

Suffolk Guild of Ringers

Belfry Advisory Committee (BAC) Minutes - 9 June 2026

The BAC held a meeting on 9 Jun 2026 at The Crown, Stowupland.

Present: C Davies (chair), C McArthur (sec), M Steggles, C Birkby, J Stevens, J Flatters, A Moulton, and W Scadding (observing).

Apologies: T Hart, N Whittle, and W Girling.

Three new members were discussed and agreed for management ratification – M Currie, W Scadding and R Paterson. This will take the committee to thirteen members and that is more than sufficient for good governance.

Minutes of previous meeting - 6 February 2026

Agreed and signed as true record.

Matters arising: T Hart would welcome comments on the proposals for a new grading system for bell condition as given in the Guild Handbook.

VAT reclaim scheme changes

We discussed at length the demise of the Listed Places of Worship Scheme (LPWS), which allowed for the reclaiming of VAT on bell projects. Since 1 Apr 26, this has been replaced by the Places of Worship Renewal Fund (PWRF), managed by Historic England. Guidelines suggest that suitable initial applications may be invited to bid for one of three different levels of grant, the lowest being up to £50K. However, the PWRF believes that it will make only 150 grants per year, rather than the 5000 grants issued under the LPWS scheme. Moreover, it seems likely that only bell projects part of a larger, general church refurbishment will be considered. Thus, the ability to recover VAT on bell projects is likely to have gone for the foreseeable future. I have written to English Heritage requesting clarification but have yet to receive a reply.

In the past, the Guild have not been giving grant aid on the VAT part of the project costs, but because of the changes, the BAC unanimously agreed that all future Guild grants should include the VAT bill as part of the allowable costs.

A Knights bequest allocations

Progress with the Arnie Knights Bequest was briefed. Currently, Long Melford has been offered £150K subject to formal acceptance of our conditions for ten bells augmentation. Meanwhile Barham, Clopton, Copdock, Drinkstone, Finningham, Haverhill and Hoxne are all in the running for one of five, £25K grants to augment into eights. The selection process continues with an emphasis on whether the respective PCC's would be able to sign contracts with their preferred bellhanger before the end of 2027.

Grant aid requests

The BAC has received three requests for grant aid. Copdock have a faculty for a new 8 pit frame into which they are going to re-hang their existing 6 bells. This project is part of a much larger restoration of the belltower, its roof, repointing of the walls, plus new floors and access paths. It is, therefore, potentially possible that this project could meet PWRF

guidelines. Nicholson's are their choice of bellhanger. Total allowable costs for this project amount to £81,699 plus VAT of £16,340, a total of £98,039. Under former guidelines the BAC recommended a BRF grant of £8.2K, which would rise to £10k were the VAT element be grant aided. Generally, we expect most refurbishments to include sound control. However, Copdock church has only one house within half a mile. Therefore, the BAC recommend that the sound, control condition be relaxed in this case.

Haverhill, like Copdock intend to install a new steel eight pit frame, into which they plan to place their existing six, retuned bells. If they receive an Arnie grant, they plan to add two additional new, 4.25cwt treble bells to make the octave. Taylors are their bellhanger of choice. Total allowable costs amount to £126,878 or £152,253 including VAT. The BAC recommended a grant of £12.7K, or £15K if VAT is included. Haverhill is to receive sound control, the cost of which largely accounts for the difference in totals between the two projects.

Finally, Sproughton is an 8cwt, 6 bell tower, rehung by White's in 1985. Odd-struckness has been a longstanding problem, compounded by the recent failure of clapper bushes. The Diocesan Advisor recommended that the clappers be re-bushed, and thinned down by judicious machining, along with an adjustable crown staple for the No2 bell. The total cost is estimated as £4,750. The BAC recommended a BRF grant of £500 towards the costs, to help keep this very active tower ringing.

Although most of the above planned restorations are also associated with the Arnie Bequest, Wetherden is also likely to be making an approach for a grant within a year.

BAC members activities

Barrow All Saints – Has been suffering from sticky clappers. Two clappers have been sent for rebushing.

Debenham St Mary Magdalene – After changes to the clock mechanism the No.6 bell now shouts down the empty weight shute. It is planned to block the shute, to regularise the sound in the ringing chamber.

Framsden St Mary – No.7-bell noted as particularly hard going, mostly due to ancient plain bearings. Little to be done except oil well before use. Plans are under way to install catch timbers under the treble and No.2 bells.

Freckenham St Andrew - A new stay was manufactured to replace a broken tenor stay.

Gipping St Nicholas – Restoration completed by Taylors with BAC help.

Ipswich St Lawrence – Scaffolding has been removed but no ringing yet allowed.

Ipswich St Mary Le Tower – Three tenders have been received for resolving issues of general wear and tear. The tower is known to be particularly damp, which does not help the longevity of the frame and fittings.

Ipswich St Nicholas – Scaffolding has been removed but no ringing yet allowed.

Ipswich St Peter – Reportedly bells may soon be available for chiming.

Little Glenham St Andrew – Reports suggest that the wheels are falling apart, due to neglect and old age. There is little appetite to make significant improvements since rumour suggests that the benefice is considering making the church redundant.

Kelsale – J Stevens has concerns that a specific ringer's bequest is being diverted away from bell restoration work, and onto other church projects. All agreed to support him raising concerns about it.

Metfield St John the Baptist – A lost stay bolt whilst the bell was being rung, resulted in the stay jamming in the frame with such violence that the bearing blocks moved out of alignment. As a result, the bell could not be raised. Stay re-bolted securely and bearings re-aligned by Taylors and BAC members.

Mildenhall Blessed Virgin Mary – The long-awaited structural engineering report has finally been delivered. A meeting to consider its findings is planned shortly.

Monewdon St Mary – The BAC were requested to help after a pulley was found to be disintegrated and tearing the ropes. Pulley replaced and replacements for the other worn pulleys ordered.

Sproughton All Saints – Clappers to be re-bushed and re-profiled plus a new crown staple for the No2 bell.

Stowlangtoft St George – Tenor wheel broken/disintegrating due to woodworm and old age. Repairs ongoing.

Stowmarket SS Peter and Mary – General maintenance.

Wickham Skeith St Andrew – General maintenance prior to a striking competition.

Other matters

A bell maintenance course is planned for the afternoon of 12 Sep 26, at Framlingham. If numbers warrant, we will also run a course in the morning. A calling notice will be included in the July and August editions of "What's On".

Trainers from BAC have been agreed and they were thanked.

A Moulton wished the committee to consider if his future position on DAC, could he be replaced please, as he wanted to retire in due course. Chairman to consider and report back.

Next meeting

Venue – The Crown, Stowupland on Tuesday 6th October 2026 at 19.00 hrs.