

Article for Ringing World

All Saints' Church, Scraptoft, Leicestershire

In 1960 the Parochial Church Council of this church decided to have the mechanism for the ringing of three bells converted to simple swing ringing. Some thirty-two years later Alan Cattell, a multi-skilled craftsman who was passionate about bell ringing and well known in bell-ringing circles, sought permission to embark on a project to convert the bell frame and attachments to facilitate the traditional English system of full circle ringing.

To facilitate the changes in the ringing mechanism Alan not only had to install new steel girders but he also had to construct large wooden bell wheels for the bell ropes. This latter task was very time consuming and required the highest level of craftsmanship. Part way into his project Alan acquired an extra bell from St Michael's Church in Leicester. As this church was no longer being used as a place of worship, the bells were not required. Eventually, this bell became known as the "Belgrave Bell".

Apart from when assistance was required to lower or raise a bell, Alan worked alone. Nevertheless, he did make time to teach some children how to handle a church bell and to explain some of the mechanics of change ringing. Indeed, one of those children, Sam Bone, is now an accomplished bell ringer. Sadly though, in 1997 Alan died. Although Alan did not complete his cherished project he had successfully installed three bells for full circle ringing.

At Alan's funeral his wife, Ann, launched a bell fund. The initial response was good, but ten years later the total was only approximately £5000. During those intervening years Ann bought a further bell from the Keltek Trust. This was previously a Trinity House Buoy Bell. Unfortunately, this bell was deemed to be unsuitable for the purpose of full circle ringing. The Keltek Trust generously took the bell back and fully reimbursed Ann. Then, early in 2007 Ann secured two quotations for augmenting the bells to a peal of five and hanging them with new fittings in a new bell frame.

In June of that same year I offered to front an appeal to raise the necessary funding. Although both quotations were in excess of £30,000, the one from Hayward Mills Associates was the more attractive option. In the event, the decision to recommend this firm proved to be fully justified. I fully expected that it would take at least two years to raise such a large sum. However, this estimate proved to be way out. Within just three months the total of cash, cheques and pledges received exceeded the target!

Back in June 2007 my knowledge of just what was involved in this project was extremely limited. However, thanks to the internet and some quite exceptional help and support from members of the Leicester Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers, I soon gained a much deeper appreciation of the history and mechanics of the art of bell ringing. This increase in knowledge really fired my enthusiasm for the project.

In September 2007, Ann and I met with our vicar, Fr. Martin, to discuss the project. Then on November 28th 2007 Ann and I, accompanied by John Adcock, a member of the LDGCBR, presented our case to the PCC. The proposal was carried unanimously. Therefore, on the following Sunday, December 2nd, appropriately Advent Sunday, I explained the project to the congregation. The response from the congregation was phenomenal. Suffice to say that from the moment of that launch I never doubted the desirability and long term value of this project.

After the success of the launch, I received some wonderful news from George Dawson, the Diocesan Bells adviser. A redundant church in Saxby, a small village near Melton Mowbray, had been sold to a developer. Both George and Peter Hayward (from Hayward Mills Associates) agreed that the peal of three bells from this church could be tuned to fit in with two of our own bells. Our third bell, the tenor, was of poor tone and proved unsuitable. As this was a seventeenth century bell, it could not be melted down and so it has gone into storage.

At this stage we were planning for a peal of five bells. However, a couple from the congregation approached me about buying a sixth bell. They had identified a sum in their wills for the bell fund but thought that the money should be used now for this project. In this way they could enjoy hearing their bell rung in the peal. In the event both of them have joined our band of bell ringers.

The good news did not finish there. When Peter Hayward came to give us the new quotation for a peal of six bells he explained that the labour charges for the entire project were being waived in memory of Alan Cattell. This was an incredibly generous offer. Furthermore, we also benefited from a similarly generous grant from the LDGCBR.

The bulk of the remaining funding came from sponsorship of the five bells and the ropes and sallies. Alan's family sponsored the "Belgrave" bell in his memory. Another two bells were sponsored in a similar fashion. A fourth bell was sponsored by the congregation. This left the fifth bell. I approached the local Parish Council and was delighted when the committee agreed to sponsor the final bell "for the people of Scruptoft". It just so happened that in a recent survey, All Saints' Church came out as the feature most valued by the people of the parish. So with the funding in place the project could get underway with confirmation being given to Peter Hayward on July 15th 2008.

Essentially, the project undertaken by Hayward Mills Associates was to create a peal of six bells using the three "Saxby" bells together with the "Belgrave" bell, a new bell (the treble) and one of the three original bells. The six bells to be hung with new fittings in a new bellframe turned through 90 degrees. However, this fairly straightforward plan gives no real indication of the huge amount of ancillary work that was necessary to accomplish the desired end result.

Firstly, the three existing bells had to be lowered and removed. This work took place on August 11th and 12th. The three Saxby bells had already been removed from St Peter's Church, Saxby, in November 2007. These bells, together with the Belgrave bell, were then taken to Hayward Mills Associates' base in Nottingham. The bells to be used in the new peal then had to be tuned accordingly to create a harmonious peal. The sixth bell, the new bell, was designed so as to require only minimal tuning. This bell was finally cast at the Eijbouts Foundry in Holland on 12th November 2008.

A new steel bell frame was required which would be mounted on a single level fabricated steel grillage of large section foundation beams, incorporating the existing steelwork. Although the new peal would comprise six bells, the framework had to be designed so as to facilitate two additional bells at a later date. Alan's wheels were to be used but additional wheels were required.

The installation commenced on 8th December and was only completed on Christmas Eve. During that period our team of voluntary helpers proved to be invaluable. Indeed, without this additional help the project would not have been possible.

Soundproofing was an issue. Together with the use of appropriate soundproofing materials it was necessary to build a new floor. In the event, this created an unexpected additional storage space, albeit one flight of stairs higher than the previous one. Of course, the first floor would be required as the bell-ringing chamber.

Turning the frame through 90 degrees afforded a better use of space in the bell-ringing chamber. However, it also created additional work. Fresh holes were required in the bell tower to accommodate the steel girders – no mean feat.

The six bells were brought into the church and blessed on December 14th.

Finally, the, frame, bell ropes, etc were installed.

At 11.00 a.m. on Christmas Eve the new peal was rung by Peter Hayward and some of his employees, all experienced ringers, plus George Dawson and a couple of other local experts. Alan Cattell had got to the stage of installing three bells, albeit including one of poor tone, but now there were six carefully tuned bells in the peal. Not only were the sounds produced magical but the sheer emotion of the occasion was all consuming. So many of us who had been intimately involved in the project could not hold back the tears of joy. Furthermore this was Christmas Eve 2008 – a Christmas Eve that will live forever in the memories of those present at this extra special occasion.

Early in 2009 a meeting of the "Bell Committee" was called to agree a detailed set of rules for the ringers, to elect a Tower Captain, a Steeple Keeper and a

Secretary. The incumbent, Fr. Martin was also present and he had prepared a special prayer to be said before each session.

Since August 2008 a novice band of ringers had been learning the art of bell ringing at St. Peter's Church in Oadby – the Bell Ringing Centre under the watchful eye of Andrew Young (head of the centre). These sessions took place every Friday evening. In the New Year it was possible to transfer the practices to our own church. Of course the bells were silent, but our novices were able to get the feel of the bells. We are all so indebted to other teachers who joined Andrew each Friday. This additional help often facilitated one to one teaching. Therefore, it is not surprising that our novices made very good progress.

The new peal was dedicated on 15th May 2009. The Right Reverend Tony Robinson, Bishop of Pontefract led the service. This was yet another wonderful occasion. The church was packed. Indeed every seat was occupied, including the emergency plastic ones and three benches. Finally, at the end of the service, the bells were rung by our novice band and then by our teachers. This was the first time that the peal was heard since the test ringing on Christmas Eve. So the project reached its conclusion.

The enormous pleasure in being so intimately involved with this development will always remain with me. Personally, I feel privileged to have been afforded the opportunity to see the entire project through to completion. During the last two years I have met so many wonderful people who have been so eager to offer help and advice. Also, as is evidenced above, I feel that good fortune stayed with us throughout the entire project. I like to think that if Alan was still with us, he would fully approve of the final outcome and share in our delight that future generations will be able to enjoy, and receive fulfilment from the heritage that is left to them.

Eric Cook

June 2009

PS The tower will not be open to other bands of ringers until November 2009. Details and application forms may be obtained from the Secretary, Ann Cattell.

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Details of our bells and the sponsors for re-hanging the new peal.

Number 1, the treble – weight 3cwt 1qr 4lb

**Cast on 12th November 2008 at the
Royal Eijbouts Foundry in Holland.**

The bell was paid for by
Josey and Graham Packwood

Number 2, the second - weight 3cwt 2qr 3lb

Cast in 1924 by

John Taylor of Loughborough.

Alan Cattell obtained the bell from

St Michael's Church, in Leicester, after the building was sold for other use.
This bell became known as the "Belgrave Bell". Alan's family paid for its re-hanging.

Number 3, the third – weight 3cwt 0qr 8lb

Cast in 1801 by

Robert Taylor of St Neots.

The smallest bell from St Peter's Church in Saxby, Leicestershire. The re-hanging of this bell was paid for by a donation bequeathed by Jean Waterfield.

(Note: following the sale of St Peter's Church, George Dawson, the Diocesan Bells' Advisor, gave us the three bells.)

Number 4, the fourth – weight 3cwt 2qr 7lb

Cast in 1801 by

Robert Taylor of St Neots.

The middle bell from St Peter's Church in Saxby. The cost of re-hanging was paid by

Brian Porteus in memory of
his wife Susan.

Number 5, the fifth – weight 4cwt 0qr 22lb

Cast in 1801 by

Robert Taylor of St Neots.

The largest of the Saxby bells, re-hung with sponsorship from Scruptoft Parish Council.

Number 6, the tenor – weight 5cwt 0qr 16lb

Cast sometime in the late 16th century.

The original second bell re-hung with donations from
the congregation of All Saints Church.

Skilled craftsmen at Hayward Mills Associates then tuned each of the bells to create a wonderfully sounding peal of six bells in the key of Bb ((933 Hz).

Wording engraved on the bells.

The treble bell.

Given to
All Saints Church
by
Josey and Graham Packwood
2008

The second bell.

Re-hung in memory of Alan Cattell –
2008

The third bell.

Re-hung in memory of Jean Waterfield –2008

The fourth bell.

Re-hung in memory of
Susan Hilary Porteus –
2008

The fifth bell.

Re-hung with sponsorship from the people of Scraftoft-
2008

The tenor bell.

Re-hung with sponsorship from the congregation of All Saints –
2008