

Tower Report April 2018

The St Michaels tower has some 19 current ringers including 2 beginners undertaking training. Usually all ten bells are rung for service on Sunday mornings with occasional ringing on Sunday evenings. The bells were also rung for weddings at both St Michaels and St Josephs during 2017.

Three of the ringers attended the Diocesan Safe Guarding training held in the WCC last August. We currently have no new recruits needing bell handling training, although this may soon change following the launching of the Bell Restoration Scheme and the supporting publicity. Thursday practice nights continue to commence at 7.30pm with Margaret, deputy ringing master, running a beginners practice before the start of the main ringing practice at 8.00pm.

The band continues to make steady advances with several members progressing well with Plain Bob, Grandsire, Stedman, Kent and Cambridge. Due to lack of sufficient available support from visiting ringers the Thursday 10 bell practices are no longer being held although the monthly 8 bell Surprise practices have continued, and the local band has progressed well ringing Cambridge Surprise Major with help from just a couple of visitors.

On Wednesday mornings practices on the Dummy Bell connected to a computer simulator have proved to be very successful and have greatly helped a number of ringers with learning basic change ringing methods such as Grandsire and Plain Bob.

During 2017 a total of 11 Quarter Peals were successfully scored but only one Peal was rung.

New LED strip lighting has been installed in the ringing chamber. The new fittings are much more effective than the old fluorescent tubes. A CCTV installation has been set with cameras in the belfry, clock and ringing chambers. Andrew Westwood, Steeple Keeper, has been maintaining the bells which have become harder to ring and require major work.

The PCC has given approval for the ring of 10 bells to be restored and rehung. The timber bell frame dates from at least 1820 and many of the fittings date from 1928 when the last major overhaul and retuning project was undertaken. The bells will be hung in a new metal frame, slightly lower in the tower where the walls are stronger, and in a different configuration to avoid structural damage. The front three bells will be recast and the remaining bells retuned, the oldest bells having been cast in Bells Hill by John Waylett in 1713. New floors would be constructed above and below the new installation, the upper floor being adapted to provide a measure of sound control by way of trap doors that can be operated from the ringing chamber.

The fundraising appeal is being formally launched in the WCC on Sunday 22 April. The works to the bells will be carried out by Nicholson Engineering. It is anticipated that the works will be carried out in late 2019. The estimated cost allowing for contingencies is £200,000 plus VAT. VAT will be reclaimed through the Listed Places of Worship Scheme. Monies raised will be kept in a PCC ring fenced account. Diocesan Advisory Committee is being sought and a Faculty application is being prepared. A fundraising committee has been set up. Two fundraising events have already been held, a choir concert in November raised £898.78 whilst a handbell concert in January raised £415.50. A quiz night has been arranged for Saturday 2 June. An appeal leaflet has been prepared for circulation and bell ringers pages have been included on the St. Michael's web site with a link to 'Just Giving' enabling donations to be made directly into the PCC's bank account. Grants from bell ringing bodies are anticipated from the Hertford County Association of Change Ringers and its Bishop's Stortford District, further grants anticipated from the Essex Association of Change Ringers and the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers as well as the Baron Bell Trust and The Sharpe Trust. It is hoped that local organisations will be able to offer grants. These include Bishop's Stortford Town Council, Hertfordshire County Council and The Stansted Airport Community Trust. Other sources of funding include local businesses and the housebuilders building the new housing estates in the town. Some £5,000 of corporate cash has already been received. Private donations will also sought.