

# Bell Project History



Back in 2017 I see that I wrote:

*“Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2017 saw the culmination of the St Nicholas’ Church, Combe Raleigh bell project with the rededication and blessing of the bells by the Right Reverend Robert Atwell, Bishop of Exeter.”*

That wasn’t the whole story, there was still a lot to come and of course there was a lot that had gone before.



*St Nicholas’ Church in Springtime.*

The tower is the oldest part of the present church building dating from the late fourteenth century. Our oldest bell was cast by Robert Norton of Exeter c1430 and bears a latin inscription *‘Plebs omnis plaudit ut me minore sepius audit’* which has been translated as: *‘All people rejoice as they hear little me more often’*. This bell has been calling the faithful for nigh on 600 years.

Until 2017 the church only had three bells. We don’t know, but assume this had always been the case. The 1553 inventory of church property lists Combe Raleigh as having three bells, two of them were subsequently recast. In 1900 these three bells were rehung in a new oak frame by Harry Stokes of

Woodbury. This frame had pits for five bells but the two additional bells never materialised.



*The Original Three Bells*

The photos show the three bells hung in 1900. The photos of the second and tenor clearly show the Ellacombe chiming hammers and the clock hammer can be seen in the photo of the tenor bell on the right. The Ellacombe chiming apparatus was removed when the bells were augmented to six in 2017. These original bells were to become the back three following the augmentation. The treble was recast by Thomas Bilbie II in 1758, the second was cast by Robert Norton of Exeter c.1430 and the tenor was recast in 1867 by John Warner & Sons. When we first came to ring these three, the second was so difficult to ring it was quickly called 'the beast', an unfair name really as after some work by our steeple keeper it became a lot easier. The Guild bell advisors had taken a look and warned us that the installation needed a thorough overhaul if we were to ring them regularly and also suggested we investigate augmentation.

Until the 1950's the three bells were regularly rung full circle, after that, until the mid-1960's, they were mainly chimed. There then followed a period of almost fifty years when the bells were rung only very infrequently, usually by visiting bands of ringers.

In late 2008, after listening to the bells being rung by visitors, the question was asked, 'Why can't the bells be rung more often?' The obvious answer was that we had no ringers. The then church warden laid down a challenge, 'if you want the bells to be rung then you'd better learn how to ring them'.

With the support of the then Vicar, the Reverend Allan Sheath, and the Churchwardens, three members of the PCC and one husband set out to learn the art. Soon they were joined by two other villagers and the six, popularly known as 'the Combe Raleigh Clangers', were taught by Derek Ballard on the bells of St Paul's church in Honiton. We were often told 'oh those are terrible

bells to ring', but we didn't understand why they would say that. Being complete novices, never having rung bells before, we had no idea of the differences between bells in different towers. For the learner the long draft and largely unguided ropes at Honiton do present a challenge, but it also had an advantage. Learning on these bells meant that we needed good rope handling. If anyone remembers my article in Ringing Round Devon entitled 'A year in the life of a Novice Ringer' you will be aware of the difficulties we found. For Lisa and I, the first time we rang away from Honiton was at Sidbury and we were amazed at how much easier it was to ring their bells. By the spring of 2009 we were ringing with St Paul's Sunday service band. Unfortunately we had lost two of the original four ringers, one to a shoulder injury and the other to the effects of Shingles though fortunately, once recovered, she came back to ringing.



*Conditions when ringing first started*

From August 2009 we began to ring the bells at St Nicholas regularly. We were forced into this when asked to ring for a wedding, which bearing in mind our limited experience was quite a challenge. The pictures give some idea of the cluttered nature of the ringing chamber in the base of the tower. As well as a sink unit and cupboard there was the clock weight casing and a large ladder to be considered, I'm afraid that one of the knobs on the front of the sink unit flew away when the tenor rope caught around it! The west door had at some time had a cupboard built into the recess such that the door could not be opened, another minor inconvenience. The flower arrangers regularly left buckets of oasis soaking in water, flower pots and stands etc, all of which had to be moved out before we could ring and moved back afterwards. The third picture records our very first practice in the tower with Derek standing behind us. The wedding was the first service we rang for and thereafter we rang each month for the Family Service and on other special occasions such as baptisms, harvest and at Christmas. Having had the installation inspected by a professional bell-hanger the next question was; why can we not have five bells since we already had a five bell frame? After inviting three companies of bell-hangers to quote for the work it seemed as if this could be achieved for the sum of £45,000. There was a rider though, all thought that we would find five bells unsatisfactory and all recommended that we investigate the possibility of

having six bells. Naturally this would put up the cost and with a new steel frame we would be looking for perhaps £55,000. I imagine that every such project has to wrestle with the problem of what to do first and what next. In our case, we first established that it would be possible to augment the existing ring of three and then looked to find ways in which we might raise the funds required.

Fund raising would take time and was a big commitment, especially for a village of barely 200 people, but still seemed to be achievable. It would take an awful lot of coffee mornings and book sales to raise this amount so we started to look for other ways of raising the cash, while the practicalities of augmentation were being worked out. For a start all the bell-ringers pledged that any wedding fees they received whether at home or at other towers they rang at would go to the bell fund. This amounted to around £2,200 over the period of the project.

It had been noted that in early spring, somewhere around St Valentine's Day, the churchyard had a glorious display of snowdrops and the idea of a Snowdrop Tea was formed. We would invite people to come along to admire the snowdrops and we would provide tea and cake for them. Maybe we could raise a couple of hundred pounds.



*Snowdrops in the churchyard*

At the same time one of our ringers decided we could sell snowdrops and thought that perhaps 500 would be enough. In the event it was far from enough and we were taking orders for later delivery. Our first Snowdrop Tea made around six hundred pounds, far in excess of our expectations. In recognition of the fact that if there was no church there would be no bells, the ringers had decided to give half the proceeds to the church and we continued with that practice from the first snowdrop tea in 2013 until completion of the project. The entire proceeds since then have been donated to the church.

The success of this event exceeded our wildest dreams and to date we have sold over 15,000 snowdrops, none from the churchyard. After this, imagination

went riot. There followed Plant Sales, Car Boot Sales, Ceilidhs, talks, a Jurassic Coast Open Tower Day, where 24 towers from East Budleigh to Askerswell in West Dorset were available to grab, exhibitions and concerts, all accompanied by tea or coffee and the famously large pieces of homemade cake. Ringers produced decorations, wood turned key rings, notelets, cards, guide books and fridge magnets, in fact almost anything that would help to boost the fund.

The Plant sale, usually on the Sunday of the Spring Bank Holiday, has proved to be another big success. Each time it has been held we wondered if the magic £1000 target would be met. Again with the completion of the bell project we decided to carry on with this now annual event and now donate the entire proceeds to the church.



*Plants for sale in the marquee*

Covid restrictions this year meant that we could not hold it in the church and churchyard in the usual way. When needs must the devil drives and he drove us to have a table set up outside one of the cottages in the village with an honesty box. Some items were priced others were available for a donation. At the end of the day we found that we had made around 80% of our one thousand pound target. This was achieved without selling even a single cup of tea or slice of cake.

The first of the many events to raise over £1000 was a very successful supper with BBC Radio Devon's Tony Beard, also known as the wag from Widecombe, at Offwell Village Hall. Originally scheduled to be held at Combe Raleigh Village Hall we found that the demand for tickets was so high we had to move it to a larger hall, even so it outstripped the available places and some applications had to be reluctantly declined. Lisa's husband Laurence

had made a bell themed thermometer and you can see that at this point it hadn't risen very far.



*Tony Beard helping to raise the temperature!*



*Artefacts on display*

Those who attended were treated to a most interesting talk, 'The Dartmoor I Love', with particular emphasis on the area around Widecombe-in-the-Moor. We heard much of the history and legends of the moor from a great character

and were shown many ancient artefacts that he had found over the years on his farm.



*Tables await our guests and supper being prepared*

During the interval a most splendid ploughman's supper with a traditional Devon Chudleigh and clotted cream and jam was served. Note: no scones, this was the proper Devon cream tea.



*Supper is served.*

A draw with a prize of Dinner for two at the Deer Park Hotel was won by Adrian Brown, the prospective son-in-law of one of our ringers. Adrian had the

good sense to donate his prize to the prospective in-laws. The relationship should go far.



*Adrian with Tony Beard and Rosemary Mapleston, Church Warden.*

After the interval Tony regaled us with some of the tales he became famous for, one in particular had the audience laughing until it hurt. Dating from before the Second World War, Tony read out a series of regulations, said to have been issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, for the better care of cows, thus proving that daft government rules are nothing new. On the other hand if the rules were complied with the cows would lead a very cosseted life.

During the course of the evening we also learnt that our earliest bell was cast in the same year as Joan of Arc was captured, tried as a heretic and sentenced to be burnt at the stake. That the bell dates from the time of the Hundred Years War makes plain just how long Church bells have been calling the faithful.

The Grand Garden Fete held at the Combe Hill Estate, Combe Raleigh, by kind permission of the Lazarus family was, despite the rain, a resounding success. Well over 200 people flocked to this stunningly beautiful location to enjoy an afternoon full of traditional fun and games.

Of course, bells were well in evidence. As well as the Frank Mack mini-ring, where we were invited to try our hand at full circle ringing, the Dunkeswell Hand Bell Ringers treated us to some fine music on their hand bells.



The Lazarus family were the prime instigators of the fete and full of ideas for attractions and money raising. There were pony rides and a steam traction engine, also giving rides and for the train enthusiasts a model railway to admire.



Traditional games included, garden chess, hoopla, a coconut shy, hook-a-boat, shove ha'penny, ping pong Pringles, the doughnut challenge, wet sponge shy and Daisy the cow, (the winner 'milked' over three quarters of a litre in 30 seconds!) The first picture shows the giant garden chess set and the second shows the Rev Jane Lankester entering into the spirit of the doughnut challenge.



For the more energetic, after the girls had shown how Maypole dancing should be done, there was an opportunity to join in, also a bouncy castle, football shoot-out and the Tennis challenge – play the pro, who'd flown in from America that day especially for the event.



*Maypole dancing for all*

After all that exhausting exercise then cream teas and cakes were available on the terrace, while thought was given on how much to bid in the Silent Auction. At the end of the day over £5,000 had been contributed.

I could regale you with tales of the splendid Beaminster Gallery Quire and the Axe Valley Choir concerts, talks by Tony Burges and others and the many smaller events for raising funds, but by now you would probably rather hear about the Bell project itself.

From the start we had wonderful support from both the Guild and Diocesan Bell Advisors which undoubtedly saved us much time and worry. Their expertise was invaluable; after all we were a completely new band starting from scratch with no previous knowledge or experience. I cannot stress too strongly how essential that support and advice was. One gold plated piece of advice suggested an approach to the Keltek Trust. Their assistance in sourcing suitable bells was also invaluable. We had little, no, let me correct that, we had no knowledge of how to select or source suitable bells, so that problem was taken away from us. Additionally, the Trust offered to give us one of the three bells needed. Fortunately the Trust had been aware of our project because of the publicity we had generated and knew of our efforts to raise the necessary funds and were very sympathetic to our cause. The other two bells were also donated, by ringers; one having an inscription added recording that it was given in memory of the donor's parents, both these bells were sourced for us by the Keltek Trust.

The band members had quickly rallied round and were committed to the idea of augmenting the ring to five and then, following advice, to six bells. With an outline of the proposal drawn up, our first significant step was to persuade the PCC of its merits and secure their backing. It undoubtedly helped that three members of the band were also members of the PCC and could explain all our ideas in a way they could easily understand. Enthusiasm can be infectious and despite doubts in some minds, we did get approval to go ahead with furthering our plans, on the understanding that there would be no funding from the church and we would be responsible for obtaining all necessary approvals and permissions. At this point we confirmed our intention to be completely open and issued frequent reports to the PCC and publicised all our efforts in the village magazine, the Raleigh Rag. We set up a group to regularly review progress and plot each next step. While quite obviously ringer based we were at pains to make it open to all and included at least one from a neighbouring tower, non-ringing villagers and PCC members; additionally, we always invited the vicar. The Rev Allan Sheath was an early supporter and wholeheartedly encouraged the ringing of the bells. We thought it was a blow when he retired and we were faced with training a new vicar, Rev Jane Lankester. She could not have been more supportive.

There are always setbacks, challenges some would call them. The idea of a new steel frame was turned down; the wooden one had to be kept. There was insufficient room in the bottom of the tower for six ringers, storage, cleaning and domestic facilities; we would need a ringing gallery. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there had been a musicians' gallery, described as ugly and this had been removed some 150 years ago. We decided it would be a good idea to replace it, preferably with something more elegant. An early estimate of the cost of the new gallery put this at around £20,000. Not put off by this, we accepted that the new challenge was to raise £75,000, quite a lot more than our original £45,000. After much negotiation and a moment of inspiration by our bell-hanger we could agree a proposal that would satisfy all parties. The wooden frame would be kept, but could be modified to take six bells. The gallery could be built, but would have to have the screen behind the green men, so that they could be clearly seen from the nave and there could be a door cut into the turret stairs. When the quotations for the revised scheme came in we realised the enormity of the challenge, we were now looking at a £95,000 project. The picture shows the Green Men the authorities were so anxious to have visible.



This new estimate made us take stock. Abandoning the project was unthinkable, but could it be delayed, or certain works deferred, until the money was available? Delay would certainly result in additional costs. Our fundraising efforts had been very successful with some very generous grants offered, including a five figure sum from the Devon Church Bell Restoration Fund, (I believe the largest grant offered up to that date) and a grant from the Central Council Bell Restoration Fund. We were agreed we had to carry on; we needed to have faith and redouble our efforts.



*Here we see how very near we were to our new higher target.*

As if the challenge of the bell project was not enough, the PCC had decided that the church needed toilet facilities. The two projects were running alongside each other. Viridor Credits gave an extremely generous grant towards the toilet costs which allowed that project to go ahead very quickly. When their representatives came to inspect the works, to be sure that it was money well spent, they were suitably impressed. Seizing the moment, our church warden asked about the possibility of a grant towards the cost of the gallery which would permit an improvement to the domestic facilities. She was advised to put in a draft proposal; in due course this became a grant application. Our faith was rewarded with a grant that covered the entire amount of the extra costs of the gallery. At that point in time we had enough funds to cover the cost of the work to the bells only and, without this timely grant from Viridor, the entire project would have had to be split into two phases while we fund-raised for the building works. We were jubilant. Both builder and bell-hanger had agreed to hold their costs for a short while to enable us to find the extra funding needed; we could now let them go ahead.

It was a significant moment when work to take out the existing ring of three bells commenced. It was significant for all the wrong reasons. On starting to open the hatch in the clock chamber floor, the floor sagged and it became apparent that it was dangerously unsupported. Rather than the joists supporting the floorboards, it was the floorboards that were holding up most of the joists! Before anything else could be done the floor had to be made safe. Nicholson Engineering in Bridport hastily made a steel supporting frame over

a weekend so that work could go ahead as planned. Ably assisted by the 'Ancient Society of Amateur bell-hangers' (volunteers from the Guild of Devonshire Ringers) the bells were lowered and the frame removed for transport to Bridport. The next series of pictures show the removal process from the dismantling in the belfry to the lorry leaving for Andrew Nicholson's works.



These first two pictures show the dismantling work under way in the belfry and the first bell passing through hatch in the hastily strengthened clock chamber floor as it was lowered to the ground.



*Safely on the floor*



*The first stage successfully accomplished with the belfry now empty and everything lined up in the nave, bells, wheels, frame members and all the other pieces.*



*The three bells lined up in the churchyard ready for loading and the first one being lifted on to the lorry.*



*A last look at the bells as the lorry prepares to depart for Nicholson's works in Bridport.*

The frame was to be modified for six bells and the bells then going on to Whitechapel for tuning, shortly before that operation closed, sadly. With the bells retuned, except the medieval bell, and the frame modifications largely complete we were invited to see the work in progress.



The six bells are seen here all together for the first time and the frame reconstruction in progress. Though some had been to Nicholson's workshop before, there was an eager group who went along to see the six bells and the progress on the frame. Standing on the floor the frame looked far too big to fit the belfry, but some quick measurements were reassuring; it would fit – just.



In this series of pictures we see all the bells together, the frame in course of modification, one of the bell donors with 'his' bell and the motley collection of ringers and villagers who had come along to view progress.



Now the end was in sight and everyone was eager to see the bells back and ready to ring. Patience was required; first the clock chamber floor had to be completely replaced, adding a further £10,000 to our costs. Then work could commence in earnest on construction of the gallery.

While all this work was going on our ringers were practising at other nearby towers. After twice taking third place in recent years, in the 2017 Striking Competition of the East Devon Branch, held at Shute, they took first place, winning the Edward Summers Memorial Shield.



*The team with the trophy*

There was much excitement when the bells and frame were returned to the belfry, four months after they were dismantled. The professional team came back and, once again, assistance was freely given by the amateur bell-hangers including our own Laurence, Mark, Stan and Alex with his very useful tractor. Without Alex and his tractor, lifting the bells out of the van would have been a big headache.

This next series of pictures show the van full of returning parts and bells and the unloading using Alex's tractor. Unfortunately the tractor wouldn't fit under the Lych gate so more traditional methods were needed to get everything up the church path.



*Preparing to unload the van with the help of Alex and his tractor and then the big manual effort to get everything up the church path and into the church.*



*Once everything was securely placed in the church the beams and frame members could be lifted into place.*



*Here we see the beginning of the frame build in the belfry.*



*The bells were then lifted and in the left and centre pictures can be seen how material was skimmed off both the inside and outside of the tenor when it was being tuned.*



*With the bells in place, wheels and stays fitted the end really was in sight. These last two pictures show more clearly how material had been taken from the tenor in tuning it.*

You may have recognized some of the people shown as they worked on the rebuild.

Three weeks later, I stress later, the building work began. Just about the first thing to be done was to remove the cupboard blocking the west door and the clock weight casing. Next was to put up scaffolding to enable work to commence to safely build a new, properly supported, clock chamber floor.



*The west door now open following the removal of the cupboard, the scaffolding in place to permit safe working on the clock chamber floor and the new floor viewed from the ringing chamber.*



With the clock chamber floor now safely completed the main beams for the gallery floor were built in and then the joists and the flooring added. Here you see it all partially constructed.

We had considered various possibilities for access to the gallery none of which seemed to us to be ideal. There were lengthy discussions with all sorts of interested bodies including the Victorian Society, English Heritage and the Diocesan authorities. Very early on we requested approval to put a door through from the turret stairs. In the end it was accepted that this was probably the safest way and so it was agreed that we could break into the turret stairs and here you see the doorway being broken through and the fairly substantial door lintel fitted and finally the door in place and just the painting of the walls left to complete the job. With easy access we could take the first view down into the church from the new vantage point.



These last three pictures show the splendid new window seat, the glass screen and rail allowing a view of the green men from the nave, deemed so important, and finally a view from the gallery with the screen and safety rail in place.



Within eight weeks the building work was finished and the final work on the bells could commence. Though the bells still could not be rung there



was so much interest in the village that we felt obliged to open the tower for villagers and ringers to see how far we had come and this photo shows the happy throng.

After the building work we needed to thoroughly clean the church; it is amazing just how much dust can be generated by builders. It was a very frantic last couple of days completing all the fiddly work and fitting the ropes.



Here we see Andrew Nicholson making the final checks before the handover. On the afternoon of 24<sup>th</sup> August 2017, nine years after the question 'why are the bells not rung?' was first asked, Andrew made his last checks before saying, 'now, it's over to you' and the local ringers had their first try-out of the new ring of six. It was a delight to hear them. It was even more so to listen to a select band ringing Cambridge Surprise Minor in celebration.

Weekly practices soon began and we just had to have a ringing party to celebrate, with champagne and cake of course. Judging by how few were left in the gallery it would seem that champagne has its attractions.



There followed the blessing and re-dedication of the bells on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2017. Our Publicity man was interviewed by BBC Radio Devon, not giving the poor interviewer a chance to interrupt and again by a BBC Spotlight News reporter. The church was packed full for the service which was conducted by the Bishop of Exeter, assisted by the Rev Sue Roberts, Rector and the Rev Jane Lankester, Vicar. Ringers came from great distances, from as far afield as Hereford and Kent to be present on this historic occasion and most of the East Devon churches and their ringers were also represented. Organist Kevin Lane, who many years ago learned to play the organ at St Nicholas, travelled from Thrushelton on the western edge of Dartmoor, especially for the day. Lessons were read by Rosemary Mapleston, churchwarden and Lisa Clarke, tower captain. After the dedication, the St Nicholas bell-ringers rang a short length of call changes following which the Bishop led the applause of an appreciative congregation. The ringers were surprised by this unexpected acclaim, unusual during a service.



The Bishop reflected that it was an amazing achievement, raising almost £110,000 in such a tiny community and it showed the dedication of villagers and the love they have for their ancient church. After the service everyone

was invited to the Village Hall for tea and to see the Bishop, Churchwarden and Tower Captain cut the celebratory cake.



*The middle picture shows Lisa Clarke (Tower Captain), Robert Atwell (Bishop of Exeter) and Rosemary Mapleston (Churchwarden) cutting the cake.*



*St Nicholas' Church, Combe Raleigh, Ringers 2017*

With faith all things are possible, but if at the outset we had been told that the total cost might exceed £110,000 it is very doubtful that we would have gone ahead with the project. There have been bells in Combe Raleigh for the last six hundred years and with this restoration and augmentation we hope to have left a legacy which will see the bells ring out for another six hundred years. As the Rev Sue Roberts said 'it is wonderful to think that these bells will call people for centuries to come'.

For those of you who like the technicalities here you see the bell details as shown on Doves Guide. Interestingly the tenor was always thought to be around seven hundred weight, but as you can see after retuning it is considerably less and I'm fairly sure that the difference isn't solely due to the material removed when tuning it.

Bell	Weight	Nominal	Note	Diameter	Dated	Founder	Canons	Turning
1	2-0-21	1617.3	G#	21.88"	1910	John Taylor & Co	F	N
2	2-2-16	1444.5	F#	23.56"	1960	Mears & Stainbank	R	8
3	2-3-16	1290.2	E	24.63"	1932	John Taylor & Co	F	N
4	3-1-18	1209.6	D#	26.25"	1758	Thomas II Bilbie	Y	8
5	4-3-0	1085.0	C#	29.44"	c1430+	Robert Norton	Y	8
6	5-2-19	985.6	B	31.19"	1867	John Warner & Sons	Y	8
Source: JGMS; D Sloman(WBF); J Clarke; A Higson; TimJ(AN); N Taylor Contributed by: <a href="#">[John Scott]</a> Last updated: 20/11/2017								

Frame	Bells	Year	Material	Maker	Truss	Layout
1	1,2,3,4,5,6	1900 [2017]	Oak	Harry Stokes [Andrew Nicholson]	6.A	5.1 [6.1]
Contributed by: <a href="#">James Clarke</a> Last updated: 15/10/2017						

We also had a guess the weight of the tenor competition and embarrassingly for us it was won by our non-ringing churchwarden, who estimated its weight almost exactly.

We consider the project to have been a huge achievement, having come, in nine years, from a tower with three almost unringable bells and no ringers, to one with six bells and eleven ringers.

Additionally, Lisa has taken on the teaching of several beginners, just taking their first steps to learning the art of church bell ringing. I ought to mention at this point that when Lisa first advertised for a pupil, as she went through the ART system, an unlikely event occurred. She received an email from a Sally Church of Clapper Lane who thought she might like to give it a go. Now with such an unlikely name and address it really had to be a wind-up. Sally? Church? Clapper Lane? After a few days Lisa thought that perhaps she should respond just in case it was a genuine enquiry. It was, there really was a Sally Church who lived in Clapper Lane and she wanted to learn to ring. Sally is now a stalwart of our band.

With the bells now installed, Lisa, together with husband Laurence, set about fitting sensors on all the bells and using an old Laptop and the Beltower software we have a most useful simulator, so that all the bells may be rung tied and practice can continue without upsetting our neighbours. This was so successful that, within a couple of months of the completion, we had a regular Friday Morning Group practice lasting around three hours for a number of ringers in the surrounding area. It was, I believe, because of having the simulator that the tower was chosen for the Ringing Remembers recruits training, led by Tim Bayton and Andrew Digby. Then after this we took on a

group of young girls on Friday evenings and that was a riot. Have you ever tried marshalling a troop of young girls high on chocolate?



*Simulator screen shown on the right of the picture.*

The simulator has been extremely useful for teaching early learners who are able to ring rounds with a perfect band before they ring with real ringers. It has also enabled individual ringers to practice on their own, before ringing new methods in Peals or Quarter Peals. You either love it or hate it, I personally love it; I find it a most useful help.

The six-bell simulator was used to great effect last year when we held monthly practices for a young ringers' band aiming at the Open Category in the East Devon Striking Competition. They rang plain hunt doubles and over five months we used the striking monitor facility to help fine tune their striking. On competition day they rang extremely well and won the category. Each and every one of them was applauded as they entered the nave after ringing. Their performance was particularly impressive as two of the girls had been ringing for just a few months. Since that summer three of the band scored their first quarter peals inside to Bob Doubles so this year the plan had been to ring 240 Plain Bob Doubles in the competition, but sadly that came to an abrupt halt after the third practice on 14<sup>th</sup> March. In the meantime we are hanging on to the trophy.

I should also point out that Lisa received an ART award for the Innovative use of Technology worth £500 for the tower. We bought items of hardware, lots of books, CDs, DVDs and the excellent Method Maker which the youngsters love. One of our most keen and regular ringers was a Ringing Remembers recruit and was ringing with us for Sunday morning services at ten years old. Oh that we had more like her.

This was not quite the end of our project, for every new ring of bells needs to have a peal rung on them. In our band only Lisa had ever rung a peal before (just one) and only two other members, myself and Stan Thompson, were up for the challenge. Being just a few months short of my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, I wasn't at all sure that I could ring for the necessary length of time. However,

encouraged and aided by Ian and Wendy Campbell and David Hird, the peal, called by Lisa, was achieved on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

*The successful first Peal Band.*



In August 2018 the first quarter peal was rung by a home band (plus Ian Campbell who was instrumental in the whole project).



*First Quarter Peal Band*

There were many enquiries from people wanting to ring peals and quarters. We had agreed with the church that one quarter peal would be allowed per month and two peals each year. Peals were quickly booked until Spring 2022 but sadly they will now be delayed. We also had an enquiry from the Devon Association, 'would we like to put our tower forward to host the South Devon Qualifier?' Their membership voted for our tower at their AGM and it resulted in a successful day of ringing on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2019.



*The first picture shows the ringers gathering before the competition and the second, later in the day, as the results were announced.*

Particular thanks are due to the Keltek Trust for sourcing the three additional bells and donating one of them. The 'new' bells came from a variety of sources; one was an ex-Trinity House buoy bell, one from St Philip's Church, Bolton and the third from the Poole Sanatorium near Middlesbrough. Despite their being from different founders and each with its own distinct history, together with our existing three bells, each from different eras, we think they form a delightful ring. At the suggestion of Ian Campbell, we gave all the bells names and personalities and had them talking among themselves about the project.

*Nameplate for 'Little Me',  
our Medieval bell.*

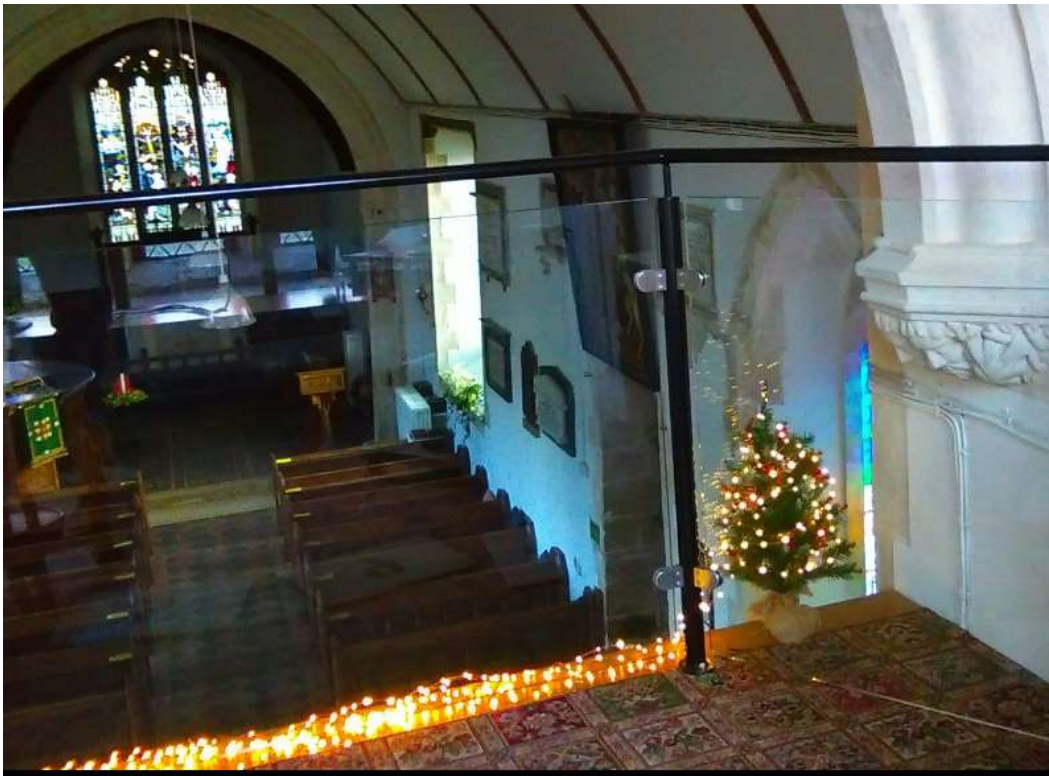


Regular readers of Ringing Round Devon will have seen the reports of some of these conversations. This was one more useful item of publicity, such that long before we had our six bells, the Combe Raleigh bell project was known far and wide. On a visit into deepest Cornwall and hearing the bells ringing in a nearby church I went along and obviously the question arose as to where did I ring. On saying Combe Raleigh one of the ringers remarked 'oh, Lisa Clarke is your tower captain, isn't she?' It is sometimes surprising how far word gets around.

Was the project worthwhile? With the present restrictions on ringing it might be questioned, but my answer is a simple one, yes. I believe that it was Disraeli who said there are lies, damned lies and statistics. Well, one interesting statistic says that since we restarted ringing at St Nicholas the average congregation has increased. The PCC member who expressed some concern that spending money on bells would take it away from the church has since said, 'the bells have been the best thing to ever happen in this church'. That might be a slight exaggeration, but it has certainly drawn everyone's attention to the fact that the church is still there, still active and still relevant. The small donations made whenever we hold a practice and those from visiting ringers all add up, last year they brought around £1750 and together with sums raised through the bell ringers two main fund raisers each year something of the order of £3500 was added to church funds. Income that was not there before ringing was re-established and the bells were restored.

Before I finish I must thank Lisa for most of the pictures, John Martin for arranging the slide show and the BBC for permission to use the Spotlight News clip.

Finally, all connected with the project wish to express their profound thanks to everyone who supported it in any way during the long journey that led to this successful conclusion. The Guild Advisors and members, local towers who allowed us to practice on their bells, the volunteer bell hangers who did so much work and all who encouraged us throughout the whole time of the project and especially our donors. Thank you all. And may we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thank you for listening.



*Trevor Hitchcock – December 2020*

*Ringling clips and the BBC Spotlight News clip can be found on Youtube:*

*Tryout, Cambridge Surprise Minor :-*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAUhGm5c4p4&t=7s>

*BBC Spotlight News item :-*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3fC4XG7vVc>

*South Devon Qualifier :-*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8q8Q1IzHwY>