

Central Council Meeting 2023 – Ipswich.

The 2023 meeting of the Central Council of Church Bell ringers this year met in East Anglia in Ipswich over the weekend 1-3 September with the main venue being The Hold, the heart of the Suffolk County Archive.

On Friday 1st September, there were a number of Development sessions ranging from ‘Moving on to Minor, Moving on to Major or Moving on to Surprise Major. These sessions were held at various towers across the County. During the evening, there was open ringing at St. Mary le Tower, a 34 cwt followed by an informal social at a local pub.

We arrived in Ipswich after a 12 hour journey from Cornwall, it was difficult enough using the A30 but this time we decided to carry on up the A30 and travel through South Somerset before joining the M3 and the M25, this was my error!

Saturday 2nd September saw the start of the main business of the weekend. First up at 11:00 was the AGM of the Ringing World. 2022 had been a successful year with the Journal showing a surplus of in excess of £26000 with a further increase anticipated by the end of 2023. However the increase in postal charges in 2024 will temper this.

Elva Ainsworth reported on a successful Ringing World National Youth Competition in York and one other item to note was the election of Gareth Davies to the Board. Gareth is a person who I know from having worked on the Historical and Archive Workgroup. The resto of the Ringing World AGM passed off uneventfully.

After lunch, the Council meeting itself started at 2:00. The first item on the agenda was to vote on the application to affiliate by the Central European Association And after a brief discussion on whether the association had in place such policies as a safeguarding one, their application was approved.

After apologies were received, a list of members who had died since the previous m meeting was read out alongside brief biographical details. One person of note whose name was read out was Robert B. Smith of Melbourne in Derbyshire. Robert was beat know for calling the longest tower bell peal ever rung at Loughborough Bellfoundry in 1963 in just a couple of minutes short of 18 hours!

After the minutes had been approved without correction, the accounts were then presented to the meeting. The assets of the Council are £441,667 and a profit of £10,000 made by the Publications workgroup and this has been transferred back into the General fund for unrestricted use.

The Executive of the Council then gave their report and the first item to be highlighted was the progress being made by the Safeguarding team who have been working hard on progressing and formulating further, the Council’s safeguarding policy, Among other topics raised were the National Ringing Centre, which at present has run into logistical difficulties and also the plan for the Mobile Belfry.

The President referred to a template for a 'Code for Ringing; had been produced and it was hope that this would be made available shortly to both associations and towers who may wish to make use of it.

At this point, the Workgroups (who carry out most of the work of the Council) took turns in presenting their reports.

The Historical and Archive Workgroup, of which I am a member, commented on the 3 projects that we have been working on, namely the ringing history website which is now live on <https://cccbr.org.uk/about/workgroups/historical-and-archive/> The peal boards recording and photography project and the proposed move of the library collection from it's present site in Shropshire to Taylor's Bellfoundry which is due to take place in 2024.

Following presentation of the Publications Workgroup, we moved on to the Public Relations Workgroup. This covered some important topics, not least the publicity generated from the ringing for the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II to the Coronation of King Charles III. Vicky Chapman the present workgroup lead is stepping down to become the new Vice President of the Council. She is to be succeeded by Alison Devine of the Ladies Guild.

As no further questions came up during the presentation of the Safeguarding Workgroup, the Stewardship and Management group were next. They referred to the increasing amount of relevant material which is now available online. They also stressed the need for people to come forward to join their group, they will also be looking for a new leader as Alison Hodge will be stepping down.

The last 2 groups to report were the Technical and Taxonomy Group Their main project at present is moving the Council website on to a new server, they are also looking for new members to join their group to get involved in various technical projects that they are working on. The last group to report were the Volunteering and Leadership group who are involved in a general survey of ringing at present in addition to the general promotion of better striking.

There then followed a general discussion on the 'Forward Plan' for ringing which is based around the 'Three Pillars Strategy', the three pillars being Publicity and Marketing, Recruitment and Development and Quality Environment. A recent study had noted that one of the main areas of support that was needed was to be able to support ringers to work around time constraints to be an active ringer.

After all of the reports had been presented, the election of the Trustees was announced with Tina Stoecklin, a former editor of the Ringing World becoming President and as previously mentioned Vicky Chapman is the new Vice-President.

We then came to the proposal of motions, the first of which was a proposal to set the Annual Subscription of Small Society at £10.00, this was carried.

The second motion was expected to be controversial in that it revolved around a vote to reduce the size of the Council. This refers back to the Crag Proposal to reform the Council

presented at the Edinburgh Council some years back. This motion also looked at the weekend around the Council Meeting was presented. Some people expressed the view that they would like to return to the previous set up with a ringing tour and a formal dinner. There were also concerns expressed about not having sufficient members to populate the workgroups.

In anticipation of what was expected to be a controversial debate, President Simon Linford produced a set of boxing gloves to laughter. When it came to a vote, a quick show of hands indicated that the vote was defeated and so there was no need for a secret ballot.

The last motion was to confirm the recommendation of the Historical and Archive Workgroup that the Library Collection be moved to Taylors Bellfoundry and was carried after some discussion regarding the legal process that might be involved.

The meeting itself was now running out of time as the venue had to be vacated by 6:00 pm, sadly this left no time for any discussion of the Julie McDonnell case to the disappointment of many of the members present.

After an announcement that the meeting was attended by 144 people, it closed at 17:55.

Ian Self.