

TOWER REPORT 2022

We are pleased to report that the refurbishment, rehanging and augmentation of the bells has been successfully completed. Work commenced after Easter with the bells being carefully lowered down from the tower and displayed in the south aisle before being loaded on to lorries and taken away for retuning and refurbishment. The bells returned late October and were again displayed in the south aisle. They were blessed during morning service on Sunday 30 October prior to being hoisted back into the tower. Rehanging was completed in time for the dedication service on Sunday 4 December led by Bishop Alan.

The work carried out included the augmentation of the bells from 10 to 12 and rehanging in a new bellframe positioned lower in the tower to improve stability with the bells reoriented and the tenor positioned in the centre. Sound control has been provided using electrically operated acoustic roller shutters installed over the inside of each of the four louvres. The old 1713 bellframe has been raised further up the tower and a perimeter walkway installed to give access to the shutters for maintenance. The old fourth bell, which was cast in nearby Bells Hill by local bell founder John Waylett in 1713, was found to be too thin for retuning and has been retained for posterity in the old bellframe. The addition of the sharp second bell gives a light ring of 8.

As part of the fundraising, six of the new headstocks were sponsored by members of the St. Michael's congregation and St. Joseph's church. Each headstock being commemorated with an inscribed brass plaque.

Unfortunately, the building work in the tower had not been completed by the end of the year requiring the Faculty to be extended. Outstanding work included the installation of the ships ladders from the ringing chamber to the tower roof, redecoration of the ringing chamber and the inspection and restarting the clock.

To qualify for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund we were required to run a Community Engagement Programme to engage a wider demographic in the history of St. Michael's and the activity of bell ringing. Information about the Bell Restoration Project has been shared with the wider community with stands at the Town Carnival and Heritage Open Day in Castle Park, and as displays in the Bishop's Stortford Independent window, the Library and the Museum.

Ringers have taken handbells out to a Christmas coffee morning at the library and to St. Elizabeth's Centre to share the activity of ringing with people who are not able to access the tower. Visits from youth groups and schools to the tower, together with Open Days, have attracted people from a range of faiths and cultures and we look forward to continuing with this in the future.

Children from St. Michael's School have visited the tower to learn about the heritage of the bells and the church. They have also taken part in a nature study of the churchyard, creating new habitat with bird boxes, log piles and a bat box and planting wildflowers to increase the biodiversity of the church grounds.

There are some 18 members of the band of ringers. During the time that the bells were out of the tower ringing practices were held at Stansted, Manuden and Much Hadham and on Sundays ringers rang at other churches including Thorley, Much Hadham, Little Hadham and Albury.

Nick Hughes March 2023