

Suffolk Guild of Ringers

Belfry Advisory Committee (BAC) minutes from a meeting – Tuesday 3 June 2025

Present – C Davies (Chair), C McArthur (Sec), M Steggles, T Hart, J Flatters, and J Stevens.

We met at Fornham St Martin, where the opportunity was taken for BAC members to ring the newly restored bells. Many thanks to Deborah Blumfield for allowing us to join her practice and hosting the meeting.

The meeting opened with a notice of a BAC member retirement. It is with regret we note the resignation of John Taylor from the BAC. John has been an active member for many years, and his lead on the Little Cornard project was particularly noteworthy. His contribution to the BAC will be sadly missed, and we thank him for all he has done, knowing his legacy will ring out in many Suffolk churches for years to come.

Finally, it is with great sadness we note the passing of Carol Girling, a longstanding and valued member of the BAC. She left her mark in many Suffolk towers and was a font of knowledge about the history of bells, towers and ringers. She will be greatly missed by her many friends.

We held a few moments of reflection for the life of Carol Girling. Secretary will send a letter of condolence from the BAC reflecting her many years of bell work across Suffolk.

Minutes of previous meeting 1/2/25 – Agreed as correct and signed.

Matters arising - None

Grants - There was one new grant request to consider. At Blythburgh, two of the clapper bushes were found to be significantly worn when the clappers were removed during the lifting of the bells. The parish took the opportunity to deal with the issue as part of the ongoing restoration. They received an estimate of £1350 from Nicholson's and the work was carried out. The rebushing was not included in the original work schedule (for which a £2000 grant has already been awarded), and the parish approached the BAC for an additional grant. The BAC unanimously recommended an additional grant of £150.

Ongoing restoration and enhancement projects - At **Fornham St Martin**, the bells have been installed and a service of dedication held. The BAC continues to work on a small number of items to complete the project. These include painting the upper surface of the frame with non-slip paint, fitting linear actuators to the sound control flaps in the louvres, so that they can be remotely controlled and the installation of a new floor in the ringing chamber. Additionally, there remain some plastering and decorating tasks to be completed.

At **Drinkstone**, the new 6 bell installation in a new steel, 8 bell frame has been completed. The only task outstanding is the installation of a ladder in the belfry. The bells have also been dedicated.

The final ongoing project is at **Blythburgh**, where we granted £2K towards the refurbishment of the bearings, new pulley blocks (both jobs undertaken with two BAC helpers), and finally the repainting of the frame. In addition, all six clappers were also re-bushed. This project was completed on 5 Jun 25.

Mention was made of the Adrian Knights bequest and progress of the working group. A letter has been sent to all Suffolk parishes, briefly explaining the aim of the bequest and inviting offers of interest. To date, eight churches have expressed interest, but the calling notice remains open until September.

Guild matters - The single issue that causes most controversy within the BAC is the grading of towers in the Guild Annual Ringers Handbook. Historically, technical advisors have rated the installations on technical merit, such as whether the bells had plain or roller bearings, or the type of construction and condition of the frame and fittings. It also considered the stability of the tower. However, most ringers are more concerned with the actual ringing experience. As a result, we have first class rings downgraded because they are in a wooden frame, whilst other rings with roller bearings and steel frames do not “go as well” as their numerical rating would suggest.

The BAC felt that the ringer’s handbook should reflect the ringing experience, rather than a technical appreciation of the bells. However, to grade all Suffolk towers is a major undertaking, and is, by its very nature, a subjective judgement. Nonetheless, if enough ‘ringing reports’ were gathered, a fair average report would result. The committee felt that if it were technically possible, ideally as a form on the website, we would encourage ringers to rate their ringing experience on the website by a numerical score. If and when, sufficient reports – perhaps a minimum of 10 were received for an individual tower, the scores could be averaged and awarded a grade. The grades would lie from ‘not to be rung’ (rather than unringable), through “poor”, ‘fair’, ‘good’, ‘very good’, to ‘excellent’. We would only change the report format when sufficient data had been collected, which might take as much as two years to complete. **Tim Hart to draft a proforma on “bell condition and ringability” for tower captains, that will be circulated within BAC for comments.**

District Reports - During the last four months, the BAC’s work has continued helping and advising parishes throughout the county. These included:

Aldeburgh SS Peter and Paul: The 5th has long been thought of as a poor bell in the otherwise excellent 8 bell tower. Consideration is now being given to replacing the bell.

Bardwell SS Peter and Paul: Ropes lowered, new tails spliced, and ropes refitted.

Blythburgh Holy Trinity. Our diocesan advisor attended a site meeting with the architect to discuss the installation of a kitchen in the current, ground floor ringing chamber. The initial plans required substantial modification as they had not made adequate provision for the ringers on a new first floor, because of the location of stairwells and ladders impinging on the ringing circle. The bell restoration has been completed. The next stage will be the installation of a new toilet, with most of the groundworks already completed. The third and final stage will be the kitchen and new first floor ring, which will also require the present rope guides to be raised up the tower.

Bures St Mary the Virgin: Ongoing problems with much repaired tenor clapper. The bells are still being rung but it has been recommended that the tenor clapper be replaced.

Cavenham St Andrew: This 7.75cwt, 3 bell tower is currently under refurbishment, in a project led by our technical advisor.

Copdock St Peter: Advice provided with reference to rehangng the six bells in a new eight bell frame. There is little space in the bell chamber and the bells currently swing into the louvre window recesses. A new concrete ring beam will be necessary to stabilise the tower. There are also some technical issues linking the frame to the ring beam. This project is gaining momentum and is increasingly more likely to happen.

Easton All Saints: Reportedly likely to be the venue for a striking competition in 2025. Reportedly poor ropes and noisy/worn pulleys may well require BAC input before the competition. We understand that the pulley block refurbishment is now planned for summer 25.

Eye SS Peter and Paul: There is no regular band ringing at Eye. However, a recent inspection revealed no new problems. The bells were subsequently pealed during May.

Framlingham St Michael and all Angels: Stainless steel clapper staples on two bells have recently failed. All eight clappers have been returned to Taylor's for repair and rebushing, and subsequently refitted.

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.

Gipping St Nicholas: Work ongoing to refurbish their single bell for swing chiming.

Great Barton Holy Innocents: Stay replacement and new ropes fitted.

Great Blakenham St Mary's: An inspection of the two, pre-reformation bells was carried out. The larger bell is badly cracked and has not been used for some years. Their Oct24 QI report requested that the bells be made safe until such time as they be fully refurbished. A suitable scheme was proposed and is awaiting a faculty before it can be implemented.

Haverhill St Mary the Virgin: Inspection undertaken, recommending a new frame. This project, although in the early stages, is gaining momentum.

Henley St Peter: Project underway to replace the seriously deteriorated intermediate floor. Also, a serious split in the west wall originating at the top of the west window arch has resulted in all ringing being suspended.

Hoxne St Peter and Paul: Eight Keltek 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. The repair work is expected to be completed in 2025.

Ipswich St Nicholas: Tower scaffolded, bells unringable due to lose pinnacles and other structural issues. The church falls outside the faculty system and so the work is likely to require listed building consent. This is unlikely to be a quick fix.

Kelsale St Mary and Peter: Days of Eye wooden frame, fittings very tired. New toilets proposed for current ringing room which may prohibit future ground floor ringing. Possibly able to ring from the clock room if ground floor ringing ceases.

Lavenham SS Peter and Paul: Problems with odd struckness, thought to be mainly because of clappers. Consideration being given to refurbishing clappers (including wooden shafts) to improve the current situation.

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

Little Glenham St Andrew: An inspection revealed considerable frame movement whilst ringing. Fittings very tired, particularly wheels which were disintegrating and have been repaired. The Parish has been advised to only undertake short periods of ringing, typically 10 minutes, for major events such as weddings.

Mildenhall Blessed Virgin Mary: Technical Advisor inspection requested by parish.

Thornham Magna St Mary Magdalene: The back bells have reportedly been increasingly difficult to ring. Nicholson's, Taylor's and White's have all carried out full inspections with an eventual target of refurbishment/restoration.

Thurston St Peter: New leather clapper washer fitted.

Tuddenham St Martin: Bells now ringable after BAC intervention. Fittings very tired, but locals are ringing the bells and teaching beginners.

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.

Wetherden St Mary the Virgin: Have requested a BAC inspection. Rumour suggests that bellhangers have been carrying out inspections suggesting a re-hanging project is very likely.

Winston St Andrew: Intermediate floor in a very poor condition. Fittings generally tired but bells are able to be rung with regular maintenance.

Worlingworth St Mary: Technical Advisor inspection requested by parish, with an aim for refurbishment.

Other Matters - During the last seven months, the BAC has been heavily involved in three major projects. I would like to thank all those individual BAC members who have put in many days of work, and the local helpers and old friends from earlier projects who all assisted in bringing the projects to successful conclusion. Thankyou one and all!

Next Meeting - Monday 22nd September 2025.

Ringling at Blythburgh Holy Trinity at 7.00 pm followed by a meeting in the White Hart PH (IP19 9LQ) across the road at 7.30pm. Closes at 9.00pm.