

Holy Rood Church : Holy Rood Church: 2. The Tower and Bells

Although the Chancel (altar end of the church) dates back to the 13th Century, the main body of the church and west tower were built some 200 years later when Buckland Newton parish fell under the jurisdiction of Glastonbury Abbey. The tower is square on plan and the rendered stone walls are more than 3ft thick as they support the upper floor ringing chamber and bell chamber. Originally access to the ringing chamber was from the interior of the church, but when a heating system was installed by the Victorians, the circular stone staircase was adapted to be accessible through the north wall of the tower. In 1552 there were five bells, all but one were subsequently recast. The oldest is the third bell dating back to about 1400. The other four recast bells date from 1581, 1609, 1670 and 1793. In 1905/6 all of the bells were rehung on a new cast iron frame which was bolted onto the original oak beams. This frame is still in place today. Space had been left for a treble bell and this was added in 1913 to complete the set. Repairs and continuing maintenance is always required, but complete rehanging of the bells with new fittings was needed 99 years later. In 2012 Nicholson Engineering were commissioned to carry out this work.



Removal of the bells was with a chain winch, through hatches in the floors of the bell and ringing chambers down to the vestry. The bells weigh between 6cwt for the treble and just over 15 cwt for the tenor bell (say 300 to 750 kgs). The treble bell has a diameter of 31 inches (79 cm) and the tenor bell is 46 inches in diameter (116 cm). You can see from the photograph alongside that the largest bell only just fitted through the hatch in the bell chamber floor! All six bells were taken to Nicholson Engineering's works for complete refurbishment, repairs and fitting of new headstocks and bearings. The bells were also attended to under the tuning machine at Whitechapel Foundry. The photograph below shows all of the bells on the lorry ready to be taken to the works.

This photograph shows three of the rehung bells.



Bells are fitted to the new oak rope wheels.

Also on the right is the tenor bell.

Bells are in the raised position in readiness to start ringing.

The bell restoration project was financed mainly from the church's Dibben Fund legacy, but also from several personal donations, donations from the Village Fete Committee, Open Gardens Day and some grants. PCC thanks must also go to members of the bell ringing team who provided back up technical advice to the PCC and practical assistance to the contractor when bells were removed and rehung.

The PCC hope that the next generations will continue to enjoy the bells and their contribution, as part of this Grade 1 Listed church, to life in our village of Buckland Newton.



Brian Wells