

The 2022 West of Severn Bell Project

From 1977 the ringers of Ashleworth, Corse, Hartpury and Staunton combined as a band – each tower individually having insufficient ringers to ring all 6 bells.

Ashleworth's bells were rehung in 1977 and are still in good condition. In 1982 some work was carried out at Hartpury, but by 2021, after nearly 100 years since any major work they were ready for a complete refurbishment. It was the same at Corse, where the bells had done well to stand the test of time, with minimal expenditure for 114 years. Both rings were highly regarded but needed a thorough overhaul to ensure their continued use for another 100 years. Staunton's bells had been unringable for some time and needed extensive work carrying out on the supporting structure of the frame, bells and their fittings.

The West of Severn Bell Project was conceived by Jim Chapman, one of the local ringers. He set about raising the £300,000 required to carry out the work needed in all the towers, and by the autumn of 2022 sufficient had been raised to place the order.

John Taylor and Co. of Loughborough was the firm chosen to undertake the work in all three towers. They had built the frame and rehung Staunton's bells in 1893. They had also recast the bells at Corse - a relatively rare example of one firm supplying the frame, recasting the complete ring, supplying the fittings and even the Ellacombe apparatus. Since Gillett and Johnston used a Taylor's design for the Hartpury frame, these three belfries usefully illustrate the development of iron frames from 1893 through 1907 to 1926.

Corse



Until 2023 no work apart from routine maintenance had been carried out since the ring was installed, so they remain an unspoilt example of the foundry's work.

The frame was painted, and the ring completely overhauled, the headstocks cleaned, and new gudgeons and sealed bearings fitted. The clappers have been overhauled, rebushed and equipped with grease nipples and the pulleys now have new turned hardwood rollers running on ball bearings, fitted in the existing boxes. The wheels were treated and repaired where woodboring insects had weakened the timbers, and the Ellacombe apparatus was refurbished with trigger action hammers. Weather protection was fitted to all the louvres, with sound proofing on two sides facing neighbouring houses.

Hartpury



The six bells had never been easy to ring, with a tenor of Eb. While there was nothing mechanically wrong with the bells, work could be carried out to make them easier to ring. As there was space in the tower to enlarge the existing frame from six to eight bells, a decision was made to rehang all the bells and augment them to eight.

Extensive work was required, the damaged crowns of the three heaviest bells were welded, the former third bell needed replacing, and is now part of an exhibition about bells and bell ringing in the former ringing chamber, a new higher floor being installed, creating a new ringing chamber.

A new bell, to replace the old third, replacing Abraham Rudhall's 1715 bell and two new trebles were cast. The replacement bell, becoming the new fifth, was dedicated to the Hartpury ringers; the new treble in commemoration of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; and the second in celebration of the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III.

The entire ring was refurbished with new headstocks, bearings and ancillary fittings. The frame was painted and extended with two bells added. Electronic chiming was installed for those occasions when ringers are not available.

Simulators were fitted on all eight bells for silent learning practices and a training bell has been hung in the room beneath the bells. The new training bell already in good use training Sarah Earis.



Sarah Earis – granddaughter of David, practicing on the new training bell

The new ring of 8 bells

treble	Eb	4cwt.2qr.7lb	2023	John Taylor and Co.
2	D	4cwt.3qr.19lb	2023	John Taylor and Co.
3	C	5cwt.3qr.11lb	1926	Gillett and Johnston
4	Bb	7cwt.1qr.4lb	1926	Gillett and Johnston recasting Abraham's 1715 bell
5	Ab	9cwt.0qr.4lb	2023	John Taylor and Co.
6	G	9cwt.2qr.16lb	c1550	Henry Jeffries
7	F	11cwt.3qr.0lb	1626	John Pennington - itinerant founder
tenor	Eb	13cwt.2qr.16lb	1628	John Pennington - itinerant founder

Staunton



The beams supporting the frame were badly corroded due to water ingress in the 1970's through the spire before it was repaired, the bell fittings were badly worn, and the second bell cracked.

All supporting beams, frame, bells and fittings were removed. The frame was stripped, repainted, and reinstalled on new foundation beams. The cracked 2nd bell was welded, and all were overhauled with new running gear, headstocks, clappers and ropes. A rope guide (moved from Hartpury) was fitted in the ringing chamber.

A new training bell has been hung in the room beneath the bells – the 19th century ringing chamber.

Following completion of the work in November 2023, the Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek, carried out a rededication service at each church flowed by open ringing.



Ringers at the dedication

Since then, work at Hartpury has continued to finish the new ringing chamber and ringers' exhibition room.

Over the weekend of the 16-17th March 2024, the first peal at each tower was rung. Bands included some of the local ringers who provided

many hours of voluntary labour for the project. The weekend also coincided with the 50th anniversary of Tower Captain, David Butler's first peal, at Bowden, Cheshire.

Details of each peal are

On Saturday, 16 March 2024 in 3h 3mins

Hartpury, Gloucestershire

St Mary the Virgin

Tenor: 13–2–16 in Eb

5056 Spliced Surprise Major (8m)

Composed by Donald F Morrison (Op. 3)

832 Rutland; 768 Pudsey; 640 Superlative; 576 Bristol,
Cambridge, Lincolnshire, London; 512 Yorkshire; 122 com.

1 Malcolm P Taylor

2 Kathryn P Cocks

3 Cindy Maude

4 Anthony S Cocks

5 Nigel A L Mellor

6 David G Butler

7 Mike Pidd (C)

8 Jeremy D Alford

1st peal on the augmented eight.

Rung on the 50th anniversary of David's 1st peal.



On Saturday, 16 March 2024 in 2h 43

Staunton, Gloucestershire

St James

Tenor: 8–1–4 in G

5040 Surprise Minor (7m)

One extent each of London, Norwich, York, Ipswich,
Surfleet, Beverley & Cambridge

1 Nicola J Galton

2 Cindy Maude

3 Jeremy D Alford

4 Nigel A L Mellor

5 David G Butler

6 Nicholas J Green (C)

First peal on the bells following recent restoration.

Rung on the 50th anniversary of David Butler's first peal.



On Sunday, 17 March 2024 in 2h 49

Corse, Gloucestershire

St Margaret

Tenor: 12–0–14 in F♯

5040 Treble Dodging Minor (7m)

1 extent each: Corse D, London S, York S, Surfleet S,
Beverley S, Cambridge S, Norwich S.

1 Anthony S Cocks

2 Nicola J Galton

3 Nigel A L Mellor

4 David G Butler

5 Mike Pidd (C)

6 Nicholas J Green

1st peal on the bells following their recent restoration.



The Future

Now that each church has a good set of bells, more ringers are required. With Hartpury and Staunton having training bells, these towers are to be used as teaching centres and it is intended to have a recruitment drive, including establishing after school clubs from the local junior schools.

Finally

The successful completion of this ambitious project was largely due to Jim Chapman, as well as many hours of voluntary labour by local ringers and friends; the generosity of donors and benefactors; and Taylors of Loughborough.

The project was made possible with the financial support given by:

- The Benefact Trust
- Church Care
- The Forest Branch Bellringers
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