

New bells ready to toll. - Extract from the Look Local Newspaper

The bells of Ecclesfield Church have been ringing for over 400 years. In these days of mobile phones and the Internet, church bells are still the only way of conveying a message to the people of Ecclesfield all at the same time.

That message is that St Mary's is open to everyone and we are here to help people love and worship God. Bells proclaim services, weddings, special occasions and celebrations. A number of areas of the bells need maintenance and repairs. The tradition of bells at St. Marys indicates that in most centuries, the number of bells has been augmented and therefore if sufficient funds could be raised, it seemed to be a way of celebrating the 21st century by adding a further two bells to increase the peal to 10.

To keep the bell ringing tradition alive for the future a target of £ 60,000 was set two years ago to do essential maintenance to the bells, their fittings and to add two new bells. St. Mary's is now an official training centre for bell ringers and a ring of 10 will greatly enhance the ability to train new ringers as the two new bells will be lighter and we can train younger people.

Young people are needed to allow this unique art to continue. Two new bells and the retuning work will turn a fairly ordinary ring of eight into a ring of ten and something truly magical to hear. The funds now stand at £ 69,307.86. This might appear to be more than needed, however during the nearly two years of fund raising costs have increased. The revised 2011 cost for the bells is £ 63,000.

There are other costs to be met, the roof access has to be changed, the ringing chamber ceiling ringing needs renewing, a new-set of ropes is required and decoration will be needed after the work is finished.

There is some work to do on the tower, renewing louvers and some repairs to the flagpole. The total cost of the whole project is now expected to be nearly £ 80,000 so the fundraising continues to cover all the requirements.

The two new bells were cast in London at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry on Friday June 3 and a group from Ecclesfield went to watch the casting. These new bells will be on show in Ecclesfield Church from the beginning of July. The eight existing bells will be removed from the tower in mid September and together with the two new bells, will be transported down to London and retuned to modern standards at the bell foundry. Two of the old bells will be re-cast but retain their original metal and inscriptions. Modern tuning techniques will improve the sound of the other bells which were cast in the 16th and 17th century.

The clappers will be refurbished and carefully matched to the bells to improve the sound quality. Pulley blocks and all bearings will be replaced. This will make the bells easier to ring. While the bells are away, the oak bell tower louvers will be replaced, the bell ironwork will be modified and repairs will be carried out to the tower roof. It is hoped that the bells will be back in time to be rung for Christmas 2011 and there will be a formal dedication early in 2012.

A spokesperson for the bell ringers told Look Local: "We would particularly like to thank our benefactor who kindly offered to pay for the two new bells.

"We would also like to thank all individuals, charities and other organisations who have contributed to our appeal.

"Thanks also to the Sheffield Branch of the Yorkshire Association of Change Ringers who have offered to pay for the cost of recasting one of the original bells."