

Oxford University Society of Change Ringers

Annual Newsletter - January 2015

New Officers

The following Society officers were elected at the AGM held on Monday 1st December in Exeter College:

President	Jeremy Pratt
Senior Member	Stephen Cameron
General Secretary	Simon Bond
Senior Treasurer	Catrin Morgan
Master	Isobel Fray, Merton
Treasurer	Niles Beadman, Christ Church
Secretary	Peter Elliott, St John's
Librarian	Freddie Manners, Balliol
Steeplekeepers	Robert Hornby, Corpus Christi and Wilfred Lewis, Lady Margaret Hall
Webmaster	Matthew Johnson, Christ Church
Brookes rep.	(vacant - no ringers this year)
CC rep.	Mark Bell

Vice Presidents: Quentin Armitage, Doug Beaumont, David Brown, John Camp, Ian W Davies, Peter Giles, Nigel Herriott, Paul Mounsey, Donald Niblett, Dermot Roaf, Andrew Stubbs, and Lester Yeo were re-elected.

Bell Restoration Fund

BRF Trustees: Senior Member and Treasurer *ex officio*, Andrew Stubbs and Christopher Poole

Independent Examiners: Marika Haseldine and Nigel Orchard

Life Members

The following have become life members since the last newsletter:

Clyde Whittaker (Trinity, 1977-80)
Catrin Morgan (St Catherine's, 2002-06)
Wilfred Lewis (St Catherine's, 2011-14)
Alex Sharpe (Kellogg, 2011-)

For keepers of historical record, it should be noted that Fergus Colquhoun, announced in last year's newsletter as having attended Balliol College, did in fact attend Trinity College. My apologies to members of Balliol for any upset this has caused.

Residents' Review

Matthew Johnson, immediate past Master, writes:

Resident numbers have remained good over the last year, with all returning after the summer vacation, when Wilfred Lewis graduated and started a DPhil. Practices at Mary Mag have been well attended and supported, with Spliced Surprise Minor and Surprise Major being rung. Mondays at St Thos have been less well attended, though they have been useful for those taught to ring in Michaelmas 2013. 12 bell practices were held at Christ Church in Hilary, and in Reading in Trinity and Michaelmas. Thank you to all those who came and supported these. Regular handbell practices have continued at lunchtimes in the ringing chamber at Mary Mag, resulting in a number of ringers ringing quarters of Cambridge Surprise Minor in hand.

This year, in addition to the ones before the practice at Mary Mag, we've been ringing quarter peals at St Thos on Saturdays before their main service at 5.30pm. In Michaelmas this became our main service ringing there when the Sunday service time moved again. Elsewhere service ringing has continued at Mary Mag, and fortnightly at St Ebbe's, SMV and New College, with variable attendance levels.

The Annual tour, based in Liverpool, was well attended with a good range of towers. Thank you to Michael O'Hagan and Lucy Bricheno for organising an excellent event. The CUG organised the joint outing in Hilary in and around Bedford. As is traditional we outnumbered them, this time sending twice as many ringers. Isobel Fray organised the summer outing by minibus to south of Newbury and Robert Hornby arranged the Fresher's Outing out of Oxford towards Eynsham, once more featuring a fresher.

From the Freshers' Fair we signed up 3 new freshers who attended practices during term. In addition 4 Learners have continued to attend practices through Michaelmas, and I look forward to seeing their continued progress next term.

In Michaelmas we hosted the SUA striking competitions and associated ringing, drinking and ceilidh. We won the 6 bell at Mary Mag but were beaten into second by the UL in the 8 bell at St Thos.

Over the year the Society scored 4 peals and 53 quarters (10 in hand.) These included 6 in a summer weekend in Kent organised by Isobel Fray. It's been great to see the improvement by ringers through the year.

Finally I'd like to thank all who have organised and participated in events during this past year and contributed to the continuing success of the Society.

President's Notes

Jeremy Pratt writes:

The principal activities of the year will, as always, be well documented elsewhere. All I need to do therefore is thank formally: the Dinner Committee for organising the Annual Dinner; Michael O'Hagan and Lucy Bricheno for organising a superb tour in the Liverpool area; and the Master and other resident officers for another successful year in Oxford.

For many years the OUS has maintained a tradition of teaching new ringers, and many OUS taught ringers have achieved much. It is a particular pleasure to note that for 2015 we have an undergraduate Master of the Society who has been taught to ring by the OUS. Congratulation both to Isobel and to her teachers!

As all are aware, there has been much focus this year on constitutional matters. A Proctorial diktat was issued that all clubs and societies should have standardised constitutions, regardless of the relevance or otherwise of the "standard" and indeed regardless of the quality of its drafting. The Senior Member and the Resident Secretary worked hard to seek to obtain some dispensation, but sadly there was an unwillingness on the part of the relevant University Officers to communicate, let alone show any element of flexibility. Fortunately, while these fruitless "discussions" were in "progress", an alternative approach was being developed under the guidance of John Camp which would permit the resident society to have a proctorially compliant constitution but leaving the broad structure of the Society largely unaffected. Many members contributed to the debate on this through the on-line forum, and as a result the new constitutional arrangements were formally adopted at the AGM. The Society is hugely grateful to John for his efforts on this. A small group was set up to monitor the operation of the new arrangements, again under John's guidance, and this will make recommendation for any amendments which may prove desirable over the next year.

Finally, I said when first elected to the post of President that I felt that 5 or 6 years would be sufficient both for the Society and for me. The Society has recently honoured me by re-electing me for my sixth year. That will be enough, and I do not intend to stand for office at the 2015 AGM. It has been (and continues to be for the time being) a great privilege to be the Society's President.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Dinner and on the Tour.
Wishing everyone a very happy 2015

2015 Annual Dinner

The 2015 OUSCR Annual Dinner will take place on Saturday 7th of February, at 7.00 for 7.30pm. It will once again take place at Harris Manchester College where we hope that the college have taken on board some of our comments from last year and will provide us with an excellent meal as they have in the past.

The guest speaker will be Simon Linford, Master of the St Martin's Guild and Past Master of the Ancient Society of College Youths. Phil Barnes will propose the toast to the guests, and Isobel Fray will reply to Simon's toast to the Society.

Tickets are now on sale for £57 to include a sparkling wine reception, wine and port.

Menu

Paupiette of Sole 'Bretonne'

Tempura Cauliflower with Honey and Sesame (V)

Tournedos of Venison with Juniper and Red Wine Gravy

Shallot 'Tatin' with Oxford Blue and Walnuts (V)

Cappuccino Brûlée

Cheese Board with Port

Coffee and Chocolates

Pre-dinner drinking on Friday evening will take place in the St Aldates Tavern Blue Room (upstairs) from 7pm. General ringing and peal attempts will take place during the day on Saturday and coffee, included in the ticket price, will be available at the Royal Blenheim on Sunday morning.

To book tickets please send a check payable to 'OUSCR Dinner Committee' to: Isobel Fray, Merton College, Oxford, OX1 4JD, enclosing a SAE, details of any dietary requirements, and seating preferences. Payment can also be made by bank transfer. Please contact isobel.fray@merton.ox.ac.uk for details. The closing date for tickets is 24th January.

2015 Tour - Sunday 5th - Thursday 9th April 2015

This year's tour *is* being organised by Luke Camden. Ever the organisational powerhouse, he has this to say:

Please come on tour. It will be in High Wycombe. Let me know if you want to stay in a hotel.

Luke can be contacted at lukeocamden@gmail.com or via the General Secretary.

The New Constitution

The University has a Clubs Committee. Its annual report for 2012-13 contained this: "Last year we reported that a Working Group on Club Constitutions had been set up. Its recommendations to the Rules Committee in Hilary 2013 were accepted. The significant ruling was that all clubs should work from the same basic constitution. ... Clubs were given until September 2014 to adopt the new constitution." (I shall refer to this as "the basic constitution".)

The OUSCR (hereafter "OUS") became aware of this in Hilary Term 2014. It was obvious that the one-size-fits-all basic constitution did not meet the requirements of the OUS. The main problem was that it failed to provide for a society which had a large and active group of life members. In future, membership was to be limited essentially to current students. (The University regulations restrict membership of "non-University student members" - an ambiguous expression - to one fifth of total membership.) Clearly, this would put an end to the OUS as it has existed (with a break of a few years) since 1872. It would not be possible for peals to include non-students. Current life members would have no status within the society and no say in its running. The office of President as we understand it would be abolished. (There was no scope for a President and a Master.) There would be no Vice-Presidents or (perhaps more importantly) General Secretary. Central Council membership would cease, as the number of members would not reach the required threshold. This pointed to another shortcoming of the basic constitution: it did not recognise the wider context of ringing.

In April 2013, A letter was drafted by the President (Jeremy Pratt), with input from the Senior Member (Stephen Cameron), the then Resident Secretary (Isobel Fray) and me, setting out these problems and requesting some flexibility in implementing the basic constitution. This was sent to the Chair of the Clubs Committee at the beginning of May, with a proposed draft, incorporating the main features of our current rules within the framework of the basic constitution. It received no reply until 7 July. The reply completely failed to acknowledge or address our concerns. Full term had ended on 21 June and the Clubs Committee office was closed until the beginning of Michaelmas Term.

Nevertheless, there was still hope in some quarters that a solution would be found through official channels. Stephen Cameron contacted the previous year's Assessor, whom he knows. (The post of Assessor was established in 1960 as a sort of female proctor but is now

responsible for student welfare and finance.) No doubt as a result of being a lawyer, I was less optimistic about the human capacity for acting rationally. It seemed sensible to work on a "plan B", in case "plan A" came to nothing.

My initial thought was that we should have to split the OUS in two. There would be a society much like the existing OUS, but minus the students, and a student society which would adopt the basic constitution, or something close. I set up an email discussion list. The idea was first to establish principles and then to work on a draft constitution. This worked very well. We should certainly not have reached a consensus without many helpful and percipient contributions from members.

It rapidly became apparent that people did not like the idea of having two societies. (I shall use the term "badgers" in time-honoured OUS fashion.) The badgers generally wanted to feel that they continued to be members of the same society they had joined. The students did not want to be deprived of the advantages of registration with the Proctors, for example IT facilities and access to the minibus. The circle had somehow to be squared.

The solution adopted was to retain one society, called "The Oxford University Society of Change Ringers", which would be free-standing and not registered with the Proctors. (The society as a whole will be referred to as "the general society".) It would contain a student section which, as it was part of the general society, would use the same name. (Perhaps this should be called "quantum nomenclature". The society's title is in two places at once.) This section would be registered with the Proctors and adopt a constitution agreeable to officialdom. There were questions about the use of "Oxford University" in the title of the general society, but I am satisfied that there are no valid legal objections. A workable draft for the general society was developed and made available online. A draft of the student section constitution, in more inchoate form, was also published and awaited comments from the residents.

Towards the beginning of Michaelmas Term, the Clubs Committee did agree that, as our present rules required notice of any rule change, we could delay adopting a new constitution until the AGM. Notice of the proposed changes was duly given at the Michaelmas TGM and in the "Ringing World". Jeremy and Stephen later heard from the current Assessor. I am told that there was no meeting of minds. "Plan B" became, of necessity, the only plan and was duly adopted at the AGM. Some tidying up remains to be done. The Clubs Committee require a "Code of Conduct on Safety Matters", which will be part of the student section constitution. Financial matters need to be clarified. The intention is that the Bell Restoration Fund will be in the hands of the general society. These matters are being dealt with. A small group will monitor the working of the new constitutions for at least the first year of their operation.

So what has changed? I hope that the average badger who doesn't attend business meetings will hardly notice the difference. Members of the student section are automatically members, and its officers are *ex officio* officers, of the general society (but not *vice versa*). It was felt that the general society didn't need termly meetings, so only an AGM is specified, with provision for other meetings if necessary. The student section meetings remain as at present. The AGM of both the general society and the student section will take place on the last Monday of Michaelmas Term. The Master will preside at student section meetings and the President at general society meetings. The new constitutions outline the duties of officers. The general

society has a new officer: a Senior Treasurer. Rules for peals and Central Council membership remain the same. The requirements for giving notice of certain things are more flexible. It will also now be necessary to give notice of the proposal of new general society officers, if the current officer is to be challenged or is not standing again. Members of the CUG, who were all "honorary members" of the OUS, are now "reciprocal members", as we are of the CUG. The organisation of the dinner and of the tour will not be affected.

There is a strong feeling among those who have been involved in these developments that the University has not shown itself at its best. We were not listened to. The Clubs Committee has been responsible for the disruption of a society with a long and distinguished history. (And whoever drafted the basic constitution thinks that "agendae" is the plural of "agenda", but let that pass.) I hope nevertheless that the replacement constitutions have not only preserved what was best in the previous arrangements but have in some respects actually improved them. For instance it is no bad thing for the residents to have exclusive control over the student section, with advice available, as it always has been, from older members.

We have not drawn the new constitution of the general society to the attention of the Proctors or Clubs Committee. It is no longer anything to do with them. But we don't want to cause problems for the student section, so a low profile is called for, at least until the new regime is up and running satisfactorily. Understandably, some badgers who have regularly made donations to the University have decided that they will no longer do so, but anyone contemplating an indignant letter to the University authorities might like to hold off for the time being.

The new (general) constitution and the latest version of the student section constitution can be found at <http://tiny.cc/ous>.

John Camp

Obituaries

I am pleased to report that I have not heard of the deaths of any members over the last twelve months. Any members having such news (or other members) should let me know so that details can be disseminated.

Meeting Dates for 2015

The Society's business meetings are held on Mondays, and customarily take place in Exeter College. Please confirm the venue in advance.

TGM dates - the first Monday in term: 19th January, 27th April, 12th October

AGM date – the last Monday in Michaelmas term: 30th November

The Society's History

Sales of the History have recently dwindled to the point that the current rate of sales would see the existing stock lasting at least another 50 years, if not 100. The remaining backers with a financial interest have very generously written off the outstanding debt on the project, freeing us to reduce the selling price. Therefore, copies of the History are now available for a minimum donation of £5 to the Bell Restoration Fund. Please contact the General Secretary if you would like to purchase a copy.

Address List and Websites

The General Secretary maintains the Society's address list, of over 500 members. The vast majority are now on e-mail. Please do keep the General Secretary informed of any changes to email or postal address and, if you wish to get in touch with a member, just ask.

Email addresses are held on the website and by the secretary, but the master list is maintained by John Camp for use on the mailing list. This is used for important announcements and the dissemination of this Newsletter, and all members are strongly encouraged to join it. You can do so either by e-mailing ouscr-admin@bellringers.net or by visiting http://www.bellringers.net/mailman/listinfo/ouscr_bellringers.net.

The OUS also has a 'chat' mailing list. This list allows Society members to discuss matters related to the Society and ringing in general. More details on this list, including how to join, can be found by visiting http://www.bellringers.net/mailman/listinfo/ouschat_bellringers.net

Contact Details

You can contact the General Secretary by post (please note the change of address) at:

Simon Bond
4 Marlborough Close
Littlemore
Oxford
OX4 4PH

or by telephone on:

01865 249922 or 07722 884389

or by e-mail at:

gensec@ouscr.org.uk