

The Church Bells of the Benefice

Each of the seven churches in the Benefice has six bells, many of which are hundreds of years old and have been rung for church services, weddings, national celebrations, and remembrance. No doubt you will have heard them ringing, or possibly had them rung for your, or another family members wedding.

A brief description of each “peal” of bells are

Ashleworth. 6 bells, the oldest cast by Rudhalls of Gloucester in 1687 and the newest by Warner of London in 1884. The largest, tenor bell weighing 15 ½ cwt tuned to E. While the bells are old, they were subject to a major overhaul in 1977 for the Queens Silver Jubilee and are in very good condition.

Corse. 6 Bells, an all-new peal was installed by John Taylor and Co of Loughborough in 1907 paid for by the local “Hulls” family, replacing an old set of four bells. The tenor bell weighing 12 cwt tuned to F sharp. A fine sounding set of bells, but after 114 years of use, now in need of a major overhaul.

Hartpury. 6 bells, a “right mixed bag” of bells, the oldest cast in 1550 by Jefferies of Bristol, three others in 1626 by John Pennington of Monmouth and two additional bells added in 1926 when the bells were rehung by Gillett and Johnston of Croyden. The tenor weighing 14 ½ cwt tuned to E flat – a very deep note for the size of bell. In need of significant work to improve the sound and go of the bells.

Hasfield. 6 bells. A new peal installed in 1901, by John Warner of London. The tenor bell weighing 13 cwt tuned to G. In 2019 the bells were subject to a lot of work by volunteers from Tewkesbury and are now in a reasonable condition.

Maisemore. 6 bells. The tenor weighs 10 ¼ cwt tuned to F sharp. One 1697 bell and two from the early 19th century all cast by Rudhalls of Gloucester, two from the late 19th century by Warners of London with a new bell cast in 1969 by Whitechapel of London. The bells were overhauled in 1969 by the Whitechapel Foundry of London and are in very good condition.

Staunton. 6 bells. The tenor weighs 9cwt tuned to G. There are two bells cast in 1695 by Rudhalls of Gloucester, one 1848 by Mears of London, one in 1893 by Taylors and two in 1902 by Mears and Stainbank of London. No major work has been carried out since then and are now in a poor condition due to severe corrosion of the bell frame due to a leaking tower roof which has now been repaired.

Tirley. 6 bells. The tenor weighs 10 ¼ cwt tuned to F. Five bells were cast by Rudhalls of Gloucester in the 1780s and one by John Taylor and Co of Loughborough in 1893 when the bells were rehung in a new metal frame. The bells are still in good condition and are easy to ring.

Work is now required on the bells of Hartpury, Corse, and Staunton to ensure that they can be rung and heard for the next 100 years.

The bells have been inspected by the Gloucester and Bristol Bell advisor, reports received of work required on each set of bells and bell hanging firms asked to provide quotes to complete the works.

Costs for the project will be reduced by using local volunteer labour to assist professional bell hangers.

The process of obtaining the necessary facilities from the Diocese to permit the work to be carried out has been started and are expected to be granted shortly.

Plans are being developed to ensure that each church gets more than an overhauled set of bells, ranging from visitor and educational attractions to teaching aids for new ringers, these should also improve the chances of grant applications being successful.

The three church PCCs have agreed the best way to achieve this is by establishing a joint project to raise the money required and making single project application to National Lottery Heritage Fund, various charities, and individual fund-raising activities by each church. One key aspect for the successful application of funding is the provision of visitor and educational benefits, but just as important is the amount of money raised locally.

While Ashleworth's bells don't require anything other than routine maintenance, it is to be included in the project with the intention of raising funds to install in the church an interactive visitor information system about bells and bell ringing.

Funding for the project at Hartpury is largely in place thanks to a bequest to the church for repairs and maintenance. Corse has received two donations which should cover half of the work required. Fund raising for Staunton is starting soon.

Details of fundraising events will be published soon – watch this space.

In the meantime, if you wish to donate towards an individual church or the whole project, please contact your local PCC. The more we raise locally, the better the chance of grant applications and hence the project succeeding. Unless you request to remain anonymous, we will arrange for all gifts over £100 to be recorded on a plaque in the relevant church at the end of the project.

If you have a specific memory or event you would like to be linked individually to the project, please contact the vicar to discuss how this could be achieved.

Full details of the project will be available soon on the West of Severn Churches website, and further updates will be given in the parish magazine.