Peterborough Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers

Re-Shaping The Guild

Over the last year the Thrapston Branch has concluded that it is no longer viable as a Branch within the Peterborough Diocesan Guild (**PDG**). Recently some events have been shared with the adjacent Branches but these have not been that well supported.

At a specially convened meeting of all the Branches it became clear that:

- Reallocating the Towers presently within the Thrapston Branch to adjacent Branches would not solve anything. The receiving Branches would struggle to support several new towers.

- Some of the other Branches were also finding that member support of Branch activities has waned since the Covid lockdown, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to fill Officer posts as they became vacant.

Accordingly the Executive took an action to review the options going forward.

This review should aim:

- To reduce the impact of several Towers within an area not supporting their Branch.

- To enlarge the skills pool, e.g. for Officers

- To support more advanced practices to develop all ringers

- To maintain local ownership of ringing within the Guild structure

This discussion paper is the first pass at this review.

Background: Compare PDG structure with other Associations across England.

Helen Allton (Secretary) has surveyed other Associations to see if we can learn from their experiences.

This has shown that the PDG is an outlier with :

- Fewer Members per Tower than the average @ 3.   (Average 5, max 7, min 2)

- More Branches per Guild than the average @ 10.   (Average 5, max 15, min 1)

- Fewer Towers per Branch than the average @ 26   (Average 36, max 66, min 23)

- Fewer Members per Branch than the average @ 89   (Average 172, max 268, min 133)

Other points:

- No Association reported their Branches were too big, even when more than 200 members per branch. *(PDG max 118)*

- Few Associations reported cross-Branch events on a regular basis, generally training.

- PDG has comparatively few members per tower – re-drawing Branch boundaries won't change this of course. We need to recruit ringers to become members of the Guild, be more relevant to them, and thus to be active in Guild affairs.

- PDG has significantly fewer members per Branch – this must seriously impact filling our Officer vacancies across the Guild.

This would seem to suggest that the present number of Branches within the Guild is both more than the average, and rapidly becoming unsustainable post-Covid.

3 different approaches have been discussed

Note that these are **not** the only possible Options - they are presented here for wider discussion amongst the members to guide the Guild and Branch Officers in developing a way forward that can be put to the next Annual General Meeting in June.

Option One: Do little or nothing, maintain 9 out of the 11 Branches listed in the Constitution.

Under this Option the Towers currently within the Thrapston Branch will need to be shared amongst the 3 adjacent Branches; the other Branches would remain unchanged.

One way of doing this would affect:

- Peterborough Branch : +6   Becomes 35 Towers
- Kettering Branch : +6   Becomes 36 Towers
- Wellingborough Branch : +10   Becomes 34 Towers

This Option does very little to address the Aims set out above, indeed the receiving Branches expressed concern that they may not be able to support the imported towers.

However the sterling work by the Master in running the 2nd Saturday Training events (by their nature cross-branch events) is already addressing the aim to provide advanced practices and develop all ringers in the Guild area.
These sessions have been popular and should continue.

Option Two: Combine Branches, most readily reducing down to 5 Branches.

Thus this Option might include combining pairs of Branches: say

- Peterborough & Rutland   (64 towers, 217 members)

- Kettering & Thrapston   (52 towers, 159 members)

- Wellingborough & Northampton   (52 towers, 180 members)

- Guilsborough & Daventry   (56 towers, 172 members)

- Culworth & Towcester   (47 towers, 165 members)

 - much closer to the average members per Branch referred to above in the Survey, thus hopefully becoming more sustainable in the future.

Referring to the aims above: this

- would minimise the impact of non-affiliated towers, diluting their effect within a larger Branch.

- should enable more Officer posts to be filled as only half as many posts required.

- could ease the admin burden overall – doubling the number of members won't necessarily double the work involved?

- could make the new Branches more self-sufficient in training resources, though it is proposed that the popular 2nd Saturday sessions should continue.

- could dilute local "ownership" of events within the new larger Branches.

The last point is the most difficult to balance: the creation of 2 to 3 **Assistant Ringing Masters** per new Branch is therefore proposed to maintain that local "presence" within a larger Branch. This would also ease the transition to this Option from the present Branches.

Option Three: Introduce a "2 tier" system, with just 3 "Branches" within the Guild.

This Option would equate to what the Church calls the "Minster" model: where a major Minster manages all the resources in the area and supports the surrounding small parishes to be the Church in the Community.

In this context this Option would involve setting up 3 new **Regions**:

- **Eastern Region** : *loosely* <u>Peterborough</u>, Rutland, Thrapston areas

- **Central Region**: *loosely* Kettering, Guilsborough, <u>Wellingborough</u> areas

- **Western Region**: *loosely* Culworth, Daventry, <u>Towcester</u>, Northampton Areas

In each Region the suggested "Minster" is underlined, being the largest tower within the Region, but the towers within each Region will almost certainly **not** be the same as those towers within the Branches indicated. The aim will be to define the new Regional boundaries so that each will have approximately 300 members in their area.

Each Region will elect a core set of Officers; namely Chair, Ringing Master, Secretary, Treasurer, Steward - to provide that support to all the Towers in that Region.
The Regions will have the power to create additional posts or co-opt additional members to carry out defined roles at any time as deemed necessary.

Within each Region there will then be a number of **Areas**, based around 'active' towers as it is suggested that, to be most effective, these Areas will be "people" based, not Tower based.   Thus the number of Areas within each Region will not be defined anywhere, it will be a dynamic grouping of towers that can change year-to-year. For example the Eastern Region might initially have Areas based on Oakham, Uppingham, Peterborough, Nassington and Thrapston towers.

Under this new arrangement the Regions will invite a Ringer to become an **Area Captain.**
The Area Captain will then suggest the area they can support and hence the towers within it. This will be discussed with and co-ordinated across the Region and between the Regions by the Regional Ringing Master(s).
The Area Captain will thus provide the all-important "local" ownership of ringing within their Area and support the Regional Officers to put together Regional Event Calendars, Training sessions, etc. and in turn allow the Regional officers to support them.

Referring to the aims above: this

- would minimise the impact of non-affiliated towers, substantially diluting their effect within a larger grouping.

- should enable more Officer posts to be filled as fewer required.

- could ease the admin burden overall.

- would support more advanced practices to develop all ringers, managed by the Regional Ringing Master, properly targeted through the new Area Captains.

- would give local "ownership" of events within the new Regions, maintained by the Area Captains.

This proposal has similarities with the way the Church is organised within the Diocese:

- *The Guild is like the Bishops and their staff – providing central support to all*

- *The Regional Officers are like the Archdeacons, supporting the Areas*

- *The Area Captains are like the Rural Deans, overseeing a number of towers.*

This is clearly the most radical option and would change the way the guild works but could it lead to a stronger, more flexible and supportive organisation?

I look forward to hearing what you think, and thus how you see the Guild moving forward.

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President
Peterborough Diocesan Guild