

# Suffolk Guild of Ringers

## **Belfry Advisory Committee (BAC) Minutes - 6 February 2026**

Location- The Crown, Stowwupland.

Present – C Davies (Chair), C McArthur (Sec), A Moulton, T Hart, N Whittle, J Flatters, M Steggles, C Birkby.

Apologies - J Stevens, W Girling and P Lock (retiring at this meeting).

The meeting agreed minutes from 22/9/25 at Crettingham.

No grant applications received currently although Copdock is imminent.

There are currently two ongoing restoration projects. At Aldeburgh, the pulley blocks have been refurbished and replaced. However, they are waiting for detailed plans for the location of the “new” clock bell, (the former No5 bell) before they can apply for a faculty. They are hoping to have the new No5 bell installed in the summer. At Fornham St Martin, a small number of minor jobs remain outstanding.

Grant aided refurbishments that reached conclusion included Blythburgh, where they rang the first quarter peal from the first-floor ringing room on 23 Jan 26. The bell chamber refurbishments were completed last summer, but building work in the church, including construction of a new ringing floor above a newly installed kitchen located in the old ringing chamber, delayed the first quarter.

Projects gaining momentum and likely to come to fruition in the foreseeable future include Copdock, Haverhill and Wetherden. Longer term projects remain Hoxne and Thornham Magna. It is likely that a grant application from Copdock will be presented at the next GMC meeting.

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, 10 churches have expressed an interest in the project. The working committee plan to contact the towers individually to progress the next stage of the project.

The single issue that causes most controversy within the BAC is the grading of towers in the 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 also reflect the ringing experience, as well as 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 the Master and the branch ringing masters were to give their opinions as to the “going” of a particular tower, we should quickly get a good feel for the state of the towers more regularly rung. The BAC will produce a ‘ringing report’ template on the website to gather the data. Grades would be awarded from ‘not to be rung’ (rather than unringable), through “poor”, ‘fair’, ‘good’, ‘very good’, to ‘excellent’. We would then add that ‘ringing experience grade’ to the tower details in the annual report when sufficient data had been collected.

An online template has been produced and is undergoing fine tuning. The BAC will continue to develop this proposal.

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: Refurbished pulley blocks were replaced on 6 Oct. Faculty application for a new 5<sup>th</sup> bell ongoing.

Bardwell SS Peter and Paul: Replacement of two ropes.

Bures St Mary the Virgin: Ongoing problems with much repaired tenor clapper. Reports of a new tenor clapper being ordered appear premature.

Cavenham St Andrew: This 7.75cwt, 3 bell tower now has a single bell available for chiming, to the delight of the village, when it was first rung for their Christmas service.

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.

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

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: Installation of sound control because to noise complaints now on back burner because of lack of complaints after recent ringing.

Ipswich St Lawrence: Tower unringable due to disintegrating flint/stonework on the tower. The repair work is expected to be completed by the builders in Mar 26, but no news on when ringing will restart.

Ipswich St Nicholas: Tower scaffolded, bells unringable due to lose pinnacles and other structural issues. Repair work due to be completed in Jul 26.

Ipswich Minster: Bellhangers are reportedly being engaged for some remedial works to the fittings.

Kersey St Mary: Reports of a very elaborate, new lighting system installed in the church. However, tower lighting is included in the main church lighting circuits, leaving the possibility that the tower could be accidentally plunged into darkness whilst ringing.

Metfield St John the Baptist: Loss of stay bolt on No3 bell, allowed the stay to rotate whilst ringing. It jammed against the frame and pushed the bell across the pit, hard against the bearing case/frame. The ringers didn't notice! Now impossible to raise the bell higher than about 40%. Because of possible bearing damage, Taylor's will carry out the repair with BAC help, once a List B, Archdeacon's letter of Approval is obtained.

Mildenhall Blessed Virgin Mary: Technical Advisor inspection completed. The advice given suggested that the two memorial bells be retained, whilst the remaining 8 would be scrapped to make way for 10 new bells. A structural engineering report by Stuart Armitage (Morton Partnership) is underway.

Old Newton St Mary: Reportedly problems with the No2 clapper.

Pakenham St Mary: Additional bolts added to brackets, and a general tightening of the ancient wooden frame.

Pettistree St Peter and St Paul: Reportedly excessive wear on ropes due to pulleys. Pulleys being refurbished locally.

Witnesham St Mary: Inspection carried out. Bells not to be rung or chimed due to condition of frame and fittings but bells safe to remain hanging in the frame. Advice given on replacement of intermediate floors.

Wrentham St Nicholas: The bells have been inspected and a project to allow some ringing later this year is ongoing. Ropes have now been fitted. It was noted that the tenor wheel is very fragile, a mixture of woodworm and nail corrosion, and will need to be removed for repair. We now 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.

Finally, the committee has accepted with sadness the retirement of Pete Lock from BAC due to an imminent move out of area and he was warmly thanked for his work with us. A replacement in NE district is still being sought.

**Next meeting - The Crown PH Stowupland at 19.00 hrs on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2025.**