



*The Weekly Journal for
Church Bell Ringers since 1911*

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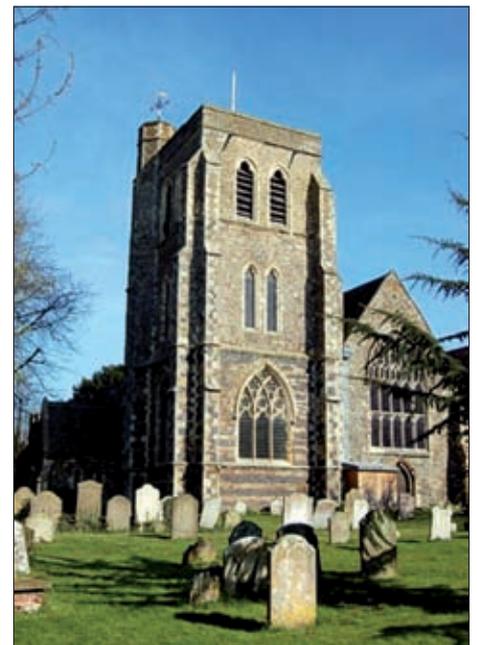
The Herne bell restoration project *by Susan & Keith Record*

St Martin-in-Herne, Kent is a village between the north Kent coast and Canterbury, just inland from Herne Bay. The church had a ring of six bells. The tower of is the oldest part of the church now standing (there are remains of a Saxon chapel under the Lady Chapel), and dates from 1310, when the parish was established. There have been bells in the tower for at least four-hundred years and the oldest bell dates from 1621.

No work had been done to the wooden frame for over a hundred years. The frame moved when the bells were rung, especially by the 5th, making them difficult to ring. Plans for restoring the ring had been discussed for some years. The bells had a reputation among local ringers as being difficult to handle and

they were a challenge for the local band, especially for teaching learners.

In the mid 1980s, we started making enquiries about the options for rehangng the bells. The ringers donated their fees for ringing for weddings to the bell fund for many years in the hope that it would provide the basis of a fund for restoration and in time (after some twenty five years) this fund amounted to over £25,000. Only four peals had been rung on the bells, in 1920, 1950, 1951 and 1976 until 2008 when a sponsored peal was rung to raise money for the restoration project. It was also planned to add two new bells to augment the ring to eight, as two donors had offered to pay for two bells, in memory of family members. The tower had space for two bells to be added at the same level as the existing six bells and



The tower of St Martin-in-Herne



The refurbished and augmented ring immediately before installation

there was plenty of room for eight in the ringing room.

Advice was obtained as to whether the existing wooden frame should or could be retained. The frame is of historic interest as it dates from the 1720s. There were meetings and discussions with the Diocesan Advisory Committee of Canterbury Diocese and English Heritage. Three bell hangers provided estimates for the work. Whites of Appleton initially advised that a new frame should be used but, when it appeared that the wooden frame would need to be retained for historical reasons, they revised the proposal to accommodate retention of the frame. This sparked an interesting debate between Brian Butcher and the archaeologist on the DAC, Paul Bennett, who had been taught to ring at Canterbury Cathedral many years ago, about



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the merits of retaining the frame for historical reasons and the best solution for the bell restoration project. Yes, we made Paul ring the bells to see what the problems were!

Grants were offered by the Council for the Care of Churches, the Central Council of Church Bellringers and the Kent County Association of Change ringers. An unsuccessful application for a grant was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Several more applications for grants were submitted and grants received from the Colyer-Ferguson Trust, the Garfield Weston Foundation and the All Churches Trust.

Fund raising continued during the 700th anniversary of the parish in 2010, which started in May at Pentecost. After a special service, attended by the Bishop of Dover, on a beautiful sunny Sunday, the Trafford mini-ring of bells was set up in the churchyard. This was a great success and generated much interest in ringing. The 2010 series of events, which included a concert, a Barn Dance, an art exhibition in the church and a poetry workshop, culminated in a weekend of celebrations in July. We held a striking competition; no rules as to what was rung just ten minutes of ringing (reduced to five minutes' ringing as it was a hot day and the bells were not that easy). This was the first Striking Competition held at Herne, and represented a true test of striking and listening by the bands, as the bells were odd-struck, especially the 2nd and 5th. Indeed, the 2nd changed its oddstruckness from time to time, when the clapper flipped over from one side of the bell to the other. The judges (a ringer and a non-ringer who is the father of two ringers and rings tunes on handbells) were looking for technical ability and artistic impression. The home team won!

After the success of the Trafford mini-ring, which was not available on the final weekend of the celebrations due to another booking, we arranged to have the Jubi peal, one of the first portable rings made by Walter Dobbie and now cared for by the Kent County Association of Change Ringers. Brian Butcher had assembled it before and offered to help (he was also judging the Striking Competition). Glad of his assistance, and Malcolm Smith's help (from the KCACR 'heavy gang') and other ringers, the ring was collected and the parts laid out in the churchyard. The ladies in the tea tent set up in the churchyard watched with interest. After an hour and a half of effort, and appropriate engineering skills, including judicious use of a hammer, the Jubi peal was erected. There were instructions but many of the colours painted on the parts to identify them had worn away with time. The spectators reckoned they had enjoyed themselves – not so sure about those who had been busy putting the ring up.

Though it was planned to proceed with restoration of the bells, using the old frame, and new fittings, in the autumn of 2010, this could not happen as all the paperwork required by the Diocesan Committee was not available. The specification for the building work was sent to the DAC by the architect in July 2010. The necessary faculty application was finally granted in February 2011.

In the meantime, the costs of the project were rising. Metal prices increased so the estimate from the bell hangers for their work including the two new bells rose. The VAT exemption which had been available, had been withdrawn, and VAT where applicable increased to 20% in 2011, so costs rose again, increasing by some £20,000 to over £100,000.

With the grant of the faculty, the order for the new bells could finally be placed with Whites of Appleton. The two new bells were cast by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in March 2011, watched by the donor families and the Vicar. We were thrilled to see the moulds at the foundry marked "Herne treble" and "Herne 2nd".

A local firm carried out treatment of the woodwork in the spring of 2011, before April as requested by Natural England, for the benefit of any wildlife in the vicinity. A bat expert from Natural England visited and advised that though bats had been in the church (identified from their droppings), there were none in the tower.

There is no trap door at Herne to enable the bells to be lowered down the tower. There is a stone vaulted ceiling in the tower so there was a problem in getting the existing bells out. So scaffolding had to be erected outside the tower so the bells could be swung out through a belfry window and lowered to the ground. It appeared that one of the windows in the belfry would have to be widened to allow the tenor bell (which was an inch or so larger than the belfry window) to be hoisted out of the tower. A new belfry floor needed to be laid on a steel grillage designed by Whites of Appleton and the old frame bolted to the new floor to prevent movement.

We thought it would be useful to have some improvement work carried out to the ringing chamber and the tower staircase (some steps are quite worn and there is no handrail). Unfortunately, the architect did not support repairs to the worn tower steps even though experienced adults have fallen on them, though a handrail can be put in. It was also planned to have sound control installed and to have some training aids, such as a ringing simulator installed.

The bell ringers had raised over £25,000, grants were obtained of £7,500 and promised of £14,700, and donations had been made or promised of over £20,000 so there was a shortfall of at least £25,000 to be met from further grant applications and fund raising. Volunteer help from the Kent County Association of change ringers was offered, which reduced the costs. The PCC agreed to underwrite the shortfall.

Local volunteer labour from the Kent County Association of Change Ringers removed the old bell wheels and fittings on Saturday, 21st May 2011. The bells were rung for the last time before the restoration work was carried out the previous weekend, with a quarter peal being rung on the Saturday. The builders removed the bottom part of the window opening down to the level of the top of the scaffolding ready for the bells to be taken out.

On 23rd May 2011, the bells were lowered out of the tower by Whites of Appleton, with the assistance of local volunteer labour from

Details of the bells

Bell	Weight (latest measured)	Weight (as supplied)	Diameter	Cast	Founder
1	4-1-7	4-1-7	27¼"	2011	Whitechapel
2	4-2-11	4-2-11	28"	2011	Whitechapel
3	5-0-10		29¾"	1724	Samuel Knight
4	5-2-22		31⅝"	1737	Samuel Knight
5	6-3-21	6-3-22	34⅛"	1868	Robert Stainbank
6	8-2-10		36⅞"	1621	Joseph Hatch
7	9-3-19		39⅝"	1781	William Chapman
8	12-2-5	13-3-12	43¼"	1867	Robert Stainbank

Herne ringers and the KCACR down to the ground through the outside scaffolding, watched by ringers and parishioners. Once the bells were on the ground, the headstocks and other fittings were removed. It was then clear that the 4th bell had had its canons hacked off during an earlier restoration. The bells were taken down the church path on pallets and loaded into a lorry. The following day, the frame was hoisted up and hung from steel beams, to enable the floorboards to be removed. The old floor was to be removed and a new floor installed.

The 4th bell was found to have two cracks of 2" and 1" in the crown. These could be welded. This work involved a further cost of £2,500 plus VAT. The bells were then taken to the Whitechapel Foundry ready for tuning once the 4th bell had been welded, at Soundweld.

Once the floor boards had been removed and the frame lifted, Paul Bennett queried the removal of the floor supports as originally planned, as much of the floor supports probably dated back to the building of the tower in 1310. The faculty had provided for the removal of the floor supports so that a new grillage and floor could be installed. One third of the floor support had already been removed early in the 20th century and replaced with newer wood.

Paul Bennett and the bellhangers met on the 7th June 2011 to discuss the options and whether the remaining part of the floor support could, or should, be retained. The DAC asked for a meeting of the structural engineer, who had advised previously, English Heritage and the bellhangers. This meeting took place on 5th July 2011. After some four hours of well natured well informed discussion, all the parties agreed on the best way forward, reaching a consensus. This was a dual grillage option that involved the retention of the wood floor beams in situ and the original grillage below it, but would involve the addition of two north-south beams which will fit in slots cut through the original floor support beams, which would be retained in the tower. A further four secondary beams would be added on east-west above the current floor support beams. The good news was that it was the cheapest solution since it involved not having to remove the existing steel work and there was less building work to be done.

The new steel grillage was delivered to the tower on 26th September 2011 by Whites of Appleton. It was hoisted in to the tower and fitted by the bellhangers, assisted by local volunteers from the church and local ringers.

This involved taking steel beams up the church path balanced on a little trolley, and hoisting them up through the scaffolding. Getting them into the tower and doing up all the bolts took two days. The new steel beams were cemented in by the builders, who also installed a floor in the belfry.

The six existing bells were returned to the tower together with the two new bells on Monday, 31st October 2011, witnessed by many parishioners and ringers, including former ringers from the parish. The bells were hallowed at a short service, and were then swung up into the tower. During a long afternoon, all the bells were installed, looking resplendent with their new blue headstocks, new blue clappers and with new wheels and other fittings. It was the first time the bellhangers had hung bells in the dark. The following day, some of the bells were rung without ropes, on the wheel, by the bellhangers, so some of the retuned bells and the new second bell could be heard. The bells swung easily in the new bearings.

Once the bells were fitted, final measurements for pulleys could be taken and holes drilled for the ropes to drop down to the ringing room. The bellhangers returned on 14th and 15th November to prepare the fittings ready for ringing, and the first tryout of our new ring of eight bells took place on Tuesday, 15th November 2011. Much to our surprise, we found a video clip of some of the ringing during the tryout on *YouTube*, taken by someone locally who was presumably passing the church.

The work to the tower was completed by the builders at the end of the week before the Dedication of the bells, so there was a quick clean and tidy up ready for visitors at the Dedication. The Dedication of the bells was carried out by the Bishop of Dover on Sunday, 4th December 2011. Visitors included Brian and Diana White from Whites of Appleton, who brought details of the bells for display, Peter Sims, Margaret Funnell (Chairman and Secretary of the KCACR) and Brian Butcher, who brought a cheque from the KCACR, who had generously made a grant towards the cost of the restoration, and Ian Oram from the Central Council, which had also generously contributed to the project.

We now have plans to refurbish the ringing room with some new seating, coat hooks, and some carpet from the church which is now available after the repairs in church from a fire in the vestry the month before the bells came out (it has been an eventful year), are

Editorial

We are printing extra pages again in an attempt to keep on top of the flow of peal and quarter peal reports. This week we are pleased to include many reports of ringing to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II in February 1952.

Please don't delay in sending reports to us and do make use of our new *BellBoard* on-line submission facility at: www.bb.ringingworld.co.uk

The Keltek Trust has enjoyed another fruitful year (report overleaf) and we commend its activities, which have played an important part in taking forward many bell restoration, installation and relocation schemes in the UK and abroad. David Kelly works very hard keeping his 'ear to the ground' and staying in touch with other bodies such as the CCCBR Redundant Bells Fund. Increased activity in Scotland is noteworthy. The proposed scheme for St John's Church, Dumfries is exciting (p.208).

First Peal Congratulations

Jono Chapman, David L. Jones, Andrew P. Hughes, Alexandra E. Rolph, Joseph Q. Peck, Max A. Chowaneitz, Simon Veal, Julian O. Howes, Christopher J. Bardsley, Marianne Webb

1,000th Peal Congratulations

Sheila C. Matthews

Dove Edition 10

A cut-off date after which material for the next printed edition of *Dove* will be finalised has now been fixed as 9th March 2012 (at midnight).

It is intended that the on-line version of *Dove* will continue to be updated thereafter.

JOHN BALDWIN

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hopefully going to be put in the ringing room. We have sensors, which were kindly donated by ringers from Penarth, South Wales, to install a ringing simulator, which will be useful for training ringers.

Herne now has a ring of bells of which the church and village are very proud and which will proclaim the presence of St Martin's to the surrounding area for years to come. The return of the bells has been welcomed in the village.