# Suffolk Guild of Ringers

## Belfry Advisory Committee (BAC) Minutes - 6 October 2026

Held at The Crown PH, Stowupland at 19.00hrs.

**Present** - C Davies (Chair), C McArthur (Sec), M Steggles, C Birkby, J Stevens, J Flatters, W Scadding, T Hart and R Patterson
**Apologies** – A Moult, W Girling, N Whittle and M Currie.

1.*Progress with the Arnie Knights Bequest was briefed.* Currently, Long Melford has been offered £150K, while Copdock, Drinkstone and Haverhill have each been offered £25K plus a restoration fund grant. None of the four bequest offers has yet been formally accepted. Nonetheless, the BAC helped remove the bells and old frame from Copdock, and will be heavily involved with the grillage installation, hopefully before Christmas. The existing six bells and frame at Haverhill are due to be removed during the week of 14 Oct and installation of the new eight is expected in the new year. Meanwhile, Drinkstone's two new bells are due to be cast on 22 Oct and will be installed by the BAC, hopefully before Christmas. Barham are reportedly making progress with the provision of two new oak doors for the porch. This is a necessary pre-requisite since the bells are (unusually) rung from the porch with the ringers open to the elements. Barham, Finningham, and Hoxne remain in the running for one of the two remaining £25K bequests. Fundraising continues at Hoxne, but things are very quiet at Finningham.

2.*Twenty-one 'students' attended a bell maintenance course* which was run on 12 Sep 2026 at Framlingham. The course followed a similar format to those ran two years ago and was very well received.

3.*The BAC has received one request for grant aid*. Both the bells and A frame at Weybread were made in 1879 by Moore, Holmes and Mackenzie of Redenhall (Norfolk) and are unique in design. The bells were last overhauled in 1984 by Eayre and Smith. The 9cwt six, rung from the ground floor are on roller bearings and are graded as in "fair going order". An inspection was carried out in 2025 by the BAC, and the PCC have taken on board all the salient points. They attempted to get quotes from Higby, Taylor's and Nicholson's, but only managed to get a firm quote from Nicholson's, which they accepted and paid a 30% deposit. Work on the refurbishment is scheduled to start in early Nov26.

The work to be carried out includes provision of new pulley blocks, rebushing and some re-working of the clappers, removal of all wooden fittings which will be repaired and treated with preservative, and a complete rub down of the frame to get rid of surface corrosion. The frame will then be repainted with primer and two coats of paint. Nicholsons quoted £21,761 including vat, and the BAC unanimously recommended a grant of £2.2K towards the project.

There is no regular band at the church, although they have two village members learning to ring locally, and two more about to start. The parish is far from wealthy but have committed £13K of their funds to the project and hope to raise the remaining £8.8K from grants. The Weybread bells are of national importance given that they are unique in design and totally original. The planned refurbishment will keep them in good ringing order making them

available for visiting bands and the Guild for at least the next 50 years. Moreover, easy handling bells will only increase the likelihood of a new local band.

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

4.*Help, expertise and ongoing maintenance continues across the districts*, including:

Bentley St Mary – Inspection of 16/17 century 4 pit frame holding one 1696 bell, complete with a serviceable wheel. The PCC wanted to chime the bell. Fittings to be tightened and a rope fitted to allow chiming only.

Blaxhall St Peter – Basically bells too heavy for the tower. Not to be rung at present time.

Brandeston All Saints – Peal attempt lost due to seized clappers during hot weather – a known problem with nylatron bushes. Plans to re-bush all 6 clappers with phosphor bronze bushes.

Bures St Mary the Virgin – Reportedly new wooden shafted tenor clapper ordered, after multiple welding attempts failed. Issues with the No3 bell bearing block. Now requires a faculty to lift the bell to enable before an effective repair to be carried out. No3 bell not to be rung until repairs completed.

Copdock St Peter – Bells lowered and returned to bellhanger. Frame dismantled, lowered to the ground and removed from churchyard.

Dalham St Mary – Reports of a sticky clapper and broken spider. Both items repaired.

Debenham St Mary Magdalene – Ongoing work with soundproofing.

Eriswell St Peter – Fittings basically worn out. Recommendation to re-bush clappers and replace fittings.

Fornham All Saints – Very difficult to ring, frame moving excessively. Full circle ringing to cease, not to be rung (condition 2). However, the bells may be chimed.

Framsden St Mary – No 7-bell noted as particularly hard going, most 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 No2 bells. No recent reports from locals.

Great Ashfield All Saints – Having been unavailable due to noise complaints for many years, bells now available to be rung. Full inspection and report. 4 and 5 bells very difficult to raise, but gudgeon pins found to be dry. Hopefully will improve with oiling and more use.

Hacheston All Saints – Reports of odd struckness on No 5 bell to be investigated.

Henley St Peter – New floor installed, and rope drop holes marked for drilling. Building work in the top of the tower continues. Problems with pulleys, clappers and loose gudgeon pins.

Herringswell St Ethelbert – Spider fitted to provide more security for bells and ropes.

Horringer St Leonard – Reports of odd struckness. Inspection revealed four loose clappers which were tightened.

Ipswich St Lawrence – Reportedly scaffolding has been removed, ringing on Wednesday lunchtimes but not on Sundays.

Ipswich St Mary Le Tower – Tenders requested 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 Margaret – Reportedly a clapper fell out of a bell but replaced with no damage.

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

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

Marlsford St Andrew – Clapper nearly fell out, re-installed.

Mildenhall Blessed Virgin Mary – The long-awaited structural engineering report has finally been delivered and concludes that the tower is basically sound. However, the two tenors which currently swing north/south are to be altered, turning one of the bells by 180 degrees to reduce tower loading. This is a complicated modification and likely to be difficult to achieve.

Old Newton St Mary– Frame tightened.

Pakenham Blessed Virgin Mary – Tenor wheel tightened. No3 bell going up wrong, clapper adjusted.

Rougham St Mary – Frame tightened.

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

Stratford St Mary – Wooden frame very loose. Tightened as much as possible.

Thornham Magna St M Magdelene – Rope Adjustments.

5. *No health and safety matters* were brought to the meeting, although it was noted that at a recent tower bells and fittings lowering, local people thought they might lend a hand on the ground floor. All agreed this had been a concern, and exclusion (except trained persons) from areas below traps when open was necessary, for future activities.

6.Next meeting - Returning to the Crown Stowupland on **Tuesday 26th January 2027 at 19.00** hrs.