

Bell Restoration

St Mary's Church Lytchett Matravers

Lytchett Band Dismantle the Small Parts

After just under a year of Grant Applications, Fundraising Events and talks, St Mary's Church Lytchett Matravers have raised just over £30,000 to begin the process of preparing their bells for restoration. On **Friday 16th August**, Tower Captain, Debbie Phipps removed the first stay. Organised by our Steeple Keeper, Gordon Paterson, we had a great '*Clapper Team*' who removed all the stays, sliders, clappers and wheels. Thank you John Marsh, Alec Cannings, Phil Stephens and Paul Tyson. We now await Andrew Mills from John Taylor & Co of Loughborough to lead some volunteers to dismantle the bells and fittings and take them to the foundry for a full restoration.

Tower Captain Debbie Phipps says *"Our church and ringing band have had the support of our Vicar and PCC, congregation, St Mary's ringing band, the East Dorset Branch of bellringers, the Salisbury Guild of ringers and visitors to our events to reach this point in such a short time."*



Bottom Left to right – Gordon, Alec, Phil, John
Top under the bell – Paul



Tower Captain Debbie Phipps

Bell Dismantling

Gordon our Steeple Keeper had purchased 2 hard hats for us to use and the men all had steel tipped shoes and gloves so health and safety was covered. There was a little trepidation about working over the open trapdoor so we will see how we got on with this later. Gordon had organised a rota of helpers and Debbie and Cathy had organised a rota of refreshment volunteers so on **Monday 19th August** we were all set with Gordon, John, Viv and Debbie to help.

Andrew Mills from Taylor's arrived around lunchtime to dismantle the bells. About the same time some scaffolding arrived to be used to gain access to the ringing chamber ceiling in order to cut a trapdoor. Beams and boards were also



delivered. Andrew had time for a quick cup of tea and Debbie made him a sandwich as he hadn't eaten all day but then he wanted to crack on. As it turned out the scaffolding was not required but the rope guide with beams balanced over the top was strong enough to support Andrew whilst cutting the trapdoor. Cathy and Pete popped in to see what was going

on and stayed quite a while as they were fascinated with the whole process. Once Andrew had made the trapdoor, Gordon and John were able to remove the loose floorboards from the belfry floor. They also removed some redundant pulleys. All finished by 6pm and time for a rest.

An early start by 8:30 on **Tuesday 20th**. This morning we had Gordon and Pete helping but John came as well as he enjoyed himself so much the day before. Cathy was due to be on refreshments but spend most of the day taking some great photos, Debbie came down so she didn't miss anything and managed to take some good videos on her iPhone and Viv also joined in!

A beam was placed on the ledges above the bells and across the exit to the roof so that the pulleys could be attached to this. Andrew got cracking setting up the pulleys while Gordon and John started unscrewing nuts. **Bell 5** was the first one down as it was immediately above the trapdoor with Pete directing it through the trapdoor. By 9:20 the first bell was down with Andrew guiding it to a safe position on boarding put on the Ringing Chamber floor. Time for a quick photo for Debbie and Cathy with bell 5. Our oldest **Bell 4** landed just before 10am and was received by Viv who has been ringing it on and off for 40 years.



The third bell down was **Bell 3** and 1 and 2 were still tucked inside the raised frame. Three bells safely down by 11am. Time for a short coffee break. Now some of the frame had to be dismantled to get at **Bell 2** and **Treble**. Gordon managed to get out the first nut at 11:30 so the 2 bells were safely lowered to the ground by 1pm. By now the fears of working over the open trapdoor were abandoned as it was not as scary as had been imagined.

Time for lunch. Cathy and Viv were released to make the sandwiches but ensuring health and safety rules they still wore their hats and made sure they had white bread for Andrew. We had a beautiful day so were lucky to be able to enjoy lunch outside where we were joined by Ben who was on duty for the afternoon.



Andrew knew we were going to have a problem with the tenor as it was going to be too wide to pass through the frame where the fifth had hung. The headstock had to be removed but still no luck despite tipping it slightly and pushing it with some hefty boots! Nuts and bolts were removed from the frame but then they had

to get out the angle grinder. There was a lot of banging going on as the frame was being beaten into submission to gain an extra half inch. The bell was turned to try to find a narrower diameter and eventually by 4:50pm the tenor was being lowered. All finished by 6pm but we decided we were too worn out to cook so a few of us met at the Rose and Crown for an evening meal and then crashed out early. It was a great end to an exciting day and one we will remember for a long time.

Morning of **Wednesday 20th** brought another early start for some at 8:30am. The transport was due to arrive at 9:30am so Debbie thought she had time to clear away breakfast as she was not on refreshment duty today. As she drove down the hill towards the church she saw a vehicle with what appeared to be rather small bells on so decided the transport had arrived with another load to add ours to. However, on closer inspection they were **our** bells – 5 of them on already as the transport had arrived at 8:30.

The **tenor** however was too big to come out of the North door so preparations were being made to wheel it up a ramp and through the **South door**. Alec and Paul were on ground level helping Andrew and the 2 guys from the transport to set the bells onto trolleys and winch them onto the transport. Gordon and John were joined by Jo Puttick to dismantle the equipment up in the bell chamber and start to send down the lifting beams, clappers, stays etc. By 8:40 Mike Kimber had arrived to see his favorite bell, the tenor and have a photo before it was taken away. It then took 5 strong men to heave it out of the door and onto the transport by 9am – closely followed by its headstock which had been removed the day before. The wheels and all other parts were put onto the transport and by 12:15 the church looked like we had never been there.

A few people had gathered to see them off but sadly, as it all happened so quickly some missed the excitement and now wait for their return before the end of the year. Some helpers who were due later in the week didn't get the opportunity but we thank Bill and Andy for offering and hope they can get to see some of the action when the bells are returned.

A huge thank you to Taylor's for setting us on this journey and to Andrew for his skill and easy personality.

