

## **Methwold Bells - The Impossible Dream became a Reality**

Over sixty years ago, the six bells of Methwold were silenced due to structural concerns about the stability of the tower.

In 1963 the demise was complete when the bells were removed to the Church floor as the wooden timbers were in serious decay; the treble bell was re-sited in the tower to allow chiming to continue for Church services and as a striking bell for the clock.

Although the Church had retained its bells, it seemed an impossible dream that they would ever be rung again due to the costs involved.

However, the local doctor (Dr. Ian Nisbet) began a project to raise funds to strengthen the tower. After a lot of effort from many people the funds were eventually raised and the tower strengthening completed. Having reached this seemingly impossible goal, Dr. Nisbet then turned his attention to raising funds for the re-hanging of the bells. Numerous local fund-raising events were held and again, due to the commitment of many people the money was raised along with donations from:

The Millennium Commission(50%)

W.R.E.N- Waste Recycling Environmental (£17K.)

Mr R. Hood (£10K.)

Ely Diocesan Association, Various Bell Trusts and other grant making bodies.

We are indebted to them all.

The new bell frame was designed to be installed lower in the tower and two new bells (Treble, No. 2) were to be cast. All existing bells to then be re-tuned to make the full complement of 8; the work to be undertaken by the Loughborough Foundry. In the intervening time, a group of novice ringers were eagerly training in readiness for the rehanging of the new bells. Again, thanks goes to the ringers at Northwold, Watlington and Hockwold who helped train those novices and allowed them access to their bells.

The newly elected tower captain, Jim Douglass, arranged two separate bus trips to see the casting of the two new bells and the re-tuning of the bells at the foundry.

In September 1998, the bell frame and bells were once again installed into the tower assisted by a small group of ringers (Colin Marsland, Ian Griffen, Alan Burbridge) who provided the free labour. A new ringing floor was then installed in the Tower approximately eight feet from the church floor. Unfortunately, numerous problems resulted which necessitated modifications to the ringing floor and the bell installation in order for the bells to be rung safely. This delayed the Dedication Service until Friday 3rd December 1999. A Service of Thanksgiving was arranged with appropriate hymns and readings. All the bell ringers formed a guard of honour as local dignitaries and villagers entered the Church, the ringers resplendent in their newly designed T-shirts and sweatshirts. A great atmosphere prevailed in the Church as the bells were officially handed over to the bell-ringers. Refreshments were served following the service, after which any experienced ringers were given the opportunity to ring the bells.

Since that official opening ceremony the bells have been rung at all Sunday services. It was especially pleasing that with the numerous services around Christmas, New Years Eve and the celebrated Millennium Ring all the bells were rung by our own team.

We ringers may lack experience but the enthusiasm appears boundless - long may it continue. Every ringer willingly contributes to the Bell Tower in one form or another - from bell maintenance to cleaning!

So, that impossible dream is now indeed a reality.

A. Burbridge  
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