

St Mary's North Creake Bell Restoration Dinner December 7th 2007

The Launch of Appeal4Apeal

John Billett Chairman of Appeal4Apeal

Your organising committee; ladies & gentlemen

I am delighted to be here and honoured to be invited to share with you our plans for restoring the church bells of our village church St Mary's

In the late summer of 2007, I was approached by the committee that was already established for the restoration of the bells of St Mary's. Peter Stewart Richardson; Nick McIver; Richard Faire, David Emerson & John Green invited me to become their Chairman.

I assessed that invitation with doubts & scepticism.

- What I knew about bells was less than zero, so what could I offer?
- Why me? I haven't been a North Creaker for long. Sure it's Glynis and my home now, there are others more established here
- The bells are ringing; they are not silent. So what's the problem?
- If the bells become silent, so what? Life goes on

- The Parochial Church Council wanted to increase the number from 6 to 8 bells. What sort of personal pleasure and private indulgence is that?
- And the first draft budget demanded a lot of money and much hard work for several years

It all felt like a “hospital pass”. (That’s a rugby term for when the ball and the tackler arrives at the same time). It’s painful, humiliating, and capable of serious injury.

I want to share with any sceptics, cynics and general doubters about the restoration of the bells of St Mary’s how it is that I have experienced my version of Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. I am now a leading enthusiast and fellow driver of this endeavour and hope to “convert” you too

Furthermore I invite the supporters and the enthusiasts for the restoration to consider what is the true purpose of this restoration so as to become with me fellow active disciples.

Let’s not abandon our inheritance

I put it simply. We are the inheritors of an over 250 year tradition of change bell ringing at St Mary’s North Creake.

If we do nothing, then it’s only a few years before the bells will have to go silent. Once that happens it’s almost impossible to start them again. The bells fall into disrepair and the bell ringers go elsewhere and none follow.

This happened nearby in the late 1930's and their bells are still silent

Let's not leave a legacy of failure

If that occurs in North Creake we shall have abandoned our predecessors and will leave a legacy of failure to the younger generation and to the as yet unborn Creakers. What an example is that?

We have a history of work to maintain our bell ringing in North Creake. The most recent work was 50 years ago in 1957. Joe Smith George & John Couzens and Roy Owen were brought together by our then Tower Captain Tony Owen. This was an enormous programme that got the bells rocking on ball bearings that are still there today. The records don't show what this cost but had it not been for Tony Owen's efforts then the St Mary's' bells would by now be silent. He was our Tower Captain for over 50 years. We don't want to be the generation that lets him down by failing to meet the challenge of today that he met all those years ago.

From the top to the bottom

Let's start with a journey from the top to the bottom of our church tower.

And its good news – on two fronts

First, the structure of the tower is sound. You might have anticipated that 250+ years of bell ringing had taken their toll on the fabric. You would be wrong. Our Surveyors report that the tower is well able to take the strain for the foreseeable future and indeed capable of handling the extra burden of additional bells

The 6-bells sit in a massive wooden frame. This has to be in excellent shape and in perfect condition to take the strains and stresses of a peal of bells in full swing.

And here is our second piece of good news. That frame is indeed in good shape. No problems there. Indeed, the frame has been described as the “Chippendale of bell frames”

But we do have problems with the bells themselves. One is badly cracked and likely to fail and another is in a poor condition. Two more are badly out of tune. So we need to take down the 6 bells and re-cast and repair and re-tune.

The not so good news.

But come below the bell frame and this is where our troubles really begin. The bell frame sits on a wooden floor on joists and beams fixed in the tower. This floor is decaying; is cracking up and less and less able to bear the weight of the bell frame. Stand on the floor with the bells silent and you can make it bounce. When the bells are in full swing the degree of movement is considerable. The situation becomes dangerous

The combination of (a) bells in their current condition with (b) the flexibility in the floor means that not only do we have a dangerous situation but also our bells are now very hard to ring. Only expert and experienced bell ringers have the strength and sensitivity to ring them. It is becoming impossible to train new young bell ringers on this peal of 6-bells.

So one challenge is to take down the bells; then replace and renovate them. The bigger and more massive task is to secure the bell frame in the tower with a temporary structure; remove the sub-standard

wooden floor, and erect a steel platform across the tower to take the weight of the bell frame

To do any of this we have to remove and store the medieval ceiling which is what you see when looking up which sits below the bell frame supporting platform.

But that is not the end of the challenge. The ringing platform where our bell ringers stand fails all reasonable health & safety requirements. It can only accommodate the six ringers so there is no space for training bell ringers. We could not complain if a devoted committed bell ringer at St Mary's were to go elsewhere for their well-being.

The platform is fixed only on two sides, straddling the archway and open to the nave. We have to build a new platform and with a safer access. This will be four feet higher to where the top of the doorway and the base of the West window meet; be secured on three sides and able to accommodate up to 12 ringers at any one time in a safe and secure situation.

And while we are doing all that it's a relatively simple and a moderate cost opportunity to increase the number of bells from 6 to 8 within the existing bell frame

That is not what I thought originally as "an indulgence". It allows the Tower Captain to orchestrate sounds around a full 8-note octave which increase the opportunities for our bell ringers and increases the chances for more people to "get involved"

It looks like three major tasks

- 1. Restore, renovate the bells & add 2 new bells**

2. Build a new steel floor to support the bell frame

3. Establish a larger safe ringing platform

But in truth, the real opportunity is none of these physical properties.

These are just the vehicles that allow us to travel.

It's the destination that counts

An automotive pleasure is not about owning the car; driving the car brings some pleasure but not much these days. Owning and driving are merely devices that allow us to ARRIVE and experience something new or re-experience the familiar at our destination

The destination is not renovating the bells, nor erecting a new steel frame for the floor nor a safer ringing platform.

- Our destination is enhancing village life in North Creake
- Our destination is maintaining community activity
- Our destination is to ensure the 250+ year tradition of change bell ringing at St Mary's is not lost
- Our destination is to leave a legacy for the young people of North Creake and to their successors and to ensure they have opportunities to fulfil goals & ambitions. Change bell ringing at St Mary's can be a must have group activity

Our destination is not BELLS but BELL RINGING

We have the support of the Norwich Diocesan Association of Ringers.

Highlights from their December 1st letter note that our bells *“are certainly not the sort of bells that would be useful for training new ringers”*

They go on to say *“Restoration of the bells including the addition of two new trebles would significantly enhance the profile of the ring to existing local ringers, making it easy to involve them in ringing at the church”*

They conclude, *“The project makes the training of new recruits possible helping David Emerson to re-establish a band of ringers at North Creake”*

Bell ringing is an art and a science, with methods and changes, with techniques and programmes to learn. It requires individuals all of whom have to be committed but devoted and participating as a team

That is why it's no longer appropriate to talk of the restoration of the bells.

We have disbanded our committee for restoring the bells

In its place we today launch our appeal for the sound of our bells

This is the launch of our appeal for a peal

I introduce **Appeal4Apeal** for St Mary's North Creake, Norfolk, England.

Appeal4Apeal is the name for our programme to enhance, extend and develop the art of change bell ringing at St Mary's North Creake.

It's a programme that will cost all up as much as £170,000. This is a 4-year programme from 2008 – 2011 so we shall be ready for Christmas 2011 and then ring in the Olympic Year of 2012.

The most excellent news is that we have already raised funds through the efforts of the villagers of North Creake of over £50,000

The principal focus of that endeavour is the St Mary's Young People's bell ringing team.

First we have the most wonderful set of tuned hand bells on loan from Rhona McEune for which we are most grateful. We do have our own hand bells but these look like very rare objects that we need to protect before considering them as ringing bells.

Our youth hand bell ringers will be the platform through which we can make appearances and receive donations and be the springboard from which they get to ring the 8-bells of St Mary's.

Donation made easy.

We've created a donation mechanism that makes it easy for anyone and everyone to give no matter how small or large

It's in four parts

First, you can attach your name to the bells and their ringing mechanisms.

You can buy a bell and add your names. You can buy a wheel, a pulley, a rope, a clanger and many more

Second, you can attach your name to the ringing methods and the changes.

A “Change” is a pre set order of ringing a set of bells. So with 8 bells it can be 1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8 or 1.5,2,6,3,7,4,8. Etc.

The order of the changes can be pre set in a series called a “Method”. A change takes a few seconds to ring; a method takes up to 10 minutes to ring.

The Methods go by the wonderful names: -

Plain Bob Major
Aldershot Surprise Major
London Surprise Major
Winchester Surprise Major

These are just 4 of the 100 Methods that David Emerson and his bell ringers can perform and all are available for you to sponsor and name.

Third, you can become a Platinum or Gold or Silver or Bronze sponsor and attach your name to the Frame, the platform, the young people bell ringing development scheme and the young people’s hand bell ringing team

Fourth, you can make a 4-year standing order contribution, a one off contribution and a pocket money donation.

And you can pay any way you wish whether credit card; debit card; cheque, standing order and cash, on the web site

www.appeal4apeal.com; via the leaflet; pay in at the Post Office in North Creake and in envelopes

And for UK tax payers all your contributions can be through Gift Aid so for every £ you donate, we get £1.28

We are approaching local businesses; charitable organisations, bell ringing associations across the UK and will be making a major effort to attract money from interested parties in the USA

We are grateful to people offering to organise events to raise funds for Appeal4Apeal. Janie Coppen-Gardner has a barn dance planned in February next year. Thank you

Discussions are in hand about planning a Village Weekend in June next year.

And the Lords Taveners are coming to play the Creakes Cricket Club on the playing field in June 2009 to be part of our second village weekend.

I hope to encourage as many as care to participate to register their event as an Appeal4Apeal event and we shall incorporate this and publicise this on the web site.

6 simple one-line statements distil the essence of Appeal4Apeal.

1. Maintaining a 250+ year tradition of church bell ringing
2. Building a legacy for the young people of our village
3. Restoring the bells of St Mary's Church North Creake, Norfolk, England

4. Sustaining a major feature of English village life
5. Creating a young persons hand bell ringing team
6. Become a named supporter; we have donation plans for all interests

Thanks to the committee for such a wonderful evening.

I hope you have found Appeal4Apeal of interest and that you will support this endeavour now and across the 4-year programme.