements once the training installation had been installed.

There are currently three ongoing restoration projects.

At Fornham St Martin, the bells have been installed and test rung. The Ringing Master made several points after her inspection including the need for a new set of ropes (awaited from Ellis Pritchard); the sliders on bells 2 and 7 were not sitting properly (subsequently adjusted); temporary LED lighting was causing discomfort to ringers (planned new lighting yet to be installed); tenor does not rise as it should on handstroke. Our technical advisor suggested that this could be easily resolved by adjusting the location of the garter hole (work in progress) since the bell rocks very freely on its new roller bearings. Additionally, the new ropes will help the bells rise, rather than the very tired ropes temporarily in use. The final point concerned noise levels in the tower. Although the bells sounded bright outside, in the ringing chamber she felt the sound clarity was disappointing. Resolving this issue is a longer-term issue and will be tackled by the BAC in the medium term. At present, a plastic sheet is tied across the gothic arch which separates the main body of the church from the ground floor ringing chamber, to limit the dust and muck entering the church from the building work within. When the electric work and new ringing chamber floor is completed, the dust sheet will be removed, and we will then be in a better position to analyse and potentially improve the internal sound balance and clarity. The BAC felt that the majority of the snagging issues would be quickly and easily resolved and that we should be able to make improvements to the internal sound balance. Given that all her points had been addressed, the BAC felt that there was no need to hold back part of our grant, and that it should be paid in full the Fornham St Martin PCC as soon as possible.

At Drinkstone, considerable progress has been made. Bells and the old wooden frame have been removed, and the 6 new bells cast. However, the discovery of bats in the church/tower has required work to stop whilst a bat license is obtained. The license is expected to be granted in November, at which time work will recommence. It is hoped the project will be complete by the early new year.

The final ongoing project is at Blythburgh, where we granted £1K towards the refurbishment of the bearings, new pulley blocks (both jobs undertaken with 2 BAC helpers), and finally the repainting of the frame. Nicholson's plan to undertake the work starting no earlier than 6 May 25.

3. Traing On the 18 May, the BAC ran two, three-hour bell maintenance courses at Framlingham. The courses were overseen by our two technical advisors, (with BAC help) and 22 people attended. On the 28 Sep 24, a further 23 people attended two identical courses. All the feedback has been very positive, and we will consider running another course in 2025, subject to sufficient interest being shown by the membership.

4. Membership - The BAC would like to thank Tim Hart for all his hard work at Fornham St Martin during the re-installation of their 8 bells. The committee recommended that he become a member of BAC, subject to ratification by management.

The meeting noted the retirement from BAC of D Rose, R Coe and M Rolph. The meeting thanked them for much work over the years and encouraged them to continue with the practical projects as appropriate. With the new addition above of T Hart, the BAC membership will now be a total of twelve active members.

5. District Reports -

Bedfield St Nicholas: Bells have been test rung and excessive frame movement was observed, so they are considered unringable. A local project to restore is ongoing but not imminent. The tower is reportedly cracked and in poor structural condition.

Bramfield St Andrew: Reports of the 4 and 5 bells being very difficult to ring, despite being listed as "fair going order". As always, the going order refers to the quality of the installation, rather than the ringing experience. However, the BAC will conduct an inspection ASAP with a view to updating the guidance.

Bures St Mary the Virgin: A broken tenor clapper was locally welded. However, it reportedly failed again (but in a different place) during a peal attempt and will need to be returned to a bellhanger for rectification.

Copdock St Peter: Advice provided with reference to rehanging the bells in a new or frame. There is little space in the bell chamber and the bells currently swing into the louvre window recesses. This project is gaining momentum and is increasingly more likely to happen.

Eye St Peter and Paul: Local band has ceased, and the bells are only occasionally rung. The tower is rated as poor, due to frame/tower movement and worn condition of fittings. However, if prepared to accept those limitations, there is no reason that the bells can't be rung.

Framlingham St Michael and all Angels: Stainless steel clapper pin on No6 bell sheared off. Clapper currently with Taylor's under repair.

Framsden St Mary. This 16cwt eight bell ring is only occasionally rung on the back 6 (the two tenors are recently reported as being hard work). The treble is not rung due to a lack of flooring under the bell. The BAC intend to replace the flooring under one bell to enable all eight bells to once again be rung after a full test ring.

Haverhill St Mary the Virgin: Inspection underway to decide if the bells can be rehung in the existing frame, or if a new frame is required.

Henley St Peter: Project underway to replace the seriously deteriorated intermediate floor.

Hoxne St Peter and Paul. Eight Kelttek bells have been allocated to the church, currently in storage with Blyth and Co (Bellhangers). Village strongly behind the project and actively fundraising.

Ipswich St Clements: Considering installation of sound control due to noise complaints/concerns from nearby flats and the future implications of additional planned building nearby.

Ipswich St Lawrence: Tower unringable due to disintegrating flint/stonework on the tower. Hearsay suggests that this is a major financial challenge with a 6-figure restoration cost.

Lakenheath St Mary the Virgin: Minor repairs completed by the technical advisor.

Levington St Peters: The three chiming bells have been rung for a wedding, but a full inspection is required.

Mendlesham St Mary the Virgin: Reports of a cracked clock chiming bell. BAC Chairman spoke with the tower captain and a churchwarden to warn them of the danger and the risk to the ancient 1575 Steven II Tonne bell. No action appears to have been taken by the parish, and the bell is still being chimed as the clock hour bell.

Metfield St John the Baptist: Re-Inspection and advice after reported difficulties with the number four bell. The parish gave a donation to the Belfry Restoration Fund in respect of the BAC's work.

Risby St Giles: Inspection undertaken of this 3-bell tower. It was recommended that no full circle ringing take place because of potential structural issues.

Stowmarket St Mary and Peter: Ongoing work including tweaking the sound control system. There is no truth in rumours circulating that they have plans to replace their tenor bell. Earlier in the project, Kelttek had been asked to look for a suitable replacement bell, but subsequently, that request was withdrawn.

Sudbury St Peter: Inspection. Building now called "The Art Centre". Bells rung from downstairs, where the bells can't be heard, or upstairs where they are very noisy. It now looks impossible to ring all 10 bells from the mezzanine floor (only the front six).

Wrentham St Nicholas: The bells have been inspected and a project to allow some ringing later this year is ongoing. Although the fittings are in a reasonable condition, they await a tower and frame movement inspection, with all six bells in motion, before a decision can be made as to future ringing. Technical Adviser leading on this project and ropes being repaired.

Wetherden St Mary the Virgin: Have requested an inspection.

6. Next meeting. We discussed winter meetings and felt that for the next one we would try a Saturday morning BAC. So, we have permission to ring at St Margarets Ipswich at 10.00 hrs on 1st February 2025, with a meeting following in the church at 10.30 hrs. Parking nearby in public car parks like Crown Pools is not a problem.