

Belfry Advisory Committee (BAC) Report for 23 Oct 22 GMC Meeting at Stowupland

The BAC held a meeting at Laxfield on 6 Sep 22.

As reported in June, four grants due to expire in Dec22, have yet to be drawn down. The BAC Chairman has contacted the project leaders, and all have asked for an extension of 3 years. Stowmarket plan to begin the steelwork installation in mid-Jan 23, hoping to complete the project by Spring 23. Fornham St Martin has already spent £20k on repairs to the stairs and installing permanent lifting beams in the bell chamber. They have also paid Nicholson's £27.5k on 2 Jul 19, as a 1/3 down payment of a £79K fixed price contract. A second, similar payment is due in Oct 23, when it is planned to remove the bells. I have been told that funds are in place to meet this second payment, but they are still fundraising for the final payment, due on re-installation. The project is certainly progressing, albeit slowly. Combs has completed the first stage of their project, namely the reinstallation of four ancient bells, fitted with electronic chiming in the top of the tower. These bells will not be rung again full circle. The parish has funded this part of their project but is still raising funds for their eventual plan to augment to ten bells (eight bells from Hunslet via the Keltic Trust plus two additional bells). They plan a Heritage Lottery Grant Application to fund the majority of the cost of phase two of their plan. The final grant remaining unpaid is £250 for St Clement, Ipswich. The repair work in this bellchamber remains on-going. The BAC recommend that all four grants be extended for a further three years, to 31Dec25.

A grant application has been received from Westhorpe St Margaret to augment their existing five to six bells. Their plan is to place the new six in a new steel frame, in the old silence chamber, leaving the old frame in situ. The old treble. and old three are both cracked. Depending on the extent of the damage, the treble will be rewelded or recast. The three is a poor bell musically with a crack and they intend to recast it as the new treble and replace it with a donated Keltic bell to make the new four bell. There is some doubt about the five bell which may well be cracked and like the other two bells, a decision will be made at the foundry as to whether to reweld or recast. A faculty has been granted and Taylor's are the preferred bellhanger.

| New Bell No | Original Bell No | Action |
|-------------|------------------|--|
| 1 | | Recast bell from present no 3 bell. |
| 2 | 1 | Believed cracked. Repair or recast - await decision when inspected at the foundry |
| 3 | 2 | Fine - re-tune. |
| 4 | 3 | Cracked and out of tune. Recast to form new treble. A bell has been offered from Keltic trust to form new no4. |
| 5 | 4 | Pre reformation bell – leave intact. (Listed) |
| 6 | 5 | Recast / retune pending inspection at foundry. |

With the backing of St Margaret's PCC, a steering committee of five has been established and has secured three quotes for the work. As of 10th June 2022, they have raised a total of £17,830.90. An initial 'project enquiry' has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and they await a response. Further applications are to be submitted to other grant trusts and they have numerous fundraising activities.

The project is currently budgeted at £128,433 plus vat (including a 10% contingency). Of this total, I believe £75,349 is eligible for Guild funding, less £6,577 for two BAC helpers throughout the project. This leaves £68,772 as the portion of the project we could help. A 5% grant would amount to £3438.6. However, given the overall size of the project coupled with the amount of uncertainty regarding the condition of the bells, the BAC unanimously recommended a grant of £5K, or approximately 7.2%.

During the summer and early autumn, the BAC's work has continued helping and advising parishes throughout the county. These included:

Bardwell St Peter & St Paul. General maintenance and improvements to the odd struckness.

Blythburgh, Holy Trinity. Help was provided to obtain a new set of ropes.

Brent Eleigh, St Mary. Three chiming bells in fittings at the very end of their life. After reports of "banging sounds", a loose cill and two suspected loose gudgeon pins identified.

Chevington All Saints. Frame tightening.

Combs, St Mary. Four bells, in the first part of this project, have been replaced in the belfry after Taylor's refurbishments and fitting of an electronic chiming apparatus. These bells will not be rung again full circle. The parish has funded this part of their project but is still raising funds for their eventual plan to augment to ten bells (eight bells from Hunslet via the Keltic Trust plus two additional bells). The Guild offered a £8k grant towards this project on 30 Jun 19 and an extension was granted at the 7 Feb 21 meeting to 31 Dec 22.

Cotton, St Andrew. The parish have had the bellchamber floor repaired, thus allowing maintenance work on the bells and frame to re-commence.

Cretingham St Peter. Stay replacements.

Darsham All Saints. Repairs to the Ellacombe Chiming Apparatus.

Dunwich St James. Maintenance on the single chiming bell.

Drinkstone, All Saints. The village have formed a committee to spearhead their project, which is in the early stages. The six bell, 11 cwt ring are unringable due to excessive frame movement. Alan Moulton has been helping the parish with their plans.

Fornham All Saints. Securing of ceiling bosses and general frame tightening of this five-bell tower.

Fornham St Martin. The project is advancing steadily with the village still raising funds for the refurbishment. The bells are expected to be removed by Nicholson's in Oct 23. Improvements to the access and the fitting of lifting beams has been completed, along with a 1/3 payment to secure a fixed price contract. The Guild offered a £5.6K grant towards the project on 17 Feb 18 and an extension was granted at the 7 Feb 21 meeting to 31 Dec 22.

Glemsford, St Mary the Virgin. After reports of unusual noises, the Technical Advisor discovered a loose bedplate sliding on the headcill. Bedplate tightened.

Great Livermere, St Peter. Inspection, lubrication, and general tightening of the frame.

Hemingstone St Gregory. After a BAC inspection, one of the three chiming bells was considered to be unsafe to ring, due to the corrosion of the fittings. The BAC returned to this church and made safe the fittings on all three bells, replacing 13 components in new stainless steel. The ropes were refitted and chiming on all three bells is now taking place.

Hoxne, St Peter and St Paul with St Edmund. Although the initial plans were to refurbish the existing unringable five bells and make a new 6/8 bell ring, the Keltic trust has also offered them a 13cwt set of eight, 1888 Mears and Stainbank bells from Bangor St David. The parish are currently working on their final plans and have yet to apply for a faculty. The guild will receive a grant application for funding assistance in due course.

Iken St Botolph. Inspection at the request of the parish. No issues identified.

Ixworth St Mary. Work on the clappers and staples, much improving the eight-bell ring.

Langham, St Mary the Virgin. The parish request BAC help in getting their two, 4cwt chiming bells working again. After inspection, it was found that all eight of the straps and their associated fittings had disintegrated with rust and age, which left only the clapper bolts holding the bells to the headstocks. The parish were informed that there was no chance of the chiming the bells without a five-figure refurbishment, and that the bells required urgent work to stop them falling from the headstocks, and potentially through their roof. A safety scheme was approved by the Diocesan Advisor and will be carried out by the BAC during late October 22.

Little Bealings, All Saints. The BAC were requested to assist refurbishing the half wheels used to chime these two bells. The wheels had suffered serious degradation, but they were repaired sufficiently to be able to ring the bells for the Platinum Jubilee. Subsequently, further restoration of the fittings and wheels has taken place to allow normal chiming.

Little Blakenham, St Mary's. The parish requested assistance from the BAC after a quintennial inspection questioned the safety of one of their two chiming bells. The BAC Chairman inspected the bells and found the headstock attachments to the bell to be badly corroded/missing. The chiming rope was removed to stop the use of the bell. The Technical Advisor has inspected the bell and made recommendations of how best to bring the bell back into use.

Haughley St Mary the Virgin. Tightening of all the clappers.

Ipswich – St Mary at the Elms. This church has five bells in very poor repair, which were originally rung full circle (anticlockwise and non-sequential). Two BAC members have assisted Nicholson's to lower all 5 bells to make them safe, whilst two bells have been rehung for electronic chiming.

Oakley, St Nicholas. Replacement of broken Hastings stays.

Rougham, St Mary. Frame tightening, lubrication, and a general inspection.

Stowmarket, St Mary and St Peter. Nicholson's plan to rehang the Stowmarket ten bell ring has been delayed, largely due to Long Covid severely affecting their workforce. Steelwork erection is now planned starting 16 Jan 23, with completion during Spring 23. All the preparatory work for the new frame and rehang of the bells has been completed in the tower. The Guild offered a £11k grant

towards this project on 17 Feb 18, and an extension was granted at the 7 Feb 21 meeting to 31 Dec 22.

Sudbury, St Gregory's. Great progress has been made since the £3k grant approval at our Feb 22 meeting. The bells have been removed to Loughborough where they received new headstocks and bearings, before being returned to Sudbury and rehung in Aug 22. The work has greatly improved what were known to be a difficult eight bell ring and the local band are delighted. The Technical Adviser and the Ringing Master plan the Guild inspection on 28 Oct 22, after which our grant can hopefully be paid. The local band carried out a repainting of the frame whilst the bells and fittings were removed. The BAC provided a great deal of manpower to this project, and we would all like to thank the parish for their hospitality and help throughout the project.

Sudbury St Peters. Discussions about the church layout and the lack of trapdoors to facilitate any future bell removal.

Troston, St Mary. This ring of six was cast by Robert Stainbank at Whitechapel in 1868. They were removed from the tower in the late 1950's to allow extensive strengthening work to take place to the tower, but funds ran out before the bells could be refitted, and only the tenor was rehung for stationary chiming. All the bells will be rehung for full circle ringing with new fittings in a new bellframe, mounted at a lower level in the tower. The BAC has not been directly involved with this project, nor were the Guild asked for a grant, but the parish has been assisted by other guild members.

Westhorpe, St Margaret. A grant application for this project has been received and has been detailed above.

Wilby, St Mary. Replacement Hastings stay, replacement of worn/corroded bolts, general maintenance.