



St. James, Sheldwich

Return to ringing

On 5th May 1998, after 92 years of silence, the tower of St James' Church, Sheldwich, Kent, proclaimed its return to the ringing world and indeed, *The Ringing World*.

In 1801, six bells in the key of F sharp were placed in the tower – all on the same level. In 1867 two bells were recast and replaced on a partially new frame above the remaining four, this seems to have been a clumsy expedient to save expense and may have led, in part, to the catastrophe that befell the tower.

The bells had been rung regularly until 1906 when a wedding was to take place. This proved to be the downfall – literally – 'something' happened during the wedding which resulted in three of the bells being broken and the others being rendered unringable.

During the succeeding decades the tower gradually succumbed to internal dereliction, care and maintenance being virtually impossible because of littering by the resultant bell debris.

'Bells' were periodically placed on the agenda of the Parochial Church Council but on each occasion, restoration was deemed to be too expensive for a small parish to fund.

It was in 1996 that a breakthrough came in the shape of substantial grants being offered by the Millennium Commission, given to enable as many bells as possible to ring out at noon on 1st January 2000. The bid was successful and the planning began.

Throughout 1997 thousands of words were written and said, to the outsider nothing appears to be happening! New bells would need new ringers and there were none currently in existence. A recently arrival in the village who had last rung bells 17 years ago was dragooned into service as tower captain despite a wealth of *inexperience* and the job of training a team began. This took place in the neighbouring tower of Selling where there were also no regular ringers. Much needed help came in the form of Clare and Philip Larter, two very experienced ringers from another neighbouring tower – Ospringe. They adopted the emerging team and are still helping/training to this day. Since 1997 much has been learnt (with still much to go), ringing now takes place every Sunday and for weddings and we are all very proud of ourselves.

In January 1998 the old bells and bell metal left the church for Whitechapel where all would be melted down, new metal added and eight new bells created in the key of B flat. While the bells were away the churchwardens could play and the long awaited task of cleaning and restoring the tower could begin.

The bells duly returned and at 7.52pm on 5th May the fruits of everyone's labour could be heard resounding far and wide. On 11th July a special service of dedication was led by the Rt Rev Richard David Say KCVO DD and the new ring of bells was rung by the new team of ringers.

It was decided at the beginning of the project that there should be no 'fund raising' events – the money was to be 'found' by donations, grants and



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'other' means. The total cost of £81,000 was ultimately borne by the Millennium Commission – 50% and the remaining 50% by the aforementioned grants, donations and labour in kind, the latter crediting the account with some £12,850 – a great deal of much appreciated local, voluntary work.

Each of the new bells has its own inscription, as follows:

Tenor – (7-3-00)

'For as man came death, so by man came resurrection of the dead'.

Seventh – (5-3-00)

'Charles Knight, Roger Mudge, Churchwardens'.

Sixth – (4-1-14)

'Sing and make melody to the Lord'.

Fifth – (3-3-14)

'Lewis Arthur, 3rd Earl Sondes'.

Fourth – (3-1-00)

'My heart is steadfast O God, I will sing and make music with all my soul'.

Third – (3-0-00)

'I waited patiently for the Lord, He turned to me and heard my cry'.

Second – (2-2-14)

'A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger'.

Treble – (2-2-14)

'Make a joyful noise to God'. PAUL EVANS