

Rensle.

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, EAST MEON

THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH BELLS, 1990

Vicar: Reverend Peter Wadsworth

Church Wardens: Vice-Admiral Dennis Mason
Adrian Pelly Esq
Mrs Margaret Pelly

The bells were restored by John Taylor & Co. (Bellfounders) Ltd of Loughborough and the peal was augmented from eight to ten bells. Local volunteers took down the bells, transported them to and from the bellfoundry and assisted with the re-hanging. Planning and fund raising started in early 1989, the work took place between July and November 1990 and the bells were re-dedicated in January 1991. The whole of the project was a major community effort, enthusiastically supported by the villagers of East Meon and friends in the neighbourhood.

The restoration marked the centenary since the last overhaul and re-hanging of the bells in 1890.

The need for restoration

Before 1890 there were six bells at East Meon in an oak frame very high up in the tower and with their old plain bearings and long rope draught they must have been extremely difficult to ring. In that year a major restoration was completed and the bells were re-hung with new fittings in a new oak and cast iron frame, much lower down in the tower. The present ringing chamber was created. At the same time two treble bells were added and this majestic octave was enjoyed by the villagers for most of the next century. (The bells were silent during the Second World War and were neglected during a subsequent period).

By 1988 it was seen that the ravages of time and wear and tear had taken their toll; the plain bearings were worn out, the elm headstocks cracking and going soft, the wheels becoming shaky and the pulleys rattling but, most importantly, worn bushes allowed the clappers to scuff the bells rather than strike them cleanly. This was producing excessive wear to the bells and had it been allowed to continue for much longer expensive re-casting would have been required.

John Taylors were therefore called in to make a survey and recommend the work which they considered necessary to make the bells safe and to modernise the ringing mechanism. Their report was presented in December 1988. At about this time a very generous offer was made by two donors to give two additional treble bells if the restoration were carried out and the bell frame modified.

Organisation and fund raising

The East Meon Parochial Church Council was briefed on the proposals for restoring and augmenting the bells. After careful deliberation it was decided to go ahead and apply for faculty, provided that the work could be

financed without prejudicing essential repairs to the fabric and the redecoration of the church interior.

It was agreed to form a committee to raise money and to organise the work. The Church Treasurer, John Rendle was appointed Chairman. Other committee members were Rosemary Bishop, Margaret and Adrian Pelly (Church Wardens) and Denys Ryder, all from the parish; Bill Cope, Malcolm Donaldson, Bill Harris and David Whiting, from the East Meon Guild of Bellringers. The Bishop of Portsmouth, The Rt Rev. Timothy Bavin kindly agreed to be the Patron of the Appeal. Many other people helped the committee with its work.

The committee first met on 16 April 1989. Early decisions were to appeal for £25,000 for the bells and the church fabric, to distribute an appeal leaflet, seek grants, run events and to conduct a 'Buy a Part' scheme; this encouraged donors to sponsor particular parts or, even, the restoration of a complete bell.

Grants were received from the following organisations: The Manifold Trust, The Nicholas Stacey Society, The Nicholson Charitable Settlement, East Meon Parish Council, The Countess Peel Trust, The Winchester and Portsmouth Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers and the Sharpe Trustees.

Much practical help in running events was given by HMS Mercury, the Naval training establishment in East Meon. In all, seventeen events took place; these included coffee mornings, sales, concerts, bridge events, a dance, sponsored bicycle ride and village gardens open to the public. Of particular significance were an Appeal Dinner in the wardroom of HMS Mercury, the Hell's Bells Ball and Barbecue run jointly for the bells and King George's Fund for Sailors and an Auction Sale run on a commission basis with help from Messrs Jacobs and Hunt of Petersfield.

There was a collection throughout the Appeal for a 'Mile of Pennies' and this raised £483 (just over half a mile).

When the appeal closed at the end of 1990 a total of £56,397 had been raised; this included £8,000 given for the two new bells.

Grants raised £5,200; donations and covenants £32,015; sale of souvenirs £1,504; events £12,869 and interest and tax rebates £4,809.

Three donations were made to cover the costs of restoring three bells and these bells, previously unnamed, were dedicated to the memory of loved ones. One of the new bells was named in memory of the wife of a ringer, a lady who did much for ringing in East Meon. Details of the dedications are shown on the bell certificate.

The Work

The bells were dismantled and removed from the tower by local volunteers. Transport to and from the bellfoundry was generously undertaken by Barry Weston of Blackmoor. The Atkinson family loaded and unloaded the bells from the truck. An interesting point was that the tenor bell is slightly too big to pass through the west door. A stone was temporarily removed and it was clear that this had also been done in 1890.

Before leaving for Loughborough and after return, the bells and their fittings were put on display in the Lady Chapel. This attracted a great deal of interest and many people visited the Church.

At the Foundry, the bells were re-tuned and fitted with new headstocks, bearings, clappers, wheels and pulleys. Also, the opportunity was taken to renew the ropes and muffles. Hanging was supervised by Rod Walker from Taylor's with assistance from local helpers.

In the tower, a new framework was fitted for the additional bells (in the position previously occupied by the old treble bell). The woodwork was repaired and treated with preservative and improvements were made to lighting, bird defences and sound-proofing.

The ringing chamber was completely redecorated and a new carpet fitted through the generous gift of Wilton's.

Those who helped with the work were David Whiting, Malcolm Donaldson, Ian Hopkins, Barry Weston, William Harris, William Cope, Lionel Doubleday, Mark Esbester, Tony Perkins, Tony Fry, Joe Liddington, Adrian Buswell, Rob Thorne, Pat Chivers, Pam Thorne, Maureen Hanson, Shirley Treadwell, Wilson Atkinson, Michael Atkinson and family.

A copy of Taylor's 1988 report and specification, which describes the work in greater detail, is included with this report.

The total paid to John Taylor & Co. in respect of all of their work was £27,681.05. In addition, expenses were incurred for associated work and fund raising of about £2,000.

The bells

Details of the bells, their inscriptions and dedications are shown in the bell certificate.

At a magnificent service on Sunday 27 January 1991, attended by over 200 people, a ringer spoke briefly about each bell and the bells were re-dedicated by the Bishop of Portsmouth.

A photographic record of the project was prepared by Maureen Hanson and Shirley Treadwell. This shows the sequence of events from the initial dismantling to the re-dedication.

In conclusion

The restoration of the bells was a community endeavour generously supported and actively assisted by many people in the parish and from around and about. It also increased the band of ringers with a number of recruits from the village.

East Meon now has a superb ring of ten bells with new fittings which should give good service and enjoyment to many, without major maintenance, well into the next century.