

Stratfield Saye Bell Restoration Appeal



Background

The five bells have been rung on only very few occasions for nearly 50 years. This is because the timber frame in which the bells are hung, although sound and sturdy in itself, is not properly anchored to the tower walls. This means the structure moves (quite alarmingly!) when the bells are rung, and there were fears that ringing could cause damage to the fabric of the church.

In November 2023, a detailed structural survey was carried out (by Adrian Dempster, of Ward Cole Consulting Engineers) and a design produced for steelwork to stabilize the frame — this construction will utilize existing steel girders that were installed in the tower by the 7th Duke of Wellington when restoration work to the church was carried out in the 1960's. We were advised that limited ringing would be possible in the meantime.

History

The front three of the five are original castings by Thomas Swain in 1756. We assume Swain cast all five bells in 1756, but two have been subsequently recast – the fourth in 1841 by Thomas Mears, and the tenor in 1864 by John Warner.



Serendipity

The frame was designed for six bells, and the Keltek Trust has offered Stratfield Saye a treble for the six, which was originally located at St Dionis Backchurch in the City of London. The bell was then the treble of a ring of ten, cast by Richard Phelps in 1726. A peal of Stedman Caters was rung on these bells at Backchurch on 22nd November 1852. This performance is reported in the *London and Sporting Chronicle*, dated 28th November 1852, alongside other reports of the ringing for the State Funeral of the Duke of Wellington, which had taken place just four days before the peal.

Renovation and augmentation: the next steps

Quotations have been obtained for the installation of the steelwork to anchor the frame, together with the restoration of fittings and augmentation of the bells (which will also involve retuning the tenor). The total cost is likely to be around £60,000 exclusive of VAT, and the Guild BRF has pledged £6,000.

The parish church is located on the estate of Stratfield Saye House, home of the Duke and Duchess of Wellington, who have most generously offered to match all funding raised, thereby contributing up to half of the total cost.

The Basingstoke District are organising an Open Day in North Hampshire on Bank Holiday Monday, 31st August this year. The bells of Stratfield Saye will be available as part of the itinerary, and day tickets will go on sale this summer. We hope this will be an opportunity for many Guild members to support this worthy project and experience what can only be described as a unique ring of bells before the restoration work gets underway!



Ian Roulstone, Tower Correspondent