

HEREFORD DIOCESAN GUILD OF BELLRINGERS
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2026
Held at St Peter's Church hall, Hereford
Saturday 9th May 2025 at 15:00

55 members present

1. Welcome & Prayers

The Master welcomed all to the meeting and invited Rev. Anthony Ellis to open the meeting with a prayer, we remembered members who had died since our last meeting:

Rev Dr Peter Newing, retired member Eastnor	John Bartley Honorary Member Welshpool
David Elliott, Cardington	Rev David Eve, retired, Cleobury Mortimer
Roy Mills, Ledbury	John Croxton, Clunbury
Andrea Moore, Leintwardine	John Turney, Hopton Heath
Katherine Fox, retired Member Colwall	Rev Canon Rosemary Lawley, Highley
Agnes Bowen Honorary Member Lyonshall	John Hope, Freeman, Almeley
Malcolm Johns, NRLM Brecon	Emily English, retired member, Almeley
Shirley Rowlands, Eardisland	

2. Apologies

We received apologies from 24 members:

Valerie Roberts, Rev. Preb. Andrew Talbot-Ponsonby (Hereford All Saints), Rev. Mandy Welch (Burghill), Sarah Buckley (Cardington), Brian Roberts (Tenbury Wells), Rick Shallcross (Burghill), Nick Cooper-Tomkins (Ewyas Harold), Jane Mason (Ledbury), Kate Price (Eaton Bishop), Andrew Kett (Ledbury), Paul Lewis (Pontesbury), Ann Bennett (Welshpool), Neil Bennett (Welshpool), Caroline Priestley (Fownhope), Liz Donovan (Burghill), Sheila Devlin (Fownhope), Geoff Lowe (Condover), Andrew Burdett (Burghill), Jenny Parker (Bosbury), Mark Pugh (Leominster), Alan Reade (Claverley), Andrew Buckley (Clun), Sue Hack (Bodenham), John MacLean (Coalbrookdale).

3. Minutes of the previous AGM

The minutes and full paperwork for the meeting had been distributed to members in advance. The adoption of the minutes of the 2025 Annual General Meeting was proposed by Nick Cronin, seconded by Mark Aston, and accepted by the meeting as a true record. The minutes were signed by the Master.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the 2025 minutes.

5. Correspondence

The Secretary told the meeting that there was no new correspondence that had not been previously shared with the Management Committee and membership as appropriate.

6. Long Service Awards

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The Master told the meeting that Long Service certificates had been presented by Bishop Richard to those members present at the close of the service in St Peter's. She then read the list of, and congratulated, the following members who had achieved long service awards:

25 years of Service:

Helen C Sharpe, Unattached, Church Stretton
Janet Collier, Clungunford
Alex C Sharpe, Unattached, Church Stretton
Andrew Kett, Ledbury

Debbie Smith, Eardisley
Ian Price, Pembridge
Paul Tompkins, Burghill
Lyn Wheeler, Unattached, Hereford

50 years of Service:

- Ann C Bennett of Welshpool
- Neil Bennett of Welshpool
- Andrew J Watkins of Hereford

Ann and Neil were already Freemen of the Guild so did not pay subscriptions, but as he had now reached 50 years' service Andrew Watkins was eligible for election as a Life Member. Len Hand proposed, and Nick Cronin seconded that Andrew become a Life Member, this was approved by a vote.

All recipients were congratulated with a round of applause.

7. Election of New Members

We had received nominations for the following new members –

John Neal - Stoke St Milborough,

Sheila Anthony – Hereford District, unattached,

David Parkes – Kington, all were proposed by Tim Hollinghurst, Seconded by Nick Cronin and all were in favour of electing the new members.

8. Officers Reports & Adoption of the Accounts

The officers' reports had been distributed prior to the meeting, and the Master invited any questions from the members. No questions were forthcoming, the adoption of the reports was proposed by Ashley Smith and seconded by Nick Cronin with all in favour.

Adoption of the accounts. The Master asked whether there were any questions regarding the accounts. Frank Seabright questioned why an item £34.75 for Badges had appeared twice. The Treasurer was able to confirm that the item appeared once in 2025 expenditure, and only appeared again in Note 4 – Other Expenditure by way of explanatory note. The note '4' had been missing from the note column in the sheet distributed.

Adoption of the accounts was proposed by Mark Gilham, seconded by Ian Thornewell.

9. Election of Executive Officers (Trustees)

Nominations for the posts of

Guild Secretary – Fran Watkins

Guild Treasurer – Mark Aston

Guild Education Officer - Vacant

Peal Recorder – Andrew Watkins

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Report Secretary - Neil Bragg



which were available for election had been received, and the members listed above were all willing to remain in post. Barney Bell proposed, and Jenny Lawrence seconded that the members remained in post.

The Master told the meeting that the post of Education Officer & Trustee was currently vacant and invited members to approach the Trustees if they were interested, it could be possible to co-opt someone into the role during the year if there was a suitable candidate. Mark Gilham asked what the role entailed – the Master and Secretary summarised the current role description in the rules – that ‘The Guild Education Officer shall co-ordinate the work of the District Education Officers and convene their meetings from time to time’ but noted that most districts do not currently have an education officer, and in practice the last Education Officer had done a great deal to organise education events for the Guild, so the holder would hopefully lead by example and inspire others. Mark asked whether the role included educating the public about what ringers do – the Master replied that this could be incorporated into the role.

Frank Seabright suggested that education of the public should fall more within the scope of the Public Engagement Officer, and that he felt the Education Officer’s role would be to educate ringers.

The Master asked the meeting to vote whether they were in favour of the re-election of the current officers, all were in favour.

10. Election of Non-Executive Officers

11. Election of Clerical Representatives

12. Election of Central Council representatives

13. Approval of Independent Examiner

10) Nominations had been received as follows –

Master-Elect – Mark Gilham

Belfries Officer – Ashley Fortey

Public Engagement Officer – Nicky Aubrey

Tower Stewardship Advisor – Alan Reade

WebMaster – Nick Chapman

Frank Seabright asked whether Mark Gilham could say a few words about himself. Mark told the meeting that he was originally from Kent, but moved to the Diocese in around 2020. He had a lapse of about 25 years from ringing but he had previously held the post of Treasurer of the Kent County Association of Change Ringers for 6/7 years. He was past tower captain of Canterbury Cathedral. His professional background is as an accountant and business advisor but he is now semi-retired. He rings at Clun and Ludlow.

Ian Thornewell proposed, and Helen Sharpe seconded the nominations above.

11) Nominations for Clerical Representatives

Current Representatives

Barney Bell

Anthony Eliis

Nicky Seabright

New nomination - Sheila Anthony

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The Master was pleased that the three current clerical representatives were willing to continue, and that the newly elected Rev. Sheila Anthony was willing to join as our fourth clerical rep.

Helen Sharpe proposed and Ashley Smith seconded the nominations for Clerical reps.

12) Nominations for Central Council representatives.

Three current representatives : Anthony Ellis, Tyler Edwards, Andrew Watkins had been nominated and were all willing to continue. There was a vacancy for a further representative. Fran Watkins had been proposed and was willing to undertake the role, but would welcome any nominations from the floor. Anthony Ellis spoke briefly about the requirement to attend one Central Council meeting annually as well as attending The Ringing World AGM on the same day. There was no interest in the role from the floor, so Fran agreed that she would be willing to undertake the role for 2026 but very much encouraged others to look at the role for next year.

Nick Cronin proposed, and Jenny Lawrence seconded the nominations for CC reps.

13) Nomination for Independent Examiner, Ruth D'Avanzo had been nominated and was willing to continue.

Len Hand proposed, and Nick Cronin seconded that Ruth should continue in the role.

The Master then asked the meeting to vote on items 10, 11, 12 and 13 – all present were in favour with none against.

14. Peal Fees & Non-Resident Life Membership subscription

Details of a proposal which had been approved by the Management Committee to increase the peal fees and Non Resident Life Member subscription had been sent to members ahead of the meeting.

The proposed new rates were

Peal Fee £1.00 per ringer

Non Resident Life Membership Subscription - £5.00

Frank Seabright spoke to remind the meeting that although the item had already been approved at the Management Committee meeting, members should be given the opportunity to discuss the matter and proper ratification by members should be sought at this meeting.

Neil Bragg proposed, and Nick Cronin seconded the increases as above, a vote was taken with a majority voting in favour, none against.

15. Rule Changes: 7c & 8

Changes to rules 7c & 8.

The Secretary explained that, since taking office, she had been working through historical rule changes that had not been notified to the Charity Commission since 2006. Most paperwork had been in order and rule changes had now been successfully notified to the Charity Commission with rules brought up to date to 2025.

There were a couple of cases, however, where changes to the rules had been agreed at AGMs without the formal procedure as set out in our rules having been followed. It was not possible to submit these changes to the Charity Commission. The Secretary had sought advice from the Charity

Commission who stated that any rule change that had not followed proper procedure was null and void and should be ignored.

The rule changes that had been a problem related to additions to the list of non-executive officers (rule 7 c) and their related duties (parts of rule 8). The Trustees had considered these and had recommended in writing that the rules be changed to avoid similar issues in future.

Following the procedure set out in Rule 20, the proposal below was agreed by the Management Committee and distributed to members ahead of the meeting –

Proposed changes to Rules 7c & 8.

Whilst sending historic rule changes to the Charity Commission it became evident that some rule changes which the Guild had adopted had not followed the correct procedure as outlined in Rule 20b and, according to the Charity Commission, those rule changes should be disregarded.

All the changes relate to **Rule 7c** where the Guild had added in additional non-executive officers, and subsequent role descriptions in **Rule 8**.

To rectify this, the Management Committee proposes the changes as described below. These changes mean we will not need to alter the rules whenever we make a slight alteration to a role name or description or decide to appoint another Non-Executive Guild Officer in what might be a temporary, or time-limited role.

Current Rule

7(c) Non-Executive Officers. The Guild may appoint such Non-Executive Officers as it sees fit:

- (i) the Master Elect;
- (ii) the Public Engagement Officer;
- (iii) the Guild Belfries Officer;
- (iv) the Tower Stewardship Advisor.
- (v) the WebMaster
- (vi) the 'events co-ordinator'.

To be replaced with:

Proposed Rule Change:

7(c) Non-Executive Officers. The Guild may appoint such Non-Executive Officers as it sees fit. A list of non-executive officers will be published annually

And

Current Rule

8 Duties of Officers.

(g) The Public Engagement Officer: shall promote the work of the Guild.

(h) The Guild Belfries Officer: shall organise training courses in belfry maintenance and, when requested, give informal advice on routine maintenance of bell installations in Guild towers.

(i) The Tower Stewardship Advisor: shall issue guidance to the Guild on tower management, with particular reference to insurance, complaints about noise,

To be replaced with:

Proposed Rule Change:

8 Duties of Officers.

Remove current sub-clauses (g) (h) & (i) and insert

(g) Non-Executive Officers: The duties of the Non-Executive Officers will be published annually.

The Secretary said the lists as described could be published on the website, in the annual report, and on membermojo. She asked whether there were any questions about the changes, there was a question as to whether the Charity Commission would be happy with the rule change, the Secretary responded that – provided we have followed our own procedures, and that the rule changes do not cause the Guild to cease to be a charity in law, then the Charity Commission would be happy with the rule changes.

Nick Cronin proposed and Jason Walker seconded, that we adopt the proposed rule changes. A vote was taken, the Secretary reminded the meeting that there needed to be a majority vote of not less than two thirds of the Members present. A count took place with all in favour, and none voting against, no abstentions.

16. Tower Support Fund / Agree Donation from Guild to Bell Restoration Fund

The following information had been sent to members ahead of the meeting –

(i) Formation of a Tower Support Fund

Following a recommendation from the Trustees, the Management Committee proposes that the existing balance of peal fees could be used to form the basis of a Tower Support Fund, specifically aimed at small projects (that would not fall under the scope of the Bell Restoration Fund [Charity number 508531]) but would be in line with our own charitable purposes. A small working group will draft and agree the criteria and application process for grants. Details of how to apply for grants will be distributed to members as soon as possible.

(ii) Agree amount of donation to the Hereford Diocesan Guild of Bellringers Bell Restoration Fund (registered charity 508531)

The Management Committee recommends that as the BRF had not made any grants during 2025, we make £0 donation to the BRF and transfer the equivalent amount £400 to the Tower Support Fund instead.

The Management Committee would, of course, be willing to consider any approach for a donation from the BRF should their circumstances change as a result of grants made.

The Master said that previous discussion of the proposal has generally received wide support, the fund would not be intended to affect or replace the work of the Hereford Diocesan Guild of Bellringers Bell Restoration Fund, charity number 508531 (the BRF), in any way, but would allow for smaller projects to be financed, it is intended to be similar in operation to the Ledbury District Maintenance Fund. A project is underway to draft the application and grant criteria which would be distributed to the membership as soon as it was available.

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Frank Seabright said that he felt the members could only vote for or against the fund, once they have details and criteria. He felt that he might be able to agree to a continuation of the exploration of setting up a fund, but would not be able to vote in agreement to the fund without being given the full details.

Jenny Lawrence said that she felt that the BRF may be a loser if we are going to ring-fence money, and said that the BRF does such sterling work, and she did not want it to be penalised by the creation of an alternative which may draw money away from the BRF.

The Master responded that the fund was intended for small projects only and would not be looking at large projects or grants such as would be considered by the BRF.

The Treasurer explained that the fund was primarily aimed at keeping towers ringing, if they need a replacement pulley for instance, the focus would be on towers that are currently active.

The Secretary said that she understood the worry about penalising the BRF, but pointed out that we, the Guild, are a charity and the BRF is a separate charity. The Guild has its own charitable obligations and aims, and if we are to give away all of our excess income to the BRF we may be failing to meet our own charitable aims.

According to the constitution of the BRF, all Guild members are members of the BRF, however this puts the Guild Trustees in a potentially difficult position where we need to consider our own rules first.

Judith Faux spoke to tell the meeting that the Ledbury Maintenance fund had just funded some pulley boxes.

The Master said that we really wanted to have some close discussion with the BRF so that we can get a demarcation quite clearly defined. The Secretary agreed that the fund was intended to fill the gap between a grant for a major project, and no funding at all.

Mark Gilham asked whether repair loans might be possible – the Master agreed that this could be a possibility. The Treasurer suggested we would look at match-funding a project, and that it would be on the lines of a crisis fund. Mark Gilham asked what sums of money might be allocated to the fund, the original proposal is that the advance peal fees of just under £200.00 would be set aside.

Frank Seabright stated that the peal fees had been intended to cover the cost of maintaining the peal books. The Peal Recorder advised that there was currently a large supply of paper and books and no new supplies would be needed for the foreseeable future.

Frank felt that all this detail needed to have been explained properly and in full in advance of any vote of the subject, and that whilst he was happy today to agree to the process of exploring the fund to continue, he certainly would not be happy to vote for the fund and to leave it to whatever the trustees may come up with.

Barney Bell spoke to say he recognised there could be a need for support at towers which may be infrequently rung, but that would benefit from some maintenance, relatively small expenditures to

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keep the bells ringing, but not a major project that the BRF would be involved in, in those circumstances some help from the Guild would be a good thing.

The Secretary reflected that as one of our charitable aims is to care for bells in the Diocese, it could be argued that we already have the wherewithal to make grants to support repairs of bells where we consider there to be a worthy case. She asked Frank Seabright whether he agreed with that position.

Frank responded that he would need to see rules for any fund before agreement could be sought. The Secretary replied that we are formulating the criteria and application form, and once finalised, the information would be sent to all members. She asked Frank whether he felt, at that point, the operation of the fund would still need to be voted on at a General Meeting. Frank replied that yes – he felt a vote would be necessary, and that the full details of the fund, which could be controversial should be brought to the meeting. He said that we had already indicated that we were yet to talk to the BRF regarding the fund.

The Secretary stated that the BRF was an entirely separate charity and could not dictate to us what we do with our funds any more than we can dictate to them what they do with their funds – other than by our position as members, where we can attend and vote at their AGMs. She asked Frank to indicate where in our rules that we cannot proceed with the fund within our existing structure. Frank replied that a set of rules should be set up for this project as the rules of a striking competition may be set up.

Anthony Ellis felt that we may need to seek approval from a general meeting.

Paul Tompkins spoke and advised that as we are not contemplating setting up a new body, or charity, rather we are creating a designated or restricted fund within our accounts, and as long as that meets our charitable objects, then there would be no need for the Trustees to seek member's authority to do so.

Judith Faux summarised that the discussion from the meeting seemed to indicate a general broad agreement for the fund, but members have indicated that they want to see more detail. Judith said that the impact on the BRF should be considered, if both charities are operating in the same field it would be good to have an understanding of exactly what each fund might cover.

The Master concluded that we would finalise the detail and then send information out. We could then either call an extraordinary meeting or wait for next year's AGM, she asked the room to indicate whether they are broadly in favour of the fund – there was general approval.

Following on from this was the second part of the recommendation from the Management Committee – as the BRF had made no grants during 2025, the Guild should make no donation to the BRF this year, but the equivalent amount of £400.00 be transferred to the proposed tower support fund. The BRF had been notified of the recommendation from the Management Committee.

Nick Cronin proposed that the £400.00 be reserved for transfer in future to the Tower Support Fund, Jenny Lawrence seconded, and a vote was taken with all in favour.

Barney Bell suggested that we might make a small donation of £200 instead in order to maintain good relations with the BRF. The Secretary advised that according to the rules (10c) we could not vote for a larger donation than had been specified by the Management Committee.

The Master told the meeting that we do want to maintain good relations with the BRF and would like to work closely with them. She has requested a copy of their grant criteria so that we can do our best to be complementary to one another, the information does not seem to be in the public domain.

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Frank Seabright spoke to remind the Guild that some time ago the subscription had increased by a £1.00, at that time the £1.00 had been intended to be used as a donation to the BRF. The Secretary asked if Frank could remember when that decision was taken, he felt it might have been 20 years ago, but we should bear in mind that the subscription is still £1 more than it would have been.

Nick Cronin commented that we had had to put up our subscriptions recently as they were insufficient, and so whatever we may have done 20 years ago was no longer relevant, for example we have had to take into account the increase of Central Council subscription.

The Master said that it is important that we use our subscription money in an appropriate manner and clearly demonstrate that as a charity, we are meeting our charitable aims.

Anthony Ellis said that as we are not entirely clear what the BRF's grant criteria is, there needs to be good communication between our officers and the BRF, and he felt that the Guild Officers and BRF need to meet. The Master advised that we have requested this on more than one occasion.

Anthony Ellis proposed a motion that a request be sent from this meeting that the Trustees of the BRF meet with the Executive Officers of the Guild. The Secretary advised that all members could also attend the BRF AGM.

Nicky Seabright commented that she felt that members from both organisations, as caring, civilised people, should get together to have a conversation without it becoming too formal or too contentious, and she would like to support a gentler approach.

The Master asked whether the meeting would like to frame the request, perhaps with the idea of the tower fund as a discussion point. Ian Thornevell suggested that if the BRF was willing to support smaller projects, then the fund might not even be needed.

Anthony Ellis proposed the following 'The Executive Officers of the HDGB meet the Trustees of the Bell Restoration Fund to have a discussion about the future funding of bell projects in the Diocese' The proposal was seconded by Nick Cronin, a vote was taken and all were in favour.

17. Awarding of the Centenary Shield

The Master said that with great pleasure she was awarding the Centenary Shield to Ashley Smith of Stoke St Miborough. The Master told the meeting that Ashley has given the Guild Officers a great deal of support, has designed marketing materials, given us ideas and is now doing a sterling job in his own district as a publicity officer supporting the Church Stretton District Officers.

Ashley thanked the Master, thanking everyone for their support, and for everybody who pays attention to the things he puts online. He said he was a strong believer in recruitment by stealth and hopes that as time goes on we might be able to get some new recruits from the younger generation, who will realise it is not about churches, stuffiness, maths, or seriousness necessarily – it can be those things but it can also be about fun and creativity.

18. Invitation for the 2027 AGM

Neil Pirie, Secretary of the Church Stretton District invited the Guild to the Church Stretton District for the 2027 AGM on Saturday 8th May.

19. Any Other Business

Neil Bragg told the meeting that the annual reports were available for collection and invited people to collect them on behalf of their districts. There are spare copies available.

Anthony Ellis told the meeting of his concerns about the future direction of the Central Council, he is a supporter of the Council and feels they do fantastic work. The Central Council has traditionally acted as an umbrella organisation for all the Guild and Associations, and Anthony feels it has always worked from the bottom up. Anthony thinks that the balance between the members and the council has changed. The Council is currently working on the Ringing 2030 project, and a lot of good work is happening.

However, he fears that all these things cost money and the Council has recently appointed several paid staff on fixed terms contracts. A business plan has been developed but the plan mostly involves drawing down on reserves combined with a recent increase in affiliation fees. The Council has no other source of income other than the affiliation fees from its members.

Anthony feels that the introduction of the business plan and the employment of staff has caused a shift so that the Council is now becoming a 'top down' organisation where those at the top will dictate to its members. The full agenda of the AGMs do not allow for any discussion or member's concerns. He fears that the executive committee of the council is running roughshod over its members.

Anthony had prepared a proposal that he would like the Guild to send to the Central Council - 'This Guild proposes that the Central Council should freeze any increase in affiliation fees until a full consultation has taken place with all affiliated Guilds and Associations regarding the Council's recent change of direction and its assumption of employer status and the financial implications from these decisions'

Anthony wants the Central Council to actually debate whether it wants to continue to have paid employees, this is a major change and has implications for all ringers, it has never had this conversation with its members.

Nick Cronin asked whether this has ever been discussed in an open meeting – Anthony replied that it had not been discussed at an open meeting to his knowledge. Nick Cronin said that in that case he would second the proposal.

Paul Tompkins said that whilst he understood and supported Anthony's viewpoint, he did not think the proposal as worded would be effective. Anthony appreciated Paul's input and asked for help in wording a suitable proposal. Anthony said that he knew he was not alone in this viewpoint, representatives from other associations were similarly minded. Paul suggested that the proposal be made stronger and called for a moratorium on employment until the discussion was held.

The Master asked how the meeting felt.

Judith Faux said that, speaking as a Trustee of an umbrella organisation who has paid staff, she did not see that there was anything wrong with having paid staff if they are necessary to be able to fulfil what your objectives are. The question should perhaps be what do we want the Central Council to do for us as ringers? and then consider whether they need paid staff to deliver that.

Jenny Lawrence asked if Anthony was concerned with the Central Council employing people for whatever purpose, whenever they felt there was a need? Anthony said this was a concern as the affiliated societies are their only source of money.

Mark Gilham agreed that other associations shared Anthony's concerns. Nick Cronin had also heard similar sentiments.

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The Secretary said that Anthony has identified the short term contracts cost have been covered by a business plan which draws down on the Council's reserves, the issue may be that a precedent has been set for employment without proper consultation.

The Master asked whether the meeting was happy for the proposal to go ahead. This was not forthcoming but there was further discussion about the best way forward.

Frank Seabright then stated that this matter should not be discussed as a matter of AOB, details of this complex matter should have been sent out prior to the meeting and it should have formed an item on the agenda. Judith Faux agreed with Frank's sentiments and said she had understood from the management committee meeting that a proposal would be on the agenda for the meeting. The Secretary apologised that it had not been possible.

More discussion ensued as how to proceed and the Master agreed that Anthony's concerns should be sent out to all District Secretaries who will be asked to seek the views of tower captains within a time-limited response period, to obtain a wider representation of the member's views. It was also suggested that Anthony write a letter to the Ringing World.

Finally, Martin Harrison proposed a vote of thanks to the organisers of the AGM for the event. The Master also recorded our thanks to our hosts St Peters, All Saints and Holmer, the Diocese for use of St Nicholas, and volunteers for today's arrangements.

The meeting closed at 16:27.