

Notes of Open General Committee Meeting held on Saturday 28 January 2017 at Sutton

Present: 65 names had been given in advance of the meeting with 57 people signing the attendance book. The meeting opened at 10.00am.

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks

Kate Flavell, Master, opened the meeting with a welcome to so many members present.

She said that these issues had been discussed at General Committee before but no consensus reached. She wanted to know the views of others and if we could get to a way forward for all or some of the four topics on today's agenda. People have differing views so that may not be possible. She encouraged all to remember that all views are valid and worthy of consideration. When speaking (one at a time), all should be respectful and courteous to others.

Everyone's views are welcome but in case we don't get to you or you would prefer just to use them, there are post-it notes available for further thoughts and comments that will be taken into consideration.

2. Recruitment and training

One of the main aims of the Association is to improve standards and expectations of ringers across the board. We need to invest in recruitment and training of ringers, provide opportunities for ringers to progress and improve their skills and promote the highest standards of leadership and stewardship in our towers. How well are we achieving this? What are the problems? What could we do better?

Paul Flavell introduced the topic with the following:

- The membership of the Surrey Association is static around 550(?) members with new members barely replacing losses
- Over 50% of the members are over 60 years old. This means we urgently need to recruit new ringers or several towers will cease ringing in a few years. I don't think this is unique to Surrey but I'm hoping we're going to do something about it.
- Towers are cancelling practices due to shortage of ringers. Thames Ditton, Kingswood, Oxted and Horley are known examples in the last 6-12 months. There is now no band at HT Clapham
- Fewer towers are capable of teaching learners and turn to other towers with experienced ringers for help
- Some 60 students attend the big training days but the same 30 or so students attend other training events
- A lot of ringers are content to ring call changes/simple things in their own towers and are not 'hobby ringers'
- Recruitment should be focussed at recruiting 'grass roots' ringers. Those who want to progress could do so by attending training events and other practices
- Poor bell handling leads to slow progress in method ringing and dissatisfaction and learners ceasing to ring
- We now have a good number of Surrey ringers who are now accredited ART teachers (about 16 including Docklands) and other good and experienced teachers we should use their skill and knowledge to train new members to a consistently high standard
- It is clear the Association should now address the issue of recruitment and retention of ringers to ensure the future of bell ringing in Surrey
- There are thousands of lapsed ringers in the country. Even if we could only attract a small proportion of them back to ringing it would be a help
- Bell ringing is a wonderful hobby with many facets to it – good physical activity, team work, all ages, engineering, computing, travel, history, music, social, national friendships etc., and we should promote this strongly as a suitable hobby for new entrants
- We are holding a recruitment and training seminar for Surrey Association members on 1st April at Caterham United Reformed Church

- The seminar and follow up clearly needs the buy in and some hard work from dedicated local ringers who will require recognition – possibly even payment – to get the commitment to take part. Details will put out on the Surrey website in the next week or two.
- The seminar is an exciting opportunity for you to get some really good ideas and inspiration as to how you can recruit and train new ringers for your tower, and hear of success stories. If you wish to take part or have any questions, please email me soonest to guarantee your place.
- There are a few training hubs who are holding regular Saturday morning practices for training new recruits (Barnes, Bletchingley, others?)
- There is a requirement to train new bands including: Walworth, Thames Ditton, Holy Trinity Clapham Common
- If all our quality teachers could give an extra Saturday morning a month we could create another training hub in the Northern District and another in the Southern District.
- Trainers could be given a payment to incentivise them to attend these sessions which could be recuperated by nominal charge to students (which would focus minds) and from a grant from Association funds.
- It should be possible to train a ringer to ring competent rounds with say 4-6 training sessions
- There should be a local recruitment campaign (local paper, social media) for these hubs
- The longer we leave it the harder it will get to replace our ageing ringers

Who is prepared to help? How can we take this forward? Is this the right way for us to be thinking?

Discussion and comments from the floor included:

Eddie Hartley: Retention is more of a problem than recruitment. Need continuity and retention.

Chris Stanley: Agreed retention is most important. Statistics show up to 90% drop-out. Nudge training towards retention and leadership.

Niki Tomlinson: Help towers at initial stages of development.

Jeremy Cheesman: Benhilton recently recruited 9 learners (aged 30-60). Key is to teach in groups. They have one publicity expert – advertised everywhere, open ringing week. 50-60 initially interested in giving it a go.

Adrian Yarding: Agreed with JC, although his example not quite so good. Problem with society. Suggested talking to schools, e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

Anne Rueff: Need to explain commitment to new ringers. Prefer them to stop ringing earlier instead of after say 6 months. Teach youngsters even if they will be off to university – for the wider ringing community.

Ian Griffiths: Duke of Edinburgh Award good. Progressing to ring more difficult things is a challenge as opportunities not always local.

Martin Crick: Teaching on difficult bells makes development difficult. Learning on their own is difficult. Need to get learners integrated socially into the rest of the band early.

David Whitehead: Need to get learners to ring on Sunday. How is this done?

Jan Herd: Difficult to learn when older. Need to ensure atmosphere of learning is good whatever age and standard.

Simon Beirne: Towers need to work together on how to recruit. Generally from church. Suggest to new recruits go to other towers if can't attend their own. Follow up with leavers.

Caroline Prescott: What can the SA do as a group?

Vicky Williams: Ringers from other towers attend Nutfield for handling tutorage. Give learners enough time to develop handling.

Kate Flavell: Teaching handling on One-to-one recommends 4 x 2 hours although some needed more, some less. What do we do as an Association – e.g. recruitment and training seminar.

Catherine Stonehewer-Newbold: Link to finance topic. Look at different ways on and thinking how we ring – different today than in the past. Is need to ring for Sunday service an expectation? How do we spend our money on recruitment? Links to schools. Creative thinking.

Kate Flavell: All items interlinked.

Simon Beirne: Youth ringers – what age of ringers is acceptable?

Caroline Prescott: Surrey Young Ringers is at its infancy. Working with Southern and Northern groups and plans are being developed.

Chris Ridley: Church is at the centre of the community. Put effort into publicity and raise awareness e.g. open days, as well as recruitment and teaching.

Paul Flavell: ... and Heritage Open Days.

Ian Griffiths: SA could provide money for equipment (cameras and TVs) to show bells being rung down in the church. Have SA equipment available for towers.

Trish Hawkins: Be more proactive in engaging with anyone.

Eddie Hartley: Continuity in training is important. Do everything you can to avoid cancelling practice – visit other towers to avoid. Get new ringers in tower ringing with rest of band within 6 weeks else they are lost. Recognise who wants to get to what standard. More help with development o the right level.

John Squirrell: Southern District made up of villages – getting ringers to a standard good enough to ring elsewhere is difficult. One solution does not fit all.

Malcolm McAlister: Place banners in front of church intermittently.

Jonathon Startup: Wandsworth have a tower open day every year. Getting screen / video in church. Congratulations to youth leaders. Get people to help but ensure they do not intimidate learners.

Kate Flavell: Produce SA booklet 'to commit' (lessons / Sunday ringing). Banner at Ockley. Use ideas from elsewhere that suit Surrey. Requested help and volunteers.

Chris Stanley: Are the SA doing the right thing?

Paul Flavell: Recruitment page on website – single person responsible for collating.

Notes from Post-Its:

- Need struggling towers and inexperienced tower captains to invite / request support from experienced ringers.
- District Training days should be at all levels, rounds, simple methods. More advanced students with their own time slots. Save people sitting / snoozing. (*Ian Griffiths*).
- Ideas to get lots of different levels of ringers to ring together e.g. on 6, Treble lead only with bob minimus on middle 4 and tenor cover – more simple ideas please. (*Ian Griffiths*).
- Concentrate training on a few individuals “with potential”, and then they would become those to help others at future events. (*Ian Griffiths*).

- We need to say ‘No’ you do not have the skills to become a competent ringer, I need to spend more time on others and I don’t think you will enjoy it. Teaching time is limited and needs to be utilised effectively and not wasted on no-hopers. *(Richard Wallis)*
- Teach lots of ringers at the same level e.g. PBd, Gd, to improve together. Lists of people who want to move onto triples, major and beyond *(Simon Beirne)*.
- Kate’s suggestion re focussed sessions e.g. PBd, Gd is excellent. A lot of us would like to start learning these from scratch; maybe a “beginners PBd” or “...Gd” could be considered. *(Jan Herd)*
- Group towers together to support each other e.g. a learners practice, a special practice. Towers hold a combined practice to avoid both not having a practice. *(Noel Gibbin)*
- Is anything being done to make the SA more ethnically diverse? *(Paul Bradley)*
- Teach rope splicing
- Would anyone be interested in a bookable ??? system held centrally for one with ??? ??? ???.
- Have an officer to support Recruitment / Retention *(Trisha Hawkins)*
- Financially support Summer schools *(Trisha Hawkins)*
- Pre-retirement group focused on getting basics right at individuals’ pace *(Vicky Williams)*
- Summer School e.g. Tulloch for a week. Holiday – ring, walk, tour. Some come and go for a day or two. Could include some non-ringing for “hangers on”. *(Ian Griffiths)*
- List of Surrey: Teachers willing to volunteer. Create a list of those able to visit towers. Areas or system for requesting such help. *(Simon Beirne)*
- Recruitment ideas on website. *(Simon Beirne)*
- What more can the Association do? Support towers where only one trainer trying to teach a group of learners e.g. “allocate” another experienced trainer to help at a tower for a given period.
- Worried about focus in S District being on a single Ringing centre at Bletchingley. It is not ideal – bells not that easy to handle; as a 6 the ropesight is poor, the ringing room isn’t lockable so used by church for other things. I’d like a second centre fully equipped at e.g. Redhill or St John’s – would need good sound proofing or easy access to bells. *(Alison McCormick)*
- I would be interested in a ringing hub where we started teaching our raw recruits. Good bells, easily muffled or better simulator. I could teach with other teachers input. Newer teachers must accompany their students. Intensive learning. Learning together as a group and then going back to own towers but would already know others from other towers. *(Alison McCormick)*
- Schools – Duke of Edinburgh Award. Opportunity near to hand to progress. *(Ian Griffiths)*.
- TV Screen in church showing ringing. Can the Association help – buy to lend, projector, camera, wireless kit etc. Also help with giving technical advice. *(Ian Griffiths)*.
- Learning hubs an excellent idea. Training days are great and well attended, but then what.... Towers often don’t have the trainers and experience to continue. Also if available it is 5 min once a week. Dedicated sessions amongst several towers? *(Ann Beirne)*.
- Training Days: It is difficult to get people to commit without knowing the venues. If had a “PBDoubles at Putney on xx between (time) rather than turn up at Wimbledon and find out then. Could book on a 1st come 1st served basis?
- Training: Need long term plan. *(Noel Gibbin)*
- Advice on website: recruitment ideas, info. Case studies on installing simulators, ringing centres, sound control, raising money ... *(Noel Gibbin)*.
- Given that Surrey is not alone with this issue of recruitment is there anything to learn from other areas in the country. Also what is the role of the Central Council and is there a wider publicity role for them to perhaps change the perception of ringing and ringers (whatever that might be)? What is our marketing strategy is there more we could do collectively – materials, strategies etc.? *(Susan Gibbin)*.

Comments from emails:

- We should have some generic wall banners printed (as have been mentioned by others) they could be kept with the boards for use with promotions. *(Trisha Hawkins)*
- I intended to suggest that the Surrey Association should write to secondary schools in its area to draw their attention to the possibility of bellringing as part of the DofE award and to offer the Association’s support. This should include all secondary schools: state schools, academies, free schools, and private schools. Perhaps one person per borough (or smaller area) could find names

and addresses of secondary schools in that area to contact. A standard letter from the Association is more likely to get attention than an approach from an individual: it demonstrates that this is a serious and organised scheme - and having one list ensures that each school gets only one approach (plus a follow-up perhaps to those that don't reply). Replies should go to a central point (one person in the Association, or the District - north/south - or one person in the local area), who would arrange a visit from a well-briefed person from the Association. If there is serious interest from a particular school, the school would be put in touch with a local tower with facilities and interest in teaching a group of learners, perhaps with some support from the Association. It's important that the well-briefed person above would also be responsible for follow-up to ensure that things went well and to learn from any problems that arose. I hope that's made clearer what I was trying to say last night, and Jan's message has made me put a little more flesh on the bones. I'm sure there must be a right time in the year for such an initiative, to get such a letter on teachers' desks just before they're going to start planning next year's DofE activities - does the Association have any members who could advise? (*Andrew Oliphant*)

Volunteers:

- Training Website (to go with suggestion) – I would be willing to look after the Southern District site for 1 year (*Paul Beeken*)

3. Finance

The Association generates regular surpluses and has about £20,000 in the general fund. In addition to this we have over £45,000 in legacy monies to distribute. How can we make best use of this money to benefit local bell ringing?

Noel Gibbin introduced the item by saying that Association is quite cash rich and generates a regular surplus. We have also recently received a large legacy.

Income is fairly steady at around £3,600 per year; 90% of which comes from membership subscriptions. Expenditure is around £2,600 with amounts on the newsletter, report, insurance, etc. In 2016 we introduced the Fellowship Grant scheme that may pay out up to £2,000 per annum so surpluses may disappear.

As to balances, the General Fund has £14,000 plus money in each District's accounts, the Training Fund and the Peal Fund. There is also the Belfry Repair Fund but that is a separate charity with its own rules and beyond the scope for today.

Libby LeBihan left £47,000 to the Association of which only 33,000 has been promised for one of the extra bells at Merton in her memory.

The question was "what so we do with our funds and the legacy money?".

The General Committee discussed this and came up with small proposals such as no more peal fees, giving donations to towers used for training events and the Fellowship Grant scheme. Going forward, we could do nothing, reduce our income (the subs), spend it all one large project, spend it gradually over the years on smaller or longer term projects or something else.

Noel finally mentioned three of the Association's objectives:

- a. to promote, advance, maintain and support the ringing of bells for services;
- c. to facilitate and assist in the instruction and practice of both the art and science of change-ringing;
- e. to promote fellowship and harmony among bellringers generally including organising social meetings and making gifts on behalf of the Association and to promote goodwill and understanding between bellringers and the general public.

Kate Flavell said there had been debate about subscription levels a short while ago at a AGM that decided to leave things as they were until we decided how we should spend our money. It is that spending issue we are here to discuss and will leave the subscription rate for the moment. She gave an anecdote about how an

EU grant to the Beekeeping Society of Great Britain had led to a falling out between people on what to spend it on and she didn't want that here.

An email contribution had suggested a Rope Fund in Libby's memory as there was no obvious central source of money but there could be an issue that all towers would apply and the first ones would be paid for and the money would run out.

Martin Crick mentioned the Oxford Diocesan Guild's (ODG) membership included Personal Accident Insurance – a tangible benefit. He also thought the legacy should be used for something longer lasting than ropes and could help established ringing centres be available longer.

John Squirrell said that money had been a long term issue and someone said the report is all you get. We should get every tower ringing regularly otherwise churches may see the price of copper at £3,600 per tonne and tin of £17,000 per tonne and do a calculation.

Trisha Shannon said she was involved with three towers needing sound control to ensure they could keep ringing – one had a rudimentary control but the other two none.

Ed Muller said they hosted a monthly Drop In Session and a Surprise Major practice thanks to the offices of Kate Wills. The technology could be made easier and they were considering extra things (e.g. dumbbells) but their limitation was often people to run it and organise things.

Trisha Hawkins thought it was a huge benefit having a screen showing what the bells were doing. People were interested and she had got people along to have a go on the back of this. The Training Officer could also use a portable projector. Sound control was important as it allowed extra sessions to be arranged far more easily.

Caroline Prescott said that the thoughts seemed to be coming towards working around the three hubs of Docklands, Barnes and Bletchingley. The Association could help co-ordinate rotas and take on responsibility for groups of students.

Eddie Hartley said he thought the ODG's Bell Fund had a large investment and just spent the interest earned. The Legacy could be used for that. Trainers were also important and could the student groups at universities in Guildford and Surrey be approached. He reiterated the time spent on admin took time away from teaching and help would be appreciated with that.

Paula Greenwood said three ropes at Putney had gone within a short time of each other and they only just the funds together to buy new ones. They were now brutal in charging visitors as there was no income from weddings. Towers were vulnerable to falling silent through not being able to afford ropes.

Vicky Williams said she charges for her teaching on the basis that if she doesn't have a full time job and taught during the working week, it was necessary. All students seemed willing to invest in their own training.

Catherine Stonehewer-Newbold said that if the objectives were holding actions back then they should be changed. There could be help with fundraising and a technical branch started.

Paul Flavell suggested a maintenance contract for bells. Negotiate with a bell hanging firm a Surrey Association maintenance contract. Several peals of bells would benefit from this making them easier to ring on and easier to teach on.

Niki Tompkinson suggested a sustained publicity campaign and supporting local ones.

Noel Gibbin said he was thinking of getting a simulator at Caterham but there was no information on our website or case studies to help him start this. Chris Baldwin said this could easily be added.

Notes from Post-Its:

- Did deceased express any wish on how she wanted the legacy to be used? *(Paul Flavell)*
- Insurance – see if we can join the ODG personal insurance policy.
- Newsletter – expensive to print and distribute. Give members option of electronic only.
- Rope Fund – organise rope splicing course rather than give money.
- What are the costs associated with setting up Training Centres? What are the restrictions? What else is involved? Could this information be available to us? *(Ann Beirne)*
- Practical help of case study pages on the website (e.g. Training centre [what equipment / what works well / what to avoid), Simulators, Sound Control, Raising Money *(Noel Gibbin)*
- Training expenses inc £10 for half day.
- Return to sending out a paper copy of the Newsletter so there is a change it will be read and people will take an interest in the Association. Make it easy for people.
- Could we have a folder in which members could deposit their successes? *(Paul Beeken)*
- Barnes, Bletchingley and Docklands are too far apart. We need maybe 2 more – one mid-East and one mid-West *(Simon Beirne)*
- Update tower information to include if it has soundproofing, simulator, camera, etc. *(Simon Beirne)*
- The thorny question of expenses. A lot of organisations technically pay expenses but the culture of those organisations is such that people don't feel able to claim. If we are going to invest in "people", we need trainers; some people may feel more able to support a training hub/event if they are fully able to claim expenses without judgment – but obviously within guidelines.
- Could we have an Association PayPal account to make collecting fees online easy?
- I think Newsletter should be a paper copy again for the reason that emails are not read. *(Peter Taylor)*
- Some churches have an annual maintenance contract for a "service" by a professional bell hanger paid for by the PCC. I feel the Association should encourage this. *(Eddie Hartley)*

Comments from emails:

- Perhaps we can set aside some of the money and advertise it to all the towers asking them to apply with proposals which best support the association aims – encouraging innovation locally. Decisions made by an elected group of people against an agreed set of criteria. *(Susan Gibbin)*

4. Membership

A significant proportion of our membership are hardly engaged with the Association or with ringing activities outside their own towers. What can we do to improve participation and encourage greater engagement in the Association? Particular problems are a lack of attendance at meetings and practices, same faces appearing at training courses time after time, few nominations for district and Association officers.

Caroline Prescott started the discussion by posing the question "Why be a member of The Surrey Association?" She listed the benefits of joining a swimming club or The National Trust. Ringers may strive to join the Cumberlands or College Youths.

In crude terms, "What do you get for your money?" We have many more members on the books than we see at events (apart from the quiz night!). Is belonging to The Surrey Association something people feel they ought to belong to, to keep the tower captain happy? Do they just assume it is funding ringing in the wider community, a sort of tax? Why pay £8 per year but take little or no interest in the group you have joined? What ideas do we have today to engage all those people we have in the Association?

Maybe we don't make it obvious what you can by being a member. Events are not "members only", nobody is turned away so what is the advantage of joining? Associations are groups. Groups can achieve much when they work together. I feel The Surrey Association as a bell ringing group can achieve much, use it's resource of talented people, and there are a lot of talented people in the Association, but we need to work out the most effective way to engage the many members we have out there.

Karen Walker said there should be a monthly email to members. The Yahoo Groups system was explained at this point. Chris Baldwin said each one (the ND and the SD ones) each had about 180 members though

at least 50 people were on both. The groups also had out of county people but couples would only be counted once in the numbers.

Shirley McGill said that not everyone had email. She thought the communication systems were good but not used well. There was the website, events page and the newsletter. She was surprised when someone said they did not know where to practice Plain Bob Doubles and when she suggested the district events, she was asked "what district events?"

Kate Wills said that during her time as District Master, she had visited all but two towers and collected email addresses from members not on Yahoo Groups so they got all communications as well. It did not make any difference. She did learn that emails of 2-3 lines were much better than a whole page.

Trisha Hawkins said that communication could be confusing and she didn't need to know about cancelled practices or weddings needing ringers. It was a shame there was not just one email list available for all communications. Perhaps there could be an "opt-out" option on the membership form.

Chris Ridley was worried there was an information overload and being bombarded by emails and notices. The most effective communication is person to person, verbal. Contacts in towers don't understand their role in passing on and encouraging people to read communication.

Anne Rueff spoke in great support of the Yahoo groups and she did want to know about cancelled practices.

Simon Beirne wasn't sure about the benefits of joining the Association. Training could be free for members but charge non-members.

Kate Flavell spoke of change programme she has been involved in in the past. Communication always comes out badly but people wanted informal contacts rather than formal letters or similar. Communication was a two-way process – Push and Pull. We push details out but members have to be willing and actively pull it as well. Some people have said they do not want to be too involved but they do want the Association to be there; someone to ask advice or help of. The Association needs to serve its members in a variety of way that they want to be served.

Jane Marsters said we should make joining easier. I don't think filling an on-line application form is a deterrent and obviously has the advantage that you have contact details straight away (Although are all tower captains/correspondents aware that you can do this? I wasn't until you told me) What I meant was why do people have to be elected? - You don't go through this procedure if you're joining the National Trust to use your example - if you apply and pay you're instantly a member. Perhaps it's time we changed the rules?

Caroline Prescott had thought about a "Pay As You Go" system where things were open to everyone but you paid, £1 say, when you attended. The Membership Form has made joining the Association more difficult but we do get contact information.

Jeremy Cheesman confirmed the difficulties caused by the membership form and the failure to get completed ones in several cases.

John Squirrell said current members should retain the right to refuse membership and election should be a business meeting.

Eddie Hartley recalled his election was when others thought he had reached a sufficient standard of ability but that was not a prerequisite these days.

Sue Dixon also had trouble with the membership form but the contact information did allow direct contact even if a Tower contact failed to pass on information.

Noel Gibbin wondered how we could make meetings more exciting. The removal of a service at the AGM caused some disquiet. Do we want striking competitions and in what format?

Chris Stanley said every member could participate as they wished. Some meetings were “snoozefests” and not exciting.

Vicky Williams commented that whilst there are lots of events for ringers, some feel inadequate and do not get many opportunities in an evening. Placing bands of experienced ringers around them means that they get lots of ringing. There were some “Here Here’s” in agreement with this.

Kate Flavell explained that the Association has Public Liability Insurance that applies to members if they injure someone negligently and it was your responsibility. Third Party Liability covered. There is also Personal Accident Insurance that varies to cover people who die/lose limbs to where something is broken or someone cannot work. Ringing is a very safe hobby and more likely to suffer travelling there in a car of doing DIY. Her advice has been to cover yourself 24 hours a day if you wish to have such cover. Just whilst ringing would not be worth it.

Notes from Post-Its:

- Development/support of hubs is good, but don't neglect support for individual towers if they ask for help.
- Ideas to increase attendance at meeting? Have more than 1 tower available simultaneously. Divide between abilities, to encourage less experienced ringers to attend.
- What is the point of membership? I was under the impression that one reason was insurance. Is that not so? (*Trisha Shannon*)
- Do we send out Welcome Packs to new members? (*Ann Beirne*)
- We hold “tower talks” when there are events coming up. Maybe useful to other towers. 5 minutes halfway through practices, but only if something to communicate. (*Anne Beirne*)
- Encourage all towers to have an admin break at practice night. 3 minutes of local and Association updates.
- I like Kate's single method practice idea (*Alison McCormick*)
- Go back to minimum standard for membership (e.g. ART Level 1) (*Simon Beirne*)
- Instead of annual subs, perhaps 50p per week collected by tower captains. (*Simon Beirne*)
- Definitely do focused method days (*Simon Beirne*)
- I noted that , even in Caterham, some say Wimbledon Training Day locations too far and not enough chance to ring Plain Bob or Grandsire Doubles (*Simon Beirne*)
- I agree. I run focussed practices for my ringers at Ranmore. They are very useful. (*Paul Beeken*)
- The Quiz Night is very well attended.
- Have one central membership database of emails. Use that for “news” including upcoming event announcements and ensure all members are on this list (*Trisha Hawkins*)
- Avoid duplication between information on that list and Yahoo Groups. Use that for tower practice info, wedding ringing, etc.
- The point of it when you look at non-geographical associations (e.g. teachers, police). They don't have a geographical link but they have commonalities which draw them together. Can we learn from this? Especially bearing in mind our own unique situations (rural / central / inner city)? Maybe 1 Association with 3 clusters with optimum number of officers.
- Make sure there is something on offer for all levels in the Association but don't get too worked up if they aren't taken up, Worrying about this silent majority is detrimental to the keen ones.
- How do we get the get the ‘non-active’ ‘active’ (towers and individuals)? (*Noel Gibbin*)

Comments from emails:

- Making joining easier. I don't think filling an on-line application form is a deterrent and obviously has the advantage that you have contact details straight away. (Although are all tower captains/correspondents aware that you can do this? I wasn't until you told me). What I meant was why do people have to be elected? - You don't go through this procedure if you're joining the

National Trust to use your example - if you apply and pay you're instantly a member. Perhaps it's time we changed the rules? (*Jane Marsters*)

- Linked to comment on recruitment how do we get a higher profile? Is it worth getting in an expert to help us think this through a collective marketing campaign or do we have someone within the association with this expertise? (*Susan Gibbin*)

5. Organisation

Is the Surrey Association still appropriate or relevant? Set up in the 1880s, would it be set up as it is these days? If not, what would there be? The current structure of the organisation faces a number of challenges. Our two districts are very divergent communities but both share problems of low engagement from members. Maybe there are structural problems present. We are being squeezed by considerable overlap on our western border with the Guildford Guild. This dilutes participation and confuses identity. On the eastern side the Docklands ringers are rapidly taking on a separate identity. There is no natural focal point to the Association as the cathedral church is in the far north of the area and largely detached from the activities of the majority of the membership.

Our name causes confusion. The Surrey Association does not really represent Surrey at all. Maybe this is holding us back and stopping people from identifying with us? Is the Association actually sustainable as an independent entity? What does our identity and brand mean? Should we be looking to redefine our borders, change our district structure or change our name?

Richard Wallis introduced the topic with the following:

RW circulated a map showing the current situation and key dates in the history of the SA. He then explained the situation has been fluid over the years. There are also some key dates over the past 137 years that have changed our core area and past attempts at trying to tidy things up - never successfully.

The questions posed in this section of the agenda can be split in two. Both are related and inter-dependent as the second part could define what we want to do for the first part.

The Surrey Association name has never been accurate. Right from the start in 1880, the limited area covered was not the county of Surrey. It bounded by the county of Kent in the East with the Kent County Association also formed in 1880 and the county of Sussex as it then was with the Sussex County Association formed five years later. In the west, the boundary was the Winchester Diocesan Guild that covered the west of Surrey and the Thames formed the border in the north. We never claimed to be a county Association. It is just we are on the boundary between County Associations on three sides and a Diocesan Guild on the other. So perhaps first question is, does the confusion where I am contacted, for example, by someone wanting to learn to ring in Guildford actually matter? I just pass on their details to my equivalent there. This may feed our discussion on the first point on the agenda as we may want to lose the 18 Guildford Guild towers - 28% of our size.

As to the second question, if we were wanting to create a new a society for ringers in this part of Surrey how would we go about it now? Would we chose a Southwark Diocese base and "claim" six towers in Kent or try to be a whole Surrey one. A merger with Guildford would still leave a hazy border on the west as the W&P Guild is one with a Diocese boundary. Should we just change our name to the "South London and East Surrey Association of Church Bell Ringers"? Or follow Sport England's lead and become "Ring Surrey"?

Around 65 towers are currently evenly split between Districts and have similar numbers - though both diminishing from their highs in the 1990s and 2000s. Both have had vacant Committee member slots over the year and whilst new blood is coming through, Caroline, Andrew, Shirley and Jeremy at District level and Kate, Paul and myself in General posts have been ringing many years. Finding volunteer organisers can be difficult.

Do we need so many officers if there is little being done or do we need more so that the Association, in whatever form, can do more?

Would four Districts of 15-20 towers each; based around a ringing centre or tower of excellence be better and more active? Do we need Districts at all? Patrick tried to breakdown some of the links whilst he was General Master and we now share a Newsletter and positively welcome each other to events.

But we don't want change for change's sake so the Status Quo - or "Do Nothing" is an option.
Discussion and comments from the floor included:

Chris Ridley: SA is unique as consists of members not towers. Don't get hung up with this. Organise hubs around groups of ringers not towers. Smaller hubs, for example youth ringers, ringing events, types of ringing.

Martin Crick: Concentrate on an association of members. The Thames is not the boundary it used to be. Don't be restrained by old (Victorian) boundaries.

Jane Marsters: Encourage members to join SA. Use benefits of adjacent Associations and Guilds.

Caroline Prescott: Coordinate around (3) hubs and all three groups then come together. Target work around hubs.

Chris Stanley: Agree with above (CP). We have three distinct areas – City, Urban, Rural. Use these as the hubs. Radical suggestion – Abolition of SA or abolition of districts.

Kate Flavell: Hubs / Clusters – Don't force clusters but have natural clusters.

Ian Griffiths: Ringers to ring together at the right / same level.

Chris Baldwin: Southern and Northern are administrative divisions. What is our brand? It puts people off. Biggest potential is people in London.

Caroline Prescott: Brand is OK; they will come if they want to come.

Anne Rueff: Disagree with IG. S Max people don't mind ringing plain hunt. People must want to learn and be able to handle a bell properly – take advantage of good ringers' expertise.

Kate Flavell: People come to training days but still struggling to ring the same thing each year. Need to improve handling. Oxford has 10 districts – very large. Districts working as separate entities.

Paul Flavell: 100 associations in country; SA probably average. We need to look at other associations, see what they are doing well and learn from it.

Anne Rueff: Haven't got a centre – difficult to know what the solution is.

Trisha Shannon: Issue in northern district – people commute in.

Kate Flavell: Someone to redraw map showing number of members in each tower. **Action Chris Baldwin, Sue Dixon/ Jeremy Cheesman** to provide information.

Kate Flavell summarised:

- Not sensing there is a feeling to change name and demographics.
- Likes idea of 3 areas but not as administrative centres.

Notes from Post-Its:

- New Committee member responsible for tower maintenance etc. "Engineer" (*Paul Flavell*)
- What could the SA do to support / help clusters? E.g. host email lists, web pages etc... (*Martin Crick*)

- Following PF's comments on looking at what other associations and guilds do,, is something that the central council can be starting do from the point of view of putting us in touch with associations facing the same issues (bearing in mind AF's point that are situation is fairly unique).

Comments from emails:

- Problems of identity. At East Molesey, newbies do find it confusing at first to get to grips with the 4 Districts in the GDG and the 2 in SA (and getting SA invites to practices in Bermondsey for e.g. - what's Bermondsey got to do with Surrey?) - but after a while it ceases to matter. What's important is being aware of the events on offer, taking part in them, widening their bell experience and meeting lots of other ringers from all over both areas. (*Jane Marsters*)

6. Any other business

- a Kate Wills said that a new home for the Archive would soon be needed as building work meant she could no longer keep it.
- b Richard Wallis said he needed to get rid of the Library within the next 12 months as it could no longer be housed at his father's home.
- c Caroline Prescott and Chris Stanley advertised the AGM at Merton on Saturday 13 May which would be ringing, meeting, a beer festival and a darts competition. Tickets may be needed in advance to help with numbers. Chris Stanley had tickets available for a beer festival at Merton on Friday 24 February.
- d Andrew Howell advertised the Southern District's regular practice tonight at Bletchingley from 6 to 8pm.

The meeting closed at 1.00pm with a promise that a summary of the meeting will be made available on the website as soon as possible.