

Tower Report 2019

There are currently 19 bellringers including 4 adult beginners undertaking training. Usually all ten bells are rung for service on Sunday mornings with occasional ringing on Sunday evenings. The bells are rung for weddings at both St Michael's and St Joseph's.

Thursday practice nights commence at 7.00pm with a beginners practice under the direction of Margaret Padgett, deputy ringing master, before the start of the main ringing practice at 7.30pm. On Wednesday mornings there is a method ringing training practice on the Dumb Bell. The bell, which cannot be heard outside, is connected to a computer simulator.

The band has continued to make steady advances with several members progressing well with Plain Bob, Grandsire, Stedman and Cambridge. Monthly 8 bell Surprise practices have continued, and the local band is now able to ring Cambridge Surprise Major with help from just a couple of visitors.

During the year the ringers entered several striking competitions and managed to field two teams for both the District Hayden Cup at Much Hadham and the Richard Atkins Call Change competition held at Great Hormead. The tower was also represented at the Herts County Association competitions for the Kimpton Cup held at Hertingfordbury, and the Coburn Trophy at Hemel Hempstead. The ringers also entered a team in two Essex Association striking completions at Nazeing and Eastwood near Rochford.

The terrible fire at Notre-Dame on 15 April shocked the world, the damage caused runs into hundreds of millions. The spire with its three carillon bells and the oak roof were lost but fortunately, the cathedral's ten bells in the two towers survived, albeit only just as the fire was reportedly only a few minutes from engulfing them. On Tuesday 16 April English style bellringers were asked by the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers that following the devastating fire at the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, the Archbishops of Canterbury & York and Prime Minister Teresa May had requested the bells at churches and cathedrals across the UK ring out in solidarity on Thursday 18th April. This was Maundy Thursday, normally ringing activities are curtailed during holy week, but this was exceptional, and the bells were fitted with half-muffles and rung at 7.00pm by members of the local band.

During 2019 only one Quarter Peal of Plain Bob was successfully scored, which was of Plain Bob Doubles and there was only one successful Peal, which was of Yorkshire Surprise Major.

Bells Appeal

Nick Hughes, assisted by Chris Brolly gave a presentation to the PCC at the November meeting to explain changes made as a result of representations from the Church Buildings Council and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings which had resulted in a number of changes to the scheme during the year which include:

- Floor of new Bell Chamber and bell frame raised by approx. 0.8 metre and is now proposed to retain the lower beams of the existing trusses to help support the floor.

This also gives a greater floor to ceiling height in the Clock Chamber which would be raised from 2.54 metres to 3.30 metres, an increase of 0.8 metres.

- Existing Bell Frame, now found to be much older dating from 1713 and now to be retained and repositioned to support the floor of the new Sound Chamber, the top of this new floor will now be approx. half way up the existing louvres having been raised by 0.2 metres. The floor to ceiling height in the Bell Chamber would now reduce from 6.1 metres to 5.50 metres, a reduction of 0.6 metres.
- Four small windows, one in each section of new infill which will infill the lower part of each of the four louvres to be installed to allow light into the new Bell Chamber.
- Sound control shutter in new Sound Chamber floor reduced from two to a to a single off-set pivoted counter balanced door. It would be no longer electrically operated but rope operated from the ringing chamber.
- Design development for Ships Ladders for Access to Tower and Roof Areas.
- Instead of recasting Bells 1, 2 and 3 the Church Buildings Council have given their approval for their replacement with new bells and the existing bells to be taken into stock by Nicholson Engineering for use elsewhere. This attracts a credit of £3,980.

Consequently, the anticipated costs for works to the bells and quinquennial work in the tower has risen to £265,000. This amount is backed up by firm quotations and includes contingencies. All monies raised by the bell ringers are being coordinated through St. Michael's PPC. The PCC can claim Gift Aid and reclaim the vast majority of VAT.

Fundraising currently totals some £145,000 so £120,000 still to be found.

Nick Hughes March 2020