

ALL HANDS ON DECK AT EAST ANSTEY

East Anstey parishioners have lived in silence for nearly four years, but this is about to change. Soon their ring of six bells, one of which is a 15th century medieval bell, possibly the oldest in Devon, will be rung again.

For many years the bells were in need of restoration, and this work has now been undertaken by the last Foundry works in Britain, Taylor's of Loughborough. The wooden bell frame was also in great need of repair and this was successfully undertaken by PFG, a local fabrication company in Bampton. As I write this the bells are currently in transit, being driven over 200 miles down the motorways, prior to being rehung during the next 3 – 4 weeks.

Many churches, including East Anstey, were greatly affected by the covid pandemic. They lost revenue, fundraising opportunities, usage and support; yet their role in a rural community is vital. East Anstey's bell restoration was part of a much larger programme of works involving the whole church. It began in 2018 after many years of fundraising, when the initial work was undertaken on the tower. This threw up many more issues and gradually involved replacing outdated and broken guttering, repainting the exterior, repainting the interior and undertaking damp proofing. In addition, the lighting and electrics were updated, making the whole building much safer.

When the bells have been rehung, there will be a brief lull in improvements – necessitated by the loss of income during the pandemic – before it is hoped to put in water, kitchen and toilet facilities. By doing this it is hoped that the church will be able to take its place as a central meeting place for a community who currently have no other suitable venue for gatherings. Only by successful fundraising will this latter part of a much larger programme of vital works be possible.